

PROPERTIUS 2.7: *MILITIA AMORIS* AND THE IRONIES OF ELEGY*

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Criticism of Propertius 2.7 has usually centred around the elegy's role as evidence for the poet's attitude towards Augustus. Treated as such, it has been used to support a surprising variety of conclusions. For Stahl and Lyne the poem represents a courageous defence of individualism under a repressive and intolerant regime. At the other end of the spectrum, Cairns has tried to show that the poet's deliberate presentation of himself as 'a morally tainted individual' undercuts his argument to such an extent that the poem is effectively an endorsement of the legislation which it purports to attack.¹ Between these two extremes, Baker detects 'a cautious blend of levity and gravity' and suggests that, while emphasizing the value of *amor*, the elegy hints at a tension between Propertius' personal inclinations and the demands of others or his own sense of duty; Boucher, who believes that Propertius is generally pro-Augustan, reads 2.7 as an open and straightforward critique of the princeps' attempts at moral reform, which, by its very openness, militates against the reading of subtle irony into apparently patriotic elegies such as 3.11 and 4.6; and Camps speaks of 'a certain extravagance, even shrillness, in the manner in which Propertius expresses his defiance of ordinary Roman values' which 'may reflect tensions within the poet himself'.² More recently, Cloud³ has argued that Propertius has simply used the marriage law⁴ as a peg on which to hang his working out of a collection of Hellenistic erotic topoi, and that the poem cannot be read as a serious statement of opposition to the princeps.

It is remarkable that such a short and apparently straightforward poem should have elicited such a variety of readings. One way of explaining the diversity of opinion is to point to the different agendas (open or hidden) of the critics, most of whom set out to 'prove' that Propertius is either pro- or anti-Augustan, and find in the text what they expect to find. Almost all approach the poem with the expectation that it can and should be interpreted as more or less univocal, and they therefore suppress or explain away details which appear to conflict with such a reading. The terms of the debate have, in fact, often been over-simplified: as a number of more recent critics have pointed out, 'pro-Augustan' and 'anti-Augustan' are not in themselves unproblematic concepts.⁵ At the very least, the commentator should beware of suggesting that 'Augustanism' was the single-handed creation of an individual: the historical Augustus could more accurately be described as the representative — or even the creation — of a pre-existing set of values. Secondly, it is clear that political readings of elegy (and of Augustan poetry in general) are always conditioned to a greater or lesser extent by the ideology of the interpreter: if we set out to find a defiant and rebellious Propertius, we will no doubt succeed; equally, the reader who is sufficiently determined to prove that the poet gave the new regime his full support will not be short of supporting 'evidence'.

My aim in what follows is to transcend the misleading categories of earlier critics and, rather than asking whether the poem (still less the poet) is pro- or anti-Augustan,

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¹ H. P. Stahl, *Propertius: 'Love' and 'War'* (1985), 140–55; R. O. A. M. Lyne, *The Latin Love Poets* (1980), 77–8; F. Cairns, 'Propertius on Augustus' marriage law', *GB* 8 (1979), 185–204.

² R. J. Baker, 'Miles annosus: the military motif in Propertius', *Latomus* 27 (1968), 322–49; J. P. Boucher, *Études sur Propèrce* (1965), 135–6; W. A. Camps, *Propertius: Elegies Book 2* (1967), 97.

³ 'Roman poetry and anti-militarism', in J. Rich and

G. Shipley (eds), *Warfare and Society in the Roman World* (1993), 113–38.

⁴ Whatever its nature may have been; most recently, it has been argued that it was not in fact a piece of Augustan legislation, but an earlier law repealed by Octavian (along with other Triumviral measures of dubious legality) in 28 B.C. (See E. Badian, 'A phantom marriage law', *Philologus* 129 (1985), 82–98.) Badian's theory is dealt with in more detail below.

⁵ See esp. D. Kennedy, "'Augustan' and 'anti-Augustan': reflections on terms of reference", in A. Powell (ed.), *Roman Poetry and Propaganda in the Age of Augustus* (1992), 26–58; cf. also A. R. Sharrock, 'Ovid and the politics of reading', *MD* 33 (1994), 97–122.

to trace the ways in which the text opens up the possibility of either reading. The notion suggested by Baker and Camps, that the elegy reflects a tension of some kind in Propertius' writing, offers a useful point of departure. If, as my introductory doxography suggests, the poem can be read in a number of different ways, that may be because conflicting and self-contradictory elements are inherent in the text itself. I will suggest that what earlier readings of the poem have missed is a pervasive and sophisticated irony (which seems to me characteristic of Propertius and of elegy as a genre): the poem sets up a series of oppositions — between poetry and war, between love and respectability, between the 'elegiac lifestyle' and Augustan ideology — which it then proceeds to undermine and collapse in various ways. In the end, the individual reader may choose to interpret the poem as pro-Augustan or as anti-Augustan; but in either case, the possibility of an ironic sub-text still persists.

With this end in view, I shall begin by focusing on the opposition between love and war, which is central to Propertius 2.7 and to the elegiac genre as a whole. The characteristic doubleness of elegiac discourse is clearly exemplified by the conceit of *militia amoris*, which tends both to privilege and to devalue the life of love in comparison with the acceptable public career of the soldier or statesman. My discussion of *militia amoris* will then serve as the basis for a detailed reading of 2.7 in Section II of this paper.

I

The idea that love is a kind of warfare is an old one.⁶ There are isolated references in Greek lyric and tragedy to the weapons of Eros;⁷ the image of the lover struggling against his divine assailant, and the familiar iconography of the winged archer, were subsequently more fully developed by the Hellenistic poets.⁸ It is in Roman poetry, however, that the ramifications of the comparison are most fully worked out. In Plautus and Terence the metaphor becomes much more common, and is extended to include lovers' quarrels, the mistress' financial 'plundering' of her lover, and 'fights' against rivals, as well as the 'war' with unconquerable Eros.⁹ Lyne suggests that the popularity of this kind of imagery in comedy results from its potential to be either 'wittily discordant or unexpectedly and amusingly appropriate — love is both violent and supremely non-violent'.¹⁰ This analysis is worth bearing in mind when we come to consider Propertius' use of military imagery, which, I would suggest, relies on precisely this ambiguity: love is both like and unlike *militia*. In Propertius' case, however, though wit and humour are certainly present (and more prominent than traditional accounts of the 'anguished' Propertius would lead us to believe), the doubleness of the conceit also reflects elegy's essential ambivalence towards the traditional ideology of military *gloria* and public life.

Horace occasionally uses military metaphors in an erotic context,¹¹ but it is in elegy that the *militia amoris* topos really comes into its own. There are some half dozen examples in the poems of Tibullus. These range from passing allusions (such as 'adsidue proelia miscet amor', 1.3.64, or 'contra quis ferat arma deos?', 1.6.30) to more extensive programmatic passages. In 1.1 and 1.10, Tibullus rejects wealth and military service in

⁶ For more detailed discussion, see A. Spies, *Militat omnis amans. Ein Beitrag zur Bildersprache der antiken Erotik* (diss. Tübingen, 1930; repr. 1978); E. Thomas, 'Variations on a military theme in Ovid's *Amores*', *G&R* n.s. 11 (1964), 151–65; P. Murgatroyd, '*Militia amoris* and the Roman elegists', *Latomus* 34 (1975), 59–79; Lyne, op. cit. (n. 1), 71–8.

⁷ e.g. Anacreon, frs 27 and 46 (and cf. Sappho, fr. 1.28 and Theognis, fr. 1285–6 for the metaphor of erotic pursuit as warfare); Aesch., *P.V.* 649–51; Soph., *Ant.* 781, *Trach.* 497–8; Eur., *Hipp.* 392–3, 530–2, and 727.

⁸ e.g. *A.P.* 5.176–8; 12.23, 37, 45, 50, 76, and 144.

⁹ e.g. Ter., *Eun.* 59–61 (lovers' quarrels); Pl., *Trin.*

239 and Ter., *Hec.* 65 (the mistress plunders her lover); Pl., *Cist.* 300 (the war against love); Pl., *Pers.* 231–2, *Truc.* 230 (love as *militia*). In Greek new comedy, by contrast, the metaphor is strikingly rare: Alexis, fr. 234K is an isolated example. The language of warfare or conquest should also be distinguished from gymnastic metaphors (e.g. 'wrestling' as a euphemism for sex); a particularly striking example is Apuleius, *Met.* 2.17, as compared with [Lucian], *Onos* 9 (the lover in Apuleius' version is clearly figured as a soldier doing battle rather than as an athlete).

¹⁰ op. cit. (n. 1), 72.

¹¹ e.g. *Carm.* 1.6.17, 3.26, 4.1.1–2 and 16. Cf. also *Cat.* 37.3 and 66.13–14.

favour of a life of love and pastoral *otium*, which is represented as a kind of alternative *militia*, incompatible with a respectable public career:

hic ego dux milesque bonus; vos, signa tubaeque,
 ite procul; cupidis vulnera ferite viris,
 ferite et opes: ego composito securus acervo
 dites despiciam, despiciamque famem. (1.1.75–8)

Here I am a good general, a good soldier; away with you, standards and trumpets; bring wounds and riches to men who desire them: as for me, secure in my garnered harvest, I will scorn both wealth and want.

Similarly, in 1.2.65ff., war is rejected in favour of life with Delia; in 1.10 it is implicitly contrasted with the relatively harmless ‘Veneris bella’ of l. 53; in 2.3.37–50 the poet inveighs against *praeda*, which is the weapon of the poet’s rival, ‘campaigning’ in Tibullus’ own *domus*; and in 2.4.20, we find an example of the characteristically Propertian and Ovidian rejection of epic on the grounds that elegy is more ‘useful’ to the lover. For the first time,¹² *militia amoris* becomes the defining feature of a poetic programme and a way of life: by speaking of love in terms of *militia*, Tibullus both contrasts it with literal warfare and simultaneously asserts that love and love-poetry have equal validity with a more conventionally respectable career. Again, Tibullus’ use of the topos relies on the fact that love is both like war (and therefore the elegist is as good as the soldier/politician and the epic poet) and unlike war (which is rejected in favour of the life of peace, love, and *otium*). This simultaneous acceptance and rejection of *militia* leads to a certain tension: the problem is that the elegist needs to subscribe to conventional social values for the first part of the comparison (the claim to respectability) to work, even as he rejects them in favour of his alternative system of values. This irony comes to the surface in 2.6, in which Tibullus considers deserting from Cupid’s army to join Macer on a real campaign, but proves unable to escape his painful fate. Here, the military metaphor has the opposite effect from its use in 1.1. Rather than rejecting war in favour of love, Tibullus now depicts both kinds of *militia* as harsh and unpleasant. He is unable to escape Cupid, because one cannot bear arms against a god; here, though, he is no longer ‘dux milesque bonus’, but rather an unwilling conscript to love’s army.¹³

In Tibullus, then, *militia amoris* is expressive of a characteristic equivocation between acceptance and rejection of the prevailing ideology of upper-class Roman society. Traditionally, military and political success are seen as appropriate goals in life, while love is dismissed either as non-serious or as harmful and demeaning (if indulged in to an excessive degree).¹⁴ Similarly, love poetry is light and insubstantial, by contrast with the weighty seriousness of epic. Tibullus challenges these conventional values in their own terms: rather than rejecting the view that the lover is a degenerate idler, and the poetry of love lacking in weight, he responds by privileging ‘idleness’ over the corruption of public life, and ‘light’ poetry over the dead weight of epic. But by accepting the conventional labels, Tibullus exposes the inadequacy of the ‘elegiac lifestyle’ as an ideal: love is desired, but also painful and humiliating; war and public life are devalued, but also likened to the lover’s own experience.

In Propertius, both the contrasts and the similarities between war and *otium*, between real warfare and the *militia amoris*, become an extremely prominent theme, particularly in Books Two and Three. This may reflect Tibullan influence, but Propertius develops the topos much more thoroughly than his contemporary, to the extent that *militia amoris* can be seen as one of the major themes of Book Two. In fact, about half the elegies in the book contain some reference to the relationship between

¹² There is some evidence that the conceit was employed by Gallus, however: see Virgil, *Ecl.* 10.44–5 and 69, with Coleman’s commentary, ad loc.

¹³ Both Spies, op. cit. (n. 6), 72–3, and Murgatroyd, op. cit. (n. 6), 77, are aware of the double-edged nature of the topos; but neither fully brings out the ironies which result from the tension between acceptance and rejection.

¹⁴ These attitudes are most clearly exemplified by Cicero’s treatment of Caelius’ relationship with Clodia in the *Pro Caelio*: Caelius’ behaviour is defended on the grounds that he was never deeply involved, and that in due course he gave up the affair in order to devote himself fully to a public career.

love and *militia*. Propertius applies the comparison and explores its implications in a variety of different ways and different contexts; the Tibullan phrase 'adsidue proelia miscet amor' could be used as a kind of epigraph for the book, in which Propertius works out the metaphor in all its possible ramifications.

The most straightforward use of the metaphor is as a euphemism for sex: in 2.1, the poet speaks of 'wrestling' with his naked mistress, and irreverently describes such encounters as 'longae Iliades'; and in 2.14 a new conquest (or perhaps a reconciliation with Cynthia) is compared to the sack of Troy and to victory over the Parthians. Alternatively, the war may be against the lover's rivals: as the poet bitterly remarks in 2.8.7-10, 'vinceris aut vincis, haec in amore rota est'. Or, as in the Hellenistic epigrams, the enemy may be Amor himself, who breaks a treaty (2.2), triumphs over the poet (2.8.39-40), and is asked, in imitation of an epigram of Asclepiades (*A.P.* 12.166), to keep shooting at the wretched lover until he is dead and out of his misery (2.9.37-40). There are also several passing references to the weapons of Amor.¹⁵ A less direct analogy between love and war is set up by the numerous comparisons in Book Two between Propertius' situation and scenes or characters from the *Iliad*, to which there are no fewer than ten references in different poems.¹⁶ Yet another group of poems contrasts the lover's life and the soldier's, or elegiac and martial poetry: these include the programmatic elegies 2.1, 2.10, and 2.34, and passages (e.g. 2.7, 2.14.23-4, and 2.15.41-6) which reject war in favour of a life of idleness and love.

In Book Two, then, Propertius displays some ingenuity in his exploration of various different ways in which the comparison between love and war can be applied.¹⁷ But this complex manipulation of the topos is not simply a literary exercise: it also serves to develop an analogously complex and ambiguous picture of Propertius' attitude towards the establishment and towards conventional morality.

Before looking in more detail at the way *militia amoris* operates in Book Two, it is worth turning back briefly to 1.6, in which Propertius first refers to his own lifestyle as *militia*. Tullus has asked the poet to accompany him to Asia on the staff of his uncle, the proconsul of the province. Propertius turns down the offer on the grounds that Cynthia has begged him to stay, and continues:

me sine, quem semper voluit fortuna iacere,
hanc animam extremae reddere nequitiae.
multi longinquo periere in amore libenter,
in quorum numero me quoque terra tegat.
non ego sum laudi, non natus idoneus armis:
hanc me militiam fata subire volunt. (1.6.25-30)

Since fortune has always wanted me to lie low, allow me to give up my life to utter worthlessness. Many have perished gladly in lasting love, in whose company may earth cover me, too. I was not fitted by my birth to praise or feats of arms: this is the soldiering which my fate wills me to undertake.

Here, the poet sets out what we might call the elegiac dilemma. On the one hand, love is 'nequitia', it involves the lover in suffering, loss of reputation, and all the other evils associated with erotic passion by moralists as different as Cicero and Lucretius. On the other, it is not only desirable — a death one would gladly die — but even, in some sense, as valid a 'career' as the more conventional path pursued by Tullus. It is hard — perhaps, finally, impossible — to decide who is the butt of the irony which pervades

¹⁵ See 2.13.1-2, 2.30.31, and the more developed working out of the image in 2.12.9-24.

¹⁶ 2.1.14 and 49-50, 2.3.32-40, 2.6.16, 2.8.29-40, 2.9.16, 2.13.37-8, 2.14.1-2, 2.15.13-14, 2.20.1-2, 2.22.29-34.

¹⁷ Indeed, it might be argued that Ovid's more explicit elaboration in *Am.* 1.9 functions as a kind of commentary on Propertius 2. Like Propertius, Ovid self-consciously applies the comparison in a number of different ways: in ll. 4-8, the mistress plays the role of general, with the lover as her soldier; in 9-16 and

19-20, the mistress is the object of the lover's *militia*; in 17-18 and 21-8, the lover is at war with his rivals, or the mistress' husband or *custodes*; and in 33-8, Ovid introduces figures from the Trojan War as *exempla*. Cf. also B. Otis, 'Propertius' single book', *HSCP* 70 (1965), 1-44, which raises the possibility of reading Book One as a 'working out' of the theme of *servitium amoris* through a series of contrasts and symmetries between poems. My analysis of Book Two is rather similar.

these lines. There is, at some level, a rejection (or defiance) of conventional social values here; but the tone of helpless regret, and the poet's overt acceptance of terms like 'nequitia' and 'non laudi idoneus', can also be seen as deflating.¹⁸ Line 30 can be read either way: either it expresses pride in the *militia amoris*, as something ultimately as valuable as literal *militia*; or it carries the ironic implication that, by rejecting one kind of *militia*, Propertius has simply bound himself to another kind, which is both more gruelling and — in conventional terms — less rewarding. Or we can accept both possibilities, and say that the line sums up the paradoxical and mocking stance which is characteristic of Propertius' poetry, in which love is viewed simultaneously through the eyes of the obsessed lover and of an ideology which condemns such obsession as diametrically opposed to the duties and rewards of public life. In sum, Propertius' mockery is directed both at conventional morality and at the pretensions of his own elegiac *persona*.

In several passages in Book Two, the regretful tone of 1.6 is replaced by a more defiant note. The theme of the poet's unfitness for any other kind of life is picked up in 2.1, Propertius' *recusatio* to Maecenas. Here he excuses himself from writing epic on the grounds that, like Callimachus, he is not up to 'thundering'; yet the tone of the poem is far from modest.¹⁹ The phrase 'longae Iliades', the suggestion in ll. 43–6 that 'battles in a narrow bed' are just as respectable a profession as farming, sailing, or soldiering, and the bold claim 'laus in amore mori' are all deliberately provocative, simultaneously claiming for elegy a status equal with that of epic and mocking the traditional morality which would term his relationship with Cynthia 'extrema nequitia'. On the other hand, the high ideal of a faithful lifelong relationship (47–8) is somewhat undercut by Propertius' lack of certainty that he will be the only one to enjoy Cynthia's love, and her supposed condemnation of the *Iliad* on the grounds of Helen's immorality (50) is highly ironic in view of the fact that she is herself compared to Helen (explicitly or implicitly) in several other elegies.²⁰ In 2.1, Propertius challenges the conventional view that elegy and the so-called 'elegiac lifestyle' are morally inferior to epic and a public career; yet the humorous extravagance of his claims tends to soften their impact, and to open up the possibility of a reading in which Propertius' *persona* is viewed as absurdly and comically exaggerated.²¹

Two elegies seem to go much further. In 2.15.41–8, the poet claims that if everyone lived a life of 'wine, women, and song', there would have been no Actium and no Civil Wars; and in 2.14, he celebrates his 'conquest' (or reconciliation, if we assume that the girl is Cynthia) as 'devictis potior Parthis'. Both statements are certainly irreverent and mocking, and have been read by critics like Stahl as overt defiance of the Augustan regime. But is the issue really that straightforward? The context is important. In both poems, Propertius expresses the exultant feelings of the successful lover through a series of extravagantly hyperbolic protestations. His joy exceeds that of Agamemnon, Ulysses, Electra, or Ariadne (2.14.1–4); he will become immortal if such bliss continues (2.14.10, 2.15.39–40); his conquest is better than 'spolia', 'reges', and 'currus'

¹⁸ This kind of self-mockery also occurs in Roman comedy (e.g. Plaut., *Most.* 85–156), where the 'reprobate' lover laments his own downfall. The humour here is derived from the young man's application *to himself* of the kind of language conventionally directed against the follies of love by the moralists.

¹⁹ On the paradoxical interplay between weakness and strength characteristic of the Callimachean *recusatio*, and its relationship to the self-abasement of the elegiac lover, cf. A. R. Sharrock, 'The drooping rose: elegiac failure in *Amores* 3.7', *Ramus* 24 (1995), 152–80.

²⁰ See esp. 2.3.32, 2.6.16, 3.8.32.

²¹ cf. P. Veyne, *Roman Erotic Elegy* (trans. D. Pel-lauer, 1988), esp. 97–100. Veyne, however, sees elegiac discourse as entirely humorous: 'the Roman elegists smile about what they are talking about — love, heroines, Ego — but they are absolutely serious about the rules of the genre' (99). This is, I think, an

over-simplification. Although, as I have argued, Propertius' self-irony makes it difficult to take his anti-conformist stance at face value, neither can we take him to mean exactly the opposite of what he seems to be saying. If the elegiac ideal of love, fidelity, *otium*, and freedom from the demands of society is shown to be unattainable and in some ways absurd, that does not alter the fact that the elegists are, on one level, putting it forward as an ideal. The fact that Propertius constantly undercuts his 'rebellious' stance does not prevent his poetry from being provocative. The complexity of elegiac irony makes it possible either to take the poems straight, or to read them as a joke; but both approaches are, in my view, equally partial. For a critique of Veyne, see G. B. Conte, *Genres and Readers* (trans. G. W. Most, 1994), 158–60, n. 19; cf. also the reviews by M. Wyke, *JRS* 78 (1988), 166–70 and D. P. Fowler, *G&R* 37 (1990), 104–6.

(2.14.23–4); the girl holds the power of life and death over her lover (2.14.31–2), and he will be faithful to her in death as in life (2.15.31–6). The references to the Parthians and to Actium stand in each poem as the climactic assertion of the validity of the poet's way of life. The conquest of the Parthians is introduced as the *summum bonum* of the conventional military and political career which Propertius rejects for himself (he does not, after all, say that such a campaign would be worthless, but that he himself prefers a different kind of conquest). In 2.15, he seems to come closer to saying 'make love not war', but there is something slightly ridiculous in the implication that drunkenness is a preferable alternative to the ambitions which lead to war. Line 44 recalls the Golden Age imagery used, for instance, by Tibullus at the beginning of 1.10; but the fact that it is 'pocula'²² rather than rustic simplicity or old-world piety that is opposed to warfare tends to subvert the commonplace antithesis between pastoral innocence and military-political strife. The eight lines devoted to Actium here also form a kind of diptych with eight lines (35–42) on the same subject in the next poem, 2.16. Here, Propertius is in a gloomier mood, lamenting Cynthia's financial greed, and love is now seen as something humiliating rather than elevating. The poet's assessment of Actium is also strikingly different: Antony is now described as subject to 'infamis amor', which causes him to turn tail at the crucial moment, and his cowardice contrasts with Caesar's 'virtus' and 'gloria'. The poet's equivocation in his handling of the battle thus corresponds very clearly to his equivocal presentation of love and the elegiac lifestyle itself. Both passages are in one sense subversive: the first exploits the conventional association between civil war and moral guilt to justify Propertius' 'immoral' lifestyle; in the second, he 'excuses' his weakness on the grounds that much greater men have fallen prey to love. But by characterizing himself as a drunken degenerate, by appearing to accept society's evaluation of his way of life, even as he rejects what society conventionally regards as success, he has again left open the possibility of two (or more) readings.²³ We can take him either to be mocking the conventions of Augustan panegyric, or to be satirizing the pretensions of his own *persona* — the rebellious youth, who thinks the world well lost for love.

There is also a latent uncertainty in both 2.14 and 2.15 that the ideal of 'love till death' can actually be carried through. While sure of his own loyalty, the poet can do no more than hope for the loyalty of his mistress (2.14.29–32, 2.15.25–8), and the opening *exempla* in 2.14 do not bode well. The victories of Agamemnon and Ariadne were both followed by sticky ends, and the rejoicing of Electra and Ulysses was, to say the least, premature. The juxtaposition of these two poems with two (2.16 and 17) in which the poet laments his separation from his fickle mistress tends to confirm these hints.

So far, then, we have seen that Propertius exploits the topos of *militia amoris* as a way of dissociating himself from conventional morality and social values and of asserting the validity of the elegiac lifestyle and elegiac poetry as an alternative to an official career and to 'official' poetry. *Militia* in its literal sense stands for the kind of activity which a young man in Propertius' position might be expected to pursue: by referring to his affair with Cynthia in the same terms, he excuses his lack of ambition and rejection of *negotium* on the grounds that to live and die a lover is just as worthy a goal in life. At the same time, the language he uses points to a degree of irony in these claims. While he mocks both overtly and implicitly the values of the Augustan establishment, he also exposes his own *persona* to mockery as the fatuous devotee of unworthy ideals. From this point of view, the role of the addressee may be seen as particularly significant: unlike Catullus, who addresses himself primarily either to Lesbia herself, or to members of his circle who can be expected to share his views on life and love, Propertius' reader is generally characterized as a more conventional figure. Despite his claims to write for an audience of young lovers,²⁴ his addressees (Tullus in 1.1 and 1.6, Bassus in 1.4, Maecenas in 2.1,

²² This interpretation assumes that the MS reading 'pocula' is accepted; most recent editors prefer Fontein's conjecture 'proelia'.

²³ Much the same could be said of the reference to Antony which some critics (e.g. J. Griffin, *Latin Poets and Roman Life* (1985), 35) have seen in 2.15. If the

allusion in one sense aligns the poet with Augustus' rival, it also undermines itself by accepting the anti-Antonian propaganda which portrayed him as a drunkard.

²⁴ See 1.7.11–24, 2.13.11–12.

or the anonymous *amicus* of 2.8) are often represented as attempting to dissuade him from his devotion to Cynthia. Thus, the audience is characterized, by and large, as hostile to (or at least, not automatically in agreement with) the ideals the poet proclaims. This again tends to open up scope for irony, as we are distanced from the speaker and alerted to the possibility that he, rather than the 'senes duri', may in the end be the butt of his own mockery.

Some of the other ways in which the topos is used in Book Two point to an even more ambivalent and ironical attitude. One of these is the frequent comparison with the *Iliad*. On the one hand, the way Propertius uses this comparison is supremely self-confident: his 'battles' with his mistress have the status of 'longae Iliades' (2.1.14), his tomb will be as famous as Achilles' (2.13B.37-8), Cynthia is another Helen (2.3.32ff.), and so on. Moreover, he persists in reading the *Iliad* as a work of love-poetry: it is about a 'levis puella' (2.1.50), and the relationship between Achilles and Briseis is several times treated as an *exemplum*, particularly at the end of 2.8, where all the effects of Achilles' wrath are ascribed to his frustrated love for 'formosa Briseis'.²⁵ This somewhat perverse reading of the epic may constitute another justification for writing love-poetry — usually seen as the antithesis of epic. On the other hand, the comparison which Propertius draws between himself and the Homeric heroes is often so wildly incongruous that it amounts to a deliberate undermining of the poet's overt claims. The most extreme example of this occurs in 2.22A, where Propertius compares his 'staying power' to the ability of Achilles and Hector to fight after a night of love. But in other contexts, too, the contrast with the heroic exploits of the *Iliad* tends to qualify the idea that love really is the most important thing in life. The last couplet of 2.8, for example, draws attention to this disparity, and to the perversity of reading the *Iliad* simply as a love story exemplifying the triumph of Amor:

inferior multo cum sim vel matre vel armis,
mirum, si de me iure triumphat amor?

Since I am inferior both in birth and in arms, is it any wonder that love justly triumphs over me?

Here, the references to Achilles' 'mater' and 'arma' remind us of the other issues involved: Homer's Achilles was not in fact motivated solely by Briseis' beauty, but by concern for his social status and for recognition of his military superiority²⁶ — precisely the kind of concern which Propertius claims to repudiate. Moreover, the mingling in this couplet of literal and figurative senses of *militia* (Achilles' arms are literal, but the triumph of *Amor* is figurative) exposes the factitious basis of the comparison. These ironies are carried further by the reference to Briseis in the following poem, where Briseis' loyalty is contrasted with Cynthia's unfaithfulness.²⁷

²⁵ cf. 2.9.9-16, 2.10.1, 2.22.29-30. Penelope's exemplary loyalty is similarly invoked in 2.9.4-8 and 3.13.24. Galinsky's term *reductio ad amorem* (coined to describe Ovid's allusions to the *Aeneid*) could equally well be applied to Propertius, who can often be shown to have anticipated traits which are usually thought of as peculiarly Ovidian.

²⁶ cf. *Il.* 1.280: εἰ δὲ σὺ καρτερός ἔσσι, θεὰ δὲ σε γείνατο μήτηρ.

²⁷ The Iliadic theme is taken up again briefly in Book Three (see especially 3.1.25-6 and 3.8.29-32). The Homeric poems again act as a kind of foil in Book Four, where the two Cynthia poems, 4.7 and 4.8, can be read as parodic versions of episodes from the closing sequences of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* respectively (cf. M. Hubbard, *Propertius* (1974), 149-55). Cynthia's ghost in Poem 7 has strong affinities with the ghost of Patroclus as it appears to Achilles in *Il.* 23 (cf. esp. ἢ ῥά τις ἔστι καὶ εἰν Ἀΐδαο δόμοισι | ψυχὴ καὶ εἰδωλὸν . . . παννυχίη γάρ μοι Πατροκλήος δειλοῖο | ψυχὴ ἔφεστήκει (*Il.* 23.103-6) with 'sunt aliqui Manes . . . Cynthia namque meo visa est incumbere fulcro' (Prop. 4.7.1-3); more generally, 4.7.5-6 ~ *Il.*

23.62-4; 7-8 ~ *Il.* 23.66-7; 13-14 ~ *Il.* 23.69-70; both ghosts issue instructions relating to their burial; 93-4 ~ *Il.* 23.91-2; and 96 ~ *Il.* 23.99-101). In Poem 8, the 'rout' of Phyllis and Teia, the punishment of the disloyal slave Lygdamus, the purification of the house, and the conclusion 'toto solvimus arma toro' recall the sequence of events in *Odyssey* 22-3 (rout of the suitors, punishment of disloyal slaves, purification, and reunion between Odysseus and Penelope). As in Book Two, the implicit comparison between the heroic and elegiac milieux contains a great deal of irony and humour (especially in 4.8). In neither poem do the protagonists live up to the characters of their Homeric models: in 7, the spite and vindictiveness of Cynthia's ghost contrast with Patroclus' pathetic pleas, and Propertius' apparent disloyalty to her memory with Achilles' devotion. The gruesome details of 7-12 and the evocation of contemporary 'low-life' in Cynthia's speech also mark the distance between this almost sordid world and the glamorous life and death of the Homeric heroes. There may also be a further example of creative 'misreading' of Homer in Propertius' use of the relationship between

The idea that love is a battle against Amor, which also occurs quite frequently,²⁸ is another version of *militia amoris* which tends to devalue the status of the life of love. To describe Love as a being with whom the lover is in conflict presupposes the old idea that love is a plague, a madness, something to be avoided — a view in fact diametrically opposed to the elegiac ideal of love as a lifelong *foedus*. This is the view expressed in 1.1, where love is seen as a *furor*, an incurable illness, from which the poet would like to escape. Admittedly, Propertius tends to use the impossibility of conquering the god, like his own unfitnes for physical *militia*, as an ‘excuse’ for continuing in his present way of life, as in 2.30.31–2, where he complains that he alone is taken to task for what is really a ‘communis culpa’; but the idea that love is ideally something to be avoided runs through Book Two, counteracting the notion that the *vita iners* is wholly to be desired.

In Book Two, and throughout the collection, then, *militia amoris* is used as a way of exploring and developing the generally anti-establishment and anti-conformist stance of elegy as a genre. Propertius parades his rejection of conventional values and standards of behaviour:

haec ubi contigerint, populi confusa valet
fabula. (2.13.13–14)

When these things have fallen to my lot, let the babbling gossip of the people go hang.

ista senes licet accusent convivia duri:
nos modo propositum, vita, teramus iter. (2.30B.13–14)²⁹

Stern old men may complain about those parties of ours: but let us, my life, follow the road we have embarked upon.

This is, of course, also a poetic creed, and the rejection of a respectable career in favour of the *vita iners* is intimately connected with the rejection of epic in favour of elegy. Both oppositions are encapsulated in the contrast between love and *militia*. But because love is also like *militia*, the opposition constantly tends to collapse. Love is not consistently held up as an ideal: like real warfare, it is also connected with hardship, uncertainty, and death. The lover is not always the proud warrior under the standards of Amor; he is also the unwilling slave of his mistress or of love itself. He is both an Achillean hero and a feeble degenerate.³⁰ On the poetic level, the claim that elegy is as good as epic entails acceptance of the conventional evaluation of epic as the highest genre, and Propertius undermines his self-assertion by the extravagance of his misreading of the *Iliad* as a love poem. On the political level, the poet both accepts and refuses to celebrate the status quo. Augustus is automatically regarded as ‘one of them’, as the supreme representative of the ‘senes duri’ who would have Propertius abandon his scandalous lifestyle, and of those who engage in real *militia*. As such, he is treated with a mixture of humility and defiance, just as Tullus is in 1.6. Where Propertius takes the line that his affairs are just as important as war or epic, the tone is almost insolent: in 2.1, he virtually puts his own ‘battles’ on a par with Caesar’s, and (perhaps) cites some of the less glorious episodes of the recent civil wars as examples of what he would write about had his fate allowed him to compose an epic.³¹ In the second *recusatio* in Book Two, Poem 10, he takes the opposite line: he is prepared to sing of Augustus’ exploits, but has not yet attained the heights of Helicon, and so must regretfully postpone the enterprise.

Patroclus and Achilles as a model for his own erotic connection with Cynthia. In 4.8, neither character has the fidelity of Homer’s Penelope (though there may be an ironic echo of her resistance to the suitors in Propertius’ assertion that Phyllis and Teia proved unable to arouse him because his mind was on the absent Cynthia); and there is further irony in the fact that Propertius casts himself in the feminine role, while Cynthia plays the avenging Odysseus.

²⁸ e.g. 2.2.1–2, 2.9.37–40, 2.12, 2.13.1–2.

²⁹ There is an obvious echo of Catullus 5 here, but the difference in tone is instructive. In Propertius’

version, defiance of conventional morality is played off against the idea that Amor is a tyrannical conqueror who will not let his victims escape (31–2, and cf. Poem 30A — although most editors regard this as a separate poem, the juxtaposition is still significant).

³⁰ cf. A. La Penna, *L’integrazione difficile: un profilo di Propertio* (1977), 135–6 and 170 on the ‘incoerenza’ of Propertius’ ideology. Cf. also Boucher, op. cit. (n. 2), 24–35 and Sharrock, op. cit. (n. 10).

³¹ cf. Camps, op. cit. (n. 2), ad loc.; J. P. Sullivan, *Propertius* (1976), 57–8; Stahl, op. cit. (n. 1), 164–7.

These equivocations seem to me one of the most characteristic features of the elegiac genre. While the elegiac poets proclaim the ideals of lifelong fidelity and the rejection of conventional values, they are constantly showing us that these ideals are unattainable. The final renunciation of the beloved is an integral part of the story, as are her infidelity, greed, and cruelty. The lover is both godlike and enslaved. He poses as an anti-establishment figure, but is only able to express himself in the language of the society he claims to distance himself from.³² The extravagance of his gestures and the stereotypical nature of his *persona* constantly draw attention to themselves, leaving us uncertain whether he is finally challenging convention, or reaffirming it by exposing the absurdity and implausibility of the ideals he proclaims. These ironies are fully apparent in 2.7, where the ambiguous figure of *militia amoris* again has an important role to play.

II

Gavisa es certe sublatam, Cynthia, legem
 qua quondam edicta flemus uterque diu,
 ni nos divideret: quamvis diducere amantis
 non queat invitos Iuppiter ipse duos.
 'At magnus Caesar'. sed magnus Caesar in armis: 5
 devictae gentes nil in amore valent.
 nam citius paterer caput hoc discedere collo
 quam possem <e> nuptae perdere more faces,
 aut ego transirem tua limina clausa maritus,
 respiciens udis prodita luminibus. 10
 a mea tum qualis caneret tibi tibia somnos,
 tibia, funesta tristior illa tuba!
 unde mihi patriis natos praebere triumphis?
 nullus de nostro sanguine miles erit.
 quod si vera meae comitarem castra puellae, 15
 non mihi sat magnus Castoris iret equus.
 hinc etenim tantum meruit mea gloria nomen,
 gloria ad hibernos lata Borysthenidas.
 tu mihi sola places: placeam tibi, Cynthia, solus:
 hic erit et patrio sanguine pluris amor.³³ 20

You rejoiced, to be sure, Cynthia, when the edict was withdrawn — the edict which once cost us both so many tears, lest it should divide us; though Jupiter himself could not divide two lovers who did not wish it. 'But Caesar is mighty'. Yes, Caesar is mighty in arms: but conquered tribes have no power in matters of love. For I would sooner allow this head to be severed from my neck, than waste torches and live like a bride, or pass your closed door, once wed, looking back with wet eyes on the scene of my betrayal. Ah, what a lullaby my flutes would play for you then, those flutes more mournful than the funeral trumpet! How am I to get sons to serve my country's triumphs? No one of my blood will be a soldier. But if I could really follow my girl's camp, Castor's horse would not be big enough for me. Indeed, it is from this that my name has won such fame — fame that has travelled as far as wintry Borysthenides. I love you alone: may you, Cynthia, love me alone: this love will be worth even more to me than the blood of my ancestors. (2.7)

In this short poem, the opposing images of the lover as a degenerate idler and as a heroic figure with his own loyalties and his own kind of *gloria* are played off against each other in complex ways, which tend to undermine neat oppositions, and make it difficult to come up with a definitive reading of the poem as either 'pro-Augustan' or 'anti-Augustan'.

³² Note especially the paradoxical condemnation of contemporary immorality and *luxuria* in passages like 2.6.35–6, 2.9.3–18, 2.16.15–22, and 3.13, which recall the Augustan moralizing of Horace or Virgil.

³³ The text is taken from Camps, except for the reading '<e> more' in l. 8, on which see n. 47 below.

To illustrate my point, it is worth glancing briefly at two of the more extreme interpretations advanced by representatives of the 'pro-Augustan Propertius' and 'anti-Augustan Propertius' schools of thought. Cairns and Stahl approach the poem from opposite directions. Cairns contends that it is impossible to take the poem at face-value, as an attack on Augustan marriage legislation, because Augustus would simply not have countenanced such an attack from one of Maecenas' protégés. His main argument rests on an analysis of the poet's *persona*, which has affinities with the wastrel youth of Roman comedy and characterizes the speaker as 'a morally tainted individual'. His attack on the law is deliberately inadequate,³⁴ and would not have impressed the contemporary reader; and his eulogy of Augustus in ll. 1–6 would be all the more flattering, coming as it does from 'the last man on earth to appreciate or value military success'.

Stahl, by contrast, assesses the tone of the poem as 'defiant', taking the first six lines to be ironic, and the protestations of ll. 7–10 to be sincere. He admits that the language is hyperbolic, but assumes that the exaggeration and the 'jocular' tone of the closing lines are 'designed to take the potential political sting out of the poem'. Propertius, he argues, is characterized as a kind of anti-type of Virgil's hero in *Aeneid* 4, rejecting duty for love.

It should be clear from these summaries to what an extent the 'meaning' of the poem is conditioned by the values and assumptions the reader brings to the text.³⁵ Cairns shows that it is possible (with some ingenuity) to read the poem as pro-Augustan if (and only if) one begins by assuming that 'the commonplace guise of the lover-poet' is both morally objectionable and not to be taken seriously. Stahl shows that it is possible to take it the other way, though only by glossing over elements in the poem which conflict with his reading. Line 13, for example, is taken to mean 'why should I bear sons?', in the face of more convincing parallels for the alternative translation 'how could I . . .?',³⁶ on the grounds that such a note of 'obliging despondency' would be out of keeping with the defiant tone of the rest of the poem. Similarly, the opposition with *Aeneid* 4 is less clear-cut if we remember Virgil's sympathetic treatment of Dido, which Stahl ignores.³⁷

It is notable that both Cairns and Stahl see irony as a crucial element in the poem, but differ as to which parts of the poem are to be seen as 'sincere' and which as ironic. It seems to me that Propertius does not in fact give the reader enough authorial guidance to force the issue one way or the other. The relationship between poet (or implied author) and *persona* is not clear-cut enough to enable us to decide whether, as it were, to side with the speaker, in his *persona* of suffering, rebellious lover, or with the more conventional system of values represented, in this poem, by Augustus and his *lex*. The reader who approaches the poem expecting to find a straightforward attack on or eulogy of Augustus will find it, because in a sense both are there in the text. Cairns' observation that 2.7 has affinities with the *recusatio* is, I think, an important one, since the refusal-poem is characterized by a similarly double-edged quality. Though the writer does, in general, end up praising his patron while claiming not to, he may also have serious

³⁴ For reasons of space, I have omitted detailed consideration of Cairns' generic argument: the poem is based, he suggests, on the rhetorical *progymnasma* devoted to the criticism of legislation, but Propertius has drawn attention to the inadequacy of his own critique by using only one of the four standard headings under which the law should be discussed. Again, this argument relies on a particular view of the audience's expectations; and it is not clear to me that even a contemporary audience would have expected a full working-out of the rhetorical model in a short, personal poem.

³⁵ I am not, of course, claiming to approach the poem without any preconceptions of my own; I hope, however, that, by emphasizing the openness of the poem to differing interpretations, I have produced a reading which is more satisfying than the univocal interpretations I have discussed.

³⁶ See D. R. Shackleton Bailey, *Propertiana* (1956), ad loc.

³⁷ Stahl's reading of the *Aeneid* as fully in sympathy with the ideals of the new regime is worked out in more detail elsewhere ('Aeneas — an unheroic hero?', *Arethusa* 14 (1981), 157–77 and 'The death of Turnus: Augustan Vergil and the political rival', in K. A. Raaflaub and M. Toher (eds), *Between Republic and Empire: Interpretations of Augustus and his Principate* (1990), 174–211). In both articles, Stahl sets himself firmly against readings based on the 'two voices' theory of the so-called Harvard school. His view of Propertius as a 'truly independent' poet is an obvious corollary to his interpretation of 'Augustan Virgil' as unambiguously imperialist.

things to say about the conventional generic hierarchy and the relative status of poet and statesman.

Propertius begins by telling us that Cynthia rejoiced when a law, which might have separated the lovers, was finally withdrawn. Propertius, on the other hand, argues that the legislation could not have parted them anyway, since not even Jupiter has the power to divide 'amantis invitos'. This assertion prompts a series of reflections in which the poet contrasts political and military might with the power of love, and the claims of society with the claims of his relationship with Cynthia. But even before we launch into the antithesis between love and war in ll. 5–6, some ironies and ambiguities have begun to appear beneath the surface of the poem. The reference to Jupiter in l. 4 is a neat variation on the commonplace that even the king of the gods succumbed to love;³⁸ but there is also an implied comparison between Jupiter and Augustus, the tone of which is hard to assess. Is this simply flattery (as Cairns would have us believe), or should we see some irony in the juxtaposition 'Iuppiter ipse . . . magnus Caesar'? Certainly the latter phrase sounds somewhat lame after the ringing hyperbole of the previous line. But, if so, self-irony is also apparent, particularly in the word 'invitos'. Propertius has already told us that he is unwilling to be separated from Cynthia: the previous poem concludes 'nos uxor numquam, numquam diducet amica: | semper amica mihi, semper et uxor eris', and 2.7 picks up and develops this idea — no wife will separate them, despite the demands of Augustus and society at large. But there may nevertheless be an obstacle to this idyllic relationship: Cynthia herself. Propertius' uncertainty that her devotion is as strong as his is implied in the tentative subjunctive 'placeam' in l. 19, and we should also remember the context of Poem 7, which forms part of a sequence leading up to 2.11, a kind of 'failed' *renuntiatio amoris*. This cycle is foreshadowed in 2.3.33–40, where Cynthia is compared to Helen, the bone of contention between the rival lovers Paris and Menelaus. The theme of erotic rivalry is developed over the next six poems. In 2.4, Propertius reflects on the inconstancy of women (compared with boys); in 2.5, he tries to persuade himself to give Cynthia up, after hearing rumours of infidelity; in 2.6, he reflects on the irrationality of his jealousy, and concludes with the declaration of eternal fidelity quoted above; but in 2.8 and 9, he has lost her to a rival, suggesting that his jealousy was not absolutely without foundation. In 2.10 and 2.11, he teases the reader with the possibility that he will finally abandon Cynthia and elegy, before reaffirming his devotion, and the impossibility of escaping Amor, in 2.12 and 13.³⁹

Throughout this group of poems, then, Propertius' declared ideal of lifelong fidelity is undermined by Cynthia's inconstancy, and the protestations of 2.7 should be read in the light of this tension. Even while he proclaims the power of love, Propertius hints that the possibility of a lasting romantic relationship may be open to question. In fact, though not even Jupiter can separate two lovers, they *will* be separated, temporarily in Book Two, and finally at the end of Book Three, by rival lovers and Cynthia's own infidelity. A flaw in the 'alternative' morality which the poet puts forward in 2.7 is revealed through the way that Cynthia is characterized, both in Book Two and throughout the collection, so that it is never possible to be sure that the poet is not laughing at himself, drawing attention to the extravagance of the impossible ideal of the Catullan *foedus amicitiae*.

In ll. 5–6, Propertius introduces the familiar opposition between *amor* and *arma*. Caesar's greatness is limited to the latter field; he has no power in the former, since

³⁸ e.g. Meleager, *A.P.* 12.101 (also the model for the opening of Prop. 1.1).

³⁹ I am obviously assuming here that the poems should be read in the order transmitted by the manuscripts; contrast, for example, S. J. Heyworth, 'The Elegies of Sextus Propertius: towards a critical edition' (unpub. thesis, University of Cambridge, 1986), 126–39. Heyworth argues that our Book Two originally consisted of two separate books (cf. also Hubbard, *op. cit.* (n. 27), 41–4), and that serious dislocation has also taken place in the ordering of the poems. 2.10 was the last poem of the original 'Book Two', while 2.13 opened a new book (2.11 and 2.12

belong elsewhere). My analysis of the cycle stretching from 2.3 to 2.13 provides an alternative explanation for what I would see as 'false' closural features in 2.10, and for the new beginning in 2.13; and I have already suggested that the whole book as we have it is unified by the recurrence of references to *militia amoris* and to the *Iliad*. It is true that the book is exceptionally long; but the total number of lines (1,362) is still surpassed by Lucretius 5 (1,457 lines), and the books of other Augustan poets vary considerably in length. On *tres libelli* in 2.13.25, see Camps, *op. cit.* (n. 2), ad loc.

Propertius would rather die than be parted from Cynthia. This assertion picks up two recurrent elegiac topoi: the contrast between love and war, and the motif of 'love till death'.⁴⁰ Both look forward ironically to the next poem, in which Propertius will be 'defeated' by his rival, despite the assertion that this is worse than having his throat cut (2.8.3-4). The hyperbolic language⁴¹ of l. 7 is also undercut by the much more uncertain tone of the closing lines, as already noted, and it should perhaps also be remarked that the 'love till death' motif is elsewhere used to indicate the harshness, not of society, but of Cynthia herself, who will 'be the death of him'.⁴² As in the case of *militia amoris*, the different ways that Propertius applies this topos point to ambiguities in his presentation of *amor*, which is both supremely desirable, and supremely painful.

The idea that physical death is preferable to the death of love is further developed in the extraordinarily complex imagery of ll. 8-11, where Propertius pictures his marriage procession passing his mistress' closed door. This is at once a marriage and a funeral procession, and also a kind of failed *komos*. The torches of l. 8 are both marriage and funeral torches,⁴³ and the flutes would sound more dreary than the funeral trumpet (l. 12). The 'faces' perhaps also suggest the flame of passion, which Propertius would be destroying ('perdere') in parting from Cynthia. This imagery continues the sentiment of l. 7: separation from Cynthia would be worse than death. But the picture of the lover passing the closed door (ll. 9-10) also suggests the *exclusus amator*,⁴⁴ and thus once again we are given an ironic reminder that Cynthia herself has been in the past, and will be in the future, the cause of the lovers' separation. Propertius would rather die than pass her closed door as a husband; but there is little he can do when Cynthia herself shuts him out, as she will in the very next poem.

But the lines also imply that the marriage would not have the desired effect. Far from becoming a useful member of society, Propertius is portrayed as a feeble, womanish figure in these lines. The marriage-torches would be wasted,⁴⁵ because this feeble character would be unable to produce warlike sons, as he tells us in l. 13. Instead of acting as a proper *maritus*, he seems rather to play the bride's role. The tearful departure from Cynthia's threshold recalls the bride's traditional reluctance to leave her mother's embrace⁴⁶ and her childhood pursuits, and the puzzling phrase 'nuptae . . . more' can also be explained in similar terms: Propertius would take the wifely role of humble obedience, rather than the husband's part.⁴⁷

The defiance of l. 7 thus begins to evaporate in these lines, leading up to the 'obliging despondency' of l. 13. The poet equivocates between the proud claim that he would rather die than leave Cynthia, and the more apologetic stance of the central lines, which recalls the 'non ego sum laudi, non natus idoneus armis' of 1.6. This reading

⁴⁰ cf., for example, 2.15.29-36.

⁴¹ Both Cairns and Stahl are aware of the exaggeration here. We do not, of course, know the terms of the *lex*, but judging from the legislation of 18 B.C. and A.D. 9, the worst that could have happened to Propertius would have been to lose out on certain public privileges (such as special seats in the theatre), and the right to inherit property from relatives not within the sixth degree, or from unrelated benefactors.

⁴² e.g. 2.1.74-7.

⁴³ Cairns, *op. cit.* (n. 1), 195, n. 27, aptly compares 4.3.13f. and 4.11.46.

⁴⁴ cf. Tib. 1.5.67-74. Note also the references to *limina/januae* in Prop. 2.6.37, 2.16.6 and 3.25.9-10. The tears of the departing lover in the *renuntiatio amoris*, 3.25, also recall the 'uda lumina' of 2.7.10.

⁴⁵ The 'wasted' marriage torches perhaps also recall the very common idea that the lover 'wastes' his patrimony on his mistress: cf. *OLD* s.v. *perdere* § 6.

⁴⁶ cf., for example, Cat. 61.79-82 and 62.20-4.

⁴⁷ On 'nuptae more' see G. Williams, 'Some aspects of Roman marriage ceremonies and ideals', *JRS* 48 (1958), 16-29. Williams argues for the reading '<e> nuptae . . . more', which he interprets as 'a very

condensed form of *ut qui ex more nuptae viverem* (or more archaically *ut qui nuptae morigerus essem*), meaning "in living a wife's life" (28). Propertius, he suggests, assumes 'that married life would consist in his being *morigerus* to his wife and not the reverse'. This is certainly more convincing than the alternatives: Butler and Barber and Camps retain the manuscript reading, translating 'at the whim / behest of a bride' (but the parallels cited by Camps are unconvincing, and 'nuptae more' would surely have to mean 'in the manner of a bride'); Enk prefers 'amore' (but, as Shackleton Bailey points out, there is surely no question of Propertius *loving* his hypothetical bride); Shackleton Bailey suggests 'in ore', which makes very little sense after 'perdere faces'. Propertius depicts himself in a similarly feminine role in 1.11.23-4, where he paraphrases Andromache's famous speech in *Iliad* 6: his dependence on Cynthia has reduced him to playing the woman's part. Cf. also 4.8 (discussed in n. 27 above); and 2.1.48 and 2.13.36, which (as Hubbard points out, *op. cit.* (n. 27), 101) entail a similar role reversal, recalling the ideal of *univiratus*, which was frequently celebrated in the epitaphs on women's tombs.

again supports Shackleton Bailey's translation of 'unde' in l. 13 as 'how?' rather than 'why?'. But with 'quod si' in the following line, the tone changes again. Propertius has protested his feebleness, which would prevent him from fulfilling the role of a useful and productive member of society. Now, paradoxically, he tells us that as a lover, and a poet of love, far from being feeble, he will be able to match the military prowess of Caesar himself. If Cynthia's camp were 'real' ('vera'⁴⁸), the poet would be transformed into a hero of the stature of Castor. He has his own kind of glory, which has spread as far as the distant Dnieper, conquering the limits of the known world as Augustus is often represented as doing elsewhere.⁴⁹ Again, this claim is provocative, but it is also undercut by the whimsical conceit of ll. 15–16 and the extravagance of the boast in l. 18 (as Cloud notes, Propertius can hardly be claiming seriously to have literary admirers in the Ukraine). There may, too, be some sexual innuendo in the reference to Castor's horse, since riding is a common metaphor for intercourse in Latin poetry.⁵⁰ Propertius' sexual potency, like his poetry, is inspired solely by Cynthia; separate him from her, and he would become the feeble wimp of ll. 8–14, rather than the macho hero of l. 16. Again, the outrageousness of this claim undermines the defiance of the opening lines.

Finally, as already noted, the last couplet sheds doubt on the idea that Cynthia's fidelity is as strong as the poet's. His decision to sacrifice respectability and his 'patrius sanguis' for her love becomes rather pathetic in the light of this uncertainty, and, although the confident assertion of the final line picks up the apparent assurance of l. 4, we have already seen that Propertius undermines that confidence in various ways.

The poem as a whole, then, sets up a series of oppositions: between the realms of *amor* and *arma*; between poetry and war; between the public sphere and the private sphere; between the power of the state (or of respectable society) and the power of love. But this neat structure is also undermined by a series of ironies: the paradoxical notion that respectability itself would make Propertius useless; the contrast between 'reality' (the feeble poet-lover) and fantasy (the heroic conqueror of ll. 15–18); the implicit reminders of his subservience to Cynthia, which contrast with his defiance of Augustus; and, finally, Caesar's (acknowledged) greatness as against the uncertainty of Cynthia's fidelity. In the last instance, in particular, it is not clear which way the irony cuts. Do we take the poet's flattery of Augustus⁵¹ as ironic and Propertius' protestations at face value? Or vice versa? I have argued that to try to decide the question one way or the other is to over-simplify the poem.

I have so far avoided discussing the precise nature of the *lex* which is the starting-point of the poem. Two facts are fairly clear. Firstly, the legislation has either been withdrawn or cancelled, so that Propertius is not actually attacking a policy which is *currently* being pursued by the princeps. Secondly, the language of l. 3 is evidently exaggerated: there is no way that any law could actually have forced Propertius to marry, unless its provisions were significantly harsher than those of the later *Leges Iuliae* and *Lex Papia Poppaea*, which seems highly unlikely. Hence, it is a mistake to see the poem as a head-on attack on Augustus; the withdrawal of the legislation is rather used as the starting-point for a series of reflections on the conflicting demands of love and society. This reading would be strengthened if we were to accept the conclusions reached in the

⁴⁸ The meaning of 'vera' is also disputed: Camps and Shackleton Bailey take it to mean 'the right kind' or 'the only true soldering', while Butler and Barber and Enk translate 'if it were real warfare'. The latter interpretation is defended by Stahl, *op. cit.* (n. 1), 150, n. 26.

⁴⁹ Cloud, *op. cit.* (n. 3), compares Hor., *Carm.* 3.5.2–4, Virg., *Aen.* 6.794–5, and Prop. 2.10. On the topos of 'world-wide fame', see further Nisbet and Hubbard on Hor., *Carm.* 2.20.14. A similar parallelism between the 'conquests' of poet and princeps can be seen in the poem to *Georgics* 3; cf. V. Buchheit, *Der Anspruch des Dichters in Vergils Georgika* (1972), 92–159.

⁵⁰ See J. N. Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary*

(1982), 165–6. The metaphor is usually used as a euphemism for the 'female superior' position, but for a more general sense, cf. Lucr. 4.1195–6, Ovid, *A.A.* 2.726 and *R.A.* 429–30, and esp. Mart. 7.57 (where the reference to Castor and Polydeuces probably has a sexual reference: see Adams, *op. cit.*, 166, n. 3). Castor's horse Cyllarus is mentioned by several classical poets: see especially Sen., *Phaedr.* 811, where Cyllarus is specifically associated with heroic prowess.

⁵¹ The speaker of the first part of l. 5 is either an anonymous objector (of the kind common in oratory and diatribe) or Cynthia herself; but Propertius does not deny Caesar's claim to greatness in the military sphere.

recent analysis of the issue by Badian,⁵² who argues that there is no solid evidence for the promulgation of any marriage legislation at the period when the elegy is likely to have been written.⁵³ On this view, either the historians are improbably silent about Propertius' *lex*, or the poet must be referring to legislation which dated from some time before 28 B.C. Badian (following Ferrero Raditsa⁵⁴) suggests that the reference is in fact to a Triumviral measure, and that (unlike Augustus' later marriage laws) it was introduced for the purposes of raising funds, rather than maintaining moral standards. Propertius would then be referring to a general abolition of irregular Triumviral ordinances in 28 B.C. If Badian is right, it becomes still more difficult to see Propertius as launching an all-out attack on Augustus' attempts at moral reform. The poem would still seem provocative: Propertius' stance is directly opposed to Augustan ideals, as he makes clear by the reference to Caesar in l. 4 (Augustus would evidently like to separate the lovers if he could, on Propertius' view); but Augustus would now figure not so much as the proponent of moral reform as the representative of the 'senes duri' who condemn the poet's relationship with Cynthia as immoral. Thus, the elegy need not be seen as directly challenging the power of the princeps, but rather as ironically manipulating elements of Augustan ideology.

III

Propertius' use of the *militia amoris* topos in 2.7, as elsewhere in Book Two, is both witty and ironic. Both the superficial flattery of ll. 4–5 and the superficial defiance of ll. 6–20 are undermined, and it is, in the end, not possible to be certain which aspect we should privilege. The readings of Cairns and Stahl are unsatisfying because they both involve over-simplifying, and jettisoning either the poet's self-irony, or the irony which he directs at the establishment.

This complex use of irony is characteristic of elegy as a genre — perhaps in part because of the way the elegiac poet represents himself. The defining features of elegy are all negative: it is anti-conformist, anti-establishment, not-epic, its values and ideology are the antithesis of those held in respectable society. The elegist is thus an outsider, someone who has explicitly put himself beyond the pale. The very prominent use of conventional language and stereotyped situations also serve as constant reminders to the reader of the distinction between poet and *persona* (or Propertius and Ego, to use Veyne's terminology). But this does not mean that the poet entirely repudiates his *persona*; rather, the reader is invited to become aware of the inadequacies and inconsistencies both in the conventional morality from which elegy distances itself and in the ideals which it sets up on its own account. We might usefully compare the multiple levels of irony which Horace constructs in book two of the *Satires*, where he often delegates the moralizing voice to other characters, so that we receive the 'message' of the poems at second or third hand. The narrator thus distances himself from the surface meaning of the text, and it becomes unclear how seriously we are to take it, particularly where Horace himself becomes the butt of the joke.⁵⁵

⁵² op. cit. (n. 4). Something of a critical consensus against Badian's theory seems to be forming, however: see, for example, S. Treggiari, *Roman Marriage: Iusti Coniuges from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian* (1991), 59–60 and n. 91.

⁵³ Badian argues that the ancient sources which are usually cited as mentioning the law are in fact referring either to later legislation or to legislation unconnected with the issue of marriage.

⁵⁴ *ANRW* 2.13 (1980), 278–339, at 295–6: 'Augustus' legislation concerning marriage, procreation, love affairs and adultery'.

⁵⁵ See especially *Sat.* 2.7, where Davus' moralizing turns out to be derived at second-hand from a second-rate philosopher's door-keeper. At the same time,

Horace 'proves' Davus' point, not only by his own past behaviour, but also by losing his temper at the end of the poem. On Horace's *persona*, see also K. Freudenburg, *The Walking Muse: Horace on the Theory of Satire* (1993), 3–51: Freudenburg argues that the *persona* of the 'diatribe satires', 1.1–4, is based on the *doctor ineptus* of comedy, and is thus not to be taken seriously. His underlying assumption that humour and parody are incompatible with serious moral reflection needs some qualification however: cf. D. P. Fowler, 'Postmodernism, romantic irony and classical closure', in I. J. F. De Jong and J. P. Sullivan (eds), *Modern Critical Theory and Classical Literature* (1994), 231–56.

In sum, the literary and political (or ideological) levels of meaning are not separable, and we should not simply dismiss Propertius' use of the *militia amoris*, and his anti-establishment stance more generally, as literary conventions. On the other hand, the very overt 'literariness' of elegy opens up levels of irony which make it impossible (or at least inadequate) to regard the poet as offering us a straightforward ideological programme or political message.

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