

GENRE AND REAL LIFE IN LATIN POETRY

By JASPER GRIFFIN

As long as poetry has existed, men have wondered and argued about its relationship to reality. The Muses, meeting Hesiod beneath Mount Helicon, told him that they knew how to tell many lies that sounded like truth; Solon and Pindar echo the chastening refrain,¹ and Plato and Aristotle are concerned to find new answers to the hoary problem. Poetry is in fact a very slippery stuff, which seems to turn into something else as we try to comprehend it; like Proteus, it can turn under our grasp into a raging fire—the revolutionary Marxist view, perhaps; or a wild beast—the Freudian *id*, as it might be; or, most commonly, into a stream of water, which flows away to nothing between our hands.²

In the time of our grandfathers a popular and respected way of avoiding the difficulty of talking about poetry was to transform it into biography. The lives of poets are much easier to enjoy than their works, as we see from our more pretentious Sunday papers, which are full of speculations about Shakespeare's love life (who is Emilia Lanier, what is she?) and of gossip about the busy childless beds of Bloomsbury, perused with pleasure by a public which does not often open the *Sonnets* or *The Waves*. The biographical method had the specially pleasing feature that it had two modes, the adulatory and the snide, to cater to the two commonest attitudes of posterity towards the mighty dead; sophisticated practitioners can indeed combine the two.

That method is now, among the more knowledgeable, out of favour. We have come to see that it is sadly naïf to try to turn the poems of Propertius into a coherent narrative of the life and loves of the poet and a woman who could, if only we knew how, be firmly pinned down, fitted into a prosopography, and provided with a beginning, a middle, and an end. In enlightened quarters, again, the quest to identify Virgil's farm, armed with the First and Ninth *Eclogues* and autopsy of the Mantuan region, raises only a weary smile. To such an extreme, indeed, have the enthusiastic carried this abstention, that in some places it is now a dogma that *no* experience of the poet is to be allowed to raise its head in the interpretation of his poems; I need only mention Pindar.³

If poetry is not, after all, concealed biography, then what can it be? In the discussion of Roman poetry one attractive possibility has seemed to be that it is, in reality, made up of poetical motifs, Greek in origin, which have little or no connection with the real world of Augustan Rome and the real lives of Horace and Propertius; that, for example, 'Horace's erotic poems are set in a world totally removed from the Augustan state'; and that the girls he writes about are 'totally unlike the compliant *scorta* of Horace's own temporary affairs'.⁴ It follows that the provision of parallels in other poets, even in poets who wrote centuries later, comes to have great explanatory power; the parallel in Paul the Silentiary or in Anacreon shows that the motif is a current one, existing in a world not just not identical with but 'totally removed from' that of Horace's experience. I have tried in another place to explain why this sort of approach, influential as it is, is false to the reality of poetry, dissociating it from life and setting it down in bookish seclusion. Poetry, although it is not just the same thing as life, is not totally remote from it either; not only is poetry influenced by history, but human behaviour in turn is influenced by poetry.⁵ Nor is one necessarily anxious to accept the implication that all poetry is really about other poetry, rather than being about the many and various things which it professes to be about, such as life and love.⁶

¹ Hesiod, *Theogony* 22–8; Solon, fr. 29 West, πολλά ψεύδονται δοῖδοι; Pindar, *Ol.* 1. 30.

² *Omnia transformat sese in miracula rerum, ignemque horribilemque feram fluviumque liquentem.* Virg., *Georg.* 4. 441–2.

³ E. L. Bundy, *Studia Pindarica* I and II (1962); and e.g. W. J. Slater, 'Futures in Pindar', *CQ* 19 (1969), 86. A balanced view: H. Lloyd-Jones in *JHS* 93 (1973), 109–37.

⁴ G. Williams, *Tradition and Originality in Roman Poetry* (1968), 557; R. G. M. Nisbet and M. Hubbard, *Commentary on Horace, Odes Book I* (1970), 73.

⁵ J. Griffin, 'Augustan Poetry and the Life of Luxury', *JRS* 66 (1976), 87–105, and 'Propertius and Antony', *JRS* 67 (1977), 17–26.

⁶ This is a widespread modern notion. We observe that many modern novels are about the writing of novels, and many modern poems about writing poetry; and Leo Steinberg had great success in the 1960's, as a critic of painting, with his dictum that 'whatever else it may be, all great art is about art' (cf. Tom Wolfe, *The Painted Word* (1975), 81, for a cruel handling).

It is another and evidently related way of handling poetry which finds the key to it all not in poetical motifs, not in biography or autobiography, but in rhetorical treatises and the doctrine of rhetorical genres. In his influential and interesting book *Generic Composition in Greek and Roman Poetry* (1972), Professor F. Cairns argues with great energy for a general view (p. 31): 'The theory which underlies this book is that the whole of classical poetry is written in accordance with the sets of rules of the various genres, rules which can be discovered by a study of the surviving literature itself and of the ancient rhetorical handbooks dealing with this subject'. Not only are the poems written in accordance with the rules of these genres; in fact, 'the poems of classical antiquity are not internally complete, individual works, but they are members of classes of literature known in antiquity as *genē* or *eidē*, which will be described in this book as genres' (p. 6). Thus, for example, on this view a poem like Propertius 1. 3 is not just like a *kōmos*, the revelling arrival of a lover at the house of his beloved, it actually is a *kōmos*; and Propertius 1. 6 actually is a propemptikon, an example of the rhetorical form for which rules are given by Menander Rhetor. It can thus be said that 'pseudo-Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Menander Rhetor are good witnesses to the literary practice of the whole of antiquity' (p. 73).

These rhetoricians, who hitherto have led quiet lives respectively in the second volume of Usener and Radermacher's Teubner edition of the *Opuscula* of Dionysius and in the third volume of Spengel's *Rhetores Graeci*, thus have sudden greatness thrust upon them; they become the key to the understanding of ancient poetry, Greek and Latin, from beginning to end. For there is in effect no change from one generation or period to another, and indeed 'in a very real sense antiquity was in comparison with the nineteenth and twentieth centuries a time-free zone' (p. 32). Such a claim is bold enough to call for a considered reply; for its acceptance carries, as we shall see, momentous implications. What, first, do we find, when we take these authors from the shelf where, perhaps, they have rather seldom been disturbed?

First, we find that all their activity is directed towards one sort of speech. There are three kinds of oratory, says Menander: that of the law-courts, *dikanikē*, that of politics, *politikē*, and that of display, *epideiktikē*. This last is his subject. It has two divisions, reproach or rebuke, *psogos*, and praise, *enkōmion*. That is to say, the speaker sets out either to lower something in the eyes of his audience or to raise it in their esteem. In fact—since no doubt there was no call for speeches attacking things and nobody would pay for them—Menander is concerned almost exclusively with praise. The reader learns how to praise the different gods, in various sorts of prose hymns; how to praise cities and countries; how to praise men. A great man is invited to come to our city, in a kletikon; he is praised on his arrival, in an epibaterion; he is praised when he leaves, in a propemptikon. Weddings, birthdays, funerals, all are occasions for the orator to show his skill and to lavish praise. Pseudo-Dionysius is exactly the same: nothing but praise from beginning to end of his dreary little work. Obviously, that was what those who paid rhetors, and who wanted occasions embellished by a few jewels of rhetoric, would pay for. But doubts arise in the mind when we remember that these little vade mecum handbooks for orators are no less than 'good witnesses to the literary practice of the whole of antiquity.' Can it really be that the whole of ancient poetry consists of panegyric? Or, to allow for the phenomenon of 'inversion', by which a poem like Horace's Tenth *Epode*, in which the poet heaps curses on a departing enemy, is diagnosed as an 'inverse propemptikon', of panegyric plus abuse?

There are other objections which can be pressed against this generic approach, which I think have weight but which I cannot develop here. I shall only mention some of them in passing. Thus, although the point of this form of analysis is supposed to be that it conforms to the thinking of antiquity, yet many of the alleged 'genres' do not exist in the ancient texts and have to be invented and named by the contemporary scholar. Nor is it at all certain that in the Augustan period even such genres as the propemptikon, as it is treated by Menander, actually existed at all. More importantly, while some of the 'genres' are defined in terms of the occasion on which they are employed—which is on the whole the method of Menander and pseudo-Dionysius—others are defined in quite different ways. Thus, the term 'dithyramb' is defined by its recipient, the god Dionysus; and we observe that there is no hint in the rhetorical writers that this term could apply to a composition in prose—except indeed as a metaphor for bombastic style. Other genres are of a quite

different character: 'gloating over fulfilment', the 'genre' to which we find ascribed poems like Horace *Odes* 3. 15, 'Uxor pauperis Ibyci'—'I said you'd get old and past it, and now you are, ha ha!'—is defined by what is said, neither by a regular occasion (a departure, a wedding) nor by the recipient. Again, some of the 'genres' are things for which we can well imagine patrons or clients paying, such as a speech at a wedding, a greeting to a newly arrived governor; but others are not. Who would pay a rhetorician to produce 'gloating over fulfilment', for instance, or the equally unexpected 'genre' of 'mandata morituri'—the last words of a dying man? To that unconvincing category is assigned, for instance, Horace *Odes* 2. 20, 'Non usitata nec tenui ferar/ penna.'

It is another serious problem that the rhetoricians themselves derived their own material from the existing practice of poets. In a *kateunastikos logos*, or speech uttered while the bride is put to bed, says Menander, 'take what the poets do as your model' (p. 405. 19 ff.); in an epithalamium, 'there is plenty of material in the poets and prose writers . . . use the love poetry of Sappho and that of Homer and Hesiod' (402. 15).⁷ If you are called upon for abuse, then Archilochus will help (393. 9); in general, you need to have in your memory 'Homer, Hesiod, and the lyric poets' (393. 5). As for a monody, or speech in lamentation for a dead man, 'Homer the divine poet, among all the things he has taught us, has not omitted the genre of monody', giving good examples in the laments he puts into the mouths of Andromache, Priam, and Hecuba (434. 11). There is at least one form, that of the *apopemptikos hymnos*, which is *only* found in the poets (336. 8). In fact, pseudo-Dionysius feels it necessary to remind his pupil that, while Sappho is a useful source, 'the procedure in poetry is not the same as in prose', so that the speaker needs to change the form of his material, to suit it for oratory. Evidently some aspiring orators stuck too closely to their poetical texts. But a question of principle presents itself with some sharpness: what justifies us in breaking the circle at just this point, and insisting on the primacy of the rhetoricians over the poets, when they themselves explicitly base their work on that of the poets?

Another point, also heavy with consequence, is that this conception of Greek and Latin poetry seems to limit us severely in judging the poems. Poems which we have wanted to say were rather poor turn out, because of their correct relation to the supposed generic framework, to be immune to our censure; thus Theocritus 12, in which little good has been found by those who have commented upon it at all, has 'merit' revealed by its assignation to the genre of *prophetikon* (p. 25); of Theocritus 17, another poem in generally low esteem, we read: 'When we have such good evidence of Theocritus' critical approach to the generic pattern and of his careful and judicious selection of material, it is no longer possible to assent to any sweeping condemnation of *Idyll* 17' (p. 112). If a poem plays the generic game, then it must be a good poem—or at least it cannot be a bad one; and the qualities of neatness, ingenuity, and sophistication become, without our having fully understood how, the framework within which we are to judge ancient poetry. What place is there for passion, sublimity, or truth, if all poems are composed, and to be judged, within a framework of rhetorical genres?⁸ Finally, we observe that there is a strong implication that none of the poems will really be about the poet. Rhetors were not commissioned to talk about themselves; if they are the model, then we must not be surprised if poets do not, either.

⁷ πολλή δὲ ἱστορία τοιαύτη παρὰ ποιηταῖς καὶ συγγραφεῦσι, παρ' ὧν καὶ λήψη τὴν χρησίαν, ἐπιφωνήσεις δὲ καὶ τῶν Σαπφούς ἐρωτικῶν καὶ τῶν Ὀμήρου καὶ Ἡσιόδου. The salutary and neglected caution of ps.-Dionysius, in his τέχνη ῥητορική (*Opuscula*, ed. Usener-Radermacher, 2. 270. 4): 'Sappho contains examples of the epithalamios', ἀλλ' ἐπειδὴ οὐχ ἡ αὐτὴ μεταχείρισις ποιησεῶς τε καὶ περὶ λόγου, ἀλλ' ὥσπερ καὶ τοῖς μέτροις, οὕτως καὶ τοῖς ἐνοήμασι διενήνοχεν ταῦτα . . . See now the edition of Menander Rhetor by D. A. Russell and N. G. Wilson (1981), xxxi-v and D. A. Russell, 'Rhetors at the Wedding', *PCPhS* 205 (1979), 104-17.

⁸ One is reminded here of ideas that have been powerful at times in French literature, with results that may seem suggestively similar. Thus Chateaubriand

in his *Essai sur la littérature anglaise* (Garnier edn., vol. xi, 588 ff.), in a section significantly headed 'Shakespeare corrupted taste', pleads: 'Persuadons-nous qu'écrire est un art, que cet art a des genres, chaque genre a des règles. Les genres et les règles ne sont pas arbitraires . . .'. The bad thing about Shakespeare is that 'il ne distingue pas les genres', and Chateaubriand triumphantly concludes that Racine is not only a better poet but actually more natural, because he observes them. One sees how readily technicality and classicism go hand in hand. N. M. Horsfall, *Échos du Monde Classique* 23 (1979), 84, doubts whether many Romans of the Augustan period knew anything about the 'doctrine of the genres'.

These are, I think, real and disturbing questions. But having simply drawn attention to them I pass on to one of a different sort: how true is it that the poems of the Augustans, with whom I shall on the whole be concerned, actually do exemplify the rhetorical genres of the rhetorician Menander? How far do they really exist in a time-free zone, without contact with society and life? I propose to take two main examples, both arising from poems in the First Book of Propertius.

One of Propertius' most familiar and memorable poems is 1. 3. The poet tells how he stood beside Cynthia's bed as she lay asleep, lit only by the moon. He gazes at her, comparing her to various glamorous ladies of mythology. She is like Ariadne, left fast asleep as Theseus sailed away; like Andromeda, in her first sleep after her delivery from the rocks; like a maenad, exhausted by ranging over the mountains in Bacchic ecstasy. Drunk and excited as he is—he has been to a party—the poet is transfixed by the sight. Gently he approaches her, smooths her hair, tries to put on her head the garland he is wearing from the party which has kept him so late, attempts to give her the fruit he is carrying. But when she wakes she deluges him with reproaches and complaints. The poem is a little drama, which contrasts the ideal beauty and tranquillity of Cynthia asleep with the shrewish vehemence which Propertius knows and dreads when she is awake (line 18, 'expertae metuens iurgia saevitiae'); the statuesque beginning gives place to an angry end.⁹ The opening, in particular, was found striking enough by contemporaries for Ovid to produce a witty and unkind burlesque of it at *Amores* 1. 10. 1–8. Analysis on generic lines finds, what had not hitherto been suspected, that the poem is a *kōmos*.¹⁰ A *kōmos* was a more or less noisy, often violent, progress of the lover, with or without companions, to the house of his beloved, by night; once arrived, he could either beg for admittance or attempt to force his way in. Sometimes he succeeded, sometimes he failed; sometimes he spent the night, or part of it, ostentatiously freezing and suffering on the doorstep of the adored object, singing, wheedling, or possibly writing verses on her door.

All this is of course familiar enough. We have read a lot about komasts in the last few years. One observes with surprise that no less than five of the idylls of Theocritus which are analysed by Cairns turn out to be *kōmoi*—2, 3, 6, 7, 11. What is gained, or lost, by the assertion that Propertius 1. 3 is a *kōmos*? We observe at once that the fundamental feature is missing: there is no arrival, no pleading, no violence; no decision, even, by Cynthia whether to admit her lover or not. Propertius, it is evident, has (as we should say) a key, and the drama begins with him already in her bedroom. Not only has he a key, she has promised him that for tonight she is his; at line 37 she asks him bitterly 'Where have you spent the night that belonged to me?' As a *kōmos*, in fact, the thing is a complete frost, and neither of the pair has made a success of the komastic role. The memory of the lover in his excluded position, clamorous or plaintive at the door, subject to the arbitrary decision of the beloved to make him happy or to make him miserable—all that is in the background only. The poem puts us in a world in which such things happened between lovers and their girls, but this time, he tells us, it was different. To insist that this actually is a *kōmos* is surely to force this delightful poem on to a Procrustean bed. It obliges us to put too much weight on what is not there, to the comparative detriment of what is; and it turns out, not much to our surprise (p. 336) that the poem contains no less than four witty points, all based upon the *kōmos* assumption. As I suggested earlier, the element of ingenuity and wit is over-valued in a poem which begins with a beautiful and touching tableau, and ends with a picture of the lonely Cynthia spinning and singing and waiting for the lover who does not come, until at last she falls asleep. That shift of emotional tone is a very natural consequence of our adopting this model of analysis of poems; as I said, its consequences are momentous.

I pause here to make a digression on the theme of the excluded lover. There are many Augustan poems on this theme, and I am sure I am not alone in feeling at times that perhaps there are even too many. Parallels are found in the Hellenistic epigram, in Comedy, perhaps even in archaic lyric; but at Rome the motif flourished astonishingly. The discovery of parallels is not, let us say with emphasis, an explanation for such a thing, interesting though

⁹ On Propertius 1. 3 see Lyne in *PCPhS* 196 (1970), 60–78; G. Williams, *Figures of Thought in Roman Poetry* (1980), 72. We could construct a 'genre' of 'the rape of the sleeping beauty' (cf.

AP 5. 275; Terence, *Eun.* 600 ff.; Ovid, *Ars* 3. 765 ff.), and invoke that, too, to help explain the poem . . .

¹⁰ F. Cairns, *Emerita* 45 (1977), 336 ff.

it is; in fact the more parallels we find, the more pressing becomes the need to make sense of the phenomenon, in terms both of human nature, which changes very little, and of human society, which changes a great deal. I here offer an explanation which attempts to go beyond the simple collection and categorizing of parallel material.

In Rome, as in most early societies, relations between the sexes were organized in a way which left very little room indeed for romance. Marriage, in the upper class, was a family alliance, contracted without courtship and experienced without passion, however devoted spouses often became to each other.¹¹ Plutarch tells us that the reason why a Roman bridegroom approached his bride for the first time in darkness was so that he should be accustomed to come to his wife with modesty; if she is modest and reserved, he should reflect that he cannot treat the same woman both as a wife and as a hetaira. A Roman bride was very young, too, which must have had its consequences in the attitude towards her of a humane husband.¹² Outside marriage there were spread out for his pleasure, and at his expense, the various temptations of the demi-monde. But the human heart is not always satisfied with a choice between the modest wife who does her wifely duty—'officium facit nulla puella mihi', says the hedonist Ovid¹³—and the professional, the *meretrix*, who obliges because she is paid. There is the desire to be loved for oneself, to be chosen; Sir Kenneth Dover has shown how in Greece this clamorous desire of the heart led to demanding and extreme conceptions of homosexual love, men behaving, in the pursuit or in the service of a beloved boy, in ways which to us recall the conduct of romantic lovers.¹⁴ The boy was in principle a social equal, possessed of the power of choice, able to say Yes or No to his admirer; that was, perhaps, the most important and exciting thing about him. Such a train of thought is suggestive also for the excluded lover and his well-publicized woes, and indeed goes well beyond it to the whole conception of the cruel mistress, the *dura domina*, of elegiac love poetry.

Neither obliged by wifely status nor simply hired for money, the high-class girl who is taken seriously by Catullus and his successors is exhilarating because she can say No. That is what is important about her, far more than the question, so much debated, whether she is or is not married. Disreputable yet bewitching, she intoxicates her lover by accepting him for himself alone, not (as he is always reminding us) for money. When she says Yes, that has value *because* she can and does say No. The poets themselves are aware of this, and Propertius makes his *lena* advise her girl to promise herself and then refuse; Ovid's *lena* gives the same advice, and so does the poet himself in the Third Book of the *Ars*.¹⁵ The whole flavour of the relationship, its masochistic overtone, is connected with this fundamental fact, that here at last is an object of love who has power and uses it; and nowhere does she use it more vividly than in refusing to open her door at all. When that happens, the lover feels not only pain at his exclusion, but also a profound pleasure. "She has admitted me in the past, she will again, and that gift is a true one, as is proved by her ability not to give it; therefore I have been truly loved and can hope to be again . . ." Different social customs, the insignificance in Rome of the whole Greek culture of the palaestra and athletics, combined no doubt with other differences in the relation of the sexes, gave a heterosexual turn to a set of feelings which in Greece characteristically took a homosexual one. The importance of this sort of argument, I suggest, is that it tries to explain not merely that a poetical form is recurrent, but why it was attractive to poets: the excluded lover at the closed door of his mistress is a quintessential vision of his whole life of love.

From the *kōmos* and love locked out I turn to the other poem which I take as an example, the sixth poem of Propertius' First Book. In that poem, addressed to Tullus, Propertius says that while Tullus is going abroad on state service, he himself is kept at

¹¹ For instance, the well known story of the betrothal of Tiberius Gracchus to the daughter of Appius Claudius Pulcher: Plut., *Tib. Gracchus* 4.

¹² οὐ δύναμαι τῇ αὐτῇ καὶ ὡς γαμετῇ καὶ ὡς ἑταίρᾳ χρῆσθαι, *Coniug. Praecepta* 29 = *Moralia* 142c, a lapidary sentence for Roman ideas; and *Roman Questions* 65 = *Moralia* 279 f., on the question why the Roman husband approached his bride for the first time in darkness; and R. O. A. M. Lyne, *The Latin Love Poets* (1980), 5 ff., and P. Grimal, *L'amour à Rome*

(1963), 105 ff. on 'les pudeurs romaines' about marriage. On the age of Roman brides, K. Hopkins in *Population Studies* 18 (1965), 309-27.

¹³ Ovid, *Ars* 2. 688. See also *Ars* 3. 585: hoc est, uxores quod non patiatur amari: conveniunt illas, cum voluere, viri.

¹⁴ K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (1978), 52 ff.

¹⁵ Prop. 4. 5. 33 ff., Ov., *Amores* 1. 8. 73, *Ars* 3. 580.

home by his fatal love; it is not for him, born as he is to an ignoble life of *nequitia* and suffering, to comply with any of the patriotic functions of his class. The poem is intensely Propertian, full of his characteristic ethos. It is subjected to generic analysis and appears—it is the first poem dealt with in Professor Cairns' book—to be a 'schetliastic propemptikon'. The rhetorical writers, at least in the second century A.D.,¹⁶ were conscious of the propemptikon as a rhetorical form: a departing friend or official is given a speech at his send-off, which expresses the grief and disappointment of those who are left behind. There may appear to be nothing very contentious about connecting Propertius' poem with such speeches, but as we shall see positive identification has serious and unfortunate implications.

First, since Tullus is going on state service as a member of his uncle's staff, the propemptikon must be of the type from an inferior to a superior. Roman governors are the top of the social scale. It seems to follow that Tullus is Propertius' patron, and also that anything in the poem which appears not to be complimentary to Tullus must be re-interpreted, for 'in ancient literature it is impossible that a poem addressed to a patron-cum-dedicatee should be uncomplimentary. Despite appearances, therefore, the contrast cannot be uncomplimentary to Tullus. How then can we explain it?' (p. 4). It is time to stop and reflect. Did Propertius, at the time of Book One, have a patron? Miss Hubbard places the dedicatee, Volcacius Tullus, rightly, when she says that he came from 'a family of social status like that of the Propertii, but one that had followed the different road of the Roman official career'.¹⁷ Propertius addresses Tullus in four poems in Book One, including the first and last, clearly the position of honour; but he also addresses four poems to Gallus, who is also, it appears, *nobilis* (1. 5. 23). In the sixth poem Tullus is off to 'mollis Ionia', while in the fourteenth poem he is rich and idle, drinking rare vintages on the banks of the Tiber, 'abiectus Tiberina molliter unda'. It might seem a reasonable inference that he is not a patron but a friend, who can be treated with a certain humour; his tastes are not much more Spartan than the poet's own. It comes, on this view, as no surprise that in fact Tullus turned out, once in Asia, anything but Catonian, and Propertius wrote 3. 22 to suggest that after all there was something to be said for coming back to face the realities of life in Rome. We contrast the way Propertius addresses Maecenas, once he has come on the scene—'Maecenas nostrae spes invidiosa iuventae' (2. 1. 73). The poet is a gentleman, of an equestrian family,¹⁸ and like Catullus he speaks, in Book One, to friends and equals. There is, then, no need to suppose that Tullus is a 'patron', and consequently no need to insist that everything said to him must be straightforwardly complimentary.¹⁹

Finally, we are no longer inhibited from saying that 1. 6 is not, in its primary nature, a poem about Tullus at all. It is, of course, really about Propertius and his love, and more than half of the poem is explicitly about that. As with most of the First Book, the poet is telling us about his own life, what it is to be the slave of passion and to live for love; the interesting part of 1. 6 is the account of Cynthia pleading with him not to leave her, sulking and threatening, prevailing upon her susceptible lover to choose life and death with her rather than the University of Athens or the opulent cities of the East, rather even than the life of glory and duty.²⁰ Tullus, by contrast, is fairly colourless; we have no clear picture of what he will be doing in Asia,²¹ nor are we keenly concerned. The generic analysis thus leads again to an unsatisfactory reading of the poem as a whole, which turns out to be distorted in just the sort of way we anticipated *a priori*: insistence that it is the same kind of thing as what rhetoricians produced was bound to lead to the conclusion that it would be

¹⁶ Cf. for instance Gordon Williams in *Oxford Classical Dictionary*² s.v. Propemptikon: 'The genre as such and its detailed specifications were probably the invention of Menander'. It is in fact striking that the term appears in poetry before it does in rhetoric: the celebrated *Propemptikon Pollionis* of Cinna (*Fragmenta Poetarum Latiorum*, ed. Morel (1927), 87).

¹⁷ M. Hubbard, *Propertius* (1974), 24.

¹⁸ *ibid.* 96 ff., cf. Hanslik in *RE* s.v. Propertius, 758. 48. Of another elegist too, Sir Ronald Syme remarks 'The *Amores* enlist no persons of high rank as patrons or protectors,' (*History in Ovid* (1978), 76). See also pp. 93–103, on the friends of Propertius,

and p. 180: 'For Ovid as for Propertius, "sodales" are disclosed, of about the same age and class.'

¹⁹ Cf. J. Clack in *CW* 71 (1971), 187. On the general question of literary patrons, see P. White, 'Amicitia and the Profession of Poetry in Early Imperial Rome', *JRS* 68 (1978), 74–92. I think this important article is misleading in one significant respect: a poet differed from other 'amici' in claiming the power to bestow immortality. That put him into a special category.

²⁰ Cf. W. Stroh, *Die röm. Liebeslegie als werbende Dichtung* (1971), 41.

²¹ F. Cairns in *AJP* 95 (1974), 150.

impersonal and encomiastic, like their set speeches of praise. Rhetoricians were not often paid to talk about themselves.

I shall turn to the general question of the significance of the rhetorical genres for poetry after a glance at another poem in Book One: the eighth poem, which, like most recent writers, I shall treat as being one poem.²² In the first half the poet laments the departure of his beloved, who is leaving him to sail away with another man; in the second he exults that after all his prayers and his love prevailed upon her, and she did not go. This too, we find, is a propemptikon. The poet has complied with the rhetorical form in expressing resistance and opposition to her departure, and she has done what such a speaker wants by yielding to his 'schetiasmos' (p. 150). Reflection on this suggests reservations. A rhetor was employed, not to make a departing governor of a province actually change his mind and decide to stay, but to express in formal terms the sadness of his subjects at seeing him go. Rhetoric and Roman constitution alike would be thrown into confusion if the proconsul were to disembark and announce his intention of staying on for another year. Nor would the situation be wholly different in another case which Menander envisages: the departure of a pupil from the rhetor's school. His studies over, the pupil leaves; the occasion is turned to account by the rhetor to show how one speaks on such an occasion. But all would become burlesque if pupils were so overcome by the exposition of correct sentiments that they could not bring themselves to so depart. It is both important and amusing that Menander actually tells us how a real rhetor behaved, p. 397. 12: 'You should protest as if you wished to persuade him not to go, and failed to succeed; then you can go on "since your mind is made up and I have been defeated, come, let us go along with your decision . . ."'

The poems at which we have been looking all have in common, I want to say, a setting which is not wholly remote from the sort of genre alleged for them. The ancient world was one in which recurrent events and occasions were signaled by rhetoric and poetry; poems for birthdays, like speeches to mark the departure of grandees, were actually composed. And Romans were tolerant, in fact enthusiastic, about the elegant rehearsal of appropriate and well-turned phrases and motifs, however familiar. But none of this compels or even allows us to make the giant leap of asserting that every poem which plays with such a set piece, or which alludes to it or glances at it, actually is an example of it. I give a couple of examples from English poetry. In 1926 W. B. Yeats wrote:

' It is time that I wrote my will ;
I choose upstanding men
That climb the streams until
The fountain leap, and at dawn
Drop their cast at the side
Of dripping stone ; I declare
They shall inherit my pride . . . '

In twentieth-century Ireland the making of a will was a serious matter, overseen by the law, the duty of a prudent man. Instructions for the making of wills were on sale. But of course Yeats is not really writing the kind of will which was deposited with the family lawyer; the point is too obvious to labour. At the death of Yeats, Auden wrote:

' Earth, receive an honoured guest :
William Yeats is laid to rest.
Let the Irish vessel lie
Emptied of its poetry . . . '

Again, not something of the same stuff and form as the words which were in fact spoken at the funeral. In each case the poet makes use of occasions and ceremonies which recur in the real world, using them as part of his unique creation; the existence of real wills and real funerals is the necessary background to the poems, the starting point of their flight. In a

²² *Contra*, O. Skutsch in *CP* 58 (1963), 238, J. A. Barsby in *Mnem.* 28 (1975), 31.

society in which the dead were burned or exposed to vultures, Auden's poem would have little power.

Poets, we are told, can give to airy nothing a local habitation and a name. That, however, is not what they usually do. Very often a poet needs or delights to have a starting point, something which can be made to happen. A love poet, for example, cannot write very many poems simply repeating that 'I love you'; he soon feels the need for things to occur. Shakespeare's *Sonnets* refer, not always very lucidly, to various happenings in a complex story of love; Herrick writes of Julia moving in a silk dress; Ben Jonson makes use of the custom of toasting the beloved ('Drink to me only with thine eyes'); Lovelace leaves his Lucasta for the wars; and so on. The poet observes in the world certain tremendous facts which do not change—that there are two sexes, that children are born, that we all must die. He observes also other facts which are important in a given society or setting; ceremonies, customs, occasions. All of these can serve as subjects for his poetry: not only death but also funerals, not only birth but also birthdays. As the Augustan poet looked at his world he saw in it such things as the set speech which marked the occasion of the departure of a high functionary, a show-piece for the rhetorician; he also observed social customs such as the hopeful lover revelling through the night to the beloved's door, in which the rhetorician had no part; and thirdly he saw such universal things as gloating, the pleasure with which one who has uttered or thought a cruel prophecy for another observes its fulfilment, which was not only not a matter for the rhetorician but was not a social custom at all. Like poets of other times and places, he was at liberty to exploit all this material, and he did so.

In 1. 6 Propertius makes use of a setting which might have held a formal rhetorical speech on the virtues of Tullus and the grief of those he leaves behind; he uses it to create a work in which Tullus' virtues are adumbrated but thinly and with less than complete conviction, and in which the emphasis is all upon himself. So far from his missing the virtuous Tullus, in fact, his thoughts will be fully occupied with Cynthia; perhaps *Tullus* will occasionally think of *him* (lines 35 f.). If he does, he can be sure that Propertius' mind is full of Cynthia and her cruelty. In 1. 8 the same sort of setting is again not far from Propertius' mind; but since the poem is not, in fact, a rhetorical set speech but a quasi-dramatic piece which glances at such things, the impossible can happen, and the departing Cynthia after all stays at home with him—an occasion of despair for the rhetor, of delight for the poet. Poets can glance at such things and then turn to something else; they are not tied to the rhetorical forms, even if they really are aware of them in detail, as opposed to being familiar with the sort of occasion on which a speech might well be made. In the case of Propertius 1. 3 any connection which exists between the poem and the form—itself not rhetorical—of the *kōmos* is even more exiguous. Often lovers arrived by night, made a scene, and pleaded for admission; this time none of that happened. The languorous opening, so beautiful and touching, gives place to anger and abuse, but at no point do we really come close to the *kōmos*-situation.

If what I have been saying is right, then we find a simpler explanation for the fact that some poems do seem to stand in a definite relationship to these rhetorical genres, while others do not, and many others come close at one moment or another to one or more of them. We shall not, that is, have to think that a poem like Horace *Odes* 3. 27 is 'a propemptikon including an inverse epibaterion' (p. 165), or that Tibullus 1. 7 is 'a genethliakon including a triumph-poem' (pp. 167-9). We have seen reason to reject the idea that poems are to be regarded as incarnating one 'genre' each; the problems involved in any attempt to treat them as compound entities made up of several 'genres' will be far greater, and all the difficulties of principle will still remain. It will be a welcome consequence that we shall be delivered from the necessity of grappling with such scholastic questions as whether 'independent genres could become *topoi* of other genres' (Cairns, p. 85), or conversely whether 'topoi could become independent genres' (p. 87).

I turn back now to Propertius 1. 6. It will prove possible to look at the poem in a way which is not liable to these objections, and which, more importantly, has the positive advantage of showing how a surprisingly large part of Augustan poetry can be seen to be intimately connected and related. This will emerge from an analysis to which the rhetorical genres are essentially irrelevant. The contents of the poem can be summarized thus:

Tullus, you are off on military service; I should like to go, too, but my mistress keeps me at home. No true lover can be unresponsive to the beloved's tears; and so I cannot sail off to the cities of the East. You are serving your country, but I was not born for glory or for arms—my military service is that of love. As you do your duty amid the luxuries of Ionia, think of me suffering for love.

We have seen that a love poet needs things to happen; he cannot for ever descant simply on the greatness of his love. An obvious thing which can happen is that the lovers can be parted, and it has the advantage that unhappiness and suffering make much better material for poetry than conjugal serenity; consider that slimmest of volumes, the poetry of married love. We can avoid the terms 'genre' and 'topoi' at the basic level of our analysis, (which will be a considerable gain, as they are by no means free of obscurity and confusion),²³ if we begin from this simple human situation. It has its variations. He can leave her, or she can leave him; he can go willingly or unwillingly; she can go innocently or with another man; they can part for a time or for ever. Having been separated they can be re-united, with many possibilities of manner and motive. They can be finally separated by death—or indeed in death they may be finally united. Both their separation and their union may suggest by contrast other ways of life than that of their mutual devotion. That contrast may be bitter (how humiliating to live like this, when there are such alternatives!) or sweet (how much better to live like this, than the banal alternatives!). In developing this material, which derives from life, and relates intimately to it, the poet can indeed use, among other things, the devices of the rhetoricians.

In Rome at this period the universal situation of lovers parting could be related especially to important aspects of real life. First, the sophisticated courtesan was well aware of the importance of not being always available; thus with elegant brevity Ovid advises her,

quod datur ex facili, longum male nutrit amorem :
miscenda est laetis rara repulsa iocis.²⁴

Again, travel was easy, both within Italy²⁵ and overseas.²⁶ So too Volumnia Cytheris toured Italy with Antony,²⁷ and later left Gallus in a way which could be represented as going off with another Roman commander over the Alps.²⁸ The Roman Empire, too, like the British Empire, called men away to duties overseas. The departure of a Roman governor was an occasion for pomp and spectacle,²⁹ and he expected to take friends with him on his staff. Even Catullus, we remember, went out to Bithynia as a staff officer; an appointment hard to beat for unsuitability, at least until Edgar Allan Poe served as a regimental sergeant-major. The lover can thus travel to duty and to war³⁰—or refuse to do so.³¹ He can deftly bridge the gap with the idea that love *is* military service.³² He can travel with a friend—'a classical commonplace of literature' according to Cairns,³³ but a regular feature also of philosophy³⁴ and of life.³⁵

It seems to me an important point that many of the motifs which can be used of the lover lend themselves with equal facility to another style of life, that of the philosopher. As a man can leave love for war, so he can leave love for philosophy,³⁶ or again he can leave

²³ See for instance M. P. Cunningham in *CP* 72 (1977), 76–8—a discussion worth pondering.

²⁴ *Ars* 3. 579–80, cf. Prop. 4. 5. 33 ff., Ov., *Am.* 1. 8. 73, Callimachus, *Epigram* 31 Pf., Horace, *Serm.* 1. 2. 105.

²⁵ Cynthia at Baiae, Prop. 1. 11; in the country, 2. 19; touring Italy, 2. 32.

²⁶ Illyria, Prop. 1. 8; Asia, 1. 6.

²⁷ Cic., *Philipp.* 2. 58.

²⁸ Virg., *Buc.* 10; Prop. 1. 8.

²⁹ e.g. Livy 42. 49; Kroll, *Die Kultur der ciceronischen Zeit* (1933), 187.

³⁰ Hor., *Epode* 1. 11, Tib. 1. 10. 3; cf. Tib. 2. 6. 1 castra Macer sequitur; tenero quid fiet Amori?

³¹ Hor., *Epode* 1. 1, Tib. 1. 3. 1, Prop. 3. 4.

³² Tib. 1. 1. 75, Hor., *Carm.* 3. 26, Prop. 4. 1. 135; Ov., *Am.* 1. 9.

³³ *Generic composition* 4.

³⁴ cf. J. C. Yardley, *Phoenix* 27 (1973), 287, who cites Aristotle, *Nic. Eth.* 9. 2, Plut., *Mor.* 491 d, 52 b–c, 95 c–d, 97 a; Lucian, *Toxaris* 18, 43.

³⁵ Men even accompanied friends to exile: Cn. Sallustius went with Cicero as far as Brundisium and perhaps further (*ad fam.* 14. 4. 6. Münzer in RE s.v. Sallustius, 1912. 44); Cicero awaited Atticus at Dyrrachium and Quintus in Epirus (*ad Att.* 3. 7. 3; 3. 8. 1, cf. also *post red. ad Quir.* 8). He promised to accompany Sestius, if he were exiled (*pro Sest.* 146). Tiberius was accompanied by a senator and at least two *equites* on Rhodes (Tac., *Ann.* 4. 15); one brave soul could claim to have accompanied Seneca to Corsica (Martial 7. 44, 45).

³⁶ Memorably in [Virg.], *Catelepton* 5, cf. Prop. 3. 5. 19 ff., Horace, *Epp.* 1. 1. 10 ff. Reversed: Prop. 2. 34 b.

philosophy for war.³⁷ As we can say that it is useless to fly from the pains of love,³⁸ so we can say that travel is no cure for the anxieties which menace philosophical serenity;³⁹ as the lover is indifferent to military success and patriotic glory, so the philosopher, too, looks down on 'res Romanas perituraque regna';⁴⁰ as the desire for wealth is an obstacle to love,⁴¹ so it is to philosophy.⁴² And as a poet can say farewell to love,⁴³ so he can to philosophy, also.⁴⁴

So, too, themes which come in a context of sexual love recur with equal freedom and elegance in a context of friendship. A friend can leave the poet, whether for the wars⁴⁵ or for some other reason,⁴⁶ and that is an occasion for a poem no less than the departure of the beloved.⁴⁷ A friend can be begged to return,⁴⁸ and can come home and be greeted with rapture.⁴⁹ And so on.

It is not hard to see the threads which lead from this nexus of ideas to other important strands of Roman poetry. The opposition of love to wealth and to war is part of the rejection of the proper career of the Roman gentleman; the separation of lovers looks to the second *Eclogue*, and the Fourth Book of the *Aeneid*, and the *Heroides*; the motif of 'going away' can take yet further forms, in the flight from the ravaged countryside of *Eclogue* 1. 64, the flight from Italy of the Sixteenth *Epode*, the flight from Rome of the Third Satire of Juvenal. The beloved comes back to the poet (Prop. 1. 8b, Ov., *Am.* 2. 11. 42); or she comes, but slowly (Prop. 1. 15); or she comes, but not to him ([Virg.], *Catalepton* 1). The absent lover wonders what she is doing (Prop. 2. 29, 1. 3), or sends a spy (Prop. 3. 6), or arrives unannounced (Tib. 1. 3. 83).⁵⁰ She can leave him by death,⁵¹ or he can die and leave her;⁵² or they can die together,⁵³ or in death they can be finally united,⁵⁴ in an erotic Elysium⁵⁵—or, by a final twist, even there one lover can spurn the other.⁵⁶

The reader will see how it would be possible to go on extending, varying, and reversing these and cognate ideas, as they run through the poetry of Catullus and the Augustans. If we turn back to the generic analysis with which we started, we find that some of these poems are classified as examples of one or another rhetorical genre: 'inverse epibaterion', 'excusatory propemptikon', 'inverse syntaktikon', 'inverse proshphonetikon', and so on.⁵⁷ Such names, I suggest, have little explanatory power. When she sails away from me (Prop. 1. 8), we seem to find a rhetorical situation to hand in the propemptikon; but when I sail away from her (1. 17) there is none, so that generic analysis has to concentrate, not on my leaving her, but on my arrival somewhere else; and the poem becomes an epibaterion. But that disguises its real nature. And all the poems in which abandoned ladies complain of the men who have left them, from Catullus 64 to the *Heroides*, should be seen simply as the counterpart of the poems in which *she* leaves *me*; a satisfying simplicity which is obscured by calling the latter 'propemptika' and leaving the former nameless.

It may be true sometimes that poets glance at rhetorical set pieces, but these are at most only one in their armoury of devices; the material they use is that of the real world of Roman experience, and it falsifies the nature of the poems if we single out the rhetorical genres, give them the centre of the stage, and make them into the single, privileged key. The poets draw upon material which is itself a complex of individual experience, conventional expectations, literary models, propaganda, and fantasy. They mould it in their different individual ways. Propertius in 1. 6 combines the motif of 'friends parting' with others—'lovers staying together', 'love rather than duty', 'love is suffering'. The poem

³⁷ Hor., *Carm.* 1. 29.

³⁸ Prop. 2. 30. Reversed: Ov., *Rem. Am.* 539.

³⁹ Hor., *Carm.*, 3. 1. 40, *Epp.* 1. 11. 27.

⁴⁰ Virg., *Georg.*, 2. 498.

⁴¹ Lovers are poor, Tib. 1. 1. 5, Prop. 3. 16, Ovid, *Ars* 2. 165, etc. Reversed (poverty drives out love): Ov., *Rem. Am.* 743.

⁴² Hor., *Carm.*, 2. 2. 9-16, *Epp.* 1. 1. 43.

⁴³ Catull. 8, 11; Prop. 3. 24, 25; Ov., *Am.*

3. 25. 11.

⁴⁴ Hor., *Carm.* 1. 34.

⁴⁵ Hor., *Epode* 1; Tibull. 1. 3.

⁴⁶ Hor., *Carm.* 1. 3. Reversed (curse on a departing enemy): Hor., *Epode* 10.

⁴⁷ Prop. 1. 8, Hor., *Carm.* 3. 27, Ov., *Am.* 2. 11.

⁴⁸ Prop. 3. 22, Hor., *Epp.* 1. 11, Hor., *Carm.* 4. 5.

⁴⁹ Catull. 9, Hor., *Carm.* 1. 36, 2. 7.

⁵⁰ Or she can spy on him (Prop. 4. 8)—or Ovid can recommend, as a cure for love, arriving unannounced, to see how unattractive she really is (*Rem. Am.* 341-8).

⁵¹ Catull. 96, *Georgic* 4, *Aeneid* 2 (Creusa), *Aeneid* 6, 472, Prop. 2. 26.

⁵² Prop. 1. 17. 19, 2. 13. 17; Tib. 1. 1. 59.

⁵³ Prop. 2. 8.

⁵⁴ Prop. 1. 19. 11, 4. 7. 93. Variant: she can recall me from death, Prop. 2. 27.

⁵⁵ Tib. 1. 3. 55, Prop. 2. 28 c.

⁵⁶ *Aeneid* 6. 450 ff.

⁵⁷ Respectively: Horace, *Epode* 1; Tibullus 1. 3; Juvenal 3; Prop. 2. 16.

he produces is uniquely Propertian. Horace lets his characteristic irony play over all these themes—he cannot be a soldier (*Epode* 1. 16, cf. *Carm.* 2. 7. 9 ff.), just as he is no philosopher (*Serm.* 2. 2), and no epic poet (‘unfortunately I lack the stature’, *Serm.* 2. 1. 13, *Carm.* 1. 6. 10–12); he is—alas!—less attractive than young men like Calais or Telephus, too (*Carm.* 3. 9, 4. 11). And so she has left me—but she may come back (*Carm.* 3. 9)—after all, she might do worse (*Carm.* 1. 13, 4. 11). That is a tone which Propertius does not strike; the supple material lends itself with equal readiness to the combinations and the colourings which different poets wish to impose on it.

Because Rome had an Empire, and that Empire needed the service of the men of the upper class, the universal situation of the parting of lovers is sometimes set against that background. So the life of the lover is contrasted with that of the good citizen, soldier, barrister, and man of *auctoritas*. But there may be no such nuance. Cynthia may go off, not to a province but to the seaside temptations of Baiae; or Propertius may think of leaving her, not for Asia but for the grave. All the varieties and permutations of separation, absence, and reunion were of interest, both in friendship and in love, the supreme themes of these poets. All of them, it seems, actually occur in their work, whether they have an erotic colouring or a philosophical one, a patriotic or a seditious tone, a setting which would or would not suit a performance by a rhetorician. This sort of situation can form the main substance of a whole poem, as when Propertius bases 2. 16 on the coming of a rich rival who has displaced him in the favours of the venal Cynthia; or of most of a poem, as when Horace welcomes Augustus back from Spain in *Odes* 3. 14—but even there he turns to his own love life at the end; or they can be no more than a passing allusion in a poem based on other things, as when Tibullus mentions a *dives amator* in the middle of 1. 5. This sort of material, the situations of the love poet, is capable of many transformations. It is in fact as various, and as interesting, not as the set-pieces of the rhetoricians, but as life itself.⁵⁸

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⁵⁸ A version of this paper was read to the Roman Society on 3 June 1980.