

THE STRUCTURE OF PROPERTIUS 2.6

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23 *felix Admeti coniunx et lectus Ulixis*
 24 *et quaecumque viri femina limen amat!*
 25 *templa Pudicitiae quid opus statuisset puellis*
 26 *si cuivis nuptae quidlibet esse licet?*
 35 *sed non immerito velavit aranea fanum*
 36 *et mala desertos occupat herba deos.*

THE PASSAGE THUS PRINTED shows the effect of transposing the couplet 35–36 of Propertius 2.6 to follow 26, as first suggested by Kuinoel.

The eight lines (15–22) that immediately precede this passage cite warning examples, from Greek and Roman legend, of the evil consequences (bloodshed and rape) of sexually motivated male aggression. At line 23 the subject changes and the behaviour of women becomes the theme. The couplet 23–24 cites examples, from Greek legend, of wives' fidelity (in these cases ultimately rewarded, but for its own sake inviting envious admiration), to prepare a contrast with the wanton inconstancy which will be implied in the following couplet (25–26) to be typical of women in Rome in the poet's own day. This implication is confirmed in the transposed couplet 35–36, which complements the sense and completes the rhythm of 23–26. It will be noticed that the criticism of women's morals in all this passage is by implication rather than direct assertion.

The reference to *templa* in line 25 (whether this is a true or a rhetorical plural does not matter) is evidently to one or both of the *sacella Pudicitiae* mentioned in Livy 10.23; and the reference to the neglected *fanum* in 35–36 will be to the abandonment of the cult of *Pudicitia* (and presumably the shrine associated with it) as reported by Livy at the end of that same chapter: *vulgata dein religio a pollutis . . . postremo in oblivionem venit*.

In transposed 35 *sed* corrects (formally) the inconsistency supposed in the indignant questions in 25–26. And *non immerito* = "not without good cause," as in Livy 10.11.7, cited by Enk (and cf. the value of *merito* in Propertius 1.9.7): the shrine is abandoned to neglect "with good cause," considering contemporary women's indifference to chastity; or "deservedly" considering the failure of the cult to keep them chaste. *deos* in 36 will be a metonymy for *fanum*, without significance attaching to its number or gender, that line being a rhetorical amplification of 35.

The passage as a whole may be translated roughly thus: "Happy Admetus' wife, and happy she who shared Ulysses' bed, and any woman who

holds her husband's threshold dear (i.e., does not wander abroad or admit unsuitable visitors). To what purpose have women dedicated temples to Chastity, if any wife is free to be whatever she will (i.e., allow herself extra-marital amours)? But with good reason cobwebs have cloaked the shrine, and weeds invade the forsaken gods' abode (i.e., the derelict sanctuary)."

With 35–36 transposed as suggested, the couplet acquires a specific relevance and complements usefully the otherwise truncated movement of 23–26.

In the line-order given by the MSS, and generally followed in editions, the couplet 35–36 is separated from 25–26 by a self-contained block of eight lines (27–34) deploring the corrupting influence exercised on women's morals by the lubricious pictures nowadays exposed to view. These lines begin (27) *quae manus obscenas depinxit prima tabellas* . . . and conclude (33–34) *non istis olim variabant tecta figuris; / tum paries nullo crimine pictus erat*. In order to give point to 35–36 positioned after this, modern editions punctuate strongly with a note of exclamation after *immerito*, making *sed non immerito!* a comment on the matter of the preceding eight lines, with the sense "but this we have deserved; (for) we have let the gods' temples be neglected and abandoned." On this view the reference (as in Horace *C.* 3.6) is to the neglected condition of the temples in Rome generally which called for repair by order of Octavian in 29–28 B.C.

This interpretation would keep the traditional line order, and easily accommodate the plural *deos* in line 36, though not the singular *fanum* in association with it. But the emphasis in 27–34 has been less on the degeneracy of women's morals than on the vogue for lubricious pictures that is supposed to have encouraged it, and it seems implausible to specify *this* as a merited punishment for neglect of Rome's temples.

A consideration worth introducing at this point is that of the movement of the elegy overall. Supposing transposition of 35–36, there is a well-defined sequence of lines: 8 + 6 + 8 + 6 + 8 + 6. Thus lines 1–8 are (all) about Cynthia's attracting and encouraging male admirers; lines 9–14 are (all) about the poet's obsessive and extravagant suspiciousness; 15–22 are (all) about the evils caused by sexually motivated male aggression, as exemplified by the legendary wars of Greece and by Romulus' Rape of the Sabine Women, which has set a bad example to amorous predators in contemporary Rome; 23–26 with 35–36 are (all) about the contrast between the fidelity of heroines in Greek legend and the wanton inconstancy implied to be prevalent among women in Rome in the poet's day; 27–34 are (all) about the contemporary vogue for lubricious pictures, seen as a corrupting influence on women's morals; 37–42 draw the conclusion that in this moral environment no watch or ward imposed by the poet could avail to keep Cynthia safe for him from intruders: only her own conscience can do that; he for his part will never let another woman come between him and her.

In line 15 *his . . . vitiis* refers, as the following examples show, to the supposed predatory intentions of the males who swarm around Cynthia (1-8), and whom the poet's chronic anxiety (9-14) causes him to regard as marauders menacing his possession of her. Line-groups 1-8 and 9-14 are complementary to one another, so that it is natural, though not at first obvious, to read line 15 as referring back to the circumstances that triggered the fears which lines 9-14 describe.

It will be noticed that Cynthia appears only at the beginning and at the end of the elegy. The main part of it expresses his anxiety about the safety of their relationship, and points to the causes of that anxiety—the threat of marauding interlopers on the one hand, and on the other hand the weakening of *pudicitia* as a restraining influence on women and the corrupting influence on them of the vogue for erotically suggestive pictures. These complaints are all generalized, and not applied specifically to Cynthia.

There is a notable quantitative regularity in the distribution of the phases in which the elegy moves after transposition of the one couplet 35-36, as well as an intelligible sequence of thought and feeling. This will be more easily observable by tired eyes, if the elegy as a whole is presented, as here below, with spacing to indicate the phases in which it progresses.

- Non ita complebant Ephyraeae Laidos aedis,
ad cuius iacuit Graecia tota fores;
turba Menandreae fuerat nec Thaidos olim
tanta, in qua populus lusit Ericthonius;
5 nec, quae deletas potuit componere Thebas,
Phryne tam multis facta beata viris.
quin etiam falsos fingis tibi saepe propinquos,
oscula nec desunt qui tibi ferant.*
- me iuvenum pictae facies, me nomina laedunt,
10 me tener in cunis et sine voce puer;
me laedet, si multa tibi dabit oscula mater,
me soror et cum quae dormit amica simul:
omnia me laedent: timidus sum (ignosce timori):
et miser in tunica suspicor esse virum.*
- his olim, ut fama est, vitiis ad proelia ventum est,
his Troiana vides funera principiis;
aspera Centauros eadem dementia iussit
frangere in adversum pocula Pirithoum.
cur exempla petam Graium? tu criminis auctor,
20 nutritus duro, Romule, lacte lupae:
tu rapere intactas docuisti impune Sabinas:
per te nunc Romae quidlibet audet Amor.*

- felix Admeti coniunx et lectus Ulixis,*
et quaecumque viri femina limen amat!
 25 *templa Pudicitiae quid opus statuisse puellis,*
si cuivis nuptae quidlibet esse licet?
sed non immerito velavit aranea fanum
et mala desertos occupat herba deos.
- quae manus obscenas depinxit prima tabellas*
 30 *et posuit casta turpia visa domo,*
illa puellarum ingenuos corrumpit ocellos
nequitiaeque suae noluit esse rudis.
a gemat in tenebris ista qui protulit arte
orgia sub tacita condita laetitia!
 35 *non istis olim variabant tecta figuris:*
tum paries nullo crimine pictus erat.
- quos igitur tibi custodes, quae limina ponam,*
quae numquam supra pes inimicus eat?
nam nihil invitae tristis custodia prodest:
 40 *quam peccare pudet, Cynthia, tuta sat est.*
nos uxor numquam, numquam deducet amica:
semper amica mihi, semper et uxor eris.

Quantitative regularity in different but equally distinctive patterns is to be seen in several elegies that are neighbours of 2.6. Thus in 2.8 (forty lines) a sequence of phases of 12 + 4 + 8 + 4 + 12 is clearly marked by abrupt changes of apostrophe and tone: first a "friend" is apostrophized, apologetically (1-12); then the woman, angrily (13-16); then the poet himself, pathetically (17-24); then the woman again, revengefully (25-28); and then presumably the "friend" again, though not identified, since what follows (29-40) is a justification of the distress which the friend thought exaggerated.¹

In 2.9.1-48 (structurally distinguished from 49-52, whatever we supposed to be the status of that quatrain) the sequence is of 2 + 16 + 12 (6+6) + 16 + 2. The first couplet (1-2) complains that the poet is supplanted by a rival in the favour of his fickle mistress; then follow sixteen lines (3-18) in which legendary examples of conjugal fidelity are cited to contrast with the fickleness complained of in 1-2; next, indignation is expressed in three couplets of angry protest (19-24) and three more of angry rhetorical questions (25-30); and now resignation sets in and progresses (31-46) from reflection on the inconstancy of women in general, through agonized acceptance of defeat in the present context, to avowal of permanent devotion to the woman

¹On the formal structure of 2.8 see T. A. Suits, "Mythology, Address, and Structure in Propertius 2.8," *TAPA* 96 (1965) 427-437, at 427 ff., followed in this by D. P. Harmon, "Myth and Proverb in Propertius 2.8," *CW* 68 (1975) 417-424.

in spite of all; in conclusion (47–48) a curse is pronounced on the rival introduced at the beginning, the couplets 1–2 and 47–48 thus neatly framing the whole.²

In 2.12, a much shorter piece, the regularity of internal pattern is equally certain though different in form from the last two examples. The elegy consists of two distinct movements of equal length (1–12 and 13–24) each alike proceeding in a sequence of 4 + 4 + 4. The first movement explains the symbolism of Love's representation in art as a boy, with wings, and with barbed arrows. The second movement declares that in the poet's case Love must have lost his wings, since he never leaves the poet's heart; and then successively Love is reproached for his cruelty and warned that he may end by destroying Love's own poet. It will be noticed that the tripartite subdivision is differently and less emphatically demarcated in the second movement than in the first.³

Observation of quantitative regularities in Propertian elegy could be carried much further, especially but not exclusively in Book 2. But because the wording of the text is uncertain in a good many places, and there have been disputes among scholars about the divisions to be supposed between the end of one elegy and the beginning of another, and also about the relative weighting of principal and secondary pauses in the movement of some pieces, it seems best to confine present study to a few reasonably indisputable examples such as have been cited above. These surely suffice to show (1) that numerical regularities are in some elegies an intended feature of Propertius' way of composing at this stage of his poetical career; and (2) that the patterns in which these regularities manifest themselves are quite widely various; and (3) that the component units of these patterns are demarcated in various ways and with various degrees of emphasis.

However, note may also be taken here of the further variety of internal patterning which is exemplified in 2.20 (8 + 10 + 10 + 8) and 2.24.17–52 (6 + 12 + 12 + 6). And suggestion of more examples will be found on pages vi and 2 of my edition of Book 2, and in the introductory notes to 2.1 and 2.34 in that edition: also pages 2–3 of my edition of Book 3.⁴

It is natural to wonder what is the purpose of this sometimes elaborate numerical patterning. A reader could hardly be expected to be aware of it without assistance or laborious counting of lines. But a reciter, especially

²Opinions on the status of 2.9.49–52 are comprehensively reviewed by Joy K. King, "Propertius 2.9.52. A New Suggestion for *morte . . . tua*," *CP* 76 (1981) 125–130, who argues that the addressee of the quatrain is the *puella* of 1–14, and not the rival as commonly supposed. If this view is accepted, it will not affect the validity of the structural pattern evident in lines 1–48.

³On the formal structure of 2.12 see P. J. Enk's analysis in his edition of Book 2 (Leyden 1962).

⁴(8 + 12 + 14 + 12 + 14) of 3.9 to that of 2.1 and 2.34.

after rehearsal and perhaps with the aid of a personally marked copy, might well find it a useful guide to the intended movement of a piece. Moreover, a poet may take a private pleasure in exercising his ingenuity in this way, as is shown by the example of Dylan Thomas' poem in which the last line rhymes with the first, the next-to-last with the second and so on inward to the middle, Chinese Box-wise (Author's Prologue, in *Collected Poems* [1952]). Book 2 belongs to an experiment-orientated phase of Propertius' poetic development. Also the disjointed movement of thought and feeling in some elegies might invite the imposition of order organized in another manner to give an effect of unity to the whole.

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