

PROPERTIUS 1.21.5:
THE ELISION OF *SERVATO*

“Tu, qui consortem properas evadere casum,
 miles ab Etruscis saucius aggeribus,
 quid nostro gemitu turgentia lumina torques?
 pars ego sum vestrae proxima militiae.
 5 *sic te servato ut possint gaudere parentes,*
 ne soror acta tuis sentiat e lacrimis:
 Gallum per medios ereptum Caesaris ensis
 effugere ignotas non potuisse manus;
 et quaecumque super dispersa invenerit ossa
 10 montibus Etruscis, haec sciat esse mea.”

I would like to acknowledge my appreciation to Professor Otto Skutsch, who in his “Readings in Propertius” *CQ* n.s. 23 (1973), 322, has called attention to the fact that my discussion of *servato* in 1.21.5 was incomplete:

“The metrical argument put forward by W.R.Nethercut, *CP* lxiii (1968), 141f., against taking *servato* as a future imperative is mistaken. He assures us that the final *o* of the imperative is seldom elided, forgetting that elision of the ablatival *-o* is proportionately rarer still.”

The point is well taken. If Propertius elides none of the nine future imperatives which Phillimore lists in his index¹), a review of all the verses in the Monobiblos which have ablatives concluding with *-o* reveals that 199 cases pass without elision. Furthermore, there *are* instances in poetry close to Propertius of the future imperative elided:

“Laudato ingentia rura,/ exiguum colito“
(Vergil, G. 2.412-413)

“Nolito ad versus tibi factos ducere plenum / laetitiae”
(Horace, A.P. 427-428)²)

1) *caedito*, 4.5.77; *facito*, 4.1.101; *memento*, 2.13.39, 2.19.27, 2.25.33; *negato*, 2.18.3; *valeto*, 2.13.13; *venito*, 2.22.43; *vocato*, 3.13.45.

2) Vergil elides *iubeto* in B. 5.15 and G. 2.412, *esto* in A. 4.35; Horace admits elision with *esto* in S. 1.2.32, 2.3.31, Ep. 1.1.81, and with *nolito* in A.P. 427.

And there is no absence of the future imperative elided with *ut*, which would be the case in Propertius 1.21.5:

“tu deinde iubeto ut certet Amyntas” (Vergil, B. 5. 15)
 “dum ne quid simile huic, esto ut libet” (Horace, S. 2.3.31)

At the same time, no less a student of Latin prosody than E. A. Barber changed the manuscripts’ *servata* to (*me*) .. *servato* in Propertius 2.14.29–30, thus making an ablative absolute elide with *an*:

“Nunc a te, mea lux, veniat *me* litora navis
servato, an mediis sidat onusta vadis”,

nor did any of the reviewers of his 1953 OCT take him to task for this suggestion³).

As Professor Skutsch observes, statistically-based arguments may be misleading. They render a service by narrowing the possibilities; they inform us what the greater likelihood is. But they can never insist that the opposite circumstances can not also come into being. In this way, it is possible to find verses in which the ablative absolute does elide:

“lumine adempto animam moribundo corpore fudit”
 (Lucretius, 3.1033)

Here the elision comes right near the beginning of the hexameter, just as we find it to occur in Propertius’ line. Even more precise, however, is a second verse from Lucretius, 1.801:

“Quin potius tali natura praedita quaedam
 corpora constituas, ignem si forte crearent,
 800 posse eadem, demptis paucis paucisque tributis,

3) reviews of the 1953 text are by Marouzeau, *R. E. L.* 31 (1953), 454–455; by the editors of *G. & R.* 2nd Ser. 1 (1954), 93; by Grimal in *Latomus* 13 (1954), 437–440; Ernout, *RPh* 29 (1955), 312–314; Sandbach, *C. R.* n.s. 5 (1955), 175–177; Enk, *JRS* 45 (1955), 242, and in *Mn.* 4a Ser. 9 (1956), 175–178; La Penna, *Athenaeum* 35 (1957), 142–147; Tovar in *Emerita* 25 (1957), 511. On the textual problems of 2.14.29–30, cf. G. Luck, “Beiträge zum Text der römischen Elegiker” *RbM* 105 (1962), 338–340; also P. J. Enk, “Propertiana” in *Studi Castiglioni* (Firenze, 1960), vol. ii, 268–269, and “Lucubrations Propertianae” *Mn* 14 (1961), 38–41; and, too, G. C. Gardina, “Note critico-esegetiche a Properzio, Libro II” *Vichiana* 6 (1969), 361–362.

“*ordine mutato et motu, facere aeris auras,
sic alias aliis rebus mutarier omnis?*”

(Lucretius, 1.798–802)

In both Lucretius 1.801 and Propertius 1.21.5, the participle is trisyllabic, and occupies the second foot of the hexameter with two long beats, eliding with a short word (*et, ut*) to begin the third foot of the line.

Another close parallel is provided by Horace, S. 2. 3. 152:

“*Men vivo?*” “*ut vivas igitur, vigila: hoc age.*” “*Quid vis?*”

In Horace and Propertius the independent ablative is made up of a singular pronoun followed by the adjectival form which elides with *ut* in a subjunctive clause. Moreover, while in Horace *ut* depends on *vigila* and appears in a subordinate clause (I have argued that in Propertius *ut* is optative and introduces *possint gaudere parentes*), it is still the case that in both poems the ablative elided with *ut* is followed by a command. If it be objected that it is the earlier writings of Lucretius and Horace which offer comparison to Propertius, this, on the other hand, should be just what we would expect; for Professor Skutsch has shown us how the metrical style of the last elegies of the Monobiblos proves them to have been composed earlier than the other poems of this book⁴).

There are, then, precedents equally for arguing that *servato* is a future imperative, or, it may be, an ablative absolute. Professor Skutsch was correct in terming my earlier, more abbreviation discussion misleading. Insofar, therefore, as the elision of *servato* as a criterion appears unable to guide us to any clearer decision, we shall have to look elsewhere for the sense of 1.21.5–6.

Elegy 1.21 has ten verses. A technique well-recognized among critics of Propertius is the manner in which the poet structures parts of his elegies by verbal repetition⁵). Even so,

4) O. Skutsch, “The Structure of the Propertian Monobiblos” *C. P.* 58 (1963), 238–239.

5) For instances of such “echoing”, see P. J. Enk, *Sex. Propertii Elegiarum Liber Secundus* (Leiden, 1962), 420–421, drawing on D. R. Shackleton-Bailey, in *P. S. Ph. S.* (1952–1953), 18. Also T. A. Suits’ review of Enk in *C. P.* 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.

Tu in 1.21.1 is echoed by *te* (*servato*) in line 5, and the present subjective *sentiat* in 6 is matched by *sciat*, a second subjective in verse 10. If we are impressed that such iteration demarcates the elegy, we may expect there to be a consistent sense in either set of five verses. Thus, in 1-5, the fleeing soldier should be actively seeking escape for himself. If the sense remains the same in verse 5 as in 1, *te servato* may well be a future imperative, whose direct action is that of *properas evadere*: in verse 1 the soldier actively seeks for himself escape; in verse 5 he is actively to save himself. *Sic .. ut possint gaudere parentes* would thus be consecutive, as many have argued⁶).

I had wanted to avoid the harsh asyndeton which *ne* at the start of verse 6 makes necessary, and so I suggested – taking *te servato* as an ablative absolute and *ut possint* as a command or wish – that the connection of *sic .. ne* with a subjunctive could be understood as that construction in which one speaker requests something from another and makes the granting of his request a condition (*sic*) upon fulfilling which his friend may then obtain what he desires for himself⁷). *Ne* would be the negative for the injunction in that clause in which the original speaker tells his friend what (not) to do⁸).

If we take *te servato* as a future imperative, *ut* will then follow closely and consecutively with *sic*: the fleeing soldier is to save himself in such condition that his parents may be able to rejoice. In this case, *ne* remains abrupt at the start of verse 6. However, the evidence of Horace, C. 1.28.23-29, where the dead man uses the kind of grammar *sic .. ne* would provide here, offers a strong parallel for the relationship I propose above.

The following approach, largely ignored by commentators on 1.21, may help us to resolve our dilemma. Our choice of *te servato* as the future imperative or ablative absolute must be

G.P.Goold, "Noctes Propertianae" *H.S.C.P.* 71 (1966), 92, is good on the unity imparted by verbal repetition to 4. 1 B, and J.H.Waszink, "Propertianum" in *Hommages à Leon Herrmann* (Brussels, 1960), 786-800, and C.Becker, "Horos Redselig? (zu Properz IV, 1)" *W.S.* 79 (1966), 442-451, study 4.1 from this standpoint.

6) e. g. P.H.Damsté, "De Properti Elegia 1.21" *Mn* 52 (1924), 1-7, and most recently, J.J.Bodoh, "Propertius 1.21" *L'Antiquité Classique* 41 (1972), 233-241.

7) W.R.Nethercut, "Propertius 1.21.5-6" *C.P.* 63 (1968), 141-143.

8) I think that the evidence is quite firm to support the manuscripts' negative at the beginning of verse 6: cf. footnote 7, above, op. cit., 143.

guided by the degree to which either reading does more to strengthen the artistic unity of the larger work within which 1.21 belongs.

If we think that *te servato* is a future imperative, the consecutive *sic . . . ut* must mean that the soldier is to seek to arrive home without getting maimed or losing his honor, so that his parents may rejoice in the *circumstances* attending his arrival, rather than in the *fact itself* of his safe return. This understanding introduces conditions superfluous to the stark contrast established between the different positions of the two men: Gallus is dead, unable to return home; the passer-by is alive and does just this. The dramatic polarization of these two destinies is obscured if we think of the honor or physical integrity of the escaping soldier and worry whether he is to stop to bury Gallus or to run straight home, because neither correct conduct nor his body's mutilation finds a precise analogue in the fate of Gallus. Instead, the problem central to 1.21, just as it lies at the heart of 1.22 in the fertile plains of Umbria set there beside the *sepulchra* of Perusia, is the contest between life and death⁹). As an ablative absolute, *te servato* sets this problem forth more clearly and stands in straightforward, rather than in less direct, opposition to the *Galli ossa* of verses 9-10.

The ablative absolute speaks of survival itself, of life, apart from accompanying considerations of etiquette or physical impairment. And 1.21 and 22 only summarize in final form the contrast developed in Book One as a whole.

Book One of Propertius moves from the opening elegy, in which Propertius writes of the effect of love upon one who is alive and suffering, through elegies of shared *fides* (2-5)¹⁰), through confident poems which demonstrate the power that his love and art make possible (6, 7-9), to a turning point at elegy 10 where Gallus, the rival in 1.5, is successful, and then subsequent poems in which Propertius, once successful himself, now finds defeat at the hands of love (11-12) and turns his thoughts to pain and the lover's cremation (13) and eventually to loneliness (15-18) and his own death (19). Elegy 1.19, as Otis has brought out in

9) For discussion of this tension in 1.22, see A.K.Lake Michels, "Propertius I, 22" *C.P.* 35 (1940), 297-300. Also, M.C.J.Putnam, "Propertius 1.22: A Poet's Self-Definition." *QUCC* 23 [1976], 93-123.

10) cf. the dissertation of J.T.Davis, *Fides and the Construction of Propertius, Books I and IV* (University of Michigan, 1967).

his fine discussion¹¹), answers 1.1: the opening elegy shows love and its meaning for the lover when he is alive; the last one shows what love means for the lover in his death¹²).

The specific connection of Skutsch's "coda" (1.20-22) to the rest of the book is as follows: once one has envisioned one's own death, one can turn to the world all around, to the subject of permanent separation on a broader level. This is the story of 1.20, where Hylas is lost to Hercules. It also lies at the heart of 1.21-22, as I have just said, for these poems concern a dead kinsman and the deaths of Italians in the civil wars. Propertius has arranged 20-22 in a typical fashion which we find exemplified, for instance, in individual elegies such as 1.3, 2.14, and 3.11¹³). According to this scheme, a mythological paradigm precedes the poet's immediate personal discussion for which the poem exists. Thus, 1.20 handles permanent separation mythologically; 1.21-22 speak of Propertius' personal loss.

It is this view of Book One from a broader perspective which encourages me to believe that Propertius, in 1.21.5, did not employ a future imperative with a consecutive subjunctive of result: this would intrude upon the poetic sense of the *σφραγίς*, the "signature" poems 1.21-22, and detract from the unified art of the entire book, by diverting our attention toward the physical condition or honor of the runaway and away from the more powerful and fundamental dissonance which the poet creates for us living, out of the memory of those who have died¹⁴).

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11) B. Otis, "Propertius' Single Book" *H.S.C.P.* 70 (1965), 1-44.

12) J. K. King, (above, note 5), 99-102.

13) For this technique in 1.3, see G. Luck, *The Latin Love Elegy* (London, 1959), 115; for 2.14, cf. J. Vaio, "The Authenticity and Relevance of Propertius 2.14.29-32" *C.P.* 57 (1962), 236-238; for 3.11, W. R. Nethercut, "Propertius 3.11" *T.A.Pb.A.* 102 (1971), 421-426.

14) This tension is underlined, finally, by the manner in which Gallus in 1.21 is made to match Milanion in 1.1. The possibility of a symmetrical correspondence between the two figures was first suggested by John T. Davis, "Propertius 1.21-22", *C.J.* 66 (1970-1971), 213; both men are wounded, have wandered in the wilds, and groan out their anguish. More specifically, *ingenuis* is found once in Propertius (Milanion in 1.1.14), and *gemitus* appears only once in Book 1 (Gallus in 1.21.3) and one more time in 4.11.58. Milanion manages to win the love he sorrows for; in 1.1 he is successful: *tantum in amore preces et bene facta valent*. In 1.21, on the other hand, Gallus does not continue to live. And if he is the relative mentioned

in 1.22.7, his prayers for burial remained without effect. Life is answered by death. There is a preparation for Gallus' vain groaning in Propertius' laments in 1.17 and 1.18, and in Hercules' calling for Hylas in 1.20. In 1.17-18, Propertius has himself fled from Cynthia; he cries to the empty winds and deserted groves. In 1.20, Hercules has been left by Hylas, and there is no more possibility that Hylas will return. In 1.17-18, by contrast, it may be the case that Cynthia will be won back. A sequence, therefore, runs from the earlier elegies in which the lonely crier may yet be successful and enjoy life with his love, to 1.20, where Hercules can not be successful and will continue to live, but alone, to 1.21 and Gallus who must die alone, his crying all in vain.