Winding up his poetic program in the first poem of his fourth book, Propertius writes *sacra diesque canam et cognomina prisca locorum* (4.1.69). In his recent commentary (Cambridge 2006) G. Hutchinson notes that for all his allusions to Callimachus’ *Aitia* the Umbrian poet, in fact, offers little direct aetiology, but rather concentrates on the monuments and objects at Rome. These refer to Roman history, but they also belong to the contemporary Augustan era and therefore to the ruler’s plan of moral and religious restoration. As in the love elegies of the earlier books, the poet reacts to the cultural and ethical values of his time and his country. The purport and the tone of these reactions are usually far from easy to pinpoint.

In the introduction to the book under review Tara Welch explains that she wants to bring out how the poet offers “ways of looking at the monuments that perhaps differ from the ways Augustus intended them to be seen”. The word “perhaps” may induce some readers to think that they will witness a tentative argument, proceeding from evidence to hypotheses, which are subsequently tested, but this is not the case. W. is quite sure that the poet “resists Roman identity as something natural” (9) and problematizes “Rome’s imperialism and normative gender roles” (12). In view of such an interpretation of book 4 one would have expected a thorough analysis of its final poem, but Cornelia’s speech is well-nigh absent from W.’s agenda. In fact, she concentrates on poems 1, 2, 4, 6, 9 and 10, to each of which one chapter is devoted. The book is completed by an introduction (1-18) and an epilogue (166-70). The notes to the various chapters are gathered on pp. 171-202.

In her analyses of the selected poems W. puts forward a number of interesting observations; some examples: in 1.57 *moenia namque pio conor disponere versu* the poet presents himself as “an architect of the city in his own way and with his own tools”, just like Augustus; in 4.2 Vertumnus explains how he “may be viewed in different ways by different viewers”; in 6.69 *bella satis cecini; citharam iam poscit Apollo* “the poet seems to prefer musical Apollo to Apollo the warrior”; in the ninth poem there are some curious ‘etymologies’, e.g. 5-6 *velabra… velificare*; 19-20: the Forum Boarium owes its name to Hercules’ *boves*; the tenth elegy, on Iuppiter Feretrius, is the only poem in book 4 in which all feminine elements are absent. To such observations may be added the twelve useful illustrations (topographical plans, photographs of coins and reliefs) and in general W.’s familiarity with Propertius’ Roman world in a wide sense of this word. There is therefore a sound basis for the exploration of Propertius’ objectives in these often puzzling poems and to get some grip on his idiosyncratic convictions.
However, in studying W.'s book the reader is soon confronted with its principal strategy. The first page of chapter 2, which deals with the Vertumnus elegy, makes this fully clear. W. begins quietly: “The god revels in his shifting identity”, but then swiftly arrives at “the variety inherent in Roman identity itself, particularly in regard to ethnic identity” (35). The Tuscan god “draws attention to a polysemy of Rome's monuments” (36). Such a speedy development can hardly be regarded as belonging to the domain of interpretation. But there is more: the poem “may be read in a metapoetic light: Vertumnus masks the poet” (42), not merely where the variety of the eleven elegies is concerned, but as an expression of his own identity. This statement is substantiated in a remarkable manner. Vertumnus’ words in 2.3 Tuscus ego et Tuscis orior are explained as expressing Propertius’ Umbrian descent. This is not a slip, for note 32 on p. 178 insists on this equation. A brief look at elegies 1.21 and 22 could have saved W. from this misstep: obviously the Etrusci aggeres of 1.21.2 and Perugia in 1.22.3 do not belong to the adjacent Umbria (1.22.9). See also e.g. Livy 9.37.12, where Perugia is said to belong to the towns quae ferme capita Etruriae populorum ea tempestate erant. In Augustus' division of regiones it belonged to regio VII (Etruria) in contrast to Propertius' Assisi, which belonged to regio VI (Umbria). I am afraid that this is a case of ‘when the evidence does not suit the argument, the worse for the evidence’.

Chapter 4, devoted to the fourth elegy (Tarpeia), is called “Amor vs Roma” (56-78). On p. 63 W. prints the first part of Tarpeia's speech (v. 31-66), adding in the margin of the text alternately AMOR and ROMA. The bare facts in the whole of Propertius’ more than 4,000 verses are that Roma(nus) occurs some fifty times and that there are three times as many occurrences of amor. Yet, only twice Roma(nus) and amor occur in the same context: 2.6.22 and 4.4.35-37; obviously the poet does not bother about coupling the two in whichever sense. However, note 29 on p. 183 opens the reader's eyes: “Amor and Roma are common terms in Propertian scholarship” (two publications are referred to). The conclusion must be that if the text does not provide the evidence needed, secondary literature will fill the gap. Unfortunately, one comes across comparable proceedings more often, which entails that numerous worthwhile remarks, which deserved careful consideration, swiftly lead to passages in which concepts like ‘liminality’, ‘conservative gender roles’, ‘metapoetic’, ‘crisis of identity’ pullulate. One is irresistibly reminded of American contributions to the study of the Aeneid in the days of the Vietnam war. Such studies testified primarily to their authors’ feelings of discontent and discomfort. In W.’s study Propertius appears gradually more and more in the guise of a North American academic intellectual struggling with her/his identity, social role and political stance. This is bound to end in all sorts of anachronistic allegorisation.

In the bibliography (203-13) eighty-five percent of the publications mentioned are in the English language, French and German contributions taken together do