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J. P. Sullivan

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PROPERTIUS

A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

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Ecquid, quaeso, nostra interest Antiquitatis studium, si ab
iis, quae olim facta sunt, orationem nesciamus ad haec
citeriora et notiora nobis deducere?

Vincenzo Padula

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PREFACE

In his preface to his study of Horace's satires in 1966 Niall Rudd complained that there was no comprehensive book in English on Propertius, Persius, Petronius, Lucan, or Pliny. Rudd, of course, was not implying any lack of general or scholarly interest in Propertius. Numerous monographs, articles, and editions have appeared in recent years, but there is still no standard introduction in English to which one may with confidence refer the neophyte classicist or even a non-classical colleague whose primary interest may be Ezra Pound, but who wishes to acquire sufficient knowledge to appreciate the difference between the Propertius we know and the Propertius presented by Pound in his *Homage to Sextus Propertius*.*

This remark is not to be taken as a criticism of Pound's interesting poem; indeed, no little credit must be given to him for restoring Propertius in some degree to the public domain by drawing him to the attention of other poets such as Robert Lowell, and arousing a greater interest in his political and literary attitudes. Before then Propertian studies had been mainly concerned with textual criticism and exegesis, apart from a mildly prurient curiosity about the poet's affair with Cynthia. It would be wrong of course to attribute this enlarged investigation of Propertius solely to Ezra Pound, although the scant credit given him by most classical scholars is a disgrace to the profession. On the one hand, our insight into the nature of Augustan politics and literature has been sharpened by our own political experiences in the past several decades, and not least by Sir

* Regrettably, Steele Commager, *A Prolegomenon to Propertius* (Cincinnati, 1974) and Margaret Hubbard, *Propertius* (London, 1974) came into my hands too late to take notice of in my text.

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Ronald Syme's crystallization of that change in the *Zeitgeist* with the publication in 1939 of *The Roman Revolution*. On the other hand, a growing and more sophisticated study of Hellenistic literature and its influence on classical Latin authors has sharpened our feeling for the complexity of Propertius' literary theory and practice.

The picture of Propertius the love-poet, whose lyric romanticism is only marred by poor texts and obscure language and whose only concern is Cynthia except in a handful of ill-conceived aetiological and panegyric elegies, is going into the limbo to which we relegated Vergil the Magician and Ovid the Preceptor of Courtly Love. In this book I attempt to articulate the more complex figure that is now assumed in modern Propertian studies.

An introduction such as this should not, of course, try to cover everything. So I have not dealt with the many problems of the transmission and emendation of Propertius' text and the extant MSS; discussion of Propertius' reputation is deliberately cursory and concentrates principally on the revival of Propertian studies in the twentieth century; and naturally no attempt has been made to analyse every poem in the *oeuvre*. Footnotes have been kept to a minimum. They record generally the source of some ideas I subscribe to or disagree with; or articles and dissertations that might otherwise escape the student's notice. I should add that many of the points I make will be familiar and many of those not so familiar will have much in common with theories proposed by other Propertian scholars. Since I have been niggardly with notes and my memory is not always trustworthy, I would like to take a leaf from Wittgenstein's book and state that 'if my remarks do not bear a stamp which shows that they are mine, I do not wish to lay any further claim to them as my property'. The standard literature on Propertius may be easily assembled from the select bibliography I append. One hopes that Propertius himself approved of Callimachus' dictum: τὸ μέγα βιβλίον ἴσον τῷ μεγάλῳ κακῷ.

Some of the arguments and views advanced here have appeared elsewhere in different forms, in *Arion*, *Arethusa*, *Classical Quarterly*, *The Kenyon Review*, *Essays in Criticism*, *Wiener Studien*, *The American Journal of Philology*, *The Times Literary*

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Supplement and in *Ezra Pound and Sextus Propertius: A Study in Creative Translation* (Austin, Texas, 1964), a book which, being directed to those interested in modern poetry, is unlikely to be familiar to classical reviewers or students of Latin literature.

I am grateful for the scholarly advice or criticism of Leo C. Curran, Lawrence Richardson, Jr, Judith P. Hallett, the anonymous reader of the Cambridge University Press and, in particular, William R. Nethercut, who also read the proofs. This book would not have been begun or finished without the encouragement of various editors in the New York office of the Cambridge University Press: Elizabeth Case, Jane Alpert and Sarah Shields. To them and my patient secretaries, Doris Michaels, Barbara Woodruff, Sandra Fazekas, Lorraine Harf and Mary Ann Lewis, my sincere thanks. For the forbearance and help of my wife, Judy Godfrey, words fail me – *ingenium nobis ipsa puella facit!*

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August 1974

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ABBREVIATIONS

- AJP** *American Journal of Philology*
BICS *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies
 of the University of London*
CJ *The Classical Journal*
CP *Classical Philology*
GRBS *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*
H *Hermes*
HSCP *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*
JRS *Journal of Roman Studies*
Latomus
Latomus, Revue d'études latines
PCPhS *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*
Pf. R. Pfeiffer, *Callimachus: vol. I Fragmenta*²
 (Oxford 1965)
RAL *Rendiconti della Classe di Scienze Morali, Storiche,
 Filologiche dell'Accademia dei Lincei, Roma*
RE Pauly–Wissowa, *Real-Encyclopädie der classischen
 Altertumswissenschaft*, Stuttgart 1894
REL *Revue des Études Latines*
RFIC *Rivista di Filologia e di Istruzione Classica*,
 Torino
RhM *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie*
TAPA *Transactions and Proceedings of the American
 Philological Society*
WS *Wiener Studien, Zeitschrift für Klassische
 Philologie (und Patristik)*
YCS *Yale Classical Studies*

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