

CHAPTER 4

An elegist's career: from Cynthia to Cornelia

Stephen Heyworth*

Virgil created the ideal poetic career, an upwards progression within the range of hexameter poetry, pastoral to didactic to epic. He marked this movement in ways obvious and less obvious: he gets up from the shepherd's sitting position at the close of the *Eclogues*; at the end of the second *Georgic* he regrets both the loss of pastoral innocence and his inability to write Lucretian natural philosophy; at the start of the third *Georgic* he looks ahead to an Augustan epic of sacred importance; in each work he presents an emblematic vision of the nymph Arethusa. Subsequently Ovid produces his own more ambitious versions of the ideal career, going from love elegy to tragedy to the universal epic of the *Metamorphoses*, and within elegy itself advancing from personal love elegy through the didactic of the *Ars* to the sacred and aetiological narratives of the *Fasti*. Each cycle then returns to the personal elegy of lamentation in the *Tristia*; but even in exile Ovid expands his range with the curse poem *Ibis*, and more letters.¹

What of Propertius, Ovid's predecessor as love elegist? Does he show a similar reaction to the Virgilian pattern? Ovid's poetry repeatedly builds on Propertian models, and there is a temptation to see the elegiac books as describing a similar arc to that from the *Amores* to the *Ars* and the *Fasti*, with the personal material of Books 1 and 2 opening out to more general material, discursive and moral in 3, aetiological in 4. There is truth in this, but more truth in a rather different view, which I shall pursue here. Rather than a rising curve we should perceive stasis, and a persistent refusal to have a career. After all, Ovid himself defines Propertius as the poet whose work is solely concerned with Cynthia (*Rem.* 763–4):

carmina quis potuit tuto legisse Tibulli
uel tua, cuius opus Cynthia sola fuit?

* Translations throughout the chapter are the author's own, unless otherwise stated.

¹ On the Virgilian and Ovidian careers, see the Introduction and Putnam, Ch. 1 and Barchiesi and Hardie, Ch. 3 in this volume.

Who could safely have read the poems of Tibullus, or yours, *whose work was Cynthia alone?*

THE CAREER REJECTED: STASIS AND REPETITION

Book I stresses that, because of his commitment to Cynthia, Propertius cannot choose to vary his output. This is symbolized by his exclusive concentration on her in poems 1 to 19, and by his refusal of other careers, whether as poet (1.7 and 1.9 reject the epic of Ponticus) or as politician (Prop. 1.6.1–2, 5, 19–22):²

Non ego nunc Hadriae uereor mare noscere tecum,
 Tulle, neque Aegaeo ducere uela salo, ...
 sed me complexae remorantur uerba puellae, ... 5
 tu patruī meritas conare anteire secures,
 et uetera oblitis iura refer sociis. 20
 nam tua non aetas umquam cessauit amori,
 semper at armatae cura fuit patriae.

I do not now fear to experience the Adriatic sea with you, Tullus, nor to spread sail on the swell of the Aegean, ...; but the words and embrace of my girl hold me back, ... You should try to go in advance of the axes your uncle has earned, and bring back old laws to forgetful allies. For your life has never had the leisure for love, but always there has been a concern for your country and its arms.

Tullus travels abroad, but Propertius is stuck in Italy: the words and the embrace of Cynthia hold him back. Whereas love of his belligerent country is Tullus' permanent condition, for the poet love is to be a lifelong career, and his assertion that he is not suited to gaining glory in warfare is attached to a forecast of his death (27–30):³

multi longaeuo periere in amore libenter,
 in quorum numero me quoque terra tegat.
 non ego sum laudi, non natus idoneus armis:
 hanc me militiam fata subire uolunt. 30

Many have willingly perished in a long-lasting love: may I too be among their number when the earth covers me. I was not born suited to glory, nor to arms: this is the soldiering that the fates wish me to undergo.

² The Propertian passages are cited in the form in which they appear in the new Oxford Classical Text (Heyworth 2007a); the text is explained in Heyworth 2007b.

³ Philip Hardie points out the implicit contrast with Gallus, whose elegiac career (sadly lost to us) did not stand in the way of a political career.

The most explicit statements come in 1.7. Not only are the travails of love his way of life (verses 5, 9), but this is where he *wants* the fame of his poetry to come from (10). Even though he is forced to serve his passion rather than his intellect (7–8), he has no ambition to make a name in another genre.

nos, ut consuemus, nostros agitamus amores,	5
atque aliquid duram quaerimus in dominam;	
nec tantum ingenio quantum seruire dolori	
cogor, et aetatis tempora dura queri.	
hic mihi conteritur uitae modus, haec mea fama est,	
hinc cupio nomen carminis ire mei.	10
me legat assidue post haec neglectus amator,	13
et prosint illi cognita nostra mala.	14
me laudet doctae solitum placuisse puellae,	11
Pontice, et iniustas saepe tulisse minas.	12

We, as is our custom, deal with our love affair, and search out something for a hard-hearted mistress. I am forced to serve my emotions more than my talent, and to complain about the harsh circumstances of my life. This is the way of life I tread, this is my fame, from this I desire the name of my poetry to come. May the abandoned lover read me assiduously in the future, and may knowledge of our woes help him; may he praise me as one who regularly pleased a learned girl, Ponticus, and often endured unfair threats.

Again the inexorable nature of his condition is stressed by reference to death (Prop. 1.7.21–4):

tum me non humilem mirabere saepe poetam;
 tunc ego Romanis praeferar ingeniis;
 nec poterunt iuuenes nostro reticere sepulchro:
 ‘ardoris nostri magne poeta, iaces?’

Then you will often wonder at me as no humble poet; then I shall be set above Roman wits; nor will the young men be able to keep quiet at my tomb: ‘Great composer of our passion, do you lie dead?’

Though death features in these earlier poems, it is the dominant theme for the first time in 1.19, the poem that ends the Cynthia sequence in Book 1 (1–4):

Non ego nunc tristes uereor, mea Cynthia, manes,
 nec moror extremo debita fata rogo;
 sed ne forte tuo careat mihi funus amore:
 hic timor est ipsis durior exsequiis.

I do not now fear the grim underworld, my Cynthia, nor do I put off the death owed to the final pyre; but that my burial may happen to lack your love, this is a fear harsher than the funeral itself.

These opening lines are at first sight a striking announcement of closure: death is inevitable, and the poet accepts that. *Nunc* and *nec moror* suggest death's imminence, *extremo* stresses that it is an end. But then through the interest in the arrangements of the funeral we are given hints of a future beyond death; and the following lines confirm this (Prop. 1.19.5–6, 11–12, 17–18):

non adeo leuiter nostris puer haesit ocellis	5
ut meus oblito puluis amore uacet. ...	
illic quidquid ero semper tua dicar imago:	11
traicit et fati litora magnus amor. ...	
quamuis te longae remorentur fata senectae,	17
cara tamen lacrimis ossa futura meis.	

Not so lightly does the boy stick in my eyes that love would be forgotten and absent from my ashes. ... There whatever I will be, I shall ever be called your image: great love crosses even the shores of death. ... Though you be held back by the fates of a long old age, yet shall your bones be dear to my tears.

What has seemed the finishing line for Propertius and Cynthia is treated rather as a turning post, the end of one lap, but the start of another: the poet's death will mean separation, but not forgetfulness; whatever the metaphysical truth of existence after death, Propertius will remain identified as Cynthia's (mirror) image; their love transcends death to such an extent that he in the underworld will mourn her death. The denial of delay in verse 2 is undone in 17: however imminent the death of one lover may be, the story can continue through the lengthy old age of the other – and beyond, with the concrete nouns *lacrimis* (tears) and *ossa* (bones) presenting a physical encounter after the second death. The closing couplet then invites the reader to see a withdrawal from this confident assertion of an unending future (Prop. 1.19.25–6):

quare, *dum licet*, inter nos laetemur amantes:
non satis est ullo tempore longus amor.

So, *while we may*, let us enjoy our love between the two of us: love is not long enough over any period.

'While we may'; but the final pentameter insists on the need for infinite continuation. Satiety, so often a marker of closure (most obviously at the end of *Eclogues* 3 and 10), is here denied. Though this is the final Cynthia poem in the book, as it finishes we are given a hint that this is not enough (*non satis est*), that more must follow. Propertius had begun, famously, with Cynthia: she was the first (*Cynthia prima*, 1.1.1), but also, he has promised us, the end (1.12.19–20):

mi neque amare aliam neque ab hac desistere fas est:
Cynthia prima fuit; Cynthia finis erit.

For me it is not possible to love another nor to abandon her: *Cynthia was the start; Cynthia will be the end.*

The first book thus in various ways establishes that this is not a poet who aims at a career, but one whose work will remain forever concentrated on a single mistress – unless he misleads her, and us.

One can imagine several possibilities for further development. *Cynthia prima* might in the second book be followed by a different mistress (as it were *Anna secunda*), just as Tibullus' Delia is replaced by Nemesis in Book 2. Or we might see the poet moving away from erotic material, even abandoning love elegy, as he has seemed to do in the epigrams, sepulchral and signatory, that end Book 1. In fact, he largely gives us more of the same (2.1.1–4):

Quaeritis unde mihi totiens scribantur amores,
 unde meus ueniat mollis in ora liber.
 non haec Calliope, non haec mihi cantat Apollo:
 ingenium nobis ipsa puella facit.

You ask how it happens that so often I write of love affairs, how my book comes in elegiac form on to people's lips. It is not Calliope who sings this for me, nor Apollo: it is my girl herself who creates my poetic talent.

The book begins by marking itself as continuing a sequence.⁴ The *amores* of which he has already written in his elegiac book have reached an audience and provoked a response, from the vague plurality of readers implied by *Quaeritis*. The sense of seriality is stressed especially by *totiens* ('so often');⁵ the poet even gives his readers a touch of impatience: When are they going to get something other than *amores*? Isn't one book of more than twenty poems enough? He immediately raises doubts about how long his erotic material can be pursued. In starting from a question he

⁴ This is one reason for rejecting the attempt by Butrica 1996 to distinguish Book 1 as a *Monobiblos*, separate from the four books that follow under the (supposed) patronage of Maecenas. More substantial reasons can be found in the use of *alter* at 2.3.4 to number the second book as the second book, and the way 3.24–5 recalls 1.1 in bringing the Cynthia cycle to a premature close.

⁵ It is worth noting that the poet has created an image of repetition already with Cynthia's *saepe* at 1.3.44 *interdum leuiter mecum deserta querebar / externo longas saepe in amore moras*: in her creative mind, even by the time of his third poem Propertius has *often* dallied in other affairs. Then we see similar effects at 1.5.21 *nec iam pallorem totiens mirabere nostrum*, 1.9.21 *pueri totiens arcum sentire medullis*, where Gallus and Ponticus (respectively) are warned about the impact of love. Again, in the first line of 2.13 (perhaps the first line of the original third book) *tot sagittis* implies the plurality of the poet's works: there is a constant threat of ending through death, but the address to Cynthia prompts continuation.

implies that an answer may be given, that the conversation will continue. The figuring of his elegy as conversational is a significantly Callimachean touch: one thinks perhaps of the λέσχη ('talk') in Epigram 2 Pfeiffer (= *A.P.* 7.80), but especially of the conversation with the Muses throughout *Aetia* 1 and 2. And yet when the answer begins to be given in verses 3–4, he rejects the Callimachean model: unlike the *Aetia*, his material is not spoken by Calliope (and her sisters) or written under the instructions of Apollo. What he emphasizes is not τέχνη (= *ars*) but *ingenium* ('talent' or 'inspiration'): contrast Ovid, *Amores* 1.15.13–14 on Callimachus (which perhaps picks up on the earlier summary judgements that Propertius has in mind):

Battiades semper toto cantabitur orbe:
quamuis ingenio non ualet, arte ualet.

The son of Battus will always be sung all over the world: although he is not strong in inspiration, he is strong in craft.

Propertius' (superficial) rejection of Callimachus in 2.1 is markedly in contrast to the opening poem of the first book, where the first word echoes Callimachus' name for Apollo (used at fr. 114.8, as well as at 67.6, cited below), and subsequent details amplify the echo of the Acontius and Cydippe episode of *Aetia* Book 3. Compare Propertius 1.1.1–5:

Cynthia prima suis miserum me cepit ocellis,
contactum nullis ante Cupidinibus.
tum mihi constantis deiecit lumina fastus
et caput impositis pressit *Amor* pedibus
donec me *docuit* castas odisse Puellas.

Cynthia was the first; she caught me with her eyes and made me miserable – I had never been infected with desire before. *Love* forced me to drop my look of resolute pride, put his feet on my head and pressed it down, until he had *taught* me to dislike the chaste girls (i.e. the Muses).

and Callimachus, fr. 67.1–6:⁶

Αὐτὸς Ἔρως ἐδίδαξεν Ἀκόντιον, ὁππότε καλῆ
ἦθετο Κυδίππῃ παῖς ἐπὶ παρθενικῆ,
τέχνην (οὐ γὰρ ὄγ' ἔσκε πολύκροτος) ὄφρα λέγοιτο
τοῦτο διὰ ζωῆς οὐνομα κουρίδιον.

⁶ See Puelma 1982: 288, n.86. He notes the link with Venus as teacher of the lover at Tib. 1.8.5; cf. also Virg. *Ecl.* 8.47 and Tib. 1.2.19 (with Murgatroyd 1980). None of the other passages are as close as the Callimachus to Propertius' opening lines (beyond the links picked out in italics, we may note that Acontius is a child, hence inexperienced like Propertius).

ἦ γάρ, ἄναξ, ὁ μὲν ἦλθεν Ἴουλίδος, ἡ δ' ἀπὸ Νάξου,
Κύνθειε, τὴν Δήλω σὴν ἐπὶ βουφονίην.

Love himself taught Acontius when the boy burnt with love for the fair maiden Cydippe, taught him *craft* [or a trick] (for he was not cunning) so that he might choose for himself this name, bridegroom, throughout his life. For, lord, he came from Iulis (Ceos) and she from Naxos, *Cynthus*, to your sacrifice in Delos.

However, in 1.1.17–18 the poet complains that in his case, unlike that of Milanion – and, implicitly, Acontius and Hippomenes⁷ – *Amor* does not think up any tricks to help him win his beloved:

in me tardus *Amor* non ullas cogitat artes
nec meminit notas, ut prius, ire uias.

In my case *Love* is slow and does not think up any *tricks* [literally arts], nor does he remember to travel the old familiar courses.

Already in 1.1, then, the Callimachean model is evoked to be abandoned. What has looked like a striking change at the start of Book 2 turns out to be a repetition.

A major difference from 1.1 is the omission of Cynthia's name from 2.1. After its extraordinary prominence as the opening word of the opening poem of the first book, *Cynthia* does not appear until poem 5 of Book 2 (though earlier lacunae may mislead us here), and there is room for us to wonder about the identity of the beloved.⁸ Different readers may see *ipsa puella* in 2.1.4 as a sign of coyness about disloyalty, or as carrying the implication that Cynthia's identity is so securely linked with the poet's that he could not possibly mean any other girl. In either case, he is playing against the preconceptions built up by the existence of his first book. But he maintains his career as the lover of Cynthia, and this clearly persists, despite a variety of divagations and distractions, until the end of Book 3.

PROPERTIUS ON THE POETIC CAREER: BOOKS 2 AND 3

As we have seen, Book 2 from the very start emphasizes the repetitiveness of what the poet is offering. There will be increasing numbers of divergent poems, as we move on to Books 3 and 4 especially, but the love

⁷ See Heyworth 2007b: 8.

⁸ Even after 2.3.8 *differtur, numquam tollitur ullus amor*, for he may be repeating for a new mistress his earlier claims of love until death, and beyond.

elegist's voice dominates. However, one repeated motif is the pointer to a change of genre followed promptly by a refusal to carry out any such promise. Thus the opening verse of 2.2 describes Propertius' determination to change:

Liber eram et uacuo meditabar uiuere lecto.

I was free and thinking of life in an empty bed.

but the abandonment of love is set in the past, and Cynthia's attractions are too great for him to persist (2.2.5–8). The following poem likewise starts with a retrospective account of a failed abandonment of love (2.3.1–4). The poet was experimenting to see if a fish could live out of water – or if he could stay awake at night engaged in some serious study (2.3.5–7):

quaerebam, sicca si posset piscis harena 5
 nec solitus ponto uiuere toruus aper;
 aut ego si possem studiis uigilare seueris.

That was me investigating if a fish could live on dry sand and a grim boar in the sea, being unaccustomed, or if I could stay up all night pursuing serious matters.

The use of *uigilare* recalls Lucretius 1.142 *noctes uigilare serenas* ('to pass the calm nights awake') and *carmina uigilata* ('poems resulting from sleepless nights') in Cinna 11 (= 13 Hollis), his version of Callimachus' epigram hailing Aratus' *Phaenomena* (27 Pfeiffer = *A.P.* 9.507), and thus (with *studiis ... seueris*) implies an aborted move to didactic on a serious topic.

A more concerted movement in a new direction comes in 2.10. This poem starts⁹ with a clear announcement of an immediate change of style: *sed tempus lustrare aliis Helicon choreis* ('But it is time to traverse Helicon with *other* dances'); and this drive towards the new is maintained in subsequent couplets, with pointers towards the new manner (2.10.9–12):

nunc uolo subducto *grauior* procedere uultu;
 nunc *aliam* citharam me mea Musa docet.
 surge,¹⁰ anime, *ex humili iam* carmine; sumite uires,
 Pierides; *magni nunc* erit oris opus.

⁹ *Sed* reacts to a preceding context, possibly the book as a whole, but possibly some verses now lost: see Heyworth 2007b: 153.

¹⁰ cf. Virg. *Ecl.* 10.75 *surgamus*.

Now I want to advance *more serious* with a frown on my face; now my Muse teaches me a *different* lyre. Rise, my spirit, from a song *now humble*; take strength, Pierides; *now* there will be need of a *big* voice.

The new music is to be that of military epic (2.10.3–4, 7–8):

iam libet et fortes memorare ad proelia turmas
 et Romana mei dicere castra ducis. ...
 aetas prima canat Veneres, extrema tumultus:
 bella canam, quando scripta puella mea est.

Now it pleases both to record the squadrons valiant for battle and to tell the Roman camp of my leader. ... Let the first age sing Venuses, the last disorder: I shall sing wars, since my girl is written.

In this last verse the poet goes as far as to assert that he can now go on to writing *bella* because his *puella* is finished. But she is not; and in 2.13, which a number of scholars¹¹ have seen as belonging at the start of the original third book, Love with his very different, more potent weapons, turns Propertius back towards Cynthia and elegy (2.13.1–7):

Non tot Achaemeniis armatur Itura sagittis
 spicula quot nostro pectore fixit Amor.
 hic me tam graciles uetuit contemnere Musas,
 iussit et Ascraeum sic habitare nemus;
 non ut Pieriae quercus mea uerba sequantur,
 aut possim Ismaria ducere ualle feras,
 sed magis ut nostro stupefiat Cynthia uersu.

Itura is not armed with so many Persian shafts as Love has fixed arrows in my breast. He has forbidden me to disdain Muses as slender as mine are, and ordered me to dwell in the Ascraean [i.e. Hesiodic] grove in the way that I do; not in order that Pierian oaks may follow my words, or so I can lead wild beasts through the Ismarian valley, but rather to stun Cynthia with my verse.

The god insists on poetry to enrapture the mistress: the *arma* of warfare will feature only in (dis)similes, and any move to Augustan panegyric is postponed – or forgotten.

Between these two poems¹² 2.12 offers an account of Amor that emphasizes permanence and continuity: *tela manent, manet et puerilis imago* (13: 'the weapons remain valid; so too does the boyish appearance'). This is emphasized especially by the failure of the image of Amor's wings, at least in the case of Propertius. In the generalized picture in verse 8 *non*

¹¹ E.g. J.K. King 1980; Heyworth 1995 (esp. 165–8); Günther 1997: 6–14; on the programme of 2.13, see Heyworth 1992 and Wilkinson 1966.

¹² But see Heyworth 1995: 166–71, where I argue that the poem has been displaced.

permanet ('does not remain steady') pictures Amor flying away; but this is negated for Propertius in 13–14 (*in me ... certe pennas perdidit ille suas*: 'In my case ... he has certainly lost his wings'). The poem closes with a further paradox, building on the idea of Love unto Death. Propertius has already become a shadow of himself; if the god continues to beat the shade he will lose his poet, and there will be no continuation of his love poetry, no one to sing elegiac songs of the elegiac mistress (2.12.20–4).¹³

Another poem that reasserts the permanence of his love for Cynthia is 2.25. His career is never-ending: unlike soldiers, plough-oxen, boats and shields, he will not retire (2.25.5–10):

miles depositis annosus secubat armis,	5
grandaeuique negant ducere aratra boues,	
putris et in uacua requiescit nauis harena,	
et uetus in templo bellica parma uacat:	
at me ab amore tuo deducet nulla senectus,	
siue ego Tithonus siue ego Nestor ero.	10

A soldier of many years sleeps away from the arms he has laid down, and aged oxen refuse to draw the plough; the rotting ship rests on the sand of an empty shore, and an old military shield rests in a temple. But no old age will draw me away from loving you, if I become a Tithonus or a Nestor.

Poem 3.5 follows 2.10 in announcing a new topic for the poet as he grows older, but the change is not imminent here, and warfare is replaced by natural philosophy as the improbable subject for Propertius' old age (19–20; 23–5):

me iuuat in prima coluisse Helicon iuuenta	
Musarumque choris implicuisse manus; ...	20
atque ubi iam Venerem grauis interceperit aetas	
sparserit et nigras alba senecta comas,	
tum mihi naturae libeat perdiscere mores.	

It pleases me to have cultivated Helicon in first youth, and to have entwined my hands with the dancing Muses; ... And when the weight of time has stolen Venus away, and white old age has speckled my black hair, then let it be my delight to learn the habits of nature.

In 3.9 Maecenas is praised for his analogous reluctance to follow the *cursus honorum*;¹⁴ he could easily lay down the law in the forum and fix victorious arms to his walls (23–6), but he prefers humility and the

¹³ The passage is brilliantly explored by Lyne 1998: 175–7 (= 2007: 202–5).

¹⁴ See the Introduction and Farrell 2002 on the significance of the *cursus honorum* for poetic careers in Rome.

shade (29–30), a judgement that sets him up as a new Camillus (31–2). Propertius is just the same, an unambitious writer of elegy, who rejects Maecenas' attempts to thrust him into the ocean (3–4): any epic is made to depend on Maecenas' willingness to lead by taking up electoral office (*te duce*, 47) – and so it will not happen. The programmatic poems thus provide an assertion of stasis, not a route map for a career.

The poet's sophisticated interest in the concept of the career is demonstrated most clearly in 2.34. Lynceus, the poet's friend, has fallen in love with Propertius' darling, and tried to seduce her (1–26). At this point he is revealed to be a moral philosopher and a poet of high pretensions, who must consequently give up his serious study and grand poetic genres, and move to elegy, to poetry that can help in love affairs (27–46). Propertius thus constructs for this friend, as previously for Ponticus, a career that moves on from the traditionally high to the erotic. Before he can enjoy love properly, Lynceus needs to learn from his friend's experience (47–50). Girls are not interested in natural philosophy (51–4). Propertius himself reigns over groups of them at symposia, entirely thanks to his ability as an elegist (55–8). This is what he enjoys – the life of love (59–60); it is for Virgil to compose an *Aeneid* (61–4):

me iuuat hesternis positum languere corollis,
 quem tetigit iactu certus ad ossa deus;
 Actia Vergilio est custodis litora Phoebi
 Caesaris et fortes dicere posse rates,
 qui nunc Aeneae Troiani suscitatur arma
 iactaque Lauinis moenia litoribus.

Me it pleases to languish settled on yesterday's garlands: the god, certain in his aim, has touched me to the marrow. It is for Virgil to have the power to tell of the Actian shores of Phoebus the protector and the bold boats of Caesar, Virgil, who now rouses the arms of Trojan Aeneas and the walls cast on Lavinia's shores.

Here he goes far beyond what he has done in 1.7/1.9, in setting his poetic achievements in the erotic sphere with Virgil's as the singer of the *Aeneid*. But the celebration of Virgil continues with an account at greater length of the non-epic works, and in particular of the *Eclogues*, cast as essentially erotic poems (67–76):

tu canis umbrosi subter pineta Galaesi
 Thyrsin et attritis Daphnin harundinibus,
 utque decem possint corrumpere mala puellas,
 missus et impressis haedus ab uberibus.
 felix qui uiles pomis mercaris amores,
 huic licet ingratae Tityrus ipse canat.

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felix intactum Corydon qui temptat Alexin
 agricolae domini carpere delicias.
 quamuis ille sua lassus requiescat auena, 75
 laudatur faciles inter Hamadryadas.

You sing, beneath the pinewoods of shady Galaesus, of Thyrsis and Daphnis with well-worn reeds, and how ten apples can seduce girls, together with a kid sent from the milked udder. Happy are you who buy love cheap with apples; to her though she be ungrateful let Tityrus himself sing. Happy is Corydon who tries to pluck the untouched Alexis, darling of his master, the farmer. Although he rests tired from his pipe, he is praised in the conversations of the easy nymphs.

This is the kind of poetry readers enjoy, Propertius claims, just like the erotic verse of Varro, Catullus, Calvus, Gallus – and himself (81–2, 85–8):

non tamen haec ulli uenient ingrata legenti
 siue in amore rudis, siue peritus erit. ...
 sic quoque perfecto ludebat Iasone Varro, 85
 Varro Leucadiae maxima flamma suae;
 sic quoque lasciui cantarunt scripta Catulli,
 Lesbia quis ipsa notior est Helena.

But these songs will not come unpleasing to any reader, whether he happens to be new to love or experienced. So too did Varro play once his Jason was finished, Varro the great flame of his Leucadia; so too did the writings of playful Catullus sing, through which Lesbia is better known than Helen herself.

Virgil's *Eclogues* are thus likened to the work of Catullus, Calvus and Gallus, consistently erotic poets (as they are represented here). But there is a contrast, in the presence of the *Aeneid* in Virgil's oeuvre; and his is even unlike Varro's career, in which the *Argonautica* was followed by erotic verse (85–6), and unlike the course Propertius advises for Lynceus, another writer of epic (perhaps philosophical *epos*) who must now turn to love poetry. Moreover, as we have seen, he places *Eclogues* and *Georgics*, the lighter genres, after the *Aeneid*, and so artfully inverts the ascent of genres and imposes on Virgil a career like Varro's.

BIOGRAPHY, UNITY AND THE
CURSUS HONORUM: BOOK 4

Propertius' life within his poetry is dominated by Cynthia: they repeatedly fight and make up, and eventually at the end of Book 3 undergo an acrimonious divorce. The final poem of Book 3 is a firm farewell to Cynthia: her constant infidelity has at last compelled the poet to abandon her. He will weep as he leaves, but he leaves nonetheless, and curses her

as he goes (3.25.7–16). When the next book begins, there is no mention of Cynthia in the first poem, and where she does appear, in 4.1B, it is only in the account of the poet's past with which the astrologer Horus tries to bolster his claim to insight into the poet's future (121–46), and even here she is not named. Horus repeats Apollo's early advice to the poet, warning him of the *una puella* who will elude his palms (140). But the book continues without any mention of Cynthia, even in the attack on the *lena* Acanthis, who is encouraging the venality of his girlfriend: there is nothing here to show the poet has gone back to his earlier mistress, and the implication that the girl needs advice on how to behave seductively suggests that she is not to be read as the experienced and always *culta* Cynthia.

Book 4 thus at last offers a real change: the poet presents himself as having moved on from Cynthia biographically and poetically. Even if his announcement *sacra deosque*¹⁵ *canam* ('rites and gods I shall sing') is not whole-hearted, the compositions have undergone a major change: he speaks in other voices (Vertumnus and the pseudonymous Arethusa following Horus), and his narratives of Tarpeia's treachery (4.4) and Actium (4.6) are not motivated by the erotic interests of himself or his friends (contrast e.g. 1.20; 3.12, 13, 15). He writes with the love elegist's perspective, but is expanding his range of material into aetiological narrative and social commentary.

Eventually Cynthia does appear, in 4.7. But the incident narrated is placed just after her burial, and the figure that seems to lie on his bed (*uisa est incumbere fulcro*, 3) is now her ghost. The sense of separation is thus compounded: she chides him for his infidelity, his indifference to her funeral and her fate, and she ends by avoiding his embrace. Their affair may continue in time to come in the underworld, but his career as a love elegist is clearly at an end.

However, any sense of an apt ending to a lifelike story is overturned by the following poem: 4.8 is one of the most vivid expressions of love elegy, yet it comes immediately after this second apparent farewell to the genre. Cynthia is once more alive, and driving off to Lanuvium on an assignation with a toy boy. She returns to catch Propertius with two prostitutes and to lay down the law. He accepts her peace terms, and the poem ends with them in bed together – a rare sight, and an effective ending to their poetic career, but 'biographical' nonsense after 4.7. Far from a career, Propertius does not have a life that makes sense.

¹⁵ Or *diesque*, as the MSS have it.

How far are we to make a unity of a single poet's career, especially when he strays into unfamiliar territory? As I have said, Propertius can for the most part in Book 4 be read as continuing to write with the love elegist's perspective: when he sings of a deity it is the slippery Vertumnus whose voice he adopts, the statue who can be dressed to fit any character, including the *non dura puella* (4.2.23 'an easy girl'); as a Roman matron, he inveighs against the separation of man and wife caused by foreign wars (4.3; cf. 3.12); his Tarpeia sells her city for love in 4.4, not gold (as in Livy 1.11.6); his Actium is sung in the mode of the supremely elegiac Callimachus,¹⁶ and he moves away from the narrative for a party with the words *bella satis cecini* (4.6.69: 'I have sung wars enough'); his Hercules pleads with a woman as he stands outside a locked door (4.9). Yet the book has one aetiological poem that lacks any hint of an elegiac voice, the account in 4.10 of three occasions on which the *spolia opima* were won. This is a military theme and a heroic one; the treatment is concise but comparatively straightforward, and shockingly bloody (4.10.11–12, 37–8, 43–4):

hic spolia ex umeris ausus sperare Quirini
 ipse dedit, sed non sanguine sicca suo. ...
 di Latias iuvere manus: desecta Tolumni
 ceruix Romanos sanguine lauit equos. ...
 illi uirgatas maculanti sanguine bracas
 torquis ab incisa decidit unca gula.

He, having dared to hope for spoils from the shoulders of Quirinus, ended up yielding them himself, and they were wetted by his own blood. ... The gods aided Latin hands: the cut neck of Tolumnius washed the Roman horses with blood. ... To Claudius, as he spattered striped breeches with blood, fell the twisted necklace from the cut throat.

After the formal dedication at the end of 4.9, asking Hercules to favour his book, this poem has been marked as a new, grander beginning (4.10.1–3):

Nunc Iouis incipiam causas aperire Feretri
 armaque de ducibus trina recepta tribus.
 magnum iter ascendo, sed dat mihi gloria uires.

Now I shall begin to reveal the origins of Feretrian Jove and the three sets of arms received from three leaders. It is a great route I climb, but glory lends me strength.

¹⁶ See Heyworth 1994: 59–67.

Note the references to Jupiter, *arma*, grand scale, travel, ascent, glory, strength: the lines imitate *Georgics* 4.559–62 in their use of such diction to imply a change of topic. In Virgil's case, a twelve-book poem in a new genre follows. But for all the blood Propertius gives us a rather half-hearted poem, in which the three winnings of the *spolia opima* are treated at decreasing length (eighteen verses for Romulus, sixteen for Cossus, six for Claudius): how different from the Ennian or Livian pattern by which the treatment gets longer the closer to the author's own day. The contraction suggests boredom with the topic, and we should not be surprised when we find a reprise of the *bella satis cecini* with which he has signed off from the narrative of Actium at 4.6.69: after a poem that seems to show how alien to Propertius' elegiac voice military narrative could be, he starts 4.II, his final publication, with a resounding *Desine*, 'Stop'. Once more a development is denied.

Before he ends his career Propertius leaves a final puzzle. Poem 4.II is an apology, delivered in her own voice, for the life of the matron Cornelia, daughter of Scribonia, and thus step-daughter of Augustus. In her public defence before the judges of the underworld (the very speech a bold assertion of a masculine power), she lays claim to the various honours and achievements more typically associated with Rome's men (29 *tropaea*, 'trophies'; 32 *tituli*, 'titles'; 47 *leges*, 'laws'; 61 *honores*, 'magistracies'; 61 *sellam ... curulem*, 'consul's chair'; 70 *facta*, 'achievements'); she has lived a distinguished life between wedding and funeral (46) and in producing three children while remaining married to a single husband she has won a female equivalent of the triumph (4.II.71–2):

haec est feminei merces extrema triumphi,
laudat ubi emeritum libera fama torum.

This is the ultimate reward of a woman's triumph, when gossip freely praises her conjugal service as duly completed.

Thus she creates a kind of feminine *cursus honorum*: marriage, childbirth, death. This stress on magistracies and triumphs is in contrast not only with the absence of political and military achievement in the *matrona*'s own life, but also with the poet's own refusals of a political or military career for himself in 1.6 (see above), and for his descendants in 2.7 (*nullus nostro de sanguine miles erit*, 24: 'There will be no soldier from my blood'). Moreover, in this final poem it plays up his continuing refusal to follow the poetic *cursus honorum* established by Virgil. Even if we emphasize the difference between the dead *matrona* celebrated here and the lively ghost of 4.7, the final poem does not break away from elegiac norms. From the

start elegiac motifs predominate: tears, death and unopening doors in verses 1–4, for example:

Desine, Paulle, meum lacrimis urgere sepulcrum:
panditur ad nullas ianua nigra preces;
cum semel infernas intrarunt funera leges,
non exorando stant adamante uiae.

Cease, Paullus, to burden my tomb with tears: the dark door is opened to no prayers; when once the corpse has entered the domain of the underworld, the way stands fast with inexorable adamant.

The speaking voice is female, the text a quasi-epigram (compare the reference to the memorial stone on which Cornelia imagines her words appearing, 36), a poem that reasserts elegy as the poetry of lamentation and separation.

And even the move from Cynthia to Cornelia may be read as a final trick of the *fallax opus* (4.1.135: ‘tricky work’). As we have seen, the poet in Book 1 has promised that Cynthia, who was the beginning, shall also be the end (1.12.20). Cynthia was literally the first word, as well as the dominant theme of Book 1. Poetically, however, the promise about the *finis* was not fulfilled there, but left for later. By including 4.7 within the final book the poet has invited us to ask why he has not taken the opportunity to place the poem on his dead beloved at the end. If we wish to find a development, we may see the young man maturing, and coming to prefer the sobriety of Cornelia to the unpredictability of Cynthia. But if we take the poet determined to have no career at his word, Cornelia is a representation of Cynthia. If Cynthia is to be read as the end, as the poet has advised, Cornelia, Augustus’ step-daughter, is the unemotional, idealized, public face of the woman whom Propertius has loved in private in all her liveliness and changeability: this is what polite Roman society makes of its women. And with this conundrum the Propertian career lapses into silence.