

Jupiter in Propertius: Death of a Lover, Birth of an Empire

Whether figuring Jupiter as rival or role model, as friend or enemy, as parallel to Augustus or to himself, Propertius stands out among Augustan poets in stripping the chief Olympian almost entirely of transcendence. Yet Jupiter plays a fascinating role in the development of Propertius's poetic persona and his evolving relationship with Augustus, both of which reflect revolutionary changes in Roman politics and (at least officially) sexual morality between the Battle of Actium (31 BC) and the Secular Games (17 BC)—roughly the bookends of Propertius's publishing career. In this paper, I shall discuss how the transformation of Roman society from Republic to Empire is mirrored in Propertius's changing depictions of Jupiter Tonans, paradigm of absolute power, and Jupiter "Amans," adulterous lover par excellence.

While Amans plays only a minor role in book 1 (Cynthia's divinity brooks no competition: see Zetzel 2012: 221-32) and Tonans none at all, book 2 develops a complex interaction between these two facets of Jupiter. For instance, 2.1 offers the poet's famous Callimachean *recusatio*, a refusal to "thunder out" a Gigantomachy starring Jupiter; he similarly refuses to write an epic enshrining Caesar's name among his Phrygian ancestors (read: an *Aeneid*), thus creating an implicit parallel between the divine and the earthly ruler (2.1.39-42). Immediately after making Jupiter represent anti-elegiac poetry and values, however, Propertius imagines Cynthia as the sort of tasty morsel Jupiter Amans would devour: on the basis of Cynthia's divine beauty, he excuses the god's ancient *furta* and even figures Cynthia as Juno (with *Aeneid* echoes: see Heyworth 2007: 115). In a particularly bizarre twist, Propertius argues that Tonans hurls thunderbolts because, a jilted Amans, he has been deceived by girls (2.16.47-54). The relationship between Jupiter and Propertius in this book ranges from emulation to

enmity, with Jupiter everything from the paragon of elegiac love (e.g., 2.30.27-32) to the sum of the forces arrayed against it—sometimes in conjunction with Augustus (e.g., 2.7.3-6).

In book 3, a major shift takes place: whereas book 2 highlights the poet's admiration for and/or rivalry with Jupiter as elegiac superstud, book 3 brings out the darker side of the god's sex life. The first full-fledged appearance of Amans shows him "bringing *infamia* on himself and his house" (*infamat seque suamque domum*, 3.11.28)—with *domus* a reference to his sleeping with Semiramis in his "temple" (Hubbard 1968: 317; Fantham 2006: 197; Fedeli 2005 *ad loc.*), but also implicitly criticizing a paterfamilias shaming his "household" through adultery. The next three appearances shift the focalization to females, with an almost Ovidian focus on the terrible consequences of a liaison with Jupiter: the sufferings of Antiope (3.15.13-22), Semele (3.17.21), and Io (3.22.35-36). Moreover, Jupiter begins to emerge as the tribal god of Rome: in Propertius's dream of singing an epic, we see "Jupiter saved through the voice of a goose" (3.3.12); as the "god Caesar" readies for war (3.4.1), "Parthian trophies will grow used to *Latian Jupiter*" (3.4.5-6); and at the instigation of that wicked minx Cleopatra, "barking Anubis opposed *our Jupiter*" (3.11.41). Both the implication that Jupiter belongs specifically to Rome and the reduced tendency to romanticize his affairs would indicate Propertius's increasing willingness to toe the Augustan party line.

In book 4, as Propertius accepts his role as the Poet of Rome, so Jupiter becomes the God of Rome, advocate of Augustus and punisher of romantic love: Amans has vanished without a trace. I close with an examination of 4.4, in which Jupiter and Tarpeia symbolically struggle for control of the Capitol, the religious heart of Rome and the symbolic center of Jupiter's power. As Tara Welch has shown (2005: 56-78), Tarpeia is a deeply sympathetic figure whose all-consuming love in many ways resembles that of Propertius for Cynthia. Like the revenant

Cynthia of 4.7 and 4.8, Propertius the “Latin lover” subversive of the culture’s dominant values (Stahl 1985; Johnson 2009) cannot really be killed—not by Jupiter, and not even by the birth of the Roman Empire.

Bibliography

- Fantham, Elaine. 2006. “The Image of Woman in Propertius’ Poetry.” In Günther (2006), 183-98.
- Fedeli, Paulo. 2005. *Propertio: Elegie Libro II*. Cambridge.
- Greene, Ellen and Tara S. Welch, eds. 2012. *Propertius*. Oxford.
- Günther, Hans-Christian, ed. 2006. *Brill’s Companion to Propertius*. Leiden.
- Heyworth, S. J. 2007. *Cynthia: A Companion to the Text of Propertius*. Oxford.
- Hubbard, Margaret. 1968. “Propertiana.” *CQ* 18: 315-19.
- Johnson, W. R. 2009. *A Latin Lover in Ancient Rome: Readings in Propertius and His Genre*. Columbus, OH.
- Stahl, Hans-Peter. 1985. *Propertius: “Love” and “War”:* *Individual and State Under Augustus*. Berkeley.
- Welch, Tara. 2005. *The Elegiac Cityscape: Propertius and the Meaning of Roman Monuments*. Columbus, OH.
- Zetzel, James E. G. 2012. “Poetic Baldness and Its Cure.” In Greene and Welch (2012), 203-32.