The Augustan Manipulation of the Roman Literary World and the Anti- Augustanism Emerging from Propertius and Ovid's Works

John Cabot University

Department of History and Humanities

Bachelor of Arts in Classical Studies
Bachelor of Arts in International Affairs

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Elena Catalina Sirbu

First Reader
Thomas Govero

Second Reader
Fabrizio Conti

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Abstract

My research question relates to how Augustus manipulated the literary world of his time and how the poets he employed to secure support among the elites – specifically Propertius and Ovid – reacted to his rule and to being used as a part of the propaganda machine and chose to express their criticism of Augustus. The methods of investigation used mostly consist of Propertius and Ovid's literary works: the *Elegiae* for Propertius and the *Amores* and *Metamorphoses* for Ovid. In the first part of this work the focus will be on the exploitation of myth, first by Augustus in his propaganda program and second by the Augustan poets as a safe means to express dissent in their works; then the discussion will move onto the nature of Maecenas' power in Rome and his role in the Roman literary scene and in ensuring literary support for the regime. The second part will consider the writings of Propertius and Ovid, with a focus on the anti-Augustanism emerging from their works. For Propertius, the discussion will revolve around his critique of Augustus and Roman military imperialism, while, for Ovid, around his critique of Augustus' appropriation and exploitation of state religion for the regime and his attempt to reform and control Roman public morality. It will be concluded that Augustus used myth to elevate his status to a mythical one and create an ever-lasting personal association with Apollo and that not only was Maecenas' power in Rome was extensive and very significant, but that he controlled literature through his literary circle and secured the support of the poets for Augustus and his rule. It will also be concluded that neither Propertius nor Ovid were sincere in their apparent support of Augustus' regime.

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List of Abbreviations

CIL	*Corupus Inscriptionem Latinorum*
ILS	*Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*

Introduction

While commentaries of Octavian/Augustus and his principate have never been consistent or anywhere near universally agreed upon, the prevalent one is based upon a benevolent, non-authoritarian, Republican leader. This commentary seems to be a result of the primary sources and accounts of Augustus taken into consideration: senatorial ones and Augustan ones – people who were directly involved in the Roman political scene but could not possibly give an objective account of the facts. As a direct result of this, the role of many of the actors involved, such as Agrippa or Maecenas, were downplayed to give Augustus more credit than he perhaps deserved. Not only that, accounts such as Cassius Dio's and Suetonius', two of the most important sources we have on the late Republic and early Empire, are deeply influenced by their senatorial status and, in Suetonius' case, religious beliefs. Most senators, as the ruling class, had everything to gain from being on the right side of history, which also contributed to make their historical accounts less and less reliable, especially when their rank or power was being threatened or ridiculed. Similarly, if it was being praised or accentuated, their historical accounts of the power figures involved would be very positive. Caligula and Nero were both well-liked by the people and Nero's reforms considerably benefitted the lower class at the expense of the upper one, which would usually make for a good ruler. However, both of them tried to undermine the role of the Senate and at times ridiculed it, so their portraits in history are those of tyrants.

Some scholars tend to rely on ancient historians without contextualizing their thought and historical framework, focusing only on senatorial accounts which were at the very center of the Roman power play and held considerable political interests that cannot be ignored. The side I

will be looking at is the side of the poets of the Augustan age, specifically Propertius and Ovid,[1] and the reasons behind the anti-Augustanism in their works. Literature was one of the most important media of the time and securing the support of well-known literary figure was crucial for anyone in power. Some of them obliged, such as Virgil; some were pressured to serve and found loopholes that still allowed them to maintain their creative freedom, such as Propertius; others, such as Ovid, were too careless in their criticism and were exiled.

The elegiac poets refused military service and any sort of political career or involvement, loyal only to their lovers. They had little to do with the balance of power in Rome, with decisions and favors, and they had little to gain from making sure that history was in their favor, as they weren't even players in the political arena in the first place. The senatorial class, on the other hand, had all to gain from making sure history was written by them and from making sure to present themselves as a powerful, united front the emperor would respect and listen to. Picturing emperors such as Nero, Caligula and Domitian as madmen served no other purpose than that of portraying the Senate as both their victims and the ones who saved the Republic by conspiring to kill "bad" emperors and restoring peace and order. In the end, the result is always the same: the senatorial portraits of the emperors only reflect what the senatorial class wanted history to remember and the narrative that places the Senate exactly where they wanted to be. This applies to Augustus as well.

Literary figures had a great influence in Rome, especially on the elite. Even though poets were rarely directly or indirectly involved in political affairs, Augustus counted on their support

[1] The reasons for the exclusion of the other two major Augustan poets, Horace and Virgil, from this analysis all come down to the limited space I have available in relation to the difficulty in assessing their works: Horace was too personally involved with Maecenas and Virgil's *Aeneid* is a very extensive work touching upon a variety of themes and subjects. Including them in this paper would culminate in an analysis of their views towards Augustus as emerging from their works that would be simply too limited. Both would require a paper of their own to adequately discuss their involvement in the Augustan literary world.

in order to consolidate their power. The underlying messages embedded in Augustan literature were targeted at the elite of Rome more than the *populus.* While every ruler needs the support of the people, it would be difficult for them to remain in power without the support of the elite and Roman history shows very well what happens when that support is lost: the leader is killed, regardless of how much popular support he had. We know poets had a considerable influence in Rome for many reasons. First and foremost, literature was a major media of mass communication for the literate in the ancient world, just like art and architecture, and it is easy to see how this can be transformed and used for propaganda purposes, which Augustus did. Having the support of the poets was so important that Augustus had its own – as we would call it in modern times – Minister for Culture: Maecenas. His role as patron of the arts and in controlling the Roman literary scene did make the difference all throughout Augustus' reign. A major example of his influence is how different people perceived the *pax* in Augustus' reign: the senatorial class and Augustus himself saw it and tried to sell it as one of the biggest blessings to ever come upon Rome; some of the Augustan poets, along with one of the most important Roman historians, Tacitus, critiqued it and saw it as a weapon Augustus used to keep everyone in their place – *he* gave them peace and *he* had the power to take it away.

Several scholars have tried to shed light on how authoritarian his leadership really was, such as Lange and Hickson[2] through their analyses of Augustus' control of peace and role as *triumphator,* and how literature as a means of mass communication was controlled by the state, such as Roman and Sullivan,[3] but the most damaging and reductionist analyses of Augustus are those which not only promote a view that is too uncritically positive but also refuse to acknowledge that Augustus' principate can fit more than one label, that Augustan poets were

[2] Lange 2015, 2016; Hickson 1991.
[3] Roman 2014; Sullivan 1972.

inherently aware of how dangerous of a world they lived in and that literature was monitored by Augustus and could not be completely spontaneous or sincere, such as White'.[4]

This paper will be focusing on how Augustus controlled and manipulated the Roman world through the help of Maecenas and the means through which Ovid and Propertius expressed their dissent in their works. The discrepancy between how Augustus presented himself – a benevolent *princeps* – and how he was perceived by major actors of the literary scene – a controlling, authoritarian leader – will be highlighted and the focus will be on three main questions: (1) how did Augustus manipulate the Roman world, (2) how did the people living in that historical context and political climate perceive him and (3) how did Propertius and Ovid as some of the most important literary voices of the time express their dissent? I will be focusing on primary sources, specifically poetry, as the main source of information for my analysis, as I believe the accounts of people who lived in that political and historical context would be most beneficial for my project. Secondary commentaries of rulers are always influenced by the writer's historical context and personal bias, other than the sources they are using for their analysis.

This paper will be divided in four chapters. The first chapter will be dedicated to exploring myth as a methodology for expressing political dissent, commenting on history and developing and maintaining a propaganda narrative focused on myth. The second one will be analyzing Maecenas, his power in Rome and his role as patron of the arts and in controlling the Roman literary scene; it will cover information about the elegiac poets in Rome and the importance of the Circle of Maecenas for Augustan propaganda. The third and fourth chapters will each be looking at two poets belonging to the Circle – Propertius and Ovid – and how each

[4] White 1993.

of them expressed their veiled dissent towards to the regime. For Propertius, the discussion will surround his critique of and attack on Roman military imperialism and the *pax Augusta*. I will then discuss Ovid's challenge to state religion and Augustus himself. After that, conclusion and final remarks will follow. All translations featured in this work are my own.

1. Myth as Methodology

Myth was as powerful of a tool in antiquity as it is now. It is a universal language everyone who is part of a given culture can read, regardless of class, nationality or position. It speaks to the poor as it speaks to the rich. It speaks to the Roman as it speaks to the Greek. It speaks to the peasant as it speaks to the magistrate. Myths are never just stories told for the sake of it, they always serve a purpose. Typically, their primary aim is that of establishing and maintaining a social or political convention. Whether they are meant to immortalize someone or something, like Alexander the Great, or to have a moral message, like the myth of Arachne, it's a story everyone can understand, both in terms of plot and deeper meaning. It knows no social or linguistic barrier. As Karen Armstrong argues in *A Short History of Myth,* myths are true not because they are factually correct or give us factual information, but because they are effective into guiding us somewhere, whether that is towards living a fuller life or towards seeing the deeper meaning of something.[5]

Throughout the course of his principate, Augustus made good use of myth to promote his political agenda. He featured myth in every media, from coins and statues to literature and his use of myth for propaganda purposes usually fit a cohesive narrative. After the Battle of Actium (31 BCE) the *pax Augusta* was presented as the final phase of a divine plan begun with the birth of Aeneas and ending with the *pax*,[6] both embodied and started by the victory at Actium, and

[5] Armstrong 2006, 10.
[6] It is important to note that our modern definition and concept of peace is not representative of the ancient one. Even though there were other conflicts after 27 BCE, such as the victories in Gaul and Spain (24 BCE), against the Parthians (19 BCE), in Gaul again (13 BCE) and in Central Europe (12-8 BCE), they were not significant or

carried out through the Heroic and Iron Ages,[7] considered eras of great moral decay in which the only positive elements were the ones previewing the beginning of the new cosmic cycle that would culminate in another Golden Age, promoted by Apollo and carried out by his son Augustus.[8] This very narrative can be seen in the decoration of the Temple of Apollo (dedicated in 28 BCE on the Palatine Hill) as told by Propertius in 2.31, where the god is depicted in triumph, defeating his enemies and restoring peace.

Another extensive example of the use of myth for propaganda purposes – and the creation of myth, as in the case of the *pax Augusta* – can be found in what is probably the most famous statue of Augustus to date, the Prima Porta statue.[9] Two myths are being employed: the myth of the *pax* Augustus crafted and the myth embodied by the human experience of Alexander the Great.[10] The myth of the *pax* is mainly represented through the representation of the Parthian victory on the breastplate and through triumphal associations such as dolphins – meant to represent the naval victory at Actium and subsequent triumph – and Augustus' *adlocutio* gesture, paired with his stance and the portrayal of him as *imperator* in full military gear. The presence of Apollo on the breastplate also connects back to triumph, due to his association with laurel – the main component of the triumphal crown. Similarly, it is hard to look at the statue as a whole and not see the references to Alexander the Great. The spear Augustus was probably holding in his

extensive enough, both in terms of time and in terms of territories affected by the conflict, to tamper with the overall peaceful status of the empire.

[7] Two of the ages of mankind discussed by Hesiod in the *Theogony.* In order: Golden Age, Silver Age, Bronze Age, Heroic Age, Iron Age.

[8] Sauron 2013, 84.

[9] The exact dating and patron of the statue are still widely debated but whether it was dedicated during Augustus' or Tiberius' time it is easy to see how the story it tells constitutes an extension of the propagandistic narrative initiated by Augustus and then resumed by Tiberius after his father's death, should he be the patron.

[10] The characterization of Alexander the Great as myth means to identify him not as a mythological figure the likes of Hercules or Apollo but rather as someone whose story and greatness are universally idealized and recognized as legendary and worthy of being pursued, replicated and celebrated.

left hand,[11] the references to triumph and the one to Apollo are all reminiscent of similar depictions of and elements we associate with Alexander. Just like Apollo was Augustus' patron god and was constantly present in Augustan propaganda and art, the presence of the god of the sun on his breastplate seems to echo Alexander's own association with and depictions as Helios. Likewise, the spear Augustus may have been holding is reminiscent of the Hellenistic tradition of portraying rulers with a spear in their hand,[12] popularized after Alexander famously began his conquest of Asia by throwing his spear on its shores when he first arrived. Not only that, the victory represented on the breastplate is the one against the Parthians, the successors to Alexander's notorious Asian enemy, the Persians, and both Augustus and Alexander were *the* conquerors of the Mediterranean sea, both subjugating all three continents and both great triumphators.

However, while all of this may initially strike as Augustus aligning himself with a great monarch, that is probably not the intended meaning behind the choice. In fact, Augustus never promoted the idea of kingship in relation to himself and his main portrait style, the Prima Porta type, which will become his only portrait type after 27 BCE,[13] presented him as, above all, a benefactor, never a king.[14] The reason Augustus was highlighting parallels with Alexander the Great was not necessarily because Alexander was a king and Augustus wanted the same status for himself, especially when one could very easily argue the principate already was a full-fledged monarchy, just not by name. Instead, Alexander was an international example and symbol of

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[11] Galinsky 1996, 165.
[12] Galinsky 1996, 163.
[13] Trentinella 2000.
[14] Portraiture in the Greek and Roman world presented a go-to standardized image for every occasion, which made the identity, role or office of the person being portraited clear to the viewer – such as philosopher, Greek magistrate, Roman magistrate, divine figure, monarch, benefactor, etc. The Prima Porta type mainly plays off of the benefactor type, which identifies the *princeps* as precisely that. He does not quite look like a politician nor quite like a monarch. He looks like a *princeps*, a brand-new role in Roman society.

greatness, success and eternal glory. Alexander the Great was in and of himself a myth, which is what Augustus strove to achieve. By aligning his persona with the one of Alexander, Augustus was not presenting himself as an Alexander-like king but as an individual and a leader of the same caliber as him.

While most history typically remembers Alexander the Great as a benevolent, merciful ruler, his numerous acts of violence and destruction are often overlooked yet should not be forgotten. In fact, while the Western World remembers him as Alexander "the Great," the Asian world remembers him as "the accursed one," a "dispenser of death and destruction on a gigantic scale that the world would not see again until Genghis Khan."[15] Allen draws quite the comprehensive list of Alexander's many devastations in her essay: he destroyed every house in Thebes and enslaved 30,000 between women and children, killing all the men, and burned down Persepolis, the Persian capital; massacred the Branchidae, descendants of the same Greeks who allowed Xerxes to take the Temple of Apollo in Miletus, and executed the governor of Gaza by tying him to a chariot and dragging him around the city walls until his death, in a replica of Achilles' treatment of Hector; massacred 80,000 of the Sambastae tribe along the Indus River and executed thousands of civilians in modern-day Pakistan.[16] Not every great conqueror left behind as much destruction as Alexander did. While one may argue this is just the reality of war, and to a certain extent it is, it is also most certainly not the norm. Defeating an enemy does not always come with wiping out entire cities and executing enemy leaders as brutally as Alexander did and it is important to remember that while war *is* brutal, and some degree of damage is inevitable, his actions were not the standard *modus operandi* and should not be treated as such. It is easy to see, then, why Augustus aspired not only to the same mythological status as Alexander

[15] Allen 2005, 220.
[16] Allen 2005, 221–24.

the Great but perhaps for the most violent parts of his reign to be similarly overlooked – and so it was.[17]

Augustus did not just enforce and reinforce mythical associations with his person, he also created brand new ones such as the *pax Augusta* – later *pax Romana* – which would stand for over a century after his death and is still remembered as a period of great peace and prosperity for the Roman Empire. He did this on a both religious and social level. On the religious one, the closing of the Temple of Janus[18] became deeply associated with him and his victories, as he was the one to have brought peace to the Roman people by ending both the civil (Marc Anthony) and foreign (Cleopatra) war that plagued Rome. On a social level, references to peace were many, especially throughout artworks and coins. We must not forget that artworks such as statues and arches were best seen and understood in their public viewing context and they were accessible to everyone, regardless of status. Everyone could see the Actian Arch in the forum,[19] just like everyone could see the Ara Pacis by the Via Flaminia and everyone knew exactly what they were looking at when standing before them. It may not have felt like a myth yet at that time, but it surely became one,[20] so much that the cult of Pax became specific to the peace of Rome, achieved and secured, *in primis,* by Augustus.

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[17] Multiple ancient authors have written about both while being (unnecessarily) flattering of their characters and reigns and choosing to overlook their flaws and misdemeanors, such as Quintus Curtius' *Historiae Alexandri Magni* or Suetonius' *De Vita Caesarum: Divus Augustus*.

[18] The closing of the temple could only occur when peace was achieved by victory throughout the entirety of the Roman Empire. Augustus, *Res Gestae,* 1.13

[19] The position and features of this arch are widely debated (see Holland 1946 for more on the various theories). My stance on this is that it was a single arch (for the Actian victory) with two side-arches added later (for the Parthian victory), located at the entrance of the Forum Romanum in between the temples of Castor and Pollux and of Divus Julius.

[20] One example of this and of the immortality of the myth of the Augustan peace is the inscription on the base of a statue put up in Valentia in honor of Titus during Vespasian's reign, reading: [*Caesari*] T. imp. [V]espasiano, Aug. [V]espasiani f., conser[va]tori Pacis Aug. (CIL 2, 3752 = ILS 259). "*To Caesar Titus Imperator Vespasian Augustus, son of Vespasian, preserver of the Augustan peace.*" Even and still in 69-79 CE (when the statue was erected according to Noreña 2003, 33) the Augustan peace was seen as something so important and central for Roman life that preserving it was enough of an accomplishment to be worthy of being remembered and celebrated on the dedication of a statue for he who "preserved the peace."

Myth was also used as a means to an end in Greek and Roman literature, where it served various purposes: didactic, such as in theatre plays, trying to teach a meaningful life lesson; etiological, such as Hesiod's *Theogony*, trying to explain the genesis of the world, the gods and of the human race; finally – and perhaps most interestingly of all – myth served as a means for historical and political commentary, such as in the case of many works of Augustan elegy. Several Augustan authors, such as Ovid and Propertius, chose to use myth to comment or report on their contemporary political scene, figures or events. Even though we tend to remember and think of the Augustan age as a prosperous, golden, violence-free time, that is not the case. It should not be assumed that writers such as Virgil or Propertius faced no political pressure or that they were free to write whatever sparked their interest without having to first take into account the consequences for doing so. They lived first and foremost in a dangerous political reality they had to consider when writing or publishing their works.[21] Consequently, it would be a mistake to think there could be no criticism of the *princeps* or his rule and it would be a mistake to have a double standard as to which emperors it was plausible or not to criticize, which is one of the main objections scholars usually have when dealing with perceived criticism of an emperor who is traditionally viewed as good or benevolent. Frederick Ahl gets this point across perfectly:

> Our mode of criticism allows only two kinds of speech: "direct criticism" and "flattery." It excludes altogether that intermediate stage of figured speech […]. This has enabled us to disregard huge amounts of Latin and Greek literature as second-rate before even reading it. The logic runs as follows:

[21] Sullivan 1972, 26.

> 1. It is "unthinkable" to criticize the emperor. Roman poets are "right-thinking" and "sincere"; Roman emperors are either "good," like Augustus, or "bad," like Nero and Domitian.
>
> 2. No right-thinking person would criticize a "good" emperor, and no one who valued his life would criticize a "bad" emperor.
>
> 3. Flattery of the emperor is therefore sincere. Those writers who flatter "good" emperors show their "good" taste, those who flatter "bad" emperors their perverse taste.
>
> […] In ancient Rome, as surely as in our own times, there have been those who defied the tyrants, both overtly and covertly, in word and in deed. Such behavior is not "unthinkable." On the contrary, it has many names. To those who disapprove, for example, it may be foolhardiness; to those who approve, it is courage.[22]

Criticism in Rome had to be subtle and myth was a way to deflect the attention from what an author was actually saying to what they wanted to appear as if they were saying. The myths they chose were carefully selected and they chose to comment on the Augustan rule through common stories everyone was free to interpret however they pleased. When having to deal with restrictions imposed by the regime figured languages such as myth became the most prudent and relatively safe means of expression both in this age and in the later empire.[23]

This deflection of blame for how something would be interpreted from the writer to the reader is quite clear, for example, in the reference Propertius makes to the Gigantomachy in *Elegiae* 2.1.39 and the parallel he creates between Jupiter and Augustus, right after subtly

[22] Ahl 1984, 204–5.
[23] Ahl 1984, 204, 207.

critiquing the Augustan peace in 2.1.36.[24] The parallel can easily be read in two completely different ways: Augustus as Jupiter, the good leader who brought peace to the cosmos after a brutal and devastating war or Augustus as Jupiter, the tyrannical god who uses violence and force to stay in power as an autocratic leader. The myth is the same in both cases, the only thing that changes is how we choose to interpret it. Technically speaking, Propertius does not seem to be criticizing his leader or portraying him as anything but benevolent and just. He is not explicitly defying Augustus or the regime. How we choose to read his words is not his responsibility and he cannot be held liable for someone else's interpretation – at least not officially. As long as he is merely recalling a myth and does not look as if he is critiquing the *princeps*, he is fundamentally guilt-free.

Myth was used as a powerful tool both by leader and subjects in an environment where mythology was as universal of a language as one could find, one that could easily defeat geographical, linguistic or temporal barriers. It was used by rulers such as Augustus to push their political agenda and by subjects such as Propertius as relatively safe means of expression meant to circumvent imposed restrictions. It was used as a comment on politics as much as a comment on history, the two linked together so deeply, at times, that it is almost impossible to say where one ends and the other begins, such as in the case of Herodotus' *Histories*, where history is often told almost as if it were a myth, integrating it with elements we would typically find within mythology rather than actual history. Herodotus uses patterns that are normally associated with myth-telling rather than history-telling, such as presenting someone's downfall as being a

[24] 2.1.35-36: "te mea Musa illis semper contexeret armis, / et sumpta et posita pace fidele caput" ("my Muse would always weave you into verses of war, / you, man who faithfully puts a start and an end to peace").
2.1.39-40: "sed neque Phlegraeos Iouis Enceladique tumultus / intonet angusto pectore Callimachus" (but Callimachus, with narrow chest, does not sing / of the Phlegraean battle between Jupiter and Enceladus").

product of offenses against deities, as in the case of Xerxes.[25] This is, in part, what happened to Alexander the Great: he was a historical figure who became a myth once dead. He was a great commander, a founder of cities and someone history generally remembers in a better light than he perhaps merited. It is easy to see why Augustus would want the same status for himself – after all, that is what he got.

[25] In the *Histories* Herodotus identifies Xerxes' hybris as the cause of his own defeat (7.35-6), not some external or military factor. Herodotus points out several transgressions carried out by the king that led to his downfall, such as the crossing of natural and god-imposed barriers (7.35), disrespect for foreign religion and customs (3.29) and the destruction of temples (8.53). Had Xerxes not done all of that, according to Herodotus' account of the Persian Wars, he may have won. His defeat was not the result of his shortcomings as king or military and strategic leader, but the result of his hybris. It was a divine punishment for his faults.

2. Maecenas' Power in Rome and His Control Over the Augustan Literary World

Political power in Rome was directly linked to three things: wealth, military prowess and political dexterity. Augustus had Caesar's wealth, Agrippa's abilities as a great and highly accomplished general and Maecenas' political mind. Caesar's money and name secured him a large amount of support, along with all of Caesar's clientele and troops.[26] Agrippa was responsible for securing important military victories for him. Maecenas was responsible for overseeing the political scene and creating the paradigm that lifted Augustus' status to myth. Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa was a close collaborator (and later son-in-law) of Augustus. He was an exceedingly successful general who secured several victories and triumphs for Octavian/Augustus and the main architect of the naval victory at Actium against Marc Anthony and Cleopatra in 31 BCE. Gaius Clinius Maecenas (his full name is disputed) was Octavian/Augustus' right-hand man and main political accomplice, an *eques* of Etruscan origins who never held any official office in Rome yet was one of the most powerful and influential people in the city due to his close relationship with the *princeps* and, before that, the triumvirs.

The power Maecenas held in Rome cannot be ignored. Several ancient authors testify that Augustus trusted both Maecenas and Agrippa enough to look after his interests: Pliny tells us that not only did Maecenas and Agrippa made use of Augustus' sphinx signet ring, but that Augustus also trusted them both enough to give them a signet ring identical to his own, while

[26] Lindsay 2009, 173.

Velleius Paterculus makes reference to Maecenas' role as *custodiis praepositus* (guardian of the city) and Tacitus confirms that while Augustus was away during the Civil Wars he left Maecenas and Agrippa in charge of everything in not only Rome but the entire peninsula, which is also backed by Cassius Dio when he refers to other instances in which Augustus either sent Maecenas back to Rome in response to an emergency or left him there in charge.[27] Chillet, in examining the different types of powers given to magistrates in Rome, concludes that Maecenas enjoyed some special powers in the city that would be accorded to the highest offices of the Roman Empire, of which he held none, and that Maecenas' ability to control Rome and Italy during the Civil Wars and after lays in his skills as administrator and negotiator and his persuasive abilities.[28] In addition to that, it is interesting to note what Pliny also tells us: Maecenas' frog signet ring was more feared in Rome than Augustus' sphynx one.[29]

The second most important aspect of his role in Rome was that of literary patron. Syme considers Maecenas' presence in the Roman literary world essential and affirms that "for the promotion of literary talent and the artistic dissemination of opinion favourable to the government, Maecenas knew no peer and left no successor."[30] The two most powerful tools for conveying ideas and messages in antiquity were visual art and literature and Augustus made good use of them to perpetrate and convey both his journey from man to myth and the idea that not much had changed since the Republican days in terms of balance of power. He used constitutional ploys and republican titles, paired with clever urban planning, architectural programs and visual art "to mask the reality of his power"[31] and give the impression that Rome

[27] Pliny, *Naturalis Historia,* 37.10; Velleius Paterculus, *Historiae Romanae ad M. Vinicium libri duo,* 2.88; Tacitus, *Annales,* 6.11; Cassius Dio, *Historia Romana,* 49.16.2.
[28] Chillet 2016, 321–31.
[29] Pliny, *Naturalis Historia,* 37.10.
[30] Syme 2002, 412.
[31] Kennedy 2011, 159.

was still, at heart, a Republic – not the monarchy that it was.[32] Literature played a central role in this strategy as well, as it appealed to multiple audiences in multiple parts of the Empire. As Osgood puts it, "Latin poetry could influence the minds not only of its Italian readers but also of those who heard it recited. And it could do so not just by celebrating Octavian, but also by giving expression to values he wished to be associated with."[33]

Literature was a very popular media among the wealthy and the ruling class and, as such, it needed to be controlled, especially when anti-monarchic sentiments continued to grow in Roman institutions of higher education and many among the Roman anti-monarchic nobility were weary of Augustus and not deceived by the republican façade of his principate.[34] Having the main literary voices of the time express anything short of support and celebration for a ruler such as Augustus was all but ideal, both in terms of perception and of legitimacy and consolidation of power. Everyone who was anyone had to be publicly celebrating the *princeps* for the propaganda machine to work – publicly expressed dissent was simply not an option.[35] It was too much of a powerful tool for expressing and propagating ideas to be left unattended. Literature, just like any other medium of mass communication, needed to be controlled in an

[32] It is interesting to note how the same political model that Augustus created in Rome, that of being essentially a king while maintaining the pretense of a Republic, is a praxis that repeats itself through history. During the Renaissance we find a very similar phenomenon in Florence, Italy, with Cosimo de' Medici (1398-1464) and his grandson Lorenzo the Magnificent (1449-1492). During this period, Florence was very similar to the Augustan Rome – a republic by name and a monarchy by fact, where the Medici stayed in power for several generations. Both they and Augustus acknowledged the ideality of identifying as a republic and they maintained it. What Augustus does in Rome is what the Medici do in Florence and the effect on artistic production is also the same: both were times of deep artistic and literary development under the patronage of the ruler or someone very close to him.
[33] Osgood 2006, 246.
[34] Cramer 1945, 157.
[35] One of the few forms of explicit dissent left during Augustus' principate was expressed in wills, a safe device for someone who had already died, as the dead faced no consequences. Roman wills were read in public after the testator's death, especially when it came to men of high rank, so many die-hard republican supporters chose to voice their opposition to the new *de facto* monarchic order in their wills, so that their allegiances would be made known after their death. Two notable examples of such post-mortem opposition to the regime, this time during the reign of Tiberius, are discussed in Tacitus, *Annales,* 3.76 (the case of Junia, Cato's niece) and Cassius Dio, *Historia Romana,* 58.25.2 (the case of Fulcinius Trio). On this, see Cramer 1945, 163.

authoritarian regime such as the Augustan one and, while the Senate controlled art and architecture, Maecenas controlled the literary scene by becoming the greatest literary patron in Rome at the time and promoting poetry meant to celebrate Augustus and his principate in his own literary circle,[36] which served to seek the support of intellectuals that could promote and endorse the *princeps'* work and values, essentially acting as a sort of intermediary between the needs of the regime and his poets.[37] Anachronistically speaking, he was both the principate's Minister for Culture and the Minister for Propaganda. Architecture and public dedications were also an equally important means of mass communication in Rome and they were a source of power and fame for those who engaged in it, as Romans highly valued public benefaction because it was a way for individuals to spend their wealth not for their own benefit but for the benefit of all. The Senate had the power to approve any public building works in the city (temples, roads, porticoes, etc.), so the matter of who could become a public benefactor and to what extent was highly regulated by Augustus so that no one could take it too far. One example of this is Cornelius Gallus, prefect of Egypt, who, after erecting too many monuments and public buildings celebrating his victories in what was a politically very charged and militarily important province, fell out of favor with Augustus. This led to a senatorial confiscation of his properties and recall from service, with the appointment of a new prefect, after which Gallus committed suicide in 26 BCE.

Some scholars, such as White and Goldsworthy, argue that we cannot plausibly think that literature, such in the cases of Horace or Propertius, was controlled by the state and had a

[36] It would not be possible to talk about Maecenas' literary patronage in Rome without mentioning his literary circle, the so-called circle of Maecenas. The most famous names who were part of it were unarguably Virgil, Propertius and Horace. Ovid was a later addition.
[37] Roman 2014, 165.

propagandistic, or at lease heavily state-influenced, nature.[38] Specifically, White does so because posthumous authors such as Suetonius and Tacitus "failed to perceive any sign of official pressure on the writers," because in Maecenas' speech quoted in Cassius Dio's *Historia Romana* (51.14-40) Maecenas "never adverts to the propaganda value of either poetry or literature in general" or even because the writers and Maecenas use "language of friendship […] towards each other."[39] These points are highly debatable. Suetonius only offers a partial view of the situation, due to his senatorial status, so the fact that he "did not see" any governmental pressure on the writers seems both hard to believe and a fairly biased stance on his part and, while Tacitus is generally much more reliable, his work in the *Annales* is more interested in historiographic sources than poetic ones, as White himself notes. Moreover, it is safe to assume that Maecenas' speech as recalled by Cassius Dio is probably just the work of Dio himself, as White acknowledges as well, so it is not realistic or fair to treat it as if those were actually the words of Maecenas when they are more likely the words of Dio, a senator, and, by proxy, of the Senate.[40] Finally, the fact that the Augustan poets under the patronage of Maecenas do not explicitly attack him or distance themselves from him in their poems does not prove much. You could do no such thing to your patron, especially when that patron was the *princeps'* right-hand man and one of the most powerful and influential individuals in Rome. In fact, as Patin notes, Maecenas was in charge of not just supporting these poets, but of recruiting them and making them work for the regime, to support the restoration program of the Roman public morals and image of Augustus

[38] Goldsworthy 2014; White 1993.
[39] White 1993, 97–98, 109.
[40] Millar 1964, 102–17 argues that the speeches of Maecenas and Agrippa told by Cassius Dio are merely used as a form of political comment on and reflection of the political climate of Dio's own time, making them far from truthful in terms of their alleged speakers.

and his acts, supporting their popularity and ensuring glory for his reign in both the present and future times.[41]

As surface-level benevolent as the Augustan rule was, we must not forget it was still an authoritarian one. Arguing that Propertius was not being pressured by Maecenas to write favorably about Augustus because he did what he was being told to do and expecting him, instead, to attack both his patron and his ruler because of the pressure he was facing is like arguing a Soviet poet was not actually pressured by the state to write favorably about Stalin or the regime because he did not attack either of them in his works. In this regard, Sullivan argues that "we should not assume that Roman poets were any more politically naïve than modern Soviet writers are."[42] In fact, just because a product is marketed a certain way, it does not mean the official description is truthful – to make things appear a different way than they actually are is, after all, the scope of propaganda. We should not assume that propaganda was not there simply because *it worked.* Likewise, should a patron such as Maecenas not leave a minimum of artistic freedom to their poets, the poems would undoubtedly be too stiff and clearly artificial to be effective and, as Barbara Gold put it, Maecenas knew better than to force his way and impose harsh conditions on his poets and those poets were talented enough to be able to balance, in their art, what they wanted to write and what they were being asked to write.[43] His role in controlling the Augustan literary scene was so effective precisely because he knew where to stop so that the final result would be usable and not immediately strike as a blatant work of propaganda where the artist's style and personality completely disappeared to give way to state-sponsored content. Propaganda does not work when one can see through it. If everyone could, it would be

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[41] Patin 1869, 61–62
[42] Sullivan 1972, 18.
[43] Gold 1987, 112.

considered a failure. Plus, as Griffin rightly states, "it was problematic for ambitious young writers to keep their artistic self-respect, if they put their pens to the service of politicians,"[44] meaning that making their works inherently political without much else to it, or for Maecenas to insist that they did, would undermine both the effectiveness of their verses and their reputation and credibility as writers.

The best example of this is the fourth book of Propertius' *Elegiae.* Scholars pretty much agree that Book IV is when Maecenas' pressures on the author to celebrate Augustus in his writing became too obvious to ignore. However, Propertius makes it clear that he is not able nor wants to write *epos*[45] about Augustus and that he wants to keep writing elegy, so he finds a way to do so in terms that will be in line with his obligations: etiological elegy. In doing so, he drew inspiration from the Greek poet Callimachus, famous for his *Aitia,* poems investigating the cause or the origin of something. Propertius takes that idea and relatively unused subgenre of elegy and uses it to his advantage: he will celebrate Augustus by celebrating Rome and he will celebrate Rome by celebrating its origins, history and what made it great in the first place. That way, he is still doing what he wants to do, which is writing elegy, but, at the same time, he is upholding his obligations to Maecenas by celebrating – even if only by proxy – Augustus. What made these political poems work as well as they did was the fact that Propertius did not make the obligations he had towards Maecenas obvious in his poems, choosing, instead, to let the reader pick up on them.[46]

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[44] Griffin 2005, 314.
[45] Epic poetry was considered, both in Rome and in Greece, to be the highest form of celebration of heroicness, glory, courage, etc. because it had the power to immortalize someone. The stories of Aeneas, Achilles and Odysseus are still some of the most famous stories in literature, which is more than impressive if we consider than the youngest of those epics was written two thousand years ago. Having one written about Augustus would uplift his already mythical status even higher, which makes it easy to understand why Maecenas would even ask that of Propertius.
[46] Gold 1987, 111.

The fact that the only two poems before Book IV that Propertius explicitly addresses to Maecenas (2.1; 3.9) are both *recusationes,* refusals to write *epos* and to dive into political panegyric, paired with the fact that several other poems in Book II and III are also *recusationes* (such as 2.10 and 3.3) made it quite clear that Propertius had little interest in doing what Maecenas asked of him. However, he seems to have acceded in Book IV, when he finally started celebrating Augustus after numerous refusals to do so. The question as to what triggered the sudden change of heart naturally arises. There is something to be said in regards to how strong or significant Maecenas' pressure on the poet had to be in order to generate such a drastic change, especially when Propertius clearly stated in Books I-III he was only interested in writing about his lover but such theme has almost disappeared in Book IV. Propertius essentially sacrificed his main poetic interest in favor of Augustus, as directed by Maecenas, who in turn only got the epic poem he was asking of Propertius with Virgil and his *Aeneid*.

Maecenas' power in Rome had multiple faces and multiple purposes. He would stand in Augustus' place and essentially govern both Rome and Italy when he was out of the country, he held his signet and he had an undeniably crucial role in Octavian's rise to power and Augustus' success as a republican leader *de iure* and a monarchical one *de facto.* He was the main literary patron in Rome and allowed literature to flourish as much as it did in the Augustan Age, holding his poets close as an important part of the Augustan propaganda machine and of controlling the Roman literary scene. That is not to say that all of Virgil, Horace and Propertius' works, as the later Ovidian ones, should be completely dismissed as propaganda or as inherently political, as the poets found ways to uphold their obligations to Maecenas while still maintaining their artistic freedom and Maecenas never insisted too strongly on his part. Both Maecenas and Augustus recognized the value of poetry and literature as an efficient method for propagating ideas all

throughout the empire and used it as such. After all, "Octavian knew that the poets could preserve one's memory,"[47] and so it was. Of all the myths of Rome, the myth of Augustus is certainly the most impressive and the most enduring.

[47] Osgood 2006, 346.

3. Propertius' Attack on the *Pax* and Roman Military Imperialism

The flourishing of art and culture was a distinctive trait of Augustus' reign. Literature arguably reached a new peak during this time and under the patronage of Maecenas, as seen in the previous chapter, and authors such as Virgil, Ovid, Horace and Propertius, who lived and operated in the Augustan Age, are still among the most famous names in Latin literature. Writers in this age present common themes throughout their works that can be read as inherent parts of the Augustan propaganda program: praise for the principality and for Augustus as bringers of peace and prosperity after a devastating civil war; defense of traditional Italic traditions and values as opposed to foreign ones;[48] the need for the restoration of the moral and religious values that made Rome great; the celebration of important historical figures and ancestors of the Empire. Peace was one of the most commonly touched upon themes in Augustan literature and one of the central themes in Augustan propaganda. Augustus presented himself as *triumphator* and associated his person with triumphal honors all throughout his principate, so much that Augustus and the concept of *pax* became so closely intertwined you could not think of one without the other.[49]

[48] As an example, Octavian/Augustus' propaganda program heavily demonized Cleopatra and her foreignness. Her portraits in Rome were more similar to caricatures of what a Roman woman should not be than anything else. This was done not only because she was an enemy of Rome but also because of her close relationship with Marc Anthony. Attacking her would be an indirect attack on him as well, which benefitted Octavian's image by presenting his rival as both a Roman fraternizing with the enemy and a "corrupt" Roman citizen who preferred the company of foreign women to Roman women and preferred to be buried in Egypt with Cleopatra rather than in Italy with his legitimate Roman wife Octavia – sister of Octavian.

[49] Lange 2015, 142.

The most popular literary genre in the Augustan Age was erotic elegy, which became greatly popular in the second half of the first century BCE, along with its founder, Cornelius Gallus,[50] who marked the shift from the *neoteroi* of Catullus' generation to the standard approach to elegy that was so common in Augustus' time. Elegy in Rome followed certain rules and themes that became a standard among Roman elegists in this age. Elegiac poets only live for their woman or women, they refuse any military or political career or involvement, reject war and violence in favor of love and are slaves for their mistress(es). This *servitium amoris,* as opposed to the *servitium militiae*, is the poet's entire life. He praises his woman's beauty just as much as her unavailability and constantly tries to earn her love and affection, thereby choosing poetry over a "proper" Roman career – whether political or military.

Sextus Propertius was born in Asisium, modern-day Assisi, between 58 and 55 BCE to a wealthy Umbrian family of landowners and politicians.[51] A victim of Octavian's military campaign in Perusia in 40-41 BCE, he moved to Rome and abandoned the path set for him by his education in rhetoric and law[52] in favor of writing poetry. The first book of his *Elegiae,* published in 29-28 BCE became popular enough to set him on Maecenas' radar, so much that he became part of his literary circle and dedicates the second volume of his poems to his new patron.

Like most elegists, Propertius too would declare the superiority of elegy over *epos*, which is a constant theme in the first three books of his *Elegiae,* more specifically in the second and third one. In 1.9 he affirms that "plus in amore valet Mimnermi versus Homero" (11),[53] which paints an accurate portrait of his attitude towards writing *epos* and about his literary preferences.

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[50] Raymond 2013, 59.
[51] Cairns 2006, 6.
[52] Cairns 2006, 25.
[53] "In love, a verse by Mimnermus is worth more than one by Homer."

Mimnermus was considered the Greek inventor of elegy, while Homer was the canon for epic poems. Propertius takes a very decisive stance on where he stands on the matter, saying that a single verse by Mimnermus is worth more than one by Homer and it does not only serve to reinforce the elegiac refusal to write about "higher themes" such as *epos*, but also to reinforce his own refusal to write about Augustus' military accomplishments and epic poetry, which was what Maecenas will later ask of him.[54] Not only that, the line is also an example of Propertius' rejection of war and the Roman military imperialism. Yes, war brought peace – but at what cost? Not only was it achieved through the subjugation and enslavement of several peoples, in 2.1.36 Propertius also suggests that the *pax* being celebrated all around Rome, from architectural programs to literature, is nothing but a military weapon in Augustus' hands ("sumpta et posita pace fidele caput") and he does so through the use of military language in regards to the peace that "renders the Augustan *pax* indistinguishable from war: both can be waged (*sumere*) and suspended (*ponere*)."[55]

Propertius' hostility towards war and, specifically, Octavian/Augustus' military-centric power, comes from the fact that he himself was a victim of it during the siege of Perusia, a city fairly close to Asisium, when he was around fifteen years old. Even though some of his poems do praise his military accomplishments, at least on the surface, they also suggest that those are not his real views. He is grateful for the peace Octavian/Augustus brought but rejects Roman military imperialism because peace was only achieved through the subjugation of other peoples, with whom he identifies. Not only did he see for himself the destruction Octavian caused in

[54] Propertius was not yet under the patronage of Maecenas in Book 1 – back then, his patron was Tullus. This means that, while his statement was not yet a refusal to be part of the propaganda machine, it still sets a concrete basis for his priorities, literary taste and stance that he will later reinforce in Books 2-3 through various and more or less explicit *recusationes.*

[55] Wiggers 1977, 337.

Perusia, his family would also have suffered from it first-hand; the whole city was burned to the ground – except the statue of Hera and the temple of Hephaistos – and most of the captives from and in Perusia were killed.[56] Propertius writes about the siege in 1.21 and 1.22. 1.21 features a dying man, Gallus, and addresses the losses caused by civil war and the most interesting note on it is that not only does the dying man have a name, so does the responsible for his death – Caesar (Octavian at the time): "me soror Acca tuis sentiat e lacrimis, / Gallum, per medios ereptum Caesaris ensis / effugere ignotas non potuisse manus" (5-8).[57] Propertius clearly states what (or, rather, *who*) is to blame for the destruction of the city and the death of Gallus, he does not merely tell the story of the horrors of civil war. Not only that, this poem is datable to the early 20s BCE, by which point, as Kruebbe notes, "Augustus, in a sense, *was* Rome" and Propertius blaming Rome for causing pain to her own citizens when Augustus had already been in charge of the city and the Empire for years can easily be seen as direct criticism of the *princeps.*[58] It is not unlikely that this highly traumatic experience shaped Propertius' unfavorable view of Augustus and the emphasis he put on military might.

His critique of Roman military imperialism is clear in poems such as 3.5, where he chooses as the first line one announcing that "pacis amor deus est"[59] and continues saying that nothing good will come from looking for an enemy and starting new wars on top of old ones (9-10). Saying this in a time where the biggest of Augustus' accomplishments – peace throughout the empire – was celebrated arguably more than anything else, is proof enough of his praises of the *princeps'* military accomplishments not being sincere,[60] just like the shift to a more political

[56] Cassius Dio, *Historia Romana,* 48.14.5.
[57] "My sister Acca shall know of my death from your tears, / that Gallus, taken away by Caesar's sword, / could not escape the unknown hand."
[58] Kruebbe 2011, 19.
[59] "Love is the god of peace."
[60] Sullivan 1972, 21.

work in Book 4 after three *recusationes* in Book 3 (3.1; 3.3; 3.9). Propertius rejects the *pax Augusta* in favor of the *pax amoris* typical of elegiac poets, a state of peace that rejects war in favor of spending time with and loving his woman: 3.12 opens with Propertius inveighing against a man, Postumus, who, instead of staying with his lover Galla as she asked, followed Augustus to war ("Postume, plorantem potuisti linquere Gallam, / miles et Augusti fortia signa sequi? / tantine ulla fuit spoliati gloria Parthi, / ne faceres Galla multa rogante tua?").[61] He attacks him saying that, while Galla is home despairing and fearing for his life, he is showing off his bravery in war to the expense of his lover, who would be devastated if anything were to happen to him (9-14).

Propertius attributes his inability and refusal to write *epos* or to sing about Augustus' military accomplishments to the gods: he does want to celebrate Augustus, but Apollo and the Muses will not allow him to write about anything other than love. 3.3 is a perfect example of this stance: as Propertius is about to drink from the spring of Bellerophon's horse, which would give him epic inspiration, Apollo stops him and reprimands him: "quid tibi cum tali, demens, est flumine? / quis te carminis heroi tangere iussit opus?" (15-16).[62] And, further, the Muse of epic poetry, Calliope, reminds him he shall sing of love, not of war, and wets his lips with water from the same spring from which Philitas of Cos drank (39-52).[63] Whenever Propertius writes or refuses to write about Augustus he justifies his actions through the mention of Apollo or the Muses – specifically, Calliope. He crafts his refusals so that they all come down not to a lack of

[61] "Postumus, how could you leave Galla, crying, / and follow Augustus' strong standards as a soldier? / Was the glory of the Parthian spoils so worth it to you / when Galla asked you so vehemently not to go?" (1-4).
[62] "Madman, what business do you have with such a stream? / Who commanded you to touch the heroic song?"
[63] Philitas was one of the most influential and famous Greek poets, operating mainly in the fourth century BCE. He was well-known for his elegies and someone like Propertius would hold him as a literary model.

will to write about Augustus but to a lack of ability to do so which stems from both poetic inability and divine disapproval. Roman clarifies this approach to *recusatio* by affirming that

> Propertius […] disqualifies himself from writing about Maecenas' and Augustus' deeds by demonstrating how his entire literary *ingenium* and output are funnelled into the representation of minute details of his love affair and his mistress' attractive traits. This literary devotion to love is not susceptible to rational choice and control—an important point, since it shores up Propertius' autonomist position. He is fundamentally incapable of writing panegyric; it is a matter of 'fate', as the contrafactual condition in which Maecenas' name is so artfully embedded implies (*si … fata dedissent*).[64]

Likewise, when he praises Augustus in 2.10 he does so because "nunc aliam citharam me mea Musa docet" (10)[65] and, when he decides to change the tone and themes of his poetry in Book 4 and write of the origins of Rome and Italic gods and traditions instead of producing the *epos* Maecenas asks for he does so because Horos tells him he must keep on writing elegy and be at the service of Venus (4.1.135-138). Similarly, in 4.6, as he is celebrating the 15th anniversary of the Actium victory, Propertius addressed Calliope saying that he shall now sing of the new Temple of Apollo Palatine, as that "res est, Calliope, digna favore tuo" (12)[66] and his songs are sung for Caesar's glory (13).

Whenever he refuses to write about Augustus, military accomplishments or to write *epos*, it is because either Apollo or the Muses forbid it.[67] Using the gods in his favor like this was a clever move on Propertius' part: if he claimed it was the gods forbidding him to abide by

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[64] Roman 2014, 172.
[65] "Now my Muse teaches me a different song."
[66] "Calliope, this is a theme worthy of your favor."
[67] 2.1 and 3.1-5 are good examples of this. In each of them there is someone in the heavens stopping Propertius from or forbidding him to write what he is being asked to write by Maecenas and/or Augustus.

Maecenas' requests there was little he or Augustus could do about it. Ignoring the will of the gods and pressuring Propertius to abandon love and write about war regardless of their council would have been regarded as an act of impiety, which would not have agreed well with Augustus' denunciation of the moral and religious decay of the Empire and his efforts to reform state religion and public morals.[68] Leaving the refusal to oblige with Maecenas' requests in the hands of the gods and not his own provided Propertius with a relatively safe shield against any harsh punishment. Questioning the truthfulness of Propertius' words would mean questioning the gods and that was simply not acceptable in Roman society at that time, especially when Maecenas was so close to the *princeps* and future *pontifex maximus*.[69]

[68] Sullivan 1972, 23.
[69] Augustus became *pontifex* in 13 BCE, after the death of Lepidus, appointed after Caesar's death in 44 BCE. Augustus' efforts to reform public morals both before and after his nominee as *pontifex* resulted in widespread performative hyper-religiosity, so, although Maecenas would have recognized the excuse in Propertius' words, he could not act on it because it would simply not look good as far as public perception went.

4. Ovid's Rejection of the Augustan Rule and State Religion

Ovid was born in 43 BCE in Sulmona to an equestrian family. Unlike Propertius, Horace or Virgil, he did not live through Caesar's rule, the Civil Wars and destruction that followed, or he was not old enough for it to have an impact on him and be a significative experience. For his generation the *pax Augusta* was the norm, not something that had to be earned and fought for; it was something he could take for granted as the *status quo*, so his treatment of the *pax* could not have been the same as the one of poets such as Horace, who would have praised it and celebrated it as a relief from the violence of the previous generation.[70] Regardless of this, he did not express overt support for Augustus' rule in Rome. The *princeps'* social and religious conservatism and his agenda pushing radical conservative change on Roman society did not agree with Ovid, who instead preferred non-monogamy and adultery and alternative religious rituals such as vegetarianism – all more than frowned upon by the regime – which he touted at length in his writings, most notably in the *Ars Amatoria* and the *Metamorphoses* (Book XV), and which culminated in his exile to Tomis in 8 BCE, due to, in Ovid's words, "carmen et error."[71] Adultery and non-monogamy are heavily discussed in both the *Amores* and the *Ars Amatoria.* This is slightly unusual from an elegiac point of view, as there is no *servitium amoris,* let alone one dedicated to one woman alone, and Ovid affirms multiple times that he cannot only love one woman. In fact, while the prevalent female figure in the *Amores* is Corinne, he had three wives. *Amores* 2.10 is all about Ovid not being able to choose between two women and loving them

[70] Little 1972, 400.
[71] Ovid, *Tristia,* 2.207 ("A poem and a mistake").

both, while 2.4 is dedicated to his love for women – not one, but all of them: every woman in Rome is desirable because they each have desirable qualities. In the *Ars Amatoria* this view is even more prominent. However, this did not coincide with the Augustan regime's policies and state-endorsed public morals. The marriage campaign Augustus passed penalized the unmarried and those without children, which of course would not agree well with a lifestyle such as Ovid's. Since the first version of this law was met with harsh opposition from the Romans, Augustus was led to abandon his proposal and only push it forward again, in a milder form, in 18-19 BCE with the *Lex Julia et Papia Poppaea* and *Lex Julia de maritandis ordinibus* once his power grew enough to allow it. Propertius heavily criticized both a previous proposal of this law and Augustus himself in *Elegiae* 2.7, where he affirms that "magnus Caesar in armis: / devictae gentes nil in amore valent" (5-6)[72] so he should not meddle into love affairs. Propertius goes even further and states that "unde mihi patriis natos praebere triumphis? / nullus de nostro sanguine miles erit" (13-14),[73] that he will not participate in the slaughter that is Augustan military imperialism by having more children Augustus can use as soldiers for his conquests. The law would have separated Propertius from his lover Cynthia, with whom he was having an affair, and 2.7 is one of his most explicit attacks on the regime. We cannot plausibly think Ovid would have reacted much differently to Augustus' marriage legislation.

Ovid was much more explicit in expressing his dissent in his writings than Propertius, which only contributed to his exile. He did little to conceal in his defiance, little will to conceal his attacks on Augustus and on the regime as a whole. This was intentional, rather than for a lack of skill. Ovid did know the rules of the game, he just chose to ignore them – perhaps carelessly or presumptuously – and that led to a punishment that was, in the eyes of many Romans, worse

[72] "Caesar is only mighty in war: / for conquered nations are worth nothing in love."
[73] "How am I to provide sons for my country's triumph? / No son of ours will be a soldier."

than death: exile. Ovid's mistake was to overestimate the regime's tolerance for criticism. While Augustus was, admittedly, more benevolent towards free speech and direct criticism during the first part of his rule, that changed during the last years of his reign, when he turned to a progressively higher intolerance of all that, which did not benefit Ovid and his more provocative works, specifically the *Ars Amatoria.*[74] Ovid expresses some apprehension regarding his (lack of) artistic freedom in the *Metamorphoses.* Specifically, the punishments of Arachne and the Emathides seem to parallel his own future one: Arachne, once a great weaver, was condemned to weave forever without art as a spider while the Emathides, once poets, were silenced by the Muses and condemned to only imitate human speech, all of which reflects an anxiety surrounding artistic production that proved to be well-founded in his case.[75] This tells us that, while at times too outspoken in his criticism of Augustus, Ovid was well-aware of the dangers of his actions and what the consequences he was potentially bringing onto himself were. In fact, Johnson goes on to say that not only does she not think these parallels between Arachne and the Emathides and Ovid himself were coincidental, but that "the horror of the artistic disempowerment suffered by his [Ovid's] fictional artists must have been within Ovid's, and the Augustan, imaginative range."[76]

It was common knowledge at the time in Rome that if one wanted the favor of Augustus they would have to speak favorably about Apollo, which is the exact opposite of what Ovid did. His choice in the *Metamorphoses* to portray Apollo, Augustus' patron god and divine father, as extremely violent in his pursue of Daphne[77] is extremely telling of his attitude towards the *princeps.* If the implication of his Apollo was that Ovid did not care for Augustus' favor, he

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[74] Syme 1978, 204–14
[75] Johnson 2008, 120, 122.
[76] Johnson 2008, 121.
[77] Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* 1.452-524.

certainly got his point across quite clearly. The myth of Apollo and Daphne was exceedingly popular and well-known in the ancient world and we have several versions of it, plenty from which Ovid could have chosen.[78] However, he chose to tell the story in a new light and make his own version of it, which raises an obvious question as to why, when he surely knew how significative and present the Apollo-Augustus association was in the Roman world. It is hard to imagine that Ovid did not consider how his characterization of Apollo might come across and the consequences in terms of how that specific (negative) portrayal would reflect on Augustus. Once again, just like Propertius when he compared Augustus to Jupiter as seen in the first chapter, Ovid was not technically or explicitly defying the *princeps* or portraying him as anything but benevolent, he was merely telling a very popular myth in a myth encyclopedia. Not taking this more subtle approach to his criticism and choosing, instead, a more explicit tactic was fairly dangerous and Ovid's exile in 8 CE is proof of that. Sullivan notes that, while the official reason for the exile was the adulterous message of the *Ars Amatoria,* it is hard to imagine that that was the whole truth or that there was nothing else to it and one must take works such as the *Metamorphoses,* much more political than the *Ars*, into account when formulating a hypothesis regarding the reasons behind his exile from Rome.[79]

The violent character of Apollo is not the only thing that can be seen as an attack on Augustus in Book I of the *Metamorphoses*. The story of Apollo and Daphne as recounted by

[78] There are mainly three versions of the myth of Apollo and Daphne, all of which are discussed in detail in Barnard 1981, 1–3. The Thessalian version presents Daphne as the daughter of the river-god Peneus, who transforms her into a laurel tree to escape Apollo. In the Arcadian version she is daughter of the river Ladon and Earth itself and she is rescued by her mother after asking for help in response to Apollo's infatuation. She is pulled into the earth, leaving a laurel tree behind. In the Laconian version Daphne is the daughter of Amyclas, king of Sparta. The son of another king falls for her and devices a plan where, in order to be closer to her, he pretends to be a girl, thereby provoking Apollo's jealousy. Apollo convinces Daphne to take a bath in a river along with her friends, which is where her previous suitor's plan fails. Apollo's pursuit of Daphne begins after the prince is killed and when Daphne does not reciprocate the god's feelings Zeus transforms her into a laurel tree so that she can escape him.
[79] Sullivan 1972, 24.

Ovid revolves around Daphne's unwillingness to accept Apollo's advances and him being so violent and relentless in his pursuit that she was forced to change and morph into a laurel tree just to escape him. Apollo forced Daphne to change just like Augustus forced the Roman world to change, somewhat unwillingly on Rome's part. There is no doubt that the advent of Octavian/Augustus' rule and the circumstances leading to it and to the shift from Republic to Empire changed the Roman world as Romans knew it. Suddenly, the game had changed. There was a new rule and new rules to follow as per the actors in power,[80] and the punishment for those who did not abide by them was severe. Ovid overlooked those rules and the consequence was exile. Not only that, Augustus succeeded in his violent quest of change just as much as Apollo did in his violent chase of Daphne. He may not have appropriated of her in human form but he did make her new form – laurel – his signature and so did Augustus. Laurel became a sign of victory and the main component of the triumphal crown. Augustus was allowed to have laurel hanging from his door at his house on the Palatine and constantly pushed the image of him as *triumphator* and bringer of peace as part of his propaganda program. Laurel was associated with triumph *and* Apollo, while Augustus was associated with all three. Not only was Apollo his divine father, his private residence on the Palatine hill was next-door to the Temple of Apollo he promised and dedicated (28 BCE), built on Augustus' private land, which was stricken by a lightning and which he interpreted as the god signaling his will to live there.

Book XV of the *Metamorphoses* equally points to his opposition. Caesar and Augustus finally make an appearance – as if the whole work was meant to begin with the creation of the universe and mankind and end with the present Ovid was living in – and so does another non-mythological character, Pythagoras.[81] Pythagoras was the inventor and initiator of many things,

[80] Little 1972, 401.
[81] Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* 745-870 (Caesar and Augustus); 60-478 (Pythagoras).

most notably geometry and mathematics as we now intend it plus the musical scale and the belief in an eternal soul, but Ovid does not focus on any of them. He only mentions Pythagoras in reference to the appeal of vegetarianism and the opposition to the killing of animals,[82] then proceeds to let Pythagoras discuss the nature of the universe and Earth. However, supporting vegetarianism and at the same time supporting ancient religion was not a viable option. Animal sacrifices were at the core of ancient religion, the cooked meat was distributed among the people and was a great source of protein for the population. Vegetarianism would entail the discontinuation of sacrificial practices, which in turn would put an end to one of the most important aspects of religion itself and by eliminating one of the core elements of religion, we would essentially be dismantling that religion as a whole. Sacrifices, participating in them and having the ability to make them happen were all part of what made a good citizen in Rome. A notable example of this is the Arch of the Argentarii in 204 CE in the Forum Boarium, dedicated to Septimius Severus and put up by the cattle-marketers. While the arch is meant to honor the emperor, it is also meant, in a way, to draw attention to its location and those who put it up and their role in the city and in Roman society. The Forum Boarium was a cattle market, the place where one would acquire animals for sacrifices. On the internal decoration of the arch the emperor and his family are depicted as taking part to a sacrifice and on the small panels underneath there is another sacrifice scene featuring bulls, by far the most expensive and precious sacrifice one could offer the gods. This is a way to say that the most important people in the city are those who provide the bulls for sacrifices, as sacrifice makes the gods happy, which in turn provides security. The cattle-market and cattle-marketers are the ones enabling the emperor and his family on the arch to make sacrifices and, without them, that would not be

[82] Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* 75-142 (vegetarianism).

possible and the gods would be unhappy with Rome. As stated in the previous chapter, Augustus made it one of his priorities to reform Roman public morals and put so much effort into promoting state religion that, in the end, religion and state were one. Undermining it the way Ovid is doing and implicitly criticizing such a vital part of it meant attacking Augustus and his appropriation of religion for the state and the regime itself.

Ovid may have anticipated the impact his words would have on his life or the regime's reaction, if the conclusion of Book XV and of the whole work can be read as such. In lines 871-2 he affirms that "iamque opus exegi, quod nec Iovis ira nec ignis / nec poterit ferrum nec edax abolere vetustas."[83] As Johnson notes, the *ira Iovis* is later used by Ovid in his exile poems as a metaphor for Augustus' feelings towards and punishment for him and his optimism was probably be based on the knowledge that book scrolls were widely distributed in Rome at the time to fulfill the demand and taste for literature that would ensure the survival of his works in private collections if not in public libraries, as it did happen after his exile.[84] Not only that, Propertius also creates a parallel between Augustus and Jupiter in his poems, such as *Elegiae* 2.1 as seen in the first chapter and 2.7 as seen above, perhaps pushing the parallel between the monarchical, controlling god and Augustus himself, like Ovid might be trying to do here.

It is interesting to note how the most explicit attacks of the *Metamorphoses* occur in the first and last books – the opening statement and the closing one. It is well-known now as much as it was then that audiences remember the beginning and the end of anything the most, skimming over the middle. It seems hard to believe that someone living in a society where rhetoric was as important as it was in Rome would not consider this. If the placement of the

[83] "Now I wrote a work that not the wrath of Jupiter, nor fire, / nor iron, nor all-consuming time will be able to destroy."
[84] Johnson 2008, 122–23.

attacks on Augustus were deliberately put in the first and last book for this reason, which I believe they were, then the statement would have impacted his reputation and his position in regards to the Augustan rule. It is a great irony that the *Metamorphoses* may have caused the greatest transformation in Ovid's own life – his exile.

Conclusions

John Rich opens his essay "Deception, Lies, And Economy With the Truth" stating that "no individual from the ancient world seems a more appropriate subject for […] [the study of] deception and deceit than the first Roman emperor, Augustus."[85] Ever since entering the political arena of Rome after Caesar's death in 44 BCE until his own death in 14 CE Octavian/Augustus has carried out a careful political program – with much outside help – made of deceit and carefully veiled monarchical traits. He maintained sole power in Rome from 29 BCE until his death by masking the true character of rule behind republican institutions and pretty words. Everything in Rome was under the control of someone in his regime – Agrippa controlled the military, Maecenas the political and literary scene and the Senate art and architecture. There was not one thing left unattended or unrestricted. The role of Maecenas and Agrippa in all this was severely underplayed throughout the years and in historical accounts and their power in Rome was admittedly more covert in nature than Augustus' – especially Maecenas'. He and Agrippa were some of the major players in the Roman political arena, only they mainly operated behind the scenes, which led to commentaries of Octavian/Augustus' rule being a tale starring the *princeps* as the head of the operation, when this was far from true.

Myth was used as a foundation for state propaganda by the regime and as a means to express their defiance and critique Augustus by the poets of the time. Augustus used Maecenas to recruit and get the support of the major literary voices of the time so that they could work for the regime and endorse not only his rule but his political program and reformation of public

[85] Rich 2010, 167

morals and state religion. He achieved a mythical status by pushing a personal association with Apollo and, most importantly, Alexander the Great – aspiring to an equal fame and recognition and perhaps to the same forgiving treatment in history. The *pax Augusta* became a source for celebration throughout every aspect of Roman life: religious, with the closing of the Temple of Janus and the cult of Pax; political, with Augustus' acceptance of triumphal honors, laurels to adorn his house on the Palatine and the civic crown; artistic, with monuments dedicated to peace and to him as a *triumphator* – such as the Ara Pacis and the Action Arch; literary, through the exaltation and celebration of the *pax* in many of the works of poets belonging to the Circle of Maecenas.

The most fervid attacks on the regime on Propertius' part are targeted at Roman military imperialism, of which he was a victim, while the ones on Ovid's side are targeted at Augustus' appropriation of religion for political means and his attempt to reform and control public morals. Both express their dissent covertly, through mythological parallels, rhetorical devices or subtle undertones to their poems. Propertius uses divine opposition as to why he cannot write more explicitly celebratory poems for Augustus or for not writing the *epos* Maecenas asks of him, saying that he does is not refusing because he does not want to do those things, but because he is not capable of doing them and because the gods disapprove of him whenever he tries to. Ovid is not this subtle and does not engage in *recusatio* very often. He, too, blames the gods for his inability to write *epos*, specifically Cupid, but he is more resistant to the change of theme the god forces onto him than Propertius is.[86] Both do, in the end, cave to the pressure but still find ways

[86] "Arma gravi numero violentaque bella parabam / edere, materia conveniente modis. / par erat inferior versus—risisse Cupido / dicitur atque unum surripuisse pedem. / 'Quis tibi, saeve puer, dedit hoc in carmina iris? / Pieridum vates, non tua turba sumus." ("I was getting ready to write about harsh fighting and violent war, / my meter fit for the topic. / it was good enough for an inferior verse—Cupid laughed / and said, then stole a foot away. / 'Cruel child, who gave you such power over poetry? / Us poets, we belong to the Muses, we're not your followers."). Ovid, *Amores,* 1.1.1-6

to express their real opinions in their works. Propertius' subtlety and restraint kept him safe. Ovid's carelessness got him exiled.

Augustus' story has been told many times in history books, both by modern and ancient historians. Tacitus is one of the few ancient ones not to offer an exceedingly uncritical or positive account of Augustus' reign. Even so, he is still careful in letting his personal views emerge from his texts. Critiques of Octavian/Augustus are only reported as other people's words, views held by the *princeps'* contemporaries.[87] Interestingly enough, the view of the opposition is recounted in much greater length and detail: it is here he makes his true intentions know.[88] While Cassius Dio's assessment of Augustus' reign[89] is overwhelmingly positive and he only reports on the positive contemporary views on the *princeps*, explicitly endorsing them, Tacitus only hints at where he stands on the matter by concluding his analysis with the hostile view and giving it significantly more space than he gives the positive one, as Rich notes.[90] Augustus' reign undoubtedly brought peace and prosperity to Rome and created an environment where the arts could flourish and reach a new peak. However, we must not forget how authoritarian and unforgiving his rule was and the political climate it created in Rome. His propaganda and deceit may have been exemplar, but that is still what it was – deceit. To use Tacitus' words, "pace sine dubio post haec, vero cruentam."[91]

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[87] Tacitus, *Annales,* 1.9-10.
[88] Tacitus, *Annales,* 1.10.
[89] Cassius Dio, *Historia Romana*, 56.43-45.
[90] Rich 2010, 170
[91] Tacitus, *Annales,* 1.10. "After that [Actium] there was undoubtedly peace, but truth be told it was a bloody one."

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