

WHY PROPERTIUS IS A WOMAN: FRENCH FEMINISM AND AUGUSTAN ELEGY

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*. . . la vraie question n'est pas celle de leur inconduite, mais celle de leur incohérence.*¹

*In the genre of Propertian love elegy . . . the narrating ego is constituted as an effeminate voice.*²

PROPERTIUS BOOK TWO moves from the initial establishment of the poet's style in the *Monobiblos* to its institutionalization and consequent engagement with the recuperative force of Roman discursive and ideological norms, embodied in what Jacques Lacan labeled the Symbolic. It is no accident that this book commences with a *recusatio* or that the figures of Maecenas and Augustus loom large over it. Propertius has begun to move in the imperial circle. This, however, does not mean that his poetry becomes less oppositional. Rather, to the extent that poetry referring to, or refusing to refer to, the emperor, Maecenas, and their coterie, is more prominent in this collection,³ then the recuperative pressures of the Roman Symbolic stand in proportionately sharper opposition to the erotic Imaginary's desire for asocial union (as exemplified in words like *nequitia*, *inertia*, etc.)⁴ that stands at the heart of elegiac discourse. By Symbolic, following Lacan, I mean the world of linguistically constituted norms that allows us to be recognized as subjects within the community. By Imaginary, I refer to our vision of the self, prior to its necessary alienation once we enter the realm of language and Symbolically regulated social practices. The Imaginary's desire for asocial union, therefore, is a longing for wholeness and completeness analogous to that expressed so vividly by the myth that forms the centerpiece of Aristophanes' speech in the *Symposium*.

In this paper, I shall examine three related areas. First, I shall look at the ways in which Propertius in Book 2 fashions an anomalous subject position

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1. Maleuvre 1998, 2.

2. Wyke 1995, 120.

3. Gold 1987, 158.

4. See for example Prop. 1.6.25–26; Tib. 1.1.57–58; Gaisser 1983, 65; Wimmel 1976, 37–38; Veyne 1988, 106; Copley 1956, 100; Sullivan 1976, 62; and Tracy 1979, 343: “*Nequitia* in the Roman elegists has been defined as the freeing of self from community consciousness, the retreating into one's own ‘I.’”

by identifying himself simultaneously with Augustan and anti-Augustan positions, paying special attention to poems 2.15 and 2.16's depictions of the battle of Actium. Second, I shall argue that the Propertian subject position thus created closely approximates that of Woman as defined by post-Lacanian feminists such as Cathérine Clément, Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva, and Luce Irigaray. Finally, I shall contend that this identification not only helps explain the frequent deployment of the trope of gender inversion in elegiac discourse, but also provides a useful explanatory framework for examining the formal rhetoric of elegy in Book 2, as exemplified in two important political poems, 2.1 and 2.7, in which the poet displays both a newfound closeness with the imperial regime and a refusal of its embrace.

1. WHEN OPPOSITES ATTRACT

When I say that the recuperative pressures of the Roman Symbolic stand in sharper opposition to the Imaginary's desire for asocial union, I do not mean that Propertius' poetry reflects an oppositional stance in a naive, thematic sense. It is not a question of the poet's "attitude" toward the regime. What I am addressing is an objective structure of the poetry, and its most clear evidence is the unending debates on whether Propertius should be seen as: (a) Augustus' political opponent;⁵ (b) his ally;⁶ or (c) an apolitical Callimachean ironist who just happens to be the beneficiary of imperial patronage.⁷ None of these options does sufficient justice to the complex and contradictory nature of Propertius' later poetry,⁸ which, as we shall see, is simultaneously more and less political than that in the *Monobiblos*. It is more political because aspects of the imperial regime are envisioned as possible themes, as in 2.15 and 2.16 where the poet treats the *princeps*' recent victory at Actium. It is less political because those same themes are almost always deferred, as in 2.10, where the composition of an epic celebrating Octavian's conquests is promised but put off to the Greek calends.⁹ The complexity of the gesture embodied in such a *recusatio*, as Alan Cameron and Steele Commager note,¹⁰ is heightened by the fact that its structure is dependent upon accepting the superiority of the very genre of eulogistic epic that it is rejecting. Such a poem thus demands a double reading¹¹ that can take account of both the possibility of infinite deferral and of what many commentators have seen as a sincere promise to provide Maecenas and Augustus the epic they desired.¹²

By the same token, when these Augustan themes are addressed, they are dealt with in an ambiguous and problematic fashion. Thus in 2.15.41–46

5. Hallett 1973, 109; Stahl 1985, 147.

6. Cairns 1979, 201–2; Newman 1997, 6.

7. Veyne 1988, 3, 30, 108.

8. Santirocco 1995, 226–28.

9. Stahl 1985, 157–60.

10. Cameron 1995, 472–73; Commager 1974, 56–58.

11. See Enk 1962, 2.151, citing Fleischmann, "Nihil certi promittere voluit Propertius hoc carmine Augusto: 'itaque fit, ut quae altero versu elatiore quodam animo et singulari quadam alacritate se aggressurum promittat ea iam altero versu refringat et quodam modo retrahat.'"

12. Lachmann 1973, 22–23; Lemaire 1832, 192; Paley 1853, 88–90; Butler and Barber 1969, 208; Camps 1967, 108–9.

the poet claims that if only everyone else pursued a life of drunken carousing then the Actian sea would not now be churning Roman bones, nor would Rome be exhausted from triumphing over its own citizens.¹³ On the surface, this sounds like opposition to the Augustan regime's program of moral reform and martial virtue. It is not a celebration of the victory at Actium. At the same time, however, it can hardly be thought to outline a serious political program. In fact, Max Rothstein reads the passage as implicit praise for Augustus as opposed to the explicit depiction of a decadence that can only recall Antony's portrayal in Augustan propaganda.¹⁴ Is this, then, political opposition, implicit praise, or self-subverting irony? If opposition, then to what and, more importantly from what standpoint? Where would it be located on the map of Roman ideology? If the poem is either implicitly Augustan or merely ironic, then how do we explain the disturbing image of Roman bones denied final rest in the churning waters off Actium,¹⁵ or the force of the uncanny feat of poetic alchemy whereby those same bones are transformed into dry leaves floating in a wine bowl at the end of the evening's revels (2.15.51–52)? Decadence and death, it seems, await us no matter the path we choose.

Poem 2.15's evocation of Actium, however, cannot be read in isolation from its companion piece, poem 2.16. There in lines 35–40, the poet compares his own *turpis amor* with that of Antony for Cleopatra, a gesture he will repeat in poem 3.11. This is a position that simultaneously puts him in direct opposition to Augustus (Propertius = Antony) and condemns that opposition (Propertius = *turpis*), while attributing *gloria* and *virtus* to Caesar.¹⁶ Propertius is thus simultaneously pro- and anti-Augustan. But even this contradictory formulation oversimplifies his position. For, on the one hand, while Propertius grants Augustus *virtus*, he defines it as almost the opposite of what it normally means in Roman ideology: "Caesaris haec virtus et gloria Caesaris haec est: / illa, qua vicit, condidit arma manu" ("This is the manly courage of Caesar, this is Caesar's fame: with the very hand by which he conquered, he put away his arms," 2.16.41–42). As Robert Alan Gurval has recently observed, "... the poet's concluding compliment to Octavian (lines 41–42) is a most unusual manner in which to praise a Roman victor in battle. The *virtus* and *gloria* come not from his courage in fighting or military success over the enemy but from the pardon that the victor bestowed on the vanquished."¹⁷ Augustus for Propertius, then, can be said to embody *virtus*, but only so long as it does not mean *virtus*.

On the other hand, it would be a mistake to accept Propertius' identification with Antony at face value, in the manner of Jasper Griffin (1977). Indeed Gurval wants to separate Propertius completely from this implied "self-comparison" on the grounds that the poet condemns Antony's *amor* as *infamis* and labels it a cause for shame while blaming it for the destruction of

13. Commager 1974, 48–49; Sullivan 1976, 58; Stahl 1985, 226–27; Gurval 1995, 181.

14. Rothstein 1979, 1.313–14. Butler and Barber (1969, 217) agree but assert, "there is no real inappropriateness." Giardina (1977, 157) is similarly ambivalent, "Minime ad Antonium refertur sermo eiusque amores."

15. Gurval 1995, 181.

16. Rothstein 1979, 1.314; Stahl 1985, 229.

17. Gurval 1995, 184–85.

his fleet: “cerne ducem, modo qui fremitu complevit inani / Actia damnatis aequora militibus” (“behold the commander who just now filled the waters of Actium with the empty cry of his doomed soldiers”).¹⁸ Clearly, there are limits to how far the identification between the poet and Antony can be taken. Propertius’ love for Cynthia cannot be posited as the efficient cause of the debacle at Actium, whereas Antony’s love for Cleopatra was and is so construed.

Gurval’s denial of any relationship at all, however, goes too far. There are at least two objections that can be raised to this position. First, Propertius uses *turpis* and *infamis* elsewhere to characterize his own affair and the poetry that pretends to chronicle it (1.16.7, 2.3.4, 2.24.1–10).¹⁹ Indeed, as Hans-Peter Stahl notes, Propertius consistently adopts the language of those who would condemn him.²⁰ If both Antony’s and Propertius’ love can be considered under the same rubric, at least from the standpoint of the emergent imperial ideology, then how different are they? If Propertius were in the same position as Antony in relation to Cleopatra, would he not have done the same thing? Second, if Antony is presented in 2.16 as responsible for the debacle at Actium, and if Propertius in 2.15 portrays his own “Antonian” lifestyle as a potential antidote to Rome’s recent civil slaughter, then, where is the real opposition between Caesar’s virtue and Antony’s (or Propertius’) vice? Each in turn can be cast as both the cause of war and the agent of peace. From the perspective of the dead at Actium, the pro- and anti-Augustan (or pro- and anti-Antonian) positions would be essentially interchangeable. As Propertius wryly observes, “victor cum victis pariter miscebitur umbris” (“the conqueror and the conquered will be equally mixed in the land of the shades,” 3.5.15). Each side may define itself as opposed to the other, but each produces the same effect as the other.

What we have in these poems is a very intricate language game in which the poet, by occupying both sides of the opposition but never being wholly present on either side, inscribes the possibility of a third position that can only be expressed in terms of the simultaneous contradiction between and equivalence of both sides. The poet’s contradictory self-positionings within this ideological matrix are, therefore, more an indication of the impossibility of a normative Propertian subject within the terms of the late republican and early imperial Symbolic than of the need to assign priority to one of these positions as “truly Propertian” and denigrate the other as either a misreading or a mystification designed to deceive the uninitiated.

Indeed, the search for the true Propertius is a fool’s game that can be played *ad infinitum*, as each side of the argument always seeks to trump the other rather than acknowledge that the text always already includes the Other.²¹ What we see in Book 2 is neither a rebel in Augustus’ camp, nor a

18. Ibid. All translations are my own. All texts are cited from Barber’s 1953 OCT unless otherwise noted.

19. Wyke 1995, 119.

20. Stahl 1985, 92–93.

21. This is precisely the problem with Stahl’s brilliant and provocative reading of the poet. He posits a double structure to later Propertian poetry, but feels consistently compelled to demonstrate that such duplicity can be resolved back into a monological whole once the “truth” is recognized (1985, 209): “The discrepancy cannot be denied: there is no bridge leading over the abyss between the poet’s true feelings and the public statements he has felt obliged to make.” The question of what gives him the epistemological and

collaborator, nor an abstracted aesthete, but the vision of an erotic subject who is placed under more and more tension as he is brought into closer and closer contact with the discourse of the Augustan regime. This tension both makes this subject position possible and, at the same time, threatens to implode it. The task of the critic is not to privilege one reading over the other, or to deconstruct the opposition in the name of irony, but to accept the contradiction itself as the fullest instantiation of the Propertian subject.

In the end, the poetic consciousness of Book 2 is not only dialogically constituted out of its own intratextual relations,²² as in the example of 2.15 and 2.16, but is also projected onto a space that is both manifestly constructed from the terms of contemporary Roman ideology and not able to be precisely located anywhere within it. It is both inside and outside, adopting and inverting traditional Roman values,²³ while projecting images of utopian beauty that are forever tinged with death (2.15.51–54):

ac veluti folia arentis liquere corollas,
 quae passim calathis strata natare vides,
 sic nobis, qui nunc magnum spiramus amantes,
 forsitan includet crastina fata dies.

and just as the leaves fallen from withered garlands, which you see swimming here and there, piled one on top of another in the wine bowl at the end of evening's revels, so perhaps tomorrow holds the fatal day for us, who now breathe the full inspiration of love.

This passage presents a moving image of sensuality and decay that is the counterpart and pendent of the churning bones of Actium. The layering of dead leaves in the wine bowl and the evocation of the *carpe diem* motif combine to produce a call for absolute commitment to the present moment and for an erotic transcendence that has no place in traditional Roman categories of manhood or *virtus*.²⁴ Here, in this moment of poetic ecstasy or what Lacan calls *jouissance*, with "its strange yoking of ecstasy, pain, and death [that] menaces the Symbolic as the symptom of what cannot enter into the logic of signification,"²⁵ the Propertian subject finds its own irreducible kernel of enjoyment, the hard core of its being that is beyond what Freud termed the pleasure and reality principles and beyond the Symbolic categories that make them possible.²⁶

ontological privilege to distinguish the true from the false, especially if as he says they share no point of contact, is never answered. What is at stake, as Duncan Kennedy observes (1993, 35–38), is an effort to save the unified liberal, male subject of the Western "ideology of the individual." The search for the one true meaning lurking behind necessarily deceptive appearances ultimately produces a style of reading in which all ambiguities and ambivalences are ruthlessly shorn away. The best recent example of this paranoid style is Maleuvre, whose book on elegy (1998) acutely diagnoses the incoherence of the elegiac subject position and then magisterially proceeds to resolve it by demonstrating how the entire elegiac canon can be shown to be an elaborately encoded allegory of Augustus' seduction of Maecenas' wife Terentia.

22. Miller 1994, chaps. 3–4.

23. On Propertius as both inside and outside traditional Roman ideology, see Platter 1995. On elegy performing "the ambiguities of equestrian status," see Fitzgerald 1995, 9.

24. Sharrock 1995, 166.

25. Janan 1994, 30.

26. See Kristeva 1979, 13; Žižek 1989, 135; 1991, 169; 1993, 90; Irigaray 1977b, 95. Žižek (1989, 132) admirably sums up the psychoanalytic theory behind this reading when he writes, "what lies beyond [the pleasure principle] is not the symbolic order but a real kernel, a traumatic core. To designate it, Lacan uses the Freudian term, *das Ding*, the Thing as an incarnation of the impossible *jouissance*. . . ."

2. "WAS WILL DAS WEIB?"

*Je plaiderai . . . en faveur d'une théorie analytique des systèmes et des pratiques signifiantes qui chercheraient dans le phénomène signifiant la crise ou le procès du sens et du sujet plutôt que la cohérence ou l'identité d'une ou d'une multiplicité de structures.*²⁷

The interstitial space of *jouissance*²⁸ just described for the Propertian subject is in fact analogous to what Clément identifies as woman's eccentric position in relation to communal Symbolic norms. Woman, she claims, occupies a position that is both radically critical and deeply conservative, both inside and outside the system. Kristeva echoes this view.²⁹ What I want to argue is that this psychoanalytically based and politically charged definition of the feminine not only has the potential to shed light on the elegiac practice of assuming traits conventionally assigned by Roman ideology to women or effeminate men—passivity, *mollitia*, and *servitium*³⁰—but can also be used to demonstrate a determined and necessary link between the practice of gender inversion and the elegists' rhetoric of ambivalence, oxymoron, and paradox. The rhetoric of undecidability and the practice of gender inversion are two sides of the same coin, which together reveal the Propertian text to be symptomatic of a profound dissociation between Symbolic norms and the possibilities of self-representation that lie at the heart of the elegiac enterprise.

Elegy, thus, does not so much reflect the lives and positions of a Tibullus or Propertius as it does a crisis in the categories of the Symbolic and the way the individual subject relates to them.³¹ This crisis, in turn, is the point where we witness the emergence of the Real as a moment of non-sense beyond the existing categories of understanding, the point where History becomes visible as that which exceeds the artifices of consciousness. It is elegy's very aporetic character³² that is the truest marker of the historical change to which it testifies, and not the various and often self-contradictory meanings that those experiencing these events attributed to those changes.³³ That moment of emergence, I argue moreover, takes place most radically within the erotic precisely because it is here that the conjugation of the private fantasmata of our Imaginary self-construction, our individually assumed self-image,³⁴ and the publicly sanctioned realm of Symbolic norms, which recognize us as a subject, takes place with the greatest acuity, and hence with the greatest possibility of conflict.³⁵ In a sense, Augustus' moral

27. Kristeva 1977, 150.

28. On *jouissance* as essentially feminine, see Lacan 1975, 13, 76–77.

29. Clément 1975, 13–14; Eagleton 1983, 164–65; Moi 1985, 133–34, 163, 166; Kristeva 1979, 8, 15.

30. Edwards 1993, 93; Kennedy 1993, 33–34.

31. Plutarch dates this crisis in the Roman Symbolic, in the system of coded values that described what it meant to be a Roman, to the time of Cato the Elder in the second century B.C.E.; see Gowers 1993, 10.

32. For a good summary of the inconsistencies and contradictions that structure the elegiac ego's world, see Veyne 1988, 2–3, 7, 50–51, 89.

33. Žižek 1989, 170–71; 1991, 30.

34. Lacan 1966, 90.

35. It is the moment of "interpellation" where the subject's Imaginary identity becomes invested in its Symbolic position that in Althusser's terms gives rise to the subject and is the consequent basis of his

reform legislation recognized this fact, but could not fully control it. Thus elegiac discourse offers a privileged vantage point for observing the production of this split in the Roman subject of the late republican and early imperial period that is signified by the inversion of genders.

Clément's and Kristeva's definitions of "Woman" are of course founded on the psychoanalytic work of Lacan. Indeed, French feminism from the 1970s to the present constitutes itself both in reaction to and in the tradition of Lacanian psychoanalysis.³⁶ Exemplary in this regard is the case of Irigaray. A member of Lacan's *Ecole Freudienne* at Paris until her expulsion in 1974 after the publication of *Speculum de l'autre femme*, Irigaray's work is both grounded in the Lacanian theory of the subject's sexualization in language and deeply critical of it. Of the many places in which this ambivalent and all but Oedipal relation between teacher and student is played out, it is perhaps best seen in her essay "Così fan tutti." In this tour de force, she revisits Lacan's *Séminaire XX, Encore*, on female sexuality, and through a strategy of extensive quotation, commentary, and parody presents the discourse of the master in the guise of a Mozartian comedy of seduction, only with the genders reversed. By changing Mozart's title "Così fan tutte" to "Così fan tutti," Irigaray makes us see the subject presumed to know travestied by the Other.

Parody, of course, as Bakhtin tells us, is always double-voiced.³⁷ In parodic texts, by definition the voice being parodied cannot be absolutely distinguished from the voice of the parodist, if the effect is not to be lost and the discourse degenerate into a monologic attack that seeks to annihilate rather than subvert the other. Two systems of accentuation are present in parodic texts, each in its most extreme manifestations clearly distinguishable from the other, but also each overlapping with and mutually determining the other at precisely those moments of contact that make parody possible. Parodic discourse is, thus, always already internally dialogized. Consequently, it must presume the authoritative status of the speech it seeks to inhabit.³⁸ Parody like the *recusatio*, therefore, always begins with a concession to the ground of the other, but continues with a simultaneous refusal to grant that territory absolute status and an imperative that the monologic dreams of the other be relativized and opened to the speech of the interlocutor. Such indeed would seem to be the case in "Così fan tutti." For, as Elizabeth Weed has argued, "Virtually every element of the essay . . . comes from the twentieth *Séminaire*."³⁹ Consequently, the point where Lacan's discourse leaves off and Irigaray's begins is impossible to determine with

theory of ideology; see Althusser 1971; Eagleton 1983, 186–87; Dowling 1984, 82–83, 91; Žizek 1989, 43–44, 101.

36. See, inter alia, Moi 1985, 99 ("Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva are all heavily indebted to Lacan's (post-) structuralist reading of Freud . . ."); and Weed 1994, 87.

37. Bakhtin 1984, 127: "... parody was inseparably linked to a carnival sense of the world. Parodying is the creation of a decrowning double; it is that same 'world turned inside out.' For this reason parody is ambivalent." On the distinction between negative, monological satire and the ambivalence of carnival laughter, see Miller 1998.

38. Bakhtin 1981, 68–69, 75–76; Morson 1989, 63, 65, 73.

39. Weed 1994, 90.

absolute precision, yet the result is not the annulling of either Lacan's or Irigaray's discursive claims, but rather the opening of the former to the interrogation of the latter. "Così fan tutti," then, is one of the purest manifestations of the dialogic possibilities inherent in Irigaray's concept of a feminist mimetic discourse.⁴⁰ It also provides a very precise model for the complex relationship maintained between Propertian erotic and parodic poetry and the normative Symbolic of the emergent imperial regime.

This inherently complex relationship between Irigaray's and Lacan's texts is further complicated by several factors. In a real sense, Lacan's discourse is self-parodic. When Lacan says of women, "elles ne savent pas ce qu'elles disent, c'est toute la différence entre elles et moi,"⁴¹ it must be remembered that for Lacan, knowledge (*le savoir*) is itself constituted within the phallic order of the Symbolic, that realm of ordered rationality and noncontradiction that psychoanalysis, both in spite of and because of its own scientific pretensions, must always see as a mystified realm of rationalization and one whose protocols Lacan's own discursive practice violates at every turn.⁴² Women don't "know" what they are saying because the feminine position within the phallic economy is located outside the Symbolic, but it is only within the Symbolic that "knowledge," defined as information processed in accord with the formal dictates of reason (i.e., the laws of Symbolic substitution recognized by a given community), can occur. Lacan, Irigaray, Clément, Kristeva, and Cixous agree that woman is not representable within the phallic order of the Symbolic.⁴³ It is for this reason that Lacan argues that "La femme" does not exist, since the article "la" implies a universal and the concept of universality is the logical category that constitutes the very heart of the Symbolic order's claim to represent the world.⁴⁴ Woman thus represents a hole in the Symbolic, not because she is lacking (although that is the only way the patriarchal Symbolic can represent her) but because she is eccentric in relation to its totalizing claims. The shudder of her *jouissance* takes place beyond words and thus beyond the Symbolic's power to

40. Irigaray 1977c, 183: "elles sont «objets» pour et entre hommes et ne peuvent, par ailleurs, que mimer un «langage» qu'elles n'ont pas produit"; 1977b, 76–77; Herndl 1991, 11; Schwab 1991, 57–59; Weed 1994, 82.

41. Lacan 1975, 68.

42. Weed 1994, 89: "Lacan . . . sees the knowledge (*savoir*) involved in symbolic processes as indissociable from the knowledge (*connaissance*) produced in the early imaginary demarcations of 'psyche' and 'body,' a *connaissance* that is, in turn, activated differently in the symbolic depending on whether the subject is sexed through language as male or female. If anything, Lacan sees women as knowing they don't know what they're saying—by virtue of their position in the symbolic order—while men are dupes of Truth." On the symbolic as a realm of ordered rationality, see Janan 1994, 35, 79; Butler 1990, 82–83; Kristeva 1980, 22.

43. Janan 1994, 28: "for Lacan, Woman is a position outside clear meaning and grammatical language—she is *hors-sens*, 'outside meaning/sense.' As such, Woman signifies the antithesis of masculine certitude, based on identification with rules, order, Law. Thus the feminine is for Lacan an attitude toward knowledge and procedure, rather than a category defined strictly by gender"; Goux 1990, 223. On woman as unrepresentable within the symbolic, Lacan 1975, 74; Herndl 1991, 16; Moi 1985, 117, 133–34, 163, 166; Irigaray 1977c, 184: "Les femmes . . . vont assurer la possibilité de l'usage et de circulation du symbolique sans y être pour autant partie prenante. C'est le non-accès, pour elles qui établit l'ordre social"; Irigaray 1977e, 25; Butler 1990, pp. 9–10, 27–28, and 154, n. 27; Goux 1990, 147; Weed 1994, 81, 88–90.

44. Lacan 1975, 53, 54, 57, 64, and 68 ("Il n'y a pas *La* femme, article défini pour désigner l'universel"). See Kristeva 1979, 15, for her reading of this passage.

categorize, anatomize, and atomize. It partakes of that Real, the realm beyond representation, from which the primary repression of our entry into the Symbolic has forever severed us.⁴⁵ She gives the lie to the Symbolic's claim to representing universality, *tout*. She says no to that. She is thus the *pas-toute*.⁴⁶ She is, as Irigaray argues, the ground on which the phallic figure of totality and totalitarianism is erected, the space that makes its calculation possible.⁴⁷ Thus her excessiveness, which the Symbolic can only conceive of as deficiency or lack, is his necessity. It is precisely this space of intrinsic eccentricity, of parody in the most profound sense, that Propertius occupies in Book 2 in relation to the emerging system of Augustan norms.

3. "WHEN DOES NO MEAN NO?"

The elegists, in fact, represent a travesty of Roman conventions of masculinity that both questions those conventions and implicitly accepts them as the ground of their questioning.⁴⁸ This travesty of the masculine and its Symbolic norms, in turn, accounts for the anomalous position of the elegiac beloved or *domina*, who is simultaneously the cruel mistress of the *servus amoris* and the victim of the poet's, and, indeed, Roman masculinity's complex games of power and manipulation. Thus Propertius, as has been widely recognized, frequently assumes the feminine discursive position and promotes Cynthia to a pseudo-masculinity without ever forfeiting his phallic privileges.⁴⁹ As Kathryn Gutzwiller and Ann Michelini note, while the elegists followed the lead of the Hellenistic poets in their reversal of normative gender values, "Roman love poets found ways of reasserting traditional male dominance in matters of sex."⁵⁰ The rhetoric of undecidability and inversion is not in itself therefore a tool of liberation, as Judith Hallett in more optimistic times had asserted (1973). Rather it is symptomatic of a disruption in those social structures that produce the gendered subject.⁵¹ It is precisely this moment of disruption, as manifested in poems 2.1 and 2.7, that I will be examining in the remainder of this paper. Each text exhibits, as we shall see, an analogously double-voiced strategy that at once deconstructs the laws of gender and of genre.

Poem 2.1 is both the opening programmatic poem of Propertius' second book and another example of the *recusatio*, already seen in 2.10, a form whose ambivalent rhetoric simultaneously refuses a closer engagement with

45. Lacan 1975, 13, 57, 69, 76–77; Janan 1994, 30; Julien 1990, 173, 176, 208; Irigaray, 1977b, 87–88, 95, 109; Butler 1990, 56; Eagleton 1983, 168.

46. Lacan 1975, 69: "Ce n'est pas parce qu'elle est pas toute dans la fonction phallique qu'elle y est pas du tout. Elle y est pas pas du tout. Elle y est à plein, Mais il y a quelque chose en plus"; see also pp. 13 and 75.

47. Irigaray 1977b, 106–7: "Donc le «tout»—de x, mais aussi du système—aura déjà prescrit le «pas-toute» de chaque mise en relation particulière, et ce «tout» ne l'est que par une définition de l'extension qui ne peut se passer de projection sur un espace-plan «donné», dont l'entre, les entre(s), seront évalués grâce à des repères de type ponctuel."

48. Hallett 1974, 212.

49. Luck 1960, 121–22; Stahl 1985, 263; Gold 1993, 89; Wyke 1995, 118. For a brief synopsis of passages in which Propertius plays the woman, see Wyke 1995, 116.

50. Gutzwiller and Michelini 1991, 76; see also Gold 1993, 91; Hallett 1993, 64.

51. Gold 1993, 83.

an alien kind of discourse (epic, encomium, etc.) and grants that engagement through this negation. It is a form that must assume the rhetorical plausibility of Maecenas' suggesting to the poet that he produce an epic on Augustus.⁵² And some have read 2.1 as a response to stronger pressures still.⁵³ It is a poem that at minimum stages the possibility of poetry's engagement with political and social power. Throughout this poem Propertius founds his project in Book 2 on both his refusal of the embrace of normative Augustan discourse and his acceptance of it. As such, the specific difference that constitutes elegiac discourse—exemplified as the poet's inability to perform his traditional encomiastic function, his rhetorical impotence—is problematized in the very gesture that marks that discourse's programmatic institutionalization.

More specifically, in 2.1 the poet begins by offering his reader a *mollis* or "effeminate" *liber* (2.1.2) that is inspired not by Apollo or the Muses but by the poet's *puella* or "girl" (2.1.3–4).⁵⁴ There then follows a list of possible topics concerning his beloved upon which the poet proposes to write *longae Iliades* (2.1.14). This allusion to epic, so seemingly out of place in the programmatically *mollis* genre of elegy,⁵⁵ is anticipated by a specific reference to amorous violence in the preceding line (*nuda erepto mecum luctatur amictu* ["Naked she fought with me, her wrap ripped away"], 2.1.13) that at once naturalizes the identification of elegy with epic and underlines the paradox. The overt inversion of genres in this passage is paralleled by an implicit inversion of genders as the epic *hostis* metamorphoses into the *puella* of the poet's *militia amoris*.⁵⁶ The conflation of genders and genres becomes complete, and the oxymoronic character of the verse explicit, when later in the same poem the possibility of Propertius producing an encomiastic epic on Augustus is rejected. Such *durus versus* (2.1.41) would be beyond the compass of the soft poet. At the same time, Cynthia, the subject of the poet's own *mollis liber*, is also characterized as *dura* (2.1.78): the same traits are attributed to the elegiac beloved as to epic itself.⁵⁷

How then are we to understand the poet's claim that the crown of epic lies beyond his grasp? The production of an annalistic epic on the *res gestae* of Augustus and his trusty companion Maecenas—the very topic Propertius says he would treat had he the ability (2.1.25–38)—seems simple compared to the act of sheer rhetorical prestidigitation the poet claims to accomplish, the creation of a *maxima de nihilo . . . historia* ("a great history out of nothing," 2.1.16). This phrase moreover follows immediately upon the formu-

52. Rothstein 1979, 209; Hubbard 1974, 99–100.

53. Stahl 1985, 164; Gold 1987, 127.

54. Wyke 1995, 117. See also Bramble 1974, 44: "Sexual overtones load the vocabulary of the critics: *tener*, *mollis*, *fractus*, *effeminatus*, *enervis*, and their opposite epithets like *fortis* or *virilis*. This patently moralistic terminology often acted as substitute for rational criticism, as at Quint. 12.10.12, where we hear that in his own day, Cicero was taxed with being in *compositione fractum*, *exultantem*, *ac paene*, *quod procul absit*, *viro molliorem*."

55. Lemaire 1832, 145; Rothstein 1979, 1:210; Enk 1962, 131; Giardina 1977, 90; Richardson 1977, 211.

56. Kennedy 1993, 31–32.

57. Wiggers 1977, 341; Kennedy 1993, 32–33; Fredrick 1997, 180.

lation of the poet's own amorous adventures as *longae Iliades* and directly precedes his apostrophe to Maecenas on his inability to write heroic verse, "quod mihi si tantum, Maecenas, fata dedissent, / ut possem heroas ducere in arma manus" (2.1.17–18). The effect of this juxtaposition is at once to underline the difference between Propertius' amorous epic and the more traditional tales he professes to be unable to recount and to reduce the distance between these poles to the most negligible possible by casting the one in terms of the other.⁵⁸ The masculine genres of history and epic are here subordinated to and surpassed by elegy.⁵⁹

At the same time, there is in these lines a deliberate confusion of form and content, since what Propertius literally says is, "if only the fates had granted me this much, Maecenas, so that I might be able to lead bands of heroes in arms." The normal gloss on the pentameter, "i.e., write an epic describing such events,"⁶⁰ erases the line's polysemic character. The basic sentiment does indeed seem to be the same as that expressed later in lines 43–44, "navita de ventis, de tauris narrat arator, / enumerat miles vulnera, pastor ovis" ("the sailor tells about the winds, the ploughman about his bulls, the soldier recounts his wounds, the shepherd his sheep"), that is, if I were a general I would write epic. But the literal reading must be maintained as well, if the line is not to lose much of its point, for Maecenas too was not born to lead men into battle. Indeed, he had made a conscious decision to lead a life of equestrian *otium* pursuing a career neither in the military nor in electoral politics, a fact that Propertius deliberately exploits in 3.9 to justify his own life of elegiac *mollitia*.⁶¹ The point becomes all the sharper when we recall that Maecenas himself was accused of effeminacy (Juv. 1.66, 12.39; Sen., *Ep.* 114). Hence the conflation of genres implicit in the poet's proposal to write *longae Iliades* on his beloved is doubled by a conflation of genders shared by the elegist and his patron in their mutual *mollitia*. Indeed, this whole unstable constellation of values is nowhere better exemplified than in the poem's final couplets (2.1.75–78):

si te forte meo ducet via proxima busto,
 esseda caelatis siste Britanna iugis,
 taliaque illacrimans mutae iace verba favillae:
 "Huic misero fatum dura puella fuit."

If perchance your way should bring you past my grave, stop your British gig with its carved yokes and weeping utter such words to my mute ashes: "a hard girl was the fate of this wretch."

The oxymoron of the *dura puella* has already been discussed, but it is here paralleled by another inversion of gender traits connoted by Maecenas' use of the British war chariot, or *essedum*. This was not a vehicle of machismo.

58. Gold 1987, 159.

59. Wiggers (1977, 339) points out that the later comparison of Cynthia's fidelity to Helen's adultery implicitly, if perversely, argues for elegy's superiority to epic on the grounds of moral seriousness.

60. Camps 1967.

61. Nicolet 1966, 704; Veyne 1988, 104–5; Gold 1982. On the pursuit of *otium* as linked to *mollitia* or effeminacy, see Edwards 1993, 85.

Ovid in *Amores* 2.16.49–50 tells us it is the kind of chariot driven by a woman, a sentiment echoed in Propertius 2.32.5. Cicero treats the *essedum* as a sign of effeminate luxury and notes that it is all the more disgusting when driven by Antony while serving in the traditionally virile office of tribune of the *plebs* (*Att.* 6.1.25, *Phil.* 2.24).⁶² The transformation from epic battle car to elegiac chick chariot, which the *essedum* undergoes as the price of entry into the Roman Symbolic, in many ways sums up the entire thrust of this poem, as elegy and epic change places in a dance that Roman culture can only conceive as feminine.

In fact, there is consistent practice of *contaminatio* throughout the poem, as one generic and gendered frame is invaded by another, and what appears to be the outside is revealed to be always already inside. This violation of the law of genre—whereby the *mollis* and the *durus*, the masculine and the feminine, epic, history, and elegy are deliberately confused—is, as Sheri Benstock argues in *Textualizing the Feminine*, one of the most consistent features of discourse traditionally marked feminine, even when produced by male writers.⁶³ The law of genre is, of course, the textual manifestation of the Oedipal law of the father whose primary social function is to institute the Symbolic and draw clear and distinct boundaries between recognized bodies and other entities. Its most striking manifestation is in the incest taboo, but it is at work wherever the “universal” strives to draw bright lines between discrete classes of persons and things so as to regulate their intercourse.⁶⁴ It is precisely this concept of the boundaries of discourse that Propertius violates at every turn. The clearest example in the present poem of this confusion of inside and outside, and hence of the problematization of the boundaries, is the old controversy over whether 2.1 is one, two, or even three poems,⁶⁵ but it is felt at all levels of diction throughout its troubled text.

Thus the first three couplets present what is on the one hand a straightforward declaration of poetic intent, and on the other a sustained meditation on the relation between form and content, signifier and signified, inside and outside:

Quaeritis, unde mihi totiens scribantur amores,
unde meus veniat mollis in ora liber.
non haec Calliope, non haec mihi cantat Apollo.
ingenium nobis ipsa puella facit.
sive illam Cois fulgentem incedere †cogis†⁶⁶,
hac totum e Coa veste volumen erit. . . .

62. Lemaire 1832; Rothstein 1979; Enk 1962; Hubbard 1974, p. 102, n. 1; Giardina 1977.

63. Benstock 1991 looks not only at H. D., Gertrude Stein, and Virginia Woolf, but also at James Joyce and Jacques Derrida.

64. Goux 1990, 222–23, 242; Rabinowitz 1993, 15; Althusser 1996, 27.

65. For a good review of the early literature on this point, Enk 1962, 8–9. The contemporary consensus is for the unity of the text.

66. Either the MS tradition is corrupt and *cogis* needs to be emended (Lachmann 1973, Lemaire 1832, Paley 1853, and Butler and Barber 1969 propose *coccis*, while Enk 1962, Camps 1967, and Goold 1990 follow the *codices deteriores* with *vidi*), or *cogis* here has the attenuated sense of *adducere*, which is all but unexampled (Rothstein 1979; Butler 1926; Shackleton Bailey 1967, 61). Many simply mark the text

You ask, why my loves so frequently become literature,
 why my soft book should be on the lips.
 Neither Calliope nor Apollo sings these things for me.
 My own genius the girl herself creates.
 If you would have her go forth shining in Coan silks,
 a whole book will be made from this Coan dress. . . .

We have already noted that *mollis* in line 2 is generally read as programmatic, referring to the subject matter contained in the *liber* (i.e., elegy), rather than the texture of the book itself. Yet the distinctions become much cloudier when we move on to the question of to whom the poet refers in the phrase *in ora*, himself or his readers, and what this means. While the majority of critics, including Enk (1962), Camps (1967), Richardson (1977), Giardina (1977), and Butler and Barber (1969) read the phrase as monologically and unproblematically referring to the fame the poet achieves through his verse—he is on the lips of everyone—Goold interprets it as a question of poetics, “how is it that my book sounds so soft upon the lips?”⁶⁷ Yet if we look at the immediately preceding hexameter and the following couplet, it becomes clear that what is most at issue is the question of origins: “whence does my soft book come softly on the lips?” This reading does not invalidate either the majority position or that of Goold, for none of these readings are mutually exclusive from a logical point of view, and all are grammatically possible owing to the line’s extreme concision. Rather it reveals their interdependence: for the question of the origin of the poetry (whence it came), its nature (soft upon the lips), and its ultimate destination (as a topic of conversation for its audience) are all three at issue in this poem. But if we cannot make a firm distinction between subject matter (*res*), style (*verba*), and reception (*res publica*), then the difference between inter-, intra-, and extratextual relations becomes impossible to maintain.⁶⁸

Nor is this an isolated instance of the transgression of fundamental boundaries. The violation of the law of genre/gender is endemic throughout both this passage and the poem as a whole. Indeed, there is an ambiguity in the very first line: does *amores* refer to the poet’s love affair or the poetry that purports to chronicle it?⁶⁹ This very confusion, however, forces us to pose the even more fundamental question of whether any such distinction can be made. On one level, the poet seems to tell us that his experience dictates the song he sings: *ingenium nobis ipsa puella facit*. But even this seemingly straightforward line is problematic when read in context, for the poet has just told us that his poetry is not the product of Apollo and the

with daggers in despair (Barber 1953—though he proposes *iuvit* in the *apparatus criticus*; Giardina 1977; Richardson 1977; Fedeli 1994). I have chosen to translate the consensus reading of the best MSS in what seems a reasonable fashion, following Butler 1926, while leaving the OCT’s daggers to denote the perilous nature of any such enterprise.

67. Butler 1926 prints the reading of the Neapolitanus, *in ore*, and translates in the same way. Rothstein 1979 reads *in ora*, but takes it to mean not “in the mouth” but before the eyes.

68. On Propertius’ deliberate undermining of the classical distinction between *res* and *verba*, see Benediktson 1989, 30–31.

69. Giardina 1977, ad loc.; Gold 1987, 158–59.

Muses. The very next words beneath the reader's eyes are *ingenium nobis*. This poetry is not the product of the gods but of the poet's own genius!⁷⁰ *Ipsa* does nothing to change our mind, since it could as easily be neuter plural as feminine singular. It is only once we reach *puella* that the process of interpretative revision has to take place. The sequence runs as follows: I need no external source of inspiration; my own innate talents are my girl's creation. But if the *amores* themselves, as Giardina points out, serve as a title for Book 2, and hence have no necessary referent beyond the book we hold in our hands, then in what sense can the *puella* herself be extratextual?

This ambivalence should come as no surprise. It is now a truism of Propertian criticism that Cynthia stands for Propertius' poetry as much or more than for a consistent character in a novelistic romance, let alone a person of flesh and blood.⁷¹ Thus when the poet tells that if she should wear Coan silks, a fabric known for its see-through qualities, that he will make an entire book from the fabric, he means not only a volume of erotic titillation, but also a deluxe edition fashioned from the fabric itself, whose style, like that of Catullus' *libellum* . . . *pumice expolitus* ("slender volume polished with pumice," 1.1–2), will be as smooth as the material from which it is made.⁷² It will be silken inside and out. That would indeed be a *mollis in ora liber*!⁷³ Thus from the very opening of 2.1, what falls within and without the realm of elegy, let alone the book-roll itself, is deliberately and intensely problematized. Within such a context, the line to be drawn between *mollis* and *durus*, masculine and feminine, epic and elegy becomes highly problematic.

It is of course part and parcel of the *recusatio* to both grant and refuse the requested verse form, and Propertius delivers on this promise not only by casting elegy in terms of epic, but also by providing an example of the kind of encomiastic verse he claims to be unable to write. Indeed, immediately following the poet's profession of epic incompetence, he provides a brief history of the genre's themes from the gigantomachy through Herodotus' *maxima historia* of the Persian wars to the deeds of Marius. His account of topics that cannot be treated culminates in a fourteen-line excursus on the feats of Augustus himself. Yet the ambivalence expressed with regard to the poet's ability to write encomiastic epic is paralleled in the subjects he proposes to treat if he were to praise Caesar: the graves at Philippi (1.27) and the desecrated hearths from the Perusine war (1.29).⁷⁴ Poem 2.1 thus presents effeminized elegy in the terms of masculine epic, while simultaneously confessing the poet's inability to produce epic verse and giving an example of that same form that would make the poet's patron thankful for

70. Thus Rothstein (1979) notes that these lines, far from reflecting modesty, actually equate the poet's *ingenium* with divine inspiration, if they do not claim its outright superiority.

71. Veiny 1988, 3, 7, 89; Wyke 1989, 28, 32–34; Gold 1993, 88; Kennedy 1993, 50–51. See 2.23.1–2: "Tu loqueris, cum sis iam noto fabula libro / et tua sit toto Cynthia lecta foro?" ("Have you spoken when you are now a story in a well-known book and your Cynthia is read in all the forum?"). These lines in addition to treating the name Cynthia as the title of the poet's book also play on the joke that characters in books cannot speak.

72. Rothstein 1979.

73. On this whole passage, see Fredrick (1997, 180), with whom I am in substantial agreement.

74. Wiggers 1977, 336.

the latter's declining of his invitation. At the same time, the very existence of 2.1 stands as a testimonial to Maecenas' and Augustus' *clementia* and respect for the traditional virtue of *libertas*.⁷⁵

4. MAKING UP IS HARD TO DO

Poem 2.7, likewise, appears on first reading to be a refusal of the existing order. It is generally read as a celebration of the repeal of one of Augustus' moral reform laws and a declaration of pure opposition to the Augustan regime's efforts to rewrite the Roman Symbolic. Instead of celebrating the return of the *mos maiorum*, the poet's vision of himself in a strictly dyadic relation with Cynthia, one that would exclude all forms of third-party interaction, is promoted to the status of a norm ("tu mihi sola places: placeam tibi, Cynthia, solus: / hic erit et patrio sanguine"⁷⁶ *pluris amor*) ["You alone please me, may I alone please you, Cynthia, and this love will be worth more than a father's blood"], lines 19–20). Yet this reading of the poem is highly problematic, since, as Ernst Badian has shown (1985), and others have agreed,⁷⁷ none of the laws promoted by Augustus had been passed at this time, let alone repealed. Badian's elegant solution to this historical conundrum is to argue that the poem's actual reference is to the repeal by Augustus of a tax imposed on unmarried men by the second triumvirate in order to raise money for the civil wars. The repeal, then, would represent part of the normalization process undertaken by Augustus, commonly referred to as "the restoration of the Republic." Implicit in Badian's reading is the idea that 2.7, rather than being an attack on Augustus' moral reform legislation, is actually a celebration of his fiscal restraint.

Yet, while Badian's solution to the problem of the legal reference in 2.7 is compelling, it hardly eliminates the interpretative difficulties that beset the poem. What Propertius and Cynthia celebrate is not their ability "to keep what they earn," but their refusal to enter into a recognized marital relationship and to provide citizens for the imperial armies of Rome ("unde mihi Parthis natos praeberere triumphis? / nullus de nostro sanguine miles erit") ["why should I offer sons for a Parthian triumph? There will be no soldier from our blood"], 2.7.13–14), neither of which can be seen as supporting what Karl Galinsky calls the moral basis of the restoration of the Republic.⁷⁸ Hence, Propertius' support of Augustus' repeal of the repressive triumviral legislation continues to be a statement of opposition to an Augustan ideology whose articulation had begun well in advance of any actually recorded legislation.⁷⁹

Indeed, it is in order to account for the anomaly of the poet's critical stance vis-à-vis the moral tenor of the Augustan regime, even as he remained the acknowledged recipient of its patronage, that Francis Cairns produced the brilliant, if reductive, expedient of interpreting 2.7 as a covert

75. Cairns 1979, 186, 201–2.

76. There is no good reason not to follow the manuscripts here and read *sanguine* instead of Postgate's *nomine*.

77. Cf. Konstan 1994, 152; and Edwards 1993, p. 41, n. 26.

78. Galinsky 1996, 8.

79. Besnier 1979, 202; Wallace-Hadrill 1985, 180–84.

endorsement of the policy it seems to oppose. Cairns notes that Propertius' casting of himself as the decadent, effeminate poet in opposition to Augustus' policy of moral regeneration merely underlines the evils the *princeps* sought to combat.⁸⁰ The poet's lack of moral credibility in traditional Roman terms provides the best possible endorsement for the proposed reforms. Poem 2.7, thus, offers a double-voiced form of discourse analogous to that of 2.1's *recusatio*. As Cairns observes, "In writing what is ostensibly a rejection of his patrons' proposals, but actually giving a favorable impression of them to the reader, Propertius is doing something paralleled in his own work and that of his contemporaries. The best-known Augustan parallels are *recusationes*."⁸¹ Poem 2.7, then, presents precisely the same kind of doubleness as that observed in 2.1.

Yet even this double-voiced reading of 2.7 is an oversimplification. It merely inverts what Galinsky refers to as the "inane dichotomies" of "'pro-' and 'anti-Augustan'"⁸² but does not posit that which eludes such binary oppositions, and hence what makes them possible: a subject position that is both inside and outside the norms of Symbolic discourse, that situates itself in the interstices of the dominant order, and that consequently assumes that feminine position which Propertius elsewhere more explicitly claimed as his own.⁸³ Cairns' position then cannot really account for both readings of 2.7, but merely demonstrates the possibility of replacing one with the other. Yet, as we saw in 2.1, Propertius' deployment of the *recusatio* form not only grants what it refuses, but then calls into question what it has granted by concentrating on Augustus' actions during the civil war. In particular, we noted the reference to the cruelties of the Perusine war, in which Propertius lost a kinsman, as he tells us in 1.22. It would be surprising indeed if at the beginning of the next book all this had been forgotten and Propertius been converted into a subtle but unrepentant apologist for the Augustan regime.⁸⁴

Hence poem 2.7 is, as we have seen, capable of being read as a defense of the *princeps*' policy of fiscal restraint, an implicit attack on his soon-to-be launched moral reform program, and a covert endorsement of that same policy. All of these readings are not only textually but historically possible and bespeak an unresolvable ambiguity in the poet's relation to the realm of public discourse, and hence to the Symbolic norms of the time, analogous to that already seen in the case of poems 2.15 and 2.16. This symptomatic undecidability is evident even on the level of 2.7's poetic diction. Thus in lines 1–6 the poet writes:

Gavisa est certe sublatam Cynthia legem,
 qua quondam edicta flemus uterque diu,
 ni nos divideret: quamvis diducere amantis
 non queat invitos Iuppiter ipse duos.
 "At magnus Caesar." sed magnus Caesar in armis:
 devictae gentes nil in amore valent.

80. Cairns 1979, 187, 190.

81. *Ibid.*, 200.

82. Galinsky 1996, 5.

83. Clément 1975, 17–18; Gold 1993, 91; Hallett 1993, 63; Wyke 1995 119–20.

84. On 2.1's deliberate echoes of 1.22, see Gold 1987, 158.

Cynthia certainly rejoiced when the law was revoked, at whose proclamation we both long wept lest it should divide us, although Jupiter himself cannot split apart two lovers if they are not willing. "But Caesar is great." But Caesar is great in arms: conquered peoples are worth nothing in love.

The reference to Jupiter can be read as a covert allusion to Augustus, thematically preparing his explicit mention in the next couplet. As Cairns notes, the association of Jupiter and Augustus is a common encomiastic strategy in Augustan poetry, allowing the poet implicitly to deify the emperor without risking impiety or a political *faux pas*.⁸⁵ The metonymic identification of Jupiter and Augustus, however, is not always benign. The same trope appears in Ovid's *Tristia*, first as an ironic insinuation of despotism (*Tr.* 2), and then as an explicit recognition of the poet's abjection in the face of imperial power. It is because of the inherent ambiguity of the identification with the father of the gods that what is for Cairns an implicit encomium becomes for Nancy Wiggers a subtle condemnation of imperial brutality.⁸⁶

The text is more elusive still. It neither quakes before the power of Jupiter, nor indicts his brutality, but proclaims the god's inability to separate lovers against their will. Moreover, the juxtaposition of Jupiter and Caesar underlines not only these figures' metonymic identification, but also their substantive difference. Caesar is introduced as a potentially more powerful adversary than Jupiter himself, "*At magnus Caesar.*"⁸⁷ This first adversative construction is not, however, allowed to stand alone, but is answered by a second, "*sed magnus Caesar in armis.*" It notes that while Caesar is great in arms, and hence a potentially more formidable opponent than the distant Jupiter, his greatness is circumscribed to a realm that has no relevance to lovers: "Conquered peoples are worth nothing in love." Thus Caesar like Jupiter is impotent before the power of love. The claim of a complete lack of relation between love and war, however, is belied by the poet's own use of the trope of *militia amoris* in both 2.1 and 2.7.⁸⁸ What this string of adversatives and negations points to then is a position that eludes the sterile dichotomies of pro- and anti-Augustan: for, what Richardson reads as a "defiant defense of liberty," Cairns sees as "open praise of Augustus' military glory"; and what Andrew Wallace-Hadrill reads as an attempt to define and limit "Augustus' proper sphere of action," the battlefield but not the heart, Badian interprets as the celebration of a return to fiscal normalcy, and J. P. Postgate as "gross flattery."⁸⁹

To this extent, then, both 2.7 and 2.1, like 2.15 and 2.16, present Propertius as speaking in the feminine, a discourse that eludes the conventional binary oppositions of official and subversive, pro and con, conscious and unconscious. Propertius is a woman because his subject position cannot be precisely located in any one spot within conventional Roman ideological space.⁹⁰ In this context, his inversion of normative gender roles in assuming

85. Cairns 1979, 187–88; see, inter alia, *Odes* 3.1.

86. Wiggers 1977, 337.

87. Postgate 1884, ad loc.; Richardson 1977, ad loc.

88. King 1980, 73.

89. Cairns 1979, 187; Wallace-Hadrill 1985, 184; Badian 1985; Postgate 1884, ad loc.

90. Wyke 1995, 120–21.

the pose of *servus amoris* can be seen as part of a wider ideological and rhetorical strategy in which the norms of gender, discourse, power, and erotic desire are called into question in a more radical fashion than the concept of mere opposition can convey. To that extent, the Propertian text can be read as symptomatic of a profound dissension at the heart of the Symbolic itself, one that figures the norms of discourse as radically incommensurate with the poet's Imaginary reflections of the self's experience. The gap that is thereby revealed is perhaps a truer gauge of this poetry's engagement with History and the Real than any reduction of the text to a state of permanent ontological inferiority, that is, to the status of a mere reflection of a preexisting reality, political or otherwise. Unlike other women, however, Propertius, at least theoretically, retains the option of being a man. His appropriation of the feminine position does not imply a new symmetry in sexual power relations so much as a destabilization of the category of the masculine. In the final analysis, it remains an appropriation that was not equally open to all. And that is real power too.⁹¹

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91. The fact that racial, gendered, class, and sexual subject positions may be in large part social constructions does not mean that they are equally available to everyone. See Steele 1997, 202.

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