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ARETHUSA TO LYCOTAS: PROPERTIUS 4.3

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My purpose in this paper is to provide both a detailed discussion and a general literary evaluation of Propertius 4.3, Arethusa's letter to Lycotas.[1] This will involve, on the one hand, an examination of the linguistic and stylistic fine points of the poem and, on the other, a consideration of Propertius' narrative strategy, his "characterization" of Arethusa, and his ultimate intentions and achievements in this elegy. The question of "characterization" is unusually difficult and complex. The choice of epistolary form all but requires a certain amount of individualizing detail, an appearance of psychological continuity in the *persona*, if the reader's sympathies are to be successfully elicited. But, as we shall see, Propertius does not attempt to maintain a perfect consistency in his portraiture of Arethusa; indeed, he occasionally allows a playful or wry touch to break through the surface of his narrative to remind us that it is all his creation, that it is to be taken seriously only to a degree.

The opening of the poem, a simple statement which echoes the normal salutation of a Roman letter, shows us immediately that Propertius is not speaking in his own *persona*. But there is a further subtlety which deserves notice. *Suo* (1) suggests the domestic intimacy and conjugal affection which might naturally be expected in a letter from wife to husband. Propertius then plays upon that expectation, making Arethusa question the appropriateness of the adjective in her particular situation. He thereby sets up the first of many dissonances

[1] The following works will henceforth be cited only by the author's last name: M. Rothstein, *Die Elegien des Sextus Propertius* (Berlin 1920, 1924); E. Reitzenstein, *Wirklichkeitsbild und Gefühlsentwicklung bei Properz*, Philologus Supplement, Band 29 (Berlin 1936); H. Tränkle, *Die Sprachkunst des Properz und die Tradition der lateinischen Dichtersprache*, Hermes Einzelschrift 15 (Wiesbaden 1960); W. A. Camps, *Propertius, Elegies, Book IV* (Cambridge 1965); H. Merklin, "Arethusa und Laodamia," *Hermes* 96 (1968) 461–94. The text used is E. A. Barber's *OCT* (Oxford 1960).

and oppositions in the poem: Rome—foreign lands; domestic vs. military life; female vs. male roles; confidence and fidelity—jealousy. Most of these are present, explicitly or implicitly, in the first two lines. Even the order of the clauses in line 2 may contribute something to this feeling of dissonance, for it produces an emphasis on *meus*, the key word in the line and in the conceit.[2] This ingenious and artificial manner of turning a situation or idea upon itself appears also in the openings of some of Ovid's *Heroides*.[3] In both poets the rhetorical wit is so self-consciously displayed that the duality of their interests is at once evident: concern for developing the fictional situation is balanced by the desire to demonstrate one's own artistry.

The remainder of the introduction (3–6) plays in similar fashion upon two probably quite common difficulties in the writing and reading of letters, whether tablets or papyrus was used. In each case, Arethusa "explains" the physical fact as the result of her psychological and emotional state, capping her self-description with a vivid and pathetic phrase (*dextrae iam morientis*, 6). The undisguised cleverness of the balancing, both conceptual and structural (the anaphora with *si qua* in lines 3 and 5), actually aids the development of a sense of pathos, for it contrasts passive (the falling of tears, 4) with active (the failing attempts to write, 6) and underlines the greater force and originality of the latter image. It is worth noting that Propertius' use of *tractus* (5) to mean "pen-stroke" is at once original and splendidly appropriate. Both this word, whose range Propertius extends by returning to the literal meaning of the base verb *traho*, and the slow procession of four consecutive spondaic feet, without parallel in this elegy, may be meant to suggest the slow movement against resistance of the writing instrument. The phrase *dextrae morientis* (6) draws upon colloquial and conventional language in a new and effective way, for Propertius integrates his expression into the context, making it grow out of the particular narrative situation.[4]

[2] This seems to me more plausible than the explanation of Merklin 462 note 1, that the *cum* clause is to be taken with line 1.

[3] Merklin 472 points out Ovid's varied and skillful handling of the *salutem mitto* theme in the *Heroides* and elsewhere.

[4] For the colloquial force, cf. Cicero, *De Sen.* 27, "quoting" Milo, *at hi* (sc. *umeri*) *quidem mortui iam sunt* and Plautus, *Cas.* 622, *cor metu mortuomst.* For a rather hyperbolic use of the convention, cf. Ovid, *Her.* 11.1–4.

Having reached something of an emotional peak in these lines, Arethusa shifts to the object of her worries and begins a description of the regions visited by Lycotas in his various tours of duty. The passage has a moderately close correspondence with the recorded campaigns of Augustan armies and we may well surmise that Propertius was drawing upon experiences and memories shared by many of his contemporaries. The vagueness and exaggeration of the description reflect not so much a trait of Arethusa's personality as the casual approach to geography for which the Augustan poets are rather notorious. This seems to have been a deliberate and purposeful strategy, intended to create a poetic and exotic atmosphere. Attraction to and fascination with the far-off is perhaps a greater factor here than the "political" implications sometimes read into these lines.[5] As is appropriate for a descriptive passage, there is considerable emphasis on visual imagery, on words of color and light: *ortus* (7), *munito equo* (8), *picto curru* (9), *ustus* and *decolor*—if those are the right readings (10). Although there is evident artificiality in the anaphora in 7–8 and in the expanding tricolon structure in 9–10, Propertius maintains some of the pathos of the foregoing lines with the expression *te viderunt* (7): Arethusa complains that all those foreign lands and tribes can look upon Lycotas, while she cannot. It is her frustrated longing, delicately suggested in 7–10, which leads to and explains the remarkable outburst in the following lines. In strong and even stinging language she in effect accuses him of a betrayal of *fides* and laments that their marriage was doomed from its inception. The almost sarcastic phrase *bracchia victa dedi* (12), a fine amalgam of amatory and military expressions,[6] and the very pointed word placement *rudis urgenti* (12) suggest that the cruelty of his treatment of her now is quite consonant with, and perhaps an outgrowth of, his violence toward her on their first night of marriage. Whether the cause is this unspoken thought of the continuity of Lycotas' behavior or the implied negative answer to the

[5] H. D. Meyer, *Die Aussenpolitik des Augustus und die augusteische Dichtung* (Köln 1961) 77 goes so far as to suggest that Arethusa herself admires the army's achievements. But the passage before us has no such signs; indeed, the outburst in lines 11 ff. suggests the very opposite, that the very thought of Lycotas' campaigns and consequent absences is painful to her.

[6] *Manus dare* is standard military terminology for surrendering, while *bracchia dare* is very common as an expression for embracing.

question posed in lines 11–12, the power and vehemence of Arethusa's reinterpretation of her marriage ceremony, inverting its traditional elements, is striking. Indeed, Merklin 465 and others invoke parallels from Greek tragedy, and not without reason, for Latin literature of the Republican and Augustan periods has no precedent for such a statement.[7] The first image (13–14) is the most fully developed and the most carefully balanced; each of the remaining three (15–16) hinges upon a single word which creates the inversion (*Stygio* and *nec*, 15, *non*, 16) and the manner of expression is terse and epigrammatic, culminating in the brief and blunt *nupsi non comitante deo* (16).

The connection of thought between lines 11–12 and 13–16 is somewhat obscure. Reitzenstein 29 suggests that the thought of their marriage leads Arethusa to make certain conclusions about it and that she feels a desire to blame something. Alternatively, we might say that Arethusa proposes, in effect, a retroactive *aition* for her present situation. What matters most is that she is willing to make such a statement at all and to express herself in such forceful language. Merklin 464–65 points to the tragic atmosphere established by the *omina* and *prodigia*, but he does not observe that Propertius thereby suggests that Arethusa's state itself is tragic. To be married to a career soldier is to live in a tragic condition; the portrait Propertius draws in this elegy of a woman's life being wasted and virtually ruined by an almost total dependence on a single man is surprisingly stark.[8] The despondent and melancholy tone of these lines continues in the next couplet (17–18), where Arethusa, in deliberate paradox, describes her prayers and offerings as *noxia*, harmful, because, as Camps rightly says, Lycotas "returned safely only to go away and leave her again."[9] The paradox fits in well with the inversion of normal relations found in the previous lines and prepares for the confirming and concluding statement of this section in line 18, Arethusa's indirect way of describing the results of her prayers, made

[7] Cf. *Heroides* 2.117 ff., 7.95 ff., and *Metamorphoses* 6.428 ff. for Ovid's handling of this motif.

[8] Propertius explores the other possibility for a married woman, fulfillment through childbearing and her own character, in 4.11.

[9] Merklin 465 can hardly be right in saying that these are verses "in dem sich die schwarze Verzweiflung der Eingangspartie aufzuhellen beginnt." Both *heu* (17) and the thought implicit in the couplet are against this.

in terms and imagery which Reitzenstein 29 very well characterizes as "weiblich empfunden." The couplet also continues the thought of lines 13–16. There Arethusa had reconsidered her marriage and declared that it was doomed and rejected by the gods; in 17–18 she turns to the present and gives evidence of their abiding opposition. She does not need to say that the gods ignore her offerings, for the paratactic arrangement of the sentences suggests an action-result relationship. The passive *texitur* is perhaps a subtle way of removing herself a little from the painful truth.

Arethusa's despair now explodes in an outburst against the *prôtos heuretês* of war. Such protests were a *topos* in Augustan writing,[10] but Propertius manages to make his contribution to the type vivid, effective, and quite appropriate for his heroine, without letting us lose sight altogether of his own presence as the artist behind the scenes. The strong image of violence against both man and nature in *carpsit* (19) finds reinforcement in *immerita*, which suggests the prior innocence of both. The pentameter, on the other hand, reveals the *doctus poeta* at work, for the idea that bones were used as the first trumpets is found in the Alexandrians Philetas (fr. 16 Powell) and Callimachus (*Hymn* 3.244). Neither, however, has an adjective corresponding to *rauca*, which brings Propertius' picture to life. The presence of such an Alexandrian borrowing in a passage otherwise remarkable for its originality, intensity, and psychological plausibility is an example of the thoroughness and subtlety with which Propertius became *Romanus Callimachus*.

Arethusa proceeds to give a most intriguing example of the sort of fate the inventor of war should have suffered. Merklin 466 notes how appropriate it is that Arethusa should fasten upon an image of a basically domestic activity, one he describes as "überraschend ähnlich" to her own situation.[11] We see Propertius' skill in character-drawing at its best in these passages, where he imagines and expresses things through the viewpoint of his *persona*. The change in subject matter corresponds

[10] Cf. Tibullus 1.10.1 ff., 1.3.47–48. For the *topos*, cf. F. Leo, *Plautinische Forschungen* (Berlin 1912) 152–54; R. Müller, *Motivkatalog der römischen Elegie* (Dissertation Zürich 1952) 21, whose list is copied by J. P. Boucher, *Études sur Properce. Problèmes d'inspiration et d'art* (Paris 1965) 419.

[11] This domestic tone is further emphasized by the colloquial *aselle*.

to a shift in tone from epic and tragic to colloquial and domestic to erotic and lightly comic (19–24). That the Ocnus image has a modulatory function in this sequence is clear when we consider that Propertius could easily have used one of the more famous mythological figures punished in the underword if he had so wished. Finally, incorporated into a couplet otherwise permeated with feminine orientation is a small touch of Propertian erudition. Anyone at Rome might have heard of the proverbial story of Ocnus, but, as commentators observe,[12] the spatial relation implicit in *obliquo* (21) is an almost sure allusion to the famous painting of the underworld by Polygnotus at Delphi, knowledge of which would be far from universal.

In lines 23–28 Arethusa moves a surprising distance from the pathos of the opening into the world of jealousy and playfulness characteristic of amatory elegy. As in 4.4, Propertius brings the language and themes of erotic poetry into military, political, and mythical contexts. The erotic aspect here is obvious even from the vocabulary: *teneros, imbellis, puella, plorandas notas, macie vultum tenuasse, desiderio.* Merklin 466 suggests that by the use of such technical military terms as *lorica* and *hasta* Arethusa attempts to identify with Lycotas' world. But the manner and context in which she mentions these objects do not support this; rather, she projects the terms and values of the amatory world upon those of the military, producing an ironic and gently humorous subversion of the latter. This is the main purpose of Arethusa's venture into technical language; we see that Propertius has begun to play with his narrative fiction.

This movement away from even a pretence of seriousness reaches a kind of climax in lines 25–26. Arethusa has so far been occupied by thoughts of anxiety, sorrow, and reproach, presumably a respectable reaction to her present condition. But once she has imagined Lycotas' activities in elegiac-erotic terms, her mind turns from concern for his physical well-being to suspicions of possible infidelity. This is especially evident in *per tua colla* (26), where Arethusa envisages the scene with an intensity born of pure female jealousy. This sudden shift of tone and attitude might well be termed a touch of characterization, for it allows us to follow Arethusa's line of thought and thereby

[12] Full discussion with references in H. M. Butler and E. A. Barber, *The Elegies of Propertius* (Oxford 1933) 339.

discover a new element in her personality. At the same time, the unexpected bathos comes very close to dissolving the whole fictional situation in gentle mockery, for it is hard to imagine many readers taking this passage with entire seriousness.

As in lines 3–6, one conceit on a topic is not enough, so Propertius takes another real physical effect of military life and interprets it in elegiac terms (27–28). *Macie vultum tenuasse* (27) is an amusingly specific adaptation of the proverbial thinness of the lover,[13] yet it also serves a special purpose here. Arethusa's visualizing of Lycotas begins with shoulders and hands, moves to the neck, and ends with the area of greatest emotional impact, the face. Parallel to this ascending line of visualization of physical details is a descent from confidence to uncertainty about Lycotas' emotional and psychological state. Arethusa begins this section as if in full command of herself and knowing whereof she speaks, a tone indicated by the imperative *dic mihi* and the forcefully repeated *num* (23). But her rhetoric turns in her hands, as the adjectives she had used for a mild taunt suddenly make her think of other marks such an *imbellis iuvenis* might receive. This unexpressed thought causes a complete change of attitude and she now very nearly wishes upon him (*haec noceant*, 25) those discomforts she had in the previous couplet attempted to tease him out of. These doubts undermine her confidence, as the uncertainties of the next lines show. She is now in the world of vague reports and wishes (*diceris, opto*, 27), not so sure either of his feelings or of her own.

This emphasis on her own unsureness makes easy and natural the subsequent transition to the present situation at home, while the elegiac tone of the preceding lines is continued by Arethusa's portrayal of herself as the rejected lover, an ingenious reversal of the *exclusus amator* motif. After the striking and poignant image *osculor arma tua* (30),[14] Arethusa proceeds to a catalogue of her domestic activities during Lycotas' absence. On the surface, the transition is made through the repetition *meo* (28), *mihi* (29), but the underlying idea is frustrated longing, which Arethusa first imagines Lycotas as feeling

[13] Cf. D. R. Shackleton Bailey, *CQ* 3 (1953) 124 for the force of *num*: "The answer to both queries is undoubtedly 'Yes', but Arethusa's solicitude makes her reluctant to admit it." But perhaps there is also some mild irony present here.

[14] Cf., for example, Ovid, *Amores* 1.6.5.

(27–28) and then attributes to herself. The presentation in this passage of internal tension and pathos by reference to external objects is very finely executed. Arethusa begins quite plainly with *queror*, continuing the tone of the previous lines, but instead of stating that she laments her loneliness and unhappiness, her inability to sleep, or the length of the night, she takes as the objects of her complaint the bedsheets and the birds that announce the dawn.[15] The nocturnal setting of the complaint is very artfully rounded off by this mention of dawn. Arethusa, however, does not follow up this possible link with a description of her daytime occupations; rather, she starts over, echoing *noctes amaras* with *noctibus hibernis*, this time naming the things she does to pass the long hours. She moves away from the elegiac vocabulary of sorrow and suffering and the strongly self-centered atmosphere of lines 29–32 into the realm of military, geographical, and scientific language and terminology. Arethusa now displays, at least in appearance, the qualities of the dutiful and restrained Roman matron, with the sort of activities and attitudes perhaps thought most proper for a soldier's wife. This more businesslike mood ultimately collapses when the phrase *hiberni temporis* (42) brings this ten-line section full circle back to the depression and lamenting of lines 29–32. But before this point is reached, Arethusa covers a wide range of topics and ideas. In lines 33–34 she elaborates on a theme first introduced in line 18, the spinning and weaving that formed so great a part of domestic life in ancient times. The application of *castrensia*, a plainly military word, to *pensa* is a mildly surprising *iunctura*. Merklin 467 regards it as part of Arethusa's attempt "den Abgrund zu überbrücken, durch den die sich von ihm und seiner Welt getrennt weiss," but we could as easily say that it emphasized their separation. The account Arethusa gives in lines 35–40 Merklin describes, slightly overstating the case, as "beinahe wie eine Generalstabsarbeit." The difficulty is determining the attitudes of Arethusa and of Propertius toward such subject matter. For example, *vincendus Araxes* (35) may carry some mild sarcasm—one thinks of Darius and Xerxes. We can at any rate sense from other poems how Propertius himself felt about grand visions of empire and the claims of great conquests that

[15] This indirect portrayal of symptoms was echoed by Ovid, *Am.* 1.2.1–2, *Her.* 21.169 f.

were then being formulated.[16] Even where there is no question of pro- or anti-imperialism, Propertius' interest does not lie with the purely technical aspects of the material he includes. Such a detail as the capabilities of the Arabian horse is in a way precise and military-sounding, but there is also a touch of the fabulous about it, the sort of thing Romans in general seem to have found fascinating about the Near and Middle East. Similarly, when Arethusa's studies move in the direction of philosophy and the natural sciences, Propertius adds a colorful image, *pictos mundos* (37), and a quasi-technical phrase, *docti positura dei* (38), which is so unusual that commentators cite Platonic notions (Rothstein) and Lucretian precedent (Tränkle 124) to give it some semblance of respectability. In fact, Propertius may once again be toying with Arethusa by making her use an expression so obscure as to border on jargon. Such undercutting would not be out of place, for there is more of the same in the following couplet. When Arethusa tells Lycotas of her study of climatic conditions (39), she seems still to be acting, at least partly, from a desire simply to know, although it is plain that she would not even consider such things were they not connected with Lycotas. But the item mentioned in line 40, the wind that will bring the army home safely to Italy, concludes the series of somewhat arcane studies on a distinctly personal note and shows us that her primary motive all along has been her wish for Lycotas' return. So much for her "Generalstabsarbeit." This allusion to Lycotas' possible return reminds Arethusa all too clearly of the true state of affairs and thus provides a point of transition back into the domestic world and a mood of despair.

As in lines 29–32, Arethusa does not express her feelings directly, but rather concentrates on the external situation in such a way as to reveal them by inference. Every detail and almost every word can be credited with some effect in creating an atmosphere of loneliness and despondency. *Assidet* carries overtones of wakes and death, the description of the *nutrix* as *pallida curis* is a subtle reflection of Arethusa's own concerns, and the rare and powerful word *peierat*[17] alone in this couplet gives any obvious indication of Arethusa's own thoughts: both

[16] Cf., for example, 3.4.21–22, 3.5.47–48, 4.6.83–84.
[17] Cf. the comments of Tränkle 96.

she and the nurse fear other reasons for Lycotas' absence.[18] At this point the tension between wish and reality becomes too great. Arethusa launches into a momentary fantasy which, as Rothstein very well observes, grows naturally out of the preceding lines: if, for whatever reason, he cannot return home, then she will join him. Here, as in lines 18–19 and 40–41, the transitional thought is omitted and we must infer it from the juxtaposition of her present state as described in 41–42 and the praise of the happy condition of Hippolyte in the ensuing lines. This passage has that curious mingling of erotic and military imagery found previously in lines 23–28, though here it is somewhat more conventional, perhaps because the subject is a familiar mythological figure. The precise economy is typically Propertian, and we can hardly miss the calculated effect of the word arrangements *arma papilla* (43) and *barbara molle* (44). Rothstein notes that in the elegiac world every female has a *molle caput*, but we should not for that reason miss the rather wry point Propertius is about to make, somewhat at Arethusa's expense. Just as he sets up the contrast *barbara—Romanis*, so he establishes a very amusing difference between Hippolyte's and Arethusa's roles in the male military world. Whereas Hippolyte was genuinely suited for war and for very masculine activities, all Arethusa can hope for is to be Lycotas' *sarcina*. That she would be a *sarcina fida* merely adds to the humor, for the phrase is surely a Propertian parody of epic diction.

From this colloquial and almost comic tone we come suddenly into epic phraseology in one of those startling "Wechsel in die Stilhöhe" which Tränkle 172–78 discusses. The prime elements in this rise are the epic expression *Pater* for *Iuppiter* and the bold metaphor *in glaciem nectit aquas*. At the psychological level, the change, coming after the modest humor of lines 45–46, suggests a surge of confidence and an affirmation of her affections which the slightly grandiose language mirrors. This almost sententious attitude persists in Arethusa's epigrammatic statement on the nature of her feelings (49–50).[19] There

[18] This is the only allusion Arethusa ever makes to any aspect of her life prior to marriage, one way of indicating the absolute quality of her dependence on Lycotas.

[19] There is considerable difficulty about *aperto* (49). Merklin, the most recent defender of the *receptus*, paraphrases *aperto in coniuge* as *cum coniunx apertus est* and compares *patuissent* (45), commenting, "Wie Arethusa dort für ihresgleichen Zugang zum Lager ersehnte, so erträumt sie sich hier als Partner der idealen Liebe den Mann, zu dem ihr

is also a neat symbolic opposition between the water and ice of lines 47–48, associated with the world of military activity, and the fire of love, here associated with the domestic world in which love's warmth can be fostered and developed. The next six lines (51–56) play upon a different opposition, setting the loneliness and desolation Arethusa feels within herself against the empty splendor of her rich but meaningless possessions. And at the end of this section, all that has gone before in the previous six lines is as it were brought face to face with the bleak reality: the epic language, the vivid, wide-ranging, and colorful fantasy, the firm and intense statement of love, and the description of fine jewelry are all cut off by the sudden and curt *omnia surda tacent* (53). With this phrase Arethusa begins her second and final description of life at home. As in the previous sequence (29–40), she concentrates first upon herself and her own situation, then gradually moves out into a larger context, but this time, instead of collapsing back into her own world, as in lines 41–42 and 51–54, she ends the section by returning in imagination to Lycotas' world for her concluding prayer and statement. After the predominantly visual imagery of lines 50–52, Arethusa now draws mainly from the auditory sense (*surda tacent*, 53; *vox . . . querentis*, 55; *crepat*, 58; *gemuit*, 59). This is quite appropriate, since a Roman wife, particularly one without children, must have been acutely sensitive to the sounds of domestic existence. Indeed, Arethusa not only notes the sounds of desolation, she colors some of them with her own feelings (*querentis*, 55, *gemuit*, 59). Even the name of Arethusa's dog, Craugis, "barker," "howler," has a reference to sound, which Propertius plays upon with *querentis*, and it

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der Zugang offen steht." In support of this he cites, without quoting, Lucan 1.465, *apertum gentibus orbem*, and Tacitus, *Germ.* 1.1, *gentibus ac regibus quos bellum aperuit.* R. Much, *Die Germania des Tacitus* (Heidelberg 1967) 38 translates the latter passage as "ans Licht bringen" and compares Livy 3.15, *lux aperuit bellum ducemque belli*, 27.2, *lux fugam hostium aperuit*, and Tac., *Agr.* 22.1, *tertius . . . annus novas gentis aperuit.* The reader may judge for himself whether Merklin's citations are really passages "wo *aperire* in der Bedeutung 'den Zugang öffnen, zuganglich machen' auf Personen bezogen wird." Surely Much's explanation is preferable for the Tacitus passages, as well as the Livy, while the Lucan citation, which does not apply at all, may be an error for the more appropriate passage, 4.352, *tradimus Hesperias gentes, aperimus Eoas.* Cf. *ThLL* 2.213.20–81 for this use of *aperire*. It is a very long way from this kind of phrase to the description of one individual as *apertus* and to the meaning "made available for approach." The problem remains unsolved.

also adds a touch of authenticity, for such grecizing pet names were probably quite popular at Rome. The word *catulae* (55) brings up a different issue, the question of diminutives.[20] The *poetae novi* showed a fondness for such forms, capitalizing on their inherent preciosity and using them to add a dimension to Latin poetry. As is well known, the Augustan poets did not continue this practice, but in this poem Propertius reverts somewhat to the older atmosphere, probably to suggest Arethusa's domestic milieu and the colloquial speech habits of the home. The rituals described in lines 57–58 show Arethusa as a cultivator of humble divinities of the sort favored by Augustan religious policy. We know that Augustus revived the Compitalia (Suetonius, *Augustus* 31), and *herba Sabina* was evidently an appropriately modest offering with traditional and patriotic associations, as we can see from Ovid, *Fasti* 1.343–44, where it is contrasted with the luxurious offerings of contemporary Rome imported from Assyria and India. There are also allusions to tradition in *veteres focos* and in the mention of the custom of regarding *crepitus* as a good omen for a sacrificial fire (cf. Tibullus 2.5.81–82). But just as the secular aspects of her domestic life have "gone sour" and cause her pain and anxiety instead of pleasure and comfort, so her performance of religious rites is motivated and attended, not by confidence and security, but by unhappiness and dark fears. The worship of the *Lares* (53–54) is qualified by *raris kalendis* and *vix aperit*, the *grata vox* (55) is that of one *querentis*—indeed, it could be *grata* precisely because of this suggestion of shared sorrow—the mention of a favorable omen in *crepat* leads immediately to the thought of more ominous occurrences (59–60): everything seems to turn out for the worst. Smaller details also

[20] The most recent extensive discussion of diminutives and preciosity is D. O. Ross, Jr., *Style and Tradition in Catullus* (Cambridge, Mass. 1969) 22–26. Cf. also Tränkle 28–30; there is a collection of Augustan examples by A. S. F. Gow in *CQ* 26 (1932) 151–52. Tränkle 29 says of Propertian usage, "Ein Dichter nach der Art des Catull und seiner Generation ist er von Anfang an kaum gewesen, und vor allen ist er immer mehr von ihr abgerückt." This is not quite true as far as diminutives are concerned. Gow's catalogue shows, excluding *puella*, the following dispersion of diminutives in Propertius: Book 1,27; 2,33; 3,8; 4,21. Book 4 shows a resurgence. Five of those 21 are found in 4.3 (*asellus, capillus, catula, papilla, sacellum*, and cf. also *querulas* and *ventilat* as well as *puella* four times), none, by contrast, in 4.6. The more colloquial settings and the wider range of topics found in Book 4 undoubtedly account for this resurgence. We should note that Propertius, at least in Book 4, returns to the original colloquial force and does *not* treat them as poeticisms.

contribute to the pathos of the scene: *in finitimo gemuit* (59) almost suggests that the *noctua* has come to join in the mournful proceedings (cf. *assidet*, 41), while *voluit tangi* (60), although said of a *lucerna*, sounds like a reflection of Arethusa's own wishes.

The mood of foreboding, anxiety, and despair that has hung over the last ten lines (51–60) is converted for a moment into a tense and almost bitter determination. We can feel the intensity of Arethusa's emotions in the forceful and nearly technical phrase *dies caedem denuntiat* (61) and in the sharply sarcastic *calent ad nova lucra* (62). Rothstein well appreciates the subtle transition between lines 59–62 and 63–66, observing that the wish grows out of the immediate context, as previously in lines 41–50. The unnamed fear in lines 59–62 is that Lycotas' life may be in danger; therefore, after taking such precautions as she can, Arethusa follows through by asking him to do likewise. But the linking is even more complex, for we could also say that the description of death and killing in something very like military terminology (*caedem denuntiare*) makes her think of the possibility of his dying in battle and that the mention of the lust for profit and rewards suggests a motivation which could bring him into such peril. Once more, a connection of thought has been left out and the dramatic effect of the sequence is enhanced. The same sort of process appears in the prayer itself, for Arethusa does not actually tell Lycotas what not to do, i.e., does not fill in the *ut* clause one could imagine following *tanti*. In fact, fully half the prayer is given over to a description of the hazards he may face. Although Propertius elaborates this scene almost for its own sake, as in lines 7–10 and 35–40, he still maintains some ties with Arethusa's own mentality. *Odorato duci*, for example, is exactly the sort of detail a woman might well single out in the stories about eastern kings, and *carbasa lina* are at least as likely to interest a woman as a soldier, who might prefer to steal gold and coins. The following couplet shows once again Arethusa's reluctance to name the thing she fears most, the prospect of injury or death befalling Lycotas. She omits all reference to the intended targets of the enemy missiles, using a passive (*sparguntur*, 65) which simply states the fact and an intransitive (*increpat*, 66). Only *subdolus arcus*, an effective personification, carries any suggestion of the danger Lycotas will be in if these events take place.

Before she delivers herself of the one real *mandatum* in the poem, Arethusa seems to attempt to mitigate its surprisingly strong element of jealousy by interpolating a wish which develops out of the situation described in lines 63–66 and is sure to appeal to his vanity. It is perhaps unfair to wonder how her prayer that he return in triumph with the *pura hasta* can be reconciled with her advice in the foregoing lines, which seems to recommend caution, if not outright cowardice. This is after all an emotional appeal from an emotional woman and is apparently meant to be the climax of her letter. The demand itself, coming after all her intense concern for his welfare and survival, is rather unexpected and even anticlimactic, but it does have a purpose. By taking us one last time into the world of elegy and amatory matters, Propertius prepares us for the wry humor of his concluding line with its pun on the physical and amatory meanings of *salvo* and Arethusa's mildly amusing description of herself as a *puella*.[21] These touches undercut what might otherwise be considered a serious and affirmative conclusion; the poem ends with Propertius playing, as he has almost throughout, with the two worlds upon which the poem is based, the personal—domestic—elegiac and the public—military—epic.[22]

We have now to reconsider the elegy as a whole, to ask why Propertius undertook such a project and what he hoped to express through it. Since there is no evidence one way or the other for epistolary elegy as a genre among Hellenistic poets, we cannot say whether Propertius was inventing or borrowing in his choice of narrative framework.[23] In

[21] The connotations of *puella* are so overwhelmingly in the direction of unmarried women that it comes rather oddly and almost comically from Arethusa both here and in 45. Elsewhere in the Augustans, the exceptions prove the rule: Horace, *Odes* 3.22.2; Propertius 3.15.21, 34; Ovid, *Heroides* 1.115 (Penelope), 4.2 (Phaedra), *Ars* 1.54 (Helen), and *Fasti* 2.557—all with very strong and ironic overtones.

[22] I find Merklin's suggestion (471) that in these final lines we reach the full and solemn tone of the *Aeneid* and the "Roman" Odes somewhat exaggerated.

[23] The origin of the epistle as a literary genre seems to lie in the spurious collections of letters attributed to Alexander and others. They were essentially rhetorical exercises concerned (as is Propertius) with *ethopoiia* or *prosopoiia* more than with historical accuracy. R. Merkelbach, *Die Quellen des griechischen Alexanderromans*, Zetemata Heft 9 (München 1954) 32–40 discusses the apparently late Hellenistic origin and the nature of this literature. He does not speculate on the possibility of Hellenistic epistolary elegy. Ovid's remark on his *Heroides* in *Ars* 3.346, *ignotum hoc aliis ille novavit opus*, may or may not suggest that there was such a genre, depending on how we choose to take *novavit* and the reference of *aliis*.

any case, his originality within Latin literature seems fairly certain.[24] In beginning a new genre, Propertius had an artistic challenge to meet, and this he did with considerable success. One aspect of this artistry is to be found at the linguistic and stylistic level, in the original and expressive language and imagery we have observed at many points. Another aspect is the recurring and conscious desire to make the reader aware of the presence of the poet, the artificer who directs the show, without too obtrusively breaking the illusion or alienating the reader's sympathies. This too Propertius accomplishes quite skilfully, particularly in the rhetorical wit of the opening, in some of the conceits where amatory and military terms and expressions are interwoven, in the carefully worked-out descriptive passages, and in the touches of wry humor where the poet gently dissociates himself from his heroine with what are virtually asides between himself and his audience. As regards the narrative itself, the Roman setting is presumably part of Propertius' "Romanizing" program, as opposed to the almost exclusively Greek and mythological settings of Ovid's *Heroides*. But, as with other poems of Book 4, this "Romanizing" involves only subject matter and does not entail an attitude of high solemnity toward the material. But if Propertius, in choosing as his format a letter from wife at home to husband on military campaign, did not commit himself to a specific viewpoint, he still must have felt within himself some kind of center which would give unity and coherence to the whole. Since the elegy derives from a believable and probably quite common situation in Rome and in consequence evokes at many points rather strong and genuine feelings of pathos and sympathy, it is possible that one of Propertius' primary intentions was to create a sense of frustration or despondency among his readers, who might well be reminded of the realities of domestic life portrayed in and suggested by the poem. All, Propertius may have wanted them to think, could not be well with a social and political system that produced such

[24] There have, to be sure, been arguments that Ovid's *Heroides* came first: H. Mersmann, *Quaestiones Propertianae* (Dissertation Münster 1931), H. Dörrie, *Der heroische Brief* (Berlin 1968) 75 note 8. I have presumed throughout this essay that this is not so, that Ovid was elaborating in his baroque way upon a structure he found in Propertius—just as, we might think, the *Fasti* developed from the strategies of Propertius' aetiological poems in Book 4 and *Amores* 1.8 plays upon Propertius 4.5.

misery and waste. To this extent only, the poem might be regarded as anti-Augustan, though it is plain that the plight of the lonely wife was hardly unique to the Augustan age. From this viewpoint, Propertius' real achievement was to summon up and express what must have gone largely unspoken in his day, a woman's reaction to the privations caused by the military way of life. He did this, not in a political tract, but with a portrait of conditions, drawn with a fidelity and seriousness that is sufficient but not absolute. The keynote is not resistance but reflection: Arethusa reflecting on the state of her marriage, past, present, future, and Propertius reflecting on the plight of women in a male-dominated world.