

THE CAMBRIDGE
COMPANION TO
LATIN LOVE ELEGY

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EDITED BY
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her *fama* might after all be closer to that of her male colleagues than the elegiac *puellae*.⁶³

Further reading

On the gendering of elegy in general, see Wyke (2002): 155–91. For Sulpicia's Latin text with an English translation, see Postgate, revised by Goold (1988, LCL). For commentaries on Sulpicia, see Tränkle, with Latin text (1990) and Lyne (2007). Though wonderfully romanticizing, Smith (1913) is still useful. Hallett (2009a): 142–4 gives a useful overview of the different theories on authorship. A superb parody of the debates on authorship is Parker (2006). An overview of Sulpician scholarship in general is Keith (2006). She, however, does not include the most recent scholarship, which includes the Petale-epigraph. For this, see Stevenson (2005). For a literary approach to the poems, see especially Santirocco (1979), Lowe (1988), Keith (1997), Merriam (2006) and Hallett (2006). For a gender-oriented reading of Sulpicia Wyke (2002) is perhaps still the most useful. On the reception of Sulpicia, see Skoie (2002).

⁶³ See also Hallett (2006).

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ALISON KEITH

Propertius

Unlike the four other major Augustan poets whose works survived antiquity, Propertius seems not to have received a notice in Suetonius' *Lives of the Poets*, perhaps because he was not generally considered the pre-eminent Roman elegist.¹ That honour apparently belonged to his contemporary, Albius Tibullus, of whom Suetonius reports 'in the judgment of many, he took first place amongst the writers of elegy' (*Tib.*, see also Chapter 4). This notice is probably derived from the first-century AD educator Quintilian, who praises Tibullus as 'polished and refined' (*tersus atque elegans*), although he acknowledges that 'some prefer Propertius' (*sunt qui Propertium malint, Inst. Or. 10.1.93*).² By implication, Propertius was a minority taste. Whatever the explanation for Propertius' failure to receive a Suetonian Life, as a result our knowledge of the elegist's biography is even more than usually dependent on autobiographical statements in his own poetry and biographical comments about him in the works of other Roman authors. Even our knowledge of the poet's first name depends on a fortuitous reference in Suetonius, for although the elegist 'signs' eight poems with his *nomen* 'Propertius' (2.8.18, 14.27, 24.35, 34.93; 3.3.17, 10.15; 4.1.71, 7.49), it is the biographer who supplies his praenomen 'Sextus' when quoting a Propertian distich (2.34.65–6) as evidence for the pre-publication fame of the *Aeneid* (Suet. *Verg.* 30).

We know neither the year of Propertius' birth nor that of his death, although we may conjecture that he must have been born around 55 BC and know that he died after 16 BC.³ Propertius himself offers scant

¹ Rostagni (1944) 136; cf. *ibid.* xxiii, 133–4.

² Quintilian probably derives his canon of four Latin elegists (Gallus, Tibullus, Propertius and Ovid) from Ovid's notices (*Ars* 3.333–4, 535–8; *Rem.* 763–6; *Tr.* 2.445–68, 4.10.51–4, 5.1.15–20). Velleius Paterculus' implicit 'canonization' of Virgil and Rabirius in epic, Livy in history and Tibullus and Ovid in elegy (2.36.3) reflects Propertius' early loss of establishment sympathy.

³ Keyser (1992) has argued for a birthdate between 4 May and 24 June, 43 BC, on the basis of a presumed horoscope in 4.1.83–6, but this has not been widely accepted.

autobiographical information in his poetry. At the end of his first book of elegies he sets a *sphragis* or 'seal' to the collection that contains the information that his family was of Umbrian provenance (1.22) and specifies the location of his ancestral seat near Perugia (modern Perugia). The poet's emphasis on Etruscan Perugia (1.22.1-8) and its proximity to his own Umbrian homeland (1.22.9-10) probably encodes a compliment to his first patron Tullus, the scion of a distinguished Etruscan family from Perugia.⁴ Propertius elaborates this brief autobiographical notice in elegy 4.1, where he proudly proclaims Umbria the fatherland of the 'Roman Callimachus', as he styles himself (4.1.64, *Umbria Romani patria Callimachi*; cf. 3.1.1-6, 3.9.43-6),⁵ and names his hometown Assisi (4.1.125). The details about his family and upbringing that emerge there include the early death of his father and the young Propertius' subsequent loss of his patrimony and removal to the protection of his maternal relatives, in whose household he dedicated his boyhood amulet and assumed adult dress (4.1.127-30). The loss of his patrimony is probably to be connected with the triumviral confiscations in the area of Perugia after Philippi and the foundation of a military colony at Spello (ancient Hispellum) near Assisi soon after. Elite Roman youths assumed the toga of adulthood between the ages of fourteen and seventeen, so if the poet was not yet of age in the late 40s BC, then his birth can be placed very approximately in the mid- to late-50s BC.

Propertius' early experience of civil war and the resulting diminution of his patrimony find suggestive parallels with those of his contemporaries Virgil, Horace and Tibullus, whose families' holdings were also purportedly diminished in the civil wars of their youth (or even earlier in Horace's case).⁶ Like his contemporaries, however, Propertius in no way forfeited membership in the municipal elite or the census classification to which his aristocratic birth entitled him, despite the depredation of his paternal estates.⁷ The epigraphic and textual records demonstrate that the Propertii retained their prominence in the poet's adulthood, when they produced not only the eminent elegist, who enjoyed the patronage of Augustus' intimate Maecenas (the dedicatee of 2.1 and 3.9) and even, perhaps, of Augustus himself (whose victory at

⁴ On the family see Bonamente (2004); Cairns (2006b).

⁵ Unless otherwise indicated, quotations of Propertius are from Fedeli (1984) and translations are my own. On the many difficulties of the manuscript tradition, see Butrica (1984); Tarrant (2006); Heyworth (2007c) vii-lxv, (2007b) *passim*.

⁶ Virgil: Suet. *Verg.* 19.2, with Rostagni (1944) 84-5 ad loc. Horace: Suet. *Hor.* 1.1-2, with G. Williams (1995). Tibullus: Tib. 1.1.19-22 and 41-2 with Maltby (2002) 40. Cf. Ovid's proud boast in *Amores* 3.15 of his Paelignian provenance and the participation of the Paeligni on the side of the allies, against Rome, in the Social War of 91-87 BC.

⁷ For the wealth of Propertius' poetic contemporaries, cf. Suet. *Verg.* 13 and *Hor.*; for Tibullus, cf. *Hor. Epist.* 1.4.7, with Maltby (2002) 40.

Actium is celebrated in 4.6), but also the first senator of the line in C. Propertius Postumus (*PIR*² P 1010). The recipient of both a Horatian ode (*Carm.* 2.14) and a Propertian elegy (3.12) in the late 20s BC, Postumus enjoyed considerable political favour, and his wife Aelia Galla,⁸ named six times in Propertius' elegy (3.12.1, 4, 15, 19, 22, 38), no doubt enhanced his standing still further, for her name suggests that she was closely related to Augustus' second prefect of Egypt, L. Aelius Gallus (*pr. Aegypti*, 26-24 BC).⁹ The name Galla may also link her directly to Propertius on his mother's side through his otherwise obscure kinsman 'Gallus', named in 1.21 and alluded to in 1.22 as an unburied victim of the Perusine war.¹⁰ In the absence of hard evidence, the most that we can infer about Propertius' maternal family, whether or not they were Aelii Galli, is that our elegist came under their protection in the aftermath of the loss of his paternal estates and benefited from their wealth and connections in this period. Their resources must have been extensive, since they enabled him to obtain an expensive education in poetry (*carmine*, 4.1.133) and rhetoric (*uerba tonare Foro*, 4.1.134).

Propertius repeatedly acknowledges Umbria as his *patria*, but his elegies show him living, and writing, in Rome. His first book of elegies clearly made him famous, and the second book reveals him in the mid-20s BC as an established elegist in the clientele of a new patron, C. Maecenas. The opening poem of book 2 is addressed to this wealthy friend of Virgil and Horace, a prominent Augustan partisan who is named twice here (2.1.17, 73) and is also the addressee of 3.9. Propertius' Umbrian origins and Etruscan friends will no doubt have commended him to the Arretine Maecenas, celebrated by Horace as the descendant of Etruscan kings (*Hor. C.* 3.29.1; cf. *Prop.* 3.9.1).¹¹ Soon after the Battle of Actium, Maecenas began the construction of a palatial mansion and tower on magnificent grounds on the Esquiline, where Propertius represents himself as owning a house in the late 20s BC (3.23.23-4). He also notes the proximity of his house to Maecenas' famous gardens (4.8.1-2), whose location archaeological excavation has pinpointed quite precisely.¹² In this area the so-called Auditorium of Maecenas has also been excavated, on whose outer wall was inscribed a Greek epigram by

⁸ Propertius' modern editors unanimously correct the MSS' corrupt (because unmetrical) 'L(a)el(l)ia' to 'Aelia' in this line.

⁹ Nisbet and Hubbard (1978) 223-4; cf. Syme (1986) 308.

¹⁰ The suggestion was advanced by Fedeli (1983) 1915, and accepted by Bonamente (2004) 52 n. 119; *contra*, Cairns (2006b) 61-2, who suggests that the poet's mother came from the Volcacii/Volcasii and that the poet was related through her to his patron Tullus.

¹¹ On Maecenas, see White (1991), (1993); Graverini (1997).

¹² For the archaeological evidence, see Grüner (1993) and Coarelli (2004), both with further bibliography. For their location, see Richardson (1992) 200-1.

Callimachus (*Epigr.* 42), adapted by Propertius early in his first collection of elegies (1.3.13–14). Originally believed to be a recital hall, the building is now generally agreed to have been a grand dining room, but there can be little doubt that it once provided a congenial and appropriate context for poetic recitation, and it is tempting to imagine Propertius, Horace and others performing there, at Maecenas' invitation, after dinner.¹³

Propertius' domestic proximity to Maecenas' urban estate implies both his restoration of the family fortunes and his access to the poets of Maecenas' 'circle'.¹⁴ These included most famously Virgil and Horace (both of whom also lived near Maecenas on the Esquiline),¹⁵ as well as many other prominent contemporary poets and men of letters. As a result of moving to Rome and entering Maecenas' *clientela*, Propertius will also have enjoyed entrée into the most exalted political circles. The impact of acquaintance with Augustus can perhaps be discerned in Propertius' elegy 4.6, which commemorates the emperor's victory at Actium and has been taken as evidence that, at the end of the 20s BC, Propertius ultimately passed from Maecenas' patronage into that of the emperor Augustus himself.¹⁶

Several elegies in the second collection document the fame Propertius won with the publication of his first book in 29 or 28 BC.¹⁷ Already in the opening couplet of elegy 2.1, for example, the poet represents his readers as inquiring into the inspiration for his amatory elegies (2.1.1–2), while a later elegy implies the wide popularity of his first book of poetry, which seems to have circulated under the title of 'Cynthia' (2.24.1–2): *tu loqueris, cum sis iam noto fabula libro | et tua sit toto Cynthia lecta foro?* ('How can you say this, when you've become the talk of the town because of your famous book, your Cynthia read in the whole forum?').¹⁸ In the final poem of the

¹³ On Maecenas' 'auditorium', see *LTUR* III 74–5, dating the building's construction and decoration to the late republic/early principate. For the performance context (with particular reference to Horace), see Murray (1985).

¹⁴ On Maecenas' literary *clientela*, see Dalzell (1956); Williams (1990); White (1993) 326 index s.v. 'Maecenas, relations in Roman literary society'. For a stimulating, if necessarily speculative, reconstruction of Propertius' place in Maecenas' 'circle', see Cairns (2006b) 295–319.

¹⁵ See note above. Suetonius reports that Horace, after his death, was buried in Maecenas' gardens near his friend's tomb, *humatus et conditus est extremis Esquiliis iuxta Maecenatis tumulum* (Hor.).

¹⁶ Cairns (2006b) 320.

¹⁷ On the publication date of the first book, see Butler and Barber (1933); Fedeli (1980); Lyne (1998a); Cairns (2006b). The arguments of Knox (2005) have not won wide acceptance.

¹⁸ Prop. 2.24.1–2; cf. Mart. 14.189, a distich composed to accompany a presentation copy of Propertius' 'single book' (*Monobiblos Properti*): *Cynthia, facundi carmen iuvenale Properti, | accepit famam, nec minus ipsa dedit* ('Cynthia, the youthful work of eloquent Propertius, received fame, and herself conferred no less').

second book, Propertius represents himself as a well-known lover (2.34.55–60), a man of modest means devoted to the pleasures of the flesh and unfit by ancestry and temperament alike to the traditional Roman pursuits of politics and war. Leaving even the poetry of war to another, he hails Virgil's *Aeneid* as greater than the *Iliad* (2.34.65–6), and his summary of the epic suggests that he enjoyed pre-publication access through Maecenas' patronage. At the conclusion of the elegy, Propertius returns to his own literary reputation and includes himself as the last in the canon of Latin elegists (2.34.85–94). His reference here to the recent death of the elegist Gallus – by suicide in 27 or 26, after Augustus renounced his friendship – suggests a date of 28 to 25 BC for the composition of the second book of elegies.¹⁹

In his later poetry, Propertius occasionally represents himself as breaking with erotic verse, but he always capitulates to the elegiac imperative (3.3, 4.1). His recurrent self-definition as a prominent elegist reflects the renown that his collections of erotic verse garnered him, despite the silence of his contemporaries. Even Horace, who provides abundant evidence about the contemporary literary scene and exhaustively documents the shifting membership of Maecenas' literary *clientela*, never names Propertius, although his parodic representation of an unnamed elegist as a would-be Callimachus or Mimnermus in *Epistles* 2.2 (91–101), conventionally dated to c.19 BC, has been taken to be a portrait of our elegist since Propertius himself pays explicit homage to both Callimachus (2.1.40, 2.34.32, 3.1.1, 3.9.43, 4.1.64) and Mimnermus (1.9.11).²⁰ By contrast, Propertius figures importantly in Ovid's poetry.²¹ Ovid includes several catalogues of amatory authors in his elegiac poetry (*Ars* 3.329–34, *Tr.* 2.427–68, *Tr.* 4.10.51–5), all apparently modelled on Propertius' *sphragis* at the end of 2.34 and according Propertius primacy. It was conventional not to name living poets in catalogues of famous poets, so Ovid's *Amores* 1.15 and 3.9, which contain catalogues of famous poets and elegists that do not include Propertius, are generally agreed to have been written before our elegist's death.²² If our knowledge of the chronology of the composition of Ovid's works were secure, Propertius' absence from or inclusion in these notices could offer us more precise

¹⁹ A publication date of 26–5 BC is widely accepted for book 2: see Butler and Barber (1933); Fedeli (2005) 21; and cf. Cairns (2006b) 257, 300, 321–42.

²⁰ Several passages in Horace's poetry (e.g., *Epistles* 1.19, 2.2.91–101) have been taken to refer, in uncomplimentary terms, to the elegist. On Horace's relations with Propertius, see Solmsen (1948); Flach (1967); Sullivan (1976); White (1993); Dimundo (2002) 295–303, with extensive bibliography.

²¹ On Ovid's relations with Propertius, see Davis (1977); Morgan (1977); Boyd (1997); Dimundo (2002) 314–18, with extensive bibliography.

²² See McKeown (1989) 395, on the catalogue of famous writers at *Ov. Am.* 1.15.9–30.

information concerning the date of his death. Ovid is our only contemporary witness to Propertius' fame in his own lifetime, and he locates his elder friend's pre-eminence in the late 20s and early teens BC, when he himself was just embarking on a poetic career (*Tr.* 2.45–6): *saepe suos solitus recitare Propertius ignes, | iure sodalicii, quo mihi iunctus erat* ('Propertius often used to declaim his passionate verse by right of the comradeship with which he was joined to me'). Propertius' own poetry makes no reference to events after 16 BC, and since our textual evidence for his life includes no further mention of him as active after that date, his death is conventionally placed c.15 BC.

Cynthia

Propertius' first poem opens with the name of a woman who, in company with the love god Amor, presides over the elegiac speaker's prostrate form (1.1.1–4): *Cynthia prima suis miserum me cepit ocellis, | contactum nullis ante Cupidinibus. | tum mihi constantis deiecit lumina fastus | et caput impositis pressit Amor pedibus* ('Cynthia first captured me, wretch that I am, with her eyes; before, I'd been touched by no Desires. Then Love cast down my glance of stubborn arrogance and trampled my head beneath his feet'). Cynthia does not reappear in 1.1, but she is the focus of the following elegy, in which the poet-lover praises her beauty extravagantly and specifies the details of her dress and appurtenances – a fancy hairstyle, expensive clothing and exotic perfumes, all of which he characterizes, in the last line of the elegy, as luxury items he wishes he could persuade her to forego (1.2.31–2). The luxury products of Cynthia's toilette, like her 'unchaste' life and Greek name, combine to characterize her as an expensive Greek courtesan²³ – or, perhaps, an independently wealthy woman of the Roman elite kitted out as an expensive Greek courtesan, her identity concealed by a Greek pseudonym.²⁴

²³ On the courtesan status of the elegiac *puella*, see James (2003); cf. Sullivan (1976) 76–106; Griffin (1986) 112–41; Laigneau (1999) 197–202; Miller (2004) 62–3; and Fantham (2006) 187–9. For a historical analogue, cf. Gallus' reputed mistress the mime-actress Volumnia, freedwoman of P. Volumnius Eutrapelus, whose stage name Cytheris ('Aphrodite's girl') suggests her sexual availability. On the identity of Gallus' Lycoris, see Serv. *ad Buc.* 10.1.6.

²⁴ Cf. Caелиus' description of Clodia Metelli as a 'fourpenny Clytemnestra, [dressed] Coan in the dining room, [but] Nolan in the bedroom' (*quadrantariam Clytemnestram, Coam in triclinio, Nolan in cubiculo*, Cael. *apud* Quint. *Inst. or.* 8.6.53). On the meaning of 'Nolan' (i.e. 'unwilling') in this riposte, see Hillard (1981). Boucher (1980) 447, 455–9, argues most strongly for Cynthia's status as Roman *matrona*; cf. G. Williams (1968) 529–30, 534.

Cynthia is also the focus of elegy 1.3, which opens with an extended comparison of the sleeping mistress to the heroines of Greek mythology (1.3.1–8) and casts the lover-poet in the role of the god Bacchus creeping up on the sleeping Ariadne (1.3.1–2).²⁵ The suggestion is enhanced by Propertius' allusion a few lines later to a famous epigram by Callimachus in which the speaker apologizes for a *kōmos* (drunken lover's vigil) at his beloved's house (Callim. *Epigr.* 42.3–4 Pf.): 'Wine (*Ákrētos*) and Love (*Érōs*) compelled me, of which the one (i.e. love) drew me on, and the other (i.e. drink) prevented me from laying aside my temerity'. The komastic context of Callimachus' epigram informs Propertius' scenario in 1.3 as we are invited to view the poet-lover, like his Callimachean model, returning late at night from drunken revels to his beloved's house. Despite the lover's caution, however, his mistress wakes when the moon's rays shine through the window on to her face (1.3.27–33) and she reproaches the poet-lover for his infidelity, documenting her chastity in a catalogue of her nocturnal activities – playing the lyre, singing and weaving (1.3.35–46).

The passion and immediacy of the Cynthia elegies have long provoked interest amongst Propertius' readers in the autobiographical origins of his elegiac poetry, and he himself plays on public curiosity about the intimate details of his love affair at the outset of the second collection (2.1.1–2): *Quaeritis unde mihi totiens scribantur amores, | unde meus ueniat mollis in ora liber* ('You [pl.] ask whence my love poems are so often written, whence my soft book comes to recital'). Few readers have been able to resist the invitation of these lines to biographical speculation, though the nineteenth century produced the most sustained efforts to reconstruct from Propertius' poems the course of his affair with Cynthia.²⁶ The challenge was taken up already in antiquity, as Apuleius shows (*Apology* 10): 'Propertius... says Cynthia to conceal Hostia'. A highly speculative case has been constructed in support of Apuleius' identification of Cynthia with a historically recoverable Hostia by biographically-minded critics, who have used Propertius' repeated emphasis on Cynthia's erudition to identify a literary ancestor for her in the republican poet Hostius, author of a lost epic *Bellum Histricum*.²⁷

Social historians and literary critics alike, however, have called into question whether the identification of a supposed historical girlfriend concealed behind Propertius' pseudonymous Cynthia can provide meaningful access to the historical woman and the circumstances of her life, let alone explain

²⁵ Hunter (2006a) 69 n. 85.

²⁶ The biographical preoccupation already animating Lachmann (1816) is carried to its furthest extreme in Plessis (1884); in English Haight (1932) 81–124 is representative.

²⁷ See, most recently, Coarelli (2004) 110–15, with further bibliography.

her literary significance in Propertius' poetry.²⁸ Feminist critics have demonstrated that women enter classical literature as 'gendered' objects of (mostly) male writing practices and have explained how such 'written' women are further shaped by the literary genre in which their authors inscribe them.²⁹ Even if we accept the biographical speculations of historical and philological scholarship, therefore, we must explore Cynthia's symbolic import in Propertian elegy by considering the literary valence of the themes and images with which our elegist associates her throughout his verse.

Catullus sets the precedent for the naming practices of the Augustan elegists by concealing the identity of his beloved behind a pseudonym, 'Lesbia', that evokes the Greek poet Sappho. Propertius' debt to Catullus is evident not only in his explicit invocation of Catullan precedent (2.25.1-4, 32.45-6), but also in his representation of Cynthia as a poet herself (1.3.41-4, 2.3.19-22) who rivals comparison with the Greek poets Sappho and Corinna (2.3.19-22).³⁰ Even more significant is Propertius' debt to his admired model Gallus, who conceals the name of his mistress 'Cytheris' (itself a stage-name of the freedwoman and mime-actress, Volumnia) beneath the pseudonym 'Lycoris', a feminized form of the cult-title of Apollo at Delphi. Cynthia too is a feminized form of one of the god's cult-titles, appearing for the first time in Latin literature in a programmatically-charged passage at the opening of Virgil's sixth Eclogue that adapts into Latin the famous scene of Callimachus' Apolline commission in the prologue of the *Aetia* (fr. 1.21-4 Pf.).³¹ Propertius thus endows his *inamorata* with a name that bears an intensely literary resonance, as we might expect of the 'Roman Callimachus' (4.1.64).³²

The metapoetic interpretation of Cynthia is facilitated by the ancient practice of identifying literary works by their opening word or phrase. Propertius' first collection of elegies will thus have circulated under the title of *Cynthia* (1.1.1). Our poet plays with the double valence of Cynthia as both woman and text already in his first book, when he imagines writing her name on the bark of trees (1.18.21-2), self-consciously foregrounding his role as amatory elegist by inscribing 'Cynthia' on the original writing

²⁸ Hillard (1989); Wyke (2002) 11-191; Kennedy (1993) 1-23.

²⁹ Wyke (2002) 11-191; McNamee (1993); Keith (1994), (2000), (2008) 86-114; Oliensis (1997); Dixon (2001); James (2003). There is an extensive feminist critical literature on Propertian elegy. Wyke's early publications, collected in Wyke (2002), are seminal; see also Gold (1993) and Greene (1998).

³⁰ On Corinna, see Snyder (1989) 41-54; Rayor (1993).

³¹ On Cynthia's name, see Randall (1979) 31-3. On the characterization of Cynthia, see also Boucher (1965) 441-74; Sullivan (1976) 76-106; Greene (1998); Sharrock (2000); Miller (2004) 60-73; Fantham (2006); O'Neill (2005); and the references above.

³² Wyke (2002) 46-114; McNamee (1993); Keith (2008) 86-114.

surface.³³ Cynthia's textualization is central as well to her characterization in book 2, where Propertius promises to write epic once his mistress has been 'written' (2.10.8); reflects on the fame the wide circulation of his *Cynthia* among contemporary Roman readers has brought him (2.24.1-2); and anticipates his readers' interest in his mistress/book at the very outset (2.1.1-16), implying that the unnamed *puella* who furnishes his inspiration in the new book is the Cynthia who gave her name to his first.³⁴

Yet the very beauty and erudition that the poet-lover celebrates in the first book and opening elegies of the second incite his mistress to caprice and infidelity. Already in 1.15, the amatory speaker complains of her inconstancy, despite his elegiac service. He construes Cynthia's exemplary beauty, still manifestly an index of the stylistic perfection of his elegy (*leuitas, componere, uariare, formosa*), as evidence of potential infidelity, and his fears concerning her promiscuity cast a lengthening shadow over their relationship in the second and third books. Thus in elegy 2.4, the poet-lover complains of her 'many transgressions' (*multa delicta*, 2.4.1), while in 2.5 he contemplates a new liaison more worthy of his verse (2.5.5-6), and in elegy 2.6 he surveys her house, thronged like those of the storied courtesans of Greece (2.6.1-2). As Propertius' verse circulates, Cynthia's scandalous appeal increases, and rivals – both literary and amatory – proliferate (1.4, 5, 8; 2.8, 9, 16, 24, 25, 34; 3.19, 20, 24-5). The poet-lover's amatory service outdoes the inconstancy of rival lovers, even as his mistress's promiscuous circulation underlines his true devotion and confers on him the literary fame of which he boasts (e.g., 2.25, 34; 3.3).

The textualization of women such as Propertius' exquisite Cynthia, and their concomitant circulation among men, is a central gender dynamic of Roman lyric and love elegy. The literary renown that Cynthia's general circulation brings the poet-lover is thus an important factor to consider in his characterization of his promiscuous mistress/book. We have seen that the opening lines of elegy 1.1 describe the poet-lover's passionate love for her, but the poem itself plays a wider function in the collection since it is addressed to Propertius' patron Tullus. Cynthia, both the lover's mistress and the poet's book of elegies, is thereby subsumed into the gift presented to Tullus, who is the dedicatee of our poet's 'single book' and the addressee not only of elegy 1.1 but also of elegies 1.6, 14, and 22, as well as the later 3.22. Through his elegies, 'Cynthia' circulates between Propertius and his friends, patrons and rivals: Bassus (1.4), Gallus (1.5, 10, 13, 20), Ponticus (1.7, 9), Maecenas (2.1, 3.9), Demophoon (2.22), Lynceus (2.34) and Horos (4.1). Thus, when our elegist complains of his mistress's promiscuity (in e.g. 1.12,

³³ McNamee (1993) 228.

³⁴ See also Hunter (Chapter 1) in this volume.

15; 2.5, 6, 8, 9, 16, 32 etc.), we should recall that his own elegies release Cynthia into public circulation, not only among Roman notables in general, but between the elegist and his friends in particular.

Propertius' poetry circulates among the Roman political elites within a culture of institutionalized social relations that consolidate male authority in and through women's bodies. The feminine clichés to which Propertius' portrait of Cynthia appeals not only strengthen male social bonds and elite authority (over female, foreigner, and slave) but also naturalize the hierarchy of the sexes on display in Latin literature and Roman culture. Propertian elegy thus makes explicit the poet's participation in the elite male homosocial network central to Latin political, rhetorical and literary culture.³⁵ By addressing members of the Roman social and political elites as patrons, friends and literary rivals, Propertius appeals to and consolidates the homosocial bonds of elite Roman male friendship and implicitly documents the social and political entitlements of his own class. Roman poetic composition and performance, like its rhetorical counterpart declamation, was an exercise in masculine co-operation and competition, as Propertius' genealogy of Latin love poetry illustrates (2.34.85–94). The distichs celebrating Roman elegiac poets and their poetry imply not only their practitioners' mutual interest in one another's verse but also each successive elegist's inspiration of the next.

Propertius' participation in the homosocial network of the Roman cultural and political elites is evident throughout his own elegiac corpus, especially in the first book, where a series of poems with named addressees signals the extent of his literary and social ambitions. In elegy 1.4, for example, he sets Cynthia into circulation between himself and the iambic poet Bassus in a complex negotiation of their mutual literary and amatory standing.³⁶ Throughout the elegy, the syntactic pairing of Propertius and Bassus establishes between them a symmetrical relationship, both amatory and literary, which distinguishes them sharply from Cynthia. The poem founds the structural congruence between the two poets on male homosocial desire and harnesses the sexual and textual exchange of women for the consolidation of literary and affective bonds between men. A similar rhetorical strategy undergirds the paired elegies 1.7 and 1.9, addressed to the epic poet Ponticus, whom Propertius represents as a rival in epic composition to Homer. He

³⁵ The adjective homosocial describes social bonds between members of the same sex in such arenas as 'friendship, mentorship, entitlement, rivalry, and . . . sexuality' (Sedgwick (1992) 1). On homosociality in general, see Sedgwick (1992), building on Girard (1976) and Irigaray (1985); and in the context of Augustan poetry, see Oliensis (1997), Miller (2004).

³⁶ Suits (1976) 89.

cautions Ponticus that, should he fall in love, he will find the Greek elegist Mimnermus – by implication Propertius' own generic model – more valuable than Homer (1.9.11): *plus in amore ualet Mimnermi uersus Homero*. Ponticus' epic themes of Cadmean Thebes, civil war, and fratricide find their structural antonym in Propertius' elegiac attention to 'love' (*nostros agita-mus amores*, 1.7.5) and a 'harsh mistress' (*duram dominam*, 6), as living Roman poets supersede Greek masters. Yet the ostensible rivalry between successive pairs of poets – Ponticus ~ Homer, Homer ~ Mimnermus, Ponticus ~ Propertius – obscures the greater homology of the poetic pursuit of renown common to both epicist and elegist, Greek and Roman. Both elegies exemplify elite male homosocial competition in their appeal to clichés of masculine rivalry even as they enact elite male solidarity.

From first to last, Propertius remains an exponent of 'soft' and 'seductive' elegiac verse, but the horizon of his elegy expands from an exclusive focus on his beloved 'Cynthia' in book 1, to encompass contemporary political themes under Maecenas' patronage, fitfully in book 2, more frequently in book 3, and consistently in book 4. The poet's careful arrangement of the poems in the first collection has been well documented.³⁷ The three poems that conclude the book illustrate the frayed relations between lover and mistress by foregoing any mention of Cynthia, offering instead advice to Gallus about his homoerotic love affair (1.20) and two sepulchral epigrams (1.21–22). The themes of death and recent civil war in the epigrams illustrate particularly starkly their closural function in the book.

Book 2: the long love

I subscribe to the view that book 2 is a single collection, badly mauled in transmission, and I accept Richard Tarrant's attractive suggestion that the 'exceptional length [of the book] should probably be seen as a provocative feature . . . a witty literalization of 2.1's opening words (. . . *totiens amores*) and of the following references to superabundant composition (12, 14).³⁸ Although exceptionally long, the book exhibits the standard structural components of programmatic opening and closing poems (2.1, 34) and an internal sequence of programmatic poems (2.10–13) that functions as an off-centre 'proem in the middle'.³⁹ The opening poem of the second

³⁷ On the design of book 1, see Skutsch (1963); Otis (1965); Courtney (1968); King (1975/76); Davis (1977); Petersmann (1980); Fedeli (1983); Manuwald (2006).

³⁸ Tarrant (2006) 57.

³⁹ Classic discussion in Conte (1992). On the problems posed by book 2, see Skutsch (1975); Menés (1983); Camps (1967); Heyworth (1995); Butrica (1996b); Lyne

collection returns us to the *mise-en-scène* of the first in its celebration of the elegiac mistress's beauty and erudition (2.1.1–16), and recalls the early elegies of the first volume (1.2–3). Like the first collection, the second exhibits a narrative progression from the poet-lover's literary and amatory success to his increasing disillusionment with the elegiac mistress/book, 'Cynthia'. Thus in elegies 2.2 and 2.3, the amatory speaker accounts for his composition of elegy as the result of his love for an exceptional woman, rehearsing the attributes that attract him so powerfully, while the following elegies (2.4–9) rehearse the lover's disillusionment with his mistress's increasing caprice and infidelity, the poet's with her genre. Cynthia's caprice makes her unmarriageable but never to be parted from the poet-lover in 2.7, the object of a rival lover's pursuit in 2.8 (*eripitur nobis iam pridem cara puella*, 1), and apparently his rival's conquest in 2.9 (*iste quod est, ego saepe fui*, 1). The brief separation and immediate reconciliation recorded in elegies 2.10–13 then invite interpretation as the poet's re-commitment to the genre, for they initiate a new sequence of amatory success (2.14, 15), infidelity, and rupture, in which both Cynthia (2.16, 17, 19, 21) and the poet-lover (2.18, 20, 22) explore the attractions of other partners.

Of particular interest is Propertius' proud boast to his friend Demophoon in 2.22, that he finds many girls desirable (1): *scis here mi multas pariter placuisse puellas* ('you know that yesterday many girls proved equally attractive to me'). The very name of his addressee, meaning 'voice of the people', suggests the poet-lover's ready capitulation to the gossip that circulates about him (in e.g. 2.1, 3) and his mistress (in e.g. 2.5, 11, 18.37–8). But his new erotic interest in a multitude of potential girlfriends reverses an earlier profession of love for Cynthia alone (2.6.19): *tu mihi sola places: placeam tibi, Cynthia, solus* ('you alone please me: let me alone please you, Cynthia'). In forswearing the exclusivity of his relations with Cynthia, the lover reveals his readiness for erotic adventure, the poet his desire for literary experimentation (2.22.3–6).⁴⁰ The elegiac speaker then disavows his commitment to a singular mistress in 2.23, as the poet-lover evinces a new interest in the comic *meretrix* and lyric freedwoman. Propertius associates his resulting amatory and literary degradation with Cynthia herself in the following poem, which opens with an interlocutor's comment on her wide circulation (2.24.1–2, quoted above). The promiscuity of the elegiac book figures that of the elegiac mistress, and as Propertius' literary fame increases their notoriety redounds to his moral discredit, setting in play an unresolved,

(1998b), (1998c); Syndikus (2006). On the design of book 2 as we have it, see Camps (1967); Syndikus (2006); Tarrant (2006).

⁴⁰ See also Gibson (Chapter 14) in this volume.

and perhaps unresolvable, tension between the mistress's erotic and literary circulation. The elegies that conclude the second book can be interpreted, through their employment of a series of closural themes, as illustrating the poet's increasing disengagement from his genre, the lover's from his mistress.

Book 3: the end of the elegiac *affaire*?

The plot of amatory disillusionment and literary disengagement intensifies in the third book, which opens with the substitution of literary for amatory programme in the 'Roman Elegies' (3.1–5),⁴¹ and concludes with the poet-lover's final disavowal of his mistress (and amatory elegy) because of her promiscuity (3.19–25).⁴² Within the book, Propertius includes fewer poems about Cynthia than in the earlier books, and he names and/or addresses her only in the closing sequence of elegies (3.21, 24–5). The elegies in which she appears, moreover, illustrate their recurrent dissension and frequent separation: elegy 3.6 reports the unfaithful poet-lover's hope for rapprochement with his mistress, despite her reproaches; 3.8 celebrates the lovers' quarrel that the elegiac speaker believes attests to his beloved's continuing love for him; 3.10 is a birthday gift for his mistress proposing a night of pleasures; 3.15 commemorates the first mistress of the elegiac *amator*, Lycinna; and 3.16 records the poet-lover's summons from Rome to his girlfriend's villa at Tibur, whereby he imagines his murder by brigands on the journey.

The sequence of five elegies that opens the third collection corresponds particularly closely to the thematically related sequence of six odes that opens Horace's third book of lyric poems, the so-called 'Roman Odes'. Throughout his sequence, Propertius explores his 'status as a poet of love'⁴³ and develops with special intensity the Horatian themes 'of his lack of interest in material acquisitions; of the equalizing function of death, which knows no distinction between rich and poor, noble and humble; of the general futility of human efforts'.⁴⁴ But Propertius' appropriation of the diction and themes of Horace's *Odes* tendentiously adapts Horatian lyric to the (im)moral project of his own elegiac verse, for he ostentatiously rejects the ethical valence of Horace's denunciation of wealth even as he appropriates it to his own elegiac poetic programme. The recuperation of public Horatian lyric for private elegiac ends also animates the narrative

⁴¹ Nethercut (1970).

⁴² On the design of book 3, see Courtney (1970); Putnam (1980); Comber (1998); Newman (2006).

⁴³ Nethercut (1970) 385, quoting Solmsen (1948) 105.

⁴⁴ Solmsen (1948) 106; cf. Flach (1967), Nethercut (1970), and Miller (1983).

trajectory of these elegies, in which Propertius retrofits Horace's celebration of Augustan *pax* to an erotic setting.⁴⁵

Propertius' extensive renovation of the programmatic language, imagery, and themes of Horace's *Odes* in elegies 3.1–5 introduces contemporary Latin lyric into the third book as a significant new source of generic engagement and experimentation. In addition to his renovation of the 'Roman Odes' in his 'Roman Elegies', Propertius' *epicedion* for Paetus lost at sea (3.7) shares with Horace's Archytas ode, *Carm.* 1.28, a speech delivered by a shipwrecked man; elegy 3.9, addressed to Maecenas, the patron they share, is a *recusatio*, or refusal to write on grand themes, of the kind that Horace makes in *Carm.* 1.6; poem 3.11 can be appreciated as a 'Cleopatra elegy' inspired by Horace's 'Cleopatra ode', *Carm.* 1.37; elegy 3.12 addresses Postumus, the recipient of Horace's famous *Eheu fugaces*, *Carm.* 2.14; and elegy 3.13 handles the theme of Roman moral decadence that Horace treats extensively in the *Odes*. The criticism of avarice in particular is a prominent theme of Horatian lyric that recurs throughout the third book of Propertius' elegies (e.g., 3.7.1–8, 3.12.1–6, 3.13)⁴⁶ but in the distinctive form of the elegist's repeated expression of a singular commitment to love and concomitant indifference to wealth. Elegy 3.17, a dithyramb or hymn to Bacchus, illustrates Propertius' newly explicit engagement with lyric. Perhaps inspired by Horace's odes to the wine god (C. 2.19, 3.25) and his wine jar (C. 3.21),⁴⁷ the elegy announces itself as a Pindaric ode (3.17.39–40). If the final couplet humorously deflates lofty lyric sentiment (41–2), the poem as a whole offers sustained and successful expression of a distinctly non-elegiac programme. Like Fedeli and other recent critics, therefore, I view this poem's experimental departure from amatory elegy as marking a stage in Propertius' disengagement from the genre in book 3.⁴⁸

The closing sequence of the third book constitutes an extended meditation not only on how the poet-lover can renounce elegy and the elegiac mistress, but also why he must. In elegy 3.19, the elegiac speaker takes his girlfriend's promiscuity as the starting point for an exploration of female wantonness (3.19.1–2), while in the following elegy, a rival lover's departure confirms his mistress's infidelity (3.20.1–6). Elegy 3.21 therefore proposes a sea voyage to cure the poet-lover of his infatuation. The lover's removal to Athens and the poet's immersion there in philosophy, rhetoric and even comedy (3.21.25–8) hold out the prospect of a cure for love, *remedium amoris*, such as the

⁴⁵ On allusion to Gallus, fr. 145 Hollis, in Propertius' elegy 3.4, see Putnam (1980); Cairns (2006b) 406–12; and Hollis (2007) 243–4.

⁴⁶ On Propertius' debt to Horace for this theme, see Flach (1967) 19–40.

⁴⁷ So, e.g., Fedeli (1985) 512–16; Hunter (2006a) 68–72.

⁴⁸ Cf. Neumeister (1983) 96–101; Fedeli (1985) 516; Lefèvre (1991); Miller (1991b).

elegist rejects in 1.1.25–38. Elegy 3.21 thus constitutes a valedictory address to the central themes – Rome, friends, and girlfriend – of Propertian elegy (3.21.15–16). The loss of his writing tablets in elegy 3.23 wittily instantiates the poet's renunciation of love elegy, and the closing elegy (or elegies)⁴⁹ commemorates the lover's final break with Cynthia. The lover renounces Cynthia in the very words with which the poet celebrated her in the opening collection, where her *forma* and *figura* furnished the subject of elegy 1.2 and her eyes inspired his love for her in elegy 1.1 (cf. 2.15.12), reducing him from arrogance (1.1.3) to submission (1.1.4, 32–8).⁵⁰ His mention in elegy 3.24 of friends (*amici*, 9) and a witch (*saga*, 10) also looks back to the opening poem of the first book (witches, 1.1.19–24; *amici*, 1.1.25–6), as do the themes of a sea-voyage (3.24.12, 15–16; 1.1.29), surgical remedies (3.24.11; 1.1.27) and slavery to Venus (3.24.14; 1.1.33). The closural function of such lexical and thematic recapitulation is abundantly clear and invites interpretation as Propertius' valedictory meditation on the circulation of 'Cynthia' among the Roman reading public. His mistress/book has made the poet famous, but the lover a laughing stock, and so he represents himself as tired of both love and love poetry. The sequence articulates Propertius' desire to bring the life of love to an end along with the composition of amatory elegy.

Book 4: aetiological elegy

The culmination of Propertius' homage to Callimachus comes in the final book of elegies where, as we have seen, he announces himself the Roman Callimachus and undertakes to commemorate in his elegiac verse specifically aetiological subjects (4.1.69–70). He is ostensibly deflected, however, from his proposed change of course by the soothsayer Horos, who bids him return to the amatory themes that have always distinguished his elegiac verse (4.1.135–46). The poems in the final book enact this competing programme of 'Callimachean' aetiological and 'Propertian' erotic elegy through the juxtaposition of aetiological and amatory subjects: poems 4.2, 4, 6, 9 and 10 treat the legends of Vertumnus' statue in the Vicus Tuscus, the Rock of Tarpeia, Actian Apollo, Hercules' foundation of the *Ara Pacis* and the *spolia opima* on display in the temple of Jupiter Feretrius, while poems 4.3, 5, 7, 8 and 11 explore amatory relationships from a variety of perspectives. In the complex imbrication of erotic and aetiological themes in the final collection we can trace Propertius' debt not only to Callimachean elegy per

⁴⁹ On the textual issues, see Fedeli (1985) 672–4. For 3.24–5 as a *renuntiatio amoris*, see Cairns (1972) 79–82.

⁵⁰ Fedeli (1985) 675–7; Fear (2005) 26–30.

se but also to the larger question of poetic book design which Callimachus and his contemporaries explored with extraordinary sophistication.⁵¹

The central elegy 4.6 functions as a 'proem in the middle' and provides a forum for reflection on the politics and poetics of Propertius' final collection. In its religious setting and explicit acknowledgment of Philitas and Callimachus as the source of his aesthetic inspiration, elegy 4.6 closely reworks the opening of elegy 3.1. In its accommodation of political panegyric to elegiac programme, the poem draws especially closely on the example of Callimachus' *Aetia*, in which statements of poetic principle (*Aetia* Prologue fr. 1-7 M, *Aetia* Epilogue fr. 112 Pf) frame praise of the Ptolemaic dynasty (*Victoria Berenices* (SH 254-69), *Coma Berenices* (*Aetia* 4 fr. 110 Pf)).⁵² Where once Cynthia had furnished our elegist's inspiration and themes (2.1.1-16), now Apollo and Calliope, the sources of Callimachus' poetic inspiration in the *Aetia*, incite him to sing of Augustus' victory at Actium (4.6.11-12). The elegy celebrates Augustus Caesar's military victories over Egypt (13-68), the German Sygambri (77), Ethiopian Meroe (78) and the Parthians (79-84), and takes the form of panegyric (13-14): *Caesaris in nomen ducuntur carmina: Caesar | dum canitur, quaeso, Iuppiter ipse uaces* ('songs are being made for Caesar's glory: while Caesar is hymned, I beg you, Jupiter, to go without being sung'). Propertius showcases his own panegyric elegy on the theme of Augustus' victory at Actium, which occupies pride of place (15-68), but he also includes notice of his fellow poets' panegyrics on related themes at a banquet after the victory celebration and he even seems to quote a snatch of a rival's song (4.6.77-84).

In elegy 4.6, the supreme patron has become the subject of poems exchanged between professional poets in a specially constituted context, displacing Cynthia to the following elegies (4.7, 8) as Propertius abandons amatory themes for imperial panegyric in public performance (cf. 4.10, 11). The elegist has finally come of age, leaving youth and its age-appropriate pursuits of love and love elegy behind (cf. 3.9.57), 'to devote his energies to the network of relations between men that constitutes the fabric of Roman society'.⁵³ His absorption into the purely homosocial society of poets in the central elegy of the final collection marks the social elevation his elegiac poetry has earned him in the public world of Roman culture.

⁵¹ On the design of book 4, see Sullivan (1984); Janan (2001); DeBrohun (2003); Welch (2005); Günther (2006b); Hutchinson (2006).

⁵² On Callimachus' two elegies for Berenice, and their structural and political importance in the *Aetia*, see Fantuzzi and Hunter (2004) 83-8. On the *Victoria Berenices*, see the *editio princeps* of Parsons and Kassel (1977) and the full discussion, with extensive bibliography, of Fuhrer (1992); on the impact of the poem on Latin poetry, see esp. Thomas (1983).

⁵³ Oliensis (1997) 152; see further Fear (2005).

Further reading

Propertius has enjoyed a protracted period of critical esteem in the last half-century or so, given impetus in the English-speaking world by the publication of Camps' sequence of commentaries on individual books of Propertian elegies (1961, 1965, 1966, 1967), followed by the seminal studies of Commager and Hubbard (both 1974), and in the Italian milieu by the *seriatim* publication of Paolo Fedeli's commentaries on individual books (1965, 1980, 1985, 2005). For translations of Propertius into English, see Lee (WC, 1994) Goold (LCL, 1990) and Katz (2004). Since the appearance of the two English monographs, Propertian elegy has been the focus of concerted scholarly attention, with the completion of two doctoral theses on the manuscript tradition (Butrica 1984, Heyworth 1986); the publication of several critical editions of the elegies (Fedeli 1984, Goold 1990 and Heyworth 2007c); the appearance of a number of scholarly commentaries on individual books of Propertius' elegies (Baker 1990; Booth forthcoming; Hutchinson 2006); and the publication of several important monographs on Propertius' literary style (Benediktson 1989; Keith 2008; Miller 2004; Newman 1997; Papanghelis 1987; Pinotti 2004), politics (Cairns 2006b; Stahl 1985) gender politics (Greene 1998; Wyke 2002) and aetiological elegy (DeBrohun 2003; Janan 2001; Warden 1980; Welch 2005).