

## PROPERTIUS' *FALLAX OPUS* (4. I. 135)

Horos recalls for Propertius what Apollo predicted for him as a boy:

“At tu finge elegos, fallax opus: haec tua castra!”

Commentators can be grouped into two camps: (1) *fallax* alludes to the seduction which elegy can exercise over the audience Propertius will gather with his charming poems – it is the *audience* which is beguiled, or even misled<sup>1</sup>); (2) *fallax* implies that *Propertius himself* will be the object of deception as he lives the lover's life and writes of Cupid's ways<sup>2</sup>). It is possible to add supporting arguments for either side.

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1) Cf. D. Paganelli's translation, *Propertius* (Paris, 1964)<sup>3</sup>, 133–135: “La fine et séduisante élégie – voilà ton part!” H. E. Butler and E. A. Barber, *The Elegies of Propertius* (Oxford, 1933), 332: “Full of lovers' guile and of the Art of Love.” Butler and Barber reject Heinsius' *pellax*, “alluring,” but G. P. Goold, “Noctes Propertianae” *HSCP* 71 (1966), 87, thinks *pellax* must be correct if Propertius here means (which so many have assumed) that elegy is a work which enchants *puellae* and wins them to the elegist. Cf. *Aeneid* 2.90, where *pellacis* (*Ulixi*) is a variant for *fallacis*. Along the same line, see the translation of E. V. d'Arbela, *Elegiarum Libri IV* (Milan, 1967), 239: “Ma tu componi elegie – opera seducente”, and the note: “*fallax*, perché strumento di astuzie amorose”. W. A. Camps, *Propertius: Elegies Book IV* (Cambridge, 1965), 70, takes *fallax* as *blandum*, probably influenced by *blandis patiere sub armis* in 4.1.137.

2) Representative of this interpretation are M. Rothstein, *Die Elegien des Sextus Propertius* (1924)<sup>2</sup>, vol. 2, 216: “Fallax ist diese Dichtung, weil sie, wie im folgenden geschildert wird, dem Dichter trotz aller glänzenden äußeren Erfolge doch nicht das bringt was er durch sie erreichen will, den ruhigen Genuß seiner Liebe.” Propertius may enjoy fame, but he can never win a permanent and tranquil happiness in Cynthia's embrace. Rothstein is followed by E. Pasoli, reviewing P. Fedeli's edition of Book 4 (Bari, 1965), in *Convivium* 33 (1965), 623: “L'elegia erotica (ché questo vale elegos) è ... un genere *fallax* per Properzio perché, dandogli il successo letterario, lo illuderà facendogli credere d'aver conquistato anche il successo in amore.”

The edition by S. G. Tremenheere, *The Elegies of Propertius* (London, 1931), 499, seems to stand alone in taking *fallax* as “a trap for your imitators” (like Ovid, whom Tremenheere calls “an unconscionable plagiarist.”). Two contemporary poetic translations do not commit themselves to any clear reading of *fallax*. J. Warden, *The Poems of Propertius* (New York, 1972), 194, writes: “Go fashion Elegies, a crafty job; provide a model for the scribbling mob.” J. P. McCulloch, *The Poems of Sextus Propertius* (Berkeley, 1972), 206, sounds as if Vergil, not Propertius, had turned it: “To mold

Regarding (1) above, it may first be suggested that *fallax* pictures only the deceptive switch in rhythm which is characteristic of the elegiac couplet. The pentameter undercuts the pretensions of the hexameter. There are a number of effective instances which occur close to the verse at hand. Lines 133-134:

"Tum tibi pauca suo de carmine *dictat* Apollo  
et *vetat* insano verba tonare Foro"

show positive affirmation in the first verse, quickly reversed in the second. Even better are 139-140:

"Nam tibi *victrices* quascumque *labore* parasti,  
eludit palmas una puella tuas"

in which the long beats of *victrices* and the Vergilian note, *labore*, are mocked by the long beats of *eludit palmas* and the single, playful, girl. Verses 145-146, to which we shall return later, represent another case in point:

"Nec mille excubiae nec te signata iuvabunt  
limina: persuasae fallere rima sat est."

Here the military maneuvers, the precautions firmly begun in the hexameter, are brought to nothing in the pentameter. The pentameter, shortened and divided liltily into two rounded halves, contrasts with the sustained sonority of the hexameter in its nature, and also in its content. A final good example is the couplet 141-142, still in Apollo's speech:

"Et bene cum fixum mento decusseris uncum,  
*nil erit hoc*: rostro te premet ansa tuo."

Whatever is accomplished in the hexameter (future *perfect*), is of no use in the pentameter. It may therefore be that *fallax* is intended to evoke in a general way the ironic surprise which the elegiac distich keeps in store for its reader.

A second possibility for interpretation can now be raised as the result of an interesting paper by E. Courtney<sup>3</sup>). He would have Propertius employ Horos and Apollo in the following way, in 4. 1. B: Horos interrupts the poet at the start, and this is meant to remind us of Apollo's entrance in elegy 3. 3. Propertius has just said that he will rival Ennius and sing of the historic gran-

and hammer the elegiac song" (*excudent alii...*) "— a treacherous undertaking — is your appointed job."

<sup>3</sup>) E. Courtney, "Three Poems of Propertius" *BICS* 16 (1969), 73-80, and especially 78-79.

deur of Rome, *sacra diesque canam*; now an Apollo-figure breaks in to forbid it. However, as soon as this point has been made, Horos' astrological nonsense discredits him. Many critics have made this observation, from Housman, through Butler and Barber, and most strongly, Fedeli in 1965<sup>4</sup>). For one example, Horos, in 4. 1. 121-126, tells, to prove his powers, what Propertius himself has just said in 63-66! Courtney reasons that if we are supposed to discredit Horos, then his admonition not to sing of *sacra diesque* must also *not* be believed. And Propertius does in fact sing of just such topics. Courtney sees the explanation as residing in the fact that Apollo himself does appear, after Horos has been talking, to tell the poet, yes, to go ahead with the composition of elegies. If we disbelieve Horos, who said *not* to sing of *sacra*, and if we believe Apollo, who says that Propertius *should* write elegies, we may think - Courtney argues - that Propertius wants to convey a complicated artistic position. He means to define for his audience his intent, if singing of *sacra* as he has stated (and as he certainly does in Book 4), nevertheless to remain an elegist. We are to understand *elegos* in 135 as the precise technical term which refers to the poet's meter: this meter will remain the same, whether it is utilized in amatory poems or for etiological and more elevated themes.

If Courtney is correct, *fallax* can allude to the supple character of elegy, which, even while the artist may be turning it to a new strain, yet remains itself. *Fallax* would mean "surprising, deceptive" and would convey that, in spite of his background, Propertius is about to undertake something unexpected by his readers.

I would now like to turn to the line of interpretation, (2) above, which sees *Propertius* as the referent of *fallax*, not Propertius' audience (be they the Princeps, who certainly would have found 2. 10 *fallax* with its highly official tone and sudden undercutting - once more in the pentameter - after nineteen and one-half verses; or be they rather the *puellae* whom the lover wishes to entice in 3. 9. 45)<sup>5</sup>). There is also a solid new argument

4) See also F.H. Sandbach, "Some Problems in Propertius" *CQ* 12 (1962), 264-272.

5) For the particularly strong reversal of 2.10, cf. E. Paratore, *L' Elegia III, 11, e gli atteggiamenti politici di Propertio* (Palermo, 1936), 179: "Palese ironia, maliziosamente affermantesi nel repentino voltafaccia di v. 20." A good discussion of the *recusatio* is given by W. Wimmel, "Kallimachos in Rom" *Hermes Einzelschriften* 16 (1960), 193-202. Most recently, W.R. Nethercut, "Propertius: Elegy 2.10" *SO* 47 (1972), 79-94.

here which could lead us to think that Apollo, in 135, is looking ahead to the disillusionment in which Propertius and all lovers have a share at the hands of their women.

It is well-known that Propertius structures his poems by repeating, at or near the end of a unit, key words or phrases which appear at the beginning of that unit. Examples are elegies 1. 9 (*amor* and *dicere* appear in 1 and 34), 1. 11 (*Baiae* is mentioned in 1 and 30), 1. 18 (*deserta* occurs in 1 and 32), 2. 5 (*Cynthia* is named in 1 and 30), 2. 7 (*Cynthia*, again, in 1 and 19), and 3. 9 (*Maecenas*, in 1 and 59)<sup>6</sup>. Propertius also employs this technique to organize different areas within an entire elegy. A case ready at hand is afforded by the collaboration of *non ... dextro* in 4. 1. 72 and *sinistra* in 150 at the end of 4. 1. B<sup>7</sup>). Moreover, sections within either half of 4. 1 are set up according to this principle: *lupam* in 38 is answered by *lupa* in 55<sup>8</sup>), and *dixi ego* in 4. 1. 89 is balanced by *ego ... dixi* in 99 and 101<sup>9</sup>).

If, now, we turn again to Apollo's speech in 4. 1. B, we first observe that it is delineated by *tum* in 133 and *nunc* in 147. With *tum*, Horos begins to recount what Apollo had advised Propertius to do, and the actual words of Apollo occur in 135-146. With *nunc* in 147, we return to Horos for the final ominous warning<sup>10</sup>). In 135-146, Apollo's speech proper, Propertius creates symmetry by having *fallax* at the start in 135 balanced with *fallere* at the end in 146.

Propertius uses this system so that a kind of summary can be provided for the sections he thus encloses. The second ap-

6) For additional instances of such "echoing", see P.J. Enk, *Sex. Propertii Elegiarum Liber Secundus* (Leiden, 1962), 420-421, drawing on D.R. Shackleton-Bailey, in *Proc. Camb. Phil. Soc.* (1952-1953), 18. Also T.A. Suits' review of Enk in *CP* 60 (1965), 38. Cf. now the American dissertation by J.K. King, *Studies in Verbal Repetition in the Monobiblos of Propertius* (Boulder, Colorado, 1969), which is an exhaustive correlation of internal echoes within the individual elegies of Book 1. See, too, A.G. Robson, "The Enfolding Couplets: Their Relation to the Problems of Propertius IV, 9, 71-74" *Mn* 26 (1973), 234-238.

7) Cf. G.P. Goold (above, note 1), 92. Also W.R. Nethercut, "Elegiac Technique in Propertius 4.1. 71-150" *WS* 81 (1968), 93.

8) Cf. J.H. Waszink, "Propertianum" in *Hommages à Léon Herrmann* (Brussels, 1960), 786-800.

9) C. Becker, "Horos Redselig? (zu Properz IV, 1)" *WS* 79 (1966), 442-451.

10) E. Lefèvre, "Form und Funktion der Einleitungslegie des 4. Buches des Properz" *WS* 79 (1966), 427-442, gives a good account of the last fifteen verses of 4.1.

pearance of the idea goes back to the first and lets us re-view the initial occurrence of the word or words in light of all that has happened in between. It is therefore reasonable to expect that we can infer from *fallere* in 146 the sense of *fallax* in 135. In 146, Apollo says that although the lover may camp out night after night and watch his mistress' house vigilantly, she can deceive him any time she is sufficiently resolved to do so. *Fallax* in 135 thus seems to nod at the choice which the poet of love must make to commit himself to never-ending titillation and torment – always seeking love's fruit, only to have it vanish too quickly. Those commentators who adduce 4. 11. 24, with its description of Tantalus (*fallax Tantalus liquor*), are on target.

What I propose is strengthened by two features of 135–146. First, in the couplets I have quoted above, 139–140, 141–142, 145–146, it is emphasized that however successful Propertius may think that he has become, or however much he may believe that he can be the master of what happens with Cynthia, this is all illusion. I would include also the couplet:

“Illius arbitrio noctem lucemque videbis:  
gutta quoque ex oculis non nisi iussa cadet.”  
(143–144)

The juxtaposition of *nox* and *lux* carries us back to the sequence of 2. 14–15, in which Propertius finally overcomes Cynthia's haughtiness; those elegies are built around the contrast of light (Cynthia is Propertius' *lux*, 2. 14. 29) and the darkness of night<sup>11</sup>). Even in triumph, Propertius is uncertain (cf. the contrary to fact subjunctive in present time, *utinam ... velles*, 2. 15. 25–26)<sup>12</sup>), and in the elegy immediately following, 2. 16, his affair is once more disrupted. My point is that the verses which come between

11) E. O'Neil, “Cynthia and the Moon” *CP* 53 (1958), 1–8, presents evidence to support the thesis that the name “Cynthia” was particularly appreciated by Propertius for its evocation of the Moon goddess. Cf. 2. 15. 7, *illa meos somno lapsos patefecit ocellos*, with 1. 3. 33, *compositos levibus radiis patefecit ocellos*. Cynthia does in 2. 15 just what the Moon does in 1. 3.

12) A lengthy discussion of this couplet and the image of the *catena* with its relationship to the Mars-Venus-Hephaistus triangle in *Odyssey* 8. 266ff., and to Encolpius and Giton in Petronius, *Sat.* 114, is to be found by S. Lundström, “Reminiszenzen an Properz bei Petron” *Humanistiska Vetenskapsamfundet i Uppsala* (Årsbok 1967–1968), 78–96. Lundström gives a thorough review of scholarly opinion on the couplet and underlines the fact that *velles* in verse 26 shows how uncertain, how insecure, Propertius really is at the height of his glory.

*fallax* and *fallere* uniformly stress Propertius' ἀμνηχανία before Cynthia's whims<sup>13</sup>). Not only is the content of Apollo's speech given over to Propertius' inability to master his destiny with Cynthia, but the final word, *fallere* (146), is weighted in this manner too. *Fallax* in 135 has little chance to mean anything different (as Rothstein, note 2, makes quite explicit: "Fallax ist diese Dichtung ... wie im folgenden geschildert wird ...").

There is a second important matter: the section 135-146 represents a *recapitulation* of Propertius' previous work. *Haec tua castra* in 135 reminds one of 2. 7. 15-19 (*vera meae ... castra puellae*, etc.); *scribat ut exemplo cetera turba tuo* in 4. 1. 136 looks back to 3. 1. 12 (*scriptorumque meas turba secuta rotas*); *militiam* in 4. 1. 137 recalls elegy 1. 6. 30 (*hanc me militiam fata subire volunt*); and the contrast of *victrices palmas* and *labore* against *una puella* in 139-140 repeats the swing in 3. 4 from *Arma deus Caesar dities*, etc., to the final scene in which Propertius reclines in the lap of his sweetheart and languidly lifts a hand for the passing parade – or, once again, makes us think of the contrast around which 3. 11 is centered:

“Septem urbs alta iugis, toto quae praesidet orbi,  
femineo timuit territa Marte minas.

Hannibalis spolia et victi † monumenta † Syphacis,  
et Pyrrhi ad nostros gloria fracta pedes!”

(3. 11, 57-58, 59-60)<sup>14</sup>).

Verse 143, as I mentioned before, looks back to similar scenes in which Propertius spoke of Cynthia being his light in the darkness. My thought, with regard now to this second feature of Apollo's speech, is that it seems difficult to think that Apollo is offering encouragement for the writing of a *new* kind of elegy (as Courtney proposes). What Horos is doing is reminding Propertius that Apollo himself told the young boy to stick to love elegy, as he has done to this moment. The words of Apollo summarize what Propertius has *already* written. It is not enough to think that *elegos* can be taken either in support of amatory or of

13) For the Roman elegists as men of ἀμνηχανία, not δροῦμα (δροῦω implies decision, action, forging destiny), see the remarks by L. Alfonsi, “Die römische Elegie des Gallus, Tibull, und Propertz” in *Acta Philologica Aenipontana* 1 (1962), 39.

14) For the elegiac conceits in 3. 11 (and a restoration of 59-60 to follow 57-58), see W. R. Nethercut, “Propertius 3. 11” *TAPA* 102 (1971), 411-443.

etiological poetry; the context makes but one possibility the correct one.

To resume, even if we are uncertain initially when we meet *fallax* in 4. 1. 135, the realizations that (1) Propertius has structured 135–146 around *fallax-fallere*, of which the second clearly refers to the deception of the lover himself, and (2) that the content of 135–146 concerns *love* elegy of the kind Propertius has written in the past and which underlines the poet's *servitium*, leave us no alternative but to think that the section is coherently arranged to bring out Apollo's command that Propertius was intended in his life to suffer and to experience the deceptions of love. Consequently, the first two interpretations of *fallax* which I raised at the beginning of this note – that the adjective might describe technically the color of elegy, or that it might refer to the fact that Propertius' audience can expect surprises from the poet now that he will be writing etiological poetry – must be set aside. There is not much poetic point to *fallax* if we think that Apollo is interested chiefly to derive a characterization from metrical taxonomy; and Courtney's hypothesis, while fresh and attractive, makes Apollo be talking about Propertius' *past* poetry at the very time that we are supposed to be thinking of the new uses which elegy will yet sanction. It is hard to think that Propertius wants to allude to the different nature of Book 4 by bringing out the poetry, in 135–146, which Apollo told him he was always to create and to which he had dedicated his creative life so far.

I am strengthened, accordingly, in the understanding of 4. 1. B which I have advanced earlier<sup>15</sup>). Perhaps we should not allow ourselves to worry so much over whether Horos is a silly figure or not, nor ought we to make the discrediting of the astrologer any basis for expecting Book 4 to contain, or not to contain, any particular kind of elegy. Propertius has said that he will depart from traditional elegy; this, in 4. 1. A. Horos warns him by the paradigms of Lupercus and Gallus, sons of a greedy mother, and by the examples of the Greeks who returned, treasure-laden, to be wrecked at Caphareus. The concern of 4. 1. B is greed and the trouble it can bring for men. In Propertius' Rome, even Jupiter is turned to deception (*fallitur auro* in 81 may be a

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15) In *WS* 81 (1968), 92–97 – (above, note 7), and in “The Astrological Significance of Propertius 4.1.150: a re-examination of *sinistra*” *WS* 83 (1970), 110–117.

passive, referring to charlatans who traffic on human trust in the gods). Or perhaps, in the topsy-turvey world Horos describes, Jupiter himself is deceived (*fallitur* may be a middle)<sup>16</sup>).

Horos reminds Propertius of his natural sympathy for poetry which would not serve Octavian's policies: Propertius should not forget the pain of his youthful years. Horos repeats Apollo's program for the young boy with the kind of life the civil wars had made for him. Then, in 147-150, Horos acknowledges the mixed kind of poetry Propertius intends to try<sup>17</sup>). The seer ends with an allusion to Cancer. There are four levels of meaning here. First, Cancer is the turning point in the course of the Sun's motion throughout the year, and Propertius spoke of the *meta* toward which his steed was straining, at the end of 4. 1. A. Cancer thus signifies a turning in the poet's life<sup>18</sup>). Secondly, – and this may be of most importance in the context of 4. 1. B, though it requires us to accept what may seem a more obscure allusion on Propertius' part – Cancer can be connected with interest in money and in particular with a coin which bore Augustus' head on the obverse and a crab on the reverse; all of this fits in well with the problem of over-expansion, in 4. 1. B,

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16) Propertius may even intend an allusion to Rome's ruling house, when he has Horos condemn "Jupiter" (I assume, if this suggestion has any merit, that *fallitur* would be a middle: "Jupiter" deludes himself). For „Jupiter" used symbolically to nod at Rome's leaders and even at Octavian in particular, cf., for the general application, 3.11.28: *nam quid ego beroas, quid raptem in crimina divos? | Iuppiter infamat seque suamque domum*; and for the specific reference to the Princeps, 2.7. 4-5: *non queat invitos Iuppiter ipse duos. | At magnus Caesar*. The Princeps is pictured by Propertius as eagerly striving after eastern gold in 3.4.1-6 (in the last line of which Jupiter is again mentioned), and in 3.12.1-4, in which Postumus is following Augustus to plunder the Parthians. Cf., also, 2.16.19-20, with its direct reference to Augustus: *atque utinam Romae nemo esset dives, et ipse | straminea posset dux habitare casa!*

17) Horos shows Propertius either out in the middle of the sea where the most turbulent currents strike against him (the sea is a familiar symbol for the composition of epic poetry, 3.3.24 and 3.9.3-4), and also as a *hostis inermis* in battle. The force of *inermis* is twofold: Propertius will be writing elegy; hence, it is appropriate to think of him as no real warrior (cf. 4.1.137-138). At the same time, he will – if he tries writing anything too impressive or grandiose – be ineffectual like Gallus and Lupercus, who, as I have tried to show, are literally not up to acquitting themselves successfully in real battle (above, note 7, 95). With Apollo's words fresh in our minds, we know that Propertius will not be able to change his style without a considerable struggle.

18) The observation by Lefèvre (above, note 10).



and with the poet's own enlarged aspirations for Book 4<sup>19</sup>). Lastly, even more obscure but with a vivid point for the *recusatio*, Cancer was connected astrologically with the Ass: Propertius is being reminded that the mighty steed upon which he fancies himself mounted at the end of 4. 1. A should properly be, for an elegist, a burro!<sup>20</sup>) Yet this reference to the Ass may, again, allude to the famous comparison made by Callimachus of the writers of epic to asses who bray their verse (*Aetia*, 1, 30ff), "thus making Horos tell Propertius to stick to elegies and avoid the raucous donkey-path of longer poems"<sup>21</sup>). It may also be possible to take the sign Cancer as the "horoscope" (ascending sign on the eastern horizon) for the world, and, as such, the sign which stands just above the "Gate of Hades" (which entrance-way Firmicus, 2. 17 and 2. 19. 3, puts below the ascendant). Here, Horos would be telling Propertius to "beware artistic oblivion and destruction if by this book of poems you exceed your limits and your fate"<sup>22</sup>).

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19) For the "back of the crab" as a final allusion to the problem of Rome's motivation and the personal greed of the poet (Propertius would not be literally anxious for more money, but his mental attitude would resemble that of the Paetuses and Postumuses in 3.7 and 3.12 – perhaps that of Augustus himself – in that he would be seeking ever more, just like Arria in 4.1), cf. H. Mattingly, *Catalogue of the Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum*, vol. 1, pp. xciv and ii. The coin, struck in 18 B.C. by M. Durmius, has Augustus' head on the obverse and a crab with a butterfly between its claws as a reverse type. Camps (above, note 1), 71, does not specify the reference, but speaks generally of the chance that such a coin may have been in Propertius' thoughts when he had Horos give the warning. The astrologer warns Propertius against seeking more than is right for his circumstances.

Crab coins are associated with the Greek designs for Cos. The other use of the crab on late Republic / early Empire coins appears on a silver denarius from 43–42 B.C., and is a coin of C. Cassius Longinus (conspirator with Brutus), issued by his *legatus*, M. Servilius. The obverse bears a head of Liberty; the reverse showed a crab holding an aplustre in its claws. H. Grueber, *Catalogue of the Coins of the Roman Republic in the British Museum*, vol. 2, p. 484, explains the entire reverse as a reference to the meeting of the Roman and Rhodian fleets in Coan waters and the later plunder of Rhodes by Cassius.

20) Cf. Nethercut (above, note 15) *WS* 83 (1970), 110–117.

21) As stated most perceptively by the most recent scholar to treat the Crab, E. C. Marquis, "Propertius 4.1, 150 and the Gate of Cancer" *WS* 86 (1973), 126–133 – see, for this approach, 129, n. 25.

22) E. C. Marquis (above, note 21), 133.