AP/HIST/CLST 4130 6.0, PROBLEMS IN ROMAN HISTORY

Augustus

Fall/Winter 2024-2025

MAJOR PAPER

Your major paper in the course should be on a theme relevant to the study of Augustus and his principate in the period from 44 BCE to 14 CE. It should be based on research involving a body of primary evidence (literary, epigraphic, numismatic, legal, archaeological and/or iconographic, as appropriate) and it should take account of the key scholarly literature most relevant to your topic.

You should take care to organize your argument carefully, with a clear thesis statement at the end of your Introduction. It would be helpful to use sub-headings to divide the paper into its various sections.

Good History papers have an organized STRUCTURE, allowing you to make a step-by-step argument. Make sure that you discuss the appropriate ancient evidence and relevant scholarly discussions, citing each of these carefully, that help to substantiate each hypothesis (or claim) that you are making in the course of your paper.

Avoid overly DESCRIPTIVE papers; you should be making an ARGUMENT in your paper. It is helpful to explain the major argument you are trying to make at the end of the Introductory section of the paper.

Be careful to check that all your sentences make sense and that there are no spelling or grammatical errors in your paper. Read over your finished paper at least FIVE times and be tough on yourself as you edit each draft. If you cannot quite understand a point that you are making, then it needs to be rephrased.

For formatting and essay style, please consult the York History Department Style Guide for writing an Ancient History assignment, which is posted under COURSE ASSIGNMENTS on the E-class site.

Your paper should be accompanied by a Bibliography that provides an organized list of (a) ancient sources and (b) modern scholarship cited in the paper. These should appear in two separate sections at the end of the paper. Be sure to indicate which edition of each of the ancient sources you have used in your research.

LENGTH: About 5000 words (about 20 double-spaced pages), excluding the bibliography.

Please include a **WORD COUNT** at the end of the paper (excluding bibliography). A 10% margin above and below the limit (i.e., between 4500 and 5500 words) will be acceptable, but no more.

DATE DUE: Friday 4 April 2025, 11.59 p.m.

VALUE: 35%

Papers should be uploaded to the course E-class site via the TURNITIN link by the due date.

Please feel free to consult me by email (jedmond@yorku.ca) as you are researching and writing your paper.

VERSE AND VIRTUE: HORACE, PROPERTIUS, AND OVID ON AUGUSTUS' MORAL REFORMS

In 2 BC, a scandal erupted in Rome when it was revealed that Augustus' daughter Julia had been involved in multiple extramarital affairs. Suetonius wrote that Augustus banished her to the island of Pandateria, denying her luxuries like wine and restricting all visitors. Augustus sent a letter to the senate informing of his daughter's disgrace to be read by a quaestor and, out of shame, avoided others for a long time. He even considered executing her own daughter (Suet. *Aug*. 65. 1-3). Suetonius frames the incident as emblematic of Augustus' strict enforcement of his moral reforms. Cassius Dio remarks that Julia's affairs with prominent Roman men bore political repercussions; while Iullus Antonius was put to death, others were banished to the islands (Dio. 55.10.15). Julia's debauchery became interconnected with Augustus' social and moral reforms. Augustus' refusal to yield to public pleas for leniency may be read as a proud father's insistence on his commitment to the social and moral legislation he had implemented. However, Julia's scandalous behaviour openly defied Augustus' efforts to reform Roman morals and presented a critique of moral legislation, manifesting a form of resistance.

In his *Res Gestae,* Augustus asserted that by passing new laws, he "brought back into use many of the exemplary practices of [Roman] ancestors which were disappearing" (*RG* 8.5). His actions following the establishment of the principate reflect his determination to initiate a programme of moral and religious reformation. An elegy of Propertius from his second book, traditionally dated to 28 BC, suggests that Augustus intended to legislate morals in Roman society as soon as he ended the civil wars. Propertius mentions Cynthia being overjoyed when the law that forced the bachelors to marry was repealed (Prop. *Eleg*. 2.7). Propertius' elegy does not offer any other details about the law but suggests that Augustus had to reconsider the proposal upon unfavourable reaction, presumably from the Roman elite. There were no other writers who referred to such legislation at the time. Only Dio mentions special privileges and

incentives granted to senators based on their large number of children or marital status, such as appointment as provincial governor and the withdrawal of some disciplinary provisions (Dio 53.13.2).[1] While Augustus aimed to reshape Roman society through legislation, he could not wholly control cultural attitudes. Augustan poetry offers insights into such cultural attitudes. While Augustan poets Horace, Propertius, and Ovid did not always support Augustus' legislation directly, their poems reflected the evolving moral landscape of Rome.[2] While the poets adhered to the conventions of their genres, engaging with themes of love and sexuality, they tried to preserve their poetic independence, acutely aware of the consequences of openly defying the emperor's ideals. Augustan poetry did not produce a direct opposition to Augustus' reforms but instead reflected the multifaceted quality of the Roman elite's morality.

Augustus' moral legislations were key to his broader moral and social reforms to reinforce traditional Roman values. The *Lex Julia de Maritandis Ordinibus* (18 BC) regulated marriage, making it mandatory and imposing sanctions on celibacy. Upon opposition to the law, Augustus had to implement several adjustments to address resistance (Suet. *Aug*. 34; Dio 56.10). In AD 9, the *Lex Papia Poppaea* revised and strengthened penalties against bachelors and childless couples while rewarding those with three or more children (Tacit. *Ann*. 3.25). It restricted intermarriage between social classes and regulated inheritance: the unmarried could not inherit beyond immediate family, and childless married individuals faced limits, while parents received preferential rights (Gaius I.178).[3] These laws reinforced social hierarchies, shaping Roman society through legal means. Similarly, the *Lex Julia Theatralis* (18 BC) addressed concerns about actors' moral influence and restructured theatre seating to reinforce

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[1] Karl Galinsky, "Augustus' Legislation on Morals and Marriage." *Philologus* 125, no. 1-2 (1981): 126-7. Galinsky argues that Octavian put forward the legislative package by force, either through the *cura legum et morum* or the *censoria potestas,* which were part of his extraordinary enabling powers. Nevertheless, Augustus was not alone in arguing that Roman society needed a social and moral regeneration. In his ode *Intactis opulentior*, which he wrote before 23 BC, Horace emphasizes a return to moral rectitude to preserve Rome's greatness and expresses his disappointment for the lack of laws for punishing vice (Hor. *Odes*. 3.24).

[2] Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, "Propaganda and Dissent? Augustan Moral Legislation and the Love-Poets," *Klio* 67, no. 67 (1985): 180. Wallace-Hadrill argues that though the creative expressions of Augustan poets cannot be reduced to either propaganda or dissent, their work can be utilized to identify the broader social and cultural developments within Roman society

[3] Susan Treggiari, "Social Status and Social Legislation," in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, edited by Alan K. Bowman, Edward Champlin, and Andrew Lintott. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. 887-888.

class distinctions.[4] Such legislation functioned as a social engineering tool, dictating societal norms and behaviour.

The *Lex Julia de Adulteriis Coercendis* (18 BC) reinforced Augustus' marriage laws by criminalizing adultery as a public offence, punishable by exile or, in some cases, death (Paul. *Sent.* 2.26). The law excluded slaves, prostitutes, and lower-class women (Paul. *Sent.* 2.26.16).[5] Fathers could kill adulterous daughters and their partners under specific conditions. Husbands were required to divorce and prosecute unfaithful wives within 60 days or risk outside intervention.[6] Violence was regulated: a husband could kill his wife's lover only if he were of low status, while a father could kill any lover caught in the act—but only in his or his son-in-law's house and if he also attempted to kill his daughter.[7] However, such killings were rare, and husbands were explicitly barred from killing their wives.[8] What was once a private matter governed by the pater familias or the husband was transformed into a public concern under the authority of the state. By criminalizing immorality, these laws made the enforcement of moral conduct a civic responsibility rather than a purely domestic one.[9]

Augustus' moral reforms were closely tied to his religious revival. Many, including Augustus, saw moral and religious decline as a cause of civil war. Horace wrote that Romans would not be absolved of the sins of the civil war until they restored "the crumbling temples and

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[4] Elizabeth Rawson, "Discrimina ordinum: The Lex Julia Theatralis." *Papers of the British School at Rome* 55 (1987): 86, 112.

[5] Susan Treggiari, "Social Status and Social Legislation," 890.

[6] Ibid.

[7] David Cohen, "The Augustan Law on Adultery," *The Family in Italy from Antiquity to the Present*, edited by David Kertzer, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991, 111.

[8] Treggiari, "Social Status and Social Legislation," 890.

[9] Marriage laws were central to Augustus' social reforms, though their true purpose remains debated. Officially, they aimed to address the elite's declining birthrate. (See Gordon Williams, "Poetry in the Moral Climate of Augustan Rome," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 52, no. 1-2 (1962): 29) However, Wallace-Hadrill argues their real goal was to secure property transfer and social stability across generations. (Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, "Family and Inheritance in the Augustan Marriage Laws," *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society,* no. 27 (1981): 59) The laws primarily targeted the elite, reflecting Augustus' belief—shared by moralists—that Rome faced moral and social disorder (Dio 54.10.5). Galinsky links the legislation to the empire's broader stability, while Edwards sees it as addressing deeper societal anxieties about control. (Karl Galinsky, "Augustus' Legislation on Morals and Marriage," *Philologus* 125, no. 1-2 (1981): 143-4.) Susan Treggiari argued that Augustus and his advisor considered that the legislation would encourage nuptiality and reproductivity in order to supply Rome with soldiers and administrators. (Susan Treggiari, *Roman Marriage: lusti Coniuges from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 60). According to Edwards, Augustus used these reforms to restore traditional values, reinforce hierarchy, and ensure the elite's continuity. (Catharine Edwards, *The Politics of Immorality in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 36).

shrines of the gods / and their smoke blackened images" (Hor. *Carm*. 3.6.3-4).[10] Augustus restored monuments, including the Temple of Jupiter and built new ones like the Temple of Mars Ultor (*RG* 19-21, Suet. *Aug*. 30.2). As *pontifex maximus*, he revived priesthoods, increased religious privileges, and regulated prophecy by burning dubious writings, keeping only the *Sibylline Books* (Suet. *Aug*. 31.3, Dio 56.10.2, Suet. *Aug*. 31.1). He reinstated neglected rituals and revived the Ludi Saeculares in 17 BC, for which Horace wrote the *Carmen Saeculare,* praising Augustus' moral reforms. The consecration of the Ara Pacis in 9 BC symbolized divine peace restored under his rule. Like his moral laws, Augustus' religious reforms made private practices the matters of the state. He elevated household gods to state cults and turned rites of passage, such as the March Past and the Temple of Youth, into public events. By integrating religious and social rites into the state, Augustus reinforced the idea that family values and personal morality were essential to Rome's stability—and, accordingly, the state's responsibility.

Augustus' moral reforms introduced significant legal transformation to Roman society. Such a profound transformation naturally would elicit reactions, particularly from the Roman elite. The works of Augustan poets provide a valuable source for examining contemporary reactions to Augustus' revival of traditional Roman values through moral and religious reforms. However, interpreting these works as evidence for public opinion or historical realities requires caution due to their inherent limitations. First, these works might be significantly biased based on the poets' personal experiences, social standing, and political affiliations. Horace, a bachelor, was adamant about endorsing the laws that promoted marriage and punished celibacy. The son of a freedman who achieved his position with such hardship had to be careful not to aggravate his benefactors. Moreover, Augustan poets, as either members of the Roman elite or their entourage, utilized the lens of the elite ideology and often failed to incorporate the experiences of lower classes, women, or non-citizens. Secondly, literary conventions may further complicate historical accuracy. Roman poets of the mid-first century BC adapted Greek, particularly Hellenistic, forms, infusing Roman themes.[11] Horace's love poetry, for instance, coexisted with Augustus'

[10] Horace's Odes Book 3 is dated 23 BC. By the time Horace wrote this poem, Augustus had completed the restoration of many temples. The ode may be read as praise or flattery of Augustus as well as a justification for his reforms.

[11] Peter White, *Promised Verse: Poets in the Society of Augustan Rome* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993), 53.

moral reforms, aligning with the cultural program rather than opposing it.[12] Like all poetry, Augustan poetry allows for multiple interpretations.

Building on the complexities of interpreting Augustan poetry, the role of patronage in shaping Augustan poetry remains debated. Some argue it enforced loyalty to Augustus' ideals, while others see it as fostering creative freedom. Maecenas, a patron of poets like Horace and Propertius, is described by Syme as Augustus' chief propagandist, using poetry to legitimize the regime.[13] Citroni similarly sees literature as closely tied to political power, with Augustus leveraging poets' prestige to enhance his image.[14] However, White challenges this view, arguing that patronage was based on friendship rather than obligation, with poets maintaining independence.[15] Gowers also suggests that Maecenas provided a space for free expression, where poets aligned with Augustan values more through subtle restraint than direct endorsement.[16] When assessing Maecenas' circle of poets, Horace himself remarks that "nowhere [was] cleaner and more remote than that kind of corruption" (Hor. *Sat.* 1.9.48). It was perfectly safe to have one's own position.

Horace has been widely acknowledged as a prominent supporter of Augustus' regime and policies. However, defining him as a pro-Augustan poet might be problematic due to the complexities in interpreting his poetry and the circumstances under which he was producing his

[12] White, 82. David West, in Horace, *The Complete Odes and Epodes*, translated by David West (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), xviii.

[13] Ronald Syme, *The Roman Revolution*, corrected edition (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 460. In *The Roman Revolution*, Ronald Syme named Maecenas the "chief of the cabinet," who was responsible for propaganda. Similarly, Michèle Lowrie argued that Maecenas' patronage compelled Horace to align his views with the Augustan regime --Michèle Lowrie, "Horace and Augustus" in *The Cambridge Companion to Horace,* edited by S. J. Harrison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 77-78.

[14] Mario Citroni, "Poetry in Augustan Rome," in *A Companion to Ovid*, edited by Peter E. Knox (Chichester, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 8-9. According to Citroni, Augustus, through his personal connections with poets like Virgil and Horace and the influential patronage of Maecenas, consolidate his image as the founder of a new era; Augustus leveraged the poets' prestige to enhance his own, honouring them publicly and featuring their works at symbolically significant events for his regime.

[15] Peter White, *Promised Verse: Poets in the Society of Augustan Rome* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993), 31, 34. White admits that Augustan poetry had a general partisan nature; however, it did not gain its distinctive Augustan character through a deliberate and coordinated effort on the part of Augustus but through initiatives originating from the poets themselves. White notes that cash gifts were typically provided in lump sums rather than steady payments. This provides evidence that support was not strictly tied to literary output. Additionally, according to White, Roman elites showed minimal interest in dictating what their poet friends should write. Augustus or Maecenas were no exceptions.

[16] Emily Gowers, *Rome's Patron: The Lives and Afterlives of Maecenas,* 1st ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2024), 74. Gowers admits that the interactions between Maecenas and the poets had political implications. If the poets reinforced Augustan values, it was not through direct references but through their restraint, tolerance, and quietism. Otherwise, they maintained a certain autonomy.

works. Horace lived through civil wars, and his civil war experiences informed his poetry. His work reflected an approval of the peaceful life under Augustus but refrained from overt political endorsement of his regime. As the son of a freedman who provided him with an aristocratic education (Hor. *Sat.* 1.6.76-79), Horace's rise to the prestigious position was closely related to historical developments of the late Roman Republic. In 44 BC, Horace signed up for Brutus' legion, who was recruiting soldiers in Athens after the assassination of Caesar. In 42 BC, Horace was a legionary tribune at Philippi (Hor. *Sat.* 1.6.48). After the defeat, he was pardoned by the Triumvirs. When he returned to Italy, he found his father's farm confiscated. Horace's contacts helped him secure a job in the treasury, which provided him enough leisure time to write. In 37 BC, upon the recommendation of Virgil and Varius, Maecenas offered him patronage, which Horace accepted immediately.[17] Horace's first book of satires, his first published work dated 33 BC, contains no mention of Octavian, despite fighting in his army against Sextus, Pompey's son, in 36 BC.[18] He offers his opinion of Octavian only after the Battle of Actium in his second book of satires published in 30 BC. Even then, it is far from unbounded praise. In Satire 2.5, Horace describes Octavian as "a young hero, the scourge of the Parthian race, / born of Aeneas' noble line shall rule over land and sea" (Hor. *Sat.* 2.5.62-64). The poet references Octavian's supposed divine lineage and reinforces his legitimacy as a ruler. However, his tone is more deferential compared to those he employs in his *Odes* written during the Principate.

Horace's poetry manifests a recognition of Augustus' evolving position within the cultural and political climate of the Principate. In Epode 9, published in 30 BC, Horace's tone is euphoric as he celebrates "great Caesar's victory" at Actium (Hor. *Epod*. 9.1). Similarly, Ode 37 of Book 1 is also an ode of joy for Octavian's victory in Actium. The praise of Octavian is continued in "Iam satis terris," in which Octavian is depicted as Mercury in human shape and "hailed as Father and Princeps" (Hor. *Carm*. 1.2.42-52). Augustus' military victories are praised with the utmost reverence in several of Horace's odes, including *Odes* 2.9, 3.5, and 3.14. Over time, however, Horace's tone becomes more measured. While still honouring Augustus, his praise shifts from elated celebration to a more subtle and nuanced recognition of the emperor's role in restoring peace and order to Rome. Not only does Augustus become less of a subject for

[17] Niall Rudd, in *Horace: Satires and Epistles*, translated by Niall Rudd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), xvii.

[18] Rudd, xviii.

Horace's poetry, but Horace's established position in literary and imperial circles –as his improved financial situation—allows him to write more liberally about societal issues.

In 20 or 19 BC, Horace published *Epistles 1*, his first book of verse letters. (*Epistles 2* would follow in 14 BC.) In the *Epistles,* Horace was not focused on promoting a specific philosophical system or persuading his audience to adopt a new worldview. Instead, the letters address ethical issues and comment on the interplay between societal expectations and philosophical ideals. Epistle 2.1, "To Augustus: A Defence of Modern Poetry," is a direct and extensive address to Augustus. Suetonius argues that Augustus complained about Horace not writing about him.[19] In his response, Horace first praises Augustus for "strengthening Rome's defences, promoting decent behaviour, / reforming our laws," but then shares with Augustus his dislike of the contemporary taste of archaic works of poetry and theatre (Hor. *Epist*. 2.1. 2-3,63-89). The letter concludes with advice to Augustus, urging him to continue to be a patron of the poets but also subtly remarking that he, Horace, would not be commanded to write (Hor. *Epist*. 2.1. 214-218, 260-270). When Horace admits that writing about the Princeps is "to venture upon a task so far beyond my abilities," he is not diminishing his talent but rather politely resisting external direction over his poetry (Hor. *Epist*. 2.1.259). However, his response to Augustus should not be interpreted as a reversal of Horace's support for Augustus' reforms or ideology.

The dating of Horace's *Odes* plays a crucial role in understanding his engagement with Augustus' policies. His first three books of *Odes* are dated to 23 BC, whereas Book 4 is generally believed to have been composed in 13 BC –after the implementation of Augustus' moral legislations. This temporal shift is significant, as it coincides with a noticeable change in Horace's tone. His odes in Book 4 reflect a recognition of Augustus' political authority. In *Ode* 4.15, Horace offers a direct endorsement of Augustus' moral reforms and celebrates his accomplishments.

> While Caesar is guardian of the state, neither civil war
> nor civil madness will drive away our peace,
> nor will anger beat out its swords
> and set city against unhappy city,
> …

[19] David West, in *Horace: The Complete Odes and Epodes*, translated by David West (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), xxv.

and on ordinary days as on holy day,
among the gifts of cheerful Bacchus, let us first
with our children and our wives
offer due prayers to the gods

(Hor. *Carm*. 4.15.17-28)

According to Horace, Augustus is the reason that peace reigns at home. Moreover, images of family and religious observance indicate that the revival of traditional religious practices and moral values under Augustus ensured stability and reinforced the connection between civic duty and divine favour.

Horace's many works reinforce the call to moral and religious renewal, the foundation of Augustus' program. Even Horace's earliest poems, such as the second epode, emphasize the importance of stable family life and chastity (Hor. *Epod*. 2. 39-40). In Epode 8, Horace expresses his dislike for inappropriate or excessive lust. Horace's critique aligns with Augustus' efforts to promote sexual restraint and reinforce traditional values as essential for the stability of the state. According to Horace, unchecked desire for sex leads to immorality. In one of the satires of his second Satire book, dated 30 BC, he criticizes his slave for his desire for sex: "You fancy someone else's wife, Davus a tart. / Who commits a graver offence?" (Hor. *Sat*. 2.7.46-47). Horace portrays adultery not only as a serious moral transgression but as a criminal act. Later, he argues that the wronged husband has the right to take revenge on both the guilty parties, but especially on the seducer (Hor. *Sat*. 2.7.61-63). According to Horace, greed and moral corruption cause the breakdown of societal order. In Ode 2.15, Horace criticizes the excessive luxury of the wealthy and praises the virtues of the modest, frugal lifestyle of the early Romans. More significantly, in the first six odes of Book 3, usually referred to as Roman Odes, Horace dwells on the virtues of patriotic Roman citizens. He criticizes the widespread domestic immorality and disregard for religious institutions, urging a swift return to the simpler and more virtuous ways of ancient times (Hor. *Carm*. 3.6). The epitome of Horace's support for Augustus' moral reforms is *Carmen Saeculare*, which he composed at the request of Augustus for the *Ludi Saeculares*, a poem that celebrates of the passing of marital legislation in 18 BC (Hor. *Carm. Saec*. 17-20).[20]

[20] Galinsky, *Augustan Culture,* 51-59. Treggiari, "Social Status and Social Legislation, 893.

While some of his works appeared to support Augustus' moral reforms, Horace did not present himself as a strict moralist regarding love affairs and sexuality. He frequently wrote about romantic entanglements, affairs with courtesans, and fleeting passions, suggesting a more indulgent view of love and sexuality. In Epode 11, Horace depicts love as a powerful and irrational force that unsettles his life, as he admits his love for a young man: "But now Lyciscus is my love / and he boasts he's prettier than any mere woman could be" (Hor. *Epod*. 11. 23-24). A homosexual relationship would not align with Augustus' moral ideals —neither an extramarital relationship. Nevertheless, while describing his passion for a courtesan and freedwoman called Phryne, Horace hints that his married patron, Maecenas, is also "fired by passion" of the same woman (Hor. *Epod*. 14. 13-16). Horace's attitude towards love does not change significantly as Augustus extends his power and enacts moral reforms. He argues that "There's no need [for a Roman elite] to be ashamed / of [their] love for a slave girl" (Hor. *Carm*. 2.4.1-2). Such advice is contrary to Augustus' *lex Julia de maritandis ordinibus* and *lex Papia Poppaea*, moral legislations that discouraged relationships between freeborn Roman citizens and those of lower social status. Similarly, in Ode 2.8, Horace admits to the inevitability of adultery when a man is captivated by the charms of a beautiful woman (Hor. *Carm*. 2.8.17-20). His poetry often reflects a lighthearted and pragmatic approach to love, prioritizing pleasure over moral or legal constraints. While describing "various approaches to good life" in the sixth epistle of Book 1, Horace advises a friend that "without sexual pleasure / no joy exists, devote your life to sexual pleasure" (Hor. *Epis*. 1.6.65-66). His self-indulgent perspective contrasts the moral discipline and matrimonial fidelity advocated in Augustus' reforms.

The ambivalent attitude of Horace's works regarding morality and sexuality can be explained partly by the discourse he employs. As a genre, odes in the late Roman Republic and early Empire—particularly in the works of Horace and his contemporaries—were primarily shaped by themes of love and sexuality. Like his contemporaries and the earlier generation of Neoteric poets, he was deeply influenced by Alexandrian poetry; the erotic themes in these poems are not reflective of Horace's real life.[21] Thus, Horace's treatment of love and sexuality, especially in his odes, can be understood as part of a larger literary tradition rather than a defiance of moral values. For Horace, as the son of a freedman, despite his fine education, a

[21] Gordon Williams, "Poetry in the Moral Climate of Augustan Rome," The Journal of Roman Studies 52, no. 1-2 (1962): 42.

proper place in the court and literary circles required careful consideration and sensitivity to Augustus' rule. Moreover, Augustus' establishment of his power might have urged Horace to temper his personal views and align his poetry with the moral and political ideals of the regime. The shift in his tone, evident in Book 4 of Odes compared to the three earlier books, serves as evidence of his attempt to regulate his works based on the Augustan ideals. However, Horace did not need a reminder, such as Augustan moral legislation, to support morality. Having lived through the turmoil of civil war, Horace was yearning for peace, stability, and the restoration of Roman values; he already believed that one of poetry's key functions was to address moral concerns.[22]

Propertius differed from Horace in social background. He came from a prosperous family of landowners in the Perusia region.[23] Unlike Horace, who lived through civil wars, Propertius, born around 50-45 BC, experienced civil war only during his early youth. In his first book of elegies, he refers to the civil war through his memories of the devastation of his region, Umbria (Prop. *Eleg*. 1.22. 5-10). Propertius was only a child when Caesar was assassinated; as a result, his poetry lacks any sense of national revival and does not reflect nostalgia for the Republic's past.[24] His first book of love elegies, *Monobiblos*, published around 30 BC, is centred around his passionate and often tumultuous relationship with a woman he calls Cynthia.[25] Propertius' poems in the first book are subjective and elegiac, focusing on themes of love, longing, suffering, and devotion rather than political or historical concerns. In his second book of elegies, which was perhaps published a year later, Propertius mentions Maecenas' name, suggesting that he became a friend of the patron of Augustan poets (Prop. *Eleg*. 2.1.17). However, unlike Horace, Maecenas never becomes a major theme or a recurring subject in Propertius' works. After the first elegy of his second book, Propertius refers to Maecenas only in the ninth of his third book, an elegy titled "Praise for Maecenas and a tactful refusal." While Propertius starts the poem praising Maecenas, whom he names as "a knight of Etruscan royal blood," he complains to Maecenas about the

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[22] Karl Galinsky, *Augustan Culture: An Interpretive Introduction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 226.

[23] Barbara K. Gold, *Literary Patronage in Greece and Rome* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 142.

[24] Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 227.

[25] R. O. A. M. Lyne and Stephen J. Heyworth, "Propertius, Sextus," in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 2012). *Oxford Reference*. Date Accessed 19 Feb. 2025 <https://www-oxfordreference-com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/view/10.1093/acref/9780199545568.001.0001/acref-9780199545568-e-5370>.

writing tasks assigned to him, which he deems not suitable for his craft (Prop. *Eleg*. 3.9.1-4). Refusal to write in heroic or historical verse and adhering to elegy is a means of asserting his poetic independence rather than contributing to Augustus' propaganda.

In the first three books, the latest published sometime after 23 BC, Propertius' poetry remains primarily focused on personal, emotional themes, setting him apart from Horace, who aligned some of his works more closely with the political agenda of the time. However, in his last book of poetry, published after 16 BC, as in Horace's poetry, there is a shift of subject matter in his elegies. In Book 4, Propertius explores themes other than love and sexuality. He opens the book with an introductory elegy in which he claims he will now sing of Roman themes:

> And now I seek to plan those walls in devoted verse:
> Alas that the sound in my mouth is weak!
> …
> But give me, Bacchus, leaves from your own ivy,
> That Umbria may swell with pride at our books,
> Umbria, birthplace of Rome's Callimachus!
> …
> I'll sing of rites and days and the ancient names of places.
> This is the goal towards which my steed must sweat!
>
> (Prop. *Eleg*. 4.1.57-58,62-64,69-70)

However, Propertius hesitates about abandoning love elegy, highlighting the tension between nationalistic themes and personal subject matter. Moreover, the opening poem does not comment on Augustan programmes, either in its support or explicit opposition.

The collection of poems in Propertius' fourth and last known book has sparked an academic debate over Propertius' relationship with Augustan ideology. Syme acknowledged that Propertius incorporated Roman themes in his last book; he claimed these themes were detached from Augustus' practical concerns and irrelevant to Augustan programmes.[26] Employing Lacanian readings, Janan argued that Propertius' fourth book engages with Roman history and national themes in a way that undermines or complicates official narratives. She suggested that the book exposes the limitations of cultural and ideological systems, particularly the Augustan

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[26] Ronald Syme, *The Roman Revolution*, corrected ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002. First published 1939 by Oxford University Press), 188.

vision of Rome, showing how these systems fail to represent reality transparently, instead masking its complexities and contradictions.[27] On the other hand, more recently, Citroni argued that formal panegyric passages and the traditional moralism marked in the elegies suggest that Augustus exerted increasing influence over literature and public discourse, encouraging poets to reinforce his vision of Roman values and morality, and Propertius complied with the requests of the Princeps.[28] The publication date of the collection supports the argument as Augustus announced his moral legislation in 18 BC. Propertius' work becomes a critique of how cultural narratives obscure deeper truths, especially in the context of Roman imperial ideology. Thus, despite the notable shift in the subject matter in his final book, Propertius' works retain an ambivalence toward Augustan ideology. They do not directly engage with Augustus' programs. When such engagement occurs, it is subtle and accessible only to those capable of reading between the lines of his verse.

Propertius rarely presents his ideas explicitly, offering subtle hints inviting interpretation. One verse might counter another; one elegy might annul a previous one. In 3.4, a patriotic poem, Propertius praises Augustus' military triumphs, particularly his campaigns in the East. However, in the following poem, 3.5, he announces that he worships peace:

> Love is the God of peace; we lovers venerate peace:
>
> …
>
> For me life's outcome shall be this, but you to whom
>
> Wars are more welcome, bring Crassus' standards home.
>
> Prop. *Eleg*. 3.5.1,47-48.

The stark contrast between the two elegies underscores Propertius' rejection of Rome's militarism. He deliberately distances himself from the ideals of conquest and glory. The elegy repeals the praise for Augustus' triumphs in the previous one. Rather than presenting outright contradictions, Propertius weaves a layered and elusive discourse. The measured complexity of his poems prevents readers from categorizing him as strictly pro- or anti-Augustan. His poetry

[27] Micaela Wakil Janan, *The Politics of Desire: Propertius IV*, 1st ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 9-10. While reading Propertius 4.4 "Beyond Good and Evil," Janan argues that the elegy interrogates the binary logic of framing loyalties to Augustan ideology and suggests that the poem's ending with the refusal to sort out who is the offender and who offended is an ultimate gesture for adherence to Augustan ideology.

[28] Citroni, 16.

resists rigidly binary interpretations and engages with Augustan themes while simultaneously challenging, subverting, or reframing them.

Throughout his poetry, Propertius frequently presents himself not as the ideal Roman citizen aligned with Augustus' vision of marriage and civic duty but as an elegiac lover devoted to Cynthia. Even in elegies where Propertius' verse appears to align with Augustan moral rhetoric, he subtly preserves a sense of moral ambiguity, resisting full endorsement of imperial values and maintaining the personal, subjective voice characteristic of his elegiac poetry. Elegy 3.13, titled "Luxury is destroying Rome," is a meditation on wealth and luxury. "Proud Rome is rotten with her own prosperity," Propertius remarks (Prop. *Eleg*. 3.13.60). His criticism aligns with Augustan moral rhetoric. But, the first line of the elegy provides clues regarding Propertius' rage: "You ask why greedy girls charge so much for their nights," he asks (Prop. *Eleg*. 3.13.1). His main concern is not moral decline brought by excess and foreign riches. In the later verses, rich with innuendo, he argues that those living in the country in rustic simplicity have better chances of fulfilling their desires (Prop. *Eleg*. 3.13.25-32). The only exception to such disposition is the last elegy of Book 4 published after Augustus announced his moral legislations. In "The Dead Cornelia Speaks in Her Own Defence," Propertius portrays Cornelia as the embodiment of Augustan values of chastity, loyalty, and dignity, offering a stark contrast to Cynthia. "On this stone let them read me married to one man," remarks Cornelia, an approval of Augustus' moral reforms promoting marital fidelity (Prop. *Eleg*. 4.11.36). "This is woman's final prize, the female Triumph-- / When children's fame brings praise to her deserving pyre," says Cornelia, emphasizing the significance of motherhood and the legacy of her children, reinforcing Augustus' emphasis on family and procreation as central to his moral and social reforms (Prop. *Eleg*. 4.11.73-74). Finally, Cornelia asks her children to accept their stepmother after her death, an acknowledgment of the *Lex Julia de Maritandis Ordinibus*, which sought to encourage remarriage and stabilize the family unit after the loss of a spouse (Prop. *Eleg*. 4.11.85-88).

Many elegies of Propertius' corpus defy social conventions, particularly those around love and fidelity. His attempt to seduce a woman whose husband has gone abroad and convince her to an adulterous relationship may be read as a direct challenge to Augustan moral ideals (Prop. *Eleg*. 3.20.7-10). Similarly, in Elegy 2.7, Propertius entertains the idea of marriage to Cynthia but ultimately rejects it, preferring love without the constraints of legal or social obligation (Prop. *Eleg*. 2.7.19-20). His refusal may be interpreted as resisting traditional Roman

values, particularly those concerning marriage and duty. However, Propertius' poems may be read just as love elegies. They strictly engage with the conventions of elegy, adhering to the erotic and transgressive themes typical of the genre. They do not form an act of resistance against Augustus' moral reforms but rather are subtle reactions to enforced morality shared among his peers, the Roman elite. His love elegies turn private life into public discourse while hinting that intimacy should remain beyond the reach of legislation.

Unlike Horace and Propertius, who retained the memories of civil war, Ovid grew up in a Rome securely pacified by Augustus. In an autobiographical elegy from exile, he notes he was born in 43 BCE (Ov. *Tr.* 4.10.6). In the early years of Augustus' rise to absolute power, Ovid came of age and began his prolific career, establishing himself as one of ancient Rome's most renowned poets. In his early period, the poet, following the example of Tibullus and Propertius, wrote love elegies. *Amores*, published around 16 BC, is a collection of elegiac love poems, mainly focused on his love affair with the fictional Corinna. The fourth elegy of Book 1 is a monologue in which the poet instructs his lover on how to conduct their secret affair while attending a banquet with her husband present. He also expresses his frustration at being unable to be with her openly, lamenting: "You'll give him as his right, because you must / What you give me in secret" (Ov. *Am.* 1.4.64-65). Ovid playfully subverts the moral expectations of Augustan Rome, which emphasized marital fidelity, by celebrating adultery and deception. However, his poetry does not directly confront the moral ideology that Augustus tries to establish. In 2.1, Ovid responds to accusations that his work is inappropriate or dangerous, arguing that his verses are harmless and meant for pleasure rather than corruption.

> A fine reward! Farewell, you famous heroes!
> I get no thanks from you that's fit for me.
> Girls, turn your pretty faces to my verses-
> Love, blushingly Love, dictates my poetry.
>
> Ovid. *Am.* 2.1.36-39

He portrays himself as a poet of passion rather than politics, distancing himself from any serious moral or social subversion.[29] Later in Book 3, Ovid blames his poetry for making women

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[29] Syme argues that Ovid found it inappropriate or undesirable to distract from the core artistic or literary purpose by including elements that are too closely tied to current political matters or contemporary events. These would be seen as irrelevant to the work's aesthetic or artistic quality --Ronald Syme, *History in Ovid* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 189.

unfaithful. But at the end of the poem, he suggests that poetry is not bound by historical accuracy or moral responsibility: "Yes, there's no limit to poetic licence, / And it's not tied to truths of history" (Ov. *Am*. 3.12.41-42). By asserting that poetry is not beholden to truth, Ovid distances himself from any real-world consequences his verses might imply. This aligns with his broader approach in *Amores*—presenting libertine themes not as ideological resistance to Augustan morality but as lighthearted explorations of love, desire, and poetic invention.

Around 2 BC, Ovid published *Ara Amatoria*, a didactic elegiac poem which playfully teaches the arts of seduction and love. The poem may be read as a text that openly encourages disobedience to Augustus' moral reforms.

> First tell yourself all women can be won:
>
> …
>
> To stolen joys both man and woman thrill;
>
> She hides her yearnings, he dissembles ill.
>
> (Ov. *Ars* 1.*269*,275-276)

The poem celebrates illicit desires and covert behaviour that would be punishable by law. Ovid mentions his awareness of his verse's criminal risks.

> Hence, hence, ye signs of wife- and maidenhood,
>
> The ankle-covering skirt, the slender snood!
>
> Of safe intrigues and lawful thefts I rhyme,
>
> Nor can my song be charged with any crime.
>
> (Ov. *Ars* 1.31-34)

Reference to the legally enforced clothing and the use of the term 'crime' shows his awareness of the law's provisions.[30] In *Ars Amatoria*, Ovid repeatedly registers the strife between the subject matter of his verses and the legislation. "No law prescribes one bed for you to share, / Love plays the part of law in your affair" (Ov. *Ars* 2.157-158). The reference to Augustan moral laws is quite apparent. At the same time, Ovid subtly comments on how morality is perceived in Roman society and the prevailing moral attitudes of the Roman elite rather than openly opposing the legislation: "What's safe when name-debauchers are at large / To make the world believe a baseless charge?" (Ov. *Ars* 2.637-638). A genuinely moralizing tone does not fit the theme of

[30] Peter J. Davis, *Ovid and Augustus: A Political Reading of Ovid's Erotic Poems* (London: Duckworth, 2006), 86.

Ars Amatoria; thus, these verses should be interpreted as a critique of the moral values presiding among the Roman elite. Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* does not yield an act of disobedience but rather a reflection of the prevailing elite culture, displaying the reality of the moral scene rather than resisting the laws.

Before *Ars Amatoria*, Ovid had already used his poetry to display the contemporary moral values of the elite Roman society in *Amores*. In 3.4, he makes fun of the jealous husband "A man's a country-bumpkin if he's hurt by / Adultery. He doesn't know the form / At Rome …" (Ov. *Am*. 3.4.37-39). According to Ovid, civilized Roman society would find such a response sadly unsophisticated. However, as Ovid remarks in *Tristia*, a series of poetry books he wrote after his exile to Tomis in AD 8, his poetry was the cause of his exile, and "carmen et error / ruined [him]" (Ov. *Tr*. 2.207-208). According to Ovid, the "carmen" is *Ars Amatoria*: "Poetry made Caesar condemn me, and my ways, / through my *Ars Amatoria*: only now is it banned" (Ov. *Tr*. 2.7-8). Ovid does not specify the political error in his writings but asks for forgiveness. According to Syme, Ovid was linked to scandalous behaviour involving the imperial family—adultery, treason, or even a mockery of Augustus and Livia. Most theories connect his exile to Julia's scandal. His *error* was known but unspoken; he could only plead innocence and folly. Augustus, however, also cited the *Ars Amatoria*, reinforcing the case against him.[31] The ten years between the publication of Ovid's book and his exile support such an argument.

Before his exile, Ovid was aware that his tone was not consistent with the new age announced in the 17 BC Secular Games. His books were banned from public libraries under the control of Augustus.[32] Ovid responded to the changing political climate, triggered by various deaths, marriages, and adoptions in the Julian family that were closely related to succession, by turning to epic. In *Metamorphoses*, his largest undertaking and only major composition in the dactylic hexameter, which is used in archetypal Greek epics, Ovid praises Augustus to the highest degree. At the end of Book 15, Augustus is foretold to ascend to the heavens in his promised deification (Ov. *Met*. 15.868-870). Moreover, Ovid remarks that he supports Augustus' moral legislation:

> When peace had come to the earth, he will turn his mind to the duties
> and rights of his people at home. Most just as a giver of the laws,

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[31] Syme, *History in Ovid*, 216-222.
[32] White, 153.

> he will guide men's ways by his own example. His eye for the future,
> for all his descendants to come, will lead him to order the holy
> Livia's son to adopt his name with the cares of his office.
>
> (Ov. *Met*. 15.832-836).

His poetics begin suiting the moral climate of Augustan Rome. Similarly, in the first book of *Fasti*, which he opens with a dedication to Germanicus, Ovid praises Augustus, remarking that "no man had achieved so great a name" (Ov. *Fasti* 1.592). In Book 2, Ovid depicts Augustus as the restorer of religious traditions and protector of morality: "You snatch wives; this man bids them be chaste under his leadership" (Ov. *Fasti* 2.139). Besides praising Augustus, Ovid gives the message that he is a changed man. At the beginning of the fourth book, Venus reproaches Ovid for abandoning erotic elegy. "In my early years I played without offence at what was proper," Ovid remarks to Venus, adding his determination to change: "now a greater space is trodden by my horses" (Ov. *Fasti* 4.9-11). However, both *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti* kept on commenting on Augustan ideology in subtle ways. Gareth Williams argues that the diversity of characters in *Metamorphoses* was a counter-reaction to the ideological shaping of character under Augustus.[33] Moreover, Ovid presents several cases of punished outspokenness, such as the story of Myrrha, who fell in love with his father, King Cinyras, and turned into a myrrh tree by Aphrodite as a result of her bluntness, drawing attention to the value of ambiguity and subtlety (Ov. *Met*. 10.309-502). More significantly, the central theme of *Metamorphoses* is transformation. Ovid might be deifying Augustus, but he reminds the emperor that everything and everybody changes --neither his name nor his empire is guaranteed to last forever. What endures, however, is the poem itself: "Now I have finished my work, which nothing can ever destroy-- / not Jupiter's wrath, nor fire or sword, nor devouring time" (Ov. *Met*. 871-872). Ovid subtly suggests that his poetry, rather than Augustus' reign, will achieve true immortality.

Latin love elegy reaches its climax at the same time as Augustus introduces his moral legislation. This is no coincidence.[34] As Augustus sought to regulate morality and shape societal values in Rome, Augustan literature provided a space for discussing, critiquing, and reinterpreting those ideals. However, it was not a place of resistance. Augustan poets responded

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[33] Gareth D. Williams, *On Ovid's Metamorphoses* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2023),15-16.

[34] Ioannis Ziogas, *Law and Love in Ovid: Courting Justice in the Age of Augustus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 2. On the other hand, Syme argued that the Augustan code had a significant influence on poetry, helping to explain why love elegy more or less ceased with Ovid --Syme, *History in Ovid*, 204.

to his efforts by reflecting the established moral order of the Roman elite, utilizing the themes of love, desire, and loss of Roman elegy. However, their efforts never reached the level of conscious disobedience or active resistance. They tailored their works to fit the political climate of Rome, which evolved alongside Augustus' growing power. Enjoying a peaceful era compared to Horace and Propertius, who retained the memories of civil war, Ovid produced more libertine works, defying moral expectations. Nevertheless, his reactions were embedded in words, awaiting interpretation and wit to be apprehended. The effects of Augustan poets' works could not outweigh Julia's scandalous actions, which offered a more overt critique of Augustus' legislation.

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