

Propertius 1.22 Notes

Bibliography e.g.: Clarke, Jacqueline. (2012) "'Engendering Landscape': Propertius' use of place in 1.21 and 22." *Phoenix* 66.3: 364–380; Roman, L. (2014), *Poetic autonomy in ancient Rome*, Oxford

"The problems of interpretation are only multiplied with this sequel to the previous elegy's themes. Asked about his family and his background by his friend Tullus, Propertius replies that he comes from Umbria near Perugia, where many citizens died during civil war, including the poet's own kinsman. Many scholars have considered it natural to assume that the dead kinsman whose bones went unburied is the Gallus of 1.21, while others remain agnostic. Whatever solution one prefers, it is undeniable that Propertius' tone and frame of reference in 1.21–2 represent a marked shift from the rest of the book. The speaker is no longer (simply) Cynthia's obsessed lover, but an Umbrian poet, who has lost a relative in civil violence.

Tullus' inquiry thus occasions a break from the generically defined amatory speaker of Book 1. Propertius' response to his friend's question points to historical events outside the carefully demarcated world of elegiac *amor* that has hitherto largely constituted the book's content. Here, as elsewhere, poetic autonomy is not asserted naively in an unproblematic void, but attains its meaning in contrastive relation to the violent forces of history it seeks to keep at bay. Propertius' love-world knows itself to be a fictional refuge, and a fragile one. But this acknowledgement does not mean that elegy's fictions are taken any less seriously, nor that the poet's autonomist endeavour is half-hearted. Like Virgil in the *Eclogues*, Propertius both creates a delimited sphere of refuge from politics, history, and violent forces in the world at large, and shows us that those violent forces are never far away, and that their existence burdens and informs the space of refuge he has designed" (Roman)

"Thanks to the revelations of 1.21–2, we know more about the author of the book we have been reading, and can begin to appreciate new aspects of his literary fiction. Tullus asks where Propertius comes from, and his answer—Perugia, Umbria, Italy, *Romana discordia*, funerals, the violence of civil war—incidentally provides a clue for understanding where his *poetry* comes from. In a straightforward sense, we can appreciate that someone who has seen the consequences of civil violence in his own family might prefer *otium* and love's battles to actual war. *Elegies* 2.15 makes the point succinctly: if everyone devoted themselves to love instead of war, then the waters of Actium would not be strewn with men's bones (41–6).

Mention of Actium may remind us of Mark Antony and his famous love affair with Cleopatra. Propertius makes it clear that he will confine his love affair to a more circumscribed domain: an erotic obsession defined by the *absence* of political or military ambitions. Unlike his fellow elegist Cornelius Gallus, who committed suicide in disgrace three years after the probable publication date of the *Monobiblos*, Propertius refuses to combine the roles of soldier and love elegist. Like Horace, he at least overtly insists on the self-enclosure of his poetic domain and its segregation from political dangers.

Propertius' elegiac fiction, however, is not merely escapist. Propertius' pacifist domain of *amor* is infused with the dangerous currents of contemporary politics. Some recent interpretations of 1.21–2 have stressed their thematic respiration with the main body of Book 1, thereby drawing this apparent realist intrusion back into the fabric of the amatory fiction. I wish to argue for a related but inverse line of interpretation that emphasizes, not the thematic integration of 1.21–21 with the preceding love elegies, but the potential in 1.21–22 for altering the reader's perception of the foregoing book. The unpleasant reality of warfare, civil conflict, subjugation, and actual, as opposed to morbidly imagined, death can be mapped back onto the ostensibly diverting fiction of amorous *servitium* that makes up elegies 1–19.

The book's coda, on this line of interpretation, invites (p.136) re-reading of a fiction we thought we understood, infusing it with new and potentially discomfiting awareness of contemporary politics." (Roman)

Last poem (seal). Question of relation to previous poem. Relation to earlier poems?
Siege/war no longer erotic. Context of Perusine war (40-1 BCE): conflict involved civilians.

1 important questions for Roman identity (Clarke).

1 Tulle: addressee (but Clarke notes *pulvis Etrusca* is the last vocative). Cf. 1.1; 1.6 (Propertius won't go with him); 1.14; 3.22. Heyworth ("Propertius, patronage and politics", *BICS* 50 (2007), 98-128 argues that there is not adequate evidence to suppose the patronage of Tullus was important to Propertius.

2 amicitia: (of P's ties with Tullus) but later contrast with civil war.

4-5: "in which *Italia* is set against *Romana*, with the implication that the *funera Italiae* can be attributed to the *Romana discordia*... This stark presentation of Rome as the enemy of Italian peace and prosperity is very different from Propertius' previous depictions of Roma in his love elegies, where he portrays it as the centre of civilization and the nurturer of love affairs (e.g., 8b.31, 12.1-2, 17.27-28)." (Clarke 2012: 370)

4 duris ... temporibus: change from discussing the *dura* mistress.

5 discordia: commonly used to describe civil war. Pointed placement next to *cives*.

7 propinqui: same as speaker of 1.22? So unburied.

8 solo: from solum (earth).

9 Umbria next to Perugia. Lack of escape from violence.