

PROPERTIUS 4.10 AND THE END OF THE
AENEID: AUGUSTUS, THE *SPOLIA OPIMA*
AND THE RIGHT TO REMAIN SILENT¹

By JENNIFER INGLEHEART

The tenth poem of Propertius Book 4 is the most remarkable in a collection full of surprises for its readers, and appears to mark a significant departure from his previous work. If Propertius had never written his final book of poetry, we might characterize him on the basis of his earlier books as the quintessential Latin love elegist: he rejects not only a military career, but even the less demanding task of celebrating Augustus' victories, in favour of the love elegist's self-indulgent life of leisure: cf. e.g. Prop. 2.1.39–46. In the first poem of Book 4, however, Propertius announces what appears to be a wholly different poetic programme; in place of the erotic elegies of the previous books is a new 'serious' purpose: Propertius will sing about national, religious and antiquarian themes, as the 'Roman Callimachus' (Propertius 4.1a.63–4). However, as soon as the next poem,² Propertius is commanded to return to his usual theme of obsessive elegiac love for one woman, a topic described as *haec tua castra* ('this is your sphere of operations', 4.1b.135). The poems which follow in Propertius 4 tend to strike a balance between antiquarian seriousness and elegiac frivolity. For example, in 4.4, Propertius relates the Vestal Virgin Tarpeia's betrayal of Rome, connecting several contemporary urban landmarks with the poem's heroine, but he remains true to his earlier colours by presenting Tarpeia as an elegiac lover who falls in love at first sight and betrays her city out of passion.³ In 4.10, however, Propertius seems to live up to his grand task: in this short

¹ Earlier versions of this paper have been delivered to audiences at the Universities of Oxford and Leiden, and at the local branch of the Classical Association at the University of Durham between April 2004 and May 2005. My thanks are due to those present who made useful and stimulating suggestions; in particular, Joan Booth, Peter Heslin, David Hunt, Luke Pitcher, Clemence Schultze and Claudia Strobel. My greatest debt of thanks is to Stephen Heyworth (in particular for the opportunity to consult his forthcoming OCT text, translation and commentary on Propertius 4). All translations in this article are my own.

² Or, on some editors' division of the text, in the same poem. I prefer to read 4.1b as a distinct production.

³ Cf. Prop. 1.1, where sight plays a prominent role in making Propertius fall in love, and thereafter reject patriotic endeavour.

elegy, Propertius explains the origin of the ancient cult title Jupiter 'Feretrius'. He relates the three occasions in Roman history on which the Roman commander-in-chief had won the right to dedicate the *spolia opima*, Rome's highest military honour, by slaughtering his enemy counterpart in single combat. At the end of the poem, Propertius offers two etymologies for Feretrius which connect it with the *spolia opima*; spoils which were, after their capture, dedicated to Jupiter Feretrius, and placed in his temple.

Comparatively little has been written about Propertius 4.10. Propertian scholars seem to find it uncongenial; it is hardly typical of the poet, given its aspirations to generic grandeur, focus on military minutiae and the gory reality of Roman warfare, and what is seen as its dry, antiquarian subject-matter.⁴ S. J. Harrison provides a good antidote to this last complaint: he persuasively argues that Propertius 4.10 is far from antiquarian, but that it is rather intensely engaged with contemporary concerns.⁵ Scholars usually date the publication of Propertius 4 to some time after 16 BC.⁶ Over a decade previously, the *spolia opima* had become a live political issue: in 29 BC, Marcus Licinius Crassus, the grandson of the famous triumvir, had claimed the right to dedicate the *spolia opima*, after killing Deldo, the king of the Bastarnae, in single combat.⁷ Augustus had disputed Crassus' claim on a religious and legal technicality, arguing that Crassus was ineligible for the honour given that Augustus himself was the commander-in-chief of the Roman forces, because only he had the authority to take the auspices upon which the success of each and every battle depended.⁸ This would be rather like Roy Keane going

⁴ For a negative assessment of the poem, cf. e.g. L. Richardson, *Propertius. Elegies I-IV* (Norman, OK, 1976), 476: 'Propertius describes his undertaking as "magnum iter" (3), the explanation of the cult of Jupiter Feretrius, but he seems soon to tire of it; each successive story is told in shorter space and with less color. The announcement of his subject in the first two couplets and the beginning of the Romulus story is lofty and organ-voiced; the conclusion is prosaic and obvious; it almost limps to a halt.' Symptomatic of the neglect into which 4.10 has fallen is the fact that it is allotted merely a long note (which is however useful on the subversive aspect of the poem, and cites other recent scholarship) in Janan's recent monograph on Prop. 4: cf. M. Janan, *The Politics of Desire. Propertius IV* (London, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2001), 197-8, n. 13. Since completing this paper, I have come across a treatment of 4.10 that reaches some similar conclusions to the independent arguments I make, in Tara S. Welch's *The Elegiac Cityscape. Propertius and the Meaning of Roman Monuments* (Columbus, 2005), 133-65.

⁵ S. J. Harrison, 'Augustus, the Poets, and the *spolia opima*', *CQ* 39 (1989), 408-14.

⁶ See W. A. Camps, *Propertius. Elegies. Book IV* (Cambridge, 1965), 1.

⁷ Cf. H. I. Flower, 'The Tradition of the *Spolia Opima*: M. Claudius Marcellus and Augustus', *Cl. Ant.* 19.1 (2000), 57-8, for the prominent place occupied by a statue of Romulus with the *spolia opima* in the Forum Augustum.

⁸ Cf. the way in which triumphs become the preserve of the imperial family and Augustus in particular in his principate: J. M. Carter, *Suetonius: Divus Augustus* (Bristol, 1982) on Suet. *Aug.* 38.1; G. K. Galinsky, 'The Triumph Theme in the Augustan Elegy', *WS* 3 (1969), 77; and R. Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford, 1939), 404.

up to collect the FA Cup after scoring the match-winning penalty for Manchester United, only for Malcolm Glazer to step in and prevent his captain from laying claim to the trophy; as owner of the team, he has the ultimate right to it.⁹ Harrison further argues that support for the Augustan line on the *spolia opima* can also be inferred from references found in Virgil's *Aeneid*, published only a few years before Propertius 4.10.¹⁰

My discussion offers a close reading of Propertius 4.10 which differs somewhat from the assessments of scholars such as Harrison (n. 5). I suggest that this poem takes its status as Roman martial poetry far from seriously; I propose that it is therefore much closer to the other poems found in Propertius 4. Harrison should be commended for providing a salutary reminder of the contemporary aspect of this poem; however, I read the political affiliations of the poem rather differently, suggesting that the poem serves to undermine the position of the princeps rather than endorsing Augustus' claims to military supremacy. The interpretation of the political standpoint of 4.10 is open to debate; but my reading of the poem as subversive rather than supportive of Augustus fits better with Propertius' previous disengagement from the Augustan regime, as expressed in poems such as 2.7, in which Propertius refuses to beget sons to die for Augustus' imperial mission, or 4.6, where Propertius neatly sidesteps a description of the future Augustus' victory at the battle of Actium with *bella satis cecini* ('I have sung enough of wars', 4.6.69). In the second part of this article, I consider the treatment of the *spolia opima* in the *Aeneid*. The interpretation of political material in the *Aeneid* is of course vexed and hotly debated;¹¹ nevertheless, I argue that both Propertius' approach to the issue of the *spolia opima* and one of the major devices in the treatment of the spoils in 4.10 could be seen to derive at least in part from Virgil;¹² a case perhaps of Propertius reading the *Aeneid* as subversive of the Augustan line, rather than of subversion within the *Aeneid* itself.

⁹ Apologies for this analogy to those readers who are not British; I here attempt to follow Propertius in making topical reference to national concerns.

¹⁰ On Virgil and the spoils, see Harrison (n. 5), 412–14.

¹¹ See e.g. S. J. Harrison, *Oxford Readings in Vergil's Aeneid* (Oxford, 1990), 1–20 for an overview. For 'pessimistic' readings of the *Aen.*, cf. e.g. M. A. Parry, 'The Two Voices of Virgil's *Aeneid*', *Arion* 2 (1963), 66–80 and M. J. Putnam, *The Poetry of the Aeneid. Four Studies in Imaginative Unity and Design* (Cambridge, MA, 1965); for 'optimistic' readings, cf. e.g. P. R. Hardie, *Virgil's Aeneid. Cosmos and Imperium* (Oxford, 1986); and G. K. Galinsky, *Augustan Culture* (Princeton, 1996).

¹² The move towards silence: see below.

Let us turn now to 4.10 itself. The poem opens thus:

*Nunc Iouis incipiam causas aperire Feretri
armaque de ducibus trina recepta tribus.
magnum iter ascendo, sed dat mihi gloria vires:
non iuuat e facili lecta corona iugo. (4.10.1–4)*

Now I shall begin to reveal the origins of Feretrian Jove
and arms, three sets, received from three leaders.
It is a great path I ascend, but glory gives me strength:
a crown picked from an easy height is not pleasing.

Harrison reads Propertius' repetition in the second line of three (*trina, tribus*; picked up in the penultimate couplet by *tria*, 45) as an implicit, prominently placed statement of political allegiance, lending support to Augustus' refusal to allow Crassus to become the fourth Roman general to dedicate the spoils.¹³ The matter is settled, according to Harrison's interpretation of 4.10; there have been only three winners of the spoils. However, given that the controversy over the award of the *spolia opima* in 29 BC was fraught with the potential for embarrassment to Augustus, it might have been more tactful for Propertius to avoid the topic, in the light of his previous refusal to sing of Augustus' military success.¹⁴

Furthermore, I detect a sly allusion to Augustus' role in the Crassus debacle of 29 BC in these opening lines. The word order and combination of the supreme king of the gods with poetic beginnings (*Nunc Iouis incipiam*)¹⁵ evokes, among other texts, the opening of Theocritus' *Encomium of Ptolemy* (*Idyll 17*):¹⁶

*Ἐκ Διὸς ἀρχώμεσθα καὶ ἐς Δία λήγετε Μοῖσαι,
ἀθανάτων τὸν ἄριστον, ἐπὴν αἰείδωμεν αἰοδαῖς·
ἀνδρῶν δ' αὖ Πτολεμαῖος ἐνὶ πρώτοισι λεγέσθω
καὶ πύματος καὶ μέσος· ὁ γὰρ προφερέστατος ἀνδρῶν.*

(*Id.* 17.1–4)

¹³ Harrison (n. 5), 411.

¹⁴ Cf. Ovid's emphasis in *Tristia* 2 upon recent episodes of Roman history which might have been embarrassing to the princeps: see T. Wiedemann, 'The Political Background to Ovid's *Tristia* 2', *CQ* 25 (1975), 264–71.

¹⁵ Both poems have as their second word the name of the supreme deity in the genitive, followed by a verb meaning 'begin'.

¹⁶ The same three words also open Aratus' *Phaenomena*, which continues, with nice irony if read in the light of Prop. 4.10: τὸν οὐδέποτε ἄνδρες ἐώμεν/ ἄρρητον ('we mortal men never leave him *unnamed*').

From Zeus let us begin and with Zeus you should cease, Muses,
 the best of the immortals, whenever we sing in songs.
 But, again, of men let Ptolemy be named among the foremost
 and last and in the middle; for he is pre-eminent among men.

What are we to make of the allusion to a poem which presents the move from praise of the supreme god to flattery of his human counterpart, Ptolemy Philadelphus, as natural? Does it set 4.10 up as an implicit encomium of Augustus, first among men in Propertius' own day, and frequently associated with the king of the gods in Augustan poetry, cult and visual arts?¹⁷ If we read the allusion in this way, the praise of Augustus seems compromised, given that Augustus' connection with the *spolia opima* is hardly a suitable topic for court poetry. Or should we read 4.10 as renegeing on the implicit promise of Propertius' opening words that he will follow Theocritus in writing a poem in praise of the contemporary 'first among men'? Propertius would thereby hint that he might write praise of Augustus, but cannot do so in this poem; were he to move from the supreme god to the supreme human leader, he would be faced only with an embarrassing situation which did not reflect well upon Augustus, who ensures his pre-eminence among men by refusing to allow honours to anyone but himself. However we choose to read the allusion to Theocritus, it at least ensures the princeps a palpable presence in the poem where previous critics have detected only his absence; other allusions to Augustus are noted below.

To return to the opening of Propertius' poem, the first four lines announce an explicit set of poetic ambitions and allegiances. The opening line's *causas* is the closest that Latin can get to the Greek *ἀρχαία*, the title of Callimachus' ambitious poem about origins. By this allusion to Callimachus' elegiac work in four books, Propertius appears to live up to his earlier claim that he is the Roman Callimachus. Given Propertius' declared Callimachean affiliations, it

¹⁷ For the association of the two in Propertius, cf. perhaps 2.7.4–5 (*non queat inuitos Iuppiter ipse duos. / 'at magnus Caesar.' sed magnus Caesar in armis*, 'Jupiter himself is not able [to part] two against their will. / "But Caesar is great." But Caesar is great in arms'), 3.4.6 (*assuescunt Latio Partha tropaea Ioui*, 'Parthian trophies become accustomed to Roman Jove'), 3.9.47 (to Maecenas: *te duce uel Iouis arma canam* [. . .], 'with you as leader I shall sing even the arms of Jove'), 4.6.13–15 (*Caesaris in nomen ducuntur carmina: Caesar / dum canitur, quaeso, Iuppiter, ipse uaces*, 'Songs are spun in honour of Caesar; Caesar / being the poetic theme, I beg your attention, Jupiter'). Elsewhere, the equation is clear at e.g. Virgil, *Ecl.* 1.6ff.; Hor. *Carm.* 1.12.50 with R. G. M. Nisbet and M. Hubbard, *A Commentary on Horace: Odes 1* (Oxford, 1970) *ad loc.*, 3.5.1–3, *Epist.* 1.16.27–9; Ovid, *Met.* 1.204–5, 15.850ff. (especially 858–60), *Fast.* 1.608, 2.130–2, *Tr.* 2.33ff.; J. R. Fears, 'The Cult of Jupiter and Roman Imperial Ideology', *ANRW* II.17.1 (1981), 3–141; and P. Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor, 1988), 230ff.

is to say the least unexpected that Propertius also seems to take on the task of the epic, martial poet:¹⁸ *arma*, the opening word of the second line, and the other theme of this poem, establishes Propertius' epic pretensions, recalling the martial concerns and the opening word – and hence alternative title – of the *Aeneid*.¹⁹ However, the position of *arma* at the start of the elegiac pentameter rather than the epic hexameter suggests that the treatment of the *arma* may be elegiac rather than epic²⁰ – Propertius can write about *arma* and still claim to be following his elegiac predecessor Callimachus²¹ – and also reveals Propertius' interest in the 'incipits' of poems. The 'incipit' here is suggestive: the poem purports to delve deep into Rome's historical past in its quest for the origins of Feretrian Jove, but Propertius implies the contemporary relevance of his discussion of the *spolia opima* as early as the poem's first word: *nunc*.

In keeping with the poem's aetiological and epic aspirations, Propertius characterizes his poem in lines 3–4 as more elevated than his previous output: *ascendo* refers to his generic ascent, and *magnum* provides a striking contrast with elegy's usual self-presentation as small or slight. However, the grandeur is undercut if we read *ascendo* literally, as a reference to Propertius' physical ascent to the Temple of Jupiter Feretrius, perched on the summit of the Capitoline hill.²² The image of the potentially (physically and generically) unfit poet toiling up the hill, spurred on by hope of glory, is faintly comical.²³

¹⁸ Cf. the complaints of the Telchines at the start of the *Aetia* that Callimachus has not produced *ἐν ἄεισμα διηκεῖς ἢ βασιλ[η/.....]ας ἐν πολλαῖς ... χιλιάσιν/*]ους ἥρωας ('one continuous song on kings or heroes in thousands of lines', *Aetia* 1.3–5 Pfeiffer); the subject matter of heroes and kings is famously rendered as *reges et proelia* ('kings and battles') by Virgil in Callimachean mode at *Ecl.* 6.3.

¹⁹ For a poem's 'incipit' as its title, see e.g. E. J. Kenney, 'That Incomparable Poem the "Ille Ego"', *CR* 20 (1970), 290.

²⁰ Cf. the beginning of another Propertian pentameter (*bella canam*, 'I shall sing wars', Prop. 2.10.8); there, after a nod to the idea that Propertius might sing of Augustan battles, the promise is revoked as the poet returns to his usual erotic themes; cf. the similarly deceptive opening of Ovid, *Am.* 1.1.1 (where *arma* is the 'incipit').

²¹ Indeed, the *Aetia* at least touches on the exploits of kings and heroes: e.g. *Aetia* 1.7.19ff. (the Argonauts' return), 1.22–3 (Heracles and the sacrifice at Lindus), 2.44–7 (the king Phalaris, killed by Heracles), 4.110 (Ptolemy III's departure for war).

²² *iugo* (4.10.4) may increase the sense that Propertius has to work hard physically here. For Propertius' active participation in religion, see perhaps 4.6, where Prop. seems to be literally present at a religious ceremony.

²³ Cf. Prop. 2.10.5–6, where Propertius looks forward to singing the praises of Augustus' military success; there we find *laus* (cf. *gloria* here) connected with *uires*, and a similar undercutting of the poet's grand aspirations with the statement that it is enough to have wished to sing of such things, which anticipates the *recusatio* of Propertius' declared theme that follows.

A similar sense of bathos can be read into the grand aspirations of the fourth line, where Propertius recalls the pleasure found in novel poetic achievement expressed at Lucretius *De rerum natura* 1.927–30:

[. . .] *iuuat* integros accedere fontis
 atque *haurire*, *iuuatque* novos decerpere flores
 insignemque meo capiti petere inde *coronam*
 unde prius nulli uelarint tempora Musae [. . .]. (Lucret. 1.927–30)

It is pleasing to approach virgin springs
 and *drain* them, and *pleasing* to pluck new flowers
 and to seek an illustrious *crown* for my head from there,
 whence the Muses have never before covered the temples of another [. . .].

Revisiting both Lucretius' language and imagery, Propertius elevates his own elegies by association with Lucretius' didactic epic.²⁴ On further consideration, however, the Lucretian parallel might make the reader of Propertius' fourth book pause. Although Propertius 'borrows' the second Lucretian image of the poet's pleasure in gaining a crown by his efforts,²⁵ he makes nothing here of Lucretius' first metaphor for poetry as the draining of virgin springs. However, the previous poem in the collection, 4.9, relates 'what Hercules did next' after killing the monster Cacus, an achievement that had previously been related at length in *Aeneid* 8. Propertius treats this epic feat of heroism with elegiac lightness of touch, revealing that Hercules, thirsty after his exertions, broke into the shrine of the Bona Dea, and drained its waters, which were reserved exclusively for the goddess' virgin devotees: at 59ff., the priestess of the Bona Dea unsuccessfully tries to warn Hercules away from the spring:

²⁴ Propertius perhaps signals the allusion to Lucretius with *lecta* (4.10.4), which can mean 'having been read' as well as 'having been picked'. For this pun in Propertius, see e.g. 4.11.14 (the dead Cornelia says: *en sum, quod digitis quinque legatur, onus*, 'look, I am a burden which can be gathered with five fingers'), where *digitis quinque* in the *pentameter* seems to guarantee a reference to reading poetry. See also e.g. Ovid, *Met.* 5.394 (*Proserpina aequales certat superare legendo*, 'Proserpina strives to beat her equals at picking'), where there may be a self-reflexive reference to Ovid surpassing his fellow-poets in his reading, given that this passage alludes to earlier representations of flower-picking in literature.

²⁵ The allusion to Lucretius 1 is complex: the reference at Prop. 4.10.4 to a poetic *corona* looks back to 4.1a.61 (*Ennius hirsuta cingat sua dicta corona*, 'Let Ennius surround his words with a shaggy crown'), which is itself an allusion to an earlier Lucretian reference to Ennius' poetic crown, Lucret. 1.117–18 (*Ennius ut noster cecinit, qui primus amoeno / detulit ex Helicone perenni fronde coronam*, 'As our Ennius sang, who first from lovely / Helicon brought down a crown with ever-lasting foliage'). In addition, Prop.'s reference to gaining a poetic crown and glory from his task seems to assimilate him to those who gain the *spolia opima*: Polybius 6.54.3–4 records how young Romans are inspired to endure suffering for the sake of glory, even volunteering for single combat with this end in view; *lego* is found of gaining spoils (examples at *TLL* 7.2.1124.23ff.); and the *corona* recalls the crown worn by triumphing Roman generals (cf. *TLL* 4.981.70ff.).

*di tibi dent alios fontes: haec lympa puellis
auiā secreti limitis unda fluit.*

[.]
at postquam exhausto iam flumine uicerat aestum. (4.9.59–60, 63)

May the gods grant you other springs: this water
flows for maidens as a pathless stream of exclusive passage

[.]
But after he had conquered the heat with the stream now *drained*

Given the comically literal treatment meted out in the previous poem to Lucretius' image of poetry as the draining of untouched springs, Propertius may hint that his generic aspirations may be less than serious here too.

However, when Propertius relates the victories of Romulus, Cossus and Marcus Claudius Marcellus, he appears to celebrate Roman military success, and hence the values of epic rather than elegiac poetry. In fact, as I shall demonstrate, Propertius displays squeamishness about relating feats of arms and maintains an ironic detachment from the military values of Augustan Rome. He thereby remains true to his previous guise as a love elegist for whom the slogan 'make love not war' might have been invented.

After the four-line introduction, Propertius relates the victory of Rome's founder in the Italian wars. The first occasion on which the *spolia opima* were gained is presented not as a foregone conclusion which provides a model for later Roman military supremacy;²⁶ it is rather a contest between equals.²⁷ Livy leaves the enemy king unnamed in his account of the battle, calling him *rex* and *dux hostium*, but in Propertius the name Acron evokes his strength via a pun on the Greek ἄκρος ('highest'); Acron, identified here and here alone as 'Herculeus',²⁸ has his own semi-divine connections to balance

²⁶ Contrast Livy 1.10.4, where Romulus disposes of the men of Caenina *leuique certamine* ('with a light struggle').

²⁷ The balance between Roman and enemy generals is already hinted at in Propertius' second line, where *armaque de ducibus trina recepta tribus* ('three sets of armour received from three generals') could refer either to the capture of the weapons from three enemy leaders or their dedication to Jupiter by three victorious Roman generals, and the parallelism of enemy and Roman *duces* is again stressed at 46, where the Roman *dux* strikes enemy *ducem*.

²⁸ As Clemence Schultze points out, Acron is also metrically equivalent to Anton (the son of Hercules). This perhaps evokes Mark Antony, the defeated enemy of the second founder of Rome, who claimed Anton as his ancestor, and stressed his links with Hercules: see e.g. Plut. *Ant.* 4; Zanker (n. 17), 44–6; R. A. Gurval, *Actium and Augustus. The Politics and Emotions of Civil War* (Ann Arbor, 1995), 92–3; and T. S. Welch, 'Masculinity and Monuments in Propertius 4.9', *AJP* 125 (2004), 65 (especially n. 15). For links between Propertius and Antony, see J. Griffin, 'Propertius and Antony', *JRS* 67 (1977), 17–26.

Romulus' future deification, alluded to at line 11;²⁹ Rome has been terrorized by Acron;³⁰ and Acron is confident enough in his abilities to attack Rome's gates and hope that he might win spoils from Romulus.³¹ Finally, Romulus' victory seems to depend upon his pious prayer to Jupiter (13–16) rather than innate Roman military superiority.³² Again, Propertius' description of the single combat is hardly what we would expect of a poem which purports to relate grand epic *arma*: it comes in line 16 in the lowly pentameter (*uouerat, et spoliū corruit ille Ioui*, 'Romulus had made a vow, and Acron fell as spoil to Jove'),³³ and focuses attention on the defeated rather than the epic victor.³⁴ This battle-description is comparable with Propertius 4.6, which treats the victory of the future emperor Augustus at the battle of Actium, the crucial 'first act' in establishing him as sole ruler of Rome. Propertius 4.6 describes in detail the layout of the opposing fleets lined up for battle, the epiphany of Apollo, Cleopatra's flight from Actium, and drunken celebrations of the victory, but the actual fighting is confined to a single laughable couplet (Prop. 4.6.55–6). Similarly, instead of focusing upon *arma* in the sense of 'feats of arms', in lines 20–2, Propertius concentrates upon the physical appearance of the *arma* which Romulus carried into battle. This recalls Tarpeia's erotic focus upon how attractive Tatius looked when dressed for war in Propertius 4.4,³⁵ undermining the epic description of Romulus' battle-dress.³⁶

²⁹ Propertius alludes to this in line 11, where Romulus is called 'Quirinus', somewhat prematurely. Cf. Ovid, *Fast.* 4.855, where Romulus' citizens are anachronistically called 'Quirites' when mourning for Remus (Ovid notes that they are *nondum facti* [. . .] *Quirites*, 'Not yet made citizens').

³⁰ As it had arguably been by Antony during the civil wars.

³¹ The enjambment makes the reversal in Acron's fortunes appear particularly rapid, but it is hardly unexpected: cf. *Aen.* 10.449ff., where Pallas hopes that he might be able to win spoils from Turnus, but ends up himself being despoiled by Turnus.

³² In Livy's account, Romulus' martial prowess is much more on display, and Romulus' address to Jupiter is made only after the battle, at the dedication of the spoils (Livy 1.10.7). In Prop. 4.10, the vow of 15, together with 16, literally provides the first example of the dedication of the *spolia opima* to Jupiter. Propertius here alludes to the Latin offering of the *primitiae* to Jupiter, as does Virgil in *Aeneid* 11.16 when he alludes to the spoils of the dead Mezentius as *primitiae*. See too Ovid *Fast.* 4.879–96, where Ovid alludes to our poem.

³³ Propertius' division of his material into epic hexameter and elegiac pentameter plays with generic convention throughout this poem: the conquering heroes Romulus and Cossus speak, fittingly, only in hexameters (15 and 35; note too that Virdomarus' very epic boasting of his descent occurs in indirect speech in another hexameter, 41).

³⁴ Cf. very obviously the end of the *Aeneid*.

³⁵ 4.4.19ff.; cf. too *Met.* 8.23ff., where Ovid draws upon Propertius 4.4 in his description of Scylla love-struck by the invading enemy general Minos.

³⁶ Note particularly the *hirsuta* plume of his helmet (20); the adjective is frequently utilized by the elegists to suggest primitive epic roughness: for which, cf. e.g. Prop. 4.1.61 and Ovid, *Tr.* 2.259 (both on Ennius). The description of how Romulus set out to battle at 17–22 also seems

Although these lines lack the graphic descriptions of severed necks and throats which close the next two sections, Romulus' victory is extremely bloody: at line 12 we read that the *spolia* which Romulus gains from Acron, who had hoped to win spoils himself, are *non sanguine sicca suo* ('soaked with his own blood'). The vocabulary in the opening lines of this passage prepares us for the bloodshed to come: *imbuis* in line 5 can mean simply 'you set/ inaugurate', but can also mean 'you stain/ wet', and is frequently used in this sense of dyeing with blood;³⁷ we might translate *plenus*, applied to Romulus' gaining of spoil in line 6, as 'glutted'; finally, I have translated *fundis* as 'you laid low' (cf. Livy 1.10.4 in his account of Romulus' victory), but the verb also has strong connotations of pouring, and here alludes to the blood poured out in Romulus' victory.³⁸ The curtailed account here of Romulus' victory, taken together with Propertius' allusion to the bloody nature of hand-to-hand combat, hints at Propertius' elegiac distaste at bloody warfare; he is far from celebrating epic *arma*. A parallel to this is Prop. 3.3, where, instructing Propertius that he should remain a poet of elegiac love (3.3.47ff.), Calliope tells the poet that he will not go *ad arma* ('to arms', 3.3.40), advises

*nil tibi sit rauco praeconia classica cornu
flare, nec Aonium tingere Marte nemus*

Let it not be your concern to blow the battle-summons on a trumpet,
nor to stain the grove of Helicon with war. (41–2)

to me to evoke Augustus and Augustan ideology: *caesi* (22) in the description of Romulus' sword-belt may allude to Augustus *Caesar*: for play elsewhere on the name of the Caesars and *caedo*, see A. Barchiesi, *The Poet and the Prince* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1997), 129 (on *Fasti* 3.709–10) and A. Michalopoulos, *Ancient Etymologies in Ovid's Metamorphoses. A Commented Lexicon* (Leeds, 2001), 46–7 (on *Met.* 15.480 and *Am.* 2.14.17ff.). Furthermore, the description of Romulus enduring the camps a *parco* [. . .] *lare* ('from a thrifty household') recalls the exhortation at Hor. *Carm.* 3.2.1ff. for the Augustan youth *angustam* [. . .] *pauperiem pati* ('endure constricting poverty') (1), pass his life in martial pursuits, and be an *eques metuendus hasta* ('formidable horseman with a spear'; picked up at Prop. 4.10 by *eques*, 19, and *cuspidem*, 7).

³⁷ Cf. e.g. Virgil, *Aen.* 7.541–2 (*sanguine bellum / imbuit*, 'gives the first blood of battle'); further examples at *TLL* 7.1.427.72ff. As Heyworth's commentary (n. 1) *ad loc.* notes, Prop. only activates this sense of *imbuo* at 12; nevertheless, its close proximity here to *palma* may suggest that Romulus stained the *palms* of his hands with Acron's blood; cf. the focus on the killing *hands* of Cossus at 37 (*di Latias iuuere manus*, 'the gods aided Roman hands'); however, the dependence of *primae* [. . .] *palmae* on *exemplum* might be a barrier to reading in this way.

³⁸ Cf. e.g. Virgil, *Aen.* 2.532 (*multo uitam cum sanguine fudit*, 'he poured out his life with copious gore'); Hor. *Epod.* 7.3–4 (*parumne campis atque Neptuno super / fusum est Latini sanguinis?*, 'or has too little Roman blood been poured out on the killing fields and at sea?'), and *TLL* 6.1.1564.22ff.

and tells him that he should not be concerned about *barbarus* [...] *Suebo perfusus sanguine Rhemus* ('the barbarian [. . .] Rhine soaked through and through with Suebian blood', 45).³⁹

Propertius' lines on Romulus also reflect badly upon Augustus' own military prowess and much-vaunted clemency: Romulus and Augustus, the first and second 'founders' of the city,⁴⁰ are closely connected in the description of Romulus at 17 (*urbis uirtutisque parens sic uincere sueuit*, 'so the father of the city and of bravery was accustomed to win'), evoking Augustus' own title of *pater patriae* and claims to *uirtus*.⁴¹ The entire line appears rich in possibilities for subversive readings *vis-à-vis* Augustus. On the most favourable interpretation of this line, Propertius identifies religious piety as the driving force behind Romulus' military successes; the positive implications for *pious* Augustus are obvious.⁴² However, Propertius' mention of Romulus' reliance on religion in gaining his victories may remind the reader that, in contemporary Rome, Augustus is such an indifferent military commander that not only has he failed to win Rome's highest military accolade himself, but he also cites religious reasons for refusing to allow anyone else to lay claim to it. Alternatively, perhaps we should refer 'so he was accustomed to win' not to Romulus' piety, but rather the bloodthirsty nature of his victories. This reading is strengthened for me by the way in which *sic* echoes line 12's *non sanguine sicca suo*, an oddly unemphatic way of saying that the spoils were wet with Acron's blood;⁴³ one explanation for the unusual expression might be that it provides a link between lines 12 and 17. Propertius thereby makes an extremely subversive point about the military victories of Romulus and Augustus: both the mythical father of Rome and his

³⁹ Cf. the opening lines of Lucan 1: at 9, Lucan talks of the civil war providing enemy nations with the spectacle of *Latium* [. . .] *cruorem* ('Roman [. . .] blood'), line 14 refers to the *ciuiles hauserunt sanguine dextrae* ('the right hands of Roman citizens which shed blood'), verses 38–9 suggest that, if this is what it takes for Nero to gain ascendancy *diros Pharsalia campos / impleat et Poeni saturentur sanguine manes* ('Let Pharsalia fill her dread plains and let the shades of the Carthaginian be saturated with blood'), and line 95 identifies the primal crime of the Romans via the image of bloodshed: *fraterno primi maduerunt sanguine muri* ('the original walls were wet with the blood of a brother').

⁴⁰ Cf. the statement at Suet. *Aug.* 7.2 that 'Romulus' was one of the names considered for Octavian before 'Augustus' ([. . .] *Munati Planci sententia, cum, quibusdam consentibus Romulum appellari oportere quasi et ipsum conditorem urbis, praeualuisset*, 'the suggestion of Munatius Plancus, with others agreeing, won the day: he ought to be called Romulus, as if he himself were the founder of the city').

⁴¹ Cf. esp. Hor. *Carm.* 3.24.27, where Augustus as the defender of morality is alluded to as *pater urbium*, itself an allusion to *pater patriae*.

⁴² For the reader of Livy or *Fasti* 3, this is an odd image of Romulus: the first founder of Rome seems much more suited to martial deeds than religious piety.

⁴³ My translation ('soaked with his own blood') obscures the oddity of the phrasing (literally 'but not dry of his own blood') in its attempt to echo the aural play in the Latin.

contemporary counterpart are accustomed to win in a welter of blood.

Furthermore, Propertius may call Romulus' piety into question by alluding in the death of his victim to that of another Acron: the Greek who at *Aeneid* 10.719ff. falls at the hands of Mezentius. Propertius takes from Virgil the description of the killer seeing his victim fighting (*hunc* [. . .] *uidet*, 'he saw him', 13, recalls *hunc ubi miscentem longe media agmina uidit*, 'he saw him from a distance causing havoc in the middle of the battle line', *Aen.* 10.721), and the bloody description of the death of Romulus' foe mirrors that of Acron in the *Aeneid*: at 10.727–8, a simile describing the death of Acron relates how the lion that represents Mezentius *lauit improba taeter⁴⁴ ora cruor* ('washes his pitiless mouth with foul gore'), and at 10.731, we read of how *Acron infractaque tela cruentat* ('bloodies the broken weapons'). The similarities between the two episodes are troubling: for Mezentius is of course most famous as the *contemptor diuum*, who despises the gods; that Romulus plays his role here subverts the description of his piety.⁴⁵

Propertius moves from legendary time to the far-distant historical past, with Cossus' victory over the Etruscan leader Tolumnius in the fifth century BC. The possible implications of *insequitur* (23) are worth exploring. On the most prosaic level, this refers to Cossus 'coming next' after Romulus in the sequence of those who won the *spolia opima*. The verb may also suggest that Cossus comes 'hot on the heels' of Romulus in martial exploits, thus bringing to the fore the competitive element to the winning of these spoils.⁴⁶ However, Phillimore's tempting conjecture *inficitur* ('is stained by') would repeat the emphasis on blood found in 5–8, and, together with *sanguine lauit* (38), frame the Cossus passage with allusions to the bloody nature of his victory. This suits a passage which expresses a typically elegiac disdain for warfare. When Propertius expresses regret at the conquest of the Etruscan city of Veii in lines 27–30, he appears to comment on the negative effects of Roman imperial dominance on her Italian neighbours.

This may recall the final poem of his first book, where Propertius had pointedly identified himself as linked with the Etruscan city of

⁴⁴ Propertius picks up on *lauit* (38).

⁴⁵ Propertius chooses to focus on a description of the *victor's* dress rather than the *victim's*; contrast *Aen.* 10.722.

⁴⁶ In this, it perhaps echoes 5, where *primae* and *palmae* evoke competition. For *insequitur* evoking competition in this way, cf. e.g. Virgil, *Aen.* 5.321 (the context is a foot-race).

Perusia, which had suffered greatly during the civil wars at the hands of the future ‘princeps’ (I give the poem in full):

*Qualis et unde genus, qui sint mihi, Tulle, Penates,
quaeris pro nostra semper amicitia.
si Perusina tibi patriae sunt nota sepulcra,
Italiae duris funera temporibus,
cum Romana suos egit discordia ciues –
sic mihi praecipue, puluis Etrusca, dolor,
tu proiecta mei perpessa es membra propinqui,
tu nullo miseri contegis ossa solo –
proxima suppositos contingens Umbria campos
me genuit terris fertilis uberibus.* (1.22)

Of what rank and origin my descent, and what my household gods may be,
you ask me, Tullus, in the name of our perpetual friendship.
If the Perusine tombs of our fatherland are known to you,
the dead when hard times were visited on Italy,
when Roman discord drove on her own citizens –
as, Etruscan dust, you are an especial source of grief to me,
who have borne the abandoned limbs of my relative,
who cover the bones of a wretched man with no soil –
its next-door neighbour Umbria, touching the plains below,
bore me, rich in fertile fields.

The convoluted nature of this geographical self-identification is a little like a socialist in modern-day Britain saying, ‘Where am I from? You know how Thatcher closed down all the steel works in Sheffield? Well, I’m from West Yorkshire, just up the road.’⁴⁷ All later Propertian references to Italian townships, particularly when they are set up in opposition to Rome, should surely be read in the light of this provocative self-identification with a specifically Italian, anti-war ethos. Here, Propertius’ grief at the fate of Veii undermines any admiration at Rome’s military success.⁴⁸

Furthermore, description of combat between Roman and enemy leaders is again elided: Cossus’ laconic declaration that war-war is better than the jaw-jaw which Tolumnius prefers (35)⁴⁹ is followed by

⁴⁷ See n. 9.

⁴⁸ There is a nice play on Virgil’s poetic career in the lines on Veii: 29 evokes the pastoral *Eclogues* (*pastoris* [. . .] *lenti* in particular looks to *Ecl.* 1.4, where the shepherd Tityrus is *lentus in umbra*; *cantat*, 30, evokes the singing of the *Ecl.*), 30 alludes to *G.* 1.493ff. (ploughing over battlefields), and the material on the warlike nature of the ancient Veii evokes the militaristic *Aen.*

⁴⁹ See S. P. Oakley, ‘Single Combat in the Roman Republic’, *CQ* 35.2 (1985), 397, for the way in which Prop. 4.10 presents the fight between Cossus and Tolumnius as a formal duel. Note how it is the enemy leaders who are overconfident in the other two vignettes (Acron hopes

a description of the leaders taking up their battle positions on the plain,⁵⁰ but we are told merely that the gods aided Latin hands (a reference to the hand-to-hand nature of the fighting that leads to the dedication of the *spolia opima*) before Propertius ‘cuts’ to the final and very bloody act of the battle (*desecta Tolumni/ ceruix Romanos sanguine lauit equos*, ‘Tolumnius’ severed/ neck bathed the Roman horses in blood’, 37–8).

Propertius provides the shortest account of Marcus Claudius Marcellus’ defeat of the Gaul Vir(i)domarus/ Britomarus in 222 BC. There is play here with a famous passage at the conclusion of *Aeneid* 6, where Aeneas in the underworld is shown his future illustrious descendants, among whom is the third winner of the *spolia opima*, described thus by Anchises:

*aspice, ut insignis spoliis Marcellus opimis
ingreditur uictorque uiros supereminet omnis.*⁵¹
*hic rem Romanam magno turbante tumultu
sistet eques,*⁵² *sternet Poenos Gallumque rebellem,*⁵³
*tertiaque arma patri suspendet capta Quirino.*⁵⁴ (Virgil, *Aen.* 6.855–9)

Look how Marcellus, distinguished by the *spolia opima*,
proceeds and, victorious, towers over all men.
He will hold fast the Roman state while a great uprising disturbs it,
on horseback, he will lay low the Carthaginians and rebellious Gaul,
and will hang up the third set of captured arms for father Romulus.

Accompanying this paragon of Roman military success is his young namesake and descendant, Augustus’ nephew and son-in-law, the famous *miserande puer* who died aged nineteen in 23 BC, after his

to win spoils from Romulus, 11, and Viridomarus boasts descent from Brennus, 41); Cossus appears the more confident here, as he issues a challenge to Tolumnius. For Roman sources presenting enemy commanders as arrogant and over-confident, cf. Oakley, 408.

⁵⁰ Propertius seems to set this up as battle between the epic Cossus and the elegiac Tolumnius, who relies on cunning rather than military prowess and prefers speech to military action (32).

⁵¹ Propertius has transferred *uictor* as a description of the dedicator of the *spolia opima* from Claudius to Romulus (8).

⁵² The Romulus and Cossus episodes in Prop. 4.10 both focus on Roman horsemanship (cf. 19 and 37); conversely, Propertius focuses on the *enemy* leader’s skill with the chariot in the Marcellus episode (42). This may be in reaction to Virgil’s description of Marcellus as *eques* here.

⁵³ Prop. 4.10.39 (*Claudius at Rheno traiectos arcuit hostes*, ‘Next Claudius repulsed the enemy who had crossed the Rhine’) is the closest Propertius gets to mentioning that Marcellus’ prize was gained during a Gallic rebellion.

⁵⁴ For the unexpected dedication to Quirinus rather than Jupiter Feretrius, cf. Harrison (n. 5), 413. Propertius avoids the issue by omitting all mention of the dedication of the spoils taken by Marcellus, and 45–8 seem to settle the matter.

adoption as Augustus' heir. Augustus' high hopes for the youth are reflected in the promise made to him at *Aeneid* 6.882–3 that, if he somehow manages to avoid his fated early death, he will be another Marcellus; that is, achieve exploits comparable with those of his illustrious predecessor.

Propertius' description of Virdomarus as *uasti . . . duci* (40) recalls Anchises' claim at *Aeneid* 6.856 that Marcus Claudius Marcellus towered over all men. Propertius' *uastus* may increase the general's stature, since he towered over even those who are described as huge, or may rather correct Anchises' testimony.⁵⁵ Marcus Claudius Marcellus was indeed a giant among men, but Virgil's *omnis* is exposed as an exaggeration, since the Roman had opponents who were physically even more impressive than him. When at 4.10.41, Propertius records Virdomarus' claim about his successful ancestor, the chieftain Brennus who had captured Rome in 390 BC, the reader might think of another man who attempts to gain for himself some of the glory of those to whom he is related: that is, Augustus himself, who perhaps hoped to gain reflected glory from Marcus Claudius Marcellus via his relationship with the young Marcellus.

The Claudius passage ends abruptly and with concentration upon bloodshed, like the Cossus passage before it, with no description of the fight itself, but what appears to be an allusion to the actual spoils taken from Virdomarus, as his torque presumably falls to Marcellus as booty at 4.10.43–4 (*illi* [i.e. Marcellus, answering *hic* of Virdomarus at 41] *uirgatas maculanti sanguine bracas / torquis ab incisa decidit unca gula*, 'To Claudius as Virdomarus stained his striped trousers with blood / the hook-ended necklace fell down from the cut throat').⁵⁶

Propertius then moves quickly to the aftermath of military victory: by line 45, the spoils are laid up in Jupiter Feretrius' temple, cleansed of disturbing associations with bloody slaughter by their new status as religious artefacts. Propertius perhaps recognizes his own role in sanitizing the *spolia opima* when he refers to them as *condita* (45): on the most literal level, these spoils are 'set (or laid) up' in a temple, but the

⁵⁵ Anchises may be biased, since Marcellus the younger will be related to him by marriage. In addition, the description of the Gaul as *uastus* may play upon a Roman sense of inferiority about their short statures relative to Gauls and Celts: see Oakley (n. 49), 407 n. 133.

⁵⁶ The details of the torque and blood seem to owe a debt to the third-century BC statue of the Dying Gaul (a Roman copy of which can be found in the Capitoline museum), which depicts a Gaul laid low, wearing a torque, and with a visible wound in his side. Propertius' focus on the barbarian and exotic torque may also owe something to the portrayal of Marcellus at Plut. *Marc.* 6.6 as having vowed the finest armour on the field to Jupiter before battle: cf. Flower (n. 7), 37.

verb frequently has connotations of literary ‘composition’:⁵⁷ famously, for example, at the beginning and end of the *Aeneid*, where the use of the verb to describe Aeneas’ foundation of the city and burying of the sword in Turnus can also be applied meta-poetically to Virgil’s own achievement in composing the poem.⁵⁸ In this poem, then, Propertius has transformed the *spolia opima* from gore-soaked tokens of military destruction into a poetic creation in a poem which celebrates beginnings rather than endings and elegiac values over epic ones.

The end of the poem returns to its beginning: *causa Feretri* (45) recalls the opening line’s *causas* [. . .] *Feretri*. We now realize that *causas* (1) was a genuine plural, since Propertius offers two alternative explanations for the name. It is significant that the poem ends on a note of doubt as to whether ‘Feretrius’ is derived from *ferire*, ‘to strike’, or *ferre*, ‘to carry’ (46–7). Although alternative explanations are characteristic of aetiological poems, such as Callimachus’ *Aetia*, or Ovid’s *Fasti*,⁵⁹ the alternative explanations at the end of this poem seem to involve more than a scholarly debate about etymology. Rather, Propertius stresses that the origins of Jupiter Feretrius’ name – and hence perhaps the award of the *spolia opima* – are open to debate.⁶⁰

A brief analysis of the structure of the poem lends support to this reading. The four-line opening and concluding sections, which deal with *causas* and proud achievement, balance each other. The passages which deal with the military exploits of Roman heroes are presented chronologically. However, we might expect Propertius to devote more time and space to the most recent events, about which more information will have been available. However, the reverse is the case: the closer Propertius gets to his own day, the less he relates about the

⁵⁷ With this meta-literary play four lines from the end of the poem, cf. the potential literary play in *lecta*, four lines in.

⁵⁸ *Aen.* 1.5 and 12.950. For *condere* in a literary sense, cf. e.g. Prop. 2.1.14 (*tum uero longas condimus Iliadas*, ‘then indeed I compose long *Iliads*’); Virgil, *Ecl.* 6.7 (*tristia condere bella*, ‘to compose grim wars’); Hor. *Epist.* 1.3.24 (*condis* [. . .] *carmen*, ‘you compose a song’); Ovid, *Tr.* 2.335–6 (*immania Caesaris acta* / *condere*, ‘to compose the outsized deeds of Augustus’) and *TLL* 4.153.74ff.

⁵⁹ Cf. e.g. Callimachus, *Aet.* 1.6 Pfeiffer or Ovid, *Fast.* 4.61–2 and 85ff.

⁶⁰ Compare the last four lines of 4.9, which also explicitly treat etymology: in this case, Hercules’ Sabine name and cult title of ‘Sancus’ (‘Sanctifier’). There is room for doubt in the explanation of how Hercules gained this title: Prop. 4.9.73–74 claims that Hercules gained this title *quoniam manibus purgatum sanxerat orbem* (‘since he had sanctified the world with his hands’), but the immediately preceding narrative hardly shows him in this heroic light, but rather as having destroyed the shrine of the Bona Dea. The misapplication of the title of ‘Sancus’ perhaps evokes the Greek version of the title ‘Augustus’ (Σεβαστός), casting into some doubt Augustus’ claims to piety and to have purified the world: cf. Heyworth’s (n. 1) suggestive comment *ad loc.*

winning of the *spolia opima*: the mythical figure Romulus gets the lion's share of the poem, eighteen lines; Cossus receives sixteen;⁶¹ and Marcus Claudius Marcellus is allotted only six lines.⁶² What significance should we attribute to Propertius' unusual focus of attention? On one level, Propertius plays up his antiquarian credentials by giving more attention to events dignified by a long pedigree. However, the structure of Propertius 4.10 also seems to carry a political punch: as time goes on, it becomes less and less possible to talk about the *spolia opima*, until we reach Propertius' own day, and it is no longer possible to talk openly on this subject, for fear of offending the princeps who is keen that the only winner of military glory in present-day Rome will be himself,⁶³ and who had associated the *spolia opima* with himself by giving them prominence in his Forum.⁶⁴ This is perhaps reflected in play between *aperire* ('reveal', 1) and *condita* ('buried', 45): Propertius promises that he is going to reveal the origins of the name, but the *spolia opima* must be buried in a temple and an ostensibly fusty antiquarian debate in order to avoid giving offence to the emperor; Propertius is not going to reveal a fourth possible claimant to the prize, as this might offend Rome's own Jupiter. Silence – or, more accurately, the end of speech – is also a concern in the opening two words of the poem which follows next in the collection, and concludes the Propertian *corpus*: *Desine, Paulle* ('Pause, Paullus', 4.11.1; compare *Paullus* with the Greek 'παύω', 'I cease').⁶⁵ By gradually saying less and less in 4.10 as he approaches the topic of *arma* and spoils in the Augustan age, and then falling silent forever as a poet after his next poem, which explicitly deals with Augustus and his house, Propertius perhaps signals his overarching distaste for Augustan Rome and its values, about which he refuses to sing further.

A similar retreat into silence is arguably detectable towards the end of the *Aeneid*, another poem of similar date which Harrison (n. 5),

⁶¹ Fourteen if we follow Heyworth's suggestion (n. 1) to delete 25–6.

⁶² Cf. Janan (n. 4), 197 n. 13, who notes the poem's 'terseness: the shortest poem in Book 4, it narrates each winning of the *spolia opima* more laconically than the last, a compression especially noticeable in the third episode.' This contributes to her interpretation of the poem as subverting its apparent 'masculinist poetics' (*loc. cit.*).

⁶³ Cf. Cass. Dio 53.19.3–4 on the change that took place in public affairs in Rome in 27 BC, and the consequent silence and concealment: cf. especially 3: ἐκ δὲ δὴ τοῦ χρόνου ἐκείνου τὰ μὲν πλείω κρύφα καὶ δι' ἀπορρήτων γίνεσθαι ἤρξατο [...], 'from that time indeed most things started to be done secretly and without being voiced'.

⁶⁴ Note that *Iouis* is juxtaposed with *superba*, which can of course carry negative connotations.

⁶⁵ For this play, see Heyworth (n. 1) *ad loc.*

413, reads as supporting the Augustan line on the *spolia opima*, pointing to *tertia* [. . .] *arma* in the description of Marcus Claudius Marcellus (*Aen.* 6.859; see above) as a denial of Marcus Licinius Crassus' claim to the honour. Harrison notes that Virgil anachronistically introduces the possibility of gaining the *spolia opima* into the heroic action of the *Aeneid* at 10.449–50, where the young Arcadian prince Pallas hopes that he might be able to aspire to this prize by defeating Turnus:⁶⁶

*'aut spoliis ego iam raptis laudabor opimis
aut leto insigni [. . .].'*

(Virgil, *Aen.* 10.449–50)

'Either I shall be praised for the *spolia opima* now snatched
or for a distinguished death [. . .].'

Harrison (p. 413), interprets this anachronism, in combination with a reference to Pallas leading troops to war *suo* [. . .] *nomine* ('under his own name', *Aen.* 8.519), as bolstering Augustus' position that only those who make war under their own auspices are eligible for the honour of the *spolia opima*. I see these lines operating in a rather different way: by mention of Pallas' opportunity either to win or – more implicitly – surrender the *spolia opima*, Virgil directs our attention to the closing of the *Aeneid*.⁶⁷ There, Aeneas kills Turnus, spurred on when he catches sight of Turnus arrayed in the spoils which he has won from Pallas:

*et iam iamque magis cunctantem flectere sermo
coeperat, infelix umero cum apparuit alto
balteus et notis fulserunt cingula bullis
Pallantis pueri, uictum quem uulnere Turnus
strauerat atque umeris inimicum insigne gerebat.*

(Virgil, *Aen.* 12.940–4)

And now more and more Turnus had begun to bend the hesitant Aeneas with his words, when there appeared high on Turnus' shoulder the fatal sword-belt and there gleamed the baldric, with its familiar studs, of the boy Pallas, whom, in his defeat, Turnus with a wound had laid low and now was sporting his hostile insignia on his shoulders.

⁶⁶ Cf. with this the vain hope of Acron – who, like Pallas, has connections with Hercules – that he might despoil the enemy commander (Prop. 4.10.11). Those with a shaky grasp of Roman history should nevertheless be able to guess that Acron will end up being despoiled himself, given Pallas' fate in the *Aeneid*.

⁶⁷ Cf. Flower (n. 7), 54–5, especially 'The final climax of the poem when Aeneas kills Turnus ... is a feat clearly synonymous with *spolia opima*' (55).

The reference here to the spoils that Turnus has stripped from Pallas should remind readers that Pallas had hoped to gain the *spolia opima* in combat with Turnus, and alert us to the fact that there is another – admittedly mythical – claimant to the *spolia opima*: Aeneas himself, who as commander-in-chief of the future Roman forces, goes on to defeat his counterpart in single combat. However, just as Propertius cannot talk about Augustus and the *spolia opima* in 4.10, so too Virgil is reluctant to talk about Augustus' ancestor earning the right to the highest Roman military prize: the *Aeneid* famously ends with a focus on the vanquished Turnus, rather than Aeneas stripping the enemy commander.⁶⁸ That Virgil omits a description of Aeneas gaining the *spolia opima* should come as no surprise to the reader who has picked up on various hints throughout this final book of the *Aeneid* that Virgil is not keen to continue with his task of writing about Augustus' ancestor.⁶⁹ I suggest that Propertius 4.10 picks up on and develops these hints, reading the end of the *Aeneid* as a pointed retreat into silence in preference to celebrating the new Augustan age.

A single passage towards the end of the book should be enough to encapsulate Virgil's reluctance to finish his epic record of Aeneas' proto-Augustan military success. In single combat with Aeneas, Turnus attempts at lines 896–914 to throw a huge rock at his enemy.⁷⁰ The opening of the passage stresses the difficulty of this wearisome task:

*uix illum lecti bis sex ceruice subirent,
qualia nunc hominum producit corpora tellus.* (Virgil, *Aen.* 12.899–900)

Scarcely could twice six picked men support the rock on their necks,
given the type of physique of the men whom earth now breeds.

⁶⁸ Contrast the defeat of Mezentius – another feat whereby Aeneas could have gained the *spolia opima* – where Aeneas *does* dedicate his rival's arms: 11.5ff. (note especially the focus on the blood dripping from the spoils at 8, and the statement at 15–16: *haec sunt spolia et de rege superbo / primitiae manibusque meis Mezentius hic est*, 'these are the spoils and the first fruits won by my hands, and this is Mezentius'; the underlined words suggest that Virgil presents this as an instance of single combat leading to the dedication of what are potentially *spolia opima*).

⁶⁹ For Augustus prodding Virgil's work on the *Aeneid*, see e.g. Donatus, *Vita Vergili* 31: *Augustus uero – nam forte expeditione Cantabrica aberat – supplicibus atque etiam minacibus per iocum litteris efflagitabat, ut sibi de Aeneide, ut ipsius uerba sunt, uel prima carminis ὑπογραφὴ uel quodlibet κῶλον mitteretur*, 'Augustus indeed – for by chance he was away on campaign in Cantabria – with prayers and even joking threats harassed him in a letter, [telling him] that there should be sent to him from the *Aeneid*, to put it in Augustus' own words, either the preliminary sketch of the poem or any portion.'

⁷⁰ The rock is *antiquum ingens* ('massive and ancient', 12.897), both of which seem to carry meta-poetic generic force here.

At first glance, this perhaps reads as the sort of remark bolstering the elevated status of heroes which is typically epic: compare, for example, *Iliad* 12.445ff., where Hector effortlessly performs feats with a rock which two of the best men from a contemporary *δῆμος* would have had difficulty even in lifting, or the rock hoisted by Diomedes which two contemporary men could not lift at *Iliad* 5.302ff. However, the number twelve seems pointed, given that we are reading the *twelfth* book of the *Aeneid*; *lecti* ('picked', but also 'read'; see earlier) and *corpora* (the 'physiques' of the men, but also the 'body' of work that comprises the *Aeneid*) also seem to hint at literary play. There is added point, then, to Virgil's description of the task; perhaps Turnus' difficulty in hoisting the rock aloft mirrors Virgil's own exhaustion at reading and writing twelve books of a huge epic, and hints that the poet, like Turnus, may not be able to complete the task he has begun. Further indications of Virgil's poetic stalling or refusal of his epic task seem to occur in the simile that expresses Turnus' inability to hurl this rock, caused by the intervention of the Dira sent by Jupiter in order to persuade Turnus' divine sister to give up her fruitless support of her brother:

*ac uelut in somnis, oculos ubi languida pressit
nocte quies, nequiquam auidos extendere cursus
uelle uidemur et in mediis conatibus aegri
succidimus; non lingua ualet, non corpore notae
sufficiunt uires nec uox aut uerba sequuntur:
sic Turno, quacumque uiam uirtute petiuit,
successum dea dira negat [. . .].*

(Virgil, *Aen.* 12.908–14)

And just as in dreams, when sluggish sleep oppresses our eyes with night, and in vain we seem to want to press forward eagerly in our running, yet, in the midst of our efforts, faint, we fall down; the tongue has no strength, our familiar powers fail our body and neither voice nor words follow on: so to Turnus, whatever courageous efforts he made to find a path, the dread goddess denied successful outcome.

This recalls the simile at *Iliad* 22.199–201 which describes the stalemate reached in Achilles' pursuit of Hector, and Lucretius' account of dream-movement at *De rerum natura* 4.453–6; however, the focus here upon speech is unusual and unparalleled in Virgil's models. Turnus' failed attempts at action have an exact point of reference within the simile: the dreamers' failed attempts to run (lines 909–11) are picked up by Turnus' doomed search for a path. When Virgil moves from the

comparison with running in dreams, it is unexpected, to say the least, to read of the failure of language, given that what Turnus is trying to do is act rather than speak.⁷¹ Yet in lines 911–12 only *non corpore notae / sufficiunt uires* concerns physical efforts, whereas *non lingua ualet* and *nec uox aut uerba sequuntur* stress speech and language. In addition, *corpore* appears to lend itself to a meta-poetic reading: that the strength of Virgil's poetic *corpus* abandons him at this point. It is tempting, then, to read these lines as a plea from Virgil to Augustus, the avid reader of the *Aeneid* who has been pressing him for further copy (see n. 69), that the poet is running out of puff, and finds himself unable to voice the sort of celebratory statements that are required in an epic concerned with Augustus' illustrious antecedents. This, I would argue, provides a good parallel with the close of Propertius 4, and offers a very different reading from Harrison's of how the poets engage with Augustus and the issue of the *spolia opima*.

⁷¹ Horace perhaps picks up on Virgil's connection of futile running in dreams with the failure of language at the close of *Carm.* 4.1, where Horace, in love with Ligurinus, reports that he is stricken with verbal paralysis (*cur facunda parum decoro / inter uerba cadit lingua silentio?*, 'Why does my eloquent tongue fall into disgraceful silence in mid-flow?', *Carm.* 4.1.35–6), before relating his futile erotic pursuit of Ligurinus in dreams (37–40).