LAMENT FOR PAETUS—PROPERTIUS 3.7

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Who was Paetus? This paper is not an exercise in prosopography; but much of it is concerned with the personality of the young man whose drowning is the central "fact" of this poem, and with his relationship to Propertius.[1] Any attempt to identify Paetus definitively would be likely to fail firstly through the paucity of the evidence and secondly through the commonness of the cognomen: and scholars have been justifiably content to describe him, as for instance Postgate does, as "a young friend of the poet." What I should like to suggest is that even to say this of Paetus is to say more than a careful examination of the text will justify. In addition, the poem has been characterized (by Butler and Barber for example) as "a *lament* for Paetus drowned at sea," and even W. E. Camps in his sensitive appraisal of the poem nevertheless describes it as an *epicedium*, a lament: I suggest that the terms *epicedium* and lament are misleading and divert attention from the real meaning and intention of the poem.

As to what that meaning is, there can be no reasonable doubt. The poem is a tirade against greed and its effects: greed is the motive which activates the man of action and leads him into a way of life which is not only dangerous but wrongheaded; the poet himself is a representative of the contemplative life—the *iners* of line 72—and Paetus is the type of the restless man of action who pays the ultimate price for his greed. The sequence of ideas is quite clearly as follows: the desire for money is a disrupting factor in life and can cause an untimely death; Paetus is a case in point, drowned in the pursuit of wealth; he may serve as a warning to adventurous spirits (1–28). Death at sea is a result of man's refusal to be content with what nature has

[1] This is substantially a paper delivered at the annual meeting of the American Philological Association in December 1968.

given him; nature has placed the sea as a snare for the greedy (29–42). If Paetus had been content with the simple life of home, he would still be alive if poor; but instead he endured the hardships of seafaring and has died an untimely death (43–70). The poet prefers his conventional *inertia* to the *sollicita vita* of the active man (71–72).

Now in more than one instance the poet of love-elegy contrasts his own way of life with the life of the man of action, such as the warrior-politician Tullus in Propertius 1.6; in the same way Tibullus compares his own aspirations with those of Messalla (Tib. 1.1.53 ff.). Tibullus has also in more general terms contrasted the pursuit of wealth with the contentment of the poet who was satisfied with a modest competence, for example in Tibullus 1.1, where Delia appears almost as an optional extra. The theme as Propertius develops it here has even greater affinity with Horace's repeated variations on the theme of contentment, which he dealt with most fully in his first satire. There the *nauta* who is also a *mercator* (like Paetus presumably) is one example of the *avarus* who is prepared to face all kinds of danger and discomfort in the pursuit of wealth. Unlike Tibullus, however, who concentrates attention on his own preferred way of life and deals with acquisitiveness only in generalizations, and unlike Horace who gives a rapid succession of type examples to point his moral, Propertius with his predilection for visual imagery and his love of the particular gives his theme peculiar force and vividness by using as his one example, which he deals with at length and with precise detail, a real or imagined youth who pays the ultimate price for his acquisitive nature. But because Paetus *is* simply an illustration, his experiences punctuate the elaboration of the theme in a series of graphic pictures. This is why the description of what happens to Paetus is not given a logical order, a fact which has disturbed many editors and has caused some to rewrite the poem in order to give greater coherence to the Paetus story.[2] The coherence consists in the statement of the poet's opposition to avarice, and within that framework Propertius recurs to the Paetus *motif* in his characteristic way, as Vahlen demonstrated,[3] by

[2] See Butler and Barber's introductory remarks on this poem in their commentary, pp. 275–76.

[3] *Sitzungsber. der kön. preuss. Akadem. der Wissensch. zu Berlin* (1883) iii, discussed in Butler and Barber.

adding new touches at various points. The bewildering succession of apostrophes to different persons (Pecunia 1–8, Paetus 11–12, Aquilo 13, Neptune 15, Paetus 17–20, anyone's guess in 25, harena 26, etc.) are less troublesome when we consider the poem as a rhetorical treatment of a theme, where Paetus is less in the forefront of the poet's mind than the general reader who is being given a homily on ethics.

In using Paetus as an illustration of a theme, Propertius certainly introduces pathos and intensity into what might otherwise be a fairly arid and conventional theme; and I have no quarrel with critics who find in this poem a moving description of the tragic death of a young man—though few would go so far as to feel with Ramsay that it reminds us how Propertius wasted his genius on Cynthia, who "did as much to degrade or divert his muse as to create it," and that the poem "fills one with regret that he did not devote his genius to nobler themes." The Victorians clearly liked rhetoric more than we do. But however tragic the portrayal of Paetus' death, there is in the poem no lament. The principal elements necessary to a lament are mourning, eulogy, and usually consolation; and none of these is present. There is, of course, something akin to mourning: the poet's attitude is not one of exultation over the condign punishment of Paetus for his greed; he shows no vindictiveness. He introduces, as Camps observes,[4] various *loci* from the rhetorical *conquestio* as outlined in Cicero, *De inventione* 1.106 f.;[5] thereby the poet evokes pity for the tragic outcome of human weakness. Paetus is young and frail, and his punishment is severe. Sympathy is aroused however by only the most general of considerations: his youth,

7: primo miser excidit aevo
17: Paete, quid aetatem numeras?
59: quo rapitis miseros primae lanuginis annos?

and his frailty,

[4] Propertius, *Elegies Book III* (Cambridge 1966) p. 83.

[5] Particularly apposite, I think, is the fifth *locus communis*, section 107: "quintus, per quem omnia ante oculos singillatim incommoda ponuntur, ut videatur is qui audit videre et re quoque ipsa quasi adsit non verbis solum ad misericordiam ducatur." The presentation of a realistic Paetus "before our eyes" is more effective than any number of abstract examples.

48: duro teneras laedere fune manus
70: non poterat vestras ille gravare manus;

the manner of his death was tragic in the extreme, not only in its physical suffering, but also in its desolation far from home and kinsmen; and he did after all have a mother—like Socrates he could have said, *καὶ γὰρ, τοῦτο αὐτὸ τὸ τοῦ Ὁμήρου, οὐδ' ἐγὼ ἀπὸ δρυὸς οὐδ' ἀπὸ πέτρης πέφυκα, ἀλλ' ἐξ ἀνθρώπων* (*Apol.* 34D)—but there is nothing unique or individual here, and, more important, no expression of mourning for his loss: no invitation to his readers, which would be conventional enough, to weep for Paetus. Nor is there anything amounting to eulogy. On the contrary, Paetus is represented as responsible for his own death: if his ideals had been different he would still be alive. He serves as an illustration of the consequences of greed, and this fact is not lost sight of at any point; it is hammered home at regular intervals:

tu *vitiis* hominum crudelia pabula praebes (3),

money encourages men's *vices* (there is no mincing of words here); "nam dum te [sc. pecuniam] sequitur . . ." (7), Paetus died in the pursuit of money; "et audaci tu timor esse potes" (28), Paetus is a warning to strike fear into the venturesome; "ista per humanas mors venit acta manus" (30), men are themselves responsible for death at sea.

ancora te teneat, quem non tenuere Penates?
quid meritum dicas, cui sua terra parum est? (33–34)

If you were not restrained by the ties of home, why should you expect an anchor to restrain you? A man who is not content with his own land deserves all he gets.[6]

natura insidians pontum substravit *avaris* (37),[7]

[6] *Te* in line 33 may have a general reference, and may not be restricted to Paetus in particular (so, for example, Butler and Barber, Camps); but clearly it refers to Paetus too, who has lost his life in a strikingly similar way: the mooring ropes frayed and failed to hold the ship.

[7] Camps suggests that *substravit* indicates "a calm sea" which is nature's snare; I feel that there is rather a reference back to *vias* (32, see Shackleton-Bailey's note *ad loc.*) and that the expression has affinities with *strata viarum*—"the sea as a travel route" was provided by nature as a snare.

travel by sea is nature's trap for the *greedy*.

quod si contentus patrio boue verteret agros,
verbaque duxisset pondus habere mea,
viveret ante suos dulcis conviva Penatis,
pauper, at in terra nil nisi fleret opes (43–46).

If Paetus had been content with life at home, he would still be alive; poor but with nothing to lament, except lack of wealth.[8]

at tu, saeve Aquilo, numquam mea vela videbis:
ante fores dominae condar oportet iners (71–72).

You won't find me making the same mistake as Paetus.

If in effect these reflections on the tragic errors of mankind were sparked off in the poet by the lamented death of a young friend, why is there this insistence on guilt? Why does Propertius end with this callous comment about the superiority of the idle lover burying himself on his girlfriend's doorstep? If Paetus was a friend with a real mother mourning his loss, Propertius is tactless to say the least.

In fact, Propertius' terminology at various points indicates his lack of personal involvement with Paetus. In highlighting the tragic manner of his death he at the same time projects details which would be offensive to mourning relatives. Let me briefly enumerate some.

et nova longinquis piscibus esca natat (8).

Not only is the image of the floating corpse fed on by fishes[9] offensive to the feelings of surviving relatives and friends—of whom Propertius is presumed to be one—but in addition there is a bizarre image in

[8] Camps takes these lines to refer to Ulysses, and it must be admitted that (1) a change of subject in 43 without the mention of Paetus by name is awkward, and (2) it is tempting to see an association between *flevit* (41) and *fleret* (46, Baehrens' "palmary" emendation, as Shackleton-Bailey so aptly terms it); but the contention cannot stand, because (1) *contentus* is meaningless if applied to Ulysses, who did not leave for Troy because of discontent, (2) *viveret* is a particularly awkward tense if applied to Ulysses, and (3) *nil nisi fleret opes* has no appropriateness in Ulysses' case, since he did not have to choose between wealth and the dangers of the sea on the one hand and poverty and the security of home on the other.

[9] It may be worth noting that Ovid remembers the line in the *Ibis* (145–47), where he is enumerating the very worst fates that he can envisage:

sive per immensas iactabor naufragus undas
nostraque *longinquus* viscera *piscis* edet
sive peregrinae carpent mea membra volucres.

the use of *nova*, "a new kind of food for foreign fish," which suggests the poet's lack of real concern; and, incidentally, Lewis and Short quote instances of *esca* used to mean "bait." Similarly sea birds are pictured as perching on his bones. The description of the decomposing body—before he is really dead if we are to believe Propertius—has a disturbing pre-Raphaelite vividness which is not calculated to console,

huic fluctus vivo radicitus abstulit unguis (51),

and his dying prayer while gulping down the unpleasant water is clearly a poetic fiction unrelated to any real account of Paetus' death. The final rhetorical zeugma,

ultima quae Paeto voxque diesque fuit (66),

has a certain impressiveness and pathos certainly, but at the same time a remoteness and impersonality which I find difficulty in reconciling with the feelings of a recently bereaved friend; this line and the similarly poignant but remote,

nunc tibi pro tumulo Carpathium omne mare est (12),

have the timelessness and impersonality of certain epitaphs in the Greek Anthology, for instance Callimachus' *ναῦν ἅμα καὶ ψυχὴν εἶδεν ἀπολλυμένην* (Gow and Page, 38).

These complementary factors, the insistence on Paetus' guilt, the delineation of lurid and harrowing details of his death, and the generally rhetorical treatment of the successive "shots" of Paetus, all point to the conclusion that Paetus was *not* a close friend of the poet whose death was the occasion for a poetic homily, and whose mother and other friends can be visualized as receiving complimentary copies of the poem. We may even question whether Paetus was a real person at all. As I have already mentioned, his personal characteristics are of a completely general nature—youth, frailty, etc. At the same time, there is nothing in the poem to associate Propertius personally with Paetus, with the single exception of line 44: "If he were contentedly tilling the paternal fields—and had considered my words to have any force . . . ." It is quite unnecessary, and in itself slightly odd, to take Propertius to be referring to an occasion before Paetus sailed when the poet had given some avuncular advice. It is more natural to

give a more general meaning to the line, "If he had given any weight to the sort of considerations I have just been putting forward"; and of course, this is precisely how we must take the line if we consider the subject of *verteret* and hence of *duxisset* to be Ulysses.[10] However, the example of this line is useful, because it is the nearest Propertius comes to any statement which could be construed as a link between himself and the dead man, and helps to highlight the impersonal, rhetorical character of the rest.

The circumstantial details of his death are in some cases clearly fiction—such as his dying words—and there is no reason why the other details should not equally be fabrications. This is not a point which I consider important, and I have no wish to argue that he is either real or unreal: we must take Paetus as the poet presents him to us. On the other hand, I think criticism should concentrate on the facts as related by Propertius, and any appeal to Paetus' "actual" circumstances, if we may use the term, is the resort of despair. There are two *cruces* in the poem which have invited this kind of recourse, and without presuming to solve them I feel that my analysis of the poem may shed some light on these.

Lines 47–50 are notoriously intractable. The traditional text is as follows:

> non tulit haec Paetus, stridorem audire procellae
> et duro teneras laedere fune manus;
> sed thyio thalamo aut Oricia terebintho
> et fultum pluma versicolore caput.

The force, and indeed the syntax, of the second couplet are uncertain: but the description of Paetus lolling on an expensive bed of citrus or terebinth, with colored downy cushions, clearly contrasts with the hardships of seafaring represented by the howling of the storm and the chafing of hands on ropes. The sequence of ideas, in accordance with my analysis of the poem, suggests that the downy cushions represent the luxurious life which was the object of Paetus' quest, in the hope of which he was prepared to endure the rigors of sailing; and any interpretation which gives this sense is obviously to be preferred. The lines as they stand cannot give this sense, and none of the explanations

[10] But cf. note 8 above.

or attempted emendations is to me quite convincing; but I am quite sure that the solution is somewhere on these lines. Barber's *nunc*[11] for *non* is helpful: the sense would then be "now, as things are, (i.e. instead of living contentedly at home) Paetus in fact put up with the howling of the storm etc." On the other hand, *seu* for *sed* in 49 leaves us without any contrast at all. But my objection to interpretations like that of W. R. Smyth,[12] which is surprisingly approved by Shackleton-Bailey[13] as "almost wholly convincing," is that they present us with a piece of circumstantial information which totally disrupts the development of the theme: Propertius interrupts the argument to inform us that Paetus did not travel *in sentina* but in a luxurious cabin somewhat reminiscent of Cleopatra's barge. The intrusion of this gratuitous "aside" is defended as a reference to the actual "facts" of Paetus' situation. Gildersleeve had long ago objected[14] that the description of luxurious quarters in 49–50 is inappropriate to the poor fortune-seeker Paetus; to which Butler and Barber respond, "we do not know Paetus' circumstances; he may have lived beyond his means or have had rich friends and protectors." Barber obviously retracted in his Oxford Text.

The other crux is vv. 21–24, for which I have no solution to propose. The reading is uncertain at various points, and no one has satisfactorily related these lines to the subject of Paetus' death: they seem to refer to Argynnus who was youthful and was drowned, though not at sea; but the passage as it stands provides no link to the Paetus story. The resort of despair—other than to postulate either a lacuna or interpolation—is to assume that the link with Paetus must be a geographical one, and that Paetus was drowned in the same place as Argynnus, whatever other complexities that may lead us into. Whatever the answer to the problem posed by these lines, I feel it is a mistake

[11] Barber incorporates *nunc* for *non* (47) and *seu* for *sed* (49) in his Oxford Text of 1953 and in the second edition of 1960, though his edition with commentary (with Butler, 1933) contained the traditional reading.

[12] *CQ* 45 (1951) 74–79.

[13] But see also O. Skutsch, *Mnemosyne* ser. 4, 5 (1952) 232–35, who says of Smyth, "rem turbidam turbatiorem reddidit," and suggests reading *noluit* for *non tulit*.

[14] *AJP* 4 (1883) 208–10. Gildersleeve's solution is to suggest that, while the description refers to the stateroom of a ship, it represents merely the accommodation Paetus would have preferred in ideal circumstances: *non tulit* he wishes to mean οὐκ ἔτλη, = *non is fuit qui ferret*, which offers as a contrast (implied by *sed* in 49) *sed is fuit qui mallet*.

to look for it in "facts" about Paetus which are external to the poem. Let us consider for a moment Elegy 3.18, which is in many ways a companion piece to the present poem. In it Propertius progresses from the actual—and well-known—event of the death of Marcellus to reflections on the vanity of human wishes reminiscent of a Horatian Ode; so well known is the event from which the poem springs that Propertius does not even mention the name of the deceased; instead he gives ample reference, by name, to the scene of the disaster:

> Clausus ab umbroso qua ludit pontus Averno,
> fumida Baiarum stagna tepentis aquae,
> qua iacet et Troiae tubicen Misenus harena,
> et sonat Herculeo structa labore via. . . .

In the Paetus poem, by contrast, the mise-en-scène—like the description and the family connections of Paetus—is vague: *ad Pharios tendentem portus, pro tumulo Carpathium omne mare.* It is therefore hazardous to assume that the relevance of the Argynnus story is purely local. For one thing, this is not how Propertius normally uses myth. Yet Camps most recently makes just this point: "Paetus' ship was moored; its cable became chafed and broke, and the gale swept it out to sea. As these particulars are known, the place must be known too, and being known will surely be mentioned; this gives the context of the following lines 21 ff." [15]

Whether Paetus is a real person or not, the "facts" about Paetus are those facts which the poet chooses to put into his poem; the most likely solutions to difficulties in the poem should therefore come from within it and not from any assumed *Realien* about the persons of the poem.

If we regard this poem not as a "personal" poem lamenting a dead friend, but as a movingly illustrated homily on man's greed, it fits more readily into any scheme which may be constructed for the arrangement of Book 3 as a whole. This is a subject which is too involved for this short paper; but there are clear thematic threads through the

[15] *Sunt Agamemnonias testantia litora curas* Camps translates as "it is that shore which bears witness to Agamemnon's love and sorrow"; but to take *sunt litora* as equivalent to *haec sunt litora* here is difficult if not impossible. The words seem rather to be introducing a paradigm in the conventional "ecphrasis" manner found in Vergil, for example: "Est locus, Hesperiam Grai cognomine dicunt" (*Aen.* 1.530), or "Est in conspectu Tenedos, notissima fama insula" (*Aen.* 2.21–22).

book.[16] In the book as a whole Propertius represents himself as an author in search of subject-matter. He is a love-poet for whom the rich vein of inspiration supplied by a personal emotion is wearing thin; and throughout the book he apologetically experiments with other themes than love, sometimes linking them with love by constrast. The Paetus poem is one of a series of generalizations on serious, non-love, themes; it has affinities with the fifth poem where war is associated with acquisitiveness which is therefore rejected by the lover, and also with the thirteenth poem where greed is the enemy of love. Poems 6, 8, 10 are "personal" love poems which contrast with 5, 7, 9, and 11, where other themes are contrasted with love. It would be difficult to fit a realistic lament within this framework. Many of the non-love themes have affinities with poems of Horace, and Camps, in the context of this book, speaks of an "elegiac counterpart to Horatian lyric." The Paetus poem deals with a favorite Horatian theme,[17] just as 3.18 uses Marcellus' death to introduce musings on life's uncertainties in the manner of a Horatian ode.

The Paetus poem is an instance, outside the realm of love, of the danger of approaching Propertius' poetry on the assumption that it springs from a personal experience. His poetry is "designed, studied, controlled";[18] and 3.7 is basically the treatment, in effective poetical terms, of a rhetorical theme.

[16] Camps suggests (Introduction, p. 4) that there is no clear principle of arrangement in the book, though he concedes that the order is "considered"; I think a case can be made out for a more elaborate structure in this book, as has been demonstrated for Book 1 in recent articles by O. Skutsch in *CP* 58 (1963) 238–39 and by Brooks Otis in *HSCP* 70 (1965) 1–44.

[17] Examples may be found in a comprehensive article dealing with *Satires* 1.1 by Hans Herter in *RhM* 94 (1951) 1–42.

[18] An excellent discussion of this aspect of Propertius is provided by Brooks Otis in the article cited above in note 16.