

***INTERDICTIONES DOMO ET INGENIO:***  
**TIMAGENES AND PROPERTIUS: A READING IN**  
**THE DYNAMICS OF AUGUSTAN EXCLUSION**

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In both the elder and younger Senecas, anecdotes are recorded about the tempestuous relationship between Augustus and the Alexandrian historian Timagenes.<sup>1</sup> The historian, it would appear, was of a rather irascible and intemperate bent,<sup>2</sup> and his own rise from a slave to the exalted heights of an *amicus Augusti* and a member of the princeps's household produced in him a disregard of status that made him a despiser of, rather than hostage to, fortune.<sup>3</sup> According to Seneca, the acid barbs of Timagenes' *temeraria urbanitas*, "rash wit," aimed at Augustus, Livia, and the whole of the imperial household circulated as they were spoken, *improbe sed venuste*, "immoderately but charmingly."<sup>4</sup> Despite Augustus's frequent admonitions, Timagenes persisted, and the princeps responded by ejecting the historian from his household.<sup>5</sup> Despite this public show of imperial displeasure, Timagenes appeared to suffer no consequences and went off to live in the house of Asinius Pollio.<sup>6</sup>

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1 Seneca the Elder *Controversiae* 10.5.22; Seneca the Younger *de Ira* 3.23.4–8, *Ep.* 91.13.

2 "homine acidae linguae et qui nimis liber erat," *Controversiae* 10.5.22.

3 "utram(que) fortunam contempsit, et in qua erat et in qua fuerat," *Controversiae* 10.5.22.

4 *De Ira* 3.23.4, *Controversiae* 10.5.22.

5 "illi multis de causis iratus Caesar interdixisset domo," *Controversiae* 10.5.22; "perseveranti domo sua interdixit," *de Ira* 3.23.5.

6 "tota civitate direptus est: nullum illi limen praeclusa Caesaris domus abstulit," *de Ira* 3.23.5. Pollio offered to bar Timagenes, too, if Augustus wished it: "si iubes, Caesar, statim illi domo mea interdicam" (*de Ira* 3.23.8), but the princeps declined.

Within the context of the *de Ira*, this story offers to the younger Seneca an excellent example of a princeps's ability to resist the urge to act in an intemperate fashion in the face of extreme provocation.<sup>7</sup> For the elder Seneca, on the other hand, Timagenes provides an opportunity to relate a rather witty riposte that fits neatly into the ambience of rhetorical display that forms the basis of the *Controversiae*.

Following Timagenes' expulsion from Augustus's household, the historian took his own revenge on the princeps by burning the portions of his histories that dealt with Augustus's own deeds.<sup>8</sup> The elder Seneca qualifies this anti-Augustan literary conflagration with the remark: "quasi et ipse illi ingenio suo interdiceret," "As though he himself was barring that man from his own talent" (*Controversiae* 10.5.22).

In this version, Timagenes is represented as engaging in a parallel and trumping bout of interdictions, as Augustus's *interdictio domo* is countered by Timagenes' own *interdictio ingenio*. Timagenes' testy action of self-censorship points to the nature of the commemorative pact between patrons and their literary clients. Augustus's withdrawal of his material support for his client/writer results in Timagenes' reciprocal act of retraction of the princeps's commemorative privileges.

Let us shift focus now from the *dominus et historiae scriptor* to the *domina et poeta* and jump sideways chronologically to look at the contemporary genre of Roman love elegy in the light of this little Augustan patronal spat. The elegiac genre is a slippery and multi-dimensional one, where disparate controlling metaphors (e.g., *militia amoris*, *servitium amoris*, etc.) contradict and complement each other in a dizzying display of intra- and extra-textual correspondences. One such area of literary and historical concision is that of literary patronage.

It is not my intention here to expand at length on what others have said on this particular thread of elegiac narrative, nor to offer a systematic appraisal of the functioning of this metaphor in elegiac discourse.<sup>9</sup> Rather, I simply want to suggest that the *interdictiones domo et ingenio* can serve

7 "ex quibus appareat iram illi non imperasse" ("as a result of which, it is evident that anger did not rule him," *de Ira* 3.23.4). The anecdote is thus one of the usual examples cited in assessments of literary freedom under Augustus; see, for example, Griffin 1985.181–82, Raaflaub and Samons 1990.442–43, Feeney 1992.7–8.

8 "libros acta Caesaris Augusti continentis in ignem inposuit," *de Ira* 3.23.6; "combureret historias rerum ab illo gestarum," *Controversiae* 10.5.22.

9 For excellent studies on this specific aspect of elegiac poetry, see Gold 1993, Gibson 1995, and Oliensis 1997.

as very useful condensed descriptions for looking at elegy from the perspective of the dramatic action between the two principal characters in the discourse, and then to illustrate this dynamic through a brief look at Propertius 2.11.<sup>10</sup>

In the sexualization and “elegization” of literary patronage that inevitably occurs when this social discourse enters the particularities of Roman love elegy, the production of poetry is turned into a bargaining chip in the wrangling relationship between the *poeta* and the *domina*.<sup>11</sup> The poetic *officium* of commemorative verse that is analogous to that which any writer might offer to an aristocratic patron, in elegy becomes the site for a battle between “an untrustworthy textuality and an untrustworthy sexuality”<sup>12</sup>—a contest between mercenary suspicion on the part of the elegiac *domina* and pauperous protestations on the part of the narrator. The poet, professing he has nothing else to offer, holds out the prospect of immortalization in verse; the *domina*, with a preference for rather more costly and easily exchangeable *munera*, generally refuses, and the narrator laments his excluded fate. On one level, the whole discourse presents itself as rotating around this masochistic cycle of the narrator’s dogged attempts to exchange poetry for sex and the *domina*’s typically recalcitrant rejection of such versifying persuasion.<sup>13</sup> This generic impasse is the basis of the persistent elegiac trope of the *paraclausithyron* / *exclusus amator*, as the *domina* exercises her imperious *interdictio domo* and the poet/lover laments his fate.<sup>14</sup> Thus in elegy, the *interdictio domo* is a foundational basis for the narrative: the stasis it produces is what enables this gridlocked genre to maintain the stand-off between a wheedling *poeta* and a stonewalling *domina*.<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, the *interdictio ingenio* can be seen as the poet/lover’s ultimate sanction against the *domina*’s tactic of exclusion. If the

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10 This is not to say, of course, that they are by any means definitive descriptions of elegiac discourse. No single metaphor or analogy could hope to capture the multiple strands of meaning that infuse elegy.

11 A process that Conte 1989 labels “transcodification.”

12 Felperin 1985.195 on Shakespeare’s sonnets.

13 This theme of attempted coercive male persuasion in Roman elegy forms the central basis of the studies on the genre by James 2001 and 2003.

14 The attribution of the *interdictio domo* to the *domina* is not intended to impute actual agency to the *domina* that she doesn’t possess. The *domina* within the text is constructed by the external poet, and her thwarting agency is part of the elegiac fiction and not a reflection of an external reality.

15 As Sharrock 1995 notes: “It is a poetry which thrives on rejection and is structured around exclusion, the most programmatic manifestation of which is the *paraclausithyron*.”

*domina* does not comply, then the *poeta* threatens her with expulsion from the discourse, in a gesture that threatens to close down rather than perpetuate elegy. The *domina* will be unsung, but the poet will also be unversed. As an action rather than a threat, it would, in effect, be an act of elegiac suicide. Yet perhaps not surprisingly in this genre of masochistic erotic/poetic abuse, we do indeed find the poet threatening to fall on his pen.

This form of elegiac *interdictio ingenio* is most fully developed and eloquently expressed in Propertius 2.11. This poem appears to represent a crisis in the elegiac narrative where the reader can posit that the pressure of an individual *interdictio domo*—or the result of such repeated exclusionary injunctions—has led to this countering dramatic and literary exclusion:<sup>16</sup>

scribant de te alii vel sis ignota licebit:  
     laudet, qui sterili semina ponit humo.  
 omnia, crede mihi, tecum uno munera lecto  
     auferet extremi funeris atra dies;  
 et tua transibit contemnens ossa viator,  
     nec dicet “cinis hic docta puella fuit.”

Let others write about you or be unknown, it's all the same to me:<sup>17</sup> let him praise you, who would plant his seeds in sterile ground. Believe me, the black day of death will carry off all your gifts on one bier; and a traveler will pass by spurning your bones, nor will he say, “This ash was once a learned girl.”

This poem dramatizes the consequences for the elegiac *domina* of the narrator's withdrawal of his poetic *laudes*.<sup>18</sup> The first line of the poem presents alternatives of someone else writing about her or her being

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16 Naturally, there can be no certainty over the narrative situation of 2.11 and what exactly the poem is a response to. This is not atypical of the elliptical narratives of elegy. The situation I have constructed is intended to illustrate how 2.11 can be taken to demonstrate one of the central *crucis* of elegiac discourse.

All translations are my own.

17 In my translation I am following the emphasis that I think Murgia 2000.179 correctly identifies in this line. As Murgia notes, the reader or listener would not know that the *licebit* is coming and so would naturally take the subjunctives as independent jussives.

18 This analysis treats the poem as an individual unit as it stands rather than trying to reconstruct it as a fragmentary part of a longer whole. There is, needless to say, much debate over this issue—see further footnote 25.

unknown. *Licebit* professes an indifference to her fate beyond the author's text, which indifference is then backed up by the use of *vel* and its suggestion of further undesirable alternatives.<sup>19</sup> This opening quite clearly signals an ending as far as the poet is concerned. Thus the first line is a sort of mini-crescendo of the consequences for the *puella* of being unwritten by Propertius, whilst also suggesting the possibility of further negative results of this exclusion. In this manner, 2.11, we might say, is a dramatization of the poet's meditative declaration in the previous poem that he has finished with elegiac composition (2.10.7–8):

aetas prima canat Veneres, extrema tumultus:  
bella canam, quando scripta puella meast.

Let a poet's early years sing of love, his last of violent conflict: I will sing of wars, since my girl has been written.

The *scripta puella* appears to represent a completed elegiac enterprise and signals an intention to develop his poetic career in an epic direction. 2.11, then, shows this decision in a dramatic rather than reflective mode as a turn in a poetic career is recast as a terminal twist in an erotic relationship.<sup>20</sup>

The second line of 2.11 serves as a warning to any other potential poet/lovers (the *alii* of line 1) who might be thinking of taking on Propertius's *puella*. The poet stresses the breakdown of the expected reciprocal relationship between celebrator and celebrated. This rupture of the decorum of exchange is expressed in terms of the efficacy (or not) of sowing seeds, a register of imagery that fits in well with the sexual nature of the discourse.<sup>21</sup> According to the rhetoric of the poet/lover, the failure of the

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19 I am grateful to the journal's anonymous reader for his or her comments on the use of *vel* in this line and for further points which I have taken into account. Nevertheless, the interpretation in this article diverges from the reader's opinion and, as such, remains my sole responsibility.

20 I would, therefore, have to disagree here with Wyke 2002.61, who says that in 2.11, "the literariness of the discourse in which the *puella* is now encountered distances the reader from whatever realistic image for the elegiac woman poem 2.11 additionally constructs." As Murgia 2000.177 says, 2.11 is rather "a farewell to Cynthia as both beloved and theme."

21 It also seems to be a not uncommon analogy when discussing the mechanisms of *amicitia*; see, for instance, Seneca *de Beneficiis* 7.32, where the narrator faced with a *homo ingratus* compares his continued efforts at redeeming this situation to those of a *bonus agricola*'s efforts at prevailing over the *sterilitas soli* through careful cultivation.

*domina* to provide herself sexually (in return for her inscription into his poetry), turns his elegiac verses into an unproductive form of poetic masturbation rather than a fecund act of symbiotic fertility. Here the language of fertility, creativity, and sex are closely entwined in a tightly condensed metaphor for the dynamics of the central confrontational relationship in elegiac narrative.<sup>22</sup>

In lines 3–4, the inevitability of death carrying off all *munera* (with the exception of poetry, of course) is stressed;<sup>23</sup> and in lines 5–6, the oblivion of the unpoeticized *puella* is brought out by the dramatic scenario of the traveler spurning the addressee's bones and the speaking of the words that will not now be said. Here the difference between being written in and out of the elegiac text is forcefully enacted by the insertion of that simple and terrible *nec* that precedes the *dicet* and steals away the words even as they are spoken. The rejection of the *poeta* leads to a fate of being despised *ignotus cinis*, "unknown ash," rather than the enduring validation of being marked out as a *docta puella*.<sup>24</sup>

The poet's threat to withdraw the *puella*'s commemorative privileges is presented appropriately enough in a concise verbal artifact in the tradition of the sepulchral epigrams found in the Greek Anthology.<sup>25</sup> Thus

22 Though, of course, we should not forget that elegiac discourse is predicated on such sterility; its continuity is built precisely upon a general principle of failed poetic seduction. In this regard, the complaints of the internal narrator over the lack of respect his poetry engenders must be balanced against the success of the external poet, whose fame is constructed out of this narrative of the failure of poetry as a sexual bargaining chip. In this sense, the *sterilis humus* that the *puella* represents is, paradoxically, the productive ground upon which elegiac discourse is built.

23 The *munera* of this line are taken by Lyne 1998.28 to be Cynthia's *caelestia munera* as at 2.3.25, with the point being that "what was earlier seen as divine, artistically inspirational, and climactic is now seen as bathetic, paltry, and emphatically mortal." Heyworth 2007.158, n. 34, on the other hand, following Strohl 1971.71–72, argues that they represent "the gifts of others" and that the lack of a qualifying *haec* in 2.11 (as at 2.3.25) rules out Lyne's more expansive sense. I think both senses are possible here and should complement each other: material gifts will be of no use to her when she is dead, and her own accomplishments will count for nothing if they are not poeticized by the narrator.

24 Naturally, the *doctrina* of the *puella* is reflected glory. Her status as *docta* depends on her incarnation in Propertius's text and, at the dramatic level of the text, in her willingness to evaluate Propertius's poetry positively. On this aspect of the *docta puella*, see further Habinek 1998.128–29 and Wyke 2002.62.

25 Whether or not 2.11 is a freestanding epigram or a fragment, it appears as it is as a finely crafted piece of poetry: punchy, antithetical, dramatic, and nicely assembled. Note the threefold jingling repetition of the sound of each pentameter: "laudet . . . auferet . . . nec dicet"; similarly, the threefold repetition in the hexameters of "ignota . . . munera . . . ossa," all in the penultimate position in the line; the (im)potent juxtaposition of *sterili semina* in

the poem in itself proves the *poeta*'s ability to produce the memorable commemorative verse that he boasts of. Yet at the same time, the poem proves its efficacy in such a fashion so as to mark out for the *domina* the consequences of non-compliance. For the poem produced in 2.11 is not only a demonstration of oblivion but also an enduring indictment, a literary form of *damnatio* rather than *celebratio memoriae* that paradoxically purports to eradicate rather than perpetuate memory. The *domina* is not celebrated—or even named—but defamed, and the conventional sepulchral form is used to criticize rather than to praise.<sup>26</sup> In this poem, she is both promised oblivion for the future and also indicted in the present in a double helping of, now and for all time, literary abuse.<sup>27</sup>

Again, the use of the form of a sepulchral epigram in conjunction with a message of renunciation marks 2.11 as ostensibly closural in nature. The poem is an exercise in what we might call poetic de-composition, as the poet threatens to write out the *puella* and simultaneously reduces her body to *cinis*. It is not surprising, therefore, that it is argued that 2.11 was originally the concluding poem in a Propertian poetry book.<sup>28</sup> Whether or

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line 2; the rhyming endings of lines 2–3, “humo . . . lecto”; and the dramatic (un)spoken conclusion. For further discussion on the status of 2.11, see Goold 1990.152, Heyworth 2007.156–58, Lyne 1998, and Murgia 2000.

26 In this manner, this particular elegiac poem is a negative mirror of the commemorative potential of the medium as expressed at *Ars Amatoria* 3.534–35: “Nos facimus placitae late praeconia formae: / Nomen habet Nemesis, Cynthia nomen habet,” “We act as heralds far and wide for women who have pleased: Nemesis has renown, Cynthia has renown.” Women who have given “satisfaction” are named and celebrated, those who have not are unnamed and vilified.

27 Although Lyne 1998.34 well remarks on these concluding lines that this is an ironic and ambiguous form of closure as the epitaph speaks *docta puella fuit* even as it denies the saying of it to the passer-by. In effect, “Cynthia” is not unwritten but no longer voiced; this dramatic *damnatio memoriae* may seek to modify, but does not erase, her previous incarnation in the text as a *docta puella*. For her status as a *docta puella* is itself a memorial to the poet, the author, rather than to his character. A dramatic renunciation of the *puella* must remain a gesture that leaves behind, rather than obliterates, a past writing practice.

28 The coherence of, and ordering of, poems in Propertius's second book has long been a hotly contested issue. As long ago as 1816, Lachman argued that Book 2 was made up of two poetry books rather than being a single unified entity. Both Lyne 1998 and Murgia 2000 argue that 2.11 closed what they term Propertius Book 2a, though Lyne, unlike Murgia, argues that 2.11 should be regarded as the concluding couplets of 2.10. Murgia 2000.180 argues persuasively that the *scribant* of 2.11.1 deliberately echoes the *scribantur* of 2.1.1 and that 2.11's final line picks up the epitaph of 2.1's concluding line. Others argue that 2.11's concluding gesture should be seen not as an actual ending but as an ongoing literary debate that plays itself out over the course of a unified and coherent single Book 2; cf. Wyke 2002.46–77 and Keith 2008.50–51, 97ff., 181, n. 138.

not 2.11 actually ended a book, we can see that this form of poetic *interdictio ingenio* functions well within the dynamics of this literary discourse. For on the level of the pseudo-realist narrative, it serves as a threat to the *domina* that exclusion will be met with exclusion, and thus it remains a bargaining chip in the poet/lover's arsenal. At the same time, on the level of the developing poetics of the author, it serves as a convenient plot twist that suggests the ongoing literary maturation of the poet.

In this manner, these two competing *interdictiones* serve to keep the disjunctive narrative trundling along in a discourse that always operates under the threat of closure as sexual and poetic exclusions tussle with each other. In this sense, the poet's *interdictio* of 2.11 doesn't necessarily need to be seen as a concluding poetic gesture, but rather as one more skirmish in an ongoing pattern of rupture and resumption that ostensibly threatens to close down elegy, but, in effect, perpetuates it as the poet "reluctantly" resumes his masochistic torment in the poems that follow 2.11. The cycle of rejection and lament/threat/curse forms a recurrent motif in elegy's narrative repertoire, where delay, simmering tension, and explosive ruptures are the normative building blocks of the discourse. Hence Propertius 2.11 and its *interdictio ingenio* is one of those moments of blustering, bluffing posturing that rightly characterize a genre that is described at Propertius 4.1B.135 as a *fallax opus*, "deceptive work."

This points towards the inevitable conclusion that it is not the breakdown of relations between the internal *poeta/amator* and the *domina* that causes closure in elegy, but rather the progression of the relationship between the external *poeta* and his feminized genre, *Elegia* (as in *Amores* 3.1). It is the poet, rather than the lover, who must ultimately move on. The pseudo-realist narrative of elegy and its central relationship is only the incarnation of the poet's affair with his genre. The tempestuous nature of elegy's internal relationship is part of the genre's own logic; its ruptures, part of its coherence. In this context, the threatened withdrawal of the internal poet's literary services, as in Propertius 2.11, is also part of elegy's normative rhetoric. It is only when this internal gesture coincides with the external poet's actual literary progression to other genres and forms of poetry that the continuation of elegy is really under threat.<sup>29</sup> In this sense, 2.11

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29 One suspects that this is the case in Propertius 3.24 and 3.25, where the poet renounces five years of servitude, and where what seems likely to have been the end of the original Propertian collection is signaled in terms of a final break between the *poeta/amator* and his *domina*; see, further, Fear 2005.27–29.



is a false ending: it marks a pause in, rather than an end to, Propertius's elegiac enterprise.

To return to our historian, we can see, of course, that Timagenes' combustion of his *laudes Augusti* in the exercise of his *interdictio ingenio* was probably a blessing in disguise for Augustus, given the historian's propensity to lacerate the imperial family with his *temeraria urbanitas*. In a similar fashion, we can see that the *puella*'s memorial in Propertius's verse is rather a mixed blessing;<sup>30</sup> it is surely a fame that is a notoriety. Hence when "Cynthia" returns in a cameo appearance in 4.7, she specifically requests that Propertius burn the verses that he wrote about her and cease to steal her *laudes* (77–78):

et quoscumque meo fecisti nomine versus,  
ure mihi: laudes desine habere meas.

And burn for me whatever verses you made in my name:  
cease to have a reputation through me.

Here amusingly, "Cynthia" attempts an *interdictio ingenio* of her own by ordering the poet to cease to reap the benefits of his association with her, and in the process, she willingly requests her own literary erasure.<sup>31</sup> The ventriloquized request in 4.7 emphasizes that Propertius's reputation as a poet is built upon the incarnation of "Cynthia" in his text. Here *poeta* and *puella* collide in a dramatic literary spat that embodies some real issues over the dynamics of literary patronage and who gets the better deal. Sometimes a character is an author's best friend; this is something that Propertius outside the text grasped, even if the poet/lover inside his verses didn't.<sup>32</sup>

### *The Open University*

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30 Despite the spin the poet puts on it at 3.2.17–18: "fortunata, meo si qua's celebrata libello! / carmina erunt formae tot monumenta tuae" ("She's the lucky one, whoever has been celebrated in my little book. My poems will be so many memorials to your beauty").

31 She also, of course, dictates for the poet a rather more positive epitaph (4.7.85–86) than the one the poet suggests for her in 2.11.

32 A point that also seems to have eluded Timagenes. Whose reputation was the more likely to suffer—Augustus through not being in Timagenes' work or Timagenes' history for not having Augustus in it?

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