

PROPERTIUS, 2. 30 A AND B¹

THE difficulties of this poem have led scholars to employ surgery of various sorts upon it.

This article attempts to show that surgery is unnecessary and that, given a fuller exegesis and a partial reinterpretation of subject-matter, the poem can be read as a single and consistent piece.

I

The Unity of the Poem

ista senes licet accuset conuiuia duri
nos modo propositum, uita teramus iter. (lines 13-14)

These two lines are generally compared *en passant* with Catullus 5. 1-3;

uiuamus, mea Lesbia, atque amemus,
rumoresque senum seueriorum
omnes unius aestimemus assis!

But this comparison is the all-important clue to the train of thought which unifies the poem. In both Propertius and Catullus the *senes* are attacking the affair between the poet and his mistress. Both poets reply to their attacks with an exhortation to the mistress to continue the affair. The need to exhort the mistress must spring in both cases from the poet's fear that the mistress will listen to the *senes* and abandon him. Catullus merely implies this by his exhortation. Propertius however expresses his fear explicitly and goes further, imagining that Cynthia has taken the *senes* so seriously that she is actually on the point of abandoning him:

quo fugis² a demens? (line 1)

and it is with this notion (i.e. the reason for his exhortation) rather than with the exhortation itself that he begins his poem.

This solution is so simple that it may well be asked why it has not been obvious to all who have worked on the poem. One reason may be that some scholars have assumed that lines 1-12 are addressed to a male friend of Propertius. This assumption is certainly one reason for W. A. Baehrens' failure in his attempt to demonstrate the unity of the poem.³ The assumption may have been made because lines 1-12 represent a helpless person unwillingly in love and completely dominated by *Amor*, a role which is generally in elegy that of the poet, the male. But this role can also be played by the female—e.g. by Cynthia herself in Propertius 1. 3. The text thus contains nothing which implies the masculinity of Propertius' addressee and so I believe that lines 1-12, like the rest of the poem, are addressed to Cynthia. Cynthia is also addressed or described as *demens* at 1. 8 A. 1; 2. 18. 23; 2. 32. 18. The first of these three examples is in the context of Cynthia's intended journey to

¹ I am indebted to Professor I. M. Campbell and Professor D. A. West for advice on this article.

² For examples of erotic *fugae* see Pease on Virg. *Aen.* 4. 314.

³ *Philol.* lxxii (1913), 274.

Illyria, the last in a reflection on her wanderings away from Propertius to various resorts—both of these uses being akin to the one found here.

Propertius, then, begins with the imagined attempted *fuga* of Cynthia. His immediate argument against her *fuga*—its impossibility because of Amor's tenacity—leads on to the reflection that Amor, in spite of his harshness to the delinquent who attempts *fuga*, is forgiving if the delinquent is repentant (lines 11–12). The implication of lines 11–12, namely that Cynthia will change her mind and decide to stay with the poet rather than abandon him, provides a suitable transition to that point in the thought-pattern which Catullus used as his starting-point, i.e. the contemptuous attack upon and dismissal of the *senes* and their criticism (lines 13–14) and the demand that Propertius and Cynthia continue along the path they have been on—the *propositum iter*—instead of Cynthia's attempting the solitary *itinera* of her *fuga* (lines 1–6).

Another factor (besides that mentioned above) which has helped to obscure this unifying thought-pattern has been scholars' failure to observe the significance of *conuiuia* (line 13) in its context. The *conuiuium* is for Propertius central to his own erotic relationships.¹ He tends also to envisage his amorous rivals in the setting of a *conuiuium* with Cynthia,² and the *conuiuium* is linked with the final humiliation which leads him to renounce Cynthia.³ Because of the erotic importance of the *conuiuium* for Propertius, he is able to use it to stand for the whole of the erotic relationship between himself and Cynthia.

Propertius' use of the *conuiuium* in this way is not an individual eccentricity. The *conuiuium* plays a large part in conventional Hellenistic and Roman erotic relationships⁴ and the general social importance of *conuiuia* in Rome (of which the erotic significance is simply a sub-division) is shown in etymologies of the period:

Cic. *Cato* 45 bene maiores accubitionem epularem amicorum, quia uitae coniunctionem haberet, conuiuium nominauerunt.

Cic. *Epist.* 9. 24. 3 sapientius nostri quam Graeci: illi *συνπόσια* aut *σύνδειπνα* id est compotationes aut concenationes, nos conuiuia, quod tum maxime uiuitur.⁵

It is the ability of *conuiuia* to stand for the whole erotic relationship which makes the situation in Prop. 2. 30. 13–14 precisely parallel to that of Catullus 5. 1–3:⁶

uiuamus, mea Lesbia, atque amemus,
rumoresque senum seueriorum
omnes unius aestimemus assis!

i.e. the *senes* are not criticizing one aspect of the affair between Propertius and Cynthia but the whole of it.

¹ Prop. 3. 10. 21 ff. (with Cynthia); 4. 8. 33 ff. (with the two meretrices); 2. 34. 57 (*qua* amatory poet).

² Prop. 2. 9. 21–2; 2. 16. 5–6.

³ Prop. 3. 25. 1–2.

⁴ See, e.g., Xen. *Mem.* 1. 5. 3; Plaut. *Bacch.* 118 ff.; Ter. *And.* 84–92. The scene in Plaut. *Bacch.* is particularly interesting in that there (as in Propertius and Catullus)

senes criticize the amatory activities of young men. Clearly the notion is topical and Hellenistic, if not earlier.

⁵ See also *T.L.L.* s.v. for later appearances of these theories.

⁶ A further small and dubious verbal correspondence is the appearance in Propertius of *uita* (line 14), reflecting perhaps on *conuiuia*. Catullus uses the verb *uiuamus* (5. 1).

Another elegiac poet, Lygdamus, displays exactly the same connection of thought as Propertius between *fuga*, *conuiuium*, and *amor*.

non ego, si fugit nostrae conuiuiua mensae
ignotum cupiens uana puella torum,
sollicitus repetam tota suspiria nocte.

(Lygdamus 5. 59-61)

In Lygdamus the girl *fugit* the *conuiuiua* of her poet-lover to go elsewhere. In Prop. 2. 30 the girl's *fuga* and *ista conuiuiua* = 'your *conuiuiua* at which I (Propertius) am present' are widely separated, but the train of thought is the same. Hence the coherence of lines 13-14 with the first section of the poem is absolute. No break is possible and the poem can stand as a unity.

II

Lines 19-22

non tamen immerito! Phrygias nunc ire per undas
et petere Hyrcani litora nota maris,
spargere et alterna communis caede Penatis
et ferre ad patrios praemia dira Lares!

2. 30 begins as a poem about love and ends as a poem about love-poetry, with Propertius wearing an ivy wreath and discussing his *ingenium*:

tum capiti sacros patiar pendere corymbos:
nam sine te nostrum non ualet ingenium. (2. 30. 39-40)

The transition from one subject to the other occurs at line 16 where Propertius' *docta tibia*, symbolizing his elegiac verses,¹ makes an appearance:

hic locus est in quo, tibia docta, sones.

This transition is neither accidental nor fleeting. Line 16 occurs in a significant position as the second and presumably weightier argument against the *senes*. Moreover a further two lines (lines 17-18) are devoted to the *tibia*, making it clear that its introduction is deliberate and important. Following these two lines and the difficult four under discussion, another long literary section involving the Muses and Helicon begins, which continues to the end of the poem.

The transition from love to love-poetry found at line 16 is easy in view of the high interchangeability in the Classical mind of poetry and its subject-matter (*vide infra*), especially since Propertius seems to be saying in this poem that the most valuable feature of his love-relationship with Cynthia is that she is the source of inspiration for his love-poetry. But the fact that there is a transition and that it occurs at line 16 is important for discussion of lines 19-22.

It is reasonable for Propertius in lines 1-6 to speak of real physical journeys that Cynthia could make since she is about to leave him physically (lines 1 ff.). It is much less reasonable to believe, as all commentators appear to have believed, that Propertius imagines in lines 19-22 that the sole alternative to his being the lover of Cynthia and writing love-poetry is that he should go

¹ The *tibia* is doubly apt in this context because of its everyday association with *conuiuiua*.

off on voyages and take part in civil wars (of which there were then none in progress). The obscurity and difficulty of exegeses along these lines are their own condemnation. Nor can the thesis of real physical travels by Propertius be supported by 2. 15. 41–6. There Propertius is saying that if *everyone* was like him and indulged in love and wine there would be no wars—and the Actian war would not have taken place.

Another possibility is suggested by the literary subject-matter of all the rest of the poem after line 15, namely that Propertius in these four lines, as in the preceding and following lines, is talking about literature. If so he must be employing the well-known Classical convention by which the writer, instead of speaking of himself writing about something being done by others, speaks of himself doing it.¹ This convention is employed by him elsewhere:

Contentus niueis semper uectabere cynis,
nec te fortis equi ducet ad arma sonus.
nil tibi sit rauco praeconia classica cornu
flare, nec Aonium tingere Marte nemus. (3. 3. 39–42)

In this latter passage Calliope is warning Propertius off the writing of epic. Much of the subject-matter of 2. 30—the plea to Cynthia not to desert him because his *ingenium* (i.e. his love-poetry) depends on her, the visit to Helicon, and the glorification of elegiac verse—conspires to suggest that 2. 30 is yet another Propertian *recusatio* in which he is rejecting the idea of writing epics.

If this is so, then lines 19–22, which describe activities which Propertius is rejecting, must (by virtue of the convention noted above) be describing (like 3. 3. 39 ff.) the subject-matter of epics which Propertius is refusing to write.

The lines can then almost speak for themselves. Sailing through the Hellespont (*Phrygias per undas*)² and then proceeding to the Caspian Sea (*Hyrcanum mare*) signifies writing Argonautica. The Argonauts' outward journey in all accounts took them through the Hellespont. As for their return journey, many alternative routes were assigned to it.³ One of these routes, which was described by Hesiod and Hecataeus of Miletus (and perhaps also Pindar and Antimachus),⁴ took the Argonauts home via the river Phasis and the Ocean. From Apollonius Rhodius 4. 131–5 and the scholia thereon it is clear that the part of the Ocean with which the Phasis was believed to communicate was the Caucasian, i.e. the Caspian or Hyrcanian sea.

There is no reason why Propertius should not have known at least one of the authors who described the Phasis–Ocean route variant of the return of the Argonauts and who thought that the Phasis flowed from the Euxine into the Hyrcanian (Caspian) Sea. Line 20, therefore, refers to the homeward journey of the Argonauts. This interpretation clarifies the much-emended *nota*, line 20. The shores are *nota* not for themselves but for their connection with *Ἀργὼ πασιμέλουσα* and the word is a pointer to the learned variant of the myth being used by Propertius. Learned variants of myths combined with linguistic pointers are in place in this poem.⁵

¹ e.g. Thuc. 1. 5. 2; Moschus 3. 82; Virg. *Ecl.* 6. 46, 62; Hor. *Sat.* 1. 10. 36; 2. 5. 41. The example most relevant to what follows is: *et qui per freta duxit Argonautas*, Stat. *Sil.* 2. 7. 77 (referring to Varro of Atax).

² See Enk ad loc.

³ Cf. schol. ad Ap. Rhod. 4. 257–62b; 282–91b.

⁴ Ibid. The latter point is not clear in the scholiast.

⁵ See Enk on lines 31 and 35, though Enk's suggestion about *Oeagri figura* (line 35) is

Hence the first enterprise from which Propertius recoils is the writing of *Argonautica*, an epic describing the outward (line 19) and the return (line 20) voyages of the Argo.¹

Similarly lines 21–2 signify an epic theme—the Theban cycle²—also mentioned as such by Propertius at 1. 7. 1–2; 2. 1. 21; 3. 9. 37–8, all contexts where the rejection of epic is at issue as here. The last of these passages is worth quoting for its cryptic mode of expression, comparable to that of lines 21–2.

non flebo in cineres arcem sedisse paternos
Cadmi nec semper proelia clade pari. (3. 9. 37–9)³
semper O *septem* Lipsius

The concept of line 22 is one which (altered in detail) is found elsewhere in connection with the Theban cycle, albeit at a different point in it. Cf. Jocasta's words to Polyneices:

φέρ' ἤν' ἔλῃς γῆν τήνδ', ὃ μὴ τύχοι ποτέ,
πρὸς θεῶν, τρόπαια πῶς ἀναστήσεις Διί;
πῶς δ' αὖ κατάρξει θυμάτων, ἔλῶν πάτραν,
καὶ σκῦλα γράψεις πῶς ἐπ' Ἰνάχου ῥοαίς;
Θήβας πυρώσας τάσδε Πολυνείκης θεοῖς
ἀσπίδας ἔθηκε; . . . (Eur. *Phoen.* 571–6)

The division of the Argonauts' voyage into outward and return journeys in lines 19–20 suggests that the Theban cycle may also be alluded to in lines 21–2 in its two major components, i.e. the war of the Seven and the war of the Epigoni. This notion is supported by the special relevance which the meaning of line 21 might be thought to have to the first expedition and the meaning of line 22 to the second. Prop. 3. 9. 37–8 gives no help with this question. If O's *semper* (recently defended by Camps ad loc.) is read, then the allusion in 3. 9. 37–8 is only to the war of the Epigoni; if Lipsius' *septem*, then there is a dual allusion parallel to that suggested for 2. 30. 20–1 but in reverse order. All in all, the hypothesis of a dual allusion at 2. 30. 20–1 is more attractive, but no certainty is possible.

The interpretation of lines 19–22 in literary terms depends on two assumptions which require justification:

- (a) that N's text of line 19 is correct;
- (b) that the subject of *ire* is *me* understood (though the failure of this latter assumption would demand only a slight shift of emphasis).

(a) No attempts to bypass N's text of line 19 are convincing. Neither is Enk's justification of *non tamen immerito* as a reference back to lines 15–16. I shall attempt to justify the text of N with an argument based on the meaning of negated *immerito*. *T.L.L.* s.v. 2a (*in fig. litot. c. negatione*) defines its meaning as,

merito, iure, cum ratione (in bonam uel malam partem; notione meriti saepissime plus minus euanida).

weakened by *Minoa figura* (3. 19. 21).

¹ In the late Republic P. Terentius Varro Atacinus had written such a work, a free translation of Apollonius. Propertius refers to him, 2. 34. 85.

² G. Luck (*Rhein. Mus.* 105 [1962], 344 ff.) also refers these two lines to the Theban

cycle but his interpretation of the surrounding lines differs from mine.

³ For a riddle on the same subject cf. *A.P.* 14. 38

κτεῖνα κάσιν, κτάνε δ' αὖ με κάσις, θάνομεν δ'
ὑπὸ πατρός·
μητέρα δ' ἀμφότεροι τεθναότες κτάνομεν.

This definition proceeds along normal lines while sounding the warning with *cum ratione* and with *cum notione* etc. that moral evaluation is not necessarily part of the meaning of the words.

Among the examples given under *T.L.L.* 2a, some clearly argue for a meaning other than 'not undeservedly, not unjustly'.

fecit hoc idem et L. Scipio tabulamque uictoriae suae Asiaticae in Capitolio posuit, idque aegre tulisse fratrem Africanum tradunt, haut immerito, quando filius eius illo proelio captus fuerat. (Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 35. 7. 22)

Justice, rights, and wrongs do not enter into the matter. Africanus had no *right* to object to his brother's action. *haud immerito* stands between a statement of an action and a fact, explaining that action. Its logical function is to introduce a fact which is consistent with the prior action and it means 'and not unnaturally', 'and no wonder', 'as you might have expected'. The writer is not concerned with the moral rightness or wrongness of the prior action but with its appropriateness. This weakened meaning can also be seen in:

inimicus patriae fuisse Ti. Gracchus existimatus est, nec immerito, quia potentiam suam saluti eius praetulerat. (Val. Max. 4. 7. 1)

Propertius is fond of negated *immerito*. He has *non tamen immerito* at 3. 19. 27 and *sed non immerito* at 2. 6. 35. 2. 6. 31-6 provides a model for Propertius' usage:

a gemat, in terris ista qui protulit arte
turpia sub tacita condita laetitia!
non istis olim uariabant tecta figuris:
tum paries nullo crimine pictus erat.
sed non immerito! uelauit aranea fanum
et mala desertos occupat herba deos.

The run of thought is

- (1) 'in ancient times there were no obscene wall-paintings <as there are now>' (*uide* previous lines);
- (2) '*sed non immerito*';
- (3) 'we neglect the shrines of the gods <which our ancestors built and looked after>'.
sed non immerito = 'no wonder', 'what can you expect', 'naturally'.

The implication is not that Propertius' contemporaries *deserved* to have obscene wall-paintings but that they are *appropriate*. Failure to realize that *immerito* could have this weakened, non-moral meaning led to those suggestions for transposing lines 35-6 rightly rejected by Barber (*OCT*).

The second case—*non tamen immerito* 3. 19. 27—was misunderstood by Housman, who proposed a transposition accepted by Barber. Lines 23-8 in the order of the manuscripts are:

haud igitur dotem uirgo desponderat hosti!
Nise, tuas portas fraude reclusit amor.
at uos, innuptae, felicius urite taedas.
pendet Cretaea tracta puella rate.
non tamen immerito; Minos sedet arbiter Orci:
uictor erat quamuis, aequus in hoste fuit.

An account of various evil deeds of women ends with Scylla's betrayal of her father to her beloved Minos. After a glance at other unmarried girls whom he wishes better fortune in their marriages, Propertius continues;

(1) Minos repaid Scylla's treacherous service by dragging her behind his ship.

(2) *non tamen immerito*

(3) *Minos sedet arbiter Orci*—the whole sequence being further explained by *uictor erat quamuis, aequus in hoste fuit*.

Propertius is not making a moral judgement. He is simply relating Minos' action to the fact that follows. Minos was made judge of Hades because of his impartial justice. That was why he repaid a treacherous favour with impartially just punishment for treachery. *non tamen immerito* means 'and no wonder'. Hence the text need not be altered. All that is required is some form of punctuation after *immerito*.

In the present case (2. 30. 19–22) exactly the same logical structure is present:

(1) The *docta tibia* was thrown by Pallas into the river Maeander.

(2) *haud tamen immerito* = 'and no wonder', 'naturally'.

(3) Either 'the *senes* want Propertius to write epics' or 'if Propertius listens to the *senes* and abandons *Amor*, epic-writing will be the only alternative'.

This latter fact is consonant with the previously mentioned action of Pallas against the symbol of elegy, i.e. her throwing the innocent *tibia* into the river.

This run of thought will perhaps be further clarified if lines 15–16 are reinterpreted,

illorum antiquis onerantur legibus aures:
hic locus est in quo, tibia docta, sones.

At first sight the *leges antiquae* appear to represent either the old-fashioned morality of the *senes* or simply 'out-of-date laws'.¹ But the two lines are highly antithetical. *illorum* is answered by *hic* and *antiquis* by *docta* with its flavour of Alexandrian modernity. Furthermore the sound of the flute answers to the sound of the *leges*. It would be strange if Propertius had taken the trouble to employ multiple antithesis of this kind if the two lines are really comparing two items as different as laws and flute-playing (i.e. elegy). An alternative interpretation suggests itself. *Lex* can be used sometimes in literary contexts to mean metrical rules.² In this context *antiquae leges* then suggests the rules of epic verse—epic being the most natural thing to be contrasted with the elegiac *tibia*. Conflicts of literary taste between generations are a familiar feature of Classical literature³ and the charge of 'out-of-dateness' is a common one in literary disputes.⁴

The contrast now suggested for the couplet, i.e. epic and elegy, provides

¹ For the latter meaning cf. *Carmen de Figuris* line 135 *leges descendum est: discit amores* (cited by Shackleton Bailey, *Propertiana*, Appendix, p. 293) where *leges* and *amor* are also contrasted. One is tempted to connect the adjective *antiquis* with *antiquare* in the sense 'to reject a law' and with its

cognates, but this may be excessive.

² e.g. Cic. *Or.* 198; Hor. *Car.* 4. 2. 12.

³ Cf. Arist. *Nub.* 1353 ff.; *Daitales* (i. p. 449K; ii. p. 103M).

⁴ e.g. Eupol. (i. p. 294K; ii. p. 481M); Antiph. (ii. p. 45K; ii. p. 46M).

a thought-structure for it which explains the multiple antithesis and is more in keeping with the rest of the poem. But it cannot be concealed that the use of the plural *leges* in the sense postulated is odd. Possibly, since Propertius frequently uses plurals for singulars,¹ this difficulty is not serious. But it is curious that the hypothesis of a Greek original (a hypothesis made more attractive by the presence of the Heliconian passage, lines 25 ff.) would instantly explain what Propertius wrote. If such an original contained a form of the plural of νόμος then Propertius would almost inevitably have translated it as 'law'.² But the Greek writer who was contrasting epic and elegy in terms of their sound would have used the word in the sense 'tune'.³ Propertius would not have noticed that anything was amiss, since for him the legal metaphor of *accusent*, *leges* (and perhaps *locus*), together with his familiarity with contrasts between *amor* and *leges* like the one cited by Shackleton Bailey,⁴ would have given the passage continuity.⁵

But whatever the origin of the contrast between *leges* and the *tibia*, it is clear that, if *leges* has a literary meaning = 'the rules of epic', then it explains the role of the *senes* both in lines 15-16 and in lines 19 ff. But if it be concluded that *leges* simply means 'laws' this conclusion does not harm the thesis previously put forward about the literary meaning of lines 19 ff.

(b) The exclamatory infinitive representing the action suggested to the speaker by others or by the context (here rendered easier by the presence of the *nunc indignantis*) is common Latin usage with ellipse of pronoun in all persons⁶ and should cause no difficulty. The real problem is whether the subject is *me* understood (i.e. Propertius) or *eam* understood (i.e. the *tibia*).

The latter hypothesis, i.e. that the *tibia* is the subject of *ire*, would provide a clearer verbal continuity. A mobile musical instrument occurs at *A.P.* 9. 324 (Mnesalca) but this epigram is a treatment of a paradox and seems to be unique. Moreover if we were to hold that the *tibia* was the subject of *ire* we would be postulating the existence of a variant of the convention discussed above: i.e. that a poet instead of speaking of writing something, could speak of his *musical instrument* doing it. But this variant is unparalleled. The closest variant which can be found is that the poet, instead of speaking of writing about something, speaks of his weapon as doing it [*A.P.* 9. 198, about Nonnus], or that the poet's weapon is spoken of as doing what he has written about, [*A.P.* 9. 184, about Alcaeus]. But *tibiae* are not weapons.⁷

Hence it seems best to accept *me* as subject of *ire*. This is further assisted by the existence of another Classical convention by which the poet, instead of talking of writing poetry, talks about sailing a ship. This convention is widely exemplified⁸ and is employed by Propertius in similar contexts of rejecting the idea of writing epics.⁹ There is no primary use of this second convention in

¹ See Postgate, *Select Elegies of Propertius*, Intro. p. xcvi.

² Just as ἀνομόν (Aesch. *Ag.*, line 150) was always rendered by scholars as 'lawless' until Lloyd-Jones [*CQ* N.S. iii (1963), 96] pointed out that it could more suitably be derived from νόμος = tune.

³ I am indebted to Mr. J. G. Howie for this suggestion.

⁴ See p. 210 n. 1.

⁵ Professor D. A. West kindly drew my attention to this metaphor.

⁶ Cf. K.-S. i. p. 720.

⁷ Further argument in favour of *tibia* being the subject of *ire* could be made by adducing Propertius' free semi-personified way of talking about the *tibia* at 2. 7. 11; 3. 10. 23; and 4. 6. 8. But while not dismissing the idea as out of the question, I remain sceptical.

⁸ e.g. Pind. *Pyth.* 10. 51; 11. 40; Virg. *Georg.* 2. 41; Hor. *Car.* 4. 15. 1-4; Ovid, *Met.* 15. 176-7; *Tr.* 2. 548.

⁹ e.g. Prop. 3. 3. 22-4; 3. 9. 3-4, 35-6.

2. 30. 19–22. Explicit contrasts between large and small ships and between rivers and open sea are lacking.¹ But the very existence of this convention may help explain how the *tibia*'s being thrown in the river could bring to Propertius' mind the idea of himself crossing the sea—although in the present case crossing the sea is not an image in itself for writing an epic but part of the subject-matter of the epic Propertius is refusing to write.²

I mentioned above that a literary interpretation of lines 19–22 is supported by Propertius' visit to Helicon [line 25 ff.]. A brief amplification of this remark may be in order. The visit to Helicon, a recurring scene in Classical literature,³ is usually linked with instructions given to the poet to write or not to write poetry of a certain kind, and it often forms part of an apologia for the sort of poetry he is in fact writing. This is the case with Propertius' other visit to Helicon (3. 3). The sort of poetry which the poet is deterred from writing on Helicon is very often epic—as it is with Propertius in 3. 3. In the proximity of these standard features of the machinery of poetic literary criticism, a literary interpretation of lines 19–22 is very much at home. Moreover the particular interpretation given, which makes the lines a rejection of advice or expectation that Propertius will write epics, is completely consonant with the normal function of visits to Helicon in the work of Hellenistic and Augustan poets including Propertius himself.

One small point remains which is connected with the literary matters discussed in the poem.

una contentum pudeat me uiuere amica?
hoc si crimen erit, crimen Amoris erit. (lines 23–4)

Enk explains *una amica* (line 23) as meaning not 'one mistress' but 'a mistress and nothing else' and makes the line a contrast with the military activities he thinks Propertius is envisaging in lines 19–22. A more natural explanation of *una* may be sought within the literary context of the second half of the poem.

Because, in this as in other matters, the conventions of elegy are diverse and self-contradictory, it cannot be said that the elegiac poet, in his role as *amator*, always commits himself to one beloved or to one beloved at one time. But there is a general tendency for the elegiac poet to proclaim this kind of commitment, which is regarded in elegiac poetry as the normal behaviour of the *amator*, poet or not. Besides what the elegiac poets generally say about themselves, Ovid, for example, describes even his typical non-poet lover as such a person:

elige cui dicas 'tu mihi sola places'. (Ovid, *A.A.* 1. 42)

Even outside elegiac poetry the idea is current. Lucretius in attacking *Amor* assumes as its opposite not abstinence but *uulgiuaga Venus*,⁴ thus implying that attachment to a single person is a basic characteristic of *Amor*.

¹ It might be argued that the *Maeander* and the *Phrygiae undae* form such a contrast. But the difficulty of fitting the concept into a consistent pattern leads me to believe that this convention was not in the forefront of Propertius' mind.

² Prop. 3. 3 and 3. 9 *inter alia* demonstrate

the ease with which Propertius moves from one metaphor for writing to another, there being no hard and fast barrier in his imagination between these metaphors.

³ Cf. M. L. West on Hesiod, *Theogony*, lines 22–34.

⁴ Lucr. *De Rer. Nat.* 4. 1071.

una amica should then mean 'a single mistress'. If Propertius is thinking of the Lucretian distinction between *una amica* and *uulgiuaga Venus* then lines 23-4 may perhaps be linked with his attack on the *senes*. The morality of the *senes* was one which would have approved of Lucretius' attitude and considered the *amator*, attached to a single mistress, immoral.¹ But within the literary context of the second half of the poem, it is probably more fitting to think of *una amica* as signifying primarily elegiac poetry, inasmuch as it is the love of one woman which Propertius *qua* elegiac poet generally practises and approves of in contrast with, e.g., the *ulgares amores* of Gallus (Prop. 1. 13. 1) which he criticizes. In a context in which Propertius is discussing the elegiac love-poetry he dedicates to his single mistress, *una amica* is probably a reference, not as Enk would have it to *Amor* in contrast with war, but to erotic elegy in contrast with epic (if with anything). And so, like the rest of the poem after line 15, it is of literary significance.

Propertius 2. 30 A and B has been described by Enk as *inter difficillimas Propertii elegias*. The above exegesis can, at least, claim greater simplicity than previous attempts. However, it remains admittedly complex and hypothesizes an abbreviated and hermetic mode of composition. Such a mode of composition is not alien to Propertius and a hypothesis invoking it probably requires no defence. But if defence is needed, the function of the poem may provide it. In virtue of its rejection of epic in favour of elegy, the poem is functioning as a *recusatio* of a standard type. Propertius has already addressed one such direct *recusatio* to Maecenas in the prologue poem of Book 2, a book dedicated to Maecenas by the address to him 2. 1. 17 ff. It may be that Propertius, in experimenting with various ways of stating his elegiac programme and rejecting Maecenas' invitations to take up epic, employed in this poem the lay-figures of the *senes* as a device to avoid laying before the eyes of Maecenas another direct *recusatio* at this point in his career and to give a suitably varied treatment to two *recusationes* in the same book.

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¹ Cf. the *sententia dia Catonis* (Hor. Sat. 1. 2. 34 f.) and Plaut. Trin. 642 ff.