SPEECH, SILENCE, AND THE PLAY OF SIGNS IN PROPERTIUS 2.18*

THOMAS K. HUBBARD

Cornell University

Most modern editors of Propertius have regarded elegy 2.18 as the amalgamation of two or even three discrete units, which are either fragments of another poem or independent poems in their own right.[1] Two recent critics have challenged this view, arguing that the text should be read as it stands in the manuscripts, and that this elegy unifies disparate themes through various structural devices.[2] I would propose that the text's unity is of a far more integral and organic nature than even its defenders have hitherto recognized. Elegy 2.18 not only explores the commonplace amatory motif of love in old age, but also reflects more generally on questions of interpersonal communication, perception, and deceit.

It may be useful first to elaborate why I find previous treatments of this text unsatisfactory. While it is true that 2.18.5–22 and 2.18.23–38 by themselves form coherent units concluded by appropriate gnomic re-

[1] The threefold division (between 2.18.1–4, 5–22, and 23–38) was proposed relatively late, by J. Hetzel, *Zur Erklärung des Propertius* (Dillenburg 1876) 12f., but has been followed by almost all the most recent editors, including H. E. Butler and E. A. Barber, *The Elegies of Propertius* (Oxford 1933) 51f.; W. A. Camps, *Propertius: Elegies, Book II* (Cambridge 1967) 35f.; G. C. Giardina, *Sex. Propertii Elegiarum Liber II* (Torino 1977) 42–44; L. Richardson, *Propertius: Elegies I–IV* (Norman 1977) 71f., 76; and R. Hanslik, *Sex. Propertii Libri IV* (Leipzig 1979) 67f. P. J. Enk, *Sex. Propertii Elegiarum Liber Secundus* (Leiden 1962) 1.95–97 favors the earlier proposal of twofold division (between 2.18.1–22 and 23–38), which was advanced by C. Lachmann, *Sex. Aurelii Propertii Carmina* (Leipzig 1816) 164–68 and followed by E. Baehrens, *Sex. Propertii Elegiarum Libri IV* (Leipzig 1880) 67f.; M. Schuster, *Sex. Propertii Elegiarum Libri IV* (Leipzig 1954) 58–60; and M. Rothstein, *Die Elegien des Sextus Propertius* (Berlin 1920) 1.325–32, who combines 2.18.1–22 with 2.17.5–18. D. Paganelli, *Properce: Élégies* (Paris 1964³) 59f. is alone among modern editors in printing 2.18 as a continuous text, but even he seems to do so only grudgingly, and footnotes the poem by saying that it is a "long développement sans intérêt, presque sans poésie."

[2] Cf. W. R. Nethercut, "Propertius 2.18: 'Kein Einheitliches Gedicht . . . ,'" *ICS* 5 (1980) 94–109; G. Williams, *Figures of Thought in Roman Poetry* (New Haven 1980) 146–49.

flections (the first on Tithonus and the theme of love in old age, the second on the theme of false hair color), it has been increasingly recognized by scholars that not all elegies of Propertius possess such epigrammatic neatness, and that the poet's style may have undergone some development in this regard.[3] Book 2 features a number of rather long elegies which explore an issue or situation by allusion to several different frames of reference,[4] much in the manner of Tibullus, as opposed to the generally shorter and more dramatically contextualized pieces of the Monobiblos. Indeed, contemporary literary hermeneutics helps us understand that what may have appeared to older critics as discontinuities or contradictions in a text may in fact be the crucial interstices of meaning in which a complex text's conflicting and submerged semiotic codes confront each other. Under any account, 2.18.1–4 remain something of an embarrassment for analysts and unitarians alike; the former either view it as a displaced fragment or attach it to the end of 2.17 (where it is quite superfluous),[5] while the latter view it as a preamble which is immediately contradicted by what follows.

In 1980, Nethercut proposed that we view 2.18 as "a single elegy unified by high irony."[6] The self-exhortation not to complain in lines 1–4 is ironically undercut by the complaints of 5–20,[7] which are capped off by the "quasi-philosophic distancing" of 21f., which in turn is undercut by the "further immersion in agony" of 23–38. The transition from lines 1–4 to 5–20 is effected by the reversal of *si quid* (3f.) into *quid . . . si* (5), even as the transition from lines 21f. to 23–38 is smoothed by the temporal antithesis inherent in both lines 22 and 23. While these observations may help us understand the transitional mechanics of the poem's construction, they do not tell us enough about its thematic development or unity—i.e., why the poet has selected the particular motifs, images, and allusions which he uses in this poem, or how these are related to one another.

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[3] On the tendency to divide elegies unnecessarily (particularly in Book 2), see the discussions of Williams (above, note 2) 122–53 and M. Hubbard, *Propertius* (New York 1975) 44–67. While no one can doubt that there are some serious textual problems in Book 2, editors have sometimes been overly imaginative in finding them, as exemplified most recently by the edition of Richardson (above, note 1).

[4] E.g. 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.9, 2.15, 2.16, 2.26, 2.28, 2.31/32, 2.33, 2.34.

[5] This has been done by Richardson (above, note 1) 76 and Hanslik (above, note 1) 67. But 2.17.17f. already provides an excellent reversal and termination to the speaker's self-pity and curses upon Cynthia: she will soon be the one who laments. This epigrammatic close would only be unbalanced by a second conclusion in which the speaker admonishes himself to silence. We should also note that although *dolere* (2.18.4) may be relevant to the theme of 2.17, *vidisse* (2.18.3) is not.

[6] Nethercut (above, note 2) 96.

[7] This view was adumbrated by P. J. Enk, "The Unity of Some Elegies of Propertius," *Latomus* 15 (1956) 191f.

Gordon Williams's treatment of the poem, which appeared in the same year, devotes somewhat more attention to the text's thematics and is in many ways illuminating, but its results are not, in the final analysis, much different. The text is analyzed as a "suppressed premise" (connecting lines 1–4 to 5f.), "a *paradeigma* ... related by opposite association to what he has just said" (the Tithonus myth), and two opposed ideas "generated from the myth," with which "the opening resolution is deliberately forgotten" (in lines 19–22), but subsequently rediscovered in line 30, after which "the theme of old age enters very obliquely and is unexpectedly expanded." Williams summarizes this approach by claiming that "the poem is a subtle unity that deliberately draws in disparate themes and solves the consequent problem of coherence by the technique of thematic anticipation and the use of *paradeigmata* to alter the movement of ideas." I quote rather extensively, because I find the mechanistic rhetoric of this analysis somewhat disturbing. If we attempt to reconstruct the processes of poetic composition, it seems unlikely that a myth will be introduced simply to illustrate the opposite of a suppressed premise, and that the poem's subsequent ideas will be "generated" out of that myth; it is much more probable that the poet initially had certain seminal ideas, whether conscious or unconscious, and that he chose this specific myth as an apt illustration of those ideas, even if the myth may be introduced as a foil to an antithetical assertion. Nor is it very helpful to say that a thematic strand is "deliberately forgotten" and later rediscovered when what we are actually dealing with is a very self-conscious framing technique enclosing illustrative matter. The whole bias and impetus of Williams's methodology is to show how the poet can yoke together seemingly irrelevant blocks of material through the use of verbal echoes and transitional formulae; what we are left with, however, is still a rag-bag tapestry which the poet has contrived to stitch together through a variety of "thematic signposts." This approach does not explain to us why the poet chose to interweave these particular thematic elements into a poetic texture.[8]

I would argue that elegy 2.18 seems disjointed largely because of a common misperception of the poem's opening (1–4) and the relation of these important lines to what follows.

> assiduae multis odium peperere querelae;
> > frangitur in tacito femina saepe viro.

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[8] Criticism of lyric poetry often concentrates excessively on either selection (i.e, the choice of themes) or contiguity (i.e., the arrangement and connection of themes). It should properly deal with both in tandem; see the remarks on the theoretical limitations of "paradigmatic" and "syntagmatic" criticism in T. K. Hubbard, *The Pindaric Mind: A Study of Logical Structure in Early Greek Poetry* (Leiden 1985) 2f.

> si quid vidisti, semper vidisse negato!
>   aut si quid doluit forte, dolere nega!
> quid mea si canis aetas candesceret annis,
>   et faceret scissas languida ruga genas? (2.18.1–6)

Commentators have usually been very unclear about whom they regard the second person of lines 3f. as addressed to; those who have faced the issue are misled by the apparent masculine application of line 2 (*tacito viro*) into interpreting it either as the speaker himself or as a generalized second person which includes the speaker.[9] This assumption faces an immediate problem with the abrupt shift to self-reference in the first person at line 5 (*mea . . . aetas*), which almost compels us to take the second person here as a genuine second person; this conclusion is supported by the recognition that the unidentified second person in Propertius is usually the speaker's mistress.[10] Indeed, the passage as a whole makes better sense if interpreted this way. The speaker is not telling himself to cease complaint (which would certainly be an awkward beginning for a poem), but is exhorting his mistress not to nag so much: her continual complaints[11] will only breed resentment (*odium*) on his part, and meet with silence in reply. The man's taciturnity renders a woman's complaints futile, and thus functions not only as a response, but also as a paradigm for her. This provides a much easier interpretation of line 2 (i.e., that her *querelae* will not move him and will only lead to her own frustration) than to assume, as most commentators do, that a man's silence about his mistress's infidelity will somehow make her break down in remorse (a thought which finds support neither in

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[9] Cf. Enk (above, note 1) 2.253f.; Nethercut (above, note 2) 96f.; Williams (above, note 2) 146f. There are only two cases of self-address in Propertius, and both are clearly indicated as such: 2.3.1–4 are framed in quotes as a self-address by the tag *quaerebam* in line 5, and 2.8.17ff. are made clear by the vocative *Properti*. The unidentified second person as a generalized lover does occur, but it is always gnomic and descriptive, and is never prescriptive, much less self-advisory; cf. 2.4.1–4, 2.8.8, 2.23.7–17, 2.30.1–12. Audience-address occurs only in the very first line of the poem; cf. 2.1.1, 3.11.1, 3.13.1, 4.2.1f., 4.8.1.

[10] This is certainly the case in 2.11, 2.17, 2.22.43, 2.24.17–52, 2.28.11–32, 2.31.1, 3.2.17f., 3.8, 3.15, 3.19.1, 3.20.1–10, and is probably also the case in 2.21 (assuming, as is likely, that Panthus' abandoned girlfriend is Cynthia). While the unidentified address to the mistress is common in Books 2 and 3, the Monobiblos tends to prefer a technique of suspended identification, with the addressee identified only well into the poem, or sometimes even at the very end of the poem (cf. 1.5, 1.8A, 1.9, 1.14, 2.7, 2.13.18ff.); this technique of suspended identification is in part what we see here, inasmuch as 2.18.19 (directly following the Tithonus digression) at least identifies the addressee with the vocative epithet *perfida*, although never explicitly naming her.

[11] Complaints (or *querelae*) just as often characterize the mistress as the lover himself. Cf. 1.3.35–46; 1.6.5–11; 1.17.9; 2.20.1–8; 3.6.17–25; 3.19.1; 3.23.11–14; 3.25.4–6, 15f.; 4.7.13–95; 4.8.79. We also find the mistress's complaints and entreaties engendering *odium* in the lover, as in 1.6.10 (accepting the manuscripts' reading *irato*) and 2.24.11–16.

common sense nor in ancient tradition).[12] "Silence" in Propertius is far more common as a response to complaints than as a state of not complaining.[13] Thus, line 2 expresses the logical consequence of line 1 (illustrating the *odium* which the woman's complaints could cause), rather than an alternative to it: *frangitur . . . femina* clearly implies conflict and *odium*, not its opposite.

The cause of the *querelae* is progressively revealed by the lines which follow.[14] Lines 3f. suggest that it is something which the mistress has seen and which has caused pain to her. Lines 5f. and the following Tithonus myth, as well as the closing reflections of 19f. (which return to the second person address), all seem to focus on the theme of old age. It therefore seems reasonable to conclude that the thing seen and lamented in lines 1–4 is not infidelity (which is nowhere mentioned),[15] but precisely what the speaker cites in the next couplet—namely, physical features which reveal the aging process (in their most extreme form, gray hairs and wrinkled skin). The speaker's implication may thus be that his mistress should not complain about his appearance, but should pretend to ignore any signs of incipient deterioration, since he is not yet completely white and withered,[16] and even if he were, this would not be grounds for ceasing to love him (as suggested by the example of Aurora, who loves Tithonus even in his old age).[17] The rhetorical extravagance of

[12] Compare Williams (above, note 2) 147, who speaks of "silently wearing the woman down." It seems to me that silence would have this effect only if a man went for a very long period saying absolutely nothing to a woman; but this is clearly not the kind of silence implied by lines 3f. (which rather seem to indicate silence about something very specific).

[13] Cf. 1.16.18; 1.18.1, 23f.; 2.33.23ff. The protracted silence which offends the ill-tempered mistress in 1.10.21f. is surely not silence about her infidelity.

[14] On the gradual revelation of circumstances and background as a characteristic technique of Latin poetry, see G. Williams, *Tradition and Originality in Roman Poetry* (Oxford 1968) 172–85.

[15] Prof. W. R. Nethercut suggests to me that if we assume Cynthia to be the addressee here, the subject indeed is her complaint about the speaker's infidelity, and as such 2.18.1–4 provide a witty reversal to the conclusion of the preceding poem (2.17.17f., where he foretells that she will eventually be the one who will cry over the loss of his former *fides*). Under this reading, 2.18.5–19 justify the speaker's lapse from fidelity by reminding Cynthia that she has done the same and is in no position to complain.

[16] Williams (above, note 2) 146 is correct in his interpretation of *quid si . . . ?* (5) as implying something like, "It isn't as if . . . " Nevertheless, we should note that this couplet is still phrased rhetorically as a question, and thus seems directed toward an imagined interlocutor; this supports our interpretation of the second person of lines 3f. as the mistress rather than an idealized lover or the speaker himself.

[17] This is a far more simple and straightforward interpretation than Williams's hypothesis of a "suppressed premise" to the effect that complaint is unnecessary because he is not old, and therefore has plenty of time to wait in silence. There is no inherent connection between the motifs of youth and silence, nor does Williams advance any topical parallels suggesting such a connection in the traditions of ancient amatory lyric. Nor does the

imagining what Cynthia's attitude toward him would be if he were gen-
uinely old is on a par with the poems where he imagines the attitude of
the lovers to each other's death (1.19, 2.11, 2.13, 4.7). Although bio-
graphical speculation in such matters is hazardous, it should be observed
that Propertius was probably in his late twenties or early thirties at the
time of this poem's composition,[18] and perhaps noticing the first indica-
tions of thinning hair and facial lines. However this may be, the motif of
a woman finding fault with her lover's premature signs of age is thor-
oughly conventional, as illustrated by a poem of Anacreon:

σφαίρῃ δηὖτέ με πορφυρῇ
βάλλων χρυσοκόμης Ἔρως
νήνι ποικιλοσαμβάλῳ
        συμπαίζειν προκαλεῖται·

ἡ δ᾽, ἐστὶν γὰρ ἀπ᾽ εὐκτίτου
Λέσβου, τὴν μὲν ἐμὴν κόμην,
λευκὴ γάρ, καταμέμφεται,
        πρὸς δ᾽ ἄλλην τινὰ χάσκει. (fr. 358 Page)

The chief rhetorical point of the epigram is of course the girl's Lesbian-
ism,[19] which provides a neat insult to her apparent pride in being from
Lesbos; that her faulting the speaker's white hair is opposed to this in a
μέν clause leads us to suppose that the woman-criticizing-lover's-white-
hair-motif was already a familiar and well-worn topos even in Anac-
reon's day.[20] Certainly it was commonplace for male lovers to find fault
with aging females (as the speaker himself does here in 19f.).[21]

Indeed, this emphasis on signs of age is evident not only through-
out the myth (7 *Tithoni senectam*, 15 *senis Tithoni*, 17 *cum sene*, 18 *canae
comae*), but also in the transitional passage closing the myth, where the

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Tithonus myth suggest that complaint is somehow the domain of old age—quite the con-
trary. It is not reasonable to assume that Propertius would engage in a twelve-line mytho-
logical digression simply as a foil to the concept of "not old."

[18] There is no reliable evidence as to Propertius' date of birth, other than that he was
probably old enough to remember well the relative who died at the siege of Perugia in
41 B.C., and whose epitaph is provided by 1.21; this would seem to suggest a date some-
time in the decade of the 50s. The only certain date in Book 2B is the allusion to the death
of Gallus (2.34.91f.) in 26 B.C.; but if Books 2A, 2B, and 3 were published together (as
may be suggested by 2.13.25), any given poem could be as late as 20 B.C.

[19] For a justification of this interpretation (and the manuscripts' ἄλλην), see M. Wigod-
sky, "Anacreon and the Girl from Lesbos," *CP* 57 (1962) 109, as against the objections of
J. A. Davison, "Anacreon, Fr. 5 Diehl," *TAPA* 90 (1959) 44f., and others.

[20] We also find it as a popular motif in the *Anacreontea* (nos. 7, 51, 63 Edmonds), which
may have been more or less contemporary with Propertius. Also compare Paulus Silentia-
rius, *AP* 5.264. Ovid (*Met.* 9.422f.) has Ceres complaining of Iasion's gray hairs. The
Tithonus example may have even been used by Mimnermus as a paradigm for the con-
tempt in which an older lover is held: cf. fr. 4 (and 1.9f., 3, 5.5–8).

[21] Cf. *AP* 5.21, 5.273; Horace *Ep.* 8, *C.* 1.25, 4.13.

speaker resumes the second person address and the addressee is more clearly revealed as his temperamental mistress:

> at tu etiam iuvenem odisti me, perfida, cum sis
>   ipsa anus haud longa curva futura die.
> quin ego deminuo curam, quod saepe Cupido
>   huic malus esse solet cui bonus ante fuit.
> nunc etiam infectos demens imitare Britannos,
>   ludis et externo tincta nitore caput. (2.18.19–24)

The *at tu ...* clearly parallels the *at non ... Aurora* at the beginning of the myth (7), and suggests that the real point of contrast is not so much between the speaker and Tithonus as between his mistress and Aurora. This reinforces our impression that the advice of lines 1–4 and the question of lines 5f. are directed toward the mistress, rather than toward the speaker himself.

The transition not only resumes the argument of 1–6, but reverses them by suggesting that it is really the mistress herself who is more threatened by age. The implication of lines 5f. was of course that the speaker was *not* yet white-haired and withered, even though his mistress may have treated him as such; this thought is asserted in more positive form by line 19 (*at tu etiam iuvenem odisti me*: the term *iuvenis*, of course, can refer to any man below the age of 40). The woman, on the other hand, is taunted as one who, at least in comparison, *ipsa anus haud longa curva futura die* (20); whatever the relative age-difference, a woman such as Cynthia is far more dependent on good looks for her prosperity and happiness than any man would be. The mythological *exemplum*, like so many in Propertius,[22] is thus revealed as asymmetrical to the dramatic situation in several important respects: the speaker is not old like Tithonus, and his mistress is not loyal like Aurora, but if anything, it is the mistress who is growing old and the speaker who is loyal.

The next couplet (21f.) also reflects on the theme of aging, particularly in its assertion that Cupid *huic malus esse solet cui bonus ante fuit*. Commentators have again taken this remark as self-addressed,[23] but in light of what has just preceded, it seems more relevant to the mistress,

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[22] Consider the *exemplum* of Milanion in 1.1.9–16, whose pain and suffering in love win him success, as opposed to the speaker, whose pain and suffering go unrewarded (1.1.17f.). The male/female-reversal of roles which we see in 2.18 is common elsewhere in Propertius, as in 1.15.9–22 (where Calypso, Alphesiboea, Hypsipyle, and Evadne are all women abandoned by men, even though the poem's dramatic situation deals with a man's abandonment by a woman), 2.24.43–46 (where Theseus, Demophoon, and Jason are all men who abandon a woman, even though the poem again concerns a woman who abandons a man), or 2.8.21–24 (where Haemon is more like Cynthia, and Antigone more like the speaker).

[23] Cf. Camps (above, note 1) 139f., Nethercut (above, note 2) 99f. Butler and Barber (above, note 1) 221f. are unhappy with the couplet and regard it as "a very weak conclusion," but still divide the poem here.

who is the one most threatened by a change of fortune and whom the speaker is consciously trying to intimidate.[24] However we take them, lines 21f. would be weak as a conclusion (which division of the poem would require them to be): if referred to the speaker himself, the sentiment would be hackneyed and self-pitying, and if referred to his mistress, it would be a spiteful and vindictive *envoi* which would not reflect well on either party. But as part of a transition which refocuses our interest from the speaker's situation onto the mistress and her struggle with the advancing years, lines 21f. are very effective; their ambiguity of reference aids the transitional function by paralleling the fates of speaker and mistress.[25]

The sharp edge of the speaker's taunt is modulated into pathos by the picture of the mistress which the poet presents in lines 23f. The reversal of situation is completed when we learn that the mistress is so dissatisfied with the appearance of her own hair that she dyes it a new color; the implication is that she too has noticed traces of gray, from which she wishes to distract attention. Not only is she about to become stooped with age at some point in the not-too-distant future (20 *haud longa ... futura die*), but she worries about her appearance even now (*nunc etiam*).[26] Rather than following the chaste and civilized paradigm of Aurora (the goddess of the far East), she "imitates" the savage and outlandish *Britannos* (people of the extreme West). The use of artificial hair color was fairly common in this period,[27] particularly as a cosmetic to conceal graying hair. Allusion to this custom even becomes a poetic topos, which would have been recognized as such by Propertius' readers.[28] One may compare especially Tibullus 1.8.41–46:

> heu sero revocatur amor seroque iuventas
> cum vetus infecit cana senecta caput.
> tum studium formae est: coma tum mutatur, ut annos
> dissimulet viridi cortice tincta nucis:

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[24] Williams (above, note 2) 148 seems to be alone in recognizing that the statement really refers to both speaker and mistress.

[25] On the transitional use of gnomic statements with ambiguous reference to both subject and object, see Hubbard (above, note 8) 143–45.

[26] Nethercut (above, note 2) 99 takes the temporal antithesis implied by *nunc etiam* to be with lines 21f.; Williams (above, note 2) 148 sees the antithesis as between *anus* (20) and *nunc etiam* (implying Cynthia's present youth). But a temporal antithesis most properly involves temporal terms (i.e., the implicit "not very long from now" and "even now").

[27] See J. P. V. D. Balsdon, *Roman Women* (New York 1962) 258–60.

[28] In addition to the passage from Tibullus quoted in the text, one should also consider Ovid *AA* 3.163f.; Martial 3.43, 4.36. Ovid *Tr.* 4.8.2 (*inficit et nigras alba senecta comas*) may be meant as a witty reversal of the topos. Of course, texts such as Propertius 1.2 and Ovid *Am.* 1.14 show that criticism of cosmetics need not necessarily be connected with the theme of old age; but when the theme is clearly present (as in 2.18.5–22), the connection is an easy and even obvious one for the reader to make.

> tollere tum cura est albos a stirpe capillos
> et faciem dempta pelle referre novam.

This passage was familiar to Propertius and was directly imitated in 3.25.11–14:

> at te celatis aetas gravis urgeat annis,
> et veniat formae ruga sinistra tuae!
> vellere tum cupias albos a stirpe capillos,
> a! speculo rugas increpitante tibi . . .

In fact, elegy 3.25 provides an interesting analogy to the structural reversal of 2.18: the speaker is at first an object of derision to Cynthia (3.25.1f.; cf. 2.18.1f.), but is unmoved by her complaints (3.25.5f.; cf. 2.18.2), and although suffering pain (3.25.7–10; cf. 2.18.19, 21), he overcomes it with the wish that it will soon be Cynthia's turn to suffer as a lonely old woman trying to maintain her appearance against the advancing years (3.25.11–18; cf. 2.18.19ff.).

Such a reversal of emphasis from the speaker's situation to his mistress's, or *vice versa*, seems to be a favored structural pattern particularly for poems in Book 2B.[29] 2.16 falls into halves, the first (1–30) concerning Cynthia and her conduct with the *praetor*, the second (31–56) concerning the speaker's reaction to the situation. There is an even neater division in 2.19, the first half (1–16) concerning Cynthia's trip to the countryside, the second half (17–32) concerning the poet's own vacation there. 2.29 is divided between the speaker's drunken delusion about visiting Cynthia's house (1–22) and Cynthia's offended reception of him (23–42). 2.31/32 balances the speaker's tardiness caused by visiting the temple of Apollo Palatinus (2.31.1–16) with Cynthia's own absences while visiting shrines and cults outside of Rome (2.32.3–18).[30] And as poems like 2.26 and 2.33 demonstrate, this book's experiments with the diptych-form are by no means limited to one type.

Although 2.18.23ff. turns the brunt of the reproach onto Cynthia herself, it does so in a manner which is not vindictive or ugly. Even as much as he has been hurt by her, the speaker remains loyal to his mistress and attempts to assuage her anxieties by assuring her that physical appearance is not important to him: one should be satisfied with whatever nature has given (25 *ut natura dedit, sic omnis recta figura est*).

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[29] I am among those who follow Lachmann in dividing Book 2, although I believe that the division should probably be made after 2.12, as has recently been argued by J. K. King, "Propertius 2.1–12: his Callimachean second Libellus," *Würzburger Jahrbücher* NF 6b (1980) 61–84 and B. A. Heiden, "Book Division Within Propertius Book II," *QUCC* NS 11 (1982) 151–69. Also, cf. O. Skutsch, "The Second Book of Propertius," *HSCP* 79 (1975) 229–33.

[30] On this balance, see T. K. Hubbard, "Art and Vision in Propertius 2.31/32," *TAPA* 114 (1984) 283f.

Beauty is not even primarily physical: *mihi certe poteris formosa videri*
(29; note the future verb), and *mi formosa sat es, si modo saepe ve-
nis* (30). The note of seemingly tender concern combined with watchful
distrust is emphasized at the poem's conclusion:[31]

> cum tibi nec frater nec sit tibi filius ullus,
>   frater ego et tibi filius unus ego.
> ipse tuus semper tibi sit custodia lectus,
>   ne nimis ornata fronte sedere velis.
> credam ego narranti, noli committere, famae:
>   et terram rumor transilit et maria. (2.18.33–38)

The theme of a love which transcends physical and temporal consider-
ations is effectively expressed in the image of the speaker as a "brother
and son" to his mistress; this not only picks up on the fact that the
speaker presumes to be younger (alluded to in lines 19f.), but also
situates the speaker's sentiment within the whole literary tradition of
romantic love elevated to the level of family loyalty and obligation.[32] Of
course, this is exactly the kind of love which has been recommended in
the paradigm of Aurora, who continued to cherish her husband even
after his physical attractions had faded.[33] The motif of Cynthia's age is
not only an object of satire, but it also becomes the basis for a more
positive exhortation that she act like a *materfamilias* with a concerned
brother and son (i.e., that she act in a manner befitting her age).

The last four verses of the poem shift the focus back to the mistress
and her behavior; their admonitory tone is in many respects reminiscent
of the first four lines, and thus serves to frame the elegy in ring-form.
Both passages concern perceptions—seeing in one couplet (35f.; cf. 3 *si
quid vidisti . . .*),[34] hearing in the other (37 *narranti famae*, 38 *rumor*; cf. 1
assiduae querelae). While the poem's opening dealt with the woman's
perceptions about her lover, the conclusion has reversed the situation by
relating other people's (including the lover's) perceptions about her. The

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[31] O. Ribbeck, "Zur Erklärung und Kritik des Properz," *RhM* 40 (1885) 489, complains
that lines 33–38 are spoken in a much gentler tone than 23–32 and thus seem isolated
from the rest of the poem. But as is clear from my preceding analysis, such a modulation
can be seen to develop gradually even in lines 23–32; these lines are abrupt and harsh
only if we insist on taking them separately from the rest of 2.18.

[32] This tradition of course began with Catullus (cf. 72.3f.), but is also echoed by Proper-
tius in 1.11.23f.

[33] Romantic love even of a partner with gray hair is a commonplace topos. Cf. 2.16.22,
Tibullus 1.6.85f., *AP* 5.26.3f., 5.48.5f., and in general R. O. A. M. Lyne, *The Latin Love
Poets* (Oxford 1980) 66f. Of course, there was also an opposite view (apparently held by
the mistress here) to the effect that love was no longer possible in old age; for parallels,
especially in Horace, see Lyne 204–15.

[34] G. C. Giardina, "Note critico-esegetiche a Properzio libro II," *Vichiana* 6 (1969) 365f.,
may be right in contending that the *lectus* of line 35 actually refers to a *lectica*, in which
Cynthia travels to public places in order to be seen.

poem moves between two negative poles of discourse; the first is defined by the *querelae* of lines 1–4, the latter by the *rumor* of 35–38. Although at opposite ends of the text, the two forms of discourse bear a fundamental similarity, *querelae* being malicious language in the presence of the injured party, *rumor* being malicious language in the injured party's absence. *Querelae* and *rumor* thus recapitulate one of the central dichotomies of Propertian poetics, that between the presence and absence of the lovers and its consequences for their feelings.[35] But this presence/absence dichotomy also highlights a fundamental difference between *querelae* and *rumor*: while the one is a private language between lovers, the other is a public discourse about lovers. One can see that the dialectic here implies another, metatextual dialectic: that between the immediate biographical reality of oral speech and the mediated revisionary distance of writing; or, to put it another way, the thoughtless and ephemeral language of passion as distinguished from its permanent inscription into poetic form. Surely when Propertius refers to that discourse which crosses land and sea in line 38, he is designating something more than just backyard gossip, and perhaps nothing less than the powers of his own art. Beneath the pretense of solicitude and sincerity, it may be that the speaker is here emerging as the poet and warning Cynthia that he can respond to her language of *querelae* with a language which is infinitely more resonant and far-reaching.

There is a counterpoint to both the *querelae* and *rumor*—namely, silence. Silence, however, is not a state of non-communication, but is developed by this text as a pregnant semiotic modality. The silence to which the mistress is exhorted in lines 1–4 is a silence which speaks, a silence which vocally denies that she has seen or felt anything unpleasant. It is compared to the paradigmatic silence of Aurora, who pretends not to notice Tithonus' old age but gives all the visible and outward signs of loving him as if still a young man. This silence ultimately constitutes a benign deception, and is thus a foil to the more self-serving silence and deception of Cynthia's hair dyeing (28 *quae mentita suas . . . comas*) and the adulterous desires (see especially 35f.; cf. also 1.2.25f.) which it silently communicates. Such meretricious silence, however, is ruptured by the noise of *rumor*. But at the same time that the poet holds *rumor* as his ultimate threat (cf. 2.5.27–30; Catullus 36), he also has the capacity to silence *rumor*, even as in a more positive form, he can either offer fame or withhold it (cf. 2.11).

This interplay between speech and silence is fundamental not only to the structure of 2.18, but to the poetics of Latin love elegy generally. It is important to recognize that love elegy presumes to reflect a series of communicative interchanges between two lovers, and that these

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[35] For the elaboration of this tension, cf. 1.6, 1.8A, 1.8B, 1.11, 1.17, 1.19, 2.7, 2.13, 2.19, 2.22B, 2.26, 2.31/32, 3.21.

interchanges consist not only of the texts themselves and the overt verbal admonitions which they contain, but also of many actions, movements, poses, and proclamations of both parties, which are transmitted to us second hand (and one-sidedly) through the medium of the text. The lovers' discourse is as often an exchange of wordless gestures and attitudinal implications as of explicit messages.[36] The non-verbalization of a sentiment is sometimes more significant, both imaginatively and psychologically, than open and direct expression.

It is in this light that we must understand the patterns of communication which are developed in 2.18. Both Aurora's and Cynthia's behavior constitute a language without language: i.e., a system of subtle, but primarily non-verbal acts which communicate their attitudes or feelings toward their lovers. Even when their acts are verbal, like Cynthia's *querelae* or Aurora's lament about the returning day and the injustice of the gods (12f.), the particular referential meaning of the statement is not nearly so important as its metalinguistic implications.

But what is perhaps most interesting about the respective gestures of Aurora and Cynthia is the speaker's way of "reading" those gestures, for it is here that we most clearly see the discrepancy between the beloved as he would like her to be and as she actually is. His interpretation of Aurora's gestures is very confident and self-assured: to the speaker's mind, her caress of Tithonus after dismounting her horses (9f.), like her embrace before departing again in the morning (11f.), is directly expressive of her continued love and affection, as are her laments (12f.) and her kisses (18). The semiotic relation between the signifying gestures and signified intentionality of the acting subject appears clear-cut and unproblematic, to the extent that the description of the gestures sometimes shades over into a positive description of Aurora's intentions (cf. 14 *invitum praestitit officium*; 15 *cui maiora senis Tithoni gaudia . . .* ; 17 *cum sene non puduit dormire*). There is no suspicion of irony, qualification, or any dissonance among the various gestures. The complex of Aurora's signifying acts is reduced in the speaker's imagination to a single, signified message—i.e., her love for Tithonus. This reduction of semiotic focus is fully in keeping with what we would expect from the treatment of physical *gestus* in ancient rhetorical theory, which emphasizes the absolute dependence and secondariness of gesture in relation to a spoken message, and denies gestural motions any autonomous semantic content.[37]

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[36] The exchange of unspoken gestures and even secret codes between lovers is a common topos: cf. 3.8.25f.; Tibullus 1.2.21f., 1.6.17–20; Ovid *Am.* 1.4.16–28, 3.11.23f., *AA* 1.137f., 1.569–74, *Her.* 17.75–89. Indeed, the whole of the *Ars Amatoria* can be seen as a systematic grammar of amatory semiotics—how to communicate erotically with members of the opposite sex.

[37] This observation applies to the ancient theory of *actio* generally. Cf. Cicero *Orator* 86 (" . . . quo significat ingenue quo sensu quidque pronuntient") and *De Oratore* 3.220–23

On the other hand, Cynthia's gesture of dyeing her hair[38] is much less securely interpreted by the speaker. Systems of fashion and personal habit were not matters of concern to ancient rhetorical theory in the same performative sense as *gestus*, but would rather fall under the general category of *ethos* (like dramatic costume), and were thus less susceptible to direct association with explicit linguistic messages, even though still highly significant and revelatory. Indeed, the emphasis here is on the ambiguity and polysemy of Cynthia's act, implying several possible explanations: while the build-up of lines 5–22 leads us to expect that the hair color is an attempt to look youthful, lines 23–26 frame the act as an appeal to foreign chic (23 *infectos imitare Britannos*, 24 *externo tincta nitore*, 26 *Belgicus color*), and lines 35–38 imply that the change of hair color reflects a desire for promiscuous relationships with other men (an interpretation of cosmetic self-enhancement also made in 1.2.25f.). In contrast with the apparent directness and authenticity of Aurora's acts, Cynthia's is one of imitation (23 *imitare*), falsification (28 *mentita*), and derivative significance within its social context. And in contrast to the normative and paradigmatic nature of Aurora's gestures, Cynthia's is an act of estrangement and de-naturalization, rejecting both genetic and social norms for the alien and aberrant (23 *demens*, 26 *turpis Romano Belgicus ore color*, 32 *caerula forma*); the outlandish and foreign hair style may communicate personal rebellion against Roman traditions and morality in much the same way that many contemporary "punk" hair styles constitute acts of adolescent self-assertion against the established authority of the adult world and its prescriptive aesthetic canons. Not only does Cynthia's hair style engender this polyphonic fugue of proliferating significations, but the poet has to adopt a variety of personae, postures, and frames of reference from which he can attempt to interpret it: he looks upon her actions from the standpoint at once of lover, brother, and son (33f.), while she is seen in the context of Britons (23f.), Belgians (25f.), the underworld (27f.), and even her own bed, which is itself exhorted to keep a watchful eye upon her (35f.). The final fragmentation of perspective into world-wide *rumor* is merely the capping term in this movement: there is no one correct interpreta-

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("omnis gestus ... universam rem et sententiam non demonstratione, sed significatione declarans ... subsequens verba, non exprimens; ... est enim actio quasi sermo corporis"). On the contrast between the reduced focus of ancient theories of gesture and the more refined perspective of modern kinesiacs, which recognizes that gesture may operate on a very different level with different implications from those of any spoken message, coded to a system which is not even commensurate with that of linguistics, see J. Kristeva, Σημειω-τικη̄: *Recherches pour une sémanalyse* (Paris 1969) 91–93.

[38] That modes of personal cultivation can constitute fertile systems of sign-production has been shown with great elaboration by R. Barthes, *The Fashion System*, transl. M. Ward and R. Howard (New York 1983).

tion of Cynthia's new hair color, but there are as many ways of looking at it as there are perceiving subjects.[39]

What we confront in the poem's two balancing panels on Aurora (7–18) and Cynthia's hair (23ff.) are two antithetical modes of sign-interpretation, the one reductive and minimalist (regarding a whole series of signifying actions in terms of a single amatory code), the other polymorphic and open (regarding a single signifying event from a plurality of hermeneutic perspectives in terms of multiple interacting codes).[40] It is interesting to note that the more positive and definitive mode of interpretation dominates precisely that portion of the poem in which the speaker is presuming to defend himself against Cynthia's *querelae* and impose upon her his idealized paradigm of feminine behavior, as expressed in the imaginary Aurora; but when he turns from self-defense to attack and ridicule of Cynthia in lines 19ff., the speaker's boldness and assurance abandon him to an uncertain mixture of sentiments, confusion, and hermeneutic *aporia*. His attempt to impose masculine will upon Cynthia ultimately founders on her independent assertion and reformulation of feminine identity (as represented by her change in appearance).[41] This ultimate failure of masculine reason also calls into question its initial success with the Aurora paradigm: Aurora's continuing love for the aged Tithonus turns out on closer examination to be nothing but a wish-fulfilling scenario of the speaker's thwarted fancy, and is in fact completely at variance with everything we know about the myth from previous tradition.[42] We thus see that the text's assertive

[39] Barthes (above, note 38) 13 contends that it is generally the nature of linguistic texts about fashion to "fix" or "immobilize" the meanings of inherently polysemous and indeterminate fashion-images. It should be clear by now that this is precisely what the Propertian text attempts, but fails to do, thus betraying its ultimate confusion and insecurity as a hermeneutic apparatus. In modification of Barthes's views, Kristeva (above, note 37) 60–89 argues that the semiotics of fashion is ultimately irreducible to a linguistic model, and thus that the kind of hermeneutic *aporia* which our present text evinces may to some extent be inevitable.

[40] This antithesis is similar to the interaction between what semioticians call "undercoding" and "overcoding"; on which see U. Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington 1976) 133–36.

[41] On the ambiguity of the female role simultaneously as a passive unit of exchange with semiotic value for masculine culture and as an active producer of her own signs, see C. Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, transl. J. H. Bell and J. R. von Sturmer (Boston 1969) 496.

[42] Compare the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* 228–38, where the point is that as soon as Tithonus' first gray hairs appeared (ἐπεὶ πρῶται πολιαὶ κατέχυντο ἔθειραι), Aurora in fact did grow tired of him, ceased making love to him, and eventually locked him up in a little room. One should also consider the story of Aurora's adulterous love for Cephalus, which Ovid (cf. *Am.* 1.13.35–40, *Her.* 4.96) specifically identifies as a consequence of her tiring of Tithonus. This style of mythological revisionism is characteristic of Propertius; compare the rendition of the Milanion myth in 1.1.9–16 (on which, cf. Richardson [above, note 1]

and even patronizing rhetoric toward Cynthia is deconstructed on the metalinguistic level by the instability of the speaker's hermeneutics and the resultant insecurity of his feelings.

It is in this subversion of the speaker's rhetoric that the text achieves its overall effect of irony and humor. The satire on Cynthia's cosmetics amuses us with its techniques of exaggeration and caricature, but as in the case of much satire, what is even more amusing is the speaker's own ardor and earnestness in lecturing Cynthia for 38 verses, only to wind up at the end rather confused and not quite certain what he thinks of her behavior. He responds to Cynthia's disparagement of his appearance by disparaging hers, but cannot maintain the tone of indignation long enough to avoid admitting that he is still desperately devoted to her (30 *mi formosa sat es, si modo saepe venis*); he tries to be vindictive (especially in lines 19–22), but does not quite have the determination to pull it off.[43] The Aurora paradigm is intended as a rebuke to Cynthia, but in its extravagance and unreality is revealed preeminently as the speaker's self-deception. While presuming at the outset to dismiss Cynthia's *querelae* and extol silence, elegy 2.18 as a whole stands as one extended *querela* on the part of the speaker.

Read in this way, elegy 2.18 is a highly complex and sophisticated composition in all its dimensions. Thematically, it plays host to significant motifs dealing with the aging process, physical appearance, and their relationship to the amatory situation. Semiotically, the text explores the different forms of lovers' language, verbal and non-verbal, from the standpoints of both sign-production (encoding) and sign-interpretation (decoding). Rhetorically, it constitutes an extended and well-unified, albeit ultimately unsuccessful, attempt to persuade Cynthia to communicate her feelings in a less self-centered way. Architectonically, the poem is very clearly structured in ring-form with admonitions to the mistress at beginning and end (each four lines long), enclosing couplets more concerned with the speaker, in turn framing the antithetical panels on Aurora's domesticated loyalty (7–18) and Cynthia's alienated falsity (23–32), with the poem's centerpiece being the four-line transitional peripeteia of 19–22.

Given this wealth of interconnection, the burden of proof must rest with those who would suggest that it is mere coincidence if 2.18A and 2.18B both feature allusions to hair color, or if the use of artificial color to conceal gray hair was a common poetic topos, or if 2.18A presents a

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147; R. I. V. Hodge and R. A. Buttimore, *The 'Monobiblos' of Propertius* [Cambridge 1977] 66–68).

[43] One thinks here of the ultimately irresolute and indecisive romantic persona of Catullus 8. On the relation of this type to Roman comedy, see E. P. Morris, "An Interpretation of Catullus VIII," *Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences* 15 (1909) 143f.; M. B. Skinner, "Catullus 8: The Comic *Amator* as *Eiron*," *CJ* 66 (1971) 298–305.

paradigm of fidelity while 2.18B implies the mistress's infidelity, or if both texts are intimately concerned with forms of language and gesture. A sympathetic reader will be more comfortable with the view that Propertius was a conscious artist who was capable of selecting his materials carefully and weaving them together into a subtle poetic tapestry of extraordinary symmetry and detail than with the view that he was merely a hack poet producing simple epigrammatic fragments or with the view that he was accustomed to yoking essentially disparate themes together by the clever manipulation of transitional formulae.