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Causes and Cases. On the Aetiologies of Aetiological Elegies

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Abstract: The paper examines why at the beginning of Callimachus' *Aitia*, in Propertius 4.1, and more indirectly in the proem to Ovid's *Fasti* there appear literary critics (the Telchines, Horus, and Augustus), who charge the aetiological poet for the quality of his work. It points out that these charges, when translated into Greek, are *aitiai*, and that the poets' defenses, when translated into Latin, are *causae*. It argues that the function of these proems is to present the poet as the cause of his poem. It is also interested in the way Propertius and Ovid adapt Callimachus' Greek conceit to the different cultural and linguistic context of Rome.

CAUSES AND CASES

On the Aetiologies of Aetiological Elegies

Literary critics are an evil no poet can avoid. But they hound with particular relentlessness and hostility the authors of ancient aetiological elegy. Callimachus could have begun his *Aitia*, like his important model Hesiod had begun the *Theogony*, with an encounter with the Muses. But alas, before confronting the Muses later in the poem, Callimachus first has to confront a group of malicious critics, referred to as Telchines, who attack his work (fr.1.1-6 Pf.):

Πολλάκ]ι¹ μοι Τελχῖνες ἐπιτρύζουσιν ἀοιδῆ,
νήιδες οἳ Μούσης οὐκ ἐγένοντο φίλοι,

Propertius, Callimachus' first Roman successor, fares no better. No sooner does the opening poem of book IV announce its aetiological program, than a critic appears in the disguise of the astrologer Horus, and blames Propertius for the imprudence of this project. He tells the poet that his new pursuit runs counter to fate and to Apollo's poetic preferences and that he will regret it (4.1.71-4):

Quo ruis imprudens, vage, dicere fata, Properti?
non sunt a dextro condita fila colo.
accersis lacrimas cantans, aversus Apollo:
poscis ab invita verba pigenda lyra.

Only Ovid, perhaps considering his two predecessors' encounters with malicious critics a source of embarrassment, sought to avoid their presence at the beginning of his

¹ Pfeiffer prints]ι, but see now Pontani (1999).

aetiological elegy. Just as there appeared critical readers in the openings of Callimachus' *Aitia* and Propertius IV, so there appears in the *Fasti* Germanicus as a critical reader. But Germanicus is asked expressly to be, not a malicious, but a benevolent reader of Ovid's poem (1.3-4 and 19-20):

*excipe pacato, Caesar Germanice, vultu
hoc opus et timidae derige navis iter ...
pagina iudicium docti subitura movetur
principis, ut Clario missa legenda deo.*

In fact, Ovid even asks the prince to be a source of inspiration for the *Fasti*, perhaps assuming that Germanicus is unlikely to criticize a poem for which he is at least partly responsible (1.5-6 and 25-6):

*officioque levem non aversatus honorem
en tibi devoto numine dexter ades! ...
si licet et fas est, vates rege vatis habenas,
auspice te felix totus ut annus eat.*

However, the appeals for benevolence Ovid addresses to one imperial reader of his poetry cannot but remind his audience of another imperial reader and his malignant and indeed condemnatory reception of Ovid's works. In fact, even if one were to forget about Augustus in the proem to the *Fasti*, Ovid's brief lament of his exile later in the poem² recalls that he is, like his two predecessors Callimachus and Propertius, a writer of aetiological elegy who is hounded by malicious critics.

² 4.79-84: *huius erat Solymus Phrygia comes unus ab Ida, | a quo Sulmonis moenia nomen habent, | Sulmonis gelidi, patriae, Germanice, nostrae. | me miserum, Scythico quam procul illa solo est! | ergo ego tam longe – sed supprime, Musa, querelas! | non tibi sunt maesta sacra canenda lyra.*

Why is it that no ancient aetiological elegy begins without its author telling his future readers how much he and his works have been impugned by past readers? The theme of these poems cannot be the reason. Aetiological elegies contain, according to *Der Neue Pauly*, “the explanation[s], generally referring to a mythical past [...], of the *aition*, i.e. the origin, of some phenomenon affecting the present-day situation of the author and his public, whether it be an object, a city, a custom, or, as is most frequently the case, a religious ritual.”³ Neither these themes, nor the poets’ effort to write about things that matter to their audience, suggest that their poems should be prefaced by the attacks of malicious literary critics.

It is only slightly more convincing to appeal to the historical circumstances in which Callimachus, Propertius, and Ovid composed their aetiological elegies as a reason for the appearance of these critics and their attacks. To be sure, Ovid certainly *was* the subject of Augustus’ hostile reaction to his *Ars Amatoria* and had to bear its consequences. Callimachus’ works are not unlikely to have encountered a hostile reception among the notoriously quarrelsome scholars of the Alexandrian *mouseion*.⁴ And as for Propertius, ancient astrologers and fortunetellers were known for predicting something’s future from its origin,⁵ and, as for instance the first part of 4.1 as well as later the *Sibylline Oracles* show, predicting the future of Rome was a growing business.⁶ Thus it is perhaps not entirely inconceivable that Propertius encountered hostility from this

³ *DNP* I.271-2 s.v. ‘aetiology’.

⁴ E.g. *SH* 786 from Timon’s *Silloi*; see Cameron (1995), esp. ch. 8, for a recent comprehensive historical account of Callimachus’ relation with his critics, their identity, and their criticism.

⁵ E.g. Sen. *suas.* 4.2: *qui vero in media se, ut praedicant, fatorum misere pignora, natales inquirunt et primam aevi horam omnium annorum habent nuntium.*

⁶ See e.g. Momigliano (1992), 696-9, who discusses the ways in which the *Sibylline Oracles* engage with the future of the Roman Empire, and Potter (1994), esp. 98-145.

particular profession for a book of poetry that developed such a decisive vision of Rome's origins.

But even if such malicious readers are based in historical facts, it is still surprising that the authors of aetiological elegy are so eager to *report* in their works the charges leveled against them. And, even more surprisingly, both Callimachus and Propertius decide to present these charges at as conspicuous a place within their works as their very beginning. Like all ancient poets, the authors of aetiological elegy of course care that their works be well received and liked by their readers.⁷ And procuring a good reception for oneself by one's future readers is not helped by telling them up front how much one was disliked by one's past readers.

The potentially high price of alienating their audiences that the three aetiological poets are willing to pay for the presence in their poems of these critics and their charges, suggests that they also anticipate the possibility of a considerable gain from them. It suggests that these critics and their charges fulfill an important function in the three aetiological poems. This function will of course vary considerably according to the individual aetiological poems, just as the form of their appearance varies. To explain for each poem why at its beginning there appear malicious critics, is one purpose of this paper. However, this explanation, provoked as it is by literary critics, cannot but discuss too the act of criticizing literary texts itself. When discussing literary texts, critics usually

⁷ Some may regard Callimachus as an exception to this rule, as it is sometimes assumed that Callimachus was an elitist artist who wrote difficult poetry accessible only to the selected few, and hence would not have worried about alienating at least large parts of his audience. But the view that to be good art must be difficult is, as Nehamas (2007), 1-71 shows, a modern assumption rooted in Kantian aesthetics, and very alien to antiquity where poets strove for a reception as favorable as possible by an audience as large as possible. What they desired is succinctly expressed by Horace (*AP* 153-5: *tu quid ego et populus mecum desideret audi: | si plausoris eges aulaea manentis et usque | sessuri donec cantor 'vos plaudite' dicat...*). Not surprisingly, recent scholarship has ceased to believe that Callimachus' works were aimed at, or read by, only an elitist audience: see Schmitz (1999), Asper (2001).

take into account three factors: firstly, the text itself and its topic; secondly its author; and thirdly themselves, the text's audience. The paper is structured into three sections, one for each aetiological elegy, and each section focuses on one of these factors: aetiology as these elegies' topic is discussed in the section on the *Aitia*, the role of the audience in the section on Propertius IV, and the role of the author in the section on the *Fasti*. My focus will be on the two Roman poets, but to understand the ways in which they employ the trope it is necessary to begin by discussing briefly how it is employed by Callimachus, as it were the Greek *protos heurètes* of the genre of aetiological elegy.

I. Callimachus

It appears that there is no good reason why Callimachus placed the Telchines' charges against his poetry and his defense against them at the beginning of the *Aitia* and not of any of his other works. First, in their attack against Callimachus as reported by the poet, the Telchines do not once refer specifically to the *Aitia*, but accuse the poet in quite general terms of not being able to complete a unified and continuous poem (fr. 1.3-4 Pf.):

εἴνεκεν οὐχ ἔν ἀεισμα διηνεκὲς ἢ βασιλ[η
]αὶ ἐν πολλαῖς ἤνυσα χιλιάσι

Second, Callimachus' response to the Telchines is not a defense of the *Aitia* only, but of a style of writing that he says he had adopted upon Apollo's advice when he first began to compose poetry, and that hence is characteristic of his entire oeuvre (fr. 1.21-2):

καὶ γὰρ ὅτε πρῶτιστον ἔμοῖς ἐπὶ δέλτον ἔθηκα
 γούνασιν, Ἀπόλλων εἶπεν ὁ μοι Λύκιος·

Moreover, there is in fact good reason to believe that the prologue is particularly ill-placed at the beginning of the *Aitia* in particular. Whether the *Aitia* consisted of the two books of its first publication, or of the four books of its final version, the poem was in either case a poem of several thousand lines. Yet despite being about to present a work of this length, Callimachus insists in the prologue to the *Aitia* on the necessity to write slender poems of a few lines only (fr. 1.9-12):

.....]... ρηην [ὀλ]ιγόστιχος· ἀλλὰ κατέλκει
 πολὺ τὴν μακρὴν ὄμπνια Θεσμοφόρο[ς
 τοῖν δὲ] δυοῖν Μίμνερος ὅτι γλυκύς, αἰ κατὰ λεπτόν
 ῥήσιες, ἢ μεγάλη δ' οὐκ ἐδίδαξε γυνή

This is confusing at best and inappropriate at worst, and has indeed created a fair amount of confusion among modern readers eager to match the prologue's precepts with the actual poem.⁸

Given this apparent mismatch of prologue and poem, it is no surprise that for the most part modern readers have been interested not so much in the prologue's function for the poem as a whole, but read it as historical testimony for Callimachus' aesthetics and his position in contemporary aesthetic debates.⁹ In fact, at a time when more recent

⁸ The question is usually solved with reference to the fact that in truth the *Aitia*, especially in its second half, consists of several shorter poems (see e.g. Hutchinson (1988), 81); and it must be noted that soon Callimachus shifts emphasis from questions of length to questions of style (Hunter (2004, 69-70). Still, novice readers of a four-book poem will be surprised when they find that poem advertised as brief.

⁹ The bibliography here is extensive, and can be traced with the help of Benedetto (1993). See especially Brink (1963), 71: "‘Short poems’ and ‘long poems’ were, after all, the battle cries of the two opposing factions in the tussles of the coteries. Callimachus' own position as the leader of a school advocating the highly-wrought short poem is too well known to require documentation;" cf. too Smotrytsch (1963) and Lohse (1973). Recently, the focus has shifted somewhat: Schmitz (1999) and Asper (1997) and (2001)

papyrus finds had not yet confirmed that the prologue must have been part of the *Aitia*, no less knowledgeable a critic of Hellenistic poetry than Paul Maas suggested that the text be regarded as an independent poem and not part of the *Aitia*.¹⁰

Yet, it is possible to explain why the *Aitia* begins the way it does under two conditions. First, the form in which the title of the poem now cited as *Aitia* appeared to an ancient reader must be taken into consideration. Second, and more importantly, one must understand some peculiar aspects of the way the ancients conceptualized what a cause is, which are reflected in the semantic range of the *Aitia*'s ancient title.

In ancient Greek libraries, whose conventions Callimachus knew well and indeed had shaped,¹¹ readers encountered the title of a book first on a little tag attached to the roll, known as a *sillybos*, on which the roll's content was identified.¹² No *sillybos* is extant on which a roll of a work that consisted of more than one book is identified; but no doubt works consisting of multiple books were identified on these tags in the same way they were identified in the customary subscription at the end of the work, namely with the book number plus the title in the genitive. One papyrus, in fact, preserves the title of the *Aitia* in precisely that form, with the genitive ΑΙΤΙΩΝ replacing the nominative ΑΙΤΙΑ as we know the title today (fr. 112-10 Pf.):

ΚΑΛΛΙΜΑΧΟΥ [ΑΙΤΙ]ΩΝ Δ

discuss the prologue's metaphors and their rhetorical function; and Acosta-Hughes/Stephens (2002) focus on its intertextuality. Yet the question why the *Aitia* begins with this prologue, and the extent to which the prologue engages aetiology, the poem's main theme, has barely been raised.

¹⁰ Maas (1928), 129.

¹¹ See Blum (1977), 169-244.

¹² For these *sillyboi* see Dorandi (1984). For a good reproduction, see Sider (2005), fig. 32.

And now one must consider the semantic range of this title as it appeared to an ancient reader. Obviously, one can identify the letters ΑΙΤΙΩΝ not only as the genitive plural of the neuter αἴτιον, as modern readers of the poem normally do. They can also be traced back to a number of other nominatives. First, in the absence of any accents that indicate stress, they could be derived from the noun ἡ αἰτία. Secondly, if taken as an adjective, they could be derived from the masculine form of αἴτιος as easily as from its neuter form. The semantic scope of the noun αἰτία, as well as of the masculine adjective αἴτιος, extends into an area that in the Greek language is rarely covered by the neuter τὸ αἴτιον (especially when used as a substantive), but that was crucial for the Greek conceptualization of causation. Unlike many modern philosophers, the Greeks did not distinguish sharply between objective and subjective causation, and intentionality and ethical considerations were a key component of any Greek discussion of causality.¹³ This emerges best in the vocabulary the Greek language uses for causation. Both αἰτία and αἴτιος are most frequently used to indicate moral and legal responsibility. αἰτία, for instance, means ‘cause’, but is much more frequently translated as ‘blame’.¹⁴ Similarly, in Greek an αἴτιος is someone who is held responsible for an action,¹⁵ and the adjective is even used to refer to the defendant at court.¹⁶ And there is a second crucial difference between ancient and modern definitions of causation, again reflected in the ancient vocabulary. Today, causes are regularly understood to be non-propositional items; when a propositional account of a cause is given, that account is, in modern usage, an

¹³ One modern philosopher who draws, in a highly influential book, that distinction is Anscombe (1957). Ricoeur (1991), 132-8 and (1992), 67-80 takes issue with that distinction, explicitly evoking as a preferable model the ancient conception of the cause where that distinction was never drawn so sharply.

¹⁴ *LSJ* s.v. I.1.

¹⁵ *LSJ* s.v. II.1.

¹⁶ *LSJ* s.v. I.2.

‘explanation’ and not a ‘cause’. But in antiquity, propositional items could be understood as causes no less than non-propositional items. The Greek language uses the word αἰτία to refer to an explanation,¹⁷ and also to refer to the account of legal and moral responsibility—which is why αἰτία can sometimes be used as the technical term for an accusation brought against someone at court.¹⁸

And now that one knows that the *Aitia*’s original title can refer to causes, but also to ‘defendants’ as well as to the ‘charges’ such defendants are confronted with, it is easy to see why that poem begins with charges leveled against its poet as well as the poet’s defense against these charges. In Greek, the Telchines’ charges are an αἰτία, and they cast the poet in the role of a defendant, in Greek αἴτιος.¹⁹ And since in Greek the adjective used for a defendant is the same as the adjective used for a cause, Callimachus is, as the defendant of his works, also their cause. What the charges of the Telchines thus achieve at the beginning of Callimachus’ *Aitia* is to provide an aetiology for the aetiological poet’s works. It presents the poet as his work’s, αἴτιον in Greek, or as its cause in English.²⁰

¹⁷ See on this usage Vlastos (1973), 78-81.

¹⁸ Fundamental for the role ethical considerations play in the ancient notion of the cause, as well as for its covering of both propositional and non-propositional items is Frede (1980). Sorabji (1980) and Irwin (1988) discuss these problems with respect to Aristotle’s metaphysics. An excellent brief account is Woodruff (1982), 151-3.

¹⁹ In fact, Callimachus is not only cast in that role, he acts it well, incorporating into his defense numerous features known from actual defense speeches: he slanders the character of his opponents referring to them as the notoriously malicious Telchines, cites evidence in form of the works of other poets, and even brings in Apollo as a witness to support his case.

²⁰ Ancient readers of the prologue, who unlike modern readers were not inhibited by a different conceptualization of causation, saw clearly that this is the point of the prologue to the *Aitia*. Witness the author of *AP* 11.275, who calls Callimachus αἴτιος by virtue of having composed the *Aitia*: Καλλίμαχος τὸ κάθαρμα, τὸ παίγνιον, ὁ ξύλινος νοῦς· | αἴτιος ὁ γράψας Αἴτια Καλλίμαχος.

II. Propertius

The fact that Propertius' aetiological work begins like Callimachus' with the confrontation of the poet and a critic can of course partly be explained by Propertius' desire to imitate his Greek model. In the programmatic conclusion at the end of the speech with which he opens his last book, Propertius refers to himself as a *Callimachus Romanus* (4.1.63-4):

*ut nostris tumefacta superbiat Umbria libris,
Umbria Romani patria Callimachi.*

And if the actual Callimachus was attacked by a malicious literary critic, there is no reason why his Roman successor should be spared that same experience.

And yet, just as there is a difference between the original Greek Callimachus and the *Callimachus Romanus*, so there is a difference in the way the charges brought against him function in the context of his work. While the author of a Greek aetiological poem, when charged by literary critics, emerges as the cause of his work, the same effect is not achieved in a Roman poem composed in Latin. Roman poets use the word *causa* to refer to their aetiologies.²¹ In general terms, there was no Roman conceptualization of causation that differed significantly from the Greeks'—as the semantic range of the Latin word *causa* indicates. Here as there, causation comprised intentionality and ethical considerations; hence, like the Greek words αἴτιος and αἰτία, *causa* can be used for events that fall into the sphere of moral and legal responsibility, for instance to designate

²¹ E.g. Propertius at the beginning of 4.10: *nunc Iovis incipiam causas aperire Feretri | armaque de ducibus trina recepta tribus*; or Ovid in the first couplet of the *Fasti*: *Tempora cum causis Latium digesta per annum | lapsaque sub terras orta que signa canam*.

somebody's responsibility for an action²² or the motivation that compelled one to take that action.²³ And here as there propositional items could be causes just as well as non-propositional items; hence, *causa* can refer to an explanation,²⁴ or to the case or defense that one side makes in a dispute, whether legal or non-legal.²⁵ Yet there is one important difference between the Greek and the Roman vocabulary for causation, a difference that is crucial for aetiological poets when they are charged by literary critics. Unlike the Greek adjective αἴτιος, *causa* is not of course used to refer to a defendant. Thus, when Propertius is attacked like his Greek predecessor by a literary critic, the Latin language prohibits him from thereby emerging as the cause of his poem.

Of course, despite the differences of the Greek and Latin language, Propertius easily could have repeated Callimachus' effect and provided his aetiological poem with its own aetiology. All that was necessary to do so was to follow Callimachus closely and to respond to Horus' criticism, just as Callimachus had responded to the Telchines', with a defense speech. For since the Latin word *causa* can mean defense speech, Propertius' defense against Horus would have been a *causa* of his poem on *causae* just as Callimachus had given an aition of his *Aitia*. But Propertius does not give this aetiology of his aetiological poem, for in a marked departure from his Greek predecessor, he does not respond to the charges leveled against him by his critic with a defense.

It is surprising that Propertius botches such an easy opportunity to present elegantly an aetiology of his aetiological poem. Indeed, it is so surprising that one may wonder whether Horus was right after all in suggesting that Propertius is not a good aetiological

²² *OLD* s.v. 11.

²³ *OLD* s.v. 7.

²⁴ *OLD* s.v. 8.

²⁵ *OLD* s.v. 2; see too the phrase *causam dicere*.

poet. And there is the more reason to dispute Propertius' skills as an aetiologist because he botches that opportunity not once, but twice. For Horus is not the only critic of the poet's new aetiological enterprise to emerge in book IV. In 4.7, his former mistress Cynthia appears in the poet's dream on the day of her funeral, and accuses Propertius of having abandoned her (and hence poetry about her)²⁶ too readily. To be sure, Cynthia claims that she is not out to prosecute Propertius (4.7.49-50):

*non tamen insector, quamvis mereare, Properti:
longa mea in libris regna fuere tuis.*

But the way and the language in which Propertius comments on her speech indicates that at least he perceives her appearance as yet another dispute in which he is the defendant (4.7.95-6):

*haec postquam querula mecum sub lite²⁷ peregit,
inter complexus excidit umbra meos.*

Would Cynthia's charges not have been a good opportunity for Propertius to make up in the middle of his book for the defense speech that was missing at its beginning? But Propertius does nothing of that kind—other than the short couplet just cited, Cynthia's charges elicit no response from him. Propertius botches the opportunity to present a *causa* for his poem on *causae* a second time.

But before one concurs with Horus' opinion about Propertius' skills and aptitude as an aetiological poet, one should ask whether there is perhaps a way of justifying

²⁶ Propertius often identifies Cynthia with the poetry about her; on this frequently noted aspect of Propertius' erotic poetry see e.g. Wyke (1987).

²⁷ On *lis* in forensic usage see *OLD* s.v. 1.

Propertius' decision to depart from his Greek model and not to compose such a defense. There is no reason to demand that Propertius imitate his Greek model in full detail: he is, after all, a *Callimachus Romanus* and thus entitled to some differences from his Greek model, especially when these differences reflect the differences between the two cultures in which both poems were composed. It is at the end of book IV that Propertius suggests an explanation grounded in these differences—namely in the differing ways in which defendants in Greece and Rome responded to forensic charges.

While a defense speech is notably missing from the beginning and the middle of book IV, one can be found at its end. 4.11 features the recently and prematurely deceased Roman noblewoman Cornelia. The poem begins with Cornelia asking her husband to stop lamenting her, but soon she shifts topic and realizes that before too long she will have to address the three judges of the dead and defend her way of life before their stern judgment. Facing this challenge, Cornelia now delivers a long defense of her life as a virtuous female member of the Roman nobility. This defense takes up the rest of the poem. Having finished it, Cornelia is sufficiently proud of her accomplishment to mention its completion explicitly to her audience (4.11.99-100):

*causa perorata est. flentes me surgite, testes,
dum pretium vitae rependit humus.*

But this explicit reference indicates the importance of Cornelia's defense speech not only to herself, but also to the audience of Propertius' poetry: the phrase *causa perorata est* reminds us that now there is—finally—that long-awaited *causa* ('defense speech') in Propertius' book on *causae* ('causes').

Yet in that speech, Cornelia defends her life, and not Propertius' decision to compose aetiological poetry that Horus had attacked. Consequently, the importance of her speech for the way Propertius deals with the critics who attack his poetry lies, not so much in what she says but in the convention-defying way in which she says it.

Cornelia has good reasons to be proud after she has delivered her defense. First, as she reminds us, she delivers a public defense of her life in front of as enormous and attentive a crowd as Cornelia encounters in front of the three judges of the dead (4.11.19-22):

*aut si quis posita iudex sedet Aeacus urna,
in mea sortita vindicet ossa pila:
assideant fratres, iuxta et Minoida sellam
Eumenidum intento turba severa foro.*

Hence, she transcends after her death the gender role that Roman society had allocated to her during her life. Roman noblewomen were expected, as Cornelia's own speech demonstrates, to show chastity and devotion to the children, but not to be public orators, which as a public task was largely reserved to the men (with Hortensia being the exception of the rule).²⁸

But more important is a second reason that justifies her pride—and this is the fact that, as she tells us at the beginning of the speech before the judges of the dead, she speaks for herself in her own voice (4.11.27-8):

*ipsa loquor pro me: si fallo, poena sororum
infelixumeros urgeat urna meos.*

²⁸ A more detailed discussion of the ways Cornelia transcends gender roles is Johnson (1997).

Having to defend oneself in one's own voice before the judges of the dead was, as Cicero remarks in the opening of the *Tusculan Disputations*, a source of considerable fear for Romans—because with their court being a Greek court, Romans could not, as they were wont to, be represented by a lawyer who spoke on their behalf (1.10):

dic quaeso: num te illa terrent, triceps apud inferos Cerberus, Cocyti fremitus, travectio Acherontis, "mento summam aquam attingens enectus siti Tantalus?" tum illud quod "Sisyphus versat Saxum sudans nitendo neque proficit hilum?" fortasse etiam inexorabiles iudices, Minos et Rhadamanthus? apud quos nec te L. Crassus defendet nec M. Antonius nec, quoniam apud Graecos iudices res agetur, poteris adhibere Demosthenem: tibi ipsi pro te erit maxima corona causa dicenda.

To be sure, some Romans, especially when they had held high offices, did deliver so-called defenses *pro se*.²⁹ But especially when contrasted with forensic practice in Greece where defendants spoke regularly for themselves,³⁰ defenses *pro se* were infrequent in Rome—so that the fear Cicero voices seems more than justified. But that fear is not for Cornelia, who has sufficient self-confidence to master a task that transgresses her society's conventions.

But at the same time as Cornelia reminds her audience of her bravery, she reminds Propertius' readers of the extraordinary nature of a defense *pro se* in a Roman context—and invites them to take that context into account when trying to understand why Propertius, the self-avowed *Callimachus Romanus*, decided not respond to his critics with a defense of his own. The answer that explains Propertius' decision is that, as a *Callimachus Romanus*, he complied with Rome's custom, where defendants did not speak for themselves, but were represented by an advocate.

²⁹ There seem to be no more than 15 instances out of almost 400 trials listed in Alexander (1990).

³⁰ It is worth noting that legal representation was an institution known to the Hellenistic world (it probably emerged out of the practice of *synegoria*). But the evidence that we have for Alexandria (which Propertius would have had in mind) suggests that the defendant always spoke for himself: see Crook (1995), 30-7.

There appears to be one huge, indeed enormous, disadvantage to Propertius' compliance with the Roman convention that defendants rely on the use of an advocate: it leaves Horus' charges without a response, and does nothing to dispel the bad and alienating effect it may have on Propertius' future readers. But that is not in fact the case, and instead of alienating his readers Propertius invites them to act, precisely, as his advocates—as we see when we bear in mind that, as we have already observed, the Latin word *causa* can be translated both as 'explanation' and as 'defense'. Because of this semantic coincidence, for a Roman reader the explanation we have just given of Propertius' decision is at the same time a defense of that decision. In just now defending Propertius' decision not to respond to Horus' charges with a defense, we have assumed the role of his advocate and therefore done exactly what, as a Roman defendant, Propertius expected us to do: namely to provide a *causa* for his poem on *causae*.

In Callimachus' *Aitia*, the charges that the Telchines brought against the poet fulfilled a thematic function. In the absence of any explicit mentioning of the poem's topic in the prologue, a Greek reader could identify these charges as αἰτίαι and understand that they made Callimachus an αἴτιον; and this was Callimachus' way of introducing aetiology as the topic of his poem. In Propertius, by contrast, a literary critic's charges fulfill a function that may be called rhetorical. Propertius mentions the topic of his new book explicitly, but what remains to be defined is the attitude that his readers are supposed to take towards that new book. To be sure, modern readers, who read literary texts within a hermeneutical tradition, one of whose most important inventions was the idea of the 'objective reader', may be surprised when they find themselves in the role of the poet's advocate. But that hermeneutical tradition is

historically contingent and did not exist in antiquity, when the reception of texts was conditioned by the ancients' elaborately developed system of rhetoric.³¹ Authors who wrote within that system did not expect that their readers desired to be objective by default, but could assume that the attitude readers take vis-à-vis a text could be influenced by the author's rhetorical devices. Propertius explores that flexibility of the ancient reader's position and issues a rhetorical invitation for us to be his advocates.³²

III. Ovid

Malicious critics appeared at the beginning of Callimachus' *Aitia*, and they appeared at the beginning of Propertius IV. The fact that Ovid's *Fasti*, by contrast, begins with Ovid's wish that Germanicus be a benevolent reader of Ovid's poem is certain to prompt the question: why did Ovid part with the tradition set by his two predecessors?³³

The proem to the *Fasti* was written in Ovid's exile at Tomis,³⁴ and one may surmise that the absence of malicious critics at the beginning of the *Fasti* is caused by the absence of any critics at all at Tomis, a fact Ovid reports elsewhere in his exile poetry (*Tr.* 4.1.91-2):

*ipse mihi (quid enim faciam?) scribo legoque,
tutaque iudicio littera nostra est.*

³¹ See especially Most (1984) and Bender/Wellbery (1990).

³² It goes without saying that the objective reader was only one of many reader roles developed by the hermeneutical tradition (if, due its alignment with historical positivism, a very influential one). For different conceptualizations of the reader's role within that tradition see e.g. Gadamer (1960), Iser (1976).

³³ On the ways generic conventions and the expectation of readers interact see Conte (1986), 23-31.

³⁴ On the chronology of the composition of *Fasti* 1 see most recently Green (2004), 15-22.

Yet if Ovid had wanted to report the facts of his life, he would have had much more reason to present a malicious critic in the proem to the *Fasti* rather than to omit him. For Callimachus and Propertius, his two predecessors, malicious critics were a matter largely of their art and not of their actual lives. Even if among Callimachus' colleagues in the Alexandrian library there really were characters like the Telchines, there is no evidence to suggest their criticism diminished Callimachus' position at court or his reputation as a poet. Similarly, even if slightly farcical³⁵ astrologers such as Horus really did attack Propertius, they clearly posed no threat to Propertius' well-being.³⁶ But for Ovid, Augustus' attacks against his *Ars Amatoria* were as real as they were malicious;³⁷ and the relegation to Tomis that was their consequence affected, as Ovid never fails to remind the addressees of the letters he writes from his exile, his life in the direst possible ways.³⁸ In other words, when Ovid composed the proem to the *Fasti*, his life had come to imitate the art of his two aetiological predecessors.³⁹

As a real defendant against real charges of an actual malicious critic, Ovid was dearly in need of advocates who could take up his cause and work for his removal from

³⁵ The most recent voice in the old debate whether Horus is to be taken seriously is Günther (2006), 364, who simply asserts that Horus is "ludicrous". However, a more complex view must be taken: see Macleod (1983) and DeBrohun (2004), 13-22 and 69-84, who shows that the substance of his remarks is capable of judicious interpretation.

³⁶ Propertius' reputation is attested by, for instance, Ovid (e.g. *Tr.* 5.1.17: *aptior huic Gallus blandique Propertius oris*), and Quintilian (10.1.93: *Elegia quoque Graecos provocamus, cuius mihi tarsus atque elegans maxime videtur auctor Tibullus. sunt qui Propertium malint*).

³⁷ In *Tr.* 2.77-80, Ovid comments on Augustus' maliciousness, though cunningly trying not to make him even more hostile, Ovid blames the person who read his works to the emperor rather than the emperor himself: *a, ferus et nobis crudelior omnibus hostis, | delicias legit qui tibi cumque meas, | carmina ne nostris quae te venerantia libris | iudicio possint candidiore legi*.

³⁸ No doubt, life at Tomis wasn't quite as dire as Ovid makes it: see Williams (1994), 1-49. For a recent account of what is known about the historical facts of life at Tomis see Gaertner (2005), 20-4 and for how Ovid's exile poetry reproduces less those facts than tropes of exile literature Gaertner (2007).

³⁹ Nisbet (1982), 56 remarks nicely on the irony that characterizes Ovid's works in general, namely that he, supposedly "the most frivolous and least autobiographical of the Roman elegists," in fact got to know the realities of Roman life better than his predecessors.

Tomis. He betrays that concern frequently in his exile poetry and sometimes in very explicit terms (*Pont.* 1.2.67-8):

*suscipe, Romanae facundia, Maxime, linguae,
difficilis causae mite patrocinium.*⁴⁰

Given his need for advocates to support his case, one could have expected Ovid to use the proem to his poem on *causae* to recruit advocates for his own *causa* too. In fact, such recruiting would only have required him to imitate the elegant rhetorical device Propertius had invented at the beginning of his book to invite the readers of a poem on *causae* to become its author's advocates. By doing so, Ovid would have drawn his advocates not just from the few individual recipients of the letters he sent from Tomis, but also from among all the readers of the *Fasti*. Yet instead of using it to improve the conditions of his life, Ovid employs the proem to the *Fasti* in the first place to improve the poem at whose beginning it is placed,⁴¹ asking Germanicus to be the poem's benevolent reader as well as to support and inspire its completion (1.25-6):

*si licet et fas est, vates rege vatis habenas,
auspice te felix ut totus annus eat.*

In a curious way Ovid appears to have eliminated from the proem to the *Fasti* the concerns and conditions of his life that occupied him so pervasively elsewhere in his exile poetry. In fact, Ovid confirms that impression in a later passage, where he interrupts

⁴⁰ Later on, Ovid directs the same plea to Messalinus (*Pont.* 2.2.43-4): *mandatique mei legatus suscipe causam | nulla meo quamvis nomine causa bona est.*

⁴¹ See on this emphasis Fantham (1985), 253.

a lament of his life in exile on the grounds that such a lament would not be appropriate given the present poem's theme (4.79-84):

*huius erat Solimus Phrygia comes unus ab Ida,
a quo Sulmonis moenia nomen habent,
Sulmonis gelidi, patriae, Germanice, nostrae.
me miserum, Scythico quam procul illa solo est!
ergo ego tam longe – sed supprime, Musa, querellas!
non tibi sunt maesta sacra canenda lyra.*

Yet the idea that there is in the *Fasti*, as opposed to the letters Ovid wrote from exile, no connection between the author's life on the one hand and his poetry on the other, rings implausible on several grounds. First, it would mark an inappropriate break with the generic tradition of aetiological elegy, for in Callimachus' *Aitia*, the genre's forebear, the relation between an author and his works was identified such that the poet was the cause of his poetry.⁴² In fact, the Telchines, to whose attacks this identification is owed, had demanded very rigidly that a poet's works must bear exact resemblance to his life, charging Callimachus for writing poetry like a child even though in his life he is an old man (fr. 1.5-6):

ἢ] . οὐκ ἦρωας, ἔπος δ' ἐπὶ τυτθὸν ἐλ[ίσσω
παῖς ἄτε, τῶν δ' ἐτέων ἢ δεκάς οὐκ ὀλίγη.

Second, the aposiopesis with which Ovid interrupts the lament of the conditions of his life in book 4 has an effect similar to a praeteritio: it recalls the conditions of Ovid's life at the time he composed the poem much more than it succeeds in suppressing them.

⁴² The dissociation (and association) of life and literature is a trope not of course limited to the beginnings of aetiological elegies: its history in antiquity (omitting aetiological elegy) has recently been traced in Möller (2004).

Third, while modern students of ancient texts often show little interest in the relation between a poet's life and his work, believing that the former bears no impact at least on the meaning of the latter,⁴³ the ancient audience for whom Ovid composed did not share that attitude. Biographical criticism was practiced regularly, and the assumption expressed by the Telchines at the beginning of Callimachus' *Aitia* that an author's works are a direct product of his life forms the methodological premise of much ancient literary criticism.⁴⁴ Roman poets are known to respond to their audience's critical reading habits,⁴⁵ and Ovid indeed discusses the relationship between a poet's life and his works elsewhere in his exile poetry.

It should not surprise that Ovid, when discussing the relationship between a poet's life and his art, defies his audience's expectations—not merely because he is known to play jokes on his readers, but also because when in exile he had a manifest interest to do so.⁴⁶ After all, at this point Ovid was eager to disavow any connection between himself and at least those of his works that were read in such a way as to result in his relegation to Tomis. In *Tristia* 2, he rebukes Augustus' supposed impression that the *Ars Amatoria*

⁴³ They follow the lead of, but simplify, Foucault (1994). Interestingly, in that paper Foucault declares that authors have been held legally responsible for their works only since the late eighteenth century. He argues that that legal responsibility produced intentionalist readings, and suggests that such readings, as being historically contingent, can and should be abandoned today. However, the fact that in ancient aetiological elegy and elsewhere in ancient literature poets face challenges of their works that are couched in legal language, undermines not only Foucault's historical account, but suggests that readers of such texts should at least consider the role of the author in the making of his texts. For a more nuanced view of how (the way we construe) the author's life determines the way we understand their texts see Nehamas (1987).

⁴⁴ See Lefkowitz (1981), Arrighetti (1987). Much less work has been done on the Roman side, perhaps under the surely problematic premise that the ancient lives of the Roman poets are more secure than the lives of the Greek poets. An exception is Horsfall (1995), who shows how ancient commentators on Virgil extracted 'facts' of his life from his works.

⁴⁵ See for instance Feeney (1991).

⁴⁶ Callimachus disagreed with the Telchines too: in his defense, he allotted to the god Apollo as much of the responsibility for the features of his poetry that the Telchines had criticized as he accepts for himself (fr. 1.21-8).

was an accurate representation of Ovid's way of life (*mores*) with unequivocal words (353-8):

crede mihi, distant mores a carmine nostro
(vita verecunda est, Musa iocosa mea)
magnaue pars mendax operum est et ficta meorum:
plus sibi permisit compositore suo.
*nec liber indicium est animi, sed honesta voluptas:*⁴⁷
pluribus mulcendis auribus apta feres.

However, this passage's supposed unequivocal nature should more likely be taken as a product of Ovid's desire at this point of his argument to dissociate himself from his art than as the expression of a general truth. After all, later in the same letter Ovid insinuates unhesitatingly that his more serious works, such as the *Metamorphoses* and the *Fasti*, constitute a more accurate representation of their poet's thoughts.⁴⁸

All these reasons suggest that in the proem to the *Fasti* too the relationship between the poet's life and his works is raised, if in more complex way than some of his ancient readers may have expected.⁴⁹ And indeed, on closer inspection the proem reveals the concerns of the *Fasti* in terms that are, if not explicit, still unmistakable. First of all, for a poet who elsewhere articulates his need at this point in his life of able advocates, Ovid

⁴⁷ *voluntas*: MG; *voluptas*: EV. Contrary to Owen's *OCT* that I cite elsewhere and where *voluntas* is read, I print *voluptas*; see Ciccarelli (2003), 226-9 with further bibliography. Note in addition that in the epigram to the *Amores* Ovid explicitly ascribes to his poetry the capacity to furnish *voluptas* (3-4): *ut iam nulla tibi nos sit legisse voluptas, | at levior demptis poena duobus abest. voluntas*, which here would have to be taken to mean 'intention' (*OLD* s.v. 5) provides no satisfactory opposition to the first half of the line. However, if Ovid writes that his poetry can provide *voluptas*, that does not of course mean that this is the only function he assigns to it; after all, he is just writing a letter that should not only delight Augustus, but compel him to take action and remove Ovid from his exile.

⁴⁸ Gibson (1997), 27 observes this discrepancy; however, rather than as a contradiction both passages must be understood with regard to their rhetorical function in Ovid's argument. See Barchiesi (1994), 167-8 and (1997), 29-34.

⁴⁹ In fact, ancient authors generally defied their audience's simplified expectation that an author's life is revealed in his works: excellent discussions of the complex interaction of reality and rhetoric in ancient autobiographical discourse are Most (1987) for Greece, and Gibson (2003) for Rome. See too the papers in Arrighetti (1991).

mentions in a very conspicuous way that Germanicus is just such an able advocate of frightened defendants (1.21-2):

*quae sit enim culti facundia sensimus oris,
civica pro trepidis cum tulit arma reis.*

Even more conspicuously, Ovid had just said that he is, indeed, frightened (1.15-6):

*adnue conanti per laudes ire tuorum
deque meo pavidos excute corde metus.*

Secondly, Ovid's dedication of his poem to Germanicus is phrased in terms that Ovid employs elsewhere in his exile poetry to oblige his readers to take up the concerns of his life by working for his removal from Tomis. In his letters, Ovid employs very frankly⁵⁰ the discourse of Roman patronage, declaring his letters as an *officium*⁵¹ offered to—perhaps reluctant—addressees so that they take up Ovid's cause (*Pont.* 1.1.19-20):

*nec vos hoc vultis, sed nec prohibere potestis,
Musaque ad invitos officiosa venit.*⁵²

⁵⁰ Gaertner (2005) 104-5, 176, 213, and elsewhere shows how rarely the vocabulary of patronage surfaces elsewhere in Roman poetry. On the reluctance of Roman poets other than Ovid in his exile poetry see White (1993), 14. Wallace-Hadrill (1989) discusses the gaps between representation and reality in Roman accounts of patronage. The shame that it carried to be identified as someone's client may have contributed to this gap: see Cic. *off.* 2.69: *at qui se locupletes honoratos beatos putant, ii ne obligari quidem beneficio volunt; quin etiam beneficio se dedisse arbitrantur cum ipsi quamvis magnum aliquod acceperint, atque etiam a se aut postulari aut exspectari aliquid suspicantur, patrocínio vero se usos aut clientis appellari mortis instar putant*; Sen. *Ben.* 2.23.3: *rariores in eorum officiis sunt quibus vitam aut dignitatem debent, et, dum opinionem clientium timent, graviorem subeunt ingratorum*; and the discussion in Brunt (1988), 395.

⁵¹ On the term *officium* and its meaning within Roman patronage see Saller (1982), 15-7.

⁵² See too 3.9.55-6: *da veniam scriptis, quorum non gloria nobis | causa, sed utilitas officiumque fuit*. Evans (1983), 149-50 discusses how Ovid appropriates to his benefit the Roman patronage system in this and in similar passages; see too Williams (1994), 89 and 103.

In the proem to the *Fasti*, Ovid presents his poem to Germanicus as just such an *officium*, only that he politely asks Germanicus to accept his token of cliently duty rather than to press it upon its reluctant addressee (1.3-7):

*excipe pacato, Caesar Germanice, vultu
hoc opus et timidae derige navis iter
officioque levem non aversatus honorem
en tibi devoto numine dexter ades.*

Yet contrary to what Callimachus' Telchines and many other ancient readers had believed, Ovid does not present his life, while present in the proem to the *Fasti* in these subtle yet unmistakable remarks, as the determining influence on his poetry. At the beginning of the *Fasti*, Ovid establishes in more explicit terms an important difference between his aetiological poem and the poems of his two predecessors. Like theirs, his is a poem on *causae*; but unlike them, he presents these *causae* within the framework of the Roman calendar, a fact Ovid indicates with the word *tempora* (1.1-2):

*Tempora cum causis Latium digesta per annum
lapsaque sub terras orta que signa canam.*

But the Roman calendar are not the only *tempora* with which Ovid is concerned at the time he composes the *Fasti*. For elsewhere in his exile poetry, Ovid often uses the word *tempus* to refer to the conditions of his life such as they are present in the proem to the *Fasti*. In the proem to *Tristia* 3, for instance, he writes (9-10):

*inspice quid portem: nihil nisi triste videbis,
carmine temporibus conveniente suis.*

And in a letter to Brutus he observes more generally that the *tempora* in which a poet writes determine his work (*Pont.* 3.9.35-6):

*laeta fere laetus cecini, cano tristia tristis:
conveniens operi tempus utrumque suo est.*⁵³

Modern readers may understand and label these *tempora* merely as a context in which Ovid's poetry was composed. But ancient readers could link them more specifically with the issue of causation that Ovid pursues in the *Fasti*. At the time Ovid composed the *Fasti*, Stoic philosophy had exerted an enormous impact on ancient culture,⁵⁴ and specifically the Stoic understanding of causation had superseded competing conceptualizations.⁵⁵ In fact, the Stoic understanding had become so preeminent that Cicero employs it to formulate rhetorical theory, namely in a passage from the *Topica* where he advises the orator on the use of the *locus ex causis* (58-67).⁵⁶ And that passage is not only helpful to budding orators, but also to readers of the *Fasti* who want to understand the role of Ovid's life in the composition of his works. First of all, Cicero suggests that the *tempora* Ovid evokes as the context of his works can be considered a cause (59):

Huius generis causarum, sine quo non efficitur, alia sunt quietia, nihil agentia, stolidia quodam modo, ut locus, tempus, materia, ferramenta, cetera generis eiusdem.

⁵³ Similar passages are *Tr.* 3.14.25-30 and 4.1.2. For *tempus* in this sense see *OLD* s.v. 4b.

⁵⁴ The Stoa's cultural influence is still well documented in Pohlenz (1947), 191-276.

⁵⁵ The preeminence of Stoic over other conceptions of causation since the Hellenistic period is the central argument in Frede (1980). See Bobzien (1998a), 234 n.2 for a full bibliography.

⁵⁶ The Stoic background of the passage is well evidenced in Reinhardt (2003), 320-3.

Yet more crucially, Cicero's passage suggests that while important, a poet's life is not a cause that by itself suffices to bring about his poetry. Cicero distinguishes two types of causes, those which suffice in themselves to bring about their effect, and those without which a certain effect cannot obtain but which are not sufficient (58):

Causarum enim genera dua sunt; unum quod vi sua id quod sub eam vim subiectum est certe effecit ...; alterum, quod naturam efficiendi non habet sed sine quo effici non possit.

Tempus as a cause belongs to this second category; it is a *sunaition* that depends for its efficacy on the agency of some other cause outside its control.⁵⁷ The circumstances of Ovid's life, in other words, exert causal agency on Ovid's poetry;⁵⁸ but they are not the only such cause. They leave room, for instance, for the influence the works of other poets may exert by means of allusion, for Ovid's own *ingenium*, and last but not least for the impact of divine inspiration such as Ovid requests in the proem from Germanicus. The multiple aetiologies that play such an enormous role in Ovid's explanations of the Roman calendar in the *Fasti*,⁵⁹ thus, are mirrored, and indeed programmatically preempted, in its proem, where the poem receives its own aetiology.

Conclusion

⁵⁷ For the *sunaition* see Frede (1980), 239 and Bobzien (1998b).

⁵⁸ In asserting that there is a relationship of cause and effect between the poet's life and his works I do not argue that this relationship can be fully recovered; see on the illusionary nature of that attempt, with a discussion of the *Fasti* and its ritualistic context, Feeney (2004). But I do believe, like Nehamas (1987), that literary interpretation involves the construal of an idea of the author's life as it contributes to his work.

⁵⁹ See Newlands (1995), 51-86 and Loehr (1996).

In this paper, I have asked why it is that no ancient aetiological elegy goes by without its author reminding his readers of the malicious critics that have attacked his works. I hope to have shown that the appearance of these critics is not accidental or irrelevant for the understanding of these works, but that in each case it serves a particular, and well-defined purpose. We have seen how Callimachus, exploiting the semantic range of the Greek vocabulary of causation, employs the charges leveled against him to present himself as the cause of his poem; we have seen how Propertius adapts his Greek predecessor's trope to the Roman context in which he writes and asks his readers to plead his cause; and we have seen how Ovid, prompted by the fact that malicious critics for him were a matter not just of his art but also of his life, reflects on the impact that a poet's life exerts on his work. At the beginning of this paper, the three authors of aetiological elegy stood accused of composing beginnings to their poems that are rhetorically ineffective and only alienate their readers from their work. My explanations, *causae* as they are, were intended to vindicate the three poems from that charge and, in case they are successful, to suggest that, perhaps, literary critics are not that much of an evil after all.

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