INTRODUCTION

Prologue

In the third-last poem of his third book, Propertius offers the following remarkable endorsement of Augustan Italy to his one-time patron Tullus:

> haec tibi, Tulle, parens, haec est pulcherrima sedes,
> hic tibi pro digna gente petendus honos,
> hic tibi ad eloquium ciues, hic ampla nepotum
> spes et uenturae coniugis aptus amor.
>
> 3.22.39–42

> This, Tullus, is your motherland, this your most beautiful home, here the public honour for you to seek as befits your distinguished family, here the citizens to move you to eloquence, here the ample hope of offspring and the suitable love of a wife to be.

As a product of the late 20s BCE, this elegant catalogue of Augustan virtues is hardly remarkable in itself – but hearing it issue from the mouth of an elegist surely is.[1] Tullus, the elegist's conservative foil in Book 1, has been living on the eastern fringe of the empire since leaving an indolent Propertius behind at Rome and pursuing a career move that, symbolically, placed *patria* above *puella* (1.6). In 3.22 Propertius seeks to entice Tullus back to Rome, but he does so with (of all things) an appeal to Tullus' sense of duty: Rome – now says the elegist – is the place to fulfil one's proper duty as a citizen, husband and father. Propertius' apparent change of heart is astounding. Here, in pair of couplets which evoke the controlled patriotism

[1] The paradox of Propertius' rhetoric is captured with typical vividness at Johnson (2009) 113–14.

of Anchises commending Rome's future to Aeneas in Virgil's imminent *Aeneid*, Propertius appears to embrace precisely the kind of Roman and masculine orthodoxy which he had so vehemently rejected when last writing to Tullus (1.6, 1.14); in a vision of personal responsibility that evokes the balancing of individual and state in Horace's *Odes*, Propertius seemingly recants his generic objection to marriage and the expectation of producing Roman children (2.7). In short, if Propertius is to honour his triumphant rededication to amatory elegy in the poems that open Book 3, then the Augustan landscape of 3.22 seems an incredible place for Propertian elegy to find itself in. The following study – an exploration of fourteen poems in Propertius' crucial third book – is an investigation of how the elegist rebuilds his genre from the inside out in order to get there.

Starting Points

3.22 is one of several poems which give rise to a well-known pair of interpretive narratives concerning Propertius Book 3; these two stories are both significant and yet, taken on their own, inevitably superficial. On the one hand, we hear that Propertius' third book displays less sustained interest in erotic material than there had been in earlier books.[2] Whereas Cynthia had stood at the head of both Books 1 and 2, Book 3 opens symbolically with Callimachus instead – while Cynthia herself is not named until 3.21; this shapes up as an irreversible thematic withering that culminates in the climactic rejection of Cynthia as both muse and mistress in the collection's final poem. The second story notes that the scope of poetic subjects and elegiac voices in the book broadens noticeably.[3] The once tightly controlled elegiac landscape becomes increasingly populated with external characters that elicit a new expansiveness from Propertius himself: 3.7, for instance, is an unparalleled poem lamenting the death at sea of the drowned merchant Paetus, a symbolically transgressive figure only belatedly contrasted

[2] Esp. Cairns (2006) 348 and *passim*.
[3] Hubbard (1974) 75–115, Sullivan (1976) 70–1, Lyne (1980) 136–8.

with the private circumstances of the lover–poet; with the faithful Aelia Galla in 3.12, Propertius stages an unexpectedly enthusiastic celebration of married life right at the middle of the book, and so seemingly gestures towards a new respect in elegy for traditional Roman morality; and, perhaps most egregiously of all, 3.18 performs an elegiac lament for Marcellus, dead Augustan prince – a poem that aligns sympathetically with Augustan symbols in a way unthinkable in Book 1.

The interconnectedness of these narratives is immediately apparent. The new material that Book 3 displays – especially the new 'Augustanism' – does give credibility to the renunciation of Cynthia with which the book ends, just as the renunciation itself invites readings which emphasise a gradual Augustan conversion across the book. On this line of interpretation, Propertius' increasing thematic breadth looks designed to test what else elegiac verse is capable of accommodating and, in doing so, it pushes erotic elegy to the point of breakdown – with the closing *renuntiatio amoris* providing, it seems, the moment when it does break down. But the present study seeks to demonstrate that this inevitably partial portrait falls far short of telling the whole story. At the same time as he approaches new topics, Propertius deploys his 'new' material and any departure it might represent in a highly self-aware manner, as part of a book-wide self-commentary on the ongoing evolution of elegy itself. Paetus' poetically novel but ultimately disastrous journey in 3.7, for instance, invites a metapoetic reading which tropes the dangers – for the *poet* – of abandoning the restraint of an elegiac aesthetic;[4] thus 3.7 is not simply novel in itself, it also problematises at an early stage in the book the very drift towards a more public form of poetry that Propertius does indeed countenance widely in the collection. In chapter 4 we see that the marital fidelity of Aelia Galla – far from signalling a new elegiac morality – in fact realises on a central pedestal (and reclaims from Horace's lyric) the feminine ideal that elegy has sought of its *puella* since the beginning. In chapter 7, Propertius certainly mourns the

[4] Houghton (2007).

death of Marcellus, but in a way that exposes the Augustan myth-making currently underway in Virgil's *Aeneid*, and in the veiled dynastic machinations of Augustus himself. Indeed, these last two elegies encapsulate particularly well the newly engaged role that Propertius envisions for elegy in Book 3, and we return to them below.

It becomes increasingly clear that Propertius Book 3 is a deeply multivocal collection, setting out a series of contrasting and even contradictory messages, often within the scope of a single poem. The aim of this study is certainly not to expose a hidden 'truth' within these twenty-four elegies, still less to argue that, contrary to appearances, Book 3 maintains an uncomplicated elegiac opposition to an Augustan programme (if, indeed, this was ever the case). Rather, it urges a full reading of these complex poems: the distinctive character of the collection lies in the friction it creates between elegy's proudly exclusive devotion to *amor* (and all this entails) and the seemingly inevitable need for elegy, along with the other Latin genres, to address the symbols of Augustus' new *Roma*.[5] If Book 3 ends by rejecting Cynthia, it turns out really to be the rejection of the tendentious portrait of Cynthia we (thought we) had known, the breaking up of the Cynthian caricature we fell for in Book 1. In her place the third book offers a rearticulation of 'Cynthia' and – as this study hopes to show – repositions Cynthian poetry in an emergent Augustan social and literary context.

Reception of Book 3

Heyworth & Morwood's excellent Oxford commentary from 2011 has brought long-overdue attention to the integrity and independence of Propertius Book 3 as a collection. Heyworth & Morwood rightly advertise the richness and diversity of a poetry book that accommodates the geography of Augustan imperial expansion, as well as the rising ambition of Augustan literature, especially through its interaction with Horace's

[5] On the latter point, see Ross (1975) 127–8.

just-published *Odes*, and with Virgil's imminent *Aeneid*. But the freshness of this commentary highlights the fact that it marks a notable departure from a very weary and for the most part cursory reception for Propertius' third collection in classical scholarship. In the past several decades, in fact, besides Heyworth & Morwood's commentary, Propertius Book 3 has largely escaped detailed reading on its own terms, or has been subject to readings which conspire against the capacity of the collection to speak with an original voice.[6]

We must look back some distance to find interpretative studies which seek to read Book 3 as a collection in its own right. The focus here is primarily structural. In the 1960s, a number of studies claimed to explain an elaborate symmetrical arrangement of the twenty-two poems of Propertius' first book.[7] Subsequently, several readers attempted to find similar concentric patterns in the third book,[8] encouraged by its similar size and by its many self-conscious allusions to Book 1. The usefulness of such schemes is questionable in any case;[9] and, certainly, these attempts to find coherence in the thematic diversity of Book 3 by making it work more like Book 1 (where Propertius is at his most thematically consistent) have largely been ineffective. But the spate of interest in the structure of Book 3 gave rise to a number of important readings which adopt a linear approach to short sequences of poems within the collection.[10] As outlined more fully below, the current study proposes a new way of reading the arrangement of poems in Book 3 – as a broad structure consisting of three series of eight poems – but a focus on linear reading remains fundamental, and sits at the foreground in chapters 1 and 3, discussing the sequences 3.1–3

[6] Greene & Welch (2012) – a collection which republishes a representative selection of scholarship on Propertius ranging from 1977 to 2007 – seemingly affirms a critical silence when it comes to Book 3: the focus of these pieces falls (almost) exclusively on poems from, or themes connected with, Books 1, 2 and 4.
[7] E.g. Otis (1965), Courtney (1968).
[8] E.g. Woolley (1967), Nethercut (1968), Marr (1978); for more linear approaches, cf. Courtney (1970), Jacobson (1976), Putnam (1980), Hutchinson (1984).
[9] Hutchinson (1984) 99.
[10] Nethercut (1970a) 385–407, Nethercut (1970b) 99–102, Jacobson (1976) 160–4, Courtney (1970) 48–53, Putnam (1980) 105–10 and *passim*.

and 3.9–11, respectively. A consecutive reading of poems might be expected as an approach to an ancient poetry book;[11] but in the case of Book 3 it seems an approach that Propertius overtly encourages by employing a recurrent 'journey' metaphor across the collection as a whole,[12] and we will see it offer particular reward as metapoetic commentary on the process of reading through the evolution of a book and, indeed, a genre.

When we turn to more recent discussion, we find that a particular fate of Book 3 has been to serve the purposes of studies whose attention lies elsewhere. Excepting a recent cluster of more comprehensive studies (discussed below), most critical interest in Propertius since the mid-1980s has been concentrated on the two extremes of the Propertian corpus: on the beginning, where Propertius first establishes the *personae* of his elegiac poet–lover and the beloved *puella*, the poetic interaction between which, to various extents, governs his first three books;[13] and, more recently, on the end – on the final book in which, as *Romanus Callimachus*, Propertius blends his erotic poetics with a new aetiological investigation of stories associated with Roman myths and landscapes.[14] Caught between the different concerns of these two approaches, Book 3 is represented either as the final iteration of the first-person amatory paradigm established in Book 1,[15] or as bringing about the closing down of the subjective 'Cynthian' poetics of Books 1–3, a move necessary before the poet could progress to a more objective style of elegy in the fourth book.[16] As regards the

[11] Putnam (1980) 97, Hutchinson (1984) 100.
[12] There are over thirty specific references to pathways, streets and travel in Book 3, compared with a mere fifty or so in the other three books combined. On the metaphor of (sea-)travel in Latin love poetry, see Jacobson (1976) 165–6; for the metaphor's teleological drive especially in the second half of Propertius Book 3, see Clarke (2004). Yet Propertius' thematic interaction with 'journeying' frequently contradicts the sense of teleology that journey symbolism provides: see recently Phillips (2011) 125–6.
[13] On the identity and function of the elegiac *puella* in Books 1 and 2, see esp. Wyke (1987b), (1989a) and (1994), and Greene (1995) and (1998); on the persona of the poet–lover particularly in Book 2, see esp. Sharrock (2000) and Greene (2000) and (2005).
[14] See the full-length studies of Janan (2001), Debrohun (2003), Welch (2005).
[15] E.g. Ross (1975) 127–8: a 'half-hearted … attempt to retain the mask he had so proudly made his own'.
[16] E.g. Debrohun (2003) 131–4.

focus of academic attention, that is to say, the position of the third book within the corpus has rendered it vulnerable to interpretation largely with reference to concerns outside itself, being read in terms of its similarity to, or difference from, the books that surround it.[17]

Given the paucity of interpretative studies whose focus is Book 3 itself, the most influential characterisations of the collection are to be found in studies which treat the breadth of the poet's work more fully. Though it has been left behind by developments in theoretical approaches to elegy,[18] Margaret Hubbard's 1974 monograph *Propertius* remains influential for her depiction of Propertius' third book as the elegist's attempt to find new subjects in order to reinvigorate a tired and restrictive genre. Discussing the novel poems in the book's centre, for instance, Hubbard writes:

> Mostly, they show an exhaustion of the genre, and give the impression that the poet is bored with love poetry and trying, though as yet unsuccessfully, to find new modes. … In all this part of the book perhaps only the slight but amiable 3.16 and the hymn to Bacchus (3.17) avoid the tedium inescapable in the spectacle of a good poet in an impasse and looking for both a subject and a manner.[19]

The effect of an approach like this is to reinforce the perception of Propertian elegy as a static genre with a strictly limited range, based on a template established by the poet in Book 1; it precludes fuller study of creativity in the third collection by appealing to the notion of generic fatigue, where the presence of new material serves only to reinforce the perceived limitations of elegy in the first place. This has proved a persuasively pessimistic reading from which more recent discussions – though more sympathetic and sophisticated – have not managed fully to liberate Propertius' third book. Alison Keith, for instance, in her judicious overview of Propertius'

[17] E.g. Nethercut (1975) 74, Stahl (1985) 189–90. Miller (2004) 147 is more nuanced on this point.
[18] Gibson (2007) 173.
[19] Hubbard (1974) 89. For the clash of new and old in Book 3, see similarly Sullivan (1976) 70–1.

poetry from 2008, quite rightly singles out Book 3 as the site of elegist's highly productive engagement with Horatian lyric (Propertius thus 'admits a new depth and generic complexity to his elegiac aesthetic'[20]). Yet, in the end, Keith nonetheless links Propertius' experimentalism with his 'disengagement' from love elegy, notwithstanding the extent to which Keith herself shows Propertius manipulating Horace to further the ends of an amatory elegiac programme.[21]

Two other recent discussions of Propertius' complete corpus adopt vastly differing approaches, and yet both further conspire to restrict the scope of Book 3 as an individual collection. Of these, Francis Cairns's massive 2006 study of Propertius is the more problematic.[22] Cairns regards the greater presence of historical and aetiological interests within Book 3 (and Book 4) as directly reflecting the poet's increasing political awareness and commitment to Augustan ideology – to the extent that it shows 'Propertius self-consciously speaking as a public mouthpiece of the regime'.[23] In these avowedly selective readings, the extent to which Cairns adopts Augustus as the central, sometimes sole, point of reference inevitably frustrates any broader significance that his very detailed analysis might offer. The obvious depth in Cairns's scholarship is frequently compelling (and useful, for instance, in providing a historical context for the composition and interpretation of 3.14 and 3.17).[24] But the uncomplicated certainty with which Cairns presents the thematic intricacy of Book 3 (combined with his frequent and blunt dismissal of alternative readings as

[20] Keith (2008) 63.
[21] Keith (2008) 56–65.
[22] Cairns's study revives a stream of historical and political approaches to Augustan elegy prevalent from the 1960s onwards: Cairns (2006) x cites Boucher (1965), Stahl (1985) and Newman (1997) as particular influences. It is a tendency of such political readings of elegy to establish the poet as uncomplicatedly pro- *or* anti-Augustan; this is a demonstrably problematic approach to a collection such as Propertius Book 3, which offers support for both viewpoints.
[23] Cairns (2006) 349.
[24] Cairns (2006) 362–403.

'misinterpretations')[25] results in a remarkably straightforward and univocal representation of what remains a complex collection of ideas and symbols.

By contrast, W. R. Johnson depicts a recalcitrant Propertius who could hardly be more different from Cairns's (pro-) Augustan poet. Eschewing the kind of political transformation that Cairns sees, Johnson sketches instead an elegist who remains keenly at odds with Roman society as Augustus was seeking to reinvent it.[26] As will become clear, there is much sympathy in the present study for Johnson's instinctive portrait of a stubborn poet who never fully renounces the subversive voice that comes, in the Roman mindset, with being a lover. Here, Johnson's tracking of a resistant eroticism from Books 1–3 into Book 4 – and so, his reading of Propertius' claim to have moved on from Cynthia at the end of the third book as inevitably misguided and, in fact, generically inconceivable – provides refreshing insight into the overall coherence of an erotic poetry that shows greater loyalty to the central claim in Book 1 – that Cynthia will be the beginning and the end (*Cynthia prima fuit, Cynthia finis erit*, 1.12.20) – than many readers allow it to have. But, as will also become clear, we will not go as far as Johnson in refusing Propertius an increasingly constructive interaction with the Augustan subjects that loom ever larger in the period during which the third book was written. Seductive though it is, Johnson's portrait of a poet for whom Augustan integration was 'impossible' necessarily lends his characterisation of the public material in Book 3 a curiously ironic air, where sarcasm and satire must become the poetry's dominant modes. Like Johnson, we find a poet who resists official goading to turn his attention to properly 'Roman' verse, at least in the way that those who would pressure him might have hoped. But we also meet a poet whose

[25] E.g. Cairns (2006) 344–7, dismissing ironic readings of the Augustan content in Book 3 as found, for instance, in Stahl (1985) ch. 10.

[26] Heyworth (2010) similarly depicts Propertius' career as one which privileges stasis over evolution, even as it explores the friction between these competing aesthetic demands. See too Wilson (2009).

principles – for all the elegist's counter-cultural bluster – prove not *always* dissimilar to those traditional values which Augustus was seeking to reinvest in Roman culture.

Contextual Considerations

The Roman literary scene had progressed significantly by the time Propertius was completing his latest collection in 23 BCE.[27] The brutal politics of civil war, out of which grew the elegist's dissident manner in his first two books,[28] was now the best part of a decade distant. Augustus was busily bedding down a new Roman constitution, which, even if the extent of the Principate that would result was not yet fully apparent, nonetheless outlined ever more clearly the beginning of an Augustan dynasty, and provided Rome's artists with a wealth of new socio-political material to interrogate, as well as, very probably, the imperative to do so. The focus of Roman cultural attention was changing. The particular type of civil defiance which gave impetus to Propertius' early poetry was no longer relevant in the way it used to be.

For a start, in the late 20s BCE all eyes were turning towards Virgil's *Aeneid*. It was clear even at the time Propertius published his second book that Virgil's Augustan epic was destined to become a dominant cultural text (*cedite Romani scriptores, cedite Grai!*|*nescio quid maius nascitur Iliade*, 'Yield, Roman writers, yield Greeks too! Something greater than the *Iliad* is coming to birth', Prop. 2.34.65–6).[29] Just a few years later, the frequency of references to the *Aeneid* – including specific allusion – in Horace's subsequent *Odes* and in Propertius' third book affirm the extent to which the epic was commanding attention while it was still being written (as well as the extent

[27] For the dating of Book 3, see Fedeli (1985) 29, Goold (1990) 2; for the dating of all Propertius' collections, see Hubbard (1974) 43–4, and Lyne (1998a) 520–4 (with particular focus on Books 1 and 2).

[28] See esp. Breed (2010). Heyworth & Morwood (2011) 8–26 provide a useful overview of the political history preceding the Augustan Principate, and the significance of this in Propertius' first two books.

[29] On Propertius' representation of the *Aeneid* in 2.34, see O'Rourke (2011).