Introduction

This study rests upon the simple premise that the various kinds of Latin poetry require various critical approaches. A search for the methodology most suited to reveal the innermost workings of a particular genre supports best our endeavors to interpret Rome's legacy. Specifically, I argue, psychoanalysis—crafted as it is to address what is fragmented, occluded, and in tension within human consciousness and culture—can best examine the incoherences that characterize Roman elegy: the logical contradictions and unexplained emotional *volte-face,* the mystifying ellipses of narrative, the at times abrupt changes in speakers and addressees, the oscillations between self-condemning love and self-justifying loathing for the Roman ethos that contemns *amor.* In particular, Jacques Lacan's focus on desire as the principal force that shapes subjectivity lends itself well to tracing intimately the eddies of longing across a genre that self-avowedly turns on love as its theme.

My previous book, *When the Lamp Is Shattered,* focused upon Catullus' poetry from the late Republic as the earliest known reasonably complete body of Roman lyric poetry. Its purpose was to fashion a basic vocabulary with which to discuss the emergence of divided erotic subjectivity[1] from the tantalizingly elliptical narrative of Latin lyric. I concentrated on the poems addressed to Catullus' lover Lesbia (the "Lesbia cycle") as the fullest account of a love affair available from his corpus. In order to throw into relief the significant details of lover's and beloved's intimate exchanges within these poems, I used those aspects of Lacan's thought best suited to explicating what seems innermost (most private, most personal) to the subject and the intrinsic scission of that "intimate core." Lacan's concept of the subject divided by desire is helpful in addressing the difficulties of constructing a single, logically coherent subject from Catullus' portrait of a lover rent by various dichotomies (duty versus love, the beloved's idealization versus her debasement, the lover's "divinization" under love's power versus his amorous enslavement). These

difficulties correlate to the equally perplexing rigors of extracting a rationally unified narrative from the text's fragmentary glimpses of Catullus' and Lesbia's love affair. From these related enigmas, I produced in *When the Lamp is Shattered* a conceptually unified analysis of the relatively interiorized concerns recorded in Catullus' Lesbia poems—poetry crucial, as precursor, to Roman love elegy, the field of inquiry for the present book.

This second book seeks to build upon the earlier work by expanding the scope both of its methodology and area of inquiry, and by articulating more broadly the social and political forces that shape the subject within Roman erotic poetry. Lacan's focus on desire always evokes the horizon of the political within the personal by showing how cultural institutions engage the subject's longing to be "whole" as strongly as lovers do (and by the same psychic means). The present study again takes advantage of Lacanian insight to offer an analysis of Propertius' corpus, but from a perspective that takes fuller account of the poetry's historical context.

I have again made use of Lacan's concept of the divided subject as an inherent cleavage that presses human beings to seek "unity" or "wholeness," but here I examine the way that widely various cultural signifiers can captivate that desire. The lure of "model citizen" or "great statesman" can be as strong as that of "devoted lover"—and is just as surely doomed: first, because division founds subjectivity: the subject cannot be healed without being abolished altogether; second, because the cultural icons under whose auspices we seek integrity themselves participate in the logical impasses that give rise to subjectivity. They are no less intrinsically flawed than the subject.[2] Propertius deeply interests himself in the allure, and the betrayal, of these seductive promises of unity offered by cultural symbols; the poet's fascination, even in its deep skepticism, aligns him more closely with "official" Rome than is usually suspected.

THE FORUM AUGUSTUM

The audience that read Propertius' poetry witnessed during the principate of Octavian—known after January 16, 27 B.C.E. as "Augustus"—a particularly fierce grappling with tensions among cultural elements evident in Rome's representation of itself; consciously or unconsciously, they brought that intensified awareness of their culture's internal contradictions to their reading of the Propertian corpus.[3] As Paul Zanker's analysis of the imagery of Augustan Rome shows (surveying not only monumental architecture, but the myriad humbler vignettes that emblazoned coinage, rings, and other quotidian objects), the public vision of the empire that Augustus' regime offered her citizens was an attempt to coax a totality from the division and incoherence of Roman cultural identity. Augustus' efforts to impose unity upon Rome's eclectic heritage are most purely evident in the Forum Augustum, the great colonnaded square containing the temple of Mars Ultor ("Mars the Avenger") that was built on the emperor's personal property (*privato solo*)[4] as an expression of his own ideas and emblazoned with a decorative program designed

to educate the Roman people in the emperor's new vision of Rome.[5] The Forum Augustum contains several images that awkwardly undertake to reconcile irreconcilables, such as the status of the Roman as both immigrant and native (descended from Trojan exiles and Latin aborigines), as Alban and Roman (Alba Longa being Rome's progenitor and, notwithstanding, its bitter enemy in a virtual civil war),[6] citizen of a nominal republic and a de facto monarchy.[7]

The Forum's very attempt to integrate the various parts of Roman mythic history—principally the myth cycles of Romulus and Aeneas—accentuates the tensions and contradictions within Rome's image of itself inherited from the past. For example, the Forum's alcoves symmetrically balance the famous image of Aeneas fleeing the burning ruins of Troy, carrying his father on his shoulders and leading his son Ascanius by the hand, against the figure of Romulus, hoisting on *his* shoulder the enemy commander's armor to be dedicated as *spolia opima.*[8] The juxtaposition, as Zanker points out, makes good enough sense as images of *pietas*[9] and *virtus*[10] respectively—except that Aeneas' protective loyalty toward his family throws into sharp relief Romulus' singular affront to such loyalty. Romulus founded the honor of the *spolia opima* when he killed King Akron of Caenina; the king had himself tried to avenge an infraction against *pietas,* namely the abduction of Caenina's women that Romulus engineered on the occasion of Rome's first Consualia.[11] The criteria that elevate both Romulus and Aeneas to venerable status cannot logically be reconciled.

Equally odd is the iconographic lifting of Romulus' counterpart, Aeneas and his family, above the logic of time and place. While Ascanius appears in the costume of a Phrygian shepherd, Anchises sports the garb of a Roman priest, and Aeneas wears Roman armor with the elaborate footwear appropriate only to a Roman patrician (an apparent reference to his status as progenitor of the noble Julii). Categories of foreigner and native, past and future, secular and sacred, noble and commoner jostle each other uneasily in this forcible blend of what Troy's exiles were with what they became.

And yet the Forum's parade of notables who articulate this divergent history—Aeneas, the Alban kings, and the Julii on one side, opposite Romulus and his fellow *triumphatores,*[12] the *summi viri*[13] of Rome's past, on the other—frame Augustus' controlling presence, implied by his triumphal chariot that commands the very center of the forum. Though the Senate dedicated this *quadriga* to Augustus as "father of the country" (*pater patriae*) after the Forum's completion, Augustus' obvious pride in the chariot and its inscription[14] shows that the Senate's inspiration fit his own vision of the Forum as an image of Rome's future—a harmonious "golden age" of peace that he himself had wrought and continued to preserve. Zanker argues cogently that the images of the Forum are carefully orchestrated to support Augustus' implicit claim to the power to unify the diverse threads of Roman identity, by uniting in his bloodline the peaceful and fertile heritage of Venus (his mythical ancestor, through Aeneas) and the martial heritage of Mars (from whose son Romulus he, like all Romans, claimed descent). Augustus surpasses Romulus' *virtus,* the

iconography implies, at the same time that he exemplifies *pietas* better than Aeneas; he unites the dual heritage of Rome in one person.

Yet Augustus' presence as the greatest of the *triumphatores* and generals who line the Forum's colonnades—a pre-eminence implied by his centrally-placed triumphal vehicle—ironically underlines the desperate need to overcome the centrifugal forces adumbrated, not only in the odd contradictions of Rome's mythical progenitors (Venus and Mars, Romulus and the Aeneadae), but in the Forum's gallery of history's great Romans. Mortal enemies line up together in the statue niches of the Forum's alcoves: Sempronius Gracchus with Scipio Aemilianus Africanus,[15] Marius with Sulla, Pompey with Lucullus.[16] Moreover, some of these imperialists evoke a social ethos and history specifically inimical to Augustus' strategic exaltation of his clan, the *gens Juliorum,* above all others in his conspectus of the Roman past, and to the monarchic and dynastic ambitions intimated in the assimilation of the Julians to the Alban kings in the north colonnade. For example, Scipio Aemilianus' enmity toward Sempronius Gracchus' son, Tiberius Gracchus the tribune, evidently stemmed from fear that Tiberius' proposed agrarian reforms were but instruments of demagoguery designed to advance their author's popular influence well beyond that of his oligarchic peers.[17] Similar alarm apparently motivated the *summus vir* Caecilius Metellus Numidicus' vigorous opposition to the "demagogues" Glauca and Saturninus.[18] When, on the other hand, the power that demagoguery seeks so avidly comes to rest *nolens volens* in the hands of another *summus vir,* M. Furius Camillus, he manifests a diffidence equally out of tune with Augustan ambitions. Though appointed dictator more than once (five times, according to Plutarch), Camillus assumed this office with reluctance, eager to lay it aside at the earliest opportunity.[19] He receives praise for always exercising his authority in common with his compeers, even when the power to propose and dispose was his alone.[20] By contrast, the Forum makes clear that Augustus' ambitions do not lie in the direction of a self-effacing equality with his peers.

I have lingered upon this description of the Forum Augustum in order to highlight the contradictions that shape the conceptualization both of Roman identity and of the state that shaped that identity. Assuredly some, if not all, of these contradictions existed before the principate and endured afterward, but the tensions they exert upon *Romanitas*[21] are greatly dramatized and hence the more forcibly impressed upon Rome's consciousness precisely through the principate's brave but futile attempts (like the Forum Augustum) to reconcile them out of existence. This consciousness of identity in tension conditions the audience for whom Propertius writes; accurately and precisely understanding the mechanism by which it operated is crucial to our fully understanding his poetry.

THE POET IMAGINES ROME

Lacan (as I shall argue with greater detail in chapter 1) offers us the best tools with which to approach this evident crisis in conceiving *Romanitas,* because his model of

subjectivity pivots upon an internal contradiction and division. That split is the very condition of subjectivity, driving all the subject's thoughts and actions insofar as he attempts to close the gap by identifying with one or another icon of ostensibly unproblematic and "whole" identity his society offers. The range of possible icons is vast and varied, even though all "work" according to the same principles. Accordingly, the wide embrace of Lacan's view of subjectivity can address within a single conceptual model the stark, seemingly contradictory division of Propertius' fourth book into erotic and political elements, along with the dichotomies of private versus public and individual versus social suggested by the principal divide. In his conceptualization of the subject's relation to society and history, Lacan refuses to regard such oppositions as fixed and stable; his thought therefore best corresponds to the complexities of Propertius' verse—to the way that hidden commerce between seeming antitheses colors the tensions that traverse its historical context and shapes the subjectivity it records.

Propertius' poetry, his fourth and last book especially, figures crucially in a debate lately sparked within the study of Latin poetry in general and Roman elegy in particular, chiefly owing to increased awareness within classical scholarship of Foucault's theory of *épistémè*—the historically distinct structures of explanation available to any given cultural formation. This debate attempts to seize the meaning of Roman poetry through its complex layers of ambiguity and contradiction by placing the poems within a sharply demarcated historical context alien (it is said) to the modern world.[22] Paul Veyne's *Roman Erotic Elegy* is the best known example of this type of scholarship applied to elegy; Veyne claims that an epistemic shift obscures from us, the heirs of Romanticism, the pure gamesmanship of elegiac inconsistency.[23] In this view, the elegists—all members of the Roman male elite—assume narrative positions of passionate enslavement to a flinty mistress and docile submission to a code of erotic debasement quite foreign to their social stratum purely out of a desire to amuse their equally elite audience. Accordingly, we can simply dismiss, with a knowing smile, the puzzling representations of *mollitia*[24] and *servitium amoris*[25] in their poetry as "empty" signifiers.

Yet Duncan Kennedy has recently objected that Veyne vastly oversimplifies when he discounts these signifiers heretical to Roman elite masculinity as pure *divertissement*.[26] Kennedy points out that ideological paradigms and the semantic possibilities they admit never cleanly give way one to the other; the contradictions Veyne sees as purely formal moves in a game are rather competing ideological paradigms coexisting in productive tension. In turn, Paul Allen Miller cogently argues that such tension—"semiotic slippage," in his words—itself makes elegy possible:[27] historical conditions that foregrounded a widening gap between the Roman male subject's basic sense of self and his cultural recognition *as a subject* in the world of codified, signifying practices gave rise to new forms of self-representation—including elegy and its torturously ambiguous relation to the "way of the ancestors" (*mos maiorum*). Miller translates that tension into Lacanian terms as a gap between the Imaginary and the Symbolic realms (roughly, between the realm of ego identifications

that falsely, imperfectly assure the subject of his fixity and consistency, and the realm of cultural symbolization systems). Accordingly, Miller sees Latin elegy's genesis as revolving around the problematization of subjectivity—the slipping of the claims of traditional Roman ideology on the subject that takes place, non-coincidentally, as the Roman Republic dies and the Augustan principate supplants it (the very problematization that the Forum Augustum represents so clearly in the sharp self-contradictions of its civic vision).

Miller's convincing and fruitful analysis of elegy's historical conditions of possibility indicates Propertius' crucial importance to understanding the genre as a whole. His poetry centrally engages the liminal period between Republic and Empire, recording the fact that he lived out his boyhood and youth in the Republic's endgame (watching his personal fortunes crumble in the shadow of its demise), yet became Augustus' client in the emerging principate. The other Roman elegists occupy historical and intellectual positions at a greater distance from this transition. Catullus never lived to see the principate;[28] Tibullus engaged only obliquely the political issues raised by its ascendancy.[29] Ovid writes chiefly when the new regime is already well established, the republic a dim memory of his childhood.[30]

Miller discusses skillfully and with great sensitivity Propertius' role in shaping elegy; he discloses whole new vistas of interpretation, especially in the poet's first three books. However, his account of Book IV, though also thought-provoking and rich, strongly emphasizes those elements of the last-published poems that align themselves with dominant ideology, and consequently misconstrues (to my mind) the true nature of their subversion. Miller notes that Propertius IV consists to a surprising extent of narratives in voices other than the familiar lover-narrator's on historical themes toward which the poet's attitude (patriotic, derisive, wistful, or any other) cannot be ascertained with certainty. This contrasts starkly with the lover-narrator's subjective monologues on the difficulties of his love life assembled in Books I-III. Miller sees irony, the determinedly elusive dominant trope of Book IV, as indicating the Augustan principate's ultimate triumph: with the new regime establishing itself more and more strongly, the gap between the subject's self-identification and his cultural recognition as a subject narrows to the point that a determinate space for opposing Rome's dominant ideology can no longer be imagined. Only irony remains, Miller says, the trope wherein one can only determine with certainty what the speaker is *not* saying—what stance he ironically undercuts—but not what he *is* saying, from what *point de repère* he as a subject speaks. In Miller's words, "the compulsive deconstruction of elegy's own aesthetic and subjective structures that this irony enacts retains within it the oppositional kernel that characterizes the subgenre, but now recontains it within a series of seemingly objective and hence unchanging frames."[31] He assigns Propertius IV (along with Ovid's *Amores*) to elegy's "sunset" period, when the possible coigns of vantage outside the Augustan ideological system have been all but foreclosed.

I disagree with this assessment in part because—for all the astuteness of Miller's interpretation—it fails to account satisfactorily for crucial details in Propertius IV,

such as Propertius' insistence on zeroing in on the embarrassments of Roman history: the costly futility of endlessly defending the empire's borders (4.3), the recently controversial *spolia opima* (4.10), or even the penchant of the Ara Maxima's patron god, Hercules, for cross-dressing (4.9).[32] Surely an apologist for Rome, or even a poet infected with indifference, would steer clear of such flashpoints. But in addition, the smothering power Miller grants to the Symbolic as the Real's "(re)container" unduly minimizes the fact that Lacan always clearly located the Real *within* the Symbolic, in its gaps and fissures, the places where the Symbolic "breaks down" in failing to disambiguate itself.[33] That the Symbolic should frame the Real hardly robs the latter of its disruptive power—to the contrary, it increases the Real's power to act as the worm in hegemony's heart. Although Miller acknowledges Lacan's implication of the Real with the Symbolic, he undervalues the full significance of this interweaving. He declares that Book IV's contextualization of the Real by its particular historical Symbolic—by the elements drawn from Roman nationalistic discourse that seem to overshadow any "personal" viewpoint of the poet's—co-opts elegy's subversiveness. I shall argue the contrary in the following pages: the way Book IV emphatically situates the Real in the very heart of a Symbolic that denies and suppresses it at every turn underlines the false pretensions of cultural symbolization systems to represent the world objectively, transparently, accurately. The powerful analysis that Miller has launched by locating elegy's genesis in the widening gap between the Symbolic and the Imaginary—a gap pried open by the Real—nonetheless misses the Real's mutinous effects as a gap within the Symbolic itself. Lacan subsumed the Symbolic's esoteric gap under the idea of Woman *qua* icon of impasse in cultural symbolization systems; significantly, Propertius cedes much of his fourth book's narration to a motley assortment of female speakers with disturbing things to say about Rome, women whose stories cause us to question the logical foundations of Rome's self-conceptualization. Book IV is not only thoroughly subversive,[34] but paradigmatically so: Propertius IV's studied entropy ironically seems *de trop* precisely because it grants the most dramatic form to the discordant forces that call elegy into existence.

Each chapter in this book (save the first two, devoted to laying the conceptual groundwork for the whole) focuses on a poem or poems drawn from the Propertian corpus. In part, I examine representative readings by modern critics, paying close attention to where and how they uncover the most interesting facets of the poem and also where and how they miscarry. In particular, why various critics identify, and negotiate, "faults" in the poem, whether attributed to a corrupt manuscript tradition or to the poet's nodding, interests me. Every chapter presses hard the conceptual assumptions behind the methodologies used to locate these poetic "flaws," arguing that many a so-called blemish discovered in these poems proceeds from attempting to impose upon them a unifying and straightforward rationale oblivious to Propertius' strategic use of unreason (e.g., anacolutha, abrupt narrative transitions, and vividly incongruous imagery). All such gaps and fissures in logic dramatize in a principled fashion fundamental aporiae in the early principate's cul-

tural symbolization systems, the Symbolic that intimately shaped both Propertius' poetry and its audience. I have drawn upon Lacanian psychoanalysis to fashion perspectives on the various poems with dual purpose: to complement the best discoverable in the critical tradition (while illuminating some of its blind spots); to render better account of what is (tellingly) missing from the text, as well as what is there. Although this book focuses on Propertius, it should interest the student of ancient Latin *litterae humaniores* in general, given that it critically examines fundamental methodologies commonly used in interpreting ancient literature and the assumptions behind them. Moreover, since the argument critically engages the topics of psychoanalysis, history, ideology and hegemony, subjectivity, and the role that language plays in all these, it should also appeal to those interested in contemporary literary theory and cultural studies.

The general scholarly reader will find that this book requires no previous knowledge either of Propertius studies, Lacanian psychoanalysis, or any other subdiscipline. I have summarized the relevant critical debates in discussing each poem and explained all specialized terms used in my argument, explicating Lacanian thought in the plainest language compatible with precise and accurate representation of his theory. Though Lacan's startling and counterintuitive thought usually will not allow the substitution of synonyms for his terminology, I have explained the latter's provenance and meaning. All the Latin in the main text has been translated into English. Since the argument unfolds as a whole built progressively on its parts, the reader will benefit most who avails herself of the entire book. However, anyone interested in my exegesis of a single poem from Propertius IV can make sense of the relevant chapter if she reads through the introduction and chapter 1 beforehand. These chapters systematically unfold all theoretical knowledge and terminology necessary to understanding the book's approach to Propertius (aside from matters that pertain only to individual poems and that are, accordingly, addressed only in the relevant chapters). It is my hope that these measures will make interest, rather than prior expertise, the only passport my readers need into Propertius' world.