

# THE SUCCESS AND FAILURE OF ROMAN LOVE ELEGY AS AN INSTRUMENT OF SUBVERSION. THE CASE OF PROPERTIUS

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It is often assumed – particularly in Anglophone literary criticism – that Roman love elegy is a fundamentally subversive genre<sup>1</sup>. It is hard to deny that the elegists had subversive tendencies, and, at the very least, they do not make much effort to improve their readers morally or to make Augustus appear politically attractive. However, the *quality* of the subversiveness of the love elegists has not been studied very closely, and unwarranted assumptions are often made about the danger or threat they presented to contemporary institutions or modes of behaviour. If we concentrate on Propertius – the most intensively studied of the elegists – it can be argued that his much-vaunted subversiveness is in fact curiously limited. That is to say, he leaves the genre’s potential for subversion far from fulfilled or realised. The key question then becomes not ‘how subversive was Roman love elegy?’, but ‘why was love elegy not more subversive?’ The answer may throw some interesting light on the limits – especially self-imposed limits – set on morally and politically subversive speech in early Augustan Rome.

A sense of the limits of Propertian subversion could be quickly reached by comparing his utterances to some early Christian texts, where a genuine and deep-seated hatred of Rome is often on view, and where Rome’s moral values and political systems are rejected, and the city’s eventual destruction envisaged. But this would be at the very least unsympathetic to Propertius,

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<sup>1</sup> ‘In short, Propertius speaks for the primacy of love and poetry. Warfare and glory are to be deprecated and dismissed. ... Conforming to a current fashion, and ostensibly responsive to imperial themes, this poet turns out to be insidious and subversive’ (SYME 1978, 188); ‘the Augustan elegiac love poets ... made elegy the genre of opposing the state, contrasting the private pursuit of love with the public pursuit of civic duties’ (NEWLANDS 1995, 14); ‘choosing to write love elegy was itself a political act, for the stance of the elegist is intrinsically subversive’ (DAVIS 2006, 84).

and comparisons should be sought within pagan culture, above all with models and texts that were potentially available to the elegist. I have chosen two figures not often mentioned in the study of elegy, but challenging, nevertheless, to think with. The first is a literary creation of the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E., but one based on a historical figure, namely the Callicles who appears in the *Gorgias* of Plato. The second is himself a writer rather than a literary creation, namely the 4<sup>th</sup>-century B.C.E. didactic poet Arcestratus of Gela. Together they illustrate some possibilities for the textual presentation of morally and politically subversive attitudes<sup>2</sup>. Plato's Callicles tries to maintain the position of a completely amoral hedonist, and makes the claim that his aspirations to conventionally 'bad' behaviour are in fact virtuous. Arcestratus is a hedonist, but not an amoral one, and takes the less threatening position of merely trampling upon ancient moral standards, without arguing that his behaviour is virtuous. He insists only on his right to ignore traditional moral standards as irrelevant to him.

### *Moral Subversiveness in Propertius*

But first, a brief look at some characteristic utterances which have helped win Propertius a reputation for subversion (and here I concentrate on moral and political subversiveness). In his first book, Propertius gives warning of the tradition in which he is working by acclaiming the power of the verses of Mimnermus over those of Homer (I 9,11-12). The verses of Mimnermus on the emptiness of life without 'golden Aphrodite' and the intrigues of secret love were notorious already in antiquity, and would attract Plutarch's condemnation as the typical utterances of ἀκολάστοι or intemperate people<sup>3</sup>. More directly, Propertius, like Catullus before him, asserted his rejection of the opinions – and the laws – of the *senes* (II 30,13-16):

*ista senes licet accusent conuiuia duri:  
nos modo propositum, uita, teramus iter.  
illorum antiquis onerentur legibus aures:  
hic locus est in quo, tibia docta, sones.*

<sup>2</sup> Arcestratus' poem appears also in a version attributed to Ennius (where it is titled *Hedyphagetica*), although this appears to have been an adaptation rather than translation, and a mere eleven lines survive, i.e. not enough to gauge its character. For text and commentary, see OLSON - SENS 2000, 241-245; COURTNEY 1993, 22-25.

<sup>3</sup> Plut. *virt. mor.* 6,445f on Mimnermus frg. 1 West; cf. the superscription in the *Palatine Anthology* to poem IX 50 (Μιμνέρμου. παραίνεσις εἰς τὸ ἀνέτως ζῆν).

Let stern old men denounce this revelling of ours; just let us continue, darling, on the path we have begun. Let their ears be burdened with old-fashioned laws; this is the place for you, skilled pipe, to play.

Rather, he will continue as normal with his riotous parties (just as Marcus Antonius had done so recently, despite widespread disapproval from respectable citizens). Propertius also values drunken and violent behaviour, because they provide evidence of the effect of immoderate passion on his lover (III 8,1-4; 8,9-10):

*dulcis ad besternas fuerat mihi rixa lucernas,  
uocis et insanae tot maledicta tuae,  
cum furibunda mero mensam propellis et in me  
proicis insana cymbia plena manu.*

.....  
*nimirum ueri dantur mihi signa caloris:  
nam sine amore graui femina nulla dolet.*

I enjoyed the lamplight brawl we had last night and all the abuse of your frenzied tongue. When, crazed with wine, you knock over the table and fling full cups at me with frenzied hand ... you are without question giving me tokens of true ardour: for no woman smarts unless hers is a serious passion.

Indeed, where love is concerned, 'moderation', as traditionally conceived, will be disregarded by Propertius, and the madness of excess will be embraced (II 15,29-30):

*errat, qui finem uesani quaerit amoris:  
uerus amor nullum nouit habere modum.*

He errs who seeks to put a limit to the madness of love: true love knows no bounds.

More disturbingly Propertius is willing to contemplate criminal acts, as in poem II 8 where, robbed of Cynthia, he decides to die and take Cynthia with him (II 8,25-28):

*sed non effugies: mecum moriaris oportet;  
hoc eodem ferro stillet uterque cruor.  
quamuis ista mihi mors est inhonesta futura:  
mors inhonesta quidem, tu moriere tamen.*

Still, you will not escape: you must die with me; let the blood of both drip from this same sword. Your death will be dishonourable for me: a dishonourable death indeed, but even so you will die.

Even though murder and suicide for love will bring him moral dishonour, Propertius contemplates the task without hesitation, and for love shall willingly – and knowingly – transgress recognised moral boundaries.

### *Propertius and Plato's Callicles*

Many similar examples of such utterances could be given from the text of Propertius, and when taken in isolation the elegist's speech sounds morally threatening enough. But in the context of other examples of subversive speech from the ancient world – examples potentially available to Propertius for imitation – the limits of his subversion become quickly apparent. In Plato's *Gorgias* Socrates deals with the question of 'who is the happy man and who is not', and finally the broad question of 'how a man should live'<sup>4</sup>. The final interlocutor, and the one who is granted the longest dialogue with Socrates, is Callicles, a 'wealthy, snobbish aristocrat about to embark on a political career at Athens'<sup>5</sup>. In the course of developing his ideal of manliness and courage (*ἀνδρεία*), Callicles argues that not only is moderation inappropriate for the suitably qualified man aiming for power, but the pursuit of excess is in fact his moral duty (492b-c):

ἐπεὶ ὅσοις ἐξ ἀρχῆς ὑπῆρξεν ἡ βασιλέων ὑέσιν εἶναι ἢ αὐτοὺς τῆ φύσει ἰκανοὺς ἐκπορίσασθαι ἀρχὴν τινα ἢ τυραννίδα ἢ δυναστείαν, τί ἂν τῆ ἀληθείᾳ αἰσχίον καὶ κάκιον εἴη σωφροσύνης καὶ δικαιοσύνης τούτοις τοῖς ἀνθρώποις, οἷς ἐξὸν ἀπολαύειν τῶν ἀγαθῶν καὶ μηδενὸς ἐμποδῶν ὄντος, αὐτοὶ ἑαυτοῖς δεσπότην ἐπαγάγοιντο τὸν τῶν πολλῶν ἀνθρώπων νόμον τε καὶ λόγον καὶ ψόγον; ἢ πῶς οὐκ ἂν ἄθλιοι γεγονότες εἴεν ὑπὸ τοῦ καλοῦ τοῦ τῆς δικαιοσύνης καὶ τῆς σωφροσύνης, μηδὲν πλέον νέμοντες τοῖς φίλοις τοῖς αὐτῶν ἢ τοῖς ἐχθροῖς, καὶ ταῦτα ἄρχοντες ἐν τῇ ἑαυτῶν πόλει; ἀλλὰ τῆ ἀληθείᾳ, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἦν φῆς σὺ διώκειν, ὧδ' ἔχει· τρυφή καὶ ἀκολασία καὶ ἐλευθερία, ἐὰν ἐπικουπρίαν ἔχη, τοῦτ' ἐστὶν ἀρετὴ τε καὶ εὐδαιμονία, τὰ δὲ ἄλλα ταῦτ' ἐστὶν τὰ καλλωπίστατα, τὰ παρὰ φύσιν συνθήματα ἀνθρώπων, φλυαρία καὶ οὐδενὸς ἄξια.

To those who are either of princely birth to begin with or able by their own qualities to win office or absolute rule or power what could in truth be more disgraceful or injurious than moderation, which involves their voluntary subjection to the conventions and standards and criticism of the majority, when they might enjoy every advantage without interference from anybody? How can they fail to be wretched when they are prevented by your fine righteousness and moderation

<sup>4</sup> See RUTHERFORD 1995, 142.

<sup>5</sup> RUTHERFORD 1995, 142, referring to *Gorg.* 484c ff.; 515a.

from favouring their friends at the expense of their enemies, even when they are rulers in their own city? The truth, Socrates, which you profess to be in search of is in fact this; luxury and excess and licence, provided that they can obtain sufficient backing, are virtue and happiness; all the rest is mere flummery, unnatural conventions of society, worthless cant.

Here Callicles does two things: first, he rejects moderation and all its restraints on men such as himself; secondly he argues that the resulting embrace of morally excessive behaviour – *τρυφή και ἀκολασία και ἔλευθερία* – is in fact virtuous behaviour (where it can be successfully achieved). This same rejection of moderation is shared by Propertius, but not, as a rule, the attempt to argue that his excessive behaviour is actually virtuous, since the elegist is happy to retain traditional moral vocabulary to describe his behaviour and then to act in defiance of it. This is particularly clear in II 8,25-28, where Propertius recognises that killing Cynthia then himself will be morally dishonourable (*ista mihi mors est inhonesta futura*); but decides to do it anyway. He does not attempt to argue that such behaviour is morally appropriate to the lover, an instance of a lover's virtuous behaviour, since he sets up traditional moral standards as something of which he acts in defiance. Where Callicles radically redesigns ancient morals, Propertius ultimately reinforces them.

Of course, in the *Gorgias* Socrates shows that Callicles cannot maintain the position of a consistent amoral hedonist: he will necessarily be dependent on traditional morality once he is in power both for the sake of his own security, and as a source of social prestige<sup>6</sup>. But the point is that Callicles believes that he can maintain such a position, while Propertius, already in his very first poem, uses the traditional vocabulary of moral condemnation to describe his own behaviour (I 1,1-8; 1,25-28; 1,35):

*Cynthia prima suis miserum me cepit ocellis,  
contactum nullis ante cupidinibus.  
tum mihi constantis deiecit lumina fastus  
et caput impositis pressit Amor pedibus,  
donec me docuit castas odisse puellas  
improbis, et nullo uiuere consilio.*

<sup>6</sup> 'Not even a Callicles could survive in a primitive chaos of anarchic violence, and if he himself were to become a tyrant, he too would wish to lay down laws' (RUTHERFORD 1995, 166). Furthermore, despite his express desire to break free from conventional values, Callicles is in fact dependent on them, as what he really wants to be is not far from removed from the ideal of the old Athenian aristocrat (*καλὸς καγαθός*) (RUTHERFORD 1995, 165-166). Callicles' inability to break free from traditional morality is later confirmed when he objects to Socrates' use of the example of the pleasure derived from male prostitutes as vulgar and shameful: he cannot sustain a consistently hedonistic point of view (*Gorg.* 494e, with RUTHERFORD 1995, 170).

*ei mihi, iam toto furor hic non deficit anno,  
cum tamen aduersos cogor habere deos.*

.....

*aut uos qui sero lapsum reuocatis, amici,  
quaerite non sani pectoris auxilia.  
fortiter et ferrum saeuos patiemur et ignes,  
sit modo libertas quae uelit ira loqui.*

.....

*hoc, moneo, uitate malum.*

Cynthia first with her eyes ensnared me, poor wretch, that had previously been untouched by desire. It was then that love made me lower my looks of stubborn pride and trod my head beneath his feet, until the villain taught me to shun decent girls and to lead the life of a ne'er-do-well. Poor me, for a whole year now this frenzy has not abated, while I am compelled to endure the frown of heaven. ... Else you, my friends, who too late call back the fallen, seek medicines for a heart that is sick. I shall bravely submit to the knife and cautery, if only I were free to utter the promptings of anger. ... shun this plague, I counsel you.

Propertius is afflicted by disease, anger and madness, and gives recognition to the moral chaos this has caused in his life. But there is no attempt to call his situation or behaviour either good or virtuous, which perhaps raises an interesting question: can we imagine a Roman text which tries to maintain a consistently 'immoral' position as 'virtuous'? Is there no Roman equivalent to the voice of Callicles? Could anyone even conceive of writing a complete text in the mode of the Marquis de Sade or Nietzsche in the ancient world?

### *Propertius and Archestratus*

From the radical subversiveness of Plato's Callicles to one of the ancient world's most notorious texts. The Ἡδυσπάρθεια or 'Life of pleasure' was written in the fourth-century before Christ by Archestratus of Gela<sup>7</sup>, and appears to have consisted largely of an extended catalogue of foodstuffs, their place of purchase, and appropriate cooking instructions<sup>8</sup>. Around one third or more of this poem survives as quotations in other authors, and this is remarkable in itself, since the text – despite its innocuous-sounding contents – seems to have provoked indignation from the moment of its publication to the third century C.E. Consistently linked with the outrageous Philaenis, the

<sup>7</sup> On this text, and its usefulness for interrogating elegy, see further GIBSON 2007, 64-66; 110-111.

<sup>8</sup> OLSON - SENS 2000, xxiv-xxviii. All references to the text are from the edition of OLSON - SENS *op. cit.*

author of an outrageous work on seduction and sexual techniques<sup>9</sup>, Arcestratus himself is condemned for encouraging licentious and extravagant behaviour. One of the speakers in Athenaeus' *Banquet of the Sophists*, after approvingly quoting the condemnation of Arcestratus by the Stoic philosopher Chrysippus, insists (VIII 335e):

ὕμεῖς δὲ πολλάκις τοῦ Ἀρχεστράτου τούτου μνημονεύσαντες ἀκολασίας ἐπληρώσατε τὸ συμπόσιον. τί γὰρ τῶν ἐπιτρεῖσθαι δυναμένων παρέλιπεν ὁ καλὸς οὗτος ἐποποιός...

But you, by making frequent mention of this Arcestratus, have filled our drinking party with licentiousness (*ἀκολασία*). For what of all things capable of ruining a person has been left out by this noble epic poet...?

This reputation of Arcestratus' poem for encouraging licentious and extravagant behaviour is borne out, at least to some extent, by the text itself. For in the summary of the most recent editors of the poem, Douglas Olson and Alexander Sens, 'One basic point of the ideology of eating implicit in the *Ἡδυπάθεια* is ... that the individuals it addresses should feel no concern for the culinary and social conventions of contemporary society as a whole, but should defy them if they can enjoy themselves more thereby' (OLSON - SENS 2000, lii). Here is where Propertius resembles Arcestratus, in his willingness to recognise traditional moral categories in order to defy them.

Thus in Arcestratus we find not only a repeated stress on the importance of culinary pleasure<sup>10</sup>, but also the advice to pursue culinary pleasure with crime if necessary, even at the risk of the readers' own lives (frg. 22,1-2):

ἐν δὲ Ῥόδῳ γαλεὸν τὸν ἀλώπεκα, κἂν ἀποθνήσκῃ  
μέλλῃς, ἂν μὴ σοι πολεῖν θέλῃ, ἄρπασον αὐτόν...

And in Rhodes, if someone is unwilling to sell you the thresher shark, even if you are likely to die as a result, steal it...

Alongside crime, readers are advised to jettison traditional moral values: to those who refuse to eat shark on the ground that it eats humans, Arcestratus responds that such 'nonsense' is for those who wish to live 'temperately' (frg. 24,18-20):

<sup>9</sup> OLSON - SENS 2000, 5-8; 11-12 = *test.* 4; 5; 9.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. e.g. frg. 5,17-18; 10,7-10; 37,7-9. This emphasis no doubt accounts for ancient attempts to associate Arcestratus (implausibly) with Epicureanism; cf. e.g. Athen. VIII 335b; 335d-336a (OLSON - SENS *test.* 5); Athen. III 104b; VII 278e-f (OLSON - SENS *test.* 6); Justin *apol.* II 15,3 (OLSON - SENS *test.* 9); also OLSON - SENS (2000) xlv-xlv, and 232, 236 (on frg. 60,12-13; 60,19-21 respectively).

ὥστε πρέπει καθαρῶς ὅποσοι τάδε μωρολογοῦσι  
 τοῖς λαχάνοις προσάγειν καὶ πρὸς Διόδωρον ἰόντας  
 τὸν σοφὸν ἐγκρατέως μετ' ἐκείνου πυθαγορίζειν

Therefore it is clearly appropriate that those who talk this sort of nonsense keep company with vegetables and go to the wise Diodoros and temperately play the Pythagorean along with him.

Similarly, of the lyre fish it is recommended (frg. 32,6-7):

καὶ πολλῷ πυρῷ καὶ ἐλαίῳ τοῦτον ἄλειφε·  
 χαίρει γὰρ δαπανῶντας ὀρῶν, ἔστιν δ' ἀκόλαστος

And baste this fish with a large amount of cheese and olive oil; for it likes to see people spend money, since it lacks self-control (*ἀκόλαστος*).

Such self-indulgence and excess, here humorously transferred from consumer to foodstuff, is the opposite of *σωφροσύνη*. *Ἀκολασία* is in fact precisely what Arcestratus' critics accused him of, but the poet wears it as a badge of pride. And alongside all this there runs an emphasis on luxury and financial expenditure, with a strong focus on the purchase of expensive foodstuffs without regret or second thoughts<sup>11</sup>.

Various similarities with the Roman love elegist are obvious. Arcestratus and Propertius share a defiance of traditional behaviour while using traditional categories to describe their behaviour, and both declare that they are acting illegally or intemperately. Arcestratus, it is true, is less personally distressed by his behaviour, is rather more at ease with his defiance of traditional values, but there are differences which run much deeper than mere unease or discomfort – and it is these which can be used to understand the peculiar nature of the subversiveness of Propertius. For even allowing for generic differences between a didactic poem and love elegy (of which more presently), it is clear that Arcestratus is profoundly different in one respect from Propertius: he is consistent in his behaviour, and does not waver from his core set of beliefs<sup>12</sup>. The same does not hold true for Propertius, who both expresses

<sup>11</sup> Arcestratus, for example, expresses a fundamental preference for an 'elegant meal' (frg. 4,1 ἄβρόδαιτι), rejects cheap food consistently throughout the work (frg. 9; 11,1; 25,1; 27,3-4; 29,1-2; 53; 60,12-15), and evinces contempt for the herd (frg. 15,2-4; 39,3-5). Instead there is a strong emphasis on the purchase of expensive foodstuffs; cf. e.g. frg. 16,2-4 τὸν κάρπον ἂν ἐσίδης ὄνοῦ καὶ μὴ κατάλειπε, | κἄν ἰσόχρυσος ἔη, μὴ σοι νέμεσις καταπνεύσῃ | δεινὴ ἀπ' ἀθανάτων ('buy the boar fish if you see it and do not leave it behind, even if it costs its weight in gold, lest terrible resentment blow down upon you from the immortals'); frg. 35,3-4 τοῦτου δὲ θέρεως χρῆ | ὀψωνεῖν ἃ πρέπει ταχέως καὶ μὴ περὶ τιμῆς ('during the summer one ought to buy the rights parts of this fish quickly – and don't argue about the price'). Cf. also frg. 6,1, with OLSON · SENS 2000, 38 *ad loc.*

<sup>12</sup> Here I am making the (not unreasonable) assumption that the lost two thirds of the poem were of a piece with those fragments which we do have, and that Arcestratus did not go on to contradict

regrets and displays sudden contradictions in his behaviour.

These inconsistencies can be found throughout his poetry, but are particularly striking in three instances: his use of moral vocabulary to control the behaviour of others; the contradiction of his own 'immoral' positions; and – at the end of the affair – his construction of a narrative of regret for his actions. For example, in the second poem of Book I, Propertius presents a long argument to Cynthia on the evils of cosmetics and the trappings of *luxuria* (I 2,1-8):

*quid iuuat ornato procedere, uita, capillo  
et tenuis Coa ueste mouere sinus,  
aut quid Orontea crines perfundere murra,  
teque peregrinis uendere muneribus,  
naturaeque decus mercato perdere cultu,  
nec sinere in propriis membra nitere bonis?  
crede mihi, non ulla tuae est medicina figurae:  
nudus Amor formam non amat artificem.*

What avails it, my love, to step out with the latest hair-style and to swing a sheer skirt of Coan silk? What avails it to drench your locks with Syrian perfume and to vaunt yourself in foreign finery, to destroy your natural charm with purchased ornament, preventing your figure from displaying its own true merits? Believe me, there is no improving your appearance: Love is naked, and loves not beauty gained by artifice.

The argument here draws extensively on the 'anti-cosmetic' tradition<sup>13</sup>, and the language used by Propertius reflects the conservative origins of this discourse: diaphanous garments are criticised, 'natural' beauty is praised, and the effects of art are disparaged. Later in the same poem the beauty of *pudicitia* alone, amply sufficient for both ancient heroines and modern *puellae*, is underlined (24 *illis ampla satis forma pudicitia*, 26 *uni si qua placet, culta puella sat est*), and contempt is expressed for luxury (32 *taedia dum miserae sint tibi luxuriae*). Propertius may recognise the power of traditional morality, only to reject or defy it with his own behaviour, but is perfectly prepared to use this rejected morality to control the behaviour of Cynthia, whom he fears will be unfaithful to him. There is no parallel in Arcestratus for this sort of contradictory behaviour, who does not insist that others should behave temperately, while rejecting moderate behaviour in his own case.

himself. Certainly the ancient *testimonia* (OLSON - SENS 2000, 1-12), for what they are worth, give no hint in this direction.

<sup>13</sup> For this tradition, see GIBSON 2003, 21-25. For the unresolved dissonance between Prop. I 1 and I 2, see further GIBSON 2007, 56-58, also 90-92.

Similarly in poem III 13, where the elegist begins with a libertine complaint about how much ‘nights of love’ are currently costing the customer in Rome, and we here talk of *avaritia* (1 *avidis ... puellis*), ruin (3 *tantis ... ruinis*), *luxuria* (4 *luxuriae nimium libera facta uia est*) and its products (5-8). But the perversely ‘righteous’ indignation of the lover soon turns into a full frontal moral assault on Rome, since Propertius not only complains of the avarice of *puellae*, but soon widens his complaint to include respectable women, even going so far as to include himself among those who have to endure the morally distasteful sight of *matronae* displaying the spoils of dishonour *nostra per ora* (III 13,9-14):

*haec etiam clausas expugnant arma pudicas,  
 quaeque gerunt fastus, Icarioni, tuos.  
 matrona incedit census induta nepotum  
 et spolia opprobrii nostra per ora trahit.  
 nulla est poscendi, nulla est reuerentia dandi;  
 aut si qua est, pretio tollitur ipsa mora.*

These are the weapons that storm even the cloistered chaste and women who wear the disdain of Penelope. Matrons step forth arrayed in the fortunes of spendthrifts and flaunt the spoils of dishonour before our eyes. There is no shame in asking, no shame in giving in return, or if there be some reluctance, even that is got rid of for a price.

As the poem develops its theme, an unstoppable flood of moralistic sentiment and vocabulary gathers pace alongside<sup>14</sup>. The libertine advocate of love, wine, and other immoderate or extreme behaviour has turned into Cato for the moment. Again, there are no parallels for this sort of behaviour of Arcestratus: he does not advocate libertine or luxurious behaviour for himself in one section of his poem, only to denounce the general moral decadence of society as a whole in another part of the poem. Rather, a consistent position of contempt for the values of ordinary society is maintained throughout the Ἠδύπαιθελα.

The contradictions of Propertius do not only consist in establishing a libertine rule for himself and a more sternly moralistic rule for others, but they extend also to flagrant contradictions in his attitudes to his own behaviour.

<sup>14</sup> Propertius praises marital fidelity, now absent at Rome (15-24); yearns for the Golden Age (25-46); laments the collapse of religion and avarice typical of the modern age (47-58); and ends with a prophecy of Rome’s destruction at the hands of her own prosperity (59-66). For the moralistic sentiment and vocabulary, cf. e.g. *pia turba* (18); *pudor* (20); *hoc genus infidum nuptarum, hic nulla puella | nec fida Euadne nec pia Penelope* (23-24); *desertis cessant sacraria lucis* (47); *uicta ... pietate* (48); *auro pulsa fides, auro uenalia iura, | aurum lex sequitur, mox sine lege pudor* (49-50); *frangitur ipsa suis Roma superba bonis* (60).

In poem II 15 Propertius unveils a libertine manifesto after a night of love spent with Cynthia (II 15,39-48):

*si dabit et multas, fiam immortalis in illis:  
nocte una quiuis uel deus esse potest.  
qualem si cuncti cuperent decurrere uitam  
et pressi multo membra iacere mero,  
non ferrum crudele neque esset bellica nauis,  
nec nostra Actiacum uerteret ossa mare.  
nec totiens propriis circum oppugnata triumphis  
lassa foret crinis soluere Roma suos.  
haec certe merito poterunt laudare minores:  
laeserunt nullos pocula nostra deos.*

If she further gives me many, I will grow immortal in them: a single such night might make any man a god. If all men wished to spend a life like mine and lie with limbs weighed down with deep draughts of wine, there would be no cruel weapons or ships of war, nor would our bones be tossed on Actium's waves, or Rome, so oft beset on every hand by her own conquests, be weary of letting loose her hair in grief. One thing at least with justice shall posterity be able to praise in me: my cups never outraged any of the gods.

Here Propertius declares that if everyone had lived Marcus Antonius' life of wine and love, there would have been no slaughter at Actium<sup>15</sup>. This is the closest that Propertius comes to maintaining the amoral hedonism of Callicles: the immoderate or immoral behaviour of Propertius is declared to be virtuous, in the sense that it avoids the wars and slaughter which displease the gods. But this position is immediately contradicted in the following poem (II 16,35-42):

*'at pudeat'. certe, pudeat! nisi forte, quod aiunt,  
turpis amor surdis auribus esse solet.  
cerne ducem, modo qui fremitu compleuit inani  
Actia damnatis aequora militibus:  
hunc infamis amor uersis dare terga carinis*

<sup>15</sup> On the interpretation of the controversial II 15 and its companion II 16, see, with references to earlier literature, MILLER 2001; GIBSON 2007, 66-69. ENK 1962, 225 *ad loc.* notes an interesting parallel with Alciphron IV 7,6, which suggests that a rather different gloss could be put on the behaviour of Propertius: οὐδὲ εἷς ἐπαίρα ὁμιλῶν τυραννίδας ὄνειροπολεῖ καὶ στασιάζει τὰ κοινά, ἀλλὰ σπάσας τὸν ἑωθινὸν καὶ μεθυσθεὶς εἰς ὥραν τρίτην ἢ τετάρτην ἡρεμεῖ ('no one, when he's with a courtesan, dreams of a tyrant's power or raises sedition in the state; on the contrary, he drains his early-morning beaker and then prolongs his drunken rest until the third or fourth hour'). In context, a courtesan is trying to convince a former lover that she is preferable to the philosopher he has apparently forsaken her for; but might not the parallel also underscore the (ultimate) quietism of the elegist's whole position?

*iussit et extremo quaerere in orbe fugam.  
Caesaris haec uirtus et gloria Caesaris haec est:  
illa, qua uicit, condidit arma manu.*

‘But one should feel shame’. Indeed I should, unless, as the proverb has it, a shameful love is wont to have deaf ears. Look at the leader who lately, amid vain alarms, filled Actium’s bay with his doomed soldiers: a base love made him turn his ships in flight and seek refuge at the ends of the world. Caesar’s merit and Caesar’s glory reside in this: the selfsame hand that conquered, sheathed the sword.

First, the elegist gives some recognition to the values of conventional society: he agrees that he should be ashamed of himself – even if, as he points out, love is deaf to the opinions of conventional society. But such love is nevertheless described as *turpis amor*. Equally deaf to common moral values – so the logic of the poem suggests – was Antonius. Just as Propertius is afflicted by *turpis amor*, so the triumvir suffered from *infamis amor*, and his deafness drove him to disgraceful defeat at Actium. That is to say, had Antonius adhered to conventional values, Actium would never have happened. Contrast with this the explicit argument of the previous poem (II 15,41-44): were everyone to have lived Antonius’s anti-conventional life of wine and love, Actium would never have happened.

As a result, the Calliclean inversion of values found in poem II 15 is immediately reversed in II 16. Archestratus, of course, does not recommend the stealing of fish or the spending of huge sums of money, only to reverse the advice and denounce law-breaking or indulgence in luxury as the source of all of society’s ills. It is thus perhaps then no surprise that Propertius should end his affair with Cynthia – at the end of Book III – with an outpouring of regret. Here Propertius chooses to deploy strongly moralistic language and imply a return to rather more conventional values, as at III 21,33-34 *seu moriar, fato, non turpi fractus amore; | atque erit illa mihi mortis honesta dies* (‘Or if I die, it will be naturally and not laid low by shameful love; and the day of my death will bring me honour’)<sup>16</sup>. The phrase *mortis honesta dies* suggests a return to almost ‘bourgeois’ standards of propriety, with further statements of regret and repentance to come in poem III 24<sup>17</sup>. Nothing comparable, of course, in Archestratus, so it will be no surprise to

<sup>16</sup> For the interpretation of the closing sequence of poems in Propertius Book III, see especially FEAR 2005; cf. GIBSON 2007, 51-52; 61-62.

<sup>17</sup> In III 24 Propertius feels *pudor* (4); declares he has finally achieved what his *patrii ... amici* could not – the end of the affair (9-12); rejoices in his returned sanity and restored health (17 *resipiscimus*; 18 *uulneraque ad sanum nunc coiere mea*; 19 *Mens Bona*); and regrets both that he was a laughing stock at *conuiuia* and his five years servitude to Cynthia (21-24).

learn that while Arcestratus suffered consistent condemnation in antiquity, Propertius is already being praised as a subject fit for imitation by the otherwise deeply conservative Pliny the Younger, just 120 years after the death of the Augustan poet<sup>18</sup>.

Why must Propertius contradict himself in this manner, why must he close his narrative with regret? If he could not maintain a Calliclean position, why not at least an Arcestratan position of consistent contempt for contemporary moral standards, and a consistent contempt for those unlike or beneath him? Such a life would reject moderation for both men and women, would readily contemplate crime as an integral part, would celebrate luxury and financial extravagance, and feel no regrets for this use of one's life. An extreme position, but – as the example of Arcestratus shows – a sustainable one.

One explanation for the differences, at least, between Propertius and Arcestratus must involve the generic inheritance of each. The Greek poet writes in the tradition of Hesiodic didactic and catalogue poetry<sup>19</sup>, and at some level has the subversion of Hesiodic high-mindedness as a consistent generic target. By contrast, not only is the generic inheritance of Roman love elegy considerably more diverse – encompassing epigram, extended narrative elegy, comedy, lyric and pastoral (hardly an exhaustive list) – but the available points of view expressed within and across these forerunners were highly variegated and often mutually contradictory or inconsistent. It is thus, perhaps, no surprise that the differences between a parodic didactic poet and an erotic elegist should be so great. Nevertheless, to rely solely on genre as an explanation is merely to push the question back by one stage: why is Propertius a prisoner of his generic legacies? If he wishes to be subversive, why can he not transcend his 'sources' in this respect?

If we ask ourselves again why Propertius cannot sustain an 'extreme' position, but can only experiment with it or hold it only for a few moments before dropping it, a fresh answer might start from the observation that the maintenance of such positions is fundamentally 'aristocratic'. Pierre Bourdieu has argued that the modern descendants of Callicles – De Sade, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Bataille, Barthes, Foucault – display a 'social aris-

<sup>18</sup> For *testimonia* hostile to Arcestratus from Clearchus and Chrysippus to Justin Martyr, see OLSON - SENS 2000, 3-12; contrast Plin. *epist.* VII 22,1, on the imitation of Propertius by Passenus Paulus: *si elegos eius in manus sumpseris, leges opus tersum molle iucundum, et plane in Properti domo scriptum*. Note here, in advance of an argument advanced later in this paper, the emphasis laid on the equestrian status of Passenus Paulus at *epist.* VI 15,1: *Passennus Paulus, splendidus eques Romanus et in primis eruditus, scribit elegos ... est enim municeps Properti atque etiam inter maiores suos Propertium numerat*.

<sup>19</sup> See OLSON - SENS 2000, xxxv-xliii.

to cratism' in their celebrations of a hedonistic excess designed to defy and transgress the norms of everyday bourgeois behaviour<sup>20</sup>:

[I wished] to highlight the politically ambiguous implications of a certain way of conceiving philosophy ... a vision of philosophy, especially through the exaltation of the works of Nietzsche and or Heidegger, that leads to an *aestheticism* of transgression, to a form of 'radical chic' ... that is extremely ambiguous intellectually and politically, ... the 'Heidegger affair' was for me an opportunity to show that philosophical aestheticism is rooted in a social aristocratism which is itself at the base of a contempt for the social sciences...

If Bourdieu – leaving the Marquis de Sade aside – uses 'aristocratic' in a largely metaphorical sense, in the ancient world we can use the term more literally. The Callicles of Plato's *Gorgias* is part of the old Athenian aristocracy, and if we know of Arcestratus little directly, it is clear on internal evidence that – as the editors of the poem suggest – 'it was directed in the first instance to a relatively restricted group of aristocratic epicures'<sup>21</sup>.

To write a book of love elegies committed to a series of 'extreme' positions – without qualification, compromise or contradiction – would be to write poetry that is fundamentally 'aristocratic' in tone. Or, to put it another way, in order to be truly subversive in Augustan Rome – at least in the purely literary field – must one imitate an 'aristocratic' voice? Of course, 'aristocratic love elegy' sounds almost a contradiction in terms, not least because both Propertius and particularly Ovid lay emphasis on their equestrian origins<sup>22</sup>. But such love elegy would, I suggest, look rather different from what

<sup>20</sup> BOURDIEU - WACQUANT 1992, 154-155; cf. 197 '[sociological / realistic utopianism] looks petty bourgeois, it does not look radical enough. Extremes are always more chic, and the aesthetic dimension of political conduct matters a lot to intellectuals'.

<sup>21</sup> OLSON - SENS 2000, xlvi; cf. xlv, 'Full appreciation of the poem requires an auditor or reader who is profoundly interested in the high-life generally and in fine wood and wine in particular, disdainful of poverty, well-versed in Mediterranean geography, and sophisticated enough to understand the poet's jokes and riddles and to catch his puns and literary allusions ... the culinary ideology implicit in the poem involves a systematic rejection of traditional civic commensality in favour of private, fundamentally secular dining'.

<sup>22</sup> For Propertius, cf. the story told by putting together IV 1,121 *Umbria te notis antiqua Penatibus edit* ('ancient Umbria bore you in an illustrious home'); 1,129 *nam tua cum multi uersarent rura iuueni* ('for whereas [formerly] many a steer ploughed up your acres'); 1,131 *mox ubi bulla rudi dimissast aurea collo* ('next when the golden locket was removed from your innocent neck'). More explicitly Ovid, at (e.g.) *am.* I 3,6-7; III 15,5-6; *trist.* II 89-90; 110ff.; 541-542; IV 10,7-8; *Pont.* IV 8,17-18. The status of Gallus is known from an inscription in Egypt (*ILS* 8995): *C. Cornelius Cn. f. Gallus eques Romanus ... praefectus Alexandriae et Aegypti primus*; while for Tibullus we are dependent on a garbled assertion in the *Vita: eques regalis*, which probably signifies *eques Romanus*. For a full rehearsal of the evidence, see ROSS TAYLOR 1968, 479-482, and the entries for these poets in WHITE 1993, 211-222. For Ovid, see also WHITE 2002, 2-9.

we actually do possess, would be more thoroughly subversive, would sustain extreme positions without contradiction<sup>23</sup>.

### *Propertius and the 'aristocratic' love elegy of Marcus Antonius*

But where to test this claim, where to find this genre of aristocratic love elegy, which has unfortunately failed either to survive or even to exist? It would be interesting to know more about a range of figures, from the archaic elegist Mimnermus, favourite of the ἀκλόαστοι, to Q. Lutatius Catulus, consul of 102 B.C.E. and imitator of Callimachus. But the remains of each are wretchedly small<sup>24</sup>. Instead we might look to the *Life of Marcus Antonius*<sup>25</sup>, where Plutarch virtually puts his own love song for Cleopatra into the mouth of the aristocratic Marcus Antonius, descendant of consuls through both his grandfather and grandmother<sup>26</sup>. In particular, throughout the *Life* Plutarch, while rarely stooping to outright fabrication, routinely conflates or moves events, supplies 'plausible' details and contexts, imaginatively reconstructs speeches and other features of his narrative, and reshapes sources to make them fit his conception of the triumvir<sup>27</sup>. This may frustrate historians, but plays into the hands of a literary critic, since the *literary* possibilities of a character like Antonius – as they suggested themselves to Plutarch – offer us the chance to see what an aristocratic Roman love elegy might have looked like.

<sup>23</sup> In context of the Roman world I use 'aristocrat[ic]' in the accepted sense of consul or descendant of a consul. Of course, one could argue – as historians have repeatedly emphasised – that there was in reality little difference between the senatorial and equestrian ranks of society. But the difference may have been felt more acutely on the inside, as the following analogy suggests. To a European, Canadians and Americans appear – and in many non-trivial senses are – remarkably alike. But to put the question to many Canadians on their differences from Americans is potentially to hear very markedly different answers from a question to many Americans on their differences from Canadians. That is to say, what appears the same when viewed 'objectively' from outside may, under certain conditions, be 'subjectively' re-ordered on the inside by one class so as to produce and maximise differences. And that re-ordering by one class will not always be passed unnoticed by the other. For one Roman consul's acute – and published – sense of his exalted status as a senatorial versifier, cf. Plin. *epist.* V 3, with special attention to the condescending reference to non-senators (including Vergil) at V 3,6.

<sup>24</sup> The remains of the poetry of Catulus comprise ten lines in total: text and commentary at COURTNEY 1993, 70-71; 74-78. For the possibly high status of his contemporary Porcius Licinius, who also wrote erotic verse, see COURTNEY 1993, 75; 82.

<sup>25</sup> We could also look at the only poetry to survive from the classical era written by a woman – the six short elegies of the aristocratic Sulpicia, niece of M. Valerius Messalla Corvinus, where 'the public display of sexual independence on the part of an unmarried female aristocrat runs counter to conventional morality' (*Oxford Classical Dictionary*<sup>3</sup>, s.v. *Sulpicia*). The *Heroides* also offer promising material; cf. Prop. IV 11, where the aristocratic Cornelia speaks.

<sup>26</sup> See PELLING 1988, 117 on the opening paragraphs of the *Life of Marcus Antonius*.

<sup>27</sup> See PELLING 1988, 26-36.

As many critics have noted before now, there are already strong resemblances between Plutarch's Antonius and the persona adopted by Propertius in his elegies: the same libertine devotion to *nox*, *amor* and *uinum*, and the same romantic obsession with death<sup>28</sup>. And, as we have seen, Propertius identifies himself for a moment at least with Antonius in poem II 15 (quoted earlier). But there are some clear divergences between the pair which can be used to suggest the difference between aristocratic love elegy and non-aristocratic love elegy.

Antonius, for example, first falls in love with Cleopatra when she appears on her splendid boat, dressed in all the luxury of Aphrodite, at the river Cydnus, and it is this stunningly luxurious sight which causes him to fall in love<sup>29</sup>. By contrast, Propertius usually feels only anxiety when Cynthia appears dressed in luxurious garments, and begins to adopt the rhetoric of traditional morality, as in poem I 2 (quoted earlier). He cannot share the greater tolerance of *luxuria* evinced by Antonius (and found also in Archestratus). Similarly, in Plutarch's account, Antonius is never depicted, even in his more sober periods, as asking Cleopatra to moderate her drinking or parties. Instead together they form the 'Society of Inimitable Livers' (*Ant.* 28,2 σύνοδος Ἀμιμητοβίων), Cleopatra joins in with Antonius's drinking (*Ant.* 29,1), their dinners remain drunken (*Ant.* 59,4-8) and, at the last, they form the 'Society of Partners in Death' (*Ant.* 71,4):

οὐδέν τι λειπομένην ἐκείνης ἀβρότητι καὶ τρυφαίῃς καὶ πολυτελείαις ...  
καὶ διῆγον εὐπαθοῦντες ἐν δαίπνων περιόδοις.

This new club was just as devoted to sensuality, self-indulgence, and extravagance as the other one ... they all spent their time in a hedonistic round of banquets.

Propertius may declare a manifesto of sex and wine for all in poem II 15, but elsewhere he has doubts about Cynthia joining in. For in poem II 33b,33-34, alarmed by the sight of Cynthia drinking into the small hours, Propertius curses the inventor of wine and inveighs against the corrupting effects of wine and its effect on fidelity between lovers: *uino forma perit, uino corrumpitur aetas*, | *uino saepe suum nescit amica uirum* ('Wine ruins beauty, wine spoils youth, wine oft causes a mistress to mistake her man'). Such

<sup>28</sup> See especially GRIFFIN 1977. For limitations on the identification between the pair, see GIBSON 2007, 53-69.

<sup>29</sup> Plut. *Ant.* 26,2: αὐτὴ δὲ κατέκειτο μὲν ὑπὸ σκιάδι χρυσοπάστω, κεκοσμημένη γραφικῶς ὥσπερ Ἀφροδίτη, παῖδες δὲ τοῖς γραφικοῖς Ἑρῶσιν εἰκασμένοι παρ' ἐκάτερον ἐστῶτες ἐρρίπιζον ('she herself reclined beneath a gold-embroidered canopy, adorned like a painting of Aphrodite, flanked by slave boys, each made to resemble Eros as if in a painting, who cooled her with their fans'). The crowd of onlookers is stunned by this luxurious sight, and so in the sequel is Antonius (*Ant.* 27-29).

moralising sentiments are not part of Plutarch's imaginative reconstruction of Antonius's life. Where aristocratic lovers may tolerate libertine behaviour in both men and women, Propertius will tolerate it only in men (a contradictory position).

Plutarch's Antonius is marked throughout by financial generosity: a feature which is brought out for readers' attention in the key summarizing description of the paired lives of Demetrius and Antonius: *Demetr.* 1,8 ἑρωτικοὶ ποτικοὶ στρατιωτικοὶ μεγαλόδωροι πολυτελεῖς ὑβρισταί ('[both] womanizers, drinkers, fighters, open-handed, extravagant, and arrogant'). And it is kept up in the main text: he is famed for liberality to others with his money (*Ant.* 4,6-9); he revels in conspicuous luxury with Cytheris and her like (*Ant.* 9,7-9), squanders his money on actors, magicians and drunken flatterers (*Ant.* 21,3; cf. 24), spends with Cleopatra 'incredible, disproportionate amounts of money' (ἄπιστόν τινα ποιούμενοι τῶν ἀναλίσκομένων ἀμετρίαν) in the Society of Inimitable Livers (*Ant.* 28,2), and showers on her gifts of amazing – or shocking – generosity (*Ant.* 36,3-4; 58,9). By contrast Propertius – as seen in poem III 13 (quoted above) – often occupies the other extreme. Aristotle observed that the generous or 'liberal' man is prone 'to go to excess in giving' (*EN* 1120b,4-6); but this 'noble' form of excess is clearly not one to which Propertius is vulnerable.

The reactions of both Propertius and Antonius to infidelity are also worth comparing. Plutarch tells us that Antonius reacted furiously to suspicions of his wife Antonia's infidelity with Dolabella by ejecting her from his house (*Ant.* 9,2-3): καὶ τὸ πρᾶγμα βαρέως ἐνεγκών, τήν τε γυναῖκα τῆς οἰκίας ἐξήλασεν ('He was furious about it, threw his wife out of the house...'). And he adds no more than that. If Antonius went mad with anger when he discovered that Antonia had been unfaithful, so too does Propertius with Cynthia, but the elegist super-adds moralising for good measure. For in II 32, Propertius treats the reader to a long sarcastic speech on Cynthia's infidelity and the moral baseness of women in general<sup>30</sup>. Where the aristocratic Antonius confines himself to mere anger, Propertius waxes moralistic.

Finally, in his imaginative reconstruction of the death of Antonius, Plutarch has the triumvir place emphasis on his own manliness, courage and position as commander, and, at the very last, on his qualities and achievements as a Roman (*Ant.* 77,7)<sup>31</sup>:

<sup>30</sup> In Rome – *in tanto stuprorum examine* (41) – the city is more than fortunate *si contra mores una puella facit!* (44); Cynthia is only following Lesbia's example, and if anyone expects Sabine standards in Rome today, he can have only just arrived in the city (47-48); one is more likely to drain the sea than ensure *ut nostrae nolint peccare puellae* (51).

<sup>31</sup> For this aspect, see further PELLING 1988, 305; 307-308; 318 on, respectively, *Plut. Ant.* 76,5-11;

αὐτὸν δὲ μὴ θρηνεῖν ἐπὶ ταῖς ὑστάταις μεταβολαῖς, ἀλλὰ μακαρίζειν ὧν ἔτυχε καλῶν, ἐπιφανέστατος ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος καὶ πλεῖστον ἰσχύσας, καὶ νῦν οὐκ ἀγεννῶς Ῥωμαῖος ὑπὸ Ῥωμαίου κρατηθεῖς.

[He begged her] not to mourn his recent misfortune, but to think of all the good luck he had enjoyed and count him happy; supreme fame and fortune had been his, and a Roman he had now been honourably defeated by a Roman.

The absence of regret or shame for the conventionally ‘disgraceful’ aspects of his life is a notable feature of this romantic death scene. By contrast, to mark his farewell to love at the end of Book III, Propertius chooses to deploy strongly moralistic language and imply a return to rather more conventional values. Propertius ‘repents’, Antonius will not.

In sum, if we examine Antonius’s ‘love song’ for Cleopatra, we find a sustained contempt for the moral standards of normal society – through indulgence in luxury, drinking, and self-destructive financial acts – without either instances of Propertian self-contradiction or expressions of regret. To write a consistently subversive love elegy – without contradiction or regret – it is perhaps necessary to adopt an aristocratic tone. Quite apart from the political constraints placed on Propertius in post-Actian Rome, is this a step that love elegy was simply unwilling to make? Would this ‘equestrian’ genre have no truck with the attitudes and behaviour of Rome’s old elite? It is not irrelevant to add that the restricted circulation and appeal of socially and morally ‘exclusive’ literature cannot have had many attractions for an elegist who was hungry for fame and for readers (e.g. III 1; 3; 9). The very limited readership won by the aristocratic and consistently contemptuous Arcestratus tells its own cautionary story to poets in search of everlasting poetic renown<sup>32</sup>.

### *After Propertius*

Much of this paper has been devoted to arguing the point that one should not overestimate the subversiveness of Roman love elegy, above all by comparing the genre in its Propertian manifestation to more apparently threatening utterances, stances and texts originating in the Greek world. It is time now, briefly, to swing the direction of that gaze, and view Propertius from the vantage point of his successors in the Roman elegiac tradition. Seen from

77,7; 84,6. Contrast Cleopatra’s final speech over Antonius’s tomb (not found in any other source and likewise imaginatively reconstructed), which does not emphasise Antonius’s qualities, but in instead concentrates on shared sufferings of the lovers and the prospect of being united in death; for the speech’s elegiac ethos in this respect, see PELLING 1988, 316-318 on Plut. *Ant.* 84,4-7.

<sup>32</sup> See OLSON - SENS 2000, xliii-xlvi for the history of the reception of Arcestratus.

this angle, Propertius emerges, by comparison, as at least an unreconciled voice in Roman literature. For Propertius' alienation and opposition, repeatedly cancelled, contradicted or qualified as they are, do not constitute an implied assent or reconciliation. Rather, the elegist is caught at a moment of stasis, of internal civil war. After Propertius, elegy would begin its journey out of internal conflict, and – in Ovid's hands – would initiate a kind of reconciliation with society. In the words of Gianpiero Rosati on the *Amores*, 'by renouncing ... conflicting ideological ambitions, recovering a non-antithetical relationship with traditional morals, refusing to present elegy as an antagonistic way of life, and carving out a "free zone" for its socio-cultural universe, Ovid created for elegy a degree of compatibility with normal social life'<sup>33</sup>. And where Ovid showed the way his successors followed, as we can see from the polite remains of 'elegy after Elegy', both as represented by the *Consolatio ad Liviam*, *Elegiae in Maecenatem* and the elegies of Pliny the Younger and his circle, and as can be glimpsed in the epithalamium composed for the elegist Arruntius Stella by Statius in his *Silvae*<sup>34</sup>.

There is one ruffle in this story of a path from the (cancelled) opposition of Propertius to elegy's full reconciliation with society in early imperial times: the *Ars Amatoria*. Yet this exception, as I shall shortly suggest, can be used to suggest that we witness, at last, elegy's adoption of an 'aristocratic' attitude – only to be punished for it immediately. The scandal of Ovid's exile for *carmen et error* – where the *error* might in any case be more truly the cause for relegation than the *carmen*<sup>35</sup> – has often blinded critics to the reconciliations with 'normal' society effected in the poem. In earlier elegy, for example, the life of love and civil life were strongly opposed: lawyers and government officials were excluded from the fun (e.g. Prop. I 6; Ov. *am.* I 15). But the *Ars* seeks rather to include such figures within its ambit (I 79-88; III 525-554), even if they are ultimately made to appear a second best to love poets<sup>36</sup>. Conversely, it had been long asserted that Love is a special arena where the 'normal rules' of society do not apply (Plato *Symp.* 182e-183c). At several places in the *Ars Amatoria*, Ovid appears to be trying to make a related point (often as a coda to some piece of shocking instruction just offered): the advice which he gives on gift giving or deception is not

<sup>33</sup> ROSATI 2005, 134; cf. esp. LABATE 1984. This is a view more common in Italy than in the world of Anglophone criticism of elegy, and is one with which I have much sympathy. The reasons why Anglophone criticism insists on emphasising the subversive elements of Ovidian elegy – and often ignores elements which imply a greater ease with conventional society – would make an interesting study in themselves.

<sup>34</sup> On all these texts, see ROSATI 2005, 135-143.

<sup>35</sup> See GREEN 1982; GOOLD 1983.

<sup>36</sup> See further GIBSON 2007, 72-86, drawing on LABATE 1984.

to be applied outside the erotic arena to 'normal' social intercourse (e.g. I 583-588; 641-644; 739ff.; II 271-272)<sup>37</sup>. An illuminating parallel is suggested by Mario Labate<sup>38</sup>, who notes a connection with the special status awarded the sphere of electoral competition. Love and electioneering are separated from the rules of normal society, and constitute arenas where behaviour that would elsewhere provoke outrage – such as simulation, ingratiating and flattery – are explicitly condoned (as for electioneering at [Q. Cic.] *pet.* 42). But, crucially, both are arenas contained within the broader ambit of society, rather than being set up in opposition to it, and are not meant to threaten society's operation.

The one area in which the *Ars* does threaten society's operation is of course in its constant flirtation with adultery, and its restless drawing of attention to moments when the poet threatens to contravene the spirit or the letter of the *lex Iulia de adulteriis coercendis*<sup>39</sup>. In fact Ovid's insistence elsewhere in the poem that established and conventional ethics remain unaffected by his teaching serves to mark out the *lex Iulia* and its promulgator as a special target for malicious irony. There must be, implies Ovid, no transfer of the customarily unscrupulous and unethical behaviour of the lover into the 'normal' sphere of conventional society – except in the case of the *lex Iulia* and its severe curtailment of sexual behaviour. Many of the established elite in Rome, indeed, can only have found Augustus' revolutionary sexual laws unforgivably intrusive on their traditional freedoms<sup>40</sup>.

The determination of the *Ars* to mock and flout these limiting laws – playfully, but without cancellation or contradiction – represents perhaps a piece of traditional aristocratic *hauteur* and contempt for 'rules'. The equestrian Ovid would shortly pay for this piece of upper-class 'arrogance' in a way that the more thoroughly contradictory Propertius never had.

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<sup>37</sup> See LABATE 1984, 97-120, who points out that these codas have often been excised from the text largely on the ground of modern ideas about contextual (in)congruity, rather than on textual considerations of transmission, language and style. See also GIBSON 2009.

<sup>38</sup> LABATE 1984, 225-226.

<sup>39</sup> See (e.g.) SHARROCK 1994; GIBSON 2003, 25-37, with references to earlier literature.

<sup>40</sup> GIBSON 2003, 31-32; 334-335.

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