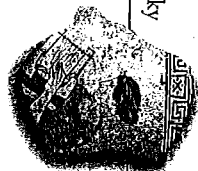


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Imprint in Classical Literature



In honor of beloved Virgil—

“O degli altri poeti onore e lume . . .”

—Dante, *Inferno*

Propertius in Love

The Elegies

SEXTUS PROPERTIUS

Translated by

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Foreword by

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Berkeley Los Angeles London

Properius

Foreword
READING PROPERTIUS

MATTHEW S. SANTIROCCO

I

Quot editors, tot Propertii. The learned quip—"There are as many Propertiuses as there are editors"—refers to the notorious unreliability of the Latin text and to the ingenuity of such scholars as A. E. Housman who have tried to emend and restore it. But the phrase could apply just as easily to the wide variety of literary interpretations, equally ingenious and often incompatible, that Propertius' love elegies have provoked over the centuries.

Writing in the Rome of the emperor Augustus toward the end of the first century B.C.E., Sextus Propertius captured and critiqued the experience of a generation that had lived through civil wars only to have peace restored at the expense of republican government, a generation for whom personal desires were often at odds with public duty and for whom the demands of aesthetics could be as urgent and morally compelling as political

necessities. In his own day, Propertius would have us believe, he was something of a scandal (*Elegy* II.24.1-8). Several years later, the rhetorician Quintilian admired the elegies of Tibullus for their terseness and elegance (qualities that would appeal to a rhetorician), and only grudgingly admitted that "there are those who prefer Propertius" (*Institutes of Oratory* 10.1.93). By the Christian Middle Ages, the elegist was virtually unknown, perhaps owing to the immorality or at least perceived irrelevance of his sort of poetry. The earliest manuscript we have dates to around 1200; and it was only later, particularly in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, that texts of Propertius circulated and he was rediscovered by readers. Among these was the great humanist and author of love sonnets Petrarch, whose copy (now lost) was the source of the largest family of extant manuscripts.¹ Goethe, whose *Roman Elegies* (1795) drew on Propertius, recognized in him a romantic sensibility akin to his own. Ezra Pound's *Hommage to Sextus Propertius* (1917), on the other hand, read the poet as a fellow satirist and political dissident.²

Whatever the merits of these, and other, competing interpretations, Propertius has by now certainly come into his own, acquiring a whole new generation of readers. Indeed, in his

1. For a brief overview of the manuscript tradition, see R. J. Tarrant's essay in L. D. Reynolds, *Texts and Transmissions: A Survey of the Latin Classics*, corr. reprint (Oxford, 1990), 324-26; for fuller discussion of all 146 manuscripts, see James Barrica, *The Manuscript Tradition of Propertius* (Toronto, 1984).

2. See J. P. Sullivan, *Ezra Pound and Sextus Propertius: A Study in Creative Translation* (Austin, 1964).

1997 play about the scholar-poet Housman, Tom Stoppard suggests that it was poets like Propertius who were responsible for "the invention of love" in the West. The occasion of a lively new version by the poet David Slavitt invites a reexamination of Propertius, with particular attention to what most recommends him to us today: his sophisticated exploration of love and gender relations (section II below), his difficult—we might almost say modernist³—poetics (section III), his strikingly independent politics that are concomitant with an overriding commitment to love and to literature (section IV), and, finally, his attempt later in life to reinvent himself and his art (section V).

II

Great love poetry is mostly about problematic love—from the unrequited passion Sappho expressed for other women to the medieval troubadours serenading an idealized and inaccessible beloved. Propertius' contemporary (and possibly rival), the lyric poet Horace, understood well the inevitable incommensurability of lovers' affections and adopted a distanced, ironic, even amused perspective on other peoples' love affairs—as well as on his own. Nothing could be further from the stance taken by the Roman elegists. Indeed, when things go wrong (as they always do), the elegists complain bitterly—so much so that "complaint," *querel(l)a*, was an alternative name for the genre in antiquity.

3. As is claimed by D. Thomas Benediktson, *Propertius: Modernist Poet of Antiquity* (Carbondale, Ill., 1989).

At its most basic the genre is defined by its meter, the elegiac couplet.

Im Hexameter steigt des Springquells flüssige Säule,
Im Pentameter drauf fällt sie melodisch herab.

In the hexameter rises the fountain's silvery column:
In the pentameter aye falling in melody back.

Allowing for the difference between the quantitative metric of Latin and the stress-based systems of German and English, Schiller's paradigm and Coleridge's translation of it reproduce the effect of the rhythm, the upward and then downward movement whereby the expansiveness of the heroic hexameter is cut back in the following pentameter to a more personal, private dimension.⁴ Ovid plays with this in the opening elegy of his *Amores* (*Love*):

Arms, and the violent deeds of war, I was making ready to
sound forth—in weighty numbers, with matter suited to
the measure. The second verse was equal to the first—but
Cupid, they say, with a laugh stole away one foot.

Amores I.1.1-4, trans. Grant Showerman⁵

4. See further Maurice Platnauer, *Latin Elegiac Verse: A Study of the Metrical Usages of Tibullus, Propertius and Ovid* (Cambridge, 1951; reprint, Harnden, Conn., 1971).

5. Grant Showerman, trans., *Ovid I: Heroides and Amores*, 2nd ed., rev. G. P. Goold, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1977).

Ovid's lines explicitly connect the meter to the theme of love. In archaic Greece, however, the elegiac couplet was used for inscriptions and also appeared in a variety of literary contexts, not only amatory epigram but also dirge and martial exhortation. Later, the Hellenistic poets used the meter for longer narrative poems, some about other people's love affairs. As far as we can tell, it was the Romans who adapted the form to deal at some length with their own subjective experience of love.⁶ The forerunner of the genre was Catullus, who wrote in the elegiac but also many other meters; the major practitioners were Gallus (whose works are mostly lost), Tibullus, Propertius, and Ovid.⁷ To be sure, not all their elegies are erotic, since the genre could still embrace many different topics, public as well as private. But what defines the genre is that the subjects are refracted through the singular, often relentless, viewpoint of a narrator who purports to be a lover—and not just any lover, but a particular individual with a unique life history, sensibility, and values.

Catullus established the basic pattern: an irresistible woman,⁸

6. For fuller discussion, see Archibald A. Day, *The Origins of Latin Love-Elegy* (Oxford, 1938; reprint, Hildesheim, 1972); see also Georg Luck, *The Latin Love Elegy*, 2nd ed. (London, 1969), 25-69.

7. Ovid lists Gallus, Tibullus, Propertius, and himself (*Tristia* IV.10.51-54); Propertius names as precursors Catullus as well as (the now largely lost) Varro of Atax, Calvus, and Gallus (II.25.1-4 [trans., 1-6, Slavitt]; II.34b.85-92 [trans., 99-106, Slavitt]).

8. In only a few of Catullus' poems is Lesbia actually named, but such is the force of her personality as represented there that the unnamed women in many of the other poems are plausibly identified with her. Catullus also addresses poems to a young man, Juventius, which treat love

cultivated as well as beautiful, but ultimately unfaithful, captures the heart—and the literary imagination—of an idealistic poet-lover who is obsessed with her but eventually disillusioned and distraught. Though his relationship with the woman he calls Lesbia is extramarital, Catullus is at pains to characterize it as much more than a physical affair, comparing it to relationships that were socially less problematic—marriage, a contract, the patron-client relationship, and, in one stunningly domestic image, the pure love a father has for his sons and sons-in-law. The realization that Lesbia is unfaithful provokes a series of violent emotional responses: increased sexual passion (which, he tells us, burns all the stronger as love fades), despair, anger, and—perhaps—resignation.

Tibullus also imagines a domestic relationship with his mistress, Delia,⁹ though he locates such bliss not in the city but in the georgic countryside. One of his most charming elegies portrays her as the *domina* or mistress of his rural household (*domus*), tending the slave children, entertaining a guest, supervising the harvest, and performing rituals of rustic piety. When confronted with the reality of Delia's infidelity, Tibullus is more self-pitying than violent; displacing responsibility from his mistress to the individual who corrupted her or to the tempting

in basically the same way. That Catullus should write homosexual poems is in keeping with Greek literary convention but also reflects the reality of a bisexual culture (on which see Eva Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World*, trans. Cormac O'Connellain [New Haven, 1992], esp. 120–54, "The Late Republic and the Principate").

9. In book II of Tibullus, Delia is replaced by the aptly named Nemesis. Like Catullus, Tibullus also wrote homosexual poems; his were addressed to a certain Marathus.

materialism of the age, he resorts to entreaty, prayer, and vows. Ultimately, though, he recognizes that his dreams of domestic bliss were mad fictions of his own creation—*haec mihi fingebam*, "I was inventing these things" (1.5.35)—and in that recognition he captures the very essence of the genre.¹⁰ Propertius is even more self-conscious. His self-presentation is calculatedly extreme—more obsessive, tortured, degraded. His unique stance is perfectly captured in the opening lines of his first and (hence) programmatic elegy:

Cynthia's eyes ensnared me who'd never before been
caught

in desire's nets: then I bent my once proud head
(as Meleager describes) in submission to Amor's triumph.

That villain forced me to do his vulgar dance,
to avoid decent young girls and live in demimondaine
excess—an entire year is down the drain,
wasted in frenzy the gods look down on in pained distaste.

.
I need a witch who can lure the moon from the sky
and conjure spirits to come with her chants and her altar's
fire.

Let her cast a spell on my mistress' heart,
and then her cheek will turn as pale as mine with longing,

10. The telling line provides the title to a useful study of the poet: David F. Bright, *Haec Mihi Fingebam: Tibullus in His World* (Leiden, 1978). Other accessible studies in English include Francis Cairns, *Tibullus: A Hellenistic Poet at Rome* (Cambridge, 1979); Robert J. Ball, *Tibullus the Elegist* (Göttingen, 1983); and Parshia Lee-Stecum, *Powerplay in Tibullus* (Cambridge, 1998).

and I shall sing praises of powers as strong as
Medea's.

The only other option is to take my friends' advice
and go to a doctor for cures for my cardiac ailment.
Surgeons perhaps can cut or cauterize my wound.

l.1-7, 18-25, Slavitt¹¹

Whereas other poets represent their progress as a movement from idealism to disillusionment, Propertius acknowledges the impossibility of the relationship from the outset, an impossibility that arises not only from Cynthia's infidelity but also from more existential causes: a clash of temperament, values, perhaps even of class—if this is the point of the observation that Cynthia taught Propertius to hate decent, that is, chaste (*castas*), girls. The wide range of images here conveys the self-destructive quality of the attachment—entrapment, military defeat, enslavement, madness, and disease;¹² in other poems Propertius explicitly links love and death.¹³ That his friends are worried attests to the moral and social degradation in which a masochistic Propertius revels and from which he is utterly unwilling to extricate himself. It is as if the *domina* has been transformed from “mistress” of the house to “mistress” as dominatrix.

11. Throughout this essay, when citing the translation I use Slavitt's line numeration rather than that of the Latin text (which it approximates); I do this as a convenience to the reader but also to demonstrate that this version, albeit free, will sustain interpretation.

12. On the use of such figuration, see Duncan F. Kennedy, *The Arts of Love: Five Studies in the Discourse of Roman Love Elegy* (Cambridge, 1993), 46–63.

13. See Theodore D. Papanghelis, *Propertius: A Hellenistic Poet on Love and Death* (Cambridge, 1987).

But if Propertius is more extreme than Catullus or Tibullus in his own self-presentation, he is no less remarkable in this representation of the beloved.¹⁴ The novelist Apuleius (*Apology* 10), purporting to reveal the real identities of the Roman poets' mistresses, informs us that “Cynthia” was a pseudonym for a certain Hostia. This individual is otherwise unknown to us and, in any case, her identity is less relevant than the implications of the pseudonym. The name “Cynthia” aptly evokes not just the sun-god Apollo (who was born on Mount Cynthus) but also his sister, Diana, who was associated with the moon, beautiful but also changeable and believed to drive men mad (hence our word “lunatic”). Whatever the reality underlying these poems, the name alerts us to what even a cursory reading suggests, that Cynthia is a poetic construct, like Catullus' Lesbia, Tibullus' Delia, and Ovid's Corinna. But the name, with its associations of mutability, also gives us a clue to her distinctive, volatile character.¹⁵

As early as the third poem, Cynthia is set apart from these other women. Returning after a night on the town, drunk and sexually aroused, Propertius lies beside her as she sleeps, admiring her beauty. The romantic moment is shattered, however,

14. For recent discussions of Cynthia, I have found particularly useful Ellen Greene, *The Erotics of Domination: Male Desire and the Mistress in Latin Love Poetry* (Baltimore, 1998), 37–66, with literature there cited (especially the series of important articles by Maria Wyke), and Micaela Jannan, *The Politics of Desire: Propertius IV* (Berkeley, 2001); see further nn. 28 and 29 below.

15. See Edward N. O'Neil, “Cynthia and the Moon,” *Classical Philology* 53 (1958): 1–8.

as a moonbeam—appropriately—awakens her from her slumbers:

She woke and raised herself, propped her head on her arm
and asked: "Have you been rejected? Has some other
girl
slammed her door in your face so that you come running
to me?"

Where have you been all night? What time is it now,
when you come lurching in, by the light of the last
exhausted

stars? Such a night as I've had, I wish on you
in turn, you thoughtless bastard. Let me know how you
like it!

I was up all hours weaving until I was weary
and when, at last, I began to feel sleepy, I sang my lonely
lament, as sad as any Orpheus keened,
complaints about you, tomcatting around all hours in
strangers'
beds, until at last, to mine, Sleep came
in mercy to bring his relief and close with his soothing
wings

my eyes, reddened, burning, and ugly from weeping."

l.3.32-44, Sulpitia

It is here in Roman elegy that the woman has been given voice. To be sure, it would be too facile to see Propertius as in any way a proto-feminist. The first part of the elegy, in which she is subjected to the male gaze, objectifies Cynthia, and she is portrayed unfavorably as petulant and shrill; moreover, her subsequent words are, after all, scripted by the poet and not,

like the poems of Sulpicia, the actual words of a real woman.¹⁶ Still, that Propertius puts in Cynthia's mouth a plausible critique of himself, that she is compared to the archetypal poet Orpheus, and that her words are represented as sung lament (*queribar*, cognate with the word for elegy itself, *querella*)—all this problematizes Propertius' own perspective here and in the poems that follow, and invites us to rethink the roles assigned to each sex in love relations, and in love poetry.

III

If Cynthia (like Propertius) is to some extent a poetic construct that enables the exploration of various amatory themes, responses, and voices, female as well as male, she is also a way of talking about poetry itself. Indeed, one essential characteristic of elegy is that just as it collapses into a single figure the lover and the poet, so too it conflates love affairs with love poetry, mistress with Muse. Thus, Propertius' first book, the so-called *Monobiblos* (single book), was also known as the *Cynthia* from its first word and leading character.¹⁷ And in the programmatic

16. For a general appreciation of Sulpicia, see my remarks, "Sulpicia Reconsidered," *Classical Journal* 74 (1979): 229-39; since that article appeared, there have been many studies of this slender corpus, including a recent and unconvincing attempt to argue that Sulpicia's poems were written by a man! For an overview of the few (mostly Greek) female poets of antiquity, see Jane M. Snyder, *The Woman and the Lyre: Women Writers in Classical Greece and Rome* (Carbondale, Ill., 1989).

17. Propertius refers to the book by this title in II.24.2, which reads literally, "Do you talk thus, now that your famous book has made you a legend, and your 'Cynthia' is read all over the forum?" (G. P. Goold,

poem of book II, Propertius rejects heroic epic in favor of elegy precisely by expressing a preference for Cynthia as his Muse over traditional sources of inspiration:

You want to know why I keep on writing these poems of
love,
these sweeters that melt in the mouth? It isn't Apollo
or even Calliope prompting me what to set down, but my
darling,
my mistress who gives me these special homework
assignments.
All she has to do is enter a room, a dazzle
of flowing silk from Cos, and a book is born. . . .
I watch when she fights against sleep and her delicate eye-
lids lower,
and the poet in me awakes in celebration;
and when I behold her naked, and we struggle together
naked,
it's as if I had been there at Troy at the funeral games.

II.1.1-6, 13-16, Statius

The translation here seeks to unpack the rich associations of the last two lines, comparing the tussles of lovemaking with the struggles at Troy, the subject of love poetry with the subject of Homer's epic. The Latin is characteristically more compressed: "If, her dress torn off, she struggles naked with me, then, be sure of it, I compose long *Iliads*" (II.1.13-14; trans. G. P. Gould). Given that erotics and poetics so dramatically coalesce, it is

trans., *Propertius: Elegies*, Loeb Classical Library [Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1909]); see also Martial, *Epigrams* 14.189.

not surprising to find Propertius often and explicitly preoccupied with aesthetic concerns. In particular, he aligns himself with Callimachus of Cyrene and Philetas of Cos, Greek scholar-poets who lived and wrote in the third century B.C.E. at the Ptolemaic court in Alexandria. At one level, there is nothing unusual about this; Roman literature generally maps itself onto the Greek, not in an overly imitative or dependent way but as part of a process of creative *aemulatio*.¹⁸ But Propertius' effort to affiliate is striking since, as we have seen (in section II above), love elegy happens to be one of the few genres that Rome could legitimately claim to have invented rather than to have borrowed from Greece. (Callimachus and Philetas had written erotic poems in the elegiac meter, but those poems did not purport to tell of their authors' *own* love affairs.) The real basis of the affiliation, then, is not a shared subject matter so much as a shared aesthetic, a way of thinking about poetry that made its way from Alexandria to Rome and that exerted a profound influence on Catullus and on the Augustan poets.

Earlier Greek poetry had been social, performed in or at least alluding to a communal context. After the death of Alexander the Great, who had transformed the political order, much of Greek cultural production shifted from Athens and the other Greek city-states to Alexandria in Hellenized Egypt, where a different, more bookish literature emerged. Callimachus not only exemplified this new type of poetry but also set forth explicit standards for it in a series of influential polemics. The most important is contained in the now lacunose prologue to

18. For general discussion, see Gordon Williams, *Tradition and Originality in Roman Poetry* (Oxford, 1968), esp. pp. 250-357.

his *Actia*, a series of short poems (or a "collective poem" containing many smaller parts) about origins. Answering critics who rebuke him for not writing "one continuous poem of many thousands of lines on . . . kings or . . . heroes," Callimachus goes on the attack, accusing his critics of jealousy and aligning heaven on the side of quality rather than quantity:

For, when I first placed a tablet on my knees, Lycian
 Apollo said to me: ". . . poet, feed the [sacrificial] victim to
 be as fat as possible but, my friend, keep the Muse slender.
 This too I bid you: tread a path which carriages do not
 trample; do not drive your chariot upon the common
 tracks of others, nor along a wide road, but on unworn
 paths, though your course be more narrow."¹⁹

Actia, fr. 1.17-34; trans. C. A. Trypanis, *adapted*¹⁹

At the end of his *Hymn to Apollo*, Callimachus again rebukes his critics and in very similar terms, attributing their views to jealousy and affiliating himself with Apollo:

Envy spoke secretly in Apollo's ear: "I do not admire the
 poet who does not sing things as numerous as the sea." But
 Apollo spurned Envy with his foot and said: "Great is
 the stream of the Assyrian river, but it carries much mud
 and refuse on its waters. Not from every source do the
 Melissae [literally, "bees," a name for priestesses] carry water
 to Demeter, but from the trickling stream that springs

19. Adapted from C. A. Trypanis, ed. and trans., *Callimachus: Actia* [etc.], Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1958).

from a holy fountain, pure and undefiled. . . ."

Hymn II.105-12, trans. A. W. Mair, *adapted*²⁰

In his own poems (including these passages just cited) Callimachus exemplified the principles he set forth: the privileging of short poems over long, quality over quantity, refinement and polish rather than bombast, novelty and experimentation rather than common themes and hackneyed treatments, avoidance of discursive narrative for a style that is discontinuous and allusive, and, as befitted a scholar-poet at the Alexandrian library, great learning—in short, serious literature that makes real demands on its (necessarily small) audience.

These features, which contribute to the difficulty we often have when we first encounter a Propertian elegy (and which account for the footnotes at the end of this volume), are seen everywhere in Propertius' work, but nowhere perhaps so clearly as in the treatment of mythology. Myth was, of course, a staple of ancient literature from all periods. The Hellenistic scholar-poets took particular interest in recondite or variant legends. The Greek author Pausanias even compiled a compendium of myths about unhappy lovers for the elegist Gallus to draw on, and his work was presumably used by other poets. For the treatment of myth, as for much else, Propertius' first elegy is programmatic. Having characterized the actuality of his wretched and debased existence, he shifts suddenly to the world of myth:

20. Adapted from A. W. and G. R. Mair, trans., *Callimachus, Lycophanon, and Aratus*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1960); see also *Epigram* 30 (in Mair's numeration; *Ep.* 28 Pfeiffer), which rejects the commonplace in literature as in life.

I'm not at all the Milanion, whom Atalanta disdained
until at last he won her. Lovelorn, distraught,
he wandered her haunts in Arcadia's rugged hillsides and
valleys

braving the shaggy beasts of that wild country,
and Hylaeus, the Centaur, who also yearned for the swift-
footed girl,

attacked with a club and smote him: he lay on the
ground

stricken for his devotion and moaning . . . and won her
heart.

For me, however, there's no such peripeteia.

119-16, Slavitt

The usual story, set in Boeotia, had Atalanta rejecting suitors by challenging them to a footrace that they could never hope to win. Hippomenes (or in some versions Milanion) managed to succeed by dropping golden apples in her path, thereby distracting her and slowing her progress. Propertius knows an obscure variant of the story, set in Arcadia, in which Milanion won Atalanta's hand not by cunning but by enduring great sufferings on her behalf. The full story, however, is not told but only alluded to, as the narrative is compressed into a few, highlighted details. The poet subtly alerts us to his game by applying to Atalanta the almost throwaway epithet "swift-footed" (13), revealing that he is aware of the other, more common version, and that he has self-consciously eschewed it. He is also playing against our expectation that myths function in literature as a form of exemplification, a timeless context in which to construe our own quotidian experience. The myth here (as so often in Propertius) serves quite a different purpose, not to point out

similarity but to create dissonance, since Milanion's success is adduced as the opposite to Propertius' own experience of love—in this witty translation, "For me, however, there's no such peripeteia."

IV

Propertius signals his Alexandrianism in many ways, from directly naming his models (III.1.1-2) to covertly alluding to them, as when Cynthia wears *Coan* silk (II.1.6), recalling Philas of Cos, or lies upon a *narrow* bed (*angusto . . . lecto*, I.8.33, II.1.45), as befits Callimachus' *slender* Muse and *narrow* path. But the most common way of affiliating with Callimachus was by adapting that poet's famous prologue to the *Aetia*, particularly the god's prohibition (quoted above). Propertius clearly alludes to that passage when, in *Elegy* III.3, he imagines himself on Mount Helicon contemplating an epic—until Apollo restrains him:

"Are you out of your mind? Or maybe sunstruck? None
of those noble

subjects your taste from the fountain has prompted
within you

is right for you. It's a joke, as you will be too, Propertius.

Yours is no martial chariot. You've got a cart

with little wheels that are suited to smooth and grassy

ground,

in a park where some pretty girl on a bench is waiting

for her beau to show up and, maybe, to pass the time

might read

that kind of light entertainment you provide.

Why does your pen run wild? That fragile craft you
 sail in
 ought for safety's sake to hug the shoreline:
 further from land, you risk a shift of wind and waves . . ."

III.3-25-35, Slavitt

The scene then shifts abruptly and Propertius finds himself in a grotto where Calliope addresses him in a similar admonitory fashion: "Keep to your stories of lovers / languishing out in the rain at their mistresses' doorways . . ." (55-56, Slavitt). Whereas in *Elegy* II.1 Propertius had rejected Apollo and Calliope in favor of Cynthia as his Muse, those two gods have now been rehabilitated and co-opted to the poet's vision.

While, as we have seen, the choice of love as a way of life implies a choice of poetry—elegy rather than epic—these choices also imply political preferences that could not have been present in Callimachus' program.²¹ The genre of elegy embodies within its very assumptions and pretensions a challenge to traditional Roman values such as patriotism, martial courage, marital fidelity, and religious piety, values on which the emperor Augustus put a premium when he "restored" the republic.²²

21. See Alan Cameron, *Callimachus and His Critics* (Princeton, 1995), which argues that the Roman poets' refusal to write political poetry and the opposition between elegy and epic on which they ground that refusal were imported into Callimachus by the Roman poets for their own purposes; Callimachus' own polemic seems to concern the claims of long as opposed to short elegies, and, as his own works attest, he was not averse to writing political encomium.

22. For this and other aspects of the emperor's self-representation, see his autobiography, in P. A. Brunt and J. M. Moore, eds. and trans., *Res*

But Propertius' political independence goes well beyond generic stance. Sometimes the challenge can be subtle, as when he applauds the emperor's triumphal parade but views it from the bosom of his mistress (*sinu carae . . . puellae*, III.4.15), or when he describes a visit to the temple of Palatine Apollo, the emperor's patron deity, but casts the poem as a reply to his mistress' query about why he was late for an assignation (II.3.1)! Often, however, the critique is even sharper—as when he concludes his first book with a pair of moving poems on the battle of Perugia, a bloody episode in the civil wars where he lost a relative (I.21 and 22), or celebrates the repeal of Augustan legislation that would have compelled bachelors like himself to marry and produce sons to fight in the service of Roman imperialistic aspirations (II.7).

Perhaps the most serious political challenge (because it is directly personalized) is embodied in two poems that again espouse Callimacheism, *Elegies* II.1 and III.9.²³ It is only here that Propertius addresses Maecenas, the close friend of Augustus and a literary patron whose circle included such great poets as Horace and Virgil. That Propertius, whose first book was dedicated to someone else, Tullius,²⁴ should now address Mae-

Gesta Divi Augusti: The Achievements of the Divine Augustus, corr. reprint (Oxford, 1970).

23. The following discussion of *Elegies* II.1 and III.9 is taken from my previously published observations, with literature there cited: "Poet and Patron in Ancient Rome," *Book Forum* 6.1 (1982): 56-62 (esp. 61-62) and "Strategy and Structure in Horace, C. 2.12," in *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History II*, ed. Carl Deroux, Collection Latomus 168 (Brussels, 1980), 223-36 (esp. 232-35).

24. That book I is dedicated to him is signaled by his address in several

cenas suggests that Propertius eventually attracted the attention of the emperor. Both elegies, however, are *recusationes*: poems that purport to refuse a patronal request to celebrate Augustus in heroic song. Recent critics, who doubt whether Maecenas really asked for such verse, read *recusationes* as a literary fiction, a way for Virgil, Horace, and Propertius to signal their Alexandrianism. But the popularity of the genre suggests that Maecenas and Augustus must have had at least some expectations; and if so, this method of establishing literary affiliation had great advantages also as a strategy of independence.

Elegy II.1 opens as Propertius explains (in a passage discussed earlier in this essay) that he continues to write love poems because Cynthia is his Muse. The next lines, addressed to Maecenas, further explain that as a Callimachean poet, he lacks talent for more capacious verse. He then lists the Caesarian exploits he would celebrate if only he were able to do them justice: the battles at Mutina, Philippi, Naulochus, Perugia, and Actium. But these were episodes in the civil wars with potentially unpleasant associations for the new regime. Philippi, for instance, is explicitly characterized as "bloodshed / where Romans fought against Romans, to be reunited in death" (32–33, Slavitt). And at Perugia, which Propertius characterized as a civil war (I.22.3–4) and which is displaced chronologically in the catalogue for emphasis, Antonian propaganda had it that the future emperor had offered human sacrifice to the shade of his adopted father, Julius Caesar (Suetonius, *Deified Augustus*

elegies, including the first (I.1, 6, 14, and 22). He was the nephew of Lucius Volcaceus Tullus, who had been consul with the future emperor Augustus in 33 B.C.E.

15). By such deliberate lack of tact in rehearsing these events, Propertius effectively proves his inability as an encomiast.

His second poem to Maecenas, *Elegy* III.9, opens in a similar fashion, again adapting the argument from inability. But now another and strategically more important reason for refusing to write encomiastic epic is introduced: the example of Maecenas himself. Although wealthy and public-spirited, Maecenas was not of senatorial rank and steadfastly declined the emperor's offers to ennoble him. His refusal of a grand public career is both parallel to and precedent for the poet's refusal of a grand poetic career. At the very end of the poem, however, this strategy of co-option seems to be abandoned, as Propertius promises to write heroics after all:

But if you will lead the way, I promise to follow
and do my best to sing of the ancient war of Iove
with Coeus and Eurymedon, those Titans on Phlegra's
bloody plain; I'll celebrate Romulus, Remus, the wolf,
and the sacrifice of the brother that founded Rome.
I'll do whatever noble work you deign to command
as I follow along behind your martial car,
rehearsing the many glories of all the campaigns
you've led.
Just ask and you'll get Augustus' expedition
in Egypt with Antony's struggle and failure and suicide.
Otherwise, let me continue as I have begun;
bear with me with praise, support, and your patronage
I prize.
Whatever I have accomplished, the world will know
how much I owe you, Maecenas, as, with your kind
permission,

I follow that good example you set for us all.

III.9.54-68, *Stanin*

Propertius has done it again. In the catalogue of epic topics, for example, he includes the murder of Remus by his brother Romulus, at the walls of the city. As in the earlier poem to Maecenas, Propertius is here being tactless, for Augustus had abandoned plans to take the name Romulus precisely because of this unsavory legend. Similarly, Actium is not cast, as by Augustus in his autobiography, as a victory over a foreign foe, Cleopatra, but rather as the defeat of a citizen, Antony, in a civil war. Finally, the image of Maecenas as general and character is ironic in view of his unbellicose characterization earlier in the poem. Although some literal-minded readers have taken these lines at face value, they are anything but a sudden capitulation, for Propertius "promises" to write an epic in honor of Augustus only *if* Maecenas will be his general. But everything that has gone before makes it clear that Maecenas will not lead the way, and there is no evidence that, after this final refusal, Maecenas ever brought up the subject again!

V

By the end of book III Cynthia is out of the picture. The last two elegies (separated in the manuscripts but surely to be read as one) reverse the conceit of the very first poem: whereas Cynthia had earlier captivated the poet with her eyes (I.1.1), Propertius now realizes that it was his own admiring eyes that had made her proud and famous in his verse (III.24.1-4). After five tempestuous years, sanity has been restored; Propertius predicts

for Cynthia a harsh old age when the tables will be turned and, spurned by lovers, she will have to endure the sort of scorn to which she once subjected him (III.25).

The renunciation of Cynthia as lover is a closural gambit, signaling a shift to new themes. And book IV is indeed very different—not, to be sure, the heroics rejected in *Elegies* II.1 and III.9, but poems that are longer, more impersonal, and more patriotically Roman. Like Horace's fourth book of *Odes*, this volume is sometimes explained as a response to direct pressure from Augustus. There are factual problems with that interpretation, which rests on speculation about the political eclipse of Maecenas and which overreads certain references in Suetonius and the poets to the emperor's role in literary culture.²⁵ More important, though, is the evidence of the poems themselves. While they differ from Propertius' earlier works, they are consistent with his commitment there to Alexandrian aesthetics. In fact, it is here in book IV that the influence of Callimachus finally extends beyond aesthetics to the actual subject matter of the book, at least half of which consists of aestheticological poems about Roman gods, cults, and places. And even when these deal with patriotic themes, they do not betray Propertius' earlier independence or political integrity.

25. For the alleged pressure exerted by Augustus on poets, see my brief remarks in "Horace and Augustan Ideology," *Arethusa* 28.2-3 (1995): 225-43 (esp. 234-38), with literature there cited. On the social context of Augustan literature, see Elaine Fantham, *Roman Literary Culture* (Baltimore, 1996); Peter White, *Promised Verse: Poets in the Society of Augustan Rome* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993); and Barbara K. Gold, *Literary Patronage in Greece and Rome* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1987).

The best example of this is *Elegy* IV.6, which occupies the central position in the collection and which is the most overtly "Augustan." It purports to give the origin of the temple of Palatine Apollo, explaining it (incorrectly) as a thanks-offering for Augustus' decisive victory over Antony at the battle of Actium in 31 B.C.E.²⁶ Propertius' earlier treatment of the shrine (in II.31, discussed above) had subordinated the political theme to an amatory pretext. So too had his earlier treatment of the battle, in which Propertius described the dangerous allure of Cleopatra to explain how it was possible for a woman to rule his own life (III.11). Here in *Elegy* IV.6, however, the poet assumes a public, vatic stance, explicitly dedicating his poem to the glory of Augustus and then recounting the battle. The narration, however, is not historical but mythical, focusing almost exclusively on Apollo's role in vanquishing the enemy rather than on any actions of Augustus. And then, after briefly connecting the victory and the temple, Propertius abruptly announces that he has sung enough of arms and that Apollo now demands the lyre:

I've sung enough of war: Apollo now directs
that as he takes off his armor, I use his lyre
For tunes for the dances of peace, as white-robed
celebrants come

26. The temple was actually vowed as a thanks-offering for an earlier victory of Octavian (the future Augustus) over Sextus Pompeius; that it was dedicated years later, after the battle of Actium, made the (intentional) confusion possible. On the significance of that battle and its representations, see Robert Alan Gural, *Actium and Augustus: The Politics and Emotions of War* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1995).

to perform in the leafy grove—and I comply
with roses around my neck. Pour out the Falernian wine
and perfume my hair with rich Cilician spices.
The Muses are kind to the genius of tuppling poets, and
Bacchus
comes to the aid of his brother Phoebus Apollo.
Let somebody else declaim on the subject of martial
exploits,
the Sygambri subjected, the Ethiopians tamed.
Let somebody better suited tell of the Parthian troubles,
how they dragged their feet to the truce to return the
standards
they took from Crassus and how, if Augustus does not
subdue them,
it will be to leave his sons the job and its glory.
Crassus can lie in his grave in confidence, waiting for
Rome
to cross the Euphrates, performing its pious duty.
Meanwhile, I pass the evenings drinking and singing songs
until I can see the sunbeams dance in my glass.

IV.6.85–102, *Slavitt*

Arms and the lyre, war and poetry²⁷—in his first three books these ideas were juxtaposed as alternatives, but now they are linked in the poem as they are in the temple (where Apollo is celebrated as martial victor but also as patron of poets) and in real life (where the peace purchased by arms has made the world safe for poets and parties). Thus, the poem concludes

27. This is the subject of Hans-Peter Sahl, *Propertius: "Love" and "War": Individual and State under Augustus* (Berkeley, 1985).

with the image of revelers entering a bower, of wine flowing freely, and of poets gathered to celebrate the achievements of the regime.

This is a new sort of verse, in which Alexandrianism and Augustanism coalesce, as the most recalcitrant of love poets now attempts to reinvent his genre and himself under the impulse of a Rome that has been renewed by Augustus. But it is important to note that even here the praise of Augustus is only indirect. By substituting mythic narrative for historical account, Propertius subtly displaces responsibility for the victory from Augustus to Apollo; and by exploiting the god's duality, as not only deadly avenger but also benign poetic patron, he shifts at the first available moment from battle narrative to the description of a more congenial literary party. And if some readers are still troubled by the poem, they might take comfort from the fact that in the final scene, Propertius represents himself only as listening to the panegyrics of his colleagues and does not himself join in.

That Propertius' bold reinvention in book IV preserves essential values is confirmed in *Elegy* IV.7, the poem with which the *Actium elegy* is jarringly juxtaposed.²⁸ Intensely personal

28. For discussion of IV.7 in the context of IV.6, see Janan, *Politics of Desire*, 100–113; she views these poems as “two centers, . . . one patriotic, one erotic-elegiac, so that the masculinist and nationalist assumptions articulated in 4.6 do not ultimately rest unchallenged” (102). See also Maurizio Bettini, *The Portrait of the Lover*, trans. Laura Gibbs (Berkeley, 1999), 109–20, where the complaint of the mistress in IV.7 is read in conjunction with the final elegy of the book, IV.11, the lament of a faithful wife, Cornelia. Finally, on these poems and on book IV generally, see also Jeri

and retrospective, for many readers this poem will be the most memorable in the book. Now dead, Cynthia visits Propertius in a dream. Physically charred from the funeral pyre but with her personality essentially intact, she leans over the bed in which he sleeps—a conscious reversal of *Elegy* I.3, the first poem in which she spoke—and utters characteristic recriminations. She complains that he has forgotten their passionate nights, that his mourning for her was insufficient, that she was poisoned by her own slaves, and that a new mistress has displaced her in her own house. But, for all that, she still thinks of Propertius, “of those years I reigned in your heart and your poems” (54, Slavitt), and she swears that she has always stayed true to him and that she still loves him, despite his many betrayals. Not only does this poem invert Propertius' anxieties about his own death and funeral in *Elegy* II.13b, it also calls into question the poet's presentation of the relationship in the earlier books. Despite his frequent protestations that Cynthia had the upper hand, we now learn that she was dependent on the poet, even financially (hence her complaint about the cheap funeral he gave her); that, despite his worries about her infidelity, she was the faithful one; and that she is still being wronged (as a new mistress, Chloris, displaces her, obliterating traces of her memory and punishing her old servants).

Cynthia then makes a few final requests—that Propertius care for her old servants, that he burn the poems he wrote to and about her (“Don't use me to get yourself fame,” 88, Slavitt), and that he tend her grave and set up an inscribed monument.

B. DeBrohun, *Roman Propertius and the Reinvention of Elegy* (Ann Arbor, Mich., forthcoming).

But the time is coming when they will be once again, and forever, reunited:

“... Our shades

waft abroad at night, free for a time from this prison,
and even Cerberus slips his tether and roves.

At dawn we are forced to return, recrossing the dark

Lethe,

where the ferryman takes his tally as each of us boards.

Other women may have you now, but my time will come,
and my bones shall cuddle and jump again with yours.”

IV.7.97-104, Silius?

THE ELEGIES

29. In addition to the works cited in the notes above, the following studies in English are useful: Steele Commager, *A Prolegomenon to Propertius*, Sempole Lectures, 3rd ser. (Cincinnati, 1974); Margaret Hubbard, *Propertius* (New York, 1975); J. P. Sullivan, *Propertius: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge, 1976); R. O. A. M. Lyne, *The Latin Love Poets: From Catullus to Horace* (Oxford, 1980); John Warden, *Fallax opus: Poet and Reader in the Elegies of Propertius* (Toronto, 1980); Paul Veyne, *Roman Erotic Elegy: Love, Poetry, and the West*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago, 1988).

1.1

Cynthia's eyes ensnared me who'd never before been caught
in desire's nets: then I bent my once proud head
(as Meleager describes) in submission to Amor's triumph.

That villain forced me to do his vulgar dance,
to avoid decent young girls and live in demimondaine
excess—an entire year is down the drain,
wasted in frenzy the gods look down on in pained distaste.

Consider, dear Tullus, your friend in my sorry plight.
I'm not at all the Milanion, whom Atalanta disdained
until at last he won her. Lovelorn, distraught,
he wandered her haunts in Arcadia's rugged hillsides and valleys
braving the shaggy beasts of that wild country,
and Hylaeus, the Centaur, who also yearned for the swift-footed
girl,
attacked with a club and smote him: he lay on the ground
stricken for his devotion and moaning . . . and won her heart.
For me, however, there's no such peripeteia.
Love has turned clumsy and dull and seems to be no help
whatever.

I need a witch who can lure the moon from the sky
and conjure spirits to come with her chants and her altar's fire.

Let her cast a spell on my mistress' heart,

20

and then her cheek will turn as pale as mine with longing,
and I shall sing praises of powers as strong as Medea's.

The only other option is to take my friends' advice

and go to a doctor for cures for my cardiac ailment.

Surgeons perhaps can cut or cauterize my wound.

Anger may be the answer. Or travel to lands

far away where women will never know how to find me.

And you, whom the god has favored with comfy love,

be content, stay at home, and enjoy yourselves, for Venus

has made my nights a torment, and Cupid is busy

all day long. Be warned. Avoid these terrible pangs.

30

Hold on tight to your sweethearts and wives. Don't rove,

or else you'll have occasion to think of me and remember

I warned you what it was like, and you didn't believe me.

1.2

What good is it, promenading that way, your coiffure amazing,

your couture an impressive shimmer of Cos

silk as your skirts swing this way and that? What good

are expensive Syrian attars you splash on yourself?

Fabrics, finery, foreign frippery, gold gewgaws . . .

they only distract from your own real beauty. Naked,

Love most admires nakedness, beauty that's unembellished.

See how the untilled meadow sends forth its floral

displays, how ivy is richest when it runs wild in the woods;

look at arbutus that's splendid out in the lonely

10

hollows where nobody prunes it; and water runs purer and sweeter

in brooks without the constraints of dams and dikes.

The prettiest shores are those where the beaches are unimproved

and the wet pebbles gleam like so many jewels,

just as the finest song is what the untutored birds,

who need no training or artifice, warble and trill.

Think of Leucippus' daughters, Phoebe, whom Castor loved,

and her sister, Hilaira, whom Pollux adored:

do you think they titivated, accessorized or used makeup?

pp 249
250

NOTES

1.1

3. The opening lines here allude to Melagete, a Greek poet (fl. 100 B.C.E.) who wrote epigrams, many of them erotic; one of these (XII.101 in the *Palatine Anthology*) is to and about a young man named Myiscus and begins similarly by asserting that eyes have wounded the heart of the speaker that, previously, had never been touched by desire.
8. Tullus, who is in effect the dedicatee of this book, was a nephew of Lucius Volcacius Tullus, the Roman proconsul (governor) of Asia, 30–29 B.C.E.
9. Propertius' reference here is to the less well known version of the story of Atalanta, daughter of Iasus, a king of Argos, whom the Centaur Hylaeus tried to rape. Melanion (or, sometimes, Melanion), her long-suffering suitor, was evidently wounded as he tried to defend her. In the more usual version, Melanion has to beat her in a footrace in order to win her; he does so by throwing down golden apples with which Venus had provided him and

which she slows down to pick up. The attacks of the Centaurs Rhecus and Hyleus are earlier, and she has repulsed them herself, killing them both. In Propertius' version, it isn't the victory in the footrace but Milanion's suffering for her sake that is effective in winning her.

22. The Latin has *Cyrtinaeis*, meaning "the woman from Cyrae," which is a place in Colchis, the birthplace of Medea, who was famous for witchcraft.

25. The knives and branding irons Propertius mentions are either physicians' implements or those of torturers, and it is likely that the ambiguity is intentional.

1.2

16-17. The story of the rape of Leucippus' daughters, Phoebe and Hilaria, by Castor and Pollux is told in Theocritus' *Idyll* 22; it was also a popular subject for vase painters.

20. Apollo tried to take Marpessa, daughter of the river-god Evenus, from Idas, the Argonaut. Jupiter intervened and allowed Marpessa to choose for herself: she chose Idas.

23. Oenomaus, king of Elis, promised his daughter Hippodamia to anyone who could beat him in a chariot race. Pelops, son of Tantalus (from Phrygia), won the race and the girl, having bribed Oenomaus' groom to remove a linchpin from the king's chariot.

27. Apelles (4th c. B.C.E.) was a famous painter from Cos.

1.3

1. Ariadne, daughter of Minos, king of Crete, helped Theseus kill the Minotaur, giving him a ball of thread that he could unwind to find his way out of Daedalus' Labyrinth at Knossos. Theseus

took her away with him but then abandoned her and left her on an island (either Naxos or Dia).

3. Andromeda was the daughter of Cepheus, king of Ethiopia, whose wife, Cassiopeia, claimed to be more beautiful than the Nereids. Neptune was angered by this arrogance and demanded the sacrifice of Andromeda to a sea monster. Perseus rode to her rescue on Pegasus, the winged horse.

6. Actually, the Apidanus is not in Thrace but in Thessaly.

18. Argus with his hundred eyes was assigned by Juno to watch Io, Inachus' daughter, whom Jove raped and who was turned into a heifer. In most versions, Jupiter is the one who effects this transformation, but in some versions—including the one to which Propertius alludes in III.22—Juno is responsible.

1.4

1. Bassus was a friend of Propertius and of Ovid as well (see *Tristia* IV.10, lines 47-48).

6. Antiope was the mother of Amphion and Zethus; their father was Jupiter.

1.5

31. Gallus, who is also addressed in I.10, 13, and 20, is not the poet of that name (of whom Virgil writes in *Eclogue* 10); the poet was not of noble birth, as line 23 implies that this Gallus was.

1.6

1. For Tullus, see the note on I.1, line 8.

I.7

1. Ponticus was a friend of Ovid and of Bassus. He was apparently writing an epic about King Oedipus' sons, Polyneices and Eteocles, of whom Aeschylus writes in *Seven against Thebes*.

I.8b

37. For Hippodamia, see the note to I.2, line 23.

I.9

6. Dodona had a grove of oaks sacred to Jupiter. The doves there provided prophetic oracles.

12. Mimnermus (7th c. B.C.E.) was a Greek elegiac love poet.

17. Propertius does not mention Tantalus by name but allows the reader to make the connection.

22. Ixion had been king of Thessaly; he was tied to a revolving wheel in Hades as punishment for attempting to seduce Juno.

29. For Ponticus, see the note to I.7, line 1.

I.10

6. For Gallus, see the note to I.5, line 31.

I.11

1. Baiiae was a fashionable spa on the Bay of Naples, famous for its hot springs.

1. The causeway between Baiiae and Misenum was said to have been put in place by Hercules.

12. Lake Lucrinus was also made by Hercules. It disappeared on September 30, 1538, in a violent earthquake; now a mountain is there.

13. Cumae is a coastal town near Baiiae; it was the home of the Cumaean Sybil, who lived in a cave.

I.12

3-4. Propertius uses "Eridanus," which is the Greek name for the Po, and "Hypanis," which is probably the Bug.

10. Prometheus was chained to a mountain peak in the Caucasus because he gave humanity the gift of fire. A vulture tore at him and feasted every day on his entrails, which grew back every night.

11. Medea, daughter of the king of Colchis, was skilled in witchcraft and knew the powers of herbs that she gathered in wild regions.

I.13

24. Tyro, daughter of Salmones, loved Enipeus, a Thessalian river-god. Neptune was in love with Tyro and impersonated Enipeus (in much the way that Jupiter impersonated Amphitryon in order to seduce his wife, Alcmena).

26. After Hercules perished on Mount Oeta, having put on the deadly shirt of Nessus, he was resurrected by Jupiter, made a god, and given Hebe, the goddess of youth, as his bride.

32. Leda was the wife of Tyndareus, king of Sparta. Jupiter saw her bathing in the Eurotas River, assumed the form of a swan, arranged for Venus to take on the shape of an eagle and pursue him, and came to Leda, ostensibly for protection. He raped her,

however, and fathered upon her the mortal Helen and Clytemnestra and the immortal Castor and Pollux.

I.14

3. Mentor (4th c. B.C.E.) was a famous Greek silversmith.

18. For Tullus, see the note to I.1, line 8.

24. Alcinoüs, the king of the Phaeacians, appears in the *Odyssey*.

I.15

9. Calypso was a sea-nymph who detained Ulysses for seven years on her island of Ogygia, promising him immortality if he would stay with her there.

14. Jason was the lover of Hypsipyle, queen of Lemnos, on his way to Colchis in his quest for the Golden Fleece.

18. Evadne was the wife of Capaneus, one of the Seven against Thebes.

20. Alpheisboea married Alcmaeon, who was one of the Epigoni (sons of the Seven against Thebes), but he left her to marry Callirhoe. Alpheisboea's brothers then murdered Alcmaeon. In turn, the brothers were killed, some say by the sons of Alcmaeon and Callirhoe; but Propertius prefers the version in which Alpheisboea herself kills them out of loyalty and a love that not even his desertion was able to extinguish.

I.17

25. Doris, wife of Nereus, is the mother of the Nereids.

I.18

22. Pan's fondness for the pine tree may be an allusion to the love he felt for Pitys—or Pithys—which is Greek for pine. She refused Pan's attentions by turning into a pine tree, as Daphne escaped Apollo by turning into a laurel.

I.20

2. The sources for this cautionary tale are Theocritus' *Idyll* 13 and, of course, Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*.

20. The Phasis is a river in Colchis, where Medea lived and where King Aëtes had the Golden Fleece.

34. "Pegē" in Greek means "spring."

I.21

This poem is set in 41 or 40 B.C.E., when Mark Antony's brother Lucius was besieged in Perugia (or Perusia) by the young Octavian. The defenders were ultimately starved out and their leaders—except for Lucius Antonius—were killed.

I.22

6. It is generally and reasonably supposed that we are to identify the kinsman with the Gallus of I.21.

II.1

19. Gaius Cilnius Maecenas was friend and advisor to Augustus Caesar, an amateur author, and a literary patron, even though it