POETIC RESPONSES TO THE BATTLE OF ACTIUM:

A STUDY OF HORACE, VERGIL, AND PROPERTIUS

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the various approaches taken by Horace, Vergil and Propertius towards the Battle of Actium, the event which upset the balance of power at Rome in favour of Octavian, the future Augustus. My intention is to view the battle from a poetic perspective, through the eyes of the poets in question, in order to discover how they decided to take on this subject in their work and how the Actium poems fit into the grand scheme of each author's *ars poetica*. Initially, the Battle of Actium would seem to be a subject not conducive to the poets' characteristic styles and genres, yet all three did give conspicuous attention to the event. In this thesis I attempt to resolve this discrepancy.

In my Introduction I address briefly the *recusatio*, the poetic convention that serves as the crux to the thesis in that the poets attempt to find a way to treat Actium without violating the "rules" they have set out for themselves in their refusals to compose poetry with a military character. Chapter One provides the historical background to the battle, focusing primarily on the rise of Octavian and the fall of Antony and Cleopatra. The struggle begins in 44 B.C. when both Octavian and Antony stepped forth to establish themselves as the rightful successor to Julius Caesar. In Chapter Two I discuss the problem of the *recusatio* in greater detail and show what exactly are these "rules" by which the poets feel obliged to abide, tracing the convention as it appears well before Actium in the poetry of Vergil up to its later use in Horace and Propertius.

From Chapters Three to Six I examine the actual poems directly concerned with Actium, studying each poet individually and taking note of the influences one had upon his colleagues. I begin in Chapter Three with a look at Horace, whose Actium poems were the

first to appear among the three poets in my study. Two chapters, Four and Six, are devoted to Propertius, since his Actium poems span a period of time that is interrupted by the poetic renditions of Actium first by Horace and then by Vergil. In Chapter Five I discuss Vergil's treatment of Actium in the *Aeneid*, in light of his earlier poetry, the *Eclogues* and *Georgics*. My Conclusion provides a short summary of my arguments and highlights the similarities and contrasts among the three poets in their efforts to incorporate Actium into their work.

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DEDICATION

For my mother and father

"It is not in vain that the farmer remembers and repeats the few Latin words which he has heard."

Henry David Thoreau

INTRODUCTION

"Caesar and his battles," cries Horace, "are the subjects for historians, not poets" (*Ode* 2.12.9-2). "Kings and battles do not suit the style of the pastoral poet" (*Eclogue* 6.3-5), insists a young Vergil behind the transparent mask of one his characters in the *Eclogues*. "I sing of love, not war" (*Elegy* 4.1.135) is the message delivered by Propertius throughout his *Elegies*.[1] The *recusatio*, or refusal poem, is a common convention of the Augustan poets; and it was employed often by them at various stages in their careers.[2] To sing of mighty Caesar's *facta* and *proelia*, it was politely maintained, would be a task beyond their craft, nor would it suit their chosen genres of poetry.[3] They do concede that to sing of Augustus is possible, and they explain how it should be done. It would demand a thundering voice, a voice equal to the power of a poet like Homer, Pindar or Ennius. But that elevation of style, they maintain, remains beyond their humble talents.[4]

It is clear that when the *recusationes* mention the possibility of celebrating the name of Augustus, the poets, for the most part, are referring to his military successes. The words employed—*facta, bella, pugnae, proelia, res* —all mean the same thing. They represent the milestones of Augustus' illustrious career. Eventually, Horace, Vergil and Propertius do compose their versions of the greatest of these battles, shunning for the occasion their former arguments of poetic inadequacy and stylistic appropriateness. The battle of Actium is celebrated in some of the most famous poems of the whole Augustan corpus. Horace's Cleopatra Ode is certainly a perennial favourite from his collection of *Odes*, while the treatment by Propertius of Actium in *Elegy* 4.6 is currently the focus of much scholarly attention. Vergil saved his only explicit reference to the battle for his ecphrasis of the

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[1] The English quotation is a paraphrase of the cited works. These particular verses are discussed below

[2] For other *recusatio* poems, see Horace *Odes* 1.6, 4.2, *Satire* 2.1; Propertius *Elegies* 2.1, 2.10, 3.1, 3.1, 3.3, 3.9; Vergil *Eclogues* 8.9-10, *Georgics* 3.1-49. Most of these poems are discussed below

[3] Although the idea behind the *recusatio* derives from a common source, studies tend to focus on the *recusatio qua* each individual author. For Horace, see Smith (1968) 56-65 and Reckford (1959) 195-208. For Vergil the best article is by Clausen (1964) 181-190, reworked in Clausen (1985) 313-319. Concerning Propertius and the *recusatio* there has been much discussion. For example, Sullivan (1976) 123 believes "that the *recusatio* is an integral part of Propertius' poetry and is used by him in more subtle and pervasive ways than by any other contemporary poet." A similar argument is offered by Stahl (1985). I refer again to the *recusatio* in greater detail in my chapter 3.

[4] For the comparison to Pindar, Horace (*Ode* 4.2.25-32); for Ennius, Vergil (*Georgics* 3.8-9); for Homer, Propertius (*Elegy* 2.34).

shield of Aeneas in Book 8 of the *Aeneid.* These poems and a few others deal with the subject of the battle of Actium, Augustus' crowning achievement as last victor of the Roman Republic and as the harbinger of long-awaited peace. In this thesis I am not overly concerned with historical questions such as Augustan poetry's propaganda value, or the real vs fictional content of the poems under scrutiny, although these themes do not escape my attention. The poems are approached from a literary perspective. Discussion focuses on the poets' attempts to find an appropriate way to include Actium in their poetry. My object is to determine how Horace, Vergil and Propertius can write successfully on a subject which they had originally avoided for ostensible reasons of inability, distaste and disinterest.

The Actium poems reveal two basic approaches that had already been well developed by the propagandists of the triumviral period.[1] Reference to the battle focuses on the main characters; Octavian and Antony had been in conflict with each other almost immediately after the death of Caesar. Cleopatra, who also figures prominently in the Actium poems, did not enter the scene historically speaking until about 41 B.C., after the rivalry between Octavian and Antony had been made manifest. In this case, her earlier affair with Julius Caesar does not really count . It had been well known, but not scandalous in the way her affair with Antony turned out to be. The setting for their confrontation is the sea off the coast of Actium, near where Antony and his troops had made their camp for the summer of 31 B.C. On September 2nd of that year, the two sides met. The details of the battle are obscure beyond the fact that Octavian emerged as the victor, Antony and Cleopatra fled in shame, only to die within the following year. Octavian became Augustus, and the Golden Age, the *Pax Romana*, began.

From this scene, the poetic license begins: Octavian is depicted as the conqueror/general *par excellence*, while Antony and Cleopatra, as the losers, become far more base and despicable than the true story might allow. They become villains brought to destruction by their own moral depravity and by a superior warrior. On the one side, Octavian is a saviour, blessed by the gods and supported by his countrymen. Fate has

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[1] The most thorough treatment of the propaganda in this period is by Scott (1929) 133-141 and again (1933) 7-49, both of which are valuable studies for anyone dealing with the final stages of the Civil Wars. Antony's propaganda, which is good to know, is collected and discussed by Huzar (1982) 639-657 and Charlesworth (1933) 172-177. Geiger (1980) 112-114 offers a minor contribution. The chapter "Rival Images" in P. Zanker (1986) is useful for the visual aspect of propaganda; for example buildings, statuary . and coinage. For a look at Augustus' *Memoirs* and *Res Gestae* as propaganda, see Yavetz (1984) 1-32.

decreed his victory. As a descendant of Aeneas and Hector, he is the rightful heir to a grand destiny, the resurgence of Troy. He represents the forces of liberty, justice and Roman virtue. By his will, Rome has been swept from the perils of slavery and discord; as a result, the world has become his to rule. On the other side, Antony, the prodigal son of Rome, has sacrificed his reputation for a life of debauchery and Oriental extravagance. He has betrayed his native land and succumbed to the barbarian enchantress, Cleopatra, queen of Egypt, the woman who swore that one day she would subjugate all of Rome under her sway.

The rivalry between Octavian and Antony, with Cleopatra as the spoiler (who brought down maybe the better man) is one of the greatest stories in history, even before Shakespeare. The tragic love affair of Antony and Cleopatra has been called the best anecdote of all time by one modern writer.[1] To match the legendary showdown at Actium, we have three of the greatest Latin poets in Rome as witnesses to this particular period of history. The poets claimed, however, that such an event was only suitable for epic. This prompts the various responses given in the *recusationes*. Besides his unwarlike disposition, Horace contends that the his modest talents have forbidden him from aspiring to the higher forms of poetry which Actium would demand. He prefers to write about banquets and wine instead. Propertius makes a similar case for himself. He has made his name as a love-poet. His argument is even more resistant: love poetry, he says, is just as important as epic. Why write on the battles of Augustus when he can write poetry that rivals the works of Homer? Almost as an aside, he mentions in one of his elegies that if he could write an epic, it would surely focus on those battles, including Actium, but this is not a viable option for him as long as his calling as a love-poet remains valid. For Vergil, there is more potential. His *Eclogues* and *Georgics* reveal an enthusiasm for a loftier strain of poetry which will include Augustus, but not necessarily as a military hero.

At the same time that the poets offer promises and refusals, they are also striving to become pioneers in their respective genres. Of their originality and expertise in the kind of poetry which they have chosen for themselves they are fiercely proud. Propertius writes of breaking new ground in elegy and becoming the Roman Callimachus. Horace refers to himself as *princeps* in his accomplishments. With a little more self-effacement than his coevals, Vergil expresses his dissatisfaction with the current subjects available to him, and

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[1] Aristides (1992) 176.

hopes that the *pugnata Caesaris* will open up a range of poetic possibilities. The battle of Actium provides the poets with a new challenge. Vergil will include Actium as an integral, if small, part of his epic. Propertius and Horace must decide how to include a subject worthy of epic in lyrical and elegiac poetry without betraying the loyalty they have professed towards those genres.

That Horace finds such an event better tailored to historians, and that all three stipulate the need for a higher form of poetry in order to treat the subject appropriately, are indicative of the approach each poet would eventually adopt towards a poetic account of Actium. When the Augustans poeticize the battle of Actium in their respective genres of lyric, elegy, and epic, the effect is, we might say, one of "breeding lilacs out of the dead land." In other words, before we read the Augustan poets' handling of political and/or military events, and the personalities behind those events, it is helpful, if not necessary, to be mindful that poets make for poor historians. Rather, we expect and undoubtedly appreciate an embellishment or a twisting, oftentimes a suppression of the facts. Because the poet's craft involves the development of themes within a select form, within a select style, tone and literary tradition, we may be rightly sceptical of that poet's commitment to historical truth—if that is even a priority at all, and certainly it is not in the case of the Augustan poets.

Nonetheless, the battle of Actium was, above all, the most important victory in the career of Augustus; its historical value cannot be simply brushed aside. As well, the era of the Civil Wars is crucial to each poet's definition of his "poetic creed", which in turn, determines the character of the Actium poems. A familiarity with the period leading up to and including Actium will allow us to recognize how certain poetic themes unfold from the historical reality. Therefore, a cursory look at the period 44-30 B.C., and some of the attempted revisions and colouring of events, along with the development of key personalities, particularly Augustus, Antony and Cleopatra, will help to place Actium in its proper context, not as an historical phenomenon, but instead, as a source of inspiration for poetry conducive to the styles and genres of the authors. Having established this background, we can then turn to the poets themselves and discover how they met the challenge posed to them by the event that made Augustus the first ruler of the Principate.

CHAPTER ONE: THE HISTORICAL VIEW

Like Vergil in his proem to the third *Georgic* and Horace in his *Satire* 2.1, Propertius measures the greatness of Augustus by military criteria. In a poem addressed to his patron Maecenas, Propertius nicely encapsulates the rise of Octavian in terms of his military achievements. The period 44-30 B.C. is described as one of a series of successful wars won by the Emperor in his younger days. In this instance, Propertius makes it quite obvious that if the years 44-30 B.C. are to be detailed in verse, then they must be seen as one victory after another—victories which can be mentioned alongside such mythical events as the war of the Titans, the Theban epic cycle, and the Trojan War:

quod mihi si tantum, Maecenas, fata dedissent,
ut possem heroas ducere in arma manus,
non ego Titanas canerem, non Ossan Olympo
impositam, ut caeli Pelion esset iter,
non veteres Thebas, nec Pergama nomen Homeri,
Xerxis et imperio bina coisse vada,
regnave prima Remi aut animos Carthaginis altae,
Cimbrorumque minas et benefacta Mari:
illaque resque tui memorarem Caesaris, et tu
Caesare sub magno cura secunda fores.
nam quotiens Mutinam aut civilia busta Philippos
aut canerem Siculae classica bella fugae,
eversosque focos antiquae gentis Etruscae,
et Ptolomaeei litora capta Phari,
aut canerem Aegyptum et Nilum, cum atratus in urbem
septem captivis debilis ibat aquis,
aut regum auratis circumdata colla catenis,
Actiaque in Sacra currere rostra Via;
te mea Musa illis semper contexeret armis,
et sumpta et posita pace fidele caput.
(*Elegy* 2.1.17-30)

Here Propertius has correctly listed all the major battles of the Civil Wars: Mutina, Philippi, Sicily, Perusia, and finally Actium, which also accounts for the fall of Cleopatra, hence the mention of Egypt and the Nile. Other important events like the political wrangling of the day, the proscriptions, or the various treaties and alliances are apparently of little concern to the poet seeking themes for glorification.

The campaign at Mutina occurred in April 43 B.C. Octavian was given legal right by the Senate to accompany the consuls Hirtius and Pansa in assisting the governor of Cisalpine Gaul, Decimus Brutus, against Antony, who had been recently declared a public enemy by decree of the Senate. It was Octavian's first chance to prove himself as a valiant warrior.

He failed miserably. There were two main confrontations: Octavian missed the first one and was defeated by Antony in the other, although, unlike the two consuls, he survived, which had been all the achievement needed for the moment. In his own condensed account, Augustus describes Mutina as his first victory on the field in the defence of the Republic's liberty, which had been threatened, he adds, by what he calls, a "faction",[1] led by Antony.

After Mutina, Octavian returned to Rome as consul. There he had obtained, through legal processes, confirmation of his inheritance from Caesar. The tyrannicides were at this time condemned as enemies of the State. Octavian used this latest law, the *lex Pedia*, as a pretext to remain in command of his legions, arguing that there were conspirators abroad with legions of their own; now they had to be stopped. Heading north from Rome, he met Antony and Lepidus, who together with him, formed the Second Triumvirate. Octavian and Antony became allies in the same cause, which was to avenge the death of Caesar, who had lately been declared a god in one of the first acts of the triumvirate. There was little doubt that the alliance was bound to dissolve; but the two men were not strong enough individually to take on the Republican armies in the East, or each other. So, for the time being, they remained on good terms. From Bononia in northern Italy where the triumvirate was established, Antony and Octavian marched eastward to confront the two main conspirators, Brutus and Cassius.

At Philippi in the late autumn of 42 B.C., the Republican forces were forced to capitulate after the unnecessarily tragic deaths of their commanders rather than because of a superior foe. Again, Octavian's role in the whole affair was rather ignominious. He had been sick at the time and, at one point, he took flight while the forces of Brutus overran his camp. Antony emerged as the true hero. However, there are some accounts from the ancient historians that attempt to slight the achievement of Antony.[2] In the Augustan record left for posterity, Octavian takes full credit for the victory, leaving Antony's name out completely.[3]

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[1] *Res Gestae* 1. *per quem rem publicam (do)minatione factionis oppressam / in libertatem vindica(vi).* Of course, he fails to mention that his actions were completely illegal: see Brunt-Moore (1967) *ad. loc.*

[2] Plutarch *Ant.* 22.2, mentions a story that Antony had missed the battle and only arrived on the scene once the enemy had been routed. Florus 2.17.10 attributes this absence to fear and cowardice. Pelling (1988) 172 suspects that the original source for this slander may have been either Livy or Messala.

[3] *Res Gestae* 2. *Qui parentem meum (interfecer)un(t, eo)s in exilium expuli iudiciis legi / timis ultus eorum (fa)cin(us, e)t postea bellum inferentis rei publicae / vici b(is a)cie.*

Augustus may well have winced at the mention of Perusia by Propertius as a moment of glory equal to Philippi or Actium.[1] That war had been largely unpopular among Italians for the destruction it caused on their own soil. Octavian's army besieged the town, which had been occupied by Antonian forces under Antony's wife Fulvia and brother Lucius. The war ended with Persusia razed to the ground in an inferno, though not through any fault of Octavian himself it seems, according to the ancient sources.[2] We might, however, expect such a bold reminder from Propertius; he was a native son of Etruria, and the war at Perusia was undoubtedly imprinted on his memory of the years under the triumvirate. In his first book of *Elegies*, he had already devoted two small poems to the subject, and one of them even makes reference to Octavian's presence in the fighting (*Elegy* 1.21.7). Nonetheless, it still would have been considered a victory by Octavian over Antonian forces, and therefore, part of his overall defeat of Antony, which began with Mutina and ended with Actium.

By the *Siculae classica bella fugae* , Propertius is referring to the war waged by Octavian against Sextus Pompeius, who had given Octavian considerable troubles in the years from 39 B.C. to his final downfall in 36 B.C. Sextus had won two major victories at sea, during which time the fleet under Octavian was destroyed. But with the help of the very capable Agrippa, Octavian was able to overcome his initial losses and eventually defeat the son of Pompey the Great off the northern tip of Sicily near Naulochus in the first week of September 36 B.C.

The battle of Actium serves as the dramatic climax where Octavian does more than simply eliminate Antony. According to Propertius, the conquest of Egypt is conflated with the battle as well. That is, the personification of the Nile, along with kings led in golden shackles, followed by the prows of the ships of Antony at Actium, are all described by Propertius as part of the triumphal procession for what might seem to be the same victory.

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[1] Propertius' mention of Perusia has led many critics to believe that it is an underhanded swipe against Octavian. For this argument, see Stahl (1985) 165 and 346 n.45. On the other hand, Horace could freely write a poem about his days at Philippi and the disastrous results of the battle (*Ode* 2.7). Commentators have referred to the tastelessness of that poem. See Nisbet-Hubbard (1978) 108-109; but no one would ever talk of a subversive Horace.

[2] Velleius 2.74.4, Appian 5.49. The fire was alleged to have been set by a Macedonian, Cestius, in a fit of rage.

Horace takes the same approach in his Cleopatra Ode.[1] In that poem, Cleopatra flees Actium only to arrive at Alexandria to see her palace in ruins with little distinction as to the actual time that has elapsed between these two separate occurrences:

...sed minuit furorem

vix una sospes navis ab ignibus
mentemque lymphatam Mareotico
redigit in veros timores
Caesar, ab Italia volantem

remis ad urgens...

ausa et iacentem visere regiam
vultu sereno.
(*Ode* 1.37.12-17, 24-25)

Upon his return from the East, Octavian celebrated a triple triumph in 29 B.C. to commemorate the three victories of Illyricum, Actium and Alexandria. This would explain Propertius' conflation in his poem as well. It is interesting to note that Propertius does not bother to include Illyricum as an exploit worthy of mention in his poem. The campaign was not as important as its inclusion in the triple triumph would seem to indicate. Rather, it was little more than a two-year (35-33 B.C.) exercise for Octavian and his new recruits in preparation for the showdown at Actium, as modern historians have pointed out.[2] With this merging of the defeat of Antony and Cleopatra at Actium and Alexandria, Propertius' intent in his poem mirrors Octavian's strategy of the triple triumph; the single victory of Actium receives extra glory in the celebrants' eyes, and it becomes one of the most decisive battles in Roman history, the one in which Octavian saved all Italy from the Egyptian menace, and also the one from which Rome was transformed from a Republic to the Principate.

Such are the great *facta* of the career that projected Octavian to the head of the Roman State as one poet would have us know them, and which are judged to be worthy of an epic treatment. The battles, however, do not reveal all that much about the characters involved, other than their military reputations. The stories and events between the battles provide the

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[1] For an explanation of how Horace speeds up the course of events beyond historical accuracy, see Nisbet-Hubbard (1970) 408-409.

[2] See Carter (1982) 108, and Syme (1939) 240. Carter says the campaign provided exercise for the troops, while Syme suggests that it was an opportunity for Octavian to prove himself finally as a valiant and brave general.

real inspirational material which the poets could exploit for their accounts of the battle. When the Augustan poets come to celebrate Actium in their work, they include several important details, which had become attached to the major characters as Octavian made his rise and Antony and Cleopatra suffered their decline and fall. The drama begins shortly after the death of Julius Caesar, when Antony and Octavian first find themselves at loggerheads.

Octavian's primary *raison d'être* in the early years of his public career was undoubtedly that of the *Caesaris ultor*. Caesar's name alone commanded a considerable following, both from the legions and the general populace. There was the appearance of a comet during the games held in honour of Caesar's memory in July 44 B.C., *ludi victoriae Caesaris*. The comet was believed to be evidence of Caesar's ascent to the threshold of Olympus, but, as Pliny the Elder remarked, Octavian inwardly took the *Julium sidus* as confirmation by the gods of his own sparkling destiny (Pliny *N.H.*2.93).[1] Others perceived it as the sign announcing the beginning of a new age, to which Vergil alludes in his fourth *Eclogue*, and which was to be the age of Apollo Helios; but how seriously this was taken cannot be known.[2] The comet, then, provided all kinds of opportunities for the promotion of Octavian's standing as an extraordinary individual among the Roman people. In any case, the comet and the name of Caesar worked to his advantage. Antony's loyalty and friendship to Caesar were undermined by the more potent claims of Caesar's son and rightful heir. Before Philippi, Caesar's ghost was reported to have been seen offering his best wishes for the Caesarians in battle against his murderers, Brutus and Cassius (Suetonius *Aug.*96.1). It is clear that Octavian had much to gain from Caesar's divinity as well. His relationship with the deified Julius would receive more attention with greater implications as the end of the wars approached.

The mandate to avenge Caesar's death was virtually nullified after the battle of Philippi in 42 B.C. There were still conspirators at large, and they were to be retrieved for

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[1] See Coleman (1977)*ad.loc.* (*Eclogue* 4.10). Syme (1939) 218, mentions the coinage of 43 B.C. bearing symbols of the Golden Age on them.

[2] Nisbet-Hubbard (1970) 162-163, commenting on *Ode* 1.12.47 in which the *Julium sidus* is mentioned argue that the comet is meant to glorify Augustus, not Caesar--who is, for the most part, gently ignored in the later 20's B.C. onward; see Syme (1939) 316f. Ross Taylor (1931) 90-92 discusses the significance of the star in connexion with the beginning of a new age. Tiberius issued coins depicting a star over Augustus' head. For a full discussion of the *Julium sidus* and its appearance on coinage and statuary see Weinstock (1971) 370-384. Weinstock also points out that the star had connexions with Alexander the Great, who obviously held appeal for successful Roman generals.

punishment as late as 30 B.C., but these men, unlike Brutus and Cassius with their scores of legions and their Senatorial support, were reduced to the status of fugitives, powerless and of no threat to either the Republic or those who sought to dominate it. When Octavian returned to Rome after Philippi, he began the odious task of land confiscations and redistribution. Neither the landowners nor the veterans were satisfied with the results. Then followed Perusia; his popularity was beginning to slip. At one point during the war with Sextus, a hostile mob almost stoned Octavian to death. He was rescued by Antony (Appian 5.68, Dio 48.31.6). The name of Caesar, which had, on a surface level, kept Octavian aloof from the contest to become the new master of Rome, had largely exhausted its purpose and immediate appeal. From the time when he entered into the war with Sextus until the battle of Actium, Octavian engaged himself in activities and plans tailored to redefining his image—without, however, forsaking his connexion to his father, the god.

The war with Sextus (39-36 B.C.) was effectively the turning point in Octavian's rise from young, unknown upstart to Rome's first citizen. By the time of this war, the empire had already been divided in two—this at the treaty of Brundisium in September 40 B.C. Octavian was given control of the West, and Antony, who would return to Italy only once more in his life (in 37 B.C.), the East.[1] For reasons of violating the treaty of Misenum, at which Sextus replaced Lepidus as the third leading man in Rome, Antony was blamed for incurring the rancour of Sextus, and thus triggering the Sicilian War.[2] A minor charge really; as Dio observes, war would have resulted even without excuses, which were, at any rate, specious (Dio 48.45.5). However, Octavian found that the real key to success lay not in the attacks against his opponents like Antony, but in the business of self-promotion. Upon the defeat of Sextus, Octavian elevated his grandeur to new heights. Sextus had been quite popular in Rome, and his execution was condemned by the mob (Velleius 2.79.6), but its anger was mitigated by Octavian's message that the Civil Wars had come to an end. There had been celebrations in varying degrees of enthusiasm for previous declarations of this sort: Mutina, Philippi, and the treaties, Brundisium and Misenum. One might think that the populace would have realized the futility of peace with more than one man in control; indeed, there were some sceptics who regarded all the pomp and ceremony whipped up by Octavian as a ploy to gain favour at the expense of his rivals, but these

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[1] For all the details of the treaty, see Syme (1939) 217.

[2] Appian 5.77-80; Scott (1933) 29-39.

dissenters were exceptional (Dio 49.15.4-5). The majority in Rome and throughout the countryside rejoiced. Too many people had suffered for too long; they were weary of destruction and strife by their own kind. Therefore they believed. Octavian was offered several honours, some of which he graciously refused. Part of Appian's account describes the scene at Rome in the wake of Octavian's victory:

> When he [Octavian] arrived at Rome the Senate voted him unbounded honours, giving him the privilege of accepting all, or such as he chose. They and the people went out at a long distance to meet him, wearing garlands on their heads, and escorted him, when he arrived, first to the temples, and then from the temples to his house. The next day he made speeches to the Senate and the people, recounting his exploits and his policy from the beginning to the present time. These speeches he wrote down and published them in pamphlet form. He proclaimed peace and good will, said that the civil wars were ended, remitted the unpaid taxes, and released the farmers of the revenue and the holders of public leases from what they owed. Of the honours voted to him, he accepted an ovation and annual solemnities on the days of his victories, and a golden image to be erected in the forum, with the garb he wore when he entered the city, to stand on a column covered with the beaks of captured ships. There the image was placed bearing the inscription:
> "PEACE, LONG DISTURBED, HE RE-ESTABLISHED ON LAND AND SEA."
> (Appian 5.130, trans. H. White).

The steps taken by Octavian to ensure the façade of peace are important to bear in mind when considering the implications of Actium, and when reading the Actium poems of the Augustans. In order to stress the end of the Civil Wars, Octavian not only published his closing remarks on the matter, he also collected and burned much of the literature concerning the previous years of the triumviral period, and made promises to restore the Republic if Antony would agree (Appian 5.132). The bad memories were to be forgotten officially. Octavian advertised, in this moment of relief, that he was no longer a rival for control of the state, but a saviour and protector of the people, and the man who returned peace to Rome. We shall see this same image of Octavian as peacemaker reappear after the battle of Actium as well.

As part of the restoration of order, Octavian also commissioned one of his admirals, Calvisius Sabinus, to rid the countryside of bandits and brigands. Moreover, Sextus' slaves, who had been given freedom under the pact of Misenum, were retrieved and

returned to their original owners.[1] In the *Res Gestae*, the war is summed up as simply the purging of the land and sea of pirates, robbers and runaway slaves, thereby liberating Italy.[2] Sextus hardly deserves the title of "pirate", but that is how Octavian would present him to posterity, a lead which Horace takes up in his *Epode* 9:

> *ut nuper, actus cum freto Neptunius*
> *dux fugit ustis navibus*
> *minatus urbi vincla, quae detraxerat*
> *servis amicus perfidis.*
> (*Epode* 9.8-11).[3]

The maligning of a rival's adherents would also be useful in vilifying the character of Cleopatra upon her entry into the focus of attack. Nor will this strategy escape the attention of the poets, as we shall see, when they describe her in their poetry.

The inscription which Appian quotes (above) in Greek contains the significant phrase, more familiar to Latin readers as *terra marique*. As Arnaldo Momigliano has pointed out, the phrase in Greek was originally part of a formula used in Hellenistic inscriptions. It eventually made its way into Roman inscriptions such as the one quoted by Appian, but with a slight change of meaning. In the Hellenistic sense, to rule over the land and sea was a monarch's right. The Romans incorporated the theme of peace into the phrasing in order, it seems, to take the edge off the reality of a ruler's power, although it implied domination none the less.[4] Octavian used the inscription to promote himself as a peacemaker. Near the site of the Battle of Actium, at Nicopolis, the city founded by Octavian in commemoration

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[1] Appian 5.132. Cf. Rice Holmes (1929) 120.

[2] *Res Gestae* 25, *Mare pacavi a praedonibus. Eo bello servorum qui fugerant a dominis / suis et arma contra rem publicam ceperant, triginta fere millia capta / dominis ad supplicium tradidi.* The theme of this part of the *Res Gestae*, as Gagé, (1977) 124, comments is "la libération de l'Italie", which is telling since chapter 25 consists of both the Sicilian War and the Battle of Actium.

[3] Cf. *Epodes* 4.17-20:

> *quid attinet tot ora navium gravi*
> *rostrata duci pondere*
> *contra latrones atque servilem manum,*
> *hoc, hoc tribuno militum?*

[4] See Momigliano (1942) 53-64, who, after the tracing the development of the phrase, concludes, "Rule over Sea had been the condition of Athenian liberty; Ruler over Land and Sea had been the Hellenistic definition of a sovereign; Peace over Land and Sea was now the justification of Roman Rule." The statement of Tacitus (*Histories* 1.1) would seem to corroborate Momigliano's conclusion: *postquam bellatum apud Actium atque amnem potentiam ad unum conferri pacis interfuit...* On this point, see Brunt-Moore (1967) 54-55.

of the victory, there remains a monument to the battle with the similar inscription *pace parta terra marique*,[1] which is repeated almost verbatim in the *Res Gestae* when it mentions the closing of the temple of Janus—the symbolic announcement of return to peace:

> *Ianum Quirinum, quem clausum esse maiores nostri voluerunt, / [cum] per totum imperium populi Romani terra marique esset parta vi / c[torii]s pax.*
> (*Res Gestae* 13).[2]

Horace refers to this theme in a relatively early work when he alludes to Octavian's future conquest of the Parthians, in a prophecy delivered by Tiresias to Ulysses:

> *Tempore quo iuvenis, Parthis horrendus, ab alto*
> *demissum genus Aenea,* tellure marique
> *magnus erit.*
> (*Satire* 2.5.62-64).

Vergil, although his wording is more allusive, makes the same point in his first *Georgic*:

> *...Caesar*
> terrarumque *velis curam, et te maximus orbis*
> *auctorem frugum tempestatumque potentum*
> *accipiat cingens materna tempora myrto,*
> *an deus immense venias* maris *ac tua nautae*
> *numina sola colant.*
> (*Georgic* 1.35-40).

The masses also celebrated the end of the Civil Wars by offering to fund the construction of a house for Octavian. It was to be built on the site that he had bought for that purpose, but he later declared it to be public property and promised to erect a temple to Apollo there instead, after lightning had struck in that area.[3] In the end, both projects came to fruition; the temple of Palatine Apollo was dedicated in 28 B.C. in connexion with celebrations for the Actium victory, and so Augustus actually shared his house with the god.[4]

Apollo, by the time of this ostensible end to the Civil Wars, had gained special status as the divine patron of Octavian. Sextus had earlier paraded himself as the son of Neptune,

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[1] Gagé (1936) 72. See also the latest study by Murray-Petsas (1989) 86. The inscription is quoted in full below, page 14 note 4.

[2] Cf. Suetonius *Aug.*22, Livy 1.19.3 For a full list of citations dealing with the closing of the Temple of Janus in conjunction with the phrase, *terra marique*, see Gagé (1977) 95-96.

[3] Reinhold (1988) 38, and Woodman (1983) 208.

[4] Velleius 2.81.3. See also Gagé (1977) 107-108; Carter (1982) 124, 130.

and Antony had been touring the East as the New Dionysus. By 38-37 B.C., the first evidence of Octavian's affiliation with Apollo begins to appear. Not everyone was impressed by such an ambitious association. Suetonius records the verses lampooning Octavian and the banquet of the gods or *cena deorum* in which Octavian played the role of Apollo: *Impia dum Phoebi Caesar mendacia ludit.* (Aug.70).[1] Also at this time, Apolline imagery finds itself on coins issued by Octavian.[2] The choice of Apollo seems to have been generated by Octavian's relationship with Caesar, who made similar claims.[3] There were also stories that Octavian was actually the son of Apollo. Finally, Plutarch records that Brutus predicted his own death at the hands of "Leto's son", who turned out to be Octavian at the battle of Philippi (*Brutus* 24.4).

The new age under the rule of Apollo Helios has already been mentioned in connexion with the *Julium sidus*, which, perhaps not so incidentally, makes its first known appearance on coins in 38 B.C., in spite of the fact that Caesar had been deified back in 42 B.C. The multiple advantages one's association with a particular deity may provide are evident. Apollo, as the god of poetry, evinces an air of high civilization;[4] the temple of Palatine Apollo, among its other attributes and functions, housed the literary works of the Greeks and Romans, and was a place where the poets could congregate.[5] But Apollo could stretch his bow, if need be, and play the fierce warrior who had once fought on behalf of the Trojans, the ancestors of the Romans via Aeneas. The god also allowed Octavian to show his piety before the Romans, not only by dedicating temples to Apollo

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[1] Scott (1933) 31, argues that the banquet was the one held after the marriage of Octavian and Livia (Jan.17, 38 B.C.), which Antony played up for scandal (Suet. *Aug.*69). This would put the *cena* at early 38 B.C. Carter (1982) 191, suggests the winter of 39-38 B.C. (i.e. the same time as Scott argues), when the corn supply was particularly low due to Sextus' blockade on Rome (Suet. *Aug.*70).

[2] Crawford (1974) 744. See also Syme (1979) 365 note 1.

[3] Weinstock (1971) 12-15.

[4] Gagé (1955) 504.

[5] Horace *Epistle* 2.2.92-105, *Ode* 2.31. Propertius *Elegy* 2.31.5-6, 15-16, aptly describes the statue of Apollo in its appropriate light:

> *deinde inter matrem deus ipse interque sororem*
> *Pythius in longa carmina veste sonat...*
> *hic equidem Phoebo visus mihi pulchrior ipso*
> *marmoreus tacita carmen hiare lyra.*

(and Mars and Neptune as well)[1], but in contrast to the inferior gods of the Orient, gods like Osiris and Isis, of whom Antony and Cleopatra assumed the garb while in Alexandria promulgating their own divine pretensions.[2]

Much of Octavian's propaganda was designed so as to place him in stark contrast to his enemies, particularly Antony, whose own efforts at self-aggrandizement were turned against him at the same time. The example of Dionysus is a case in point; Antony attempted to use the god in the same ways that Octavian benefitted from his relationship with Apollo. Dionysus was a civilizer, and a god symbolic of world conquest.[3] Alexander the Great encouraged the Dionysiac association to the same effect, which doubtless had an influence on Antony. Octavian, however, countered by emphasizing the less impressive attributes of the god, effeminacy and drunkenness. The scandal of Octavian's own *cena deorum* was matched by similar stories detailing the banquets of debauchery where the participants also impiously dressed as their favourite gods (Plutarch *Ant.*28; Athenaeus 4.147f; Velleius 2.83.2; Pliny *N.H.* 9.119-121.)

As Antony became "orientalized", so did his patron deity. Once his affair with Cleopatra had become well established, Antony played the role of the Egyptian god Osiris, and had portraits made of him as such, posing with his Egyptian lover, who paraded herself as the avatar of Isis or Selene (Dio 50.5.3). Besides being a drunkard and a debauchee, Antony was depicted as a slave to women—Cleopatra above the rest. Octavian had already written scurrilous verses about Antony's earlier affair with the Cappadocian queen Glaphyra (Martial 11.20). The appeal of his Herculean ancestry, which Antony advertised for obvious reasons, was subverted by comparing him to the hero in the context

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[1] Suetonius *Aug.*18; Gagé, (1936) 70-72, (1955) 510. At Nicopolis, Octavian restored and enlarged a local temple of Apollo, as well as consecrated his campsite to Neptune and Mars with the following inscription:

> *Imp. Caesa]r div[i Iuli] f. vict[oriam mar]it[imam consecutus bell]o quod pro [repu]blic[a] ges[si]t in hac region[e c]astra [ex] quibu[s ad hostem in] seq[uendum egr]essu[s est spoli]is [ornat]a [dedicavit cons]ul [quinctum i]mperat[or se]ptimum pace parta terra [marique.*
> (quoted from Carter (1982) 112).

[2] Pelling (1988) 179-180; Scott (1929) 136-137.

[3] Scott (1929) 133.

of that Hercules, stripped of his club and lion-skin, a veritable slave, doing women's work at the behest of Omphale, who naturally represented Cleopatra.[1]

While slanders and accusations were directed against Antony continually from 44-30 B.C., the nasty line of propaganda shifted its attention more towards Cleopatra as Actium approached. She, like Antony, was attacked for her debauched character and profligate lifestyle. The Cleopatra who has survived for posterity is certainly more of a *persona dramatis* than a real individual, testament to the success of Octavian's propaganda and its influence on the poets.[2] Like Sextus, Cleopatra was vilified for the company she kept. It was bad enough that a noble Roman had been seduced by a foreigner, but worse yet, although a queen, Cleopatra associated with a rabble more akin to slaves than respectable advisors and lieutenants. Plutarch cites Octavian himself as the source for this type of slander:

> And Caesar said in addition that Antony had been drugged and was not even master of himself, and that the Romans were carrying on war with Mardion the eunuch, and Porthenius and Iras, and the tire-woman of Cleopatra, and Charmion, by whom the principal affairs of government were managed.
> (Plutarch, *Ant.*60 trans. B. Perrin).[3]

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[1] Zanker, (1986) 45-46, 59. Cf. Plutarch *Syncresis of Demetrius and Antony* 3.3:

> Antony, on the contrary, like Heracles in paintings where Omphale is seen taking away his club and stripping off his lion's skin, was often disarmed by Cleopatra, subdued by her spells, and persuaded to drop from his hands great undertakings and necessary campaigns, only to roam about and play with her on the sea-shores by Canopus and Taphosiris.
> (trans. B. Perrin).

[2] Murray-Petsas (1989) 1, give a tally of the numerous literary works inspired by Cleopatra.

[3] Cf. Dio 50.28.5-6, who has Octavian exhorting his troops with similar rhetoric:

> "I, for my part, am really ashamed that we are vanquishing whom we shall gain no glory, whereas if we are defeated we shall be disgraced."
> (trans. E. Cary).

On the other hand, Octavian was not immune from employing slaves in his armies, as many as 20,000 in fact; see Gabba (1971) 154. Octavian was also known to have dined with the freedman Menodorus whom he made a knight after his defection from Sextus.

Far more important to Octavian, however, was the fact that Cleopatra represented a foreign power, and therefore an external threat to Rome and Italy.[1] This was in keeping with the fiction that the Civil Wars had ended back in 36 B.C. For the record, however much that convinced anyone, the Battle of Actium was an international war with Octavian and *tota Italia* (*Res Gestae* 25) opposed to a rag-tag collection of Oriental states under the leadership of the queen of Egypt. The truth of events is hardly so clear-cut. Octavian had virtually chased out of Rome the two consuls of 32 B.C., Gaius Sosius and Domitius Ahenobarbus—Antonians both—along with several senators, after Octavian had spoken ill of Sosius and Antony before the Senate while surrounded by his soldiers, who were clutching daggers beneath their cloaks.[2] Shortly thereafter, Octavian, through the treachery of Munatius Plancus and Marcus Titius, retrieved Antony's will, which he then read to the Senate. Among other scandalous legacies, Antony had allegedly asked in his will that he be buried in Alexandria. Romans were insulted by Antony's preference of Alexandria to his (and their) own native *patria*, and Octavian was able to press the idea of Antony's abandonment of Rome by having his triumviral powers nullified and his consulship for the following year (31 B.C.) revoked. Dio comments that, having subdued Antony and so many others, Cleopatra set her sights on Rome itself (Dio 50.5.4). Sibylline prophecies tentatively dated to around 33-32 B.C., predicting world domination under an eastern mistress or *despoina*, echoed such ambitions.[3] So, obtaining the oaths of the Italian cities *sponte sua* (*Res Gestae* 25) and of the provinces of the Western Empire, Octavian declared war on the queen of Egypt, not Antony, thereby officially ignoring a renewal of Civil War.[4] The lone triumvir then performed the solemn rites at the temple of Bellona, ancient rites which Octavian himself revived for the occasion.[5] It seems that Octavian made certain

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[1] It is interesting to note that Antony criticised Octavian for fraternizing with the Barbarian by claiming that his rival had offered himself for marriage to the daughter of the Getan king Cotiso, and Octavian's daughter was added to the deal as the betrothed of Cotiso (Suetonius *Aug.* 63). We can imagine how Octavian would have looked had he lost at Actium.

[2] Rice Holmes (1929) 140-141; Tarn-Charlesworth (1965) 122-124.

[3] Tarn (1932) 136-143.

[4] Plutarch *Ant.*60; Rice Holmes (1929) 145-146, 247-250; Tarn-Charlesworth (1965) 123.

[5] Pelling (1988) 264.

that when he called on the gods for assistance, he did so publicly in the most Roman of ways.

The two sides were now drawn up. The dipsomaniac Antony, weakened by his own self-indulgence and captivated under the spell of his wily mistress, betrayed his country in order to join the base retinue of Cleopatra, the Egyptian queen who endeavoured to dominate or at least destroy Rome. Octavian claimed to be Rome's only hope. He had liberated Italy from brutal civil war; now he would eliminate the foreign menace. Rome's Western Empire had pledged its allegiance to him and the cause, and the gods had received his prayers. All that remained was the final confrontation.

The Battle of Actium was waged on September 2, 31 B.C. That much is certain. As for the details, there is much controversy concerning the true nature of this momentous historical event: was it a *bona fide* battle, worthy of the reputation it has achieved for posterity, or a non-event, which survives only as the victors have coloured and revamped it? The modern debate, which is almost 100 years old now, has been a lively one, and has done much to reconstruct the unfolding of action during the battle—as much as can be known from the ancient sources and more recently, the archaeological evidence.[1]

The Actian War did not consist simply of one battle. There had been a build-up to the final showdown, which resulted after almost a full year of manoeuvring by both sides, punctuated by sporadic skirmishing and small, though not insignificant, clashes along the Greek coast in the region around Actium. Octavian, who had assembled his forces at Tarentum and Brundisium after declaring war on Cleopatra, conveniently waited until the new year (31 B.C.)—when he assumed the consulship needed to put constitutional authority on his side—before setting out for Greece. Some of Antony's veterans, who had been discharged and resettled in Italy, took up arms again—this time for Octavian. For the campaign, the Caesarian forces amounted to about 16 legions and a fleet of 400 ships.

In September of 32 B.C., Antony had taken up camp at Actium just south of the Gulf of Arta. His forces totalled 30 legions, 19 of which were spread out at points along the coast from Corcyra down the Southern Peloponnese; the rest of the legions remained in Egypt, Syria and Cyrene. On the sea, there were 500 ships under his command. Because Antony's access to troops from Italy had been blocked, now that Octavian had established almost exclusive control of Italy and the West after the treaty of Brundisium in 40 B.C.,

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[1] For an excellent discussion of the debate, see Murray-Petsas (1989) 131-151.

many of the Antonian forces—up to two-thirds of the legions—were comprised of recruits from the East. Antony also received assistance from Cleopatra's Eastern allies: Libya, Cilicia, Cappadocia, Paphlagonia, Commagene, Thrace, Arabia, Media, Galatia, and Lycaonia. Clearly the war had the appearance of an international affair.

With half the Caesarian fleet under his command, Agrippa sailed to the Southwest corner of the Peloponnese, where he attacked and won a victory at Methone early in 31 B.C. There he intercepted some ships ferrying from Egypt and Syria supplies for Antony's camp. Agrippa followed up this strategic victory with more successes at Leucas, Patrae and Corinth. Antony was now effectively cut off from the Peloponnese as well as from the East. As a result, his fleet became locked up in the Gulf of Arta by the end of the spring of 31 B.C. However, Agrippa was unable to seal him off completely. Plutarch relates the story—passed from his great-grandfather, Nicarchus—that locals were dragooned into transporting grain on their backs from Charonea to the sea at Anticyra on the Gulf of Corinth, "over steep and difficult country."[1] Antony's desperation was matched by his cruelty; Plutarch also mentions the joy experienced by these people when it was learned that Antony had been defeated (*Ant.*68.4-5).

The blockade imposed on Antony was a decisive factor in the outcome of the war. Throughout the summer of 31 B.C., Antony's side greatly suffered from starvation, dysentry and/or malaria, and desertions. These conditions, along with the resentment of Antony's top advisors towards Cleopatra's presence, contributed to the low morale of Antony's forces. Some of his most loyal followers now made the crossing to Octavian's camp. The former consul Domitius Ahenobarbus defected, only to die shortly thereafter. Cleopatra was blamed as the the reason for his treachery. Antony tried to calm his people by claiming that instead, the uxorious Domitius had been lovesick for his mistress, and so deserted (Suetonius *Nero* 2). A close friend of Antony, the desultory Quintus Dellius, escaped (Dio 50.13.6), as did some of the Eastern dynasts: Philadelphus of Paphlagonia, Rhoemetalces of Thrace, and Amyntas of Galatia, whom Antony had personally set up as king (Dio 50.13, Plutarch *Ant.*59, 63). Antony rightly became suspicious of further desertions, and certain others contemplating treachery—Iamblichus, an Arabian king, and Quintus Postumius, a Roman Senator—were executed (Dio 50.13.7).

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[1] Pelling (1988) 289.

A naval engagement was now imminent. Plutarch (*Ant.*62) claims that Cleopatra was behind the decision to fight at sea. Antony's friends opposed this strategy, realizing their own superiority on land. Octavian's superiority on sea was also to be considered; Agrippa, at Sicily, had proven that much. In any case, a land battle would only prolong the war. Control of the sea was essential for both sides: Antony needed to cross over to Italy undaunted if he wished to attack or pacify the considerable force left behind by Octavian at Brundisium and Tarentum; Octavian likewise intended to sail for Egypt as master of the seas.[1] The other main source for the battle of Actium gives a different reason for the decision to fight at sea. According to Dio (50.23.3), when Dellius deserted to Octavian, he brought with him the news that Antony and Cleopatra had resolved to set up a sea battle, only to make their escape in the midst of the fighting. The debate among modern historians centres around these two theories: namely, that Antony intended to fight it out, or that he had premeditated, with Cleopatra, his escape to Alexandria.[2]

Once it had been decided to confront Octavian's fleet, Antony and Cleopatra only had to wait for the weather to cooperate. Storms had whipped up the waves for a few days, making it unwise to set sail in a battle formation where order must be maintained. On the 2nd of September calm returned to the area. Antony mobilized his ships out of the Gulf of Arta and into the open sea, where Octavian's fleet lay in wait.

Octavian outnumbered his enemy by a ratio of almost 2:1 in terms of ships. Antony's original fleet of 500 ships had been reduced by the defeats against Agrippa at Leucas, Patrae and Corinth. It is also conjectured that some ships were stationed elsewhere at the time, possibly in the southern Peloponnese.[3] We know from Plutarch (*Ant.*64.1) and Dio (50.15.4) that Antony also burned some of his ships himself before the battle. This was done presumably to prevent them from falling into the hands of Octavian. Besides, Antony had not the men to fill these extra ships. Part of his crews were already comprised of last minute recruits: muleteers and reapers from the area.[4] Octavian's fleet of 400 ships, on the

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[1] For this explanation, see Carter (1971) 203, 214-215.

[2] Most scholars tend to side with the belief that an escape had been planned. The notable exceptions are Ferrabino (1924) 433-472, and Tarn (1931) 173-199. (I have not read Ferrabino's article, but it is summarized in both Rice Holmes (1929) 255-258, and Tarn (1931) *passim.*

[3] Murray-Petsas (1989) 134, 135 note 15.

[4] Carter (1971) 213.

other hand, had remained largely intact. The situation, however, was not completely hopeless for Antony; his ships were larger and more powerful than Octavian's smaller, swifter ships (Plutarch *Ant.*.65-66, Dio 50.23.2-3, Florus 2.21.5). If this were to be simply a war of attrition, Antony, then, had a chance at victory. So with his 170 ships and Cleopatra's 60, Antony prepared for battle.

Agrippa, whose job it was to direct the entire fleet for the battle, took the left wing of the Caesarian formation. He faced Antony's right wing under the command of Publicola. Antony himself stayed in a small boat, which he used to move from ship to ship in order to exhort his men and deliver messages on the run. At the centre position the Caesarian Arruntius faced Antony's man, Gaius Octavius. Octavian occupied the right wing against the former consul Sosius, although Octavian, like Antony, was also needed to float about with relative speed and ease. So his command was given over to M. Lurius while he himself remained on board a swift Liburnian galley. Cleopatra and her ships lurked out of the main battle-line, taking their position at the centre, but behind the squadron of Octavius. She was stationed thus either to prevent premature retreats and desertions back to the harbour, or to provide a backup to the whole battle line in case any of Octavian's ships should break through.[1] On her flagship was the treasure, the war-chest used to pay the troops. This is an important clue in the theory that Antony and Cleopatra intended to flee. For, it is argued, why would they risk having the ship and its treasure sink to the bottom of the sea in battle if they were resolved to fight it out?[2] Dio increases this suspicion by mentioning that the goods were transported on board at night in secrecy (50.15.4).

For the long hours of the morning of September 2nd, after both fleets had assumed their formations, neither side would make the aggressive first strike. As yet, the waters had been relatively still. Then a wind picked up, and Sosius' squadron ventured forward. Octavian and his wing retreated, hoping to lure the enemy away from the Gulf and into open waters where there was a better chance of swinging round with his swifter ships and thereby surrounding Sosius. Agrippa now did the same on his wing as he moved back and extended his ships to the left in anticipation of a forward thrust by Antony's squadron. The

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[1] Tarn (1931) 192; Richardson (1937) 162.

[2] It is this fact that forces Tarn (1931) 188, to propose that, although Antony intended to fight for victory, he had a plan B in case the battle did not turn out as planned. Much of Tarn's argument is quite ingenious, but it cannot be substantiated by the evidence we have. For a refutation of Tarn's argument see Richardson (1937) 153-164.

ships presently began to ram and grapple with each other; close fighting ensued. This lasted for some time, perhaps about two hours,[1] with no indication as to who had the upper hand. Then, suddenly, Cleopatra's ships hoisted their sails and broke through both lines—friend's and foe's—riding swiftly on a wind from the North that had been picking up. As Cleopatra bolted, so did Antony. He caught up with her ship and transferred to it. Together they sailed to Taenarum on the southern tip of the Peloponnese, before returning, in shame and in defeat, to Alexandria. Octavian's ships gave chase, but briefly and without success. Only two runaway ships were captured (Plutarch *Ant.*67).

Meanwhile, amidst the tumult of the great escape, the battle continued somewhat haphazardly. Some Antonian ships tried to make away with their leader; others retreated back to their harbour. Among the ranks, there was confusion and disbelief concerning the conduct of Antony. It seemed inconceivable that he had really deserted his own men. Octavian, therefore, achieved a rather easy victory. Many ships were captured, but few lives were lost (Plutarch *Ant.*68).

The Actian War was all but over. There was, however, still the matter of Antony's land army under Canidius. Octavian preferred to negotiate a surrender rather than engage in battle. For seven days the two sides bargained with each other before a proper settlement was reached. With the capitulation of the land forces, Antony's doom was sealed. Before pursuing the fugitives to Alexandria, Octavian first introduced himself as sole ruler of the Roman Empire to the monarchs and dynasts of Greece and the East, where he either confirmed or revoked their positions as heads of state.[2]

Returning to Actium briefly, Octavian celebrated his victory by founding the city of Nicopolis near where he had established camp for the war. There he set up two statues to the mule *Nikon* (Victory) and its master *Eutychos* (Prosper), whom Octavian had met on the eve of the battle . At Nicopolis a large monument was built; it displayed several prows

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[1] Carter (1971) 223, argues very persuasively that the escape was planned right down to the time of flight, since Antony, after a year in the region, would have been well aware of the wind patterns around Actium. Therefore, he would have known the most opportune moment in which to hoist their sails. Carter's account is, among the moderns, the best and most thorough, 215-227.

[2] These trips took place over an extended period of time, both before and after Octavian's return to Nicopolis and his trip to Alexandria. For details, see Charlesworth-Tarn (1965) 141-143; Rice Holmes (1929) 159; Syme (1939) 300-302.

of Antony's ships and an inscription declaring peace over land and sea.[1] A nearby temple of Actian Apollo was at this time restored and enlarged, while on the site itself a shrine to Apollo was consecrated. Octavian also established the Actian games at Nicopolis to be held every five years (Dio 51.1.1-3).[2]

An attempted mutiny by some disaffected legions in the winter of 31 B.C. soon prompted Octavian to travel to Egypt in search of the treasure with which Antony and Cleopatra had escaped, so that he could pay off his troops in full. He set sail the following summer. Antony put up a weak resistance, and on the 1st of August, he died by his own hand, content that it took nothing less than another Roman to lay him low (Plutarch *Ant.*77.4)—so much for the effeminate, orientalized slave to women. Within days Cleopatra, in legendary fashion, was dead as well. The bite of an asp not only killed, but, according to Egyptian religion, it deified its victim.[3]

Scholars writing on this period often like to muse on the death of Cleopatra in connexion with Octavian's desire or lack thereof in having her displayed before the Roman public in a triumph. The question is worth considering. There had been a meeting held between the two official arch-rivals, in private. What occurred is impossible to tell; Plutarch (*Ant.*83) and Dio (51.12, 13.1-4) give two radically divergent accounts. The options, however, are simple: if Octavian wished Cleopatra for the triumph, then she, in an act of heroic and haughty defiance, killed herself, disdaining to indulge her conqueror's pride;[4] if Octavian was embarrassed to parade a woman in shackles in a procession where Romans had seen pass some of their greatest and most formidable enemies, he encouraged her death.[5] Generally Romantics prefer the former, pragmatists the latter. This true story, like the controversy over the veracity of Antony's love for Cleopatra, remains a mystery.

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1 Murray-Petsas (1989) 138, found 33-35 prows on the site. Cf. *Greek Anthology* 6.236. They believe the number of prows represents a tithe of all the ships captured by Octavian during the Actian War, tallied by Plutarch *Ant.*65.3 (who used Augustus' *Memoirs*) to 300 ships. The inscription is quoted on page 14 note 4 above.

2 Gagé (1936) 92-97. The Actian games were also held all throughout the East, in Egypt, Syria, Arabia, Phrygia, and elsewhere. See Reinhold (1988) 226.

3 Charlesworth-Tarn (1965) 139.

4 Syme (1939) 299.

5 Another factor in Cleopatra's death may have been her threat to Augustus as a witness to the events of Actium and Alexandria. As Charlesworth-Tarn 137, put it, "Cleopatra on some Aegean rock writing her *Memoirs* might have been too awkward for the future Augustus."

Having secured his victory abroad, Octavian returned to Rome in the summer of 29 B.C. to great acclaim. On the way home, stopping at Atella in Campania for some rest, he met Vergil and Maecenas, who took turns reading the newly completed *Georgics* to their weary master. It undoubtedly pleased Octavian to hear that Rome's latest greatest poet was planning to compose an epic involving his own military exploits:

> *mox tamen ardentis accingar dicere pugnas*
> *Caesaris et nomen fama tot ferre per annos*
> *Tithoni prima quot abest ab origine Caesar.*
> (*Georgics* 3.46-48)

A triple triumph was held in full splendour on three days from August 13-15th for the victories of Illyricum, Actium and Alexandria. The children of Cleopatra and Antony, Alexander Helios and Cleopatra Selene, were led in chains down the *Via Sacra* before the Roman public. An effigy of Cleopatra on her litter with an asp clinging to her arm substituted for the real thing. Money was distributed in generous amounts to the people as part of the festivities. Both Suetonius (*Aug.*41) and Dio (51.21.5) remark that the riches from Alexandria, when injected so suddenly into the private sector, caused interest rates to drop sharply and property values to rise. A temple to the Deified Julius was dedicated at this time. By the next year the temple of Palatine Apollo would be completed. Octavian embarked on an incredibly vast amount of major building projects from this time forth (eighty-two temples were restored), so that he could look back as the Emperor Augustus and claim that he had found Rome a city of bricks, and left it one of marble (Suetonius *Aug.*28-29) More games and festivals were held, taxes remitted, and the grain dole increased. The temple of Janus had been closed for only the third time in Rome's long history. Peace, at Octavian's instigation, had finally returned to Rome. The historian Velleius, writing during the reign of Tiberius, expresses the universal relief at the revival of peace:

> *Prisca illa et antiqua rei publicae forma revocata. Rediit cultus agris, sacris honos, securitas hominibus, certa cuique rerum suarum possessio; leges emendatae utiliter, latae salubriter; senatus sine asperitate nec sine severitate lectus.*
> (Velleius 2.89.3-4)

According to the later ancient historians, the Battle of Actium marks the precise date when Octavian began his reign as the Princeps of Rome.[1] Suetonius (*Aug.*8.3) dates the

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[1] Cf. Millar (1973) 65-67.

period of Augustus' rule from the battle of Actium,[1] while Appian mentions that the end of the Civil Wars marks the time when Egypt fell under Roman rule and the Roman government became a monarchy (*Roman History*, Preface 14). Dio is the most explicit, explaining why he chooses Actium as the starting point:

> Such was the naval battle in which they engaged on the 2nd of September. I do not mention this date without a particular reason, nor am I, in fact, accustomed to do so; but Caesar now for the first time held all the power alone, and consequently the years of his reign are properly reckoned from that day.
> (Dio 51.1)

It would take another three years before this fact was confirmed, when, in January 27 B.C., Octavian would announce that the Republic was restored and he would remain in control as Rome's first citizen. As the Princeps, he was honoured with the name Augustus, the Revered One. The Principate was born; and Rome was ready to enter into the Golden Age.

With the completion of the *Georgics* in 29 B.C., Vergil was at the height of his career. Horace had established himself comfortably under the wing of Maecenas; but his best work, the *Odes*, still lay ahead of him. Propertius, the youngest of the three at about 20 years of age by 29 B.C., had yet to complete the first book of his *Elegies*, which would capture the attention of Maecenas, and propel him into the Augustan circle. All three, "safe and subsidized in Rome"[2] could, throughout the following decade and a half, think seriously about how to wax poetic on the *facta* of Augustus Caesar.

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[1] Carter (1982) *ad.loc.*

[2] Syme (1939) 299. He is referring only to Horace and his *Ode* 1.37, but the same applies to Propertius and Vergil as well.

CHAPTER TWO: THE NATURE OF REFUSAL

Despite the return of Octavian in 29 B.C. and the subsequent establishment of the *Pax Romana*, the poetic accounts of the battle of Actium were rather slow in the making. Vergil's *Aeneid*, in which his version appears, was not published until after his death in 19 B.C.; and Propertius reserved his Actium poem for the fourth Book of his *Elegies*, which appeared around 16 B.C. Horace is perhaps exceptional here; his Actium poems—*Epodes* 1 and 9 and *Ode* 1.37—were written before 23 B.C. Before the main Actium poems, however, the poets have composed their *recusationes* in which they decline the suggestion that they compose poetry on subjects like Actium. These refusals, and the reasons for them, will help to determine the character of the subsequent Actium poems.

In my Introduction, the *recusatio* was identified as an Augustan convention that carried stylistic implications for the poets. By this convention, lyric, elegy, and pastoral were held to be inappropriate genres by which to describe events that would be better suited for epic or historical treatment. This is the purely literary aspect of the *recusatio*. It holds true, but it tells only half the story. As the Augustan poets inherited the idea from the Alexandrian tradition, the *recusatio* is part of a stylistic doctrine. However, by the time this convention finds itself in the poetry of Horace, Vergil and Propertius, it has taken on an added significance which is distinctly Roman in character, since recent history now provides the subject matter. It is the combination of the demands made by these two elements—the Alexandrian and the Roman—that enables the poets to sing the *facta* of Augustus in a way with which they themselves would be satisfied. Therefore, how the *recusatio* figures into the artistic doctrines of each of the Augustan poets is a key factor in the genesis of the literature concerning Actium.

The literary background notwithstanding, the *recusatio* was not an artistic convention completely contrived or imagined by the poets, but a true response to some form of request by a patron whether Maecenas (*Odes* 2.12, *Elegies* 2.1, 3.9, *Georgics* 3.42), Varus (*Eclogue* 6), Agrippa (*Odes* 1.6) or Augustus himself (*Odes* 4.15, *Epistles* 2.1). The poets make it very clear that, for whatever reason, they do not feel up to the task of writing such poetry.[1] Can the poets be believed? Rarely—on face value at any rate. The excuse that the

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[1] Not everyone is in agreement on the true nature of the *recusationes*. Some have regarded the idea of pressure from the patrons as overrated: Dalzell (1956) 151-162; Reckford (1959) 195-208. This view, which stesses the difficulty in perceiving the "real" situation through the conventions of poetry, has not

writer lacks ability—coming from three of the greatest poets in Roman history—seems very flimsy indeed. In certain cases (Horace is the best example), the *recusatio* looks more like an acquiescence than a refusal (eg. *Odes* 4.2, 4.15). A.Y. Campbell succinctly described the practice as "deprecating but doing".[1]

Yet, if we examine the poems in their wider context, we find good reason to trust the poets when they claim that poetry of a higher order is not for them, in spite of their exaggerated humility. The *recusatio* determines the poetic creed of the Augustans. All three poets employ their refusals in such a way that they maintain a consistency in their views on poetry. Their credibility rests on the fact that they are a highly self-conscious group regarding discussion of their work. As Propertius' career evolves throughout his first three books he gradually becomes less of a love poet than a poet writing in defence of poetry on the subject of love. Vergil's collection of *Eclogues*, it has often been noted, is itself an *ars poetica* on the pastoral genre.[2] Horace, who was his own best critic, provides a wealth of information on the nature of his poetry and his role as poet in such works as the *Ars Poetica* and his epistles to Augustus and Florus. The *recusationes* are perhaps the most polished expressions of each man's poetic creed; the Actium poems, we shall see, show that the poets kept their word.

The Romans were familiar with the idea behind the *recusatio* through the Hellenistic court poet Callimachus, who flourished in the third century B.C. at Alexandria. An avant-garde and controversial artist, Callimachus opposed the genre of epic on aesthetic grounds, and instead advocated poetry of a lighter nature and smaller quantity—without, of course,

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died: Zetzel (1982) 87-109. However, the tide has begun to turn once again, largely because of studies in Propertius: eg. For Stahl (1985) 161, the reality of the reasons behind the *recusatio* is fundamental to the thesis of his book: "Why then does he [Propertius] take upon himself the toils entailed in producing a deceptive form of surface promise and subsurface denial? My answer is that he was exposed to considerable pressure—more pressure than critics today are inclined to ascribe to Maecenas or Augustus in their dealings with contemporary writers." Cf. Griffin (1984) 189-221. Stahl and other Propertian scholars notwithstanding, one of the latest views attempts to effect a compromise by saying that the poets made a political commitment when they joined the circle of Maecenas and therefore, were at once prepared for the requests for poems favourable to the new regime (because they were expected of a poet whose patron was second only to Agrippa in terms of influence with the Princeps) and sufficiently independent to make a genteel refusal. For this belief see the collection of essays in Woodman and West (1986), especially those by Nisbet, Du Quesnay and Cairns. See also Wallace-Hadrill (1989) 36.

1 A.Y. Campbell (1924) 229.

2 For example, see Putnam(1970) 15-16; Leach (1974) 246-248; R.D. Williams (1979) ix. For Vergil's outbursts of humility and evaluations of his own work in the *Georgics*, see Muecke (1979) 90-91.

sacrificing quality. The Callimachean doctrine, which would later be appropriated by the Roman poets, is stated explicitly in the prologue to his poem, the *Aetia*. As for the grandiose style of epic, "thundering is not for me," he writes, "but for Zeus" (1.20). He then goes on to describe an encounter with Apollo, who sets him on the correct poetic path:

> For when I first set the writing tablet
> on my knees, Lycian Apollo told me,
> "poet, feed the victim as fat as possible,
> keep yon Muse slender."
> (1.21-24)

This scene is reworked by Vergil into his sixth *Eclogue*, when the shepherd Tityrus says that his erstwhile attempts at singing of kings and battles were curbed by Apollo:

> *cum canerem reges et proelia, Cynthius aurem*
> *vellit and admonuit: "pastorem, Tityre, pinguis*
> *pascere oportet ovis, deductum dicere carmen."*
> (*Eclogue* 6.3-5)

The shepherd then says that he will play bucolic songs with his slender pipe: *agrestem tenui meditabor harundine Musam (Eclogues* 6.8). Here Vergil translates Callimachus' λεπταλεην (slender) into *tenuis*, which literally describes his pipe, and metaphorically his poetry. The statement is programmatic for the pastoral genre, and when Vergil introduces Tityrus in the first *Eclogue*, we find him in the pastoral *locus amoenus*, dabbling in that very kind of poetry:

> *Tityre, tu patulae recubans sub tegmine fagi*
> *silvestrem tenui Musam meditaris avena;*
> *nos patriae finis et dulcia linquimus arva,*
> *nos patriam fugimus; tu, Tityre, lentus in umbra*
> *formosam resonare doces Amaryllida silvas.*
> (*Eclogue* 1.1-5)

The programmatic line in *Eclogue* 6 is a virtual repetition of the second line of *Eclogue* 1. This is pastoral poetry in its ideal context. Tityrus is relaxed in the comfort of the shade and is pondering the subject of true love. There is no room at all for the themes of *reges et proelia*, hence Apollo's admonition. This is Vergil's Callimachean justification for shying away from poetry concerned with war: the pastoral genre is too light and refined for the gravity and sonority demanded by epic. But there is more to Vergil's reluctance than literary precepts:

> *...namque super tibi erunt qui dicere laudes,*
> *Vare, tuas cupiant et* tristia *condere* bella.
> *(Eclogue* 6.)

War is anathema to Vergil's Arcadia. Throughout the *Eclogues* war looms in the background as an ever-present threat to the peace and tranquility that characterize the pastoral landscape. By war, in the *Eclogues*, Vergil means the Civil Wars. The contrast of fates established in the first five lines of *Eclogue* 1 (above) is inextricably involved with the consequences of the Civil Wars. In this and the ninth *Eclogue* Vergil alludes to the land confiscations of 41 B.C., which Octavian administered after the battle of Philippi and which Lucius Antonius used to fire up dissension in the countryside. The bad feeling on both sides culminated in the Perusine War in 41 B.C.[1] In *Eclogue* 9 Vergil has one of his shepherds lament that War even leads to the nullification of the poetic voice:

> *...sed carmina tantum*
> *nostra valent, Lycida, tela inter Martia quantum*
> *chaonias dicunt aquila veniente columbas.*
> (*Eclogue* 9.11-13)[2]

The tone of the first and ninth *Eclogues* is sombre. War is no cause for celebration. The epithet Vergil uses to describe war in *Eclogue* 6, *tristia*, contributes to the feeling that war is out of the question for the pastoral poet. His refusal is not only entrenched in literary doctrine, but it is also what Wendell Clausen calls a "moral" decision.[3] Without delving into the personal aspects of Vergil's character, I would suggest that it is a decision of *poetic* morality. That is, Vergil cannot possibly include war as a suitable subject in his poetry to be celebrated because the particular genre of pastoral will not allow it. Therefore, the poet is obliged to respect the limitations of his genre and avoid war, and not only avoid it, but regard it disparagingly. In the *Eclogues*, it is abundantly clear that war can never be glorified. The opposite is always the case. Vergil portrays war as sinful, irrational and destructive. He can allude to Octavian in a highly complimentary light; but it is a very unwarlike deed that results in the young triumvir's praise. Tityrus has been granted reprieve from the confiscations: *O Meliboee, deus nobis haec* otia *fecit* (*Eclogue* 1.6). Octavian has brought *peace* to the shepherd's life.[4]

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[1] Syme (1939) 207-211.

[2] Cf. *Eclogue* 1.77 and Meliboeus' lament: *carmina nulla canam.*

[3] Clausen (1964) 193.

[4] Although Octavian is not explicitly identified by name as the *iuvenis deus*, the allegory is incontestable, see Coleman (1977) 74. Whether Tityrus represents Vergil and he is referring to the return of his own property or not is immaterial.

Vergil wrote the *Eclogues* during the years 42-37 B.C. After the publication of the *Eclogues*, he worked for approximately another seven years on the *Georgics*, which were completed, as I have mentioned,[1] in time for Octavian's return from the East in 29 B.C. During all this time, Horace was busy establishing himself as a writer of satires (42-30 B.C.), while at the same time working on his *Epodes* (41?-29 B.C.). It is therefore somewhat misleading to speak of Horace and Vergil in this context as "Augustan" writers; they are really "Triumviral" writers.[2] Propertius, although only a child at the time of Caesar's death, was also shaped by this era. The two elegies (1.22, 23) with which he completes his first Book attest the political environment in which the poet grew up. As a native of Perusia, he had suffered from both the land confiscations and the Perusine War itself. In a later poem he makes mention of his family's fate during this time (Propertius' astrologer Horos addresses the poet):

> *ossaque legisti non illa aetate legenda*
> *patris et in tenues cogeris ipse lares:*
> *nam tua cum multi versarent rura iuvenci,*
> *abstulit excultas pertica tristis opes.*
> (*Elegy* 4.1.127-130)

Only in Book 2 and following, when Propertius has joined the circle of Maecenas and when Octavian has become the last survivor of the Civil Wars, does his poetry assume an engagé character as in the *recusationes*, the Actium poems or most of Book 4. But, as a witness to the madness and strife of the triumviral period, Propertius advertises an attitude towards the Civil Wars that is shared by his older contemporaries. The Civil Wars show up in the work of the Augustan poets as a theme with overtones suggesting evil and sinfulness. If Actium is looked on as a battle within these wars, it could prove difficult to glorify it given the age of which it was an inextricable part.

Horace's *Epodes* 7 and 16 portray the triumviral period in a very negative light. The tone of *Epode* 7 is severe, and the message is pessimistic and indignant:

> *Quo, quo scelesti ruitis? aut cur dexteris*
> *aptantur enses conditi?*
> *parumne campis atque Neptuno super*
> *usum est Latini sanguinis?*
>
> *...furorne caecus an rapit vis acrior*

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[1] Above 23.

[2] Griffin (1984) 189.

an culpa? responsum date!
(*Epode* 7.1-4, 13-14)

The sixteenth *Epode* is no less compelling.[1] The poet speaks of fleeing to the Happy Isles, which are described as a Golden Age setting, unaffected by the corruption of human society and far from the violence and destruction that Rome has brought down upon itself:

Altera iam teritur bellis civilibus aetas,
suis et ipsa Roma viribus ruit.
(*Epode* 16.1-2)

The first words *altera iam* convey the continuity and seeming endlessness of the strife. *ruit* picks up the *ruitis* of *Epode* 7. There is no end in sight; the poet can offer no solution beyond that of escape (*Epode* 16.17ff). Eduard Fraenkel, who greatly admired the *Epodes*,writes, "No reader can remain unmoved by the real indignation and sorrow with which the poet watches the fate of Rome...he succeeded in writing a great, if not a perfect poem."[2] Although Fraenkel's point is well taken, I do not wish to consider the man Quintus Horatius Flaccus in my discussion. The tone is the important thing to notice about this poem. The pessimism evident in *Epodes* 7 and 16 contributes to the reluctance of the poet to write on martial themes. As in the *Eclogues*, the disdain for war becomes part of not only a stylistic doctrine, but a poetic ethos as well.

The imagery used to describe the Civil Wars matches the tone for its negative portrayal of the triumviral period. In poetic terms the Civil Wars are described as a period tainted by sin (*scelus*), wickedness (*nefas*) and impiety (*impius*).[3] Both Vergil and Horace attribute the discord to an age-old, mythological curse: Horace mentions the fratricide of Remus (*Epode* 7.17-20); Vergil refers to the perjury of that Roman ancestor, Laomedon, the king of Troy (*Georgic* 1.502).

Rome's dark days, for which Horace cautiously enough blames everyone generally and no one in particular, do not simply pass from memory after Actium. They remain a tender

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[1] A.Y. Campbell (1924) 89, 131, even suggests that at the time of this poem's composition Horace was still a Republican in spirit, adding: "The tone of the sixteenth epode at any rate is not particularly patriotic, nor does it strike me as neutral; the mood is less like indignation than like bitterness become sullen." Cf. Nisbet (1986) 8-9, who argues that upon the completion of *Epodes* 7 and 16 it took Maecenas and his bribe of the Sabine Estate to calm down the irascible although apparently easily placated Horace. Nonetheless I would agree with Nisbet that *Epodes* 7 and 16, better than any history of the period, justly reflect the true atmosphere in Rome during the Civil Wars, except perhaps Dio in certain moving passages.

[2] Fraenkel (1957) 51.

[3] Cf. *Eclogues* 1.77, 4.13 9.17; *Georgics* 1.504, 1.506, 1.466; *Aeneid* 1.294; *Epodes* 7.17, 16.9, 16.14; *Ode* 1.2.29.

topic. So much so that perhaps, Horace wonders, safe opinions may be delivered in print only after a cooling period, when times have settled. In his introductory poem to his second Book of *Odes*, Horace addresses the writer and statesman Pollio, who, at the time of the ode's composition, we are to infer, was in the process of writing his history of the Civil Wars. Although not written in response to a patron's request, the poem is a self-confessed *recusatio*. Having digressed on the theme of Pollio's history, Horace concludes the poem by admonishing himself to eschew such a dire topic:

sed ne relictis, Musa procax, iocis
Ceae retractes munera neniae,
mecum Dionaeo sub antro
quaere modos leviore plectro.
(*Ode* 2.1.37-40)

Horace bids his Muse forget melancholy dirges and come away to the Dionean grotto for a renewal of inspiration. The poem ends literally on a lighter note (*leviore plectro*). Horace, the lyric poet, contrasts himself with Pollio, the historian. While a lyric poet is not fit to take on the subject of the Civil Wars, Pollio, on the other hand, has made an appropriate choice, which is to write a history. This is one of the possibilities suggested by Horace in his *recusatio* to Maecenas:

...tuque pedestribus
dices historiis proelia Caesaris.
(*Ode* 2.12.9-10)

In the ode addressed to Pollio, Horace also remarks that his friend is giving up the writing of tragedy for which he had gained considerable fame, as he says elsewhere (*Satires* 1.10.42-43). Having complimented him thus, Horace mentions Pollio's military career and from there (now that Pollio's record shows him equipped to deal with martial themes), he makes the smooth transition to the subject of his history.

But even a man of Pollio's talents must be careful. The Wars are still fresh in Roman minds: beneath the ashes, Horace warns, there may be some lingering fires (*Ode* 2.1.7-8). Then Horace shows himself incapable of succeeding with the theme; for as he begins to praise Pollio for the power of his writing (it causes Horace to actually see and hear the familiar images of war: trumpet blasts, gleam of weapons) he slips into his old laments . They are the same kind as expressed in the *Epodes* previously:

quis non Latino sanguine pinguior
campus sepulcris impia proelia
testatur auditumque Medis
Hesperiae sonitum ruinae?

qui gurges aut quae flumina lugubris
ignara belli? quod mare Dauniae
non decoloravere caedes?
quae caret ora cruore nostro?
(*Ode* 2.1.29-36)

He becomes so swept away with the theme that he actually begins to thunder in his verse: notice the hard alliteration in the last two lines, the repetition of the "u" sound in line 33 and the bellowing "or" sound in the final two lines.[1] The emphasis on *nostro* in the final line before the epilogue strikes a grave note and deliberately exposes Horace's vulnerability to the issue as he would have us acknowledge; for he checks his emotions by resorting to the statement of refusal in the concluding verse (*Ode* 2.1.37-40 above).

The ode has not been dated conclusively. Nisbet and Hubbard have conjectured that it may have been written as early as 34 B.C., when the Civil Wars had been officially pronounced to be over, although Antony and Octavian remained in conflict.[2] It may also have been written shortly after Actium. In any case, the poem, regardless of the composition, is set in a time when war has very recently ended . Horace refers to the bloodshed as being yet unexpiated: *et arma / nondum expiatis uncta cruoribus* (*Ode* 2.1.4-5) . Augustus will change that now. At least that is Horace's hope in another of his poems: *cui dabit partis scelus expiandi / Iuppiter?* (*Ode* 1.2.29-30, the answer to the question is, of course, Augustus: *Ode* 1.2.44) Again the wars are described as a period of sacrilege (*impia proelia*).

In the final line of *Epode* 16, Horace expresses the hope that if his prophecy were to come true then righteous individuals would find a way out of the present-day disasters: *piis secunda vate me datur fuga* (*Epode* 16.68). The contrast of piety and impiety in their relationship to the Civil Wars runs consistently throughout the poetry of Vergil and Horace. Piety is part of the solution to a problem that is infested with sin and crime—impiety. Vergil describes the veteran who has imposed himself unjustly on his shepherd's territory as an *impius miles* (*Eclogue* 1.70). In the *Georgics*, Vergil, after listing the crimes of the age—wrong over right, the many faces of evil, the land laid to waste—sums up the scene: *saevit toto Mars impius orbe* (*Georgic* 1.511). We find the same word used to describe the personification of Furor in the prophecy of Jupiter in the *Aeneid*. Venus is assured that Aeneas (whose most common epithet is *pius*) will triumph, and from his lineage will be

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[1] Page (1959) *ad.loc.*

[2] Nisbet-Hubbard (1978) 10.

born Augustus, who will close the gates of the temple of Janus in which he will imprison Furor:

> *"nascetur pulchra Troianus origine Caesar,*
> *imperium Oceano, famam qui terminet astris,*
> *Iulius, a magno demissum nomen Iulo.*
> *hunc tu olim caelo, spoliis orientis onustum,*
> *accipies secura; vocabitur his quoque votis*
> *aspera tum positis mitescent saecula bellis;*
> *cana Fides et Vesta, Remo cum fratre Quirinus*
> *iura dabunt; dirae ferro et compagibus artis*
> *claudentur Belli portae; Furor impius intus*
> *saeva sedens super arma et centum vinctus aenis*
> *post tergum nodis fremet horridus ore cruento."*
> (*Aeneid* 1.286-296)

From a poetic perspective, Vergil has inverted the importance of Augustus from that of a military man, a conqueror worthy of epic, to that of a peacemaker and a saviour. This is the idea that Octavian himself had promulgated as early as 36 B.C. when he took credit for having ended the Civil Wars and for establishing peace on land and sea. There was no sense in glorifying a man for his conquests during a war in which every victory was also a defeat for Romans. Peace was the grand prize for the victor at Actium.

The definition of the Civil Wars as a deep-rooted *scelus* renders the onset of peace even more astounding. It now receives religious significance. As well, the new era is given the status of a Golden Age or a return to the land of Saturn. Vergil, in his *Eclogue* 4, with qualified and conditional optimism, predicts the return to the age of Saturn. There are still wars to come and a second Achilles, he prophesies (*Eclogues* 4.35-36), but, unlike Horace's thoughts of escaping to the Saturnian lands (*Epode* 16), the Golden Age is about to return:

> *...redeunt Saturnia regna*
> *iam nova progenies caelo demittitur alto.*
> *tu modo nascenti puero, quo ferrea primum*
> *desinet ac toto surget gens aurea mundo,*
> *casta fave Lucina: tuus iam regnat Apollo.*
> (*Eclogues* 4.6-10)

The identity of the *nova progenies* in this poem is immaterial.[1] The point remains that the sinless Golden Age and an age without War are synonymous.[2] We need not even

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[1] For a list of possible candidates on the identity of the *puer*, see Coleman (1977) 150-152.

[2] There is an excellent discussion on the implications of the idea of *scelus* in relationship to the Civil War as well as the subsequent celebration of the return to the Golden Age in Wallace-Hadrill (1989) 19-36.

suspect that Vergil is referring to Octavian at all; for this is quite an early poem (c.40 B.C.),[1] and although he had been firmly established as a contender for the control of Rome, his eventual triumph over Antony could not have been predicted with any certainty. Rather, the poem reflects Vergil's longing for peace in a state consumed by its own self-destruction. After the victory at Actium, Vergil can refer to him unambiguously as the only hope for the Roman people against the wickedness of the present age:

> *iam pridem nobis caeli te regia, Caesar,*
> *invidet atque hominum queritur curare triumphos;*
> *quippe ubi fas versus nefas: tot bella per orbem,*
> *tam multae scelerum facies...*
> (*Georgics* 1.503-506)

Horace, in one of his last odes, stresses the true greatness of Augustus' *facta* in such a way that it seems almost as if he is answering Vergil's worries as expressed in the above passage. Again, the language of the *recusatio* is employed:

> *Phoebus volentem proelia me loqui*
> *victas et urbes increpuit lyra,*
> *ne parva Tyrrhenum per aequor*
> *vela darem. tua, Caesar, aetas*
>
> *frugas et agris rettulit uberes...*
>
> *...Ianum Quirini clausit...*
>
> *...custode rerum Caesare non furor*
> *civilis aut vis exiget otium...*
> (*Odes* 4.15.1-5, 9, 17-18)

...and on and on—which is why that is one of Horace's least successful poems. But we see his point: peace and its effects render Augustus worthy of praise. Propertius, without the excessive fawning, and without bothering to deal with the consequences of peace, allows Augustus his due:

> *Caesaris haec virtus et gloria Caesaris haec est:*
> *illa, qua vicit, condidit arma manu.*
> (*Elegy* 2.16.41-42)

But the praise here is conditional: only when the sword had been sheathed does Augustus finally attain virtue and glory.[2]

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[1] One the date see Coleman (1977) 153. The poem was written for Pollio who was consul in 40 B.C. Coleman suggests that the idea for the poem may have been conceived as early as 43 B.C. when the *Julium sidus* appeared. This would lend credence to the argument that the *puer* represents Augustus himself. Coleman also provides a list of all possible candidates for the *puer* with an evaluation for each.

[2] Baker (1983) 174.

From this moral standpoint, we can see how the poets use the *recusatio* as an excuse not to celebrate the battles of Augustus. The poets emphasize the brutality and widespread injustice of the Civil Wars. One way around the problem of celebrating Augustus' achievement, then, is to highlight his role as the man who put an end to war—an act to which Augustus himself attributed considerable importance, both after the war with Sextus in 36 B.C., and again after Actium. However, this poetic manoeuvring still does not address the *recusatio*'s Callimachean component, which the poets emphasize as the real obstacle to the poetry with a martial theme. The resolution to this problem requires a certain amount of ingenuity. They must decide how to embark on the task of writing acceptable poems without compromising their poetic principles. By sheer necessity, despite their reluctance to extol anyone's military virtues, poems dealing with Actium must inevitably address the clash of arms. Even a poet who avoids or denigrates war in his poetry cannot change that fact.

The finished products undeniably did result in some alteration in style, and in genre. After all, Vergil did write an epic, and Propertius' *Elegy* 4.6 is certainly no love poem. Yet a deliberate effort to match style with subject matter is quite detectable. And although their paths do cross, as we would expect, each poet seems to have found a different solution, which has been carefully set up in their other poems. By close inspection of the Actium poems, then, we should be able to see how Horace, Vergil and Propertius attempted to develop the material provided to them from the historical sources without fundamentally forsaking their own aesthetic values and artistic standards.

CHAPTER THREE: ACTIUM IN LYRIC (HORACE)

In an epistle written around 20 B.C., when he was still smarting over the cool reception with which his three Books of *Odes* had been greeted, Horace sought to explain the nature of his art to Maecenas. Contrasting himself with the prodigious herd of poetasters who shamelessly eructate their volumes of dross, Horace stresses his originality and prides himself on being an innovator in Latin poetry. He begs his friend, *doctus Maecenas*, to take notice. The aesthetic aims of his work, the poet says, have been in effect as far back as the days when he was writing the *Epodes*:

> *libera per vacuum posui vestigia princeps,*
> *non aliena meo pressi pede. qui sibi fidet*
> *dux reget examen . Parios ego primus iambos*
> *ostendi Latio, numeros animosque secutus*
> *Archilochi, non res et agentia verba Lycamben.*
> (*Epistle* 1.19.21-25)

Horace is no imitator; he has transferred the spirit (*animos*) and the meter (*numeros*) of Archilochus into his own poetry. Archilochus was known for the ferocity of his verses. The story goes that in bitter response to the refusal of Lycambes to marry one of his daughters to Archilochus, the disgruntled poet composed such vicious and vituperative poems that the daughters, in their shock, hanged themselves.[1] Although this is not Archilochus' sole distinction as a poet, this is the idea behind much of his *animus*. Horace does not disappoint in this respect. Several characters suffer from the jabs of the poet's quill (*Epodes* 4, 5, 6, 10, 17) and two of his epodes have been censored right off the page in at least two 20th-century editions of Horace (*Epodes* 8, 12). The tone is maintained for the public invectives of *Epodes* 7 and 16, in which Horace complements perfectly his literary influence with his present day environment. But in this connexion as well, Horace could pay tribute to Archilochus; for the latter did not merely strike fear into the hearts of young women, but he was also known for his politically motivated poems in which he would address the citizens of his *polis*.[2]

Given Horace's model for the *Epodes*, it may seem odd, then, to find the introductory poem of the collection to be exceptionally staid and emotionally restrained. Horace

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[1] D. A. Campbell (1967) 136-138.

[2] For a full explanation of the influence of Archilochus on Horace see Fraenkel (1957) 46-48.

declares his friendship to Maecenas, who has boarded a ship and is on his way to join Augustus in a naval battle:[1]

Ibis Liburnis inter alta navium,
amice, propugnacula,
paratus omne Caesaris periculum
subire, Maecenas, tuo.
(*Epode* 1.1-4)

This epode may be classified as the first Actium poem. Augustus has not yet begun to fight, but at this point there is no doubt that the rivalry between Antony and Augustus would be decided on sea. The poem is less about Augustus and his mission than it is about the relationship between Horace and Maecenas. Their impending separation induces Horace to declare his commitment to his friend (1.2) and patron (1.31). Nonetheless, there are certain elements worth noticing. Horace has identified himself early in his career as the poet who is ill-prepared to adapt his work to the theme of war. The point is made in the contrast between Maecenas who is heading off to battle and Horace who is staying in Rome:

roges, tuum labore quid iuvem meo,
imbellis ac firmus parum?
(*Epode* 1.15-16)

Horace employs the epithet *imbellis* when describing his own poetry in his *recusatio* to Agrippa:

nec saevam Pelopis domum
conamur, tenues grandia, dum pudor
imbellisque lyrae Musa potens vetat
laudes egregii Caesaris et tuas
culpa deterere ingeni.
(*Ode* 1.6.8-12)

Fraenkel maintains that *Epodes* 1 and 9 read more like lyric poetry than Archilochean iambics.[2] In *Epode* 1, Fraenkel continues, only the mention of the miser Chremes bears any resemblance to the vigorous tone so readily apparent in most of the other *Epodes*. These two poems (both of which are late in the collection) reveal Horace's development as

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[1] Each of the three poems dealing with Actium (*Epodes* 1,9 and *Ode* 1.37) has its own historical controversy and inaccuracies. Was Maecenas at Actium? was Horace? was there really mass destruction at the battle? Although the answers to these questions all seem to be "no", it is enough to say that on a detailed level Horace is unreliable as an historical source.

[2] Fraenkel (1957) 70.

a lyricist within the iambic genre. The transition can be seen best by comparing the two Actium *Epodes* with the earlier political poems, *Epodes* 7 and 16.

Those scholars who have sought to classify the *Epodes* into thematic categories have tended to group *Epodes* 1, 7, 9 and 16 together as the Political or National Epodes.[1] Moreover, by examining the *Epodes* from a structural point of view, we can see that the four poems have been arranged symmetrically. *Epodes* 1 and 9 introduce the two halves of the collection while 7 and 16 are set as the penultimate poems to each half. The two sets of poems represent the positive and negative extremes between which the rest of the *Epodes* fall in a progressive order.[2] Against the pessimism and sorrow of 7 and 16, the Actium epodes reflect a change in Horace's attitude. There may be an end to the Civil Wars in sight. In *Epode* 1, Maecenas is leaving, but nothing is assured. In *Epode* 9, the battle has been fought and won. However, it remains to be seen what the final outcome will be. The furor of 7 and 16 is replaced by an equally forceful anxiety, but it is an anxiety which is qualified by hope not despair.

Epode 9 is the first direct treatment of the Battle of Actium by any of the Augustan poets. *Epode* 1 had introduced Actium, but the battle had not yet occurred. In *Epode* 9, it has occurred. Horace sets the poem at a moment between the battle of Actium in 31 B.C. and the deaths of Antony and Cleopatra in August of 30 B.C. This is certain from the lines showing that Antony has indeed taken flight, though his destination is as yet unknown:

> *terra marique victus hostis Punico*
> *lugubre mutavit sagum.*
> *aut ille centum nobilem Cretam urbibus,*
> *ventis iturus non suis,*
> *exercitatas aut petit Syrtes Noto,*
> *aut fertur incerto mari.*
> (*Epode* 9.27-32)

It is possible to see much of the lyrical Horace in this poem, as Fraenkel has suggested. Such a mood is introduced with a question directed to Maecenas:

> *Quando repostum Caecubum ad festas dapes*
> *victore laetus Caesare*
> *tecum sub alta (sic Iovi gratum) domo,*
> *beate Maecenas, bibam,*

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[1] For a complete summary of the criticism on the *Epodes* (with chart) see Carrubba (1969) 34-35.

[2] This is well demonstrated by Porter (1991) 254-259.

sonante mixtum tibiis carmen lyra,
hac Dorium, illis barbarum...
(*Epodes* 9.1-6)

There are two points worth noting here. First, the Civil Wars may be coming to their conclusion finally. Horace, in this *Epode*, is set to begin celebrations, but the moment is postponed by the question *quando*. When the answer becomes known, then he can drink and celebrate to the combined songs of the Doric (warlike) lyre and that of the barbarian or Phrygian (orgiastic, sympotic). Secondly, at the same time, Horace has been developing stylistically in his *Epodes*. This is most apparent in the poems that reveal a tendency away from the Archilochean invective towards other forms more characteristic of Horace's lyrical efforts.[1] Some of these poems (*Epodes* 11,15,14) have an elegiac tinge to them: Horace is wounded by Cupid's arrows (11); he has loved and lost (15); love has distracted him from completing his *Epodes* (14). In *Epode* 13 Horace dwells on the familiar *carpe diem* theme which would become an Horatian trademark in his *Odes*:

rapiamus, amici,
occasionem de die; dumque virent genua
et decet, obducta solvatur fronte senectus.
tu vina Torquato move consule pressa meo.
cetera mitte loqui: deus haec fortasse benigna
reducet in sedem vice. nunc et Achaemenio
perfundi nardo iuvat et fide Cyllenea
levare diris pectora sollicitudinibus.
(*Epode* 13.3-10)

The two themes developed in the non-invective Epodes—symposia and love—become the criteria by which Horace defines his lyric poetry in the *recusatio* to Agrippa. After declining to sing of both Agrippa's and Augustus' military feats, Horace explains what kind of poetry he wishes to master:

nos convivia, nos proelia virginum
sectis in iuvenes unguibus acrium
cantamus, vacui, sive quid urimur,
non praeter solitum leves.
(*Ode* 1.6.17-20)

In the context of the sympotic theme, wine is frequently mentioned not just as a prop to the banquet scene, but also as an antidote to the grave sentiments or worries pressing upon either the poet himself or his addressee.[2] In *Epode* 13 Horace calls on the wine to release

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[1] One must be cautious when saying that Horace is deviating from his Archilochean stance since not enough of the Greek poet's work has survived. Nonetheless, the mood change is evident enough from reading Horace.

[2] Commager (1957) 68-80 gives a good study on this theme.

the consternation which has furrowed his brow, just as in *Ode* 1.11, Leuconoe is encouraged to forget about death and instead prepare some wine, *vina liques* (*Ode* 1.11.6). The same sentiment is expressed in Horace's praise of wine in another ode:

> *siccis omnia nam dura deus proposuit neque*
> *mordaces aliter diffugiunt sollicitudines.*
> *quis post vina gravem militiam aut pauperiem crepat?*
> (*Ode* 1.18.3-5)

Wine dispels the worries of war and poverty and other gnawing cares. The lyrical Horace shows that he is much more welcoming to the Phrygian than the Doric lyre. War is scarcely to be recalled. Horace puts the emphasis on relief and *not* remembering. Addressing a comrade in arms from the days of Philippi, Horace beseeches his friend Pompeius to give up the fight and make his way to Rome. In turn they will celebrate a banquet (*dapes*). The emphasis of the ode is on the welcoming home of a friend with whom Horace will drink and forget the troubles of the past, of a time consumed by war:

> *oblivioso levia Massico*
> *ciboria exple, funde capacibus*
> *unguenta de conchis. quis udo*
> *deproperare apio coronas*
>
> *curatve myrto? quem Venus arbitrum*
> *dicet bibendi? non ego sanius*
> *bacchabor Edonis: recepto*
> *dulce mihi furere est amico.*
> (*Odes* 2.7.21-28)

This seems to be the spirit in which *Epode* 9 was written as well, except that Augustus, unlike Horace's friend Pompeius, is on the winning side. In connexion with *Epode* 1, *Epode* 9 is a continuation of Horace's statement of friendship to Maecenas. He is anxious to celebrate the victory of Octavian at Maecenas' palace. Wine plays an important role; the mention of it surrounds the poem. Of course, the occasion (the battle of Actium) is not insignificant. It provides the major section of the epode:

> *ut nuper, actus cum freto Neptunius*
> *dux fugit ustis navibus,*
> *minatus urbi vincla, quae detraxerat*
> *servis amicus perfidis.*
> *Romanus eheu — posteri negabitis —*
> *emancipatus feminae*
> *fert vallum et arma, miles et spadonibus*
> *servire rugosis potest,*
> *interque signa turpe militaria*

sol adspicit conopium.
ad hoc frementes verterunt bis mille equos
Galli, canentes Caesarem,
hostiliumque navium portu latent
puppes sinistrorsum citae.
io triumphe, tu moraris aureos
currus et intactas boves?
io triumphe, nec Iugurthino parem
bello reportasti ducem
neque Africanum, cui super Carthaginem
virtus sepulcrum condidit.
(*Epode* 9.7-26)

The battle of Actium is first compared to the earlier naval victory against Sextus Pompeius, who is portrayed both in his Neptunian persona and as the scallywag that Augustus would later dismiss him as in the *Res Gestae* (25). The threat of enslavement introduced with the mention of Sextus is then transferred to Antony himself, who has succumbed to Cleopatra and panders (*servire*) to her troop of flaccid eunuchs. Antony's fall is emphasized by Horace's description of him as opposed to Cleopatra. The *Romanus miles* turned slave is placed in stark contrast to his master (or mistress), a woman, from the effeminate East no less. The detrimental effect of women on soldiers needed little exaggeration. It was commonplace that a female's charms could debilitate a military camp and induce sloth and a dismantling of discipline.[1] Cleopatra easily fit the stereotype.

The Egyptian Queen's power over Antony, according to the epode, results in treachery and a refusal to fight among the Antonian ranks. The first is shown by the mention of the 2,000 horse of the Galatians under Amyntas and Deiotarus. This fact is attested by the accounts of both Plutarch (*Ant.*63.3) and Dio (50.13.6). The following couplet (19-20) is presumed to refer to Actium. Historically speaking, Horace's words cannot be explained conclusively. According to most commentators from Bentley onwards, Horace is referring to a defection or premature retreat to the harbour by some of Antony's ships.[2] This would balance the idea of treachery on land (*bis mille equos*) and sea (Actium) and thus account for Antony's defeat *terra marique* (9.27). Some historians, notably Tarn, have cited these

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[1] The classic example is in Tacitus' account of the speech of Caecina Severus (*Annals* 3.32): *inesse mulierum comitatui quae pacem luxu, bellum formidine morentur et Romanum agmen ad similitudinem barbari incessus convertant. Non imbecillum tantum et imparem laboribus sexum, sed, si licentia adsit, saevum, ambitiosum, potestatis avidum.*

[2] Tarn (1931) 174-175 uses this consensus of commentators' interpretations to back up his argument for his same reading of lines 19-20.

verses as evidence that this treachery actually triggered the flight of Antony and Cleopatra.[1] However, none of the ancient sources refers to a defection or retreat of any kind at all save the infamous one to Alexandria. Were Tarn's interpretation correct even to the slightest degree, it would seem that the ancients would have known of such an important event, and plainly they do not. Rather, the lines most likely refer to the break-out (suggested by *citae*) of Antony and Cleopatra since that was the obvious highlight of the battle. In that case *sinistrorsum* would describe the South (or the left from Antony's position) movement of Cleopatra's ships after they broke through Octavian's battle line. This idea is picked up by the next set of verses where Horace wonders why celebrations have not begun, followed by the reference to the disappearance of Antony.

The immediacy of the poem adds to its tone. A victory surely has been won and Antony is presently a fugitive. But as the conclusion to the poem shows, there is still doubt in the air. Although drinking occurs in the final lines of the epode, the question posed in the beginning has not been answered. Wine functions on two distinct levels in this poem.[2] In the introduction we see wine in its convivial setting, fueling the revelry of joyful celebration. The whole scene, however, is checked by the initial question, *quando*. That is, there is no celebration just yet. But there had been, Horace says, when Sextus was defeated. The reference to Sextus and the recent past (*nuper*) leads to Antony and Cleopatra and the present. Their defeat is hailed, but they are still fugitives. Although Horace declares *io triumphe*, the festivities have not yet begun: the chariots have not been drawn, nor the sacrifical bull slaughtered. There is delay (*moraris*) because the triumph lacks its prize. Note that the prize at this point is Antony and not Cleopatra.

When Horace gives the order for greater goblets to fill with the Chian or Lesbian vintages, he is not answering his original question; for it is clear that celebration has been postponed by the absence of Antony. The setting described in the introduction has not been achieved by the conclusion of the Epode:

capaciores adfer huc, puer, Scyphos
et Chia vina aut Lesbia,
vel quod fluentem nauseam coerceat
metire nobis Caecubum.
curam metumque Caesaris rerum iuvat
dulci Lyaeo solvere.

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[1] Tarn (1931); also Tarn-Charlesworth (1965).

[2] Carrubba (1969) 105-107.

(*Epode* 9.33-38)

Wine provides the desired release (*solvere*) from fear and consternation concerning Octavian' situation (*rerum*). This is hardly the atmosphere of the delightful symposium described earlier. The ambiguity of the hour is still very prevalent as Horace awaits the outcome, almost sick with worry (*fluentem nauseam*).

The two epodes mark the end of Horace's career as a "triumviral poet". In both poems there are certain lyrically Horatian themes—wine, the banquet scene, friendship—being developed against the backdrop of Octavian's fate. Horace addresses his poems to Maecenas, while Octavian plays a major role in both cases. It is Octavian's danger that Maecenas will be sharing, and it is his victory they will be celebrating. At this point Octavian's absolute control over the state has not been secured. By the time that Horace's second book of *Satires* appears it has, and in the very first satire, Horace gives the standard "I would if I could" *recusatio* (*Satires* 2.1) to his friend Trebatius, who suggests Horace sing the deeds of Augustus:

> *"aude*
> *Caesaris invicti res dicere, multa laborum*
> *praemia laturus."*
> *Cupidum, pater optime, vires*
> *deficiunt: neque enim quivis horrentia pilis*
> *agmina nec fracta pereuntis cuspide Gallos*
> *aut labentis equo describat volnera Parthi.*
> (*Satire* 2.1.10-15)

Although the attention is already on Augustus' more worthy campaigns (i.e. against the barbarian), to deliver the poetic roar is of no importance to Horace. The *Epodes* have shown that he has been willing to intertwine his poetry with contemporary political, even martial, themes, but only on his own terms. Having finished the *Epodes* and the *Satires*, Horace concentrated on his greatest work, the three Books of *Odes*. Augustus hadby this time become the Princeps. Horace's first *recusationes* (*Satire* 2.1, *Ode* 1.6) show that his predilections towards a certain style of poetry have not changed by Augustus' victories. His development as a poet—most apparent in the *Epodes*—remains consistent and unaffected by Augustus' new status. Shedding his Archilochean persona, Horace moves towards his lyrical self, the singer of *convivia* and love as he details it in *Ode* 1.6. When he comes to write his definitive Actium poem, the Cleopatra Ode, he refuses to abandon his poetic creed. Instead he manipulates it in a way that results in a superior, more mature poem than any of his engagé *Epodes*.[1] The ode also shows how Horace can adapt the

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[1] Frankel (1957) 160-161.

desired historical information to a lyric poem. For the purposes of explication it must be quoted in full:

Nunc est bibendum, nunc pede libero
pulsanda tellus, nunc Saliaribus
ornare pulvinar deorum
tempus erat dapibus, sodales,

Antehac nefas depromere Caecubum
cellis avitis, dum Capitolio
regina dementis ruinas
funus et imperio parabat

contaminato cum grege turpium
morbo virorum, quidlibet inpotens
sperare fortunaque dulci
ebria. Sed minuit furorem

vix una sospes navis ab ignibus
mentemque lymphatam Mareotico
redegit in veros timores
Caesar ab Italia volantem

remis adurgens, accipiter velut
mollis columbas aut leporem citus
venator in campis nivalis
Haemoniae, daret ut catenis

fatale monstrum. Quae generosius
perire quaerens nec muliebriter
expavit ensem nec latentis
classe cita reparavit oras

ausa et iacentem visere regiam
voltu sereno fortis et asperas
tractare serpentes, ut atrum
corpore conbiberet venenum

deliberata morte ferocior,
saevis Liburnis scilicet invidens
privata deduci superbo
non humilis mulier triumpho.

The differences between *Epode* 9 and this ode reflect both the stylistic advancement of Horace's poetry and also the way that history is perceived (or meant to be perceived) and presented by Horace to his audience, now that Augustus' victory has been confirmed and his dominance established. The ode has in the past been cited as evidence of the Augustan

poets' willingness to help produce propaganda for the new Principate.[1] Such a superficial evaluation misunderstands not only what Horace has achieved by this particular poem, but also the nature of Augustus' putative encouragement of the poets.

There is no reason to doubt Suetonius when he writes that Augustus despised sycophants and their efforts to impress and glorify him. The anecdote Suetonius relates in this context seems wholly valid. He says that Augustus found the term *dominus* repulsive and forbade its use in his company. When during a play an actor recited the line, *O dominum aequum et bonum!*, and the audience burst into a standing ovation for the Princeps, Augustus cut short their enthusiastic applause with a scowl of disapproval (*Aug*.53). On the following day he even issued an edict on the matter. This sort of response certainly transgresses an act of simple humility.

Moreover, Augustus' literary merits should not be underestimated or glossed over when dealing with the idea that the poets provided grist for the propagandist mill. The evidence suggests that he did not regard the poets in this manner. We might consider Augustus as a man of letters for a moment. Suetonius says that Augustus wrote abundantly on various subjects including rhetoric and philosophy. He also wrote an Autobiography in thirteen books which later historians Dio, Appian and Plutarch used as a source for their own work. He dabbled a little in poetry, composing a poem entitled "Sicily" in hexameters, and a collection of epigrams, many of which he wrote in his spare time at the baths. He had attempted a tragedy called "Ajax", but, ultimately dissatisfied with his style, he abandoned that project. At least, however, when asked about its progress he could deliver a witty response (*Aug*.84-86). Therefore, like many prominent statesmen of the day he was himself a litterateur, if only a minor figure in the company of writer-soldiers like Pollio, Caesar, and Gallus. He clearly had ideas about his own writing; he preferred simplicity and thoroughness over vague allusions and purple prose. While preserving most of Caesar's writings, he withheld others from circulation—mostly the products of the Dictator's youth (*Jul.* 56). In short Augustus was himself a highly self-conscious writer and an active critic. Is it too much then to attribute to him a sense of understanding towards any of the writers in Maecenas' circle?

We also know from Suetonius that he heartily encouraged intellectual activity and would frequently attend readings of poets, historians and orators. Most importantly, he

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[1] For two different refutations of this opinion see Johnson (1967) 387-402 and Commager (1958) 47-58.

despised above all mediocre art and forbade anyone from treating him in literature unless that author was *praestantissimus*. And he refused to let his name become the subject of orators participating in rhetorical competitions, though it happened often nonetheless (*Aug.* 89).

Augustus had set out to turn Rome from a city of bricks into one of marble. Besides the architectural projects, this encouragement of artists and intellectuals seems to fit into the same program. If we return to the poets, their work may be viewed in a better light. Simply to sing victory poems would not suffice. Adulation was not tolerated on aesthetic grounds; it would only make for bad art. If there were requests for poetry on the *facta* of Augustus as the *recusationes* suggest, then Augustus would have been aware that the poets would have to do so without compromising the styles that had made them the top writers of their fields. The nature of the poets' refusal is in part an appeal for sympathy from a fellow litterateur. It is also possible that the patron's request was not an order, but a challenge.[1]

In the Cleopatra Ode we can see that Augustus' role in the battle of Actium is an important part of the poem, but it is not the predominating theme. This does not mean that Horace has somehow come up short in fulfilling the request to sing a victory song. In fact he has surpassed himself with this poem. It is at once lyrical, political, distant enough from the clatter of saber rattling, and yet it aspires to the grandeur of epic.[2] The result is a great work of art. It is also the composition or *labor* of an Augustan poet, one who played an important role in creating the Golden Age of Literature for which Maecenas and Augustus were responsible as providers of the *ignobile otium* required for artists to flourish in a highly civilized society.

Immediately the ode harks back to Horace's earlier treatment of the battle. The question posed in *Epode* 9 is finally answered by the opening statement *nunc est bibendum*. Sure enough, as Horace had promised, the scene described in the first part of the epode has come to fruition in the ode. There is a banquet (*dapibus*) among friends (*sodales*) with the wine flowing freely at last. In the same way that Horace has borrowed the meter and spirit from Archilochus for his iambic poetry, so he has taken his cue this time from one of his primary influences for the *Odes*, the Greek lyric poet Alcaeus. Educated Romans, as educated moderns love to point out, would be able to derive added joy from the first stanza

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[1] Dalzell (1956) 151-162.

[2] Commager (1962) 33, for example, isolates *Odes* 1.37, 2.1, and 3.4 as Horace's closest parallels with Vergil's *Aeneid* for these very reasons.

beyond that of simple jubilation; for they would have undoubtedly caught the allusion to Alcaeus' νυν χρη μεθηυσθην (fr.332), which celebrates the death of the tyrant Myrsilos. In the same meter as his predecessor, Horace celebrates the death of the Queen of Egypt. Unlike *Epode* 9, there is nary an allusion to Antony. Now that the outcome has been decided with certainty, the battle is portrayed as Augustus had established it: it is part of a war between *tota Italia* and the Barbarian East. Cleopatra is the foe, and it is her vain ambition to destroy Rome. The battle itself is rendered as part of the series which led to the Queen's downfall, culminating in her suicide at Alexandria in 30 B.C. If there were any suspicions concerning the historicity of Horace's accounts of the battle they are confirmed by this ode. The battle of Actium is quickly and incorrectly described as an inferno, and to say that scarcely one ship escaped the flames is a gross exaggeration of the destruction actually caused by the victors. Nor did Augustus immediately pursue the fugitives; it was almost a year before he landed on the shores of Egypt to finalize his victory. The linking of Actium to Alexandria is also exemplified by Horace's own joining of themes from his epode to his ode, since the question asked in the immediate aftermath of Actium is only answered by the resulting events at Alexandria.

Horace is little concerned with factual details here. The ode is not meant to be read as an historical document. Lyric poetry would not allow it. Horace has taken a theme provided by the contemporary information on Cleopatra as a debauchee in the company of drunks and libertines and has woven this image together with one of his favourite lyrical themes (drinking) into the whole fabric of the poem.[1] Now that Cleopatra is dead, it is time to drink (*nunc est bibendum*). It was forbidden to do so while she was planning doom for Rome, herself drunk on fortune (*fortunaque dulci ebria*)—not to mention the effects of Mareotic wine, an Egyptian vintage. Augustus enters the scene and sobers her up (*minuit furorem*) by his victory at Actium. Finally she, with "stoic fortitude" and remiss at urging a typical way out, drinks in (*conbiberet*) the poison of the scaly-skinned asps.

The final stanza, in which Cleopatra is depicted as defiantly heroic to the bitter end, demonstrates the range that Horace can achieve within a single poem. The conviviality of the first stanza is followed by two stanzas of invective recalling the spirit of *Epode* 9 with respect to the disparaging description of Cleopatra and her train. The attention then shifts to Octavian, at which point Horace takes the poem to loftier heights. It is Augustus who

[1] Commager (1962) 88-98 gives an excellent study of this poem.

divides the divergent moods of drunkenness in the poem by his presence. Following his entry at line 16 we find the similes of the hawk and dove and hunter and his prey—what Nisbet and Hubbard justly call a "piece of epic convention".[1] Fraenkel isolates these two stanzas (1.37.12-20), which find their starting point at the description of Actium, as the moment when Horace rises to a Pindaric or epic strain.[2] It is interesting to see that in allotting the central and Pindaric stanzas for Augustus, Horace has managed to keep his praise almost restricted to an abstract level. The facts are distant from the poem. The first stanza is purely exaggerated fabrication, while in the next stanza Horace completely removes Augustus from the historical context, offering the two similes instead. Although we need not agree with W.R. Johnson, who argues that the ode is Horace's flat, even subversive, refusal to pander to Augustus' requests for sycophantic versification, he is right to point out that the poem avoids what he calls "official versions" of Actium and Alexandria.[3] The poem is an amalgam of images and moods with an almost surrealistic effect. Perhaps "Ovidian" is a more accurate and less anachronistic term; for as we read of Augustus pressing on with the oars of his galley, the oars (*remis*) of the victor suddenly become the wings of a hawk. Horace hatches a second visual image for *remis* (which can mean wings as well as oars) by the simile of the hawk and dove immediately following the mention of the chase. In the same way as Cleopatra flies off (*volantem*) in her escape, she is then compared to the gentle dove flying from the hawk. The prey-and-predator image is then transferred to a second simile of the hunter and the hare. The scene has travelled a long way from the clash of arms with which Horace introduced the scene.

Through the fourth and fifth stanzas Horace has gracefully diverted his readers' attention away from the battle scene while at the same time managing to elevate the tone of his poem. If we divide the poem symmetrically into three main sections—stanzas 1-3, 4-5, 6-8—it is possible to see that the middle section acts as the point of transition in several ways. After stanza 4 and 5 the battle of Actium is now a thing of the past, and so is the Cleopatra of the pre-Actium period. Chronology is affected by Horace's structural arrangement of the poem. No longer the besotted megalomaniac of stanzas 2 and 3, Cleopatra re-enters the poem in stanza 6 as something more fearful and not at all the focus

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[1] Nisbet-Hubbard (1970) *ad.loc.*

[2] Fraenkel (1957) 160.

[3] Johnson (1967).

of ridicule: she is *fatale monstrum*. The lofty and sobering tone introduced by the mention of Octavian is now transferred to Cleopatra. She seeks a death worthy of her noble self (21-22); she faces her fate with calmness and manly courage (22-27); she refuses to descend from her status as monarch, nor will she deign to grace a triumph by her presence (30-32). This is a different character from the one vilified in lines 4-10. In the latter half of the poem Cleopatra has become the individual (she has even relinquished her sex) who posed the greatest threat to the security of Rome since Jugurtha or even Hannibal. This is the Cleopatra who more closely fits the legendary descriptions of Plutarch and Shakespeare.[1]

In the aftermath of Alexandria, Cleopatra usurps Antony's position as Augustus' arch-enemy, thereby giving the war an international status. *Epode* 9 clearly shows that up until the time of the battle, Antony had held the focus of attention as the enemy. When Horace avers that it would have been downright sinful (*nefas*) to hold any sort of celebrations while Cleopatra was conspiring to ruin Rome, the distinction between the Civil Wars and the World War waged by Augustus against Egypt is blurred. Hitherto, as in *Epode* 9, Horace had viewed the Civil Wars as the period that prevented the uncorking of the Caecuban. Cleopatra was not the principal threat. She had undone the uxorious Antony, but he remained the enemy. Officially, this was changed when Augustus declared war on Egypt and conspicuously ignored Antony.

This change is reflected in the ode as well, and in this way Actium is presented from two perspectives, neither one of which distorts the historical validity of the other. The use of the word *nefas* had already been associated with the "sinful" Civil War era by both Vergil and Horace. In mentioning the days without symposia, Horace is able to draw Actium out of its civil context and join it more appropriately with Alexandria just as Propertius has done in *Elegy* 2.1, and as Augustus had done himself in his triple triumph of 29 B.C. In *Ode* 3.6 Horace explains the battle of Actium in its dual role as the final battle of the Civil Wars and as the battle where West defeated East and quashed the foreign menace. In this poem, Horace reflects on piety and its importance to the survival and success of the Roman State. Romans are held to be a superior race because of their piety, and this advantage ensures their supreme ability as conquerors. He exhorts his fellow citizens to expiate the sin of their ancestors. A number of the consequences resultant from

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[1] Cf. Velleius 2.87.1 on Cleopatra's suicide: *At Cleopatra frustratis custodibus inlata aspide in morsu et sanie eius expers muliebris metus spiritum reddidit.*

Roman sin and impiety are listed. These consequences are invariably military defeats. Having neglected the gods, Horace writes, Romans have brought disaster upon themselves:

di multa neglecti dederunt
Hesperiae mala luctuosae...

paene occupatam seditionibus
delevit urbem Dacus et Aethiops,
hic classe formidatus, ille
missilibus melior sagittis.
(*Ode* 3.6.6-7,13-16)

Here Actium is referred to vaguely as the sea battle against the Ethiopians (or Egyptians). The link is now evident: the battle of Actium was part of a foreign war which put Rome in great peril since its citizens were at the time preoccupied with their own internal strife (*seditionibus*). They were weakened by their impiety and this rendered them vulnerable to the designs of a foreign power. By this explanation, in spite of their contrary perspectives, both *Epode* 9 and *Ode* 1.37 are rendered historically accurate in a very loose sense. That is, when Horace composed *Epode* 9, Actium was still part of the Civil Wars; by *Ode* 1.37 he has turned the battle into an international event. Yet there is no conflict in the divergent presentations. In relation to the theme of *Ode* 3.6, Actium is shown to be part of both realities: the Civil Wars, a period of sinfulness, almost caused defeat for the distracted Romans in a foreign war. Augustus' victory commenced the process of expiation both by ending the Civil Wars and by defeating the morally inferior Orientals. And as Horace says in *Ode* 1.2, the way for Augustus to expiate the sin (*scelus*) of the past is to divert the energies of the Roman military against a foreign enemy.[1] The restoration of temples mentioned by Horace in *Ode* 3.6 is another act in the expiation of the previous generations' impiety.

Horace has managed to have his cake and eat it too. He has succeeded in working within the boundaries set by his genre while tackling the predominant Roman themes, including the *facta* of Augustus—the greatest of these being the battle of Actium. "Second-raters may dabble with jingoism" writes W.R. Johnson in his defence of *Ode* 1.37 against the belief that it is a piece of poetic propaganda.[2] Undeniably, whether one considers Augustus to have been a beneficent ruler, a "subtle tyrant" as Gibbon calls him, or

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[1] Commager (1962) 189.

[2] Johnson (1967) 399.

whatever other profile he has cast to those acquainted with this period, he deserves at least some credit for the generation of the Augustan poets. If Augustus encouraged the greatest poets of the day with enough artistic freedom that what ensued would be a Golden Age, and if he did this pre-meditatively so that this Golden Age would be synonymous with the Augustan Age, then this may indeed be a form of propaganda in a very oblique and unconventional sense. And if so, then Horace's poem might be called propaganda. But ultimately Johnson's point is irrefutable: Horace was no second-rater.

CHAPTER FOUR: ACTIUM IN LOVE ELEGY (PROPERTIUS)

In the same period that Horace was working on his three books of *Odes* and establishing himself as the unrivalled lyricist of Rome, Propertius was carving his own niche in the Roman literary scene as one of the top elegists, who, along with Tibullus, became the successor to a chorus of love-poets that included such revered talents as Calvus, Catullus and Gallus. Like Horace in his lyrics, Propertius sought to strain the limits of love elegy to a greater potential by injecting a political element to his work without, however, abandoning the genre in which he flourished. Propertius was first and foremost an elegiac love poet. His inspiration, he claims, is his mistress Cynthia; and his first book of poems focuses primarily on the trials and tribulations of his turbulent relationship with Cynthia and the life of a man driven under the spell of Amor. It is also very clear that the poetic persona whose adventures we trace in Propertius' *Elegies* is a man far more sympathetic to a languorous life ensconced in peace, rather than one beleaguered by war. This is a common theme throughout the *Elegies*, and it poses a difficulty for the poet when he attempts to write on the battle of Actium. How can a self-avowed pacifist write about Actium without compromising his overtly anti-militaristic disposition, or without risking a poem that might somehow denigrate Augustus' greatest military achievement? And if Propertius can manage this task, we might then wonder if he can do so convincingly.

These questions have consumed 20th-century Propertian scholarship, and the various responses have made him perhaps the most controversial of the Augustan poets. For a study on his Actium poems the current debate over Propertius deserves a brief mention since they are the poems most often discussed. The traditional view has been that Propertius succeeds in championing the Augustan cause through his elegies; it is often elegies such as 2.16, 3.11, and 4.6 which critics cite in favour of this view.[1] On the other hand, a drastically different school of interpreters indicates these same poems and a few more (notably 1.21-22, 2.7, 2.15, 3.1-5) to argue that Propertius was at one extreme indifferent to or bored with Augustus, and at the other a subversive intellectual, who

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1 See for instance the introduction of Butler and Barber (1964). Grimal (1952) 183-197, 315-326, 437-450 adheres to this view in his studies on Book 4. The latest proponent of this view is Baker(1968) 322-349, (1976) 56-62. For other studies dealing with this issue but focussing specifically on *Elegy* 4.6, see below

deplored his country's despot and everything Augustus stood for, imperialist jingoism, morality codes and all.[1] As one proponent of this theory so laconically puts it: "Propertius hates Augustus."[2] This second interpretation can be said to have had some of its origins in the provocative translations of Propertius by Ezra Pound, completed in 1917.[3] In 1936, a study by E. Paratore on *Elegy* 3.11 gave this line of criticism academic legitimacy.[4] Currently the anti-Augustan Propertius seems to be the more prevalent view, or at least more prolific, although the traditional interpretation has seen a resurgence of supporters in the last twenty-five years from those who apply a more generic method of criticism to the poems.[5]

One can see, I think, the reason for the controversy, especially over poems such as *Elegies* 2.15, 2.16, 3.11, 4.6, where both praise and blame are ambiguously contrived. These poems are difficult at times; they are jarring or even strident in tone on first inspection. In the poems' relation to Augustus and to Antony and Cleopatra, there is a tension well evident, but on which side of Augustan ideology the poet's message falls seems to be a matter of taste, and therein rests the debate. My own view is that in order to arrive at a fair understanding of Propertius, we must first reject the idea that the Actium poems hinge on either a panegyrical or a rebellious message with regard to Augustus. Consequently we may better evaluate how Propertius achieves a resolution of the problem established in the *recusationes* that the genre (in this case elegy) is ill-equipped to sing the *facta* of Augustus.

The sort of character Propertius assumes is a fair indicator for the tone of much of his poetry. The Propertius whom we encounter throughout the *Elegies* has the qualities of a wag.[6] He is a love-sick fool who at once revels in and laments his lot. But throughout it

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[1] For this group see Johnson (1973) 151-180, Nethercut (1971) 299-301, (1971a) 411-433, Sullivan (1966) 5-22, (1972) 169-172, (1974) *passim*. Stahl (1985) prefers to disassociate himself from the aforementioned "band of Young Turks" (371), although he is in agreement with them on a the most basic level that Propertius chafed under the yoke of Augustus and resisted him throughout his poetry.

[2] Johnson (1973) 174.

[3] For a discussion on the many influences of Pound's translations see Sullivan (1964) *passim.*

[4] Paratore (1936). His arguments are summed up by Stahl (1985) 369-70 and Nethercut (1971a).

[5] Most of this scholarship concentrates on *Elegy* 4.6. See below chapter 6.

[6] Nethercut (1971a) comes close to this approach when he creates a new sub-category of interpretation of 3.11 as "ironic and whimsical", but he cannot let go of the idea that this irony equals dissention.

all he remains steadfastly committed to Amor. Often he exhorts others to take heed and learn from his example. Unlike Horace, who advises his fellow poets Tibullus and Valgius to cease their elegiac pinings (*Odes* 1.33, 2.9), even encouraging Valgius to sing instead the *tropaea Augusti* (*Odes* 2.9.19-20), Propertius stresses the superiority of elegy and admonishes his friends Ponticus (1.7, 1.9) and Lynceus (2.34) to abandon their futile endeavours in epic poetry and Socratic philosophy and begin composing love poetry. Already in Book 1, Propertius freely admits that he is a lover not a fighter:

> *non ego sum laudi, non natus idoneus armis:*
> *hanc me militiam fata subire volunt.*
> (1.6.29-30)

There is nothing covert or sly about Propertius' aversion to the war, but neither is this part of an anti-Augustan platform. We cannot know what the Princeps thought of that rascal of a poet with his Soldier-of-Love routine, but it is generally recognized that Propertius joined the circle of Maecenas after the publication of Book 1, in which the verses quoted above and others like them appear. We do know from Tacitus (*Annals* 1.79) that Augustus was annoyed by poets who ridiculed him in the cowardly security of anonymity. The poet and his patron(s), it is fair to say, were aware of each other. And yet they entered into this professional relationship. That is to say, Maecenas (and Augustus) would have known very well what kind of poet they were bringing into their stall of writers. None of the Augustans miraculously transformed himself into a different poet after Maecenas became his patron.

The first poem in Book 2 is an affirmation of the poetic ideals evident in Book 1: *ingenium nobis ipsa puella facit* (2.1.4). Maecenas, Propertius informs us, has asked where he derives his inspiration to compose love elegies. From here Propertius turns the poem into a standard *recusatio*. If he were able to sing epic, he says, it would concern Augustus, but alas this is impossible since he draws his inspiration from his *puella*; and his poetry is meant to be gentle (*mollis*) not grand. The dichotomy of genres—epic and elegy—having been established, Propertius remains acutely aware of his position as a love-poet throught the next two books. He often muses on the subject of his vocation in the context of Roman literature. He mentions his Greek influences (3.1-5), and the genealogy of Roman poets whom he has succeeded (2.34). At the same time he stresses his commitment to the themes of love and peace (3.5), both of which are placed in stark contrast to the theme of war:

Pacis Amor deus est, pacem veneramus amantes:
sat mihi cum domina proelia dura mea.
(3.4.1-2)

This is still the same Propertius whom we have witnessed in Book 1. Both this and the previous elegy (3.4) are indicative of the consistency of character introduced earlier. Propertius undermines the highfalutin tone demanded from the Parthian campaign by thumping his tub while he sits in the lap of Cynthia and cheers on the troops marching down the Sacra Via. If he is going to incorporate an event like Actium into his poetry, then we must realize that this is the persona behind these attempts. Therefore when we read *Elegies* 2.15, 2.16 and 3.11 we shall be able to appreciate not his success at encomium or protest, but rather his ingenuity in elegizing a subject more conducive to epic. His solution is that if he cannot rise to the demands which a subject such as Actium would impose, then he will force Actium to meet the demands of elegy. Before he does so, he first proves that those initial demands are unattainable. He makes this abundantly clear not only in his refusals like 2.1, but by example as well. This is the scene in *Elegy* 2.10.

In the preceding two elegies (2.8, 2.9) Propertius has broken with Cynthia and their affair appears to be at an end. In 2.10 he decides that since his mistress has deserted him, it is time to abandon elegy for a greater strain of poetry. Augustus and his Parthian campaign will comprise the subject matter. In Maeonian fashion, then, the poet prepares to soar:

aetas prima canat veneres, extrema tumultus:
bella canam, quando scripta puella mea est.
nunc volo subducto gravior procedere vultu,
nunc aliam citharam me mea Musa docet.
surge anima; ex humili iam carmine sumite vires,
Pierides: magni nunc erit oris opus.
(2.10.7-12)

Or so he contends, but this noble endeavour is hardly credible. How would we react, for instance, if Robert Herrick were to renounce his love for Julia or Perilla and then set off into a few lines of Miltonic verse with a Paradise Lost theme? The result is farce. Although Pound's poetic criticism involves much more than a simple interpretation of the Latin text,[1] his translation of this poem is one example where he has captured the spirit of Propertius better than most critics have acknowledged:

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[1] However, Pound's approach is in fact more sympathetic to Propertius the poet than the criticism of Pound's American scholarly followers whose articles constantly make references to fascism, communism, Vietnam, etc.—political issues. Pound saw Propertius as an appropriate persona for him to assume because they both felt pressure to produce a certain kind of poetry for a movement within a literary tradition; the

My Muse is eager to instruct me in a new gamut, or gambetto,
Up, up my soul, from your lowly cantilation,
put on a timely vigour.

O August Pierides! Now for a large-mouthed product.
Thus:
"The Euphrates denies its protection to the Parthian
and apologizes for Crassus,"
And "It is, I think, India which now gives necks to your triumph,"
And so forth, Augustus. "Virgin Arabia shakes in her inmost dwelling."
If any land shrink into a distant seacoast,
it is a mere postponement of your domination
And I shall follow the camp, I shall be duly celebrated,
for singing the affairs of your cavalry.
May the fates watch over my day.
("Homage to Sextus Propertius", translation of 2.10.10-20)

Stahl remarks on the "high and elevated style"[1] of Propertius' poem, and this would seem to be the case for the part quoted above in Pound's translation; but that sonorousness is undermined when we consider who delivers these lines. Pound amply demonstrates the friction resultant from the irreverent elegist's aspirations towards epic with the mock-epic phrasings such as "a mere postponement of your domination", "the affairs of your cavalry" and the bathetic "now for a large-mouthed product," not to mention the gaffes, "I think" and "And so forth." The description of Arabia as a virgin (*intactae*) also shows how Propertius the love-poet bumbles his way through unknown and undesired territory. By the end of the poem Propertius admits that he had better remain true to his original calling and Latin literature is spared an elaborate failure (but not an impudent hoax).

In *Elegy* 2.15, the first of his efforts to mention Actium beyond that of a passing reference, Propertius handles the Actium theme in a most unconventional manner. The

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pressure came from a "literary dictator", not a political dictator. Pound like Propertius was reacting to an aesthetic movement in letters. In this way both poets end up defining themselves by commenting on both their predecessors and their contemporaries. The *Homage to Sextus Propertius* reveals one poet's voice within another who had apparently gone through a similar experience. The very loose translation of *iam ... vires* (2.10.11) as "put on a timely vigour" later becomes in Pound's own words, "The age demanded an image." And Propertius, like Pound, is concerned with the artistic implications of following someone else's *castra*—another example where the English "camp" is almost better than the Latin itself. Political ideology does not figure as importantly in this scenario as Propertian scholarship has maintained. At the same time, Pound's criticism, whether in essay form or through translation, must be regarded with caution. As a staunch anti-academic reader, his idiosyncratic and iconoclastic views are not as concerned with proving a point as they are with offering a learned impression. This approach has its advantages for the non-specialist, but it is obviously vulnerable to charges of inappropriate subjectivity.

[1] Stahl (1985) 156.

poem begins with the poet gleefully announcing the success of a night well spent with Cynthia. He then goes on to expound on the virtues of nudity—not the sort of setting we might expect for a battle scene. But in 2.1 he has already proclaimed,

> *seu nuda erepto mecum luctatur amictu,*
> *tum vero longas condimus Iliadas*
> (2.1.13-14)

Elegy 2.15 seems to be an example of this sentiment.[1] Battle between the sheets can rival the Trojan War for poetic inspiration. It is significant that Propertius chooses this moment to introduce Actium although it would seem so antithetical to the main subject of the poem. That is, he has decided to juxtapose what he considers to be great poetry (a love scene) with the conventional "great" poetry (*proelia*) in order to prove his conviction that elegy can rival, maybe even surpass, epic. And if the elegist should contend with the epicist, so then, should the lover rival the soldier as the protagonist in this poetry.

Propertius chooses for the time being not to focus exclusively on the battle. It plays a minor role in fact. But he does reserve its mention for a crucial moment in the poem. He begins with a celebration of the night's revels. He follows this with praise for nudity, supported by a few examples from mythology in order to illustrate his claim that eyes are the vanguard of love:

> *non iuvat in caeco Venerem corrumpere motu:*
> *si nescis, oculi sunt in amore duces.*
> (2.15.11-12)

After a demand to see Cynthia in all her naked glory while her body still retains the suppleness of youth, Propertius then, in a sly shift of mood, finds himself digressing on the question of mortality and the brevity of human life. Suddenly a roll in the clover has taken on greater implications: it has become a matter of life or death. He concludes that he might achieve eternal bliss if he can prolong these moments of sexual ecstasy. This particular train of thought culminates in the reference to Actium, which Propertius sees as an event inconceivable in his own world:

> *qualem si cuncti cuperent decurrere vitam*
> *et pressi multo membra iacere mero,*
> *non ferrum crudele neque esset bellica navis,*
> *nec nostra Actiacum verteret ossa mare,*
> *nec totiens propriis circum oppugnata truimphis*
> *lassa foret crines solvere Roma suos.*
> *haec certe merito poterunt laudare minores:*

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[1] Rudd (1982) 152-155 gives a short but fine discussion on this elegy.

laeserunt nullos pocula nostra deos.
(2.15.41-48)

Having thus described this last virtue of a lover's lifestyle, Propertius then concludes the poem with an exhortation to love and live while the time allows, for life is too short and any day may be the last (2.15.49-54). It is remarkable how far Propertius can develop a simple theme; and it is particularly in the three Actium poems which I discuss in this chapter that he manages this feat with considerable success, skill and good fun. These are the kinds of poems which he himself says prove how versatile elegy really is, contrary to conventional belief. Interpretations on the above passage range from praise for Augustus to criticism of Augustus to praise for Antony to criticism of Antony.[1] That Propertius has portrayed Actium in a less flattering light there is little doubt; but his rancour towards the battle does not extend to individuals in this instance. He has different aims than to point the finger at either Augustus or Antony for their part in the Civil Wars. On a more basic level, he has again attempted to supplant the pre-eminence of epic with elegy. Unlike Horace, who in *Epode* 9 awaits the uncorking of the Caecuban and who in *Ode* 1.37 celebrates victory with his wine, Propertius by contrast, says war need not have occurred at all had Romans been drunk in the first place! It is the life of the elegiac paramour that deserves praise; war has only caused suffering. As for the impiety and sin to which Horace and Vergil refer when describing the Civil Wars, Propertius counters that he has offended no gods (2.15.48).

That Propertius treats Actium as part of the Civil Wars and not as an international conflict is perhaps significant, but how far this can be taken as criticism of Augustus is uncertain, if it is relevant at all. I would suggest that it is not as bold a defiance of Augustan propaganda as some critics make it out to be. Although Octavian declared war against Cleopatra, it is doubtful that many people saw the battle of Actium as anything but an event of the Civil Wars, especially those who had relatives or loved ones on the wrong side. Dio (50.8.6) mentions an omen which occurred shortly before Actium: for two days gangs of young anarchists calling themselves Antonians and Caesarians battled with each other in the streets of Rome. Moreover, there are other instances in literature of the period that harbour no illusions concerning the true nature of the conflict—Horace's *Epode* 9 is a good example as is a passage in Cornelius Nepos (*Atticus* 20.5), who casually mentions the struggle between Antony and Octavian over the sole mastery of the world. Augustus

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[1] Stahl (1985) 215-233, 362-365, discusses the variant interpretations.

would surely have conceded that many of the bones washed up on the Actian shores belonged to Romans. Propaganda may have eased certain consciences, and it was no doubt promoted with vigour. But there is no indication that this new history was forced down Roman throats; for that implies a harsher, more dictatorial regime than the one Augustus ruled. There is a sense in much of the scholarship concerning the alleged anti-Augustanism of particularly Vergil and Propertius that Augustus was of a Stalinist disposition, that he brought pressure upon his propagandists (i.e. the poets) to churn out panegyric and that he (along with two millennia of readers) was so intellectually deprived that he failed to notice that the greatest artistic voices of the Augustan Age were also his very enemies. This opinion is very hard to believe.[1] The evidence suggests a great deal of intellectual freedom in the Augustan Age. Tacitus (*Annals* 4.35) recounts the fate of Cremutius Cordus, an historian who fell out of favour during the reign of Tiberius. In an address, Cremutius contrasted the present freedom of speech and expression (which is non-existent he claimed) with the era under Augustus when, he says, historians could praise Brutus and Cassius, Augustus could jokingly refer to Livy as *Pompeianus*, and Antony's letters were preserved for all to see. Moreover, Seneca (*de Ira* 3.23.4-8) tells an instructive anecdote about Augustus' relations with the historian Timagenes. The two were personal enemies, yet Timagenes remained a popular figure in Rome and was never persecuted. He lived many years and continued to write histories which infuriated Augustus, working from the home of Pollio, who took him in after he was banned from Augustus' palace.[2]

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[1] Similarly, those who discount the anti-Augustanism in the poets nevertheless maintain that Augustus did compel Horace, Vergil and Propertius to churn out propaganda. The difference of opinion for these scholars is that the poets willingly complied. eg. Baker (1968) 324: "But as soon as his career was launched with the publication of the Monobiblos, and his reputation as a poet of outstanding ability established, Propertius was recruited into the literary circle of Maecenas and placed under some pressure to turn his talents to producing poetry that could be used as literary propaganda." Although I believe that the *recusationes* reflect a bona fide request by Maecenas as I have maintained earlier, and it seems obvious that the subject proffered was the Princeps and his *facta*, the idea of pressure to conform to some unspoken agenda calling for propaganda seems an over-reading of the available texts. In this respect Dalzell (1956) is closer to the truth when he argues that the request by Maecenas is to be regarded not as an order, but as a challenge for writers of exceptional talent to outdo themselves. Moreover, Propertius' efforts to expand the possibilities of elegy are evident not only in his politically bent poems but also in his treatment of other epic subjects, particularly in his use of Homeric themes, which he manipulates for elegiac purposes. For an example of this, see Benediktson, (1986) 17ff.

[2] Griffin (1985) 180-183 cites the same two passages to make a similar point concerning Vergil.

Propertius is hardly impressed by war in even the best of all possible worlds. Horace may deplore the Civil Wars, but he has no qualms about chasing after the barbarian. Indeed, *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.* Vergil is less enthusiastic, but to him, as the *Aeneid* shows, war is something of a necessary evil. Odious as it may be, Aeneas cannot succeed until the fighting is over. Propertius, on the other hand, will have none of it. He subjects both the Civil Wars and the Parthian campaign to ironic and even negative treatments. But he effects this on a general level. He considers war an exercise in folly when there are women to be wooed and wine to be consumed. According to his philosophy, for anyone to choose the harsh and bitter life of a soldier over that of the dissolute lover is a gross misunderstanding of the seemingly obvious advantages of hedonism. True, Antony had led such a life: he was notorious for his drinking and his philandering. But he erred in failing to abandon his military life, and therefore his divided allegiance to both Amor and Mars laid him low.[1] This is the "theory" promulgated in *Elegy* 2.16 by Propertius.

As in the previous poem, there is little to prepare us in the beginning of *Elegy* 2.16 for the eventual mention of Antony and Augustus. Propertius laments a praetor's return to Rome and the problems this causes for his love life: Cynthia dumps him for the rival come lately. The poem thus becomes a platform for Propertius to expound on the evils of materialism, citing his mistress as a case in point. He cautions that greed bodes ill for venal lovers and he has examples to prove it: Creusa, Eriphyla. Then he switches and says, "maybe not, since *Turpis Amor* is usually deaf. For instance, look at Antony:"

> *cerne ducem, modo qui fremitu complevit inani*
> *Actia damnatis aequora militibus:*
> *hunc infamis amor versis dare terga carinis*
> *iussit et extremo quaerere in orbe fugam.*
> *Caesaris haec virtus et gloria Caesaris haec est.*
> *illa, qua vicit, condidit arma manu.*
> (2.16.37-42)

Here, as in 2.15, Propertius has inverted the significance of Actium. The alleged grand achievement of Augustus has now become the unfortunate result of an ignominious love

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[1] The interpretation of this passage by Griffin (1985) 35: "Had he [Augustus] lived like me [Propertius]—like Antony—the disaster of Actium need never have happened," is equally plausible, but I find that the interpretation that Antony was a dissolute yes and Propertius would have sympathized as Griffin stresses, but Antony failed himself by playing the role of soldier as well is more consistent with the poem (2.15) in which Augustus is not even remotely alluded to, as well as in the next poem (2.16) where this interpretation is fully expanded by Propertius.

affair—unfortunate because Romans died in vain (*inani*). Propertius maintains the elegiac approach to the subject: love destroyed Antony. He does not concern himself with the logistics of the battle, but instead pursues the theme more conducive to his genre. The military aspect of the war he completely dismisses as irrelevant to the victory. Having indicated the reason for Antony's defeat (i.e. *infamis amor*), Propertius then hails Augustus' true virtue and glory. Augustus, according to Propertius, deserves encomium not for his successful participation in war, but for his termination of war. This couplet of praise (41-42) immediately follows the lines depicting the true version (as this poem would have it) of Actium, and therefore makes explicit Propertius' message that he will not bring Augustus the military man into his poetry. As this particular poem shows, Augustus' role at Actium is negligible. That does not, however, detract from his glory: blessed are the peacemakers.

Propertius published his third book of *Elegies* sometime after 23 B.C. Horace's *Odes* were already in circulation, and their influence is well evident throughout Propertius' work.[1] Among such poems is *Elegy* 3.11, which is very much the Propertian rendition of Horace's Cleopatra Ode. The introduction is typical of some of the earlier elegies in which Propertius warns his reader that as a veteran lover, he has some advice to impart to the ingenuous neophyte. His subject for this lesson is the power of women. He begins with a rhetorical question in response to his addressee's indictment of cowardice on the part of Propertius:

> *Quid mirare, meam si versat femina vitam*
> *et trahit addictum sub sua iura virum,*
> *criminaque ignavi capitis mihi turpia fingis,*
> *quod nequeam fracto rumpere vincla iugo?*
> *ventorum melius praesagit navita motum,*
> *vulneribus didicit miles habere metum,*
> *ista ego praeterita iactavi verba iuventa:*
> *tu nunc exemplo disce timere meo.*
> (3.11.1-8)

This last line, with its whimsical arrogance—"Now you listen here, I'll show you fear"—sets the tone for the rest of the poem. The introduction follows with a characteristic series of mythological *exempla* from Jason to Jove; all have been subjugated under the

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[1] For the influence of Horace on Propertius see Sullivan (1974) 19-25; W.R. Nethercut (1970) 385-407; Solmsen, (1948) 105-109.

sway of a woman. This continues for ten couplets and serves as the prelude to the main character, Cleopatra:

Quid modo quae nostris opprobia vexerit armis
et famulos inter femina trita suos,
coniugis obsceni pretium Romana poposcit
moenia et addictos in sua regna Patres?
(3.11.29-32)

The previous examples have prepared us for this development. Propertius moves gradually from relationships concerned primarily with the love theme (Medea, Penthesilea) to those which carry a broader, more political significance with respect to their control over men (Omphale, Semiramis). The language used in this switch from mythology to recent history also harks back to the very introduction of the poem and reveals how Propertius has now transposed his elegiac imagery into a political/historical context. The subjection (*addictum sub sua iura virum*) of Propertius the lover describes in line 32 Cleopatra's ambition to impose control on Rome and the Senate (*addictos in sua regna Patres*). Cleopatra, as a head of state, beholds a power not unlike that of Cynthia over Propertius. The poem's initial question, which had concerned man in his relationship with woman, takes on an engagé character. [1]

A simple hallmark of Propertian elegy (i.e. woman's power over man) somehow has rippled into epic proportions by the mention of Cleopatra and the implications of her attempts to enslave Rome. Having effected this transition, Propertius decides to press his point for all its worth and more. From Cleopatra, he moves on to Alexandria—that foul land well versed in the art of trickery. Next he includes the fate of Pompey and his death on the shores of Egypt, as if there were a connexion. A woman's charms, it would seem, have very wide-ranging effects. He then focuses directly on Cleopatra for the next ten couplets of the poem:

scilicet incesti meretrix regina Canopi,
una Philippeo sanguine adusta nota,
ausa Iovi nostro latrantem opponere Anubim,
et Tiberim Nili cogere ferre minas,
Romanamque tubam crepitanti pellere sistro,
baridos et contis rostra Liburna sequi,
foedaque Tarpeio conopia tendere saxo,
iura dare et statuas inter et arma Mari!
quid nunc Tarquinii fractas iuvat esse securis,
nomine quem simili vita superba notat,

[1] For an elaboration of this argument, see Stahl (1985) 239.

si mulier patienda fuit? cape, Roma, triumphum
et longum Augusto salva precare diem!
bracchia spectavi sacris admorsa colubris,
et trahere occultum membra soporis iter.
"Non haec Roma, fuit tanto tibi cive verenda!"
dixit et assiduo lingua sepulta mero.
septem urbs alta iugis, toto quae praesidet orbi,
femineas timuit territa Marte minas.
haec di condiderant, haec di quoque moenia servant:
vix timeat salvo Caesare Roma Iovem.
(3.11.39-66)

Although there is a considerable amount of repetition from Horace's Cleopatra Ode[1]—the chase of the Liburnian galley, the flight to Egypt, the asps, the drunkenness, Cleopatra's entourage—the lofty tone which Horace achieves is absent from this elegy. Instead, Propertius' poem has become a rant, which, despite its praise for Augustus, seems anything but an elevation of style. Ironically, however, Propertius has managed to run the whole gamut of Roman history, including the mention of such notables (friend and foe alike) as Tarquinius Superbus, Marius, Scipio, Pompey, Hannibal, Camillus and Pyrrhus. He belies the stateliness which these names might evoke in his verse by wondering what can "the grandeur that was Rome" possibly mean now that a *woman* (pejoratively stressed) has instilled terror into the hearts of Romans. In glaring contrast to Horace's *non humilis mulier*, Propertius allows Cleopatra a speaking part which she delivers in a state of drunkenness. Finally, Augustus receives his due laudations: Rome need not fear Jove himself while Augustus rules; but then Jove could not handle his women (3.11.28). There is the anecdote in Dio (51.12) that when Cleopatra tried to seduce Augustus he refused to make eye contact with her and thereby resisted her wiles successfully—an admirable achievement considering Cleopatra's track record. Translated into elegiac terms, this is the glory of Augustus; unlike Achilles, Jason, Hercules, Jove or Propertius, he did not succumb to a woman. Then, in the same way that Propertius earlier had progressed from the private (love) to public (war) theme, so now does he shift Augustus' control over Cleopatra (individual) to his rule over land and sea (international). This concludes the poem:

Leucadius versas acies memorabit Apollo:
tantum operis belli sustulit una dies,
at tu, sive petes portus seu, navita, linques,
Caesaris in toto sis memor Ionio.

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[1] Sullivan (1974) 23.

(3.11.69-72)

It is noteworthy how Propertius' treatment of Actium has changed since his earlier poems and, perhaps more importantly, since the Cleopatra Ode. Antony receives a passing mention in 3.11, but his role is subordinated to that of Cleopatra who has now become the principal enemy. Propertius stresses her Egyptian connexion and he gives the international aspect of the war full attention: "Our" (*nostro*) Jove opposes Anubis; the Nile threatens the Tiber; Pompey had suffered from *dolis aptissima tellus*; Cleopatra seeks to stretch her mosquito net over the Tarpeian Rock. There are no Roman bones floating in the Actian waters, nor is Rome tearing her hair in grief. Propertius continues to have fun in his novel attempts to glorify Augustus, but there is less of an edge to 3.11 concerning the battle itself. The final two couplets do refer to Actium, except that now Leucadian Apollo will tell of Augustus' victory. In contrast to the woman who browbeats Propertius (*versat meam vitam*), Augustus has repelled the enemy's battleline (*versas acies*). The sailor whom Propertius cited earlier as an example of one who learns from experience now must remember who controls the Ionian waters (i.e. Augustus).[1]

There is no doubt that Propertius undermines the gravity which a more grandiloquent treatment would have provided for Actium. He has prepared us for such an approach already with the frivolous poetic blunder of 2.10 and the strangely unnatural settings from which Actium appears in 2.15 and 2.16. These Actium poems reveal both a refusal to sing the *facta* of Augustus along conventional lines and a concerted effort to find new material for his elegies without fundamentally altering his instinctively rakish character. Throughout Books 2 and 3 we can detect an effort on the part of Propertius to extend the possibilities of his poetry beyond the standard love themes that he has all but exhausted in his first Book, much the same way that Horace had been preparing already in his iambic poetry to rise to lyric and then from standard lyric to something greater within that genre.[2] From Books 2 to 3 there are gradually fewer love poems *per se* as Propertius begins to experiment, the results of which can be seen in 3.11 and less so in 2.15 and 2.16. By the end of Book 3 (3.24-25) Propertius has separated from Cynthia with bitter finality. This sets the stage for Book 4, which, in spite of its uniqueness within the total corpus of Propertius' work, does not come as a total surprise given the developments of theme and

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[1] Cf. Vergil's Georgic 1.29-30: *Caesar.../ an deus immensi venias maris ac tua nautae / numina sola colant.*

[2] Butler-Barber (1964) xii-xiii; Hubbard (1975) 92-93.

style evident in Books 2 and 3. Book 4 contains the longest and last poetic account of the battle of Actium by any of the Augustan poets. It is indicative of the progress Propertius has made as a writer of elegy. Just as Horace had influenced Propertius' Cleopatra poem, so in *Elegy* 4.6 is Vergil's presence felt. Therefore, before we can proceed with Propertius' final effort on Actium, we must first consider the battle as portrayed on the Shield of Aeneas and Vergil's contribution to the Actium myth.

CHAPTER FIVE: ACTIUM IN EPIC (VERGIL)

Actium makes its truly epic debut when Vergil describes the battle in one of the most important and symbolically charged passages in the *Aeneid*, the Shield of Aeneas. I propose to concentrate in this chapter on two main aspects of the shield. First, before Vergil can embark on his epic, there must be some form of resolution of the *recusatio* and Vergil's tendency to Callimachean aesthetics as declared in *Eclogue* 6. Having identified this resolution, I shall then proceed to the shield itself.

Wendell Clausen has argued cogently that the poetry of the early Augustan period reflects a merging of Callimachean aesthetics with the poets' own "moral" aversion to war, given the divisive, violent and self-destructive nature of the Roman Republic in the first century B.C.[1] Having found in *Eclogue* 6 Vergil's most explicit statement on this union of Callimachus (art) and Rome (history), Clausen remarks, "that the same poet who wrote *cum canerem reges et proelia* wrote, a few years later, *arma virumque cano* is one of the surprises of Latin literary history."[2] This is an observation which any reader of the *Eclogues* would be at pains to deny. Clausen is so impressed by it that he suggests Vergil's idea to compose an epic occurred sometime later, during the writing of the *Georgics*. Of course, whether this is true or not, we shall never know. However, certain evidence intimates that the potential for epic had always been in Vergil. As his three separate projects demonstrate, Vergil had been willing to alter his style to suit his subject matter. He also displays an eagerness to treat distinctly Roman themes in poetic genres learned from his Greek predecessors, Theocritus, Hesiod and Homer. When the moment arrived for his greatest poetic endeavour, the essential problem remained: how could Vergil manage recent events in Roman history into an epic if he had consistently deplored this period as an age of sin in his previous work? Ultimately Vergil did resolve this problem, and the result was that thoroughly Roman, yet unorthodox epic poem called the *Aeneid.*

The literary surprise of the *Aeneid* notwithstanding, one cannot help but be struck by the calculated, even logical, progression of Vergil's entire poetic career. The leap from the *Eclogues* to the *Aeneid* may be astonishing, but not after we have read the *Georgics*. In the

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[1] Clausen (1964) 181-191.

[2] Clausen (1964) 185.

course of the *Eclogues* and *Georgics*, Vergil lays the groundwork for the *Aeneid*. We might notice this process only with the hindsight of having read him *in toto*, but it is there from the start in the form of a constant striving on the part of Vergil to surpass himself as he advances through his poetry. Reading the *Eclogues* with this in mind, we discover that Vergil as a pastoral poet has foreshadowed his rise to loftier strains of poetry, including epic. This is not to say that Vergil was planning the *Aeneid* from his youthful days as a poet, but that there are certain recurring themes in his earlier poetry. These themes eventually find themselves in the *Aeneid*; and it is obvious that they are meant to recall their previous usages in the *Eclogues* and *Georgics*.

Although Vergil chooses in *Eclogue* 6 not to sing *reges et proelia*, that does not prevent him from alluding to a desire for a far more ambitious style (and thus genre) of poetry. *Eclogue* 4 is conspicuous for its grand pretensions as Vergil displays in the poem's introduction:

> *Sicilides Musa, paulo maiora canamus.*
> *non omnis arbusta iuvant humilesque myricae;*
> *si canimus silvas, silvae sint consule digne.*
> (*Eclogue* 4.1-3)

The poem begins in the first person, but in this case, Vergil assumes no identifiable persona as in his other cameos. That is, there are no shepherds in this poem—not in the narrator's character, nor in the text itself.[1] Vergil employs the epithet *magnus* frequently throughout the poem (4.5, 12, 22, 36, 48, 49).[2] *Carmina* are not merely songs, but prophecies. Clearly Vergil has abandoned the humble tone of pastoral for the occasion of this eclogue. The themes touched on—the Golden Age (4.9), *Saturnia tellus* (4.6), the reign of peace (4.17), even the return of a second Achilles (4.36)—will be familiar to the reader of Vergil's later works. Along with these inspiring themes will come great poetry to match:

> *o mihi tum longae maneat pars ultima vitae,*
> *spiritus et quantum sat erit tua dicere facta.*
> *non me carminibus vincet nec Thracius Orpheus*
> *nec Linus, huic mater quamvis atque hic pater adsit,*
> *Orphei Calliope, Lino formosus Apollo.*
> (*Eclogue* 4.53-57)

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[1] In the Golden Age, there is no need for shepherds, 4.21, 4.43.

[2] Coleman (1977) *ad.loc.*

Of course this is all conditional: the narrator only promises to achieve such heights when this great age will have arrived. The poem is also quite vague in its allusions; and it has never been decided whose *facta* the poet will one day sing. But the *Eclogues* are early. Although Vergil had made a thinly veiled reference to Octavian as a *iuvenis deus* in *Eclogue* 1, at the time of composition nothing was for certain. If Vergil was supporting any historical figure such as Octavian in *Eclogue* 4, he was cautious to leave the reference elusive enough in case fortunes should change subsequently. The point remains however that Vergil has written a poem in which there is a promise for great poetry upon the return of the Golden Age. Although this *Eclogue* functions independently in the collection as a fictional prophecy, we should not ignore the probability that Vergil had not forgotten this poem when he embarked on his writing of the *Aeneid*, the epic which partly responds to the promise given in lines 53-57.

In the conclusion of *Eclogue* 10, Vergil, appearing as himself, departs with the exhortation, *surgamus* (10.75). Besides its literal meaning, the command can be taken metaphorically as Vergil's call for a new challenge from which the Georgics were the result. Propertius emboldens himself in the same way when he announces his ambitions to sing the glory of Augustus: *surge anime, ex humili; iam carmina, sumite vires* (*Elegy* 2.10.11, cf.4.1.67). For Vergil, the *Eclogues* have ended, and as he ends his poem, having exhausted the pastoral genre, he makes a brief allusion to the direction of his next project. I shall point out other instances of this self-reflective commentary throughout Vergil's poetry later on in this chapter. For now we should note that he has already done this at least once before in the introduction to *Eclogue* 4.

By the time Vergil was finishing his *Georgics* (30-29 B.C.), Antony had met with defeat and Octavian had become the successful victor at Actium. The references to Augustus in the *Georgics* are no longer veiled, and they are unabashedly panegyrical. Vergil stops just short of calling him a god (*Georgics* 1.25-42). In the *laudes Italiae* in the 2nd *Georgic*, the poet, as in *Eclogue* 4, unites the themes of the Saturnian land and his own poetry. He also incorporates the great names of Roman history into this formula, culminating in the mention of Augustus:

> *haec eadem argenti; rivos aerisque metalla*
> *ostendit venis atque auro plurima fluxit.*
> *haec genus acre virum, Marsos pubemque Sabellam*
> *adsuetumque molo Ligurem Volscosque verutos*
> *extulit, haec Decios Marios magnosque Camillos,*
> *Scipiadas duros bello et te, maxime Caesar,*
> *qui nunc extremis Asiae iam victor in oris*

imbellem avertis Romanis arcibus Indum.
salve, magna parens frugum, Saturnia tellus,
magna virum: tibi res antiquae laudis et artis
ingredior sancto ausus recludere fontis,
Ascraeumque cano Romana per oppida carmen.
(*Georgics* 2.165-176)

In *Georgics* 3 and in *Eclogue* 4, Vergil expresses a slight dissatisfaction with the themes of his current genre: *omnia iam vulgata* (3.4). He then proceeds to predict for himself a time when he will soar to greater poetic heights. Now he has become explicit about his subject matter: *in medio mihi Caesar erit templumque tenebit* (3.16). By the end of this passage, Vergil abandons the metaphor and declares his poetic intentions forthrightly:

mox tamen ardentis accingar dicere pugnas
Caesaris et nomen fama tot ferre per annos
Tithoni prima quot abest ab origine Caesar.
(*Georgics* 3.46-48)

Among other allusions to conquest mentioned in the introduction of *Georgics* 3, there are a few references to Augustus' victory at Actium as well as the triple triumph of 29 B.C. (3.30, 32-33).[1] As Propertius would write only a few years after the publication of the *Georgics*, if a poet were to compose an epic concerning Augustus, the battle of Actium would certainly play a major role in that poem (*Elegy* 2.1.30-36).[2] When Propertius announces the great new epic in the works by Vergil, he reveals how important Actium ranks as subject matter:

Actia Vergilio custodis litora Phoebi,
Caesaris et fortes dicere posse rates,
qui nunc Aeneae Troiani suscitat arma
iactaque Lavinis moenia litoribus.
cedite Romani scriptores, cedite Grai!
nescioquid maius nascitur Iliade.
(*Elegy* 2.34.61-66)

Although he may have been influenced by Vergil's *Georgics* 3 when he wrote these verses, Propertius seems to have overstated the presence of Actium in the *Aeneid*.[3] This may indeed hint at the literary coup Vergil posthumously achieved with his epic in terms of his portrayal of Augustus and his *facta*. In any case the battle is obviously perceived as the

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[1] Thomas (1988) *ad.loc.*

[2] See above 23.

[3] Eden (1975) *ad.loc. Aeneid* 8.675ff thinks the description of the shield gave him this impression.

best material for an epic on Augustus. There was at least one epic composed on Actium and the triumviral years, but their fragments are so insubstantial that they do not warrant a place in this discussion.[1] Nonetheless, their very existence attests the attraction of the subject matter for an epic treatment.

Vergil had already portrayed Augustus eulogistically as a peacemaker rather than a conqueror in the *Eclogues* and *Georgics*. It is this same aspect of Augustus that Vergil incorporates into the Aeneid as the prophecy of Jupiter in Book 1 makes very clear. But a peacemaker cannot exist without the previous condition of war, and in Rome Augustus closed the gates of Janus only after he had vanquished his enemy. For Vergil then, although the emphasis may rest on peace, he cannot deny the necessity of the battle that brought an end to war. War is essential in the *Aeneid* to the triumph of Aeneas, reluctant as he may be to engage, and undesirable as Vergil has decried it in his earlier poetry.

War is also the essence of epic: *arma virumque cano*. Aeneas can be an awkward hero at times, largely because of his recalcitrance in the face of violence, unlike Homer's warriors, Achilles, Odysseus, Diomedes or Hector. Ultimately, Aeneas realizes that it is impossible to circumvent fate, and when battle becomes imminent, he steels himself to the task. Having completed the Odyssean half of the poem, Vergil then turns to the Iliadic half—the martial half—which he himself deems the greater part of the poem; for in the beginning of Book 7, again we see Vergil commenting on the necessity of his own poetry to match the grandeur of his subject matter:

> *...expediam, et primae revocabo exordia pugnae.*
> *tu vatem, tu, diva, mone. dicam horrida bella,*
> *dicam acies actosque animis in funera reges,*
> *Tyrrhenamque manum, totamque sub arma coactum*
> *Hesperiam. maior rerum mihi nascitur ordo,*
> *maius opus moveo.*
> (*Aeneid* 7.40-45)

There is even an echo of *Eclogue* 4.5 (*magnus ab integro saeclorum nascitur ordo*) in line 44,[2] with the same implications for Vergil's poetry. The subject matter incites the poet to loftier heights. A similar call for inspiration (7.641-646) appears immediately following the outbreak of war and the opening of the temple of Janus. Vergil has reached that part of

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[1] Benario (1983) 1656-1662 has collected and translated the fragments with a brief discussion. Rabirius, a fairly well known poet and mentioned in a positive light by Ovid, Velleius and Quintilian, may have been the author.

[2] Forydice (1977) *ad.loc.*

his poem in which he finally sings *reges et proelia.*[1] Book 7 ends with a catalogue of forces on the side of the Latin tribes headed by Turnus. In the preceding section of this book, Aeneas has arrived finally at the land of his destiny, and as Latinus informs the Trojan ambassadors, they have come to the *Saturnia tellus*, which is also the land where the Trojans took their origins as sons of Dardanus (7.202-211). The Trojan spokesman Ilioneus refers to their journey as the return of Dardanus (i.e. Trojan stock) to this land at the behest of Apollo: *hinc Dardanus ortus / huc repetit, iussisque ingentibus urget Apollo* (7.240-241).

We are reminded of Saturn and the Golden Age again in Book 8 in an important scene in which Evander leads Aeneas around the site of Rome. Vergil threads a connexion between the Golden Age of the past and that of Vergil's present day when Evander's description of the Age of Saturn recalls the prophecies of Jupiter (1.286-296) and Anchises (6.789-807, 851-853). Both Augustus and Saturn are described as rulers of Italy in time of peace, legislators for the people,[2] and instigators of a Golden Age, *aurea saecula.*

Shortly after his tour of Rome, Aeneas receives his shield from Venus. The shield is the last, longest and most discursive prophecy in the *Aeneid.*[3] The idea for the shield comes from Homer's Shield of Achilles, but there the similarities seem to end.[4] On it Vulcan has designed a pictorial history of Rome. The events on the shield continue from where the previous scene of Evander and Aeneas ends. Evander describes Latium from its earliest known origins when Fauns, Nymphs and men sprung from oak trees inhabited the region (8.314-315). He rounds off his narrative with his own fate as a settler of Latium (8.335-336). Aeneas, to whom this history is told, provides the next stage by his arrival at

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[1] Newman (1967) 35-36.

[2] Eden (1975) *ad.loc. Aeneid* 8.322 points out the contradiction between Evander's and Latinus' comments on Saturn that leaves no doubt as to Vergil's intentions. Evander says that Saturn *legesque dedit* while earlier Latinus (7.202-204) had mentioned that the Satunrian lands needed no laws. But the echo of *Remo cum fratre Quirinus / iura dabunt* in Evander's speech reveal Vergil's attempts to link the ages of Saturn and Augustus.

[3] The most extensive discussion of the shield, with a good background of the criticism on this passage, is in Hardie (1986) 97-109, 336-376. Hardie deals more with Actium than any of the other scholars in this area. Most of the scholarship has tended to attempt a classification of the scenes on the shield. None are completely convincing, but many good points are made throughout. For instance, see Eichholz (1966-67) 45-48, Griffith (1967-68) 54-65, R.D. Williams (1981) 8-11.

[4] For a comparison of Homer's shield with Vergil's, see Hardie (1986).

the site of Rome. Then, as Vergil states, Vulcan has depicted Rome's history from the line of Ascanius:

> *Illic res Italas Romanorumque triumphos*
> *haud vatum ignarus venturique inscius aevi*
> *fecerat Ignipotens, illic genus omne futurae*
> *stirpis ab Ascanio pugnataque in ordine bella.*
> (*Aeneid* 8.626-629)

The scenes continue down through the ages to Augustus himself whose presence at the battle of Actium takes up the prominent position at the centre of the shield. Thus, in one book, Vergil has delineated the entire history of Italy, albeit in a selective manner,[1] from one Golden Age to the renaissance of another. The advent of the Augustan Age completes the historical cycle which Vergil has made as part of his thematic repetoire in *Eclogue* 4, *Georgics* 2, and in the major prophecies of the *Aeneid*. In this regard, Book 8 (and the shield in particular) ranks as one of the most successful achievements of Vergil in his attempts to pay tribute to his *patria* in the grandest poetic manner possible.

That Vergil chooses to portray Augustus in the role of victor at Actium is obviously of great significance, both in the poem itself and from the perspective of Vergil the poet writing about the *pugnata Caesaris*. For Aeneas, the shield is inspirational. Although he cannot properly recognize the scenes on the shield (he is *ignarus rerum*, 8.730), he marvels (*miratur*, 8.619, 730) at his divine gift and takes delight in what he sees (*gaudet*, 8.730). When Book 8 ends, we see Aeneas hoisting the fate and fame of his progeny upon his shoulders as he heads off equipped and encouraged to battle Turnus and the Rutulians: *attolens umero famamque et fata nepotum* (8.731). Just as in Book 2 Aeneas had carried Anchises (the past) on his shoulders out of the fallen Troy, so now he takes up the burden of the shield (the future) in order to claim his destiny as the founder of Rome. For the Roman reader, the inclusion of the battle of Actium and the mythological proportions which Vergil attributes to it, must have been particularly striking. By the time of Vergil's death (19 B.C.), Actium was little more than a decade in the past. The declaration in 31 B.C. of war against Egypt, the religious ceremonies performed at Rome before the battle, the portrayals of the armies as East vs. West, the harping on Cleopatra's womanhood, the triple triumph in which Actium is celebrated as a victory over a barbarian melange of exotic countries—all these events are evidence of Augustus' intentions of promoting Actium as the supreme victory of *tota Italia* under the guidance of the Roman pantheon over a foreign

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[1] As Vergil intimates: *et clipei non enarrabile textum* (8.625).

menace. As the contrast between *Epode* 9 and *Ode* 1.37 indicates, Horace had heeded this message and shifted his focus from Antony to Cleopatra. Propertius from *Elegies* 2.15, 2.16 to 3.11 effected the same transition. Only in the shield, however, do we see a poet devote a considerable effort to the broader implications of Actium, instead of concentrating on incidental specifics such as Horace's treatment of Cleopatra's personal character, or Propertius' attention to the love affair between Antony and Cleopatra. Taking advantage of the poetic genre most conducive to the retelling of historical events, Vergil creates a detailed and highly visual account of Actium.

The description of the battle *per se* by any of the Augustan poets is really quite scant, as if there were nothing to tell in the first place. In *Ode* 1.37, Horace describes the battle very briefly as an inferno followed by the notorious escape. Propertius is even less informative. With respect to what actually happened at the battle, Vergil adds little more than Horace and Propertius. One cannot call Vergil's Actium any more loyal to historical fact than Horace's *vix una sospes navis ab ignibus*. Nonetheless, it is still possible to see how Vergil created the mythic account which most faithfully follows the version Augustus himself promoted:

> *in medio classis aeratas, Actia bella,*
> *cernere erat, totumque instructo Marte videres*
> *fervere Leucaten auroque effulgere fluctus.*
> *hinc Augustus agens Italos in proelia Caesar*
> *cum patribus populoque, Penatibus et magnis dis,*
> *stans celsa in puppi, geminas cui tempora flammas*
> *laeta vomunt patriumque aperitur vertice sidus.*
> *parte alia ventis et dis Agrippa secundis*
> *arduus agmen agens; cui, belli insigne superbum,*
> *tempora navali fulgent rostrata corona.*
> (*Aeneid* 8.675-84)

The significance of the central position the battle assumes is self-evident. The promise in the *Georgics* that Augustus would occupy the centre of Vergil's "temple" (*in medio mihi Caesar erit templumque tenebit*) has in a different setting taken place. In both cases the abstract reference to Augustus hints at Vergil's attempts to sing of the military victories in an indirect manner. The shield provides Vergil with the means to obtain a sufficient distance from the battle, although it is in fact for him very recent history. The battle of Actium and the subsequent triumph are among the latest chronological events in the *Aeneid*. The battle provides the catalyst for the return of the Golden Age under Augustus while the triumph officially ushers it in. This is as far as Vergil can predict the "future". Aeneas is the progenitor of Augustus' Rome, which is the greatest justification for the epic quest and the impending battle against Turnus. The connexion between Aeneas and Augustus is also

evident in the verbal echo of line 679, recalling an earlier passage in which Aeneas recounts his departure from Troy: *feror exsul in altum / cum sociis natoque penatibus et magnis dis* (3.11-12). On the shield, the son (Ascanius) has aged through history into one of the fathers of the Julian clan and the ancestor of the race whose battles are depicted on the shield (8.629, above).

Vergil relies heavily on visual imagery to bring out the drama of the scene.[1] The golden waves glitter, flames flare, Agrippa's helmet flashes. Most striking of all, the *sidus Iulium* shines on the forehead of Augustus. The introduction of Augustus leading his people with his ancestors and gods, and of Agrippa wearing his naval victory crown is glorious indeed. According to the *Vita Vergili* of Suetonius (44), Agrippa was apparently not impressed by the poetry of the *Aeneid*. He derided the style as grossly affected, too much under the influence of Maecenas. He might have at least been pleased to know that on the shield his own appearance is by far the most down to earth of all the characters. Agrippa, the handy-man who really won the battle for Augustus is given his due. The gods may support Augustus, but they are working for Agrippa. While Augustus' head is graced with the star of Caesar and the flames spume from his temples, Agrippa's head-gear is not symbolic or fantastic at all; he wears the naval crown he received in honour of his successes against Sextus Pompeius in the Sicilian War. Augustus may lead the Italian people (more in spirit than a physical act), but Agrippa, in practical fashion, leads the battle-line. It is a nice fidelity to the historicity of Actium that Agrippa on the shield is managing the battle while Augustus stands off and receives the credit—as he does on the shield. The description of the victors fittingly ends with a golden line (684). Opposite the forces of justice and piety are Antony and Cleopatra.

> *hinc ope barbarica variisque Antonius armis,*
> *victor ab Aurorae populis et litore rubro,*
> *Aegyptum viresque Orientis et ultima secum*
> *Bactra vehit, sequitur (nefas) Aegyptia coniunx.*
> *una omnes ruere ac totum spumare reductis*
> *convulsum remis rostrisque tridentibus aequor.*
> *alta petunt.*
> (*Aeneid* 8.685-691)

A stranger to Roman history would hardly recognize the true heritage of Antony as he appears on the shield. Vergil describes him as the victor from the East, as if he were native to the region and not the man who conquered it on behalf of Rome—an interesting

[1] See West (1975-76) 1-6, and Hardie (1986) 357-358.

distortion of the historical reality. The confrontation of East vs West is poignantly marked. Augustus and Agrippa lead (*agens*) their people; they are both in the company of gods (*magnis dis, dis*). Antony drags (*vehit*) his barbarian allies along from the ends of the earth. In contrast to the solidarity of the Italians, they are of diverse backgrounds (*variis armis*). Cleopatra, nicely isolated in the line by the parenthetical condemnation (*nefas*), trails. The sea is churned by oars and prows as the ships rush forward in combat. Just as quickly the vanquished are in flight (*alta petunt*).

There are few surprises up to this point in the account; and although the standoff between Augustus and Antony makes for a dramatic scene, it serves only as the introduction to the more magniloquent description that follows:

> *pelago credas innare revolsas*
> *Cycladas aut montis concurrere montibus altos:*
> *tanta mole viri turritis puppibus instant.*
> *stuppea flamma manu telisque volatile ferrum*
> *spargitur, arva nova Neptunia caede rubescunt.*
> *regina in mediis patrio vocat agmina sistro,*
> *necdum etiam geminos a tergo respicit anguis.*
> *omnigenumque deum monstra et latrator Anubis*
> *contra Neptunum et Venerem contraque Minervam*
> *tela tenent.*
> (*Aeneid* 691-700)

The battle rises to a superhuman level. The description of the ships as Cycladic islands and mountains would have been difficult to actually depict on the shield without being unsightly, if not ridiculous; so Vergil rightly keeps it to an act of imagination (*credas*). "This is a conflict not of human forces, but of raw chunks of nature."[1] Delos was a floating island, and it was Apollo who finally fastened it into place—which may allude to the god's forthcoming role in the battle. Propertius refers to Apollo in this capacity in his subsequent Actium poem (4.6.27-28), while Statius replaces the Cyclades with Delos in a passage meant to recall Vergil here (*Thebiad* 5.338-9).[2] Vergil employs this imaginative scene as if to take our eyes off the shield for a moment during which time the battle takes on greater implications. When we return to the shield, the battle has increased its intensity. Although we cannot actually "see" the bloodied Actian waters as the *arva Neptunia*, the description in these terms prepares us for the next scene, as does the image of Cleopatra

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[1] Hardie (1986) 100.

[2] Hardie (1986) 102 note 47.

rattling her *sistrum*, which was used in the worship of Isis, only now it is used to call her gods on to battle.[1] The religious import of the battle becomes obvious with the sight of the Roman gods confronting the monstrous foreign gods and Anubis, not even an anthropomorphic deity.[2] The gods and the weapons blazing through the air have now set the battle in full career. This establishes the tone for the next section:

> *saevit medio in certamine Mavors*
> *caelatus ferro, tristisque ex aethere Dirae,*
> *et scissa gaudens vadit Discordia palla,*
> *quam cum sanguineo sequitur Bellona flagello.*
> (*Aeneid* 700-704)

Nowhere, in fact, do we see Augustus actually engaged in war. He is introduced, but Vergil defers to the Roman gods, who act in the capacity of warriors, and then to an abstact description of the violence. Bellona and Discordia personify the fury and horror of the battle without getting Augustus' hands dirty. If we count back to the beginning of the battle in line 689 when the ships first clash, and then up to the end of the battle when Cleopatra flees to Egypt at line 713, then the mention of Mars (Mavors), the Furies, Bellona and Discordia comes at the very heart of the action and at the midway point of the narrative. This particular scene is as close as Vergil comes to alluding to the fact that Actium was part of the Civil Wars; but he does come very close. In the *Georgics*, he had made reference to Mars raging in the context of the Civil Wars: *saevit toto Mars impius orbe* (*Georgics* 1.511). As well, both Vergil (*Eclogue* 1.71-2) and Propertius (*Elegy* 1.22.5) had earlier used the epithet *discordia* to describe the state of affairs during the triumviral period.[3] Finally, although Augustus had performed solemn rites at the temple of Bellona before setting out for Actium,[4] according to the activities of her cult, the blood on that whip (*sanguineo flagello*) would belong to the one who wielded it.[5] The battle is at its peak of intensity. Even the shield's material is iron (*caelatus ferro*), the metal of war. But if this passage is meant to portray the civil aspect of Actium and the horror of the triumviral

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[1] As Propertius 3.11.43 makes clear: *(ausa) Romanumque tubam crepitanti pellere sistro.*

[2] Cf. Propertius 3.11.42: *ausa Iovi nostro latrantem opponere Anubim.*

[3] Grandsen (1976) *ad.loc.*

[4] Above 17.

[5] Forydice (1977) *ad.loc.*

period, Vergil has effectively bordered it with the mention of Cleopatra immediately before and after, as well as with the Roman gods fighting against foreign powers:

> *Actius haec cernens arcum intendebat Apollo*
> *desuper: omnis eo terrore Aegyptus et Indi,*
> *omnis Arabs, omnes vertebant terga Sabaei.*
> *ipsa videbatur ventis regina vocatis*
> *vela dare et laxos iam iamque immittere funis.*
> *illam inter caedes pallentem morte futura*
> *fecerat Ignipotens undis et Iapyge ferri,*
> *contra autem magno maerentem corpore Nilum*
> *pandentemque sinus et tota veste vocantem*
> *caeruleum in gremium latebrosaque flumina victos.*
> (*Aeneid* 8.705-714)

As Vergil proceeds through this passage, he attributes to Actium a much greater significance than it held originally. He conflates the victory at Actium with the pacification of the eastern states and the defeat of Antony and Cleopatra a year later at Alexandria.[1] Apollo, Augustus' chosen protector, terrorizes Egypt, India, Arabia and Saba (Sheba) into submission.[2] Vergil emphasizes the sweeping totality of the victory (*omnis...omnis...omnes*). Propertius had joined these events together in his *Elegy* 2.1, as had Horace in *Odes* 1.37. They have all taken their cue from the triple triumph in which the victories of Actium and Alexandria (and Illyricum) were celebrated together under the rubric of international conflict.

Vergil makes a verbal connexion between Cleopatra (8.709) and Dido (4.644), who both pale at the realization of their impending deaths (*pallentem [pallida] morte futura*). Aeneas in Book 4 is more reminiscent of Antony than Augustus. Dido's unsuccessful suitor Iarbas contemptuously refers to Aeneas in his Phrygian garb, his locks dripping with perfume, and his keeping company with a band of eunuchs (4.215-218). Shortly after this scene, Mercury finds Aeneas dressed in a fancy Tyrian cloak (a gift from Dido). This is very much the Antony of Augustus' propaganda, and the Antony Horace describes in his *Epode* 9. On the shield, Antony is the *victor ab Aurorae populis*, but he will meet defeat at the hands of Augustus. Much of Aeneas' struggle in Book 4 involves the shedding of his Antonian skin; that called for a rejection of his Cleopatra (Dido). In the person of Augustus with his Penates, we recall Aeneas leaving Troy with his Penates (the same in

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[1] See Syme (1939) 300-302.

[2] Forydice (1977) *ad.loc.* The Sabaeans did not even take part in the battle.

fact), rightly obeying his destiny. In the person of Antony, surrounded by the wealth of the barbarian (*ope barbarica*), we also must recall Aeneas, but from a time when he had neglected his duties, just as Jupiter has said of him: *Tyria Karthagine qui nunc / exspectat fatisque datas non respicit urbes* (4.224-25). Aeneas does not recognize the significance of the scenes on the shield, but the glittering metal acts much like a mirror, reflecting the Aeneas who accepted his fate, and the one who succumbed to more ignoble temptations.

The account of the battle ends with the Nile in divine form welcoming the fugitive Cleopatra into the folds of his garment. The reference to Alexandria is immediately followed by the description of the triple triumph which is the final scene depicted on the shield:

> *at Caesar, triplici invectus Romanus triumpho*
> *moenia, dis Italos votum immortale sacrabat,*
> *maxima ter centum totam delubra per urbem.*
> *laetitia ludisque viae plausuque fremebant;*
> *omnibus in templis matrum choru, omnibus arae;*
> *ante aras terram caesi stravere iuvenci.*
> *ipse, sedens niveo candentis limine Phoebi,*
> *dona recognoscit populorumque aptatque superbis*
> *postibus; incedunt victae longo ordine gentes,*
> *quam variae linguis, habitu tam vestis et armis.*
> *hic Nomadum genus et distinctos Mulciber Afros,*
> *hic Lelegas Carasque sagittiferosque Gelonos*
> *finxerat; Euphrates ibat iam mollior undis,*
> *extremique hominum Morini, Rhenusque bicornis,*
> *indomitique Dahae, et pontem indignatus Araxes.*
> (*Aeneid* 8.714-728)

Augustus duly pays homage to the gods who assisted him and celebrates with considerable pomp and ceremony, while he sits blessed on the steps of the temple of Apollo (which was not dedicated until over a year after the triumph). No longer a mere defeat of the Orient, Augustus has pacified the ends of the earth in other directions as well: the Rhine, the Morini (a Belgian tribe) and the North East to the Caspian Sea (Gelonians). These conquests are not too far distant from the idea of *imperium sine fine* which Jupiter predicts for Augustus. This state of world peace under Augustus recalls the opposite scene of the Age of Sin, which Vergil described earlier in the *Georgics*:

> *hinc movet Euphrates, illinc Germania bellum*
> *vicinae ruptis inter se legibus urbes*
> *arma ferunt; saevit toto Mars impius orbe.*
> (*Georgics* 1.508-510)

This description of the deplorable state of the world follows a call to the gods and ancestors of the country (*di patrii, Indigetes, et Romule Vestaque mater*) to preserve

Augustus so that he may bring an end to Rome's Dark Ages. On the shield, pacification has taken place. The Euphrates no longer moves to war; its waters are calm. *Impius Mars* rages no more and *Impius Furor* is imprisoned in the temple of Janus. The Augustus we see depicted on the shield has confronted and endured his *horrida bella*, and now rules in triumph. Although Actium is the catalyst for the renewal of the Golden Age, Vergil has deftly shifted the attention from Augustus the warrior to the autocrat who established peace and gave it to all countries far and wide. The final scene of the river Araxes chafing under the bridge brings to mind the kind of power which Rome is fated to wield, as Anchises tells Aeneas in the Underworld. The admonition of Anchises also alludes to this image of Augustus as employing war in order to establish peace:

> *tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento*
> *hae tibi erunt artes pacique imponere morem,*
> *parcere subiectis et debellare superbos.*
> (*Aeneid* 6.851-853)

On the shield Vergil gives his hero a glimpse of the prophesies of Jupiter and Anchises. Rome's greatness can only come to fruition through Aeneas' complicity, which he has often been reluctant to offer. But the shield instills in him a sense of joy and admiration. He willingly accepts his fate and that of his progeny in the final act of Book 8 when he picks up the shield and sets out to confront his own *horrida bella*—which dominate the rest of the poem. The inherent duty of Romans to be world leaders, and the responsibility of Aeneas to set this process in motion are nowhere made more manifest than on the shield. Vergil has made Augustus' victory at Actium part of Rome's boundless destiny to rule the world.[1]

Yet the praise is not obsequious. Nor is it sycophantic, despite the obvious hyperbole. Exaggeration is a characteristic of epic. Vergil can portray Actium in the *Aeneid* in a way that Horace and Propertius would not allow themselves in lyric and elegy. As *Eclogue* 4 shows, Vergil had made his *recusatio* conditional, unlike Horace and Propertius, who profess inability and loyalty to their chosen genres. Throughout his career, Vergil demonstrates a willingness to work in different genres provided that he has exhausted the possibilities of his current work and he has sound reason (i.e. subject matter) to strive for

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[1] See R.D. Williams (1981) 9. It is interesting to note that O'Hara (1991), whose thesis stresses the dark and foreboding ambiguities of Vergil's underlying message in the optimistic prophecies, relegates the most important optimistic prophecy (the shield) of the poem to a mere two-page appendix, 173-175.

loftier poetry. The *Pax Augusta* provided that reason for the *Aeneid*; and the prophecies indicate that when Vergil mentions Augustus, it is in the context of his abilities as a peacemaker and as one of the many celebrated leaders of a state which deserved and received an epic treatment.

CHAPTER SIX: ACTIUM IN LOVELESS ELEGY (PROPERTIUS)

Propertius' *Elegy* 4.6 is chronologically the final Actium poem; it is also the consummate Actium poem. In it Propertius incorporates themes and techniques used by Horace and Vergil in their earlier versions, while maintaining that distinctly Propertian character which shaped his previous attempts in *Elegies* 2.15, 2.16 and 3.11, and which remains faithful to the influence of Callimachus. This fusion of influences—Vergil, Horace and Callimachus—so well managed has resulted in a controversial poem which has been much debated by critics in the past thirty years. In this chapter I shall address the critical opinions of *Elegy* 4.6 and their importance in obtaining a proper understanding of Propertius' achievement. At the same time I shall attempt to show how Propertius deals with the Actium issue once and for all; for there is a decided finality to this poem regarding Actium. As far as Actium is concerned, the problem posed in the *recusatio* no longer applies after this elegy.

That Horace, Vergil and Propertius were indebted to their Greek predecessors is beyond doubt. However, Propertius is also quite open about his place in a strictly Roman literary tradition, whereas evidence for this in Horace and Vergil is much less apparent.[1] In *Elegy* 2.34, when Propertius defends his vocation as a love-poet, he places himself at the end of a long line of Roman poets, including Varro, Catullus, Calvus and Gallus. But the move to engagé poetry involves a new Roman literary tradition, one which is still in its revolutionary and formulative stages. Throughout Books 2 and 3 of the *Elegies*, Propertius shows himself to be in the vanguard of this movement. In the genre of elegy, this may have already been ignited by Gallus as the only substantial surviving fragment of his suggests:

> *Fata mihi, Caesar, tum erunt mea dulcia, quom tu*
> *maxima Romanae pars eris historiae*
> *postque tuum reditum multorum templa deorum*
> *fixa legam spolieis divitiora tueis.*[2]

The real pioneers in this "Romanization" of poetry are of course Vergil and Horace; and it is to them that Propertius turns when he writes his final Actium poem. In the

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[1] Horace may speak of Lucilius, and Vergil may allude to to Ennius or Lucretius, but they do not discuss a Roman tradition as they do for the Greeks.

[2] Anderson, Parsons, Nisbet (1979) 125-155 provide the text for Gallus.

meantime, he has declared himself to be *Romanus Callimachus* in the beginning of Book 4 (4.1.64). This self-indulgent proclamation is not to be forgotten when we read *Elegy* 4.6.

The mention of *Romanus Callimachus* is a reaffirmation of the aesthetic principles stated earlier in the programmatic poems of Books 2 and 3 (2.1, 3.1-3). It is a not so subtle reminder that although the poems in Book 4 may seem on the surface different from the rest of his work, they really are of the same ilk. In *Elegy* 3.3, a *recusatio*, Apollo warns Propertius to avoid becoming too serious in his poetry: *non est ingenii cumba gravanda tui* (3.3.22). Later in the same poem, Propertius' favourite Muse, Calliope, offers further advice:

> *nil tibi sit rauco praeconia classica cornu*
> *flare, nec Aonium tinguere Marte nemus.*
> (Elegy 3.3.41-42)

Nor are we to forget the facetious tone that Propertius has already established in his earlier Actium poems. Learned frivolity pervades the tone of Book 4, and we should be prepared for it to dominate the tone of *Elegy* 4.6 as well. It is this tone over which the critics are in disagreement. It is also the misinterpretation of Propertius' tone which has caused some scholars to condemn the poem as a failure or to hail it as a valiant spoof of Augustan ideals.[1] I hope to show that neither of these interpretations does justice to the unique talent of Propertius.[2]

Book 4 is rife with deliberate ambiguities and ironic double entendres. This is a Propertian trademark, and *Elegy* 4.6 is no exception. The introduction to the poem sets the tone:

> *Sacra facit vates: sint ora faventia sacris,*
> *et cadat ante meos icta iuvenca focos.*
> *serta Philetaeis certet Romana corymbis,*
> *et Cyrenaeas urna ministret aquas.*
> *costum molle date et blandi mihi turis honores,*
> *terque focum circa laneus orbis eat.*

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[1] G. Williams' (1968) 51-57 disparaging remarks on the poem are notorious. Johnson (1973) loves the poem for the way Propertius allegedly makes fun of Augustus and parodies Vergil and Horace. Sullivan (1972) finds the poem to be deliberately bad. He revises this view (1976) 145-147 to no avail. Connor (1978) 4, makes an absurd observation: "...the reader is forced to consider the whole question of Actium—and Augustus and the poets—in rather an earnest way and is compelled to view the whole procedure with despondency and alarm." I have cited here only the extreme interpretations and those which seem least likely to be correct. I take issue with Williams in my text (below) primarily because our observations are similar, but two drastically different interpretations have ensued. His view is also the least offensive.

[2] Even more tempered judgements find the poem lacking. For example, Hubbard (1974) 136: "There are probably few readers of Propertius who find 4.6 their favourite poem."

spargite me lymphi, carmenque recentibus aris
tibia Mygdoniis libet eburna cadis.
ite procul fraudes, alio sint aere noxae:
pura novum vati laurea mollit iter.
(*Elegy* 4.6.1-10)

The first line is an overt allusion to Horace's first Roman Ode: *Favete linguis. carmina non prius / audita Musarum sacerdos / ...canto* (*Ode* 3.1.2-4). In the Roman Odes Horace portrays himself as the highly patriotic poet-prophet (*vates*) who delivers to his audience dignified and didactic lyrics on moral issues pertinent to individual and state in Rome. We might infer this direction taking shape in Propertius' poem as well. He has already announced his poetic commitment to Rome in his introductory poem to this Book: *Roma, fave, tibi surgit opus* (4.1.67). But if we are to remember this declaration, we should also keep in mind that in the same poem, Propertius' enthusiasm is checked by his astrologer Horos, who warns him not to abandon elegy: *at tu finge elegos, haec tua castra* (4.1.135, cf. 70-76, 133-136). In a similar way, Propertius' allusion to the Horatian *vates* (and by implication the solemnity of vatic poetry), is followed by the references to Philetas and Callimachus (4.6.3-4), whose mention implies the opposite tone, less serious, more witty and polished verse. To make matters more complex, Propertius plays on the different meanings of *vates* as both a poet and a priest. Mixed in with the images of altars and sacrifice, there are garlands, pipes and laurels. The introduction opens and closes with the word *vates* representing both meanings, first as priest, then as poet.

Gordon Williams, who found *Elegy* 4.6 to be "a thoroughly bad poem",[1] is disturbed by the artificial and abstract nature of the poem, and he is not at all amused by the mixture of metaphors in the introduction. He prefers Horace's definite vatic assertions and Vergil's serious and straightforward treatment of the battle of Actium.[2] This is, after all, a poem about Actium; it should be serious. Of course the comparisons are unjust. Genre forces the reader to approach a poem from different perspectives. Vergil has employed epic to communicate that visual and emotionally heightened picture Williams desires, and Vergil is successful. But epic is not the genre of Propertius. His aims are much different, and therefore, they do not invite comparison at this level. Williams wonders what is the point of all the artifice and the ambiguity of the term *vates*, but he is reading Propertius as if he were reading Horace's Roman Odes or Vergil's *Aeneid*. I suggest, then, that Propertius

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[1] Williams (1968) 51.

[2] Williams (1968) 53-54. Cf. Hubbard (1974) 136.

plays on these allusions to emphasize his own originality—which is the ultimate goal of all these poets. We are meant to pick up the allusions to Horace and Vergil so that we can see how Propertius manages the same material *his* way. There is a reason for the deliberate ambiguity of *vates*, but I shall come to that later. In the meantime I wish to discuss the effect of Propertius' introduction on the reader. This "devious expression of ambiguous fantasies in a learned and allusive style"[1] is an example of the kind of poetry at which Ezra Pound credited Propertius as being an expert. He called it *logopoeia*, "the dance of intellect among words."[2]

Brushing aside traditional generic classifications, Pound defined poetry into three major groups of which *logopoeia* was "perhaps the most tricky and undependable mode."[3] Along with his favourite French poet Jules Laforgue, Pound judged Propertius to be a master of *logopoeia*.[4] His full definition is as follows:

> ...it employs words not only for their direct meaning, but it takes count in a special way of habits of usage, of the context we expect to find with the word, its usual concomitants, of its known acceptances, and of ironical play. It holds the aesthetic content which is peculiarly the domain of verbal manifestation, and cannot possibly be contained in plastic or in music.[5]

J.P. Sullivan takes up Pound's definition with alacrity and tries to expand on it with some examples from Laforgue, Eliot, Juvenal and Propertius,[6] but he errs in his attempts because of his inability to see the "ironical play" as anything but "political irony"[7] (in the case of Propertius). Political irony betrays a modern sensibility that infers that the ironical content in a poem with political overtones is directed against the ruling party or individual—who would be Augustus in Propertius' poems. Ultimately, Sullivan's

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[1] Williams (1968) 53.

[2] Pound (1954) 25.

[3] Pound (1954) 25.

[4] Pound (1960) 38.

[5] Pound (1954) 25.

[6] Sullivan (1964) 64-76. There is a slightly different version in a subsequent study by Sullivan (1976) 147-158.

[7] Sullivan (1964) 75.

elaboration on the term *logopoeia* emerges as a linguistic version of satire—which is valid, but incomplete. If we forget politics and remember aesthetics, the definition makes much more sense. When Propertius introduces himself as a *vates* in the Horatian manner, and then plays on the ambiguities of the word, he confuses our initial reaction to the meaning of *vates*. He is no longer the poet-prophet (4.6.1), he is a priest at an altar (4.6.2); now he is a poet again, only in the Callimachean vein (4.6.3). What we had expected "to find with the word" after line 1 is no longer the case. He switches, not once, but two, three times. The result is ironical, maybe even farcical; but the irony is part of the artifice which distinguishes himself from the *vates* in Horace, or the *vates* in Vergil for that matter. In short, his word play is devilishly witty. Unfortunately, because it invites a comparison with Horace's serious use of *vates*, Propertius' intentions are perceived as parody, or as Williams sees it, bad poetry.

Propertius loves to play on the meanings of words, and he does so often in Book 4. It is part of his cerebral, yet elegant style—the craft of a truly *docta poeta*. We see it in the aetiological poem on the temple of Jupiter Feretrius, whose name, according to Propertius, derives from the acts of one general smiting another in battle (*ferit* 4.10.46), or else from the victor carrying away the arms of the vanquished (*ferebant* 4.10.47). We see this same playfulness in *Elegy* 4.8, in which Propertius comically describes Cynthia's actions in a domestic fight as if she were a conqueror of nations. Her rage gives the appearance of a city under siege (4.8.56). Having chased away Propertius' erstwhile girlfriends, Cynthia reacts like a Roman general: *Cynthia gaudet in exuviis victrix* (4.8.63). Propertius capitulates and sues for peace (4.8.71). Cynthia defines her terms of his surrender (4.8.74). And in the end they lay down their weapons for a night of love (4.8.88). We have also seen this in his Cleopatra *Elegy* 3.11. He introduces to us terms in an elegiac context (*addictum sub sua iura virum*), which he later applies to a political context (*addictos in sua regna Patres*). Examples abound. This is precisely the kind of manipulation of expected meanings of words Pound talks about when he refers to *logopoeia*. Poetry of this kind follows the advice of Apollo to beware of becoming too serious, while thinking seriously and earnestly about becoming a better poet. As Propertius has admitted in *Elegy* 4.1, he intends to elevate his poetry beyond traditional elegiac themes, but that does not mean his tone must become sombre as a result. He is after all *Romanus Callimachus*.[1]

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[1] Pillinger (1969) 177: "It is the genial, if slightly ironic, smile of Callimachus that seems to reappear at times in Propertius." Pillinger's arguments are by far the most convincing of all the critics on Book 4.

There is an instructive parallel in our modern appreciation of the genteel poetry of the seventeenth century. In an essay on Ben Jonson, the English poet Thom Gunn complains that some of Jonson's poems have been underrated for reasons that are not unlike those adumbrated by Williams in his discussion of *Elegy* 4.6:

> The difficulties of tone are less easy to abridge out of the 'Elegie on the Lady Jane Pawlet', which many a modern reader would accuse of ludicrous elaboration and insincerity ... What we must remember is that artifice is not necessarily the antithesis of sincerity.
>
> Perhaps it is relevant here to quote from Christopher Isherwood's definition of High Camp, a term he invented. His character says: 'true High Camp always has an underlying seriousness. You can't camp about something you don't take seriously. You're not making fun of it; you're making fun out of it. You're expressing what is basically serious to you in terms of fun and elegance.' (*The World in the Evening*) ...[1]

High Camp, as Gunn wishes us to see it in relation to Ben Jonson's poetry, is not an inaccurate description of Propertius' humour; and it fits in well with his self-professed allegiance to the Callimachean principles calling for poetry that is light, elegant, polished (and in the style of *logopoeia*). This gives his poetry a baroque quality we would not find in the Actium poems of Horace and Vergil. The result is a highly original style. This is itself a Callimachean objective mentioned by Propertius in *Elegy* 3.1: in peacetime, he must avoid the *turba scriptorum* and strive to travel down the *intacta via* (3.1.19), which we see again in 4.6 as *novum iter*. If we perceive this kind of humour as crucial to the tone of the poem, then the introduction becomes neither subversive nor incompetent, but instead aesthetically pleasing to the reader who can appreciate its Callimachean flavour.

Following the introduction of the *vates*, Propertius then states the occasion of his poem:

> *Musa, Palatini referemus Apollinis aedem:*
> *res est, Calliope, digna favore tuo.*
> *Caesaris in nomen, ducuntur carmina: Caesar*
> *dum canitur, quaeso, Iuppiter ipse vaces.*
> (*Elegy* 4.6.11-14)

The elegy is to be an aetiological poem concerning the temple of Palatine Apollo, which Augustus dedicated on October 9, 28 B.C. originally to commemorate the Sicilian War,

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Sweet (1972) 196-175 rightly offers Callimachus' *Coma Berenices* as a parallel to Propertius elegant humour which is witty, but not satirical.

[1] *Ben Jonson Selected by Thom Gunn* (Harmondsworth: 1974) 15.

but then later in honour of the battle of Actium. Propertius' intentions are ambitious as the pseudo-epic call to the Muse implies, as well as the wish that Jupiter give his attention to the song. The vatic qualities are acting up again. But if Calliope is to approve, we should remember her warning to Propertius to stay clear of the martial theme (3.3.41-42 above). The mention of Calliope and Apollo in close connexion also harks back to Propertius' statement in his *recusatio* to Maecenas that he did not rely on Calliope or Apollo for inspiration as long as he had his *puella*. Now he is attempting something different. This is not standard love elegy. The story behind the origins of the temple is Augustus' victory at the battle of Actium. The introduction of the three most important characters in the poem—Apollo, Augustus and Propertius the *vates*[1]—is now complete.

Propertius proceeds to set the scene for Actium. Any previous notions that Actium had been part of a Roman civil war are promptly dismissed: *huc mundi coiere manus* (19). Antony is not even hinted at in the poem. The disgrace that Antony had been undone by a women and ruined by *turpis amor* is now translated into a different image: *pilaque feminea turpiter acta manu* (22). There is no show of "stoic fortitude" in this Cleopatra. Her role as enemy is very clear; Rome's victory is her death: *vincit Roma fide Phoebi: dat femina poenas* (57). The battle according to Propertius is a foregone conclusion. Fortune favours the Romans (20-21) and Jove allows the sea-breeze to fill the sails of the Augustan ships (23). In Vergil the favourable breeze had been blown into Agrippa's sails (*Aeneid* 8.682); he too has disappeared from the scene. Propertius' concentration is fixed on the relationship between Apollo and Augustus. The verbal echoes in the poem demonstrate their connexion to each other. Propertius describes both Apollo and Augustus as protectors (*se vindice* 27, *te vindice* 41) of their native lands, Delos and Rome. They are also responsible for releasing their people from fear (*solvit* 35, *solve* 41). For Apollo these people would be the Muses, for Augustus the citizens of the *patria*.[2] Apollo's deeds are superhuman. He cuts an Homeric profile, looking dour as in the time when he inflicted the plague on the Greeks (33). Augustus is portrayed in a similar light. Apollo encourages him to remember his ancestor Hector (a much better fighter than Aeneas), and Propertius describes Augustus as a world conqueror (37-39).

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[1] That it is a *vates* who tells the tale of Actium is important, especially when we consider that Vergil is the model for much of Propertius' account. Vergil refers to Vulcan possessing the knowledge of a *vates* before he gives his version of Actium (*Aeneid* 8.626-628).

[2] Baker (1983) 159-160. See also Mader (1990) 325-334.

Certain reminiscences of Vergil are evident, but with significant alterations. Augustus takes the same pose in *Elegy* 4.6 (29-30) as he did on the shield, *stans celsa in puppi* (*Aeneid* 8.680). But instead of the star of Caesar or the flames shooting from Augustus' head, Propertius describes a lightning bolt. The relationship between Augustus and Caesar is given more attention than Vergil permitted. Caesar gives his approval to the battle with a reminder that Augustus' victory is proof of his divine heritage (59-60). Caesar's congratulations are followed by the jocular scene of Triton blowing on his conch while the goddesses of the sea show their warm applause around the *libera signa* (61-62). There is no sight of Bellona or Discordia in this battle. The scene, though worked up to great effect, lacks the power of Vergil's account, as Williams opined. The result is a sanitized and more congenial setting in which Apollo is guilty of prolixity (37-54) and all the other deities wear smiles on their faces. Propertius has written a battle narrative worthy of the *imbellae Musae*. The parallels with Vergil's shield suggest a deliberate effort to stand off from the stateliness of epic in favour of a more delicate account. Finally, for all the length of this elegy, the actual description of fighting comes in one single couplet. It also hurriedly links the aftermath of the battle to the dedication of the temple:

> *Actium hinc traxit Phoebus monumenta, quod eius*
> *una decem vicit missa sagitta rates.*
> (*Elegy* 4.6.67-68)

The entire account is sheer fantasy. Far from inspiring a sense of awe in the reader as Vergil's account had done, this elegy succeeds if it has raised a smile. That does not mean it is totally devoid of seriousness. As in the case of the poems of Ben Jonson mentioned by Thom Gunn, that seriousness underlies the theme of the poem. Actium is serious. In his portrayal of Augustus, Propertius is quite generous. Apollo calls him *mundi servator* (37). Although there may be considerable levity throughout the poem, there is nothing to suggest that Propertius is making fun of Augustus. The poem is part of the celebration of the *Pax Augusta* that followed Actium. Apollo tells Augustus: *vince mari: iam terra tua est* (39). The battle of Actium (Augustus' victory at sea) is a condition of the forthcoming peace, which Augustus would establish *terra marique* as he said himself on the monument at Actium,[1] and on coins of the post-Actium period.[2] *Pax terra marique* is also the imagery

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[1] Above 14 note 4.

[2] Camps *ad.loc.* 4.6.38. See also Léon-Marcien (1956) 339-341.

used by Horace and Vergil in their references to Augustus' bringing peace to the world,[1] the very act that enabled him to become *mundi servator*.

Apollo, having decimated the enemy, wins his temple. This brings us back to the occasion of the poem. Actium constitutes the story behind the temple; it is the historical event that prompted Augustus to build it. With the war over now, Propertius returns to the theme of poetry:

> *bella satis cecini: citharam iam poscit Apollo*
> *victor et ad placidos exuit arma choros.*
> *candida nunc molli subeant convivia luco;*
> *blanditiaeque fluant per mea colla rosae,*
> *vinaque fundatur prelis elisa Falernis,*
> *perque lavet nostras spica Cilissa comas.*
> *ingenium potis irritet Musa poetis:*
> *Bacche, soles Phoebo fertilis esse tuo.*
> (*Elegy* 4.6.69-76)

Augustus dedicated the temple in commemoration of the war. It was an act of piety and gratitude towards the *vindex deus* who brought him victory. The temple housed the statue of Apollo the archer-warrior who won the war at Actium,[2] but outside the temple stood another Apollo, "the rather effete chanteur, with the flawlessly coiffed hair and his long fingers fondling the lyre." [3] This is the Apollo whom Propertius describes in an earlier poem dealing with the same temple (2.31). The temple was also the site of a library which contained the works of the Greeks and Romans; it was a favourite haunt of the poets apparently.[4] In Horace's poem on the occasion of the temple's dedication (*Ode* 1.31), he begins, *Quid dedicatum poscit Apollinem / vates?* At this particular temple it seems the *vates* (priests) and *vates* (poets) wander side by side. The word play on *vates*, then, is not gratuitous after all. It reflects the two-fold nature of the temple—which is, we are told, the subject of the poem. In the final couplet, we see Propertius passing the night with libations (*patera*) and song (*carmine*), or in both capacities as a *vates*. Now that peace has arrived, Apollo drops his bow and takes up his lyre. (Apollo himself serves two distinct functions as a god: archer-warrior and civilized aesthete.) The poem enters a new phase which we

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[1] Above 13.

[2] Johnson (1973) 163.

[3] Johnson (1973) 163.

[4] Above 14.

have seen in another Actium poem already: *nunc est bibendum*, as the call to Bacchus shows. Along with the drinking there will be poetry:

> *ille paludosos memoret servire Sygambros,*
> *Cepheam his Meroen fuscaque regna canat,*
> *hic referat sero confessum foedere Parthum:*
> *'Reddat signa Remi, mox dabit ipse sua:*
> *sive aliquid pharetris Augustus parcet Eois,*
> *differat in pueros ista tropaea suos.*
> *gaude, Crasse, nigras si quid sapis inter harenas:*
> *ire per Euphraten ad tua busta licet.'*
> *sic noctem patera, sic ducam carmine, donec*
> *iniciat radios in mea vina dies.*
> (*Elegy* 4.6.69-86)

The poets—Propertius and other would-be *vates*—gather for a night-long symposium to the tune of the Doric lyre. Augustus' new conquests provide the subject matter. Propertius listens while the others sing. For his own part, he has already sung his song—we have just heard it. The subject was Actium, the greatest event a poet could hope to sing at one time; but those days are past. As the night passes he listens to the *turba scriptorum* attempt to follow in his tracks by singing the latest *facta* of Augustus.[1]

It had always been Propertius' aim to strive for originality, to travel down the untrodden path. In this respect, the poetic symposium recalls another passage that nicely binds the double nature of Propertius as a poet who wished to elevate his poetry for Rome's sake (*Roma, fave, tibi surgit opus* 4.1.67), while remaining true to his calling as an elegist:

> *at tu finge elegos, fallax opus: haec tua castra!—*
> *scribat ut exemplo cetera turba tuo.*
> (*Elegy* 4.1.135-136)

Propertius has in effect taken the advice of Horos and satisfied his own ambitions for greater poetry. Actium and Augustus provided the subject matter, but Propertius delivered his poetic rendition according to the rules of his *castra*, with enough Callimachean wit to keep himself in favour with Calliope. In the end, his efforts redefined elegy. At the symposium, the *turba* has learned from his example, and he watches and listens as they attempt to match his success. (Of course, the poem which Propertius quotes on the Parthian campaign is in elegiacs.) The camp (*castra*) was never abandoned; it was elevated.

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[1] Baker (1983) 173-174.

CONCLUSION

Between the military confrontations, the war of words during the years after Caesar's death in 44 B.C. up to the return of Octavian to Rome in 29 B.C. and the triple triumph in the following year provided much of the material later used by the Augustan poets in their versions of Actium and its causes and effects. Octavian had put considerable effort into building for himself the reputation of a great soldier and statesman. He promoted his connexion to the deified Caesar and his special relationship to Apollo. He also emphasized his success in restoring peace to the state as early as the end of the Sicilian War in 36 B.C. Antony had made similar efforts to create his own glorified image, but these were repelled by the negative propaganda campaign which stressed his drunkenness and his association with the barbarian queen Cleopatra. Eventually Cleopatra's role in the conflict gained prominence so that before Actium Octavian could declare war not on Antony, but on Egypt. Octavian's victories at Actium and Alexandria secured his own positive image while preserving the negative profiles of Antony and Cleopatra. None of this escaped the attention of the Augustan poets.

In their *recusationes* Horace, Vergil and Propertius make a commitment to a particular kind of poetry—to each his own. Ultimately their common goal was to establish themselves as masters of a new brand of distinctly Roman poetry. This was accomplished partly through each poet's association with his Greek predecessors. In conjunction with their use of Greek influences, the poets applied these borrowed genres and styles to subjects and themes from Roman history, or more immediately, from the current political scene.

Vergil could write pastoral based on the Theocritean model, and in doing so, emphasize the contrast between the peaceful Arcadia he had devised and the Roman state torn apart by the Civil Wars. The hazards of war and its destructive consequences rendered it impossible for Vergil in his bucolic shepherd-poet persona to sing of *reges et proelia.* Still, he expressed a desire to reach greater heights in his poetry, and in *Eclogue* 4, he established the criteria whereby he would allow himself to aspire to these heights. In the *Georgics*, the tone becomes more confident in this respect. Singing the Ascraean song through Roman towns, as he says, Vergil hails the success of Octavian, the end of the Civil Wars and the preservation of the Italian land, which had been left to ruin while Mars continued to rage throughout the country and the whole world. Octavian's victory at Actium, the defeat of

Antony and Cleopatra and the closing of the temple of Janus introduced a new era to Rome, a return to the land of Saturn, a Golden Age. The vague and veiled promise in *Eclogue* 4 is reaffirmed and clarified in the proem to *Georgics* 3, in which Vergil announces his intentions to compose a great poem dealing with the *pugnata Caesaris*. What results is something quite different in the *Aeneid*. But the shield in Book 8 provides Aeneas and the reader with the clearest look at the awe-inspiring future, the Age of Augustus when the Golden Age returns for the first time since Saturn had ruled the same region.

Horace is the first poet to treat Actium in his poetry directly. At the time, he was composing his *Epodes*, for which he tells us, he appropriated the iambic metre and the vigorous style from his model Archilochus. The Archilochean *animus* was conducive not only for Horace's invectives against specific characters, but also in his political epodes, in which he decries the tumultuous state of affairs in Rome under the triumvirate. To a lesser extent, that spirit is also evident in his attack on Antony in *Epode* 9. At the same time, however, Horace is advancing within his *Epodes* towards the lyrical poet of the *Odes*. In *Ode* 1.37 he gives another poem which concerns Actium, Augustus and Cleopatra, leaving Antony out of the picture now that the battle has taken on an international character. By focussing on the sympotic celebrations resultant from the end of the war, Horace can write a poem concerning Actium while maintaining a lyrical pose. He manipulates the theme of drinking, so common to his lyrical poetry, in a way that allows him to aspire to loftier poetry by adding a political element to his poem. He does this first in the translation of his first line from the politically involved lyric poet who greatly influenced his *Odes*, Alcaeus. This establishes a starting point from which Horace develops the drinking theme in relation to Cleopatra, who moves from a state of reckless inebriation to the image of her soberly drinking in her very death. In this way, he transforms Cleopatra from the pre-Actium target of abuse to the post-victory view of her as the greatest enemy of Rome since Jugurtha or Hannibal. Thus, Augustus has achieved an astounding victory.

Initially Propertius attempts to incorporate Actium into the genre of love elegy. He has claimed that love-poetry is as valid as Homer's epics, and so rather than rise to the grand style which Actium calls for (as he admits), he decides to concentrate on Actium as not a military event, but in relation to love themes. First he contrasts his own life with that of the soldier, claiming that lives would never have been lost at Actium had everyone followed his philosophy of wine, women and song (2.15). He later attributes Antony's demise to his misfortunes in his love life (2.16). In *Elegy* 3.11, a poem that increases the entanglement of elegiac and political elements, Propertius compares his own troubles with Cynthia to

Rome's peril at the hands of Cleopatra. Like Cynthia, Cleopatra is the domineering *femme fatale*, only now she has applied her charms in a political context by threatening to put Rome under her spell. In this way, Augustus' achievement is treated with a certain playful irreverence. In his final Actium poem (4.6), Propertius borrows elements from the poetry of Vergil and Horace, and reworks them into a witty, Callimachean style, which results in the perplexing and baroque treatment of the battle.

Although the message of the *recusationes* would suggest the impossibility of composing a poetic account of Actium, the Augustan poets demonstrate with considerable skill, variety and ingenuity how they are able to reconcile such a paradox without sacrificing the quality of their art or compromising their markedly individual styles. Instead, the respective versions of Actium provide a fine example of the diversity of Augustan poetry and the wide range of approaches available on a single subject to poets of rare talent.

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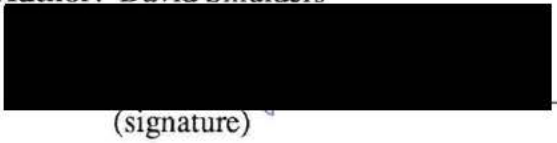

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