

NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

TWO NOTES ON PROPERTIUS

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2.16.27–28

*barbarus excussis agitat vestigia lumbis—
et subito felix nunc mea regna tenet.*

Erik Wistrand has recently argued that *mea regna* (28) is inspired by Verg. *Ecl.* 1.67 ff. because in the Vergilian passage the owner (of a piece of land) has, like Propertius, been dispossessed of his *regna* by a *barbarus*. “I do not know of any other case (i.e. than Propertius 1.16.28) where a person is called *mea regna*,” comments Wistrand, and he concludes that it was Vergilian influence that made Propertius use *regna* in this way, since “when a phrase is taken over from an author to another it is often found that the phrase does not fit quite so naturally in the later text.”¹

But is *mea regna* to be taken personally? Surely Propertius is saying that a *barbarus* has usurped “the kingdom which consists of your love”? (This is what Tibullus seems to mean in his imitation of Propertius: *nota loquor: regnum ipse tenet quem saepe coegit/barbara gypsatos ferre catasta pedes* [2.3.59–60]). If so, I suspect that he has drawn the notion from a Hellenistic source, one reflected in an epistle of Alciphron. In a letter addressed to Glycera Alciphron has Menander refer to τὴν ἐμὴν βασιλείαν τῆς σῆς φιλίας (Alciphron *Ep.* 4.18.8). Indeed, one is tempted to suggest a Menandrian source for the conceit, not only because Menander is the “author” of the epistle but also because the situation depicted in Propertius’ poem is clearly derived from comedy.²

3.8.35–40

*gaude quod nulla est aequae formosa: doleres,
si qua foret: nunc sis iure superba licet.
at tibi, qui nostro nexisti retia lecto,
sit socer aeternum nec sine matre domus!
cui nunc si qua data est furandae copia noctis,
offensa illa mihi, non tibi amica, dedit.*

These lines appear as a separate poem, or fragment, in Camps, Butler (both the 1905 edition and 1912 Loeb) and Constance Carrier’s trans-

¹*Miscellanea Propertiana* (Gothenburg 1977 [*Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis* 38]) 55 f.

²See Margaret Hubbard, *Propertius* (London 1974) 61.

lation,³ and while the most recent editor, Richardson, regards the lines as belonging to 3.8, he does not discuss the problem. Margaret Hubbard has explained 35–36 (CQ 18 [1968] 316) and Shackleton Bailey adduces one good reason for regarding 37–40 as part of the poem, that “it is in Propertius’ manner to end an elegy with a more or less abrupt apostrophe” (*Propertiana* 158). But another good reason is the fact that at 38 two stock characters of comedy appear, the *socer*, who will inevitably take the daughter’s part against the son-in-law, or potential son-in-law, and the mother-*lena*, who looks after her daughter’s financial interests (to the detriment of the lover’s interests).⁴

The theme of 1–34 is that a physical attack on one’s sexual partner constitutes proof of the attacker’s love. As A. L. Wheeler conclusively demonstrated, this is “part of the τέχνη ἐρωτική of comedy.”⁵ It goes back to Aristophanes (*Plut.* 1013 ff.) and its occurrence in erotodidactic contexts in Greek New Comedy can be inferred from its appearance in similar contexts in, for instance, Lucian (*Dial. Mer.* 1), Theophylactos (*Ep.* 4.4) and Propertius (in the mouth of the *lena*, 4.5.31). Menander’s Polemon in the *Periceiriomene* was a violently jealous lover, and the “heroine” of the *Rhapizomene* probably suffered violence at the hands of a jealous lover.⁶ Furthermore, some of the details of the attack which Propertius solicits from Cynthia (5 ff.) are reminiscent of scenes in Roman comedy (see Shackleton Bailey, *Propertiana* 299), and Friedrich Leo correctly identified the erotodidactic *topos* of 17 f. as deriving from comedy.⁷ It is not surprising, therefore, that the language of the poem is redolent of comedy, with certain words occurring in Propertius only in this poem, but repeatedly in Roman comedy (e.g. *maledicta* [2], *invadere* [5], *minitari* [7], *aequales* [21], *offendere* [40]). In a poem which so obviously derives from and recalls comedy, the nature of Propertius’ curse upon his rival—*sit socer aeternum nec sine matre domus*—is very appropriate.

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³Most recently Kathleen Morgan seems to incline towards this view (*Ovid’s Art of Imitation* [Leiden 1977] 36).

⁴This is noticed only by Camps (who nevertheless divides the poem). For the *socer* cf., e.g., the *senex* of Plautus’ *Menaechmi*, Antiphon in the *Stichus*, Chremes in Terence’s *Andria* and *Haut*. For the mother-*lena* see F. Leo, *Plautinische Forschungen* (Berlin 1912; repr. Darmstadt 1966) 147 ff. In Propertius she appears at 2.15.20.

⁵“Erotic teaching in Roman elegy,” *CP* 6 (1911) 59.

⁶So Wheeler 59 n.1 (see 57 ff. for more examples in comedy-related literature); T. B. L. Webster, *Studies in Menander* (Manchester 1950) 18; A. Koerte–A. Thierfelder, *Menandri quae supersunt. Pars altera*² (Leipzig 1959) 131.

⁷*Op. cit.* (above, n. 4) 145.