3
CYNTHIA PRIMA FUIT

The critical problems

In conventional regard, difficult to gainsay, Propertius' love affair with Cynthia dominates the bulk of his poetry before Book 4. The problem is to approach the material critically. In simpler days it was assumed that the first three books faithfully recorded the beginnings and the end, with all the joys and miseries in between, of a long relationship between a younger poet and a disreputable, talented, and cruel, older woman, even though there were those who contrasted unfavourably the contrived and Alexandrian complexities of Propertius' narrative to the directness of Catullus' love poetry.

Lachmann, Plessis and others even thought that they could give us almost a blow by blow chronology of the affair. An intense beginning when Propertius was 18; a year's painful rejection by her; then five years' uneasy devotion, between 29 and 24 B.C., which slowly cools into the final bitter rejection of 3.25, after which Cynthia dies in poverty, but still dominates Propertius' imagination, reappearing to him as a ghost (4.7). But the year of separation *(discidium)* is placed differently by different scholars; five years is a conventional number; and a case might be made for the relationship lasting ten years (29–19 B.C.). There is even disagreement as to whether Cynthia was a *meretrix* or a married woman. What emerges from these discussions is that elegiac poets are not historians nor are they on oath.

The reaction against the biographical approach to Roman love poetry, like our own abandonment of romantic canons of judgement, has been healthy: the lessons inculcated were well taken and the gains should not be discounted.[1] Attempts to

1 Cf. e.g. H. Cherniss, 'Biographical fashion in literary criticism', *U. of Cal. Publications in Class. Phil.* 12 (1943) 279ff. and A.W. Allen, '"Sincerity" and the Roman elegists', *CP* 45 (1950) 145–60.

reconstruct the chronology of Propertius' liaison with Cynthia rested on a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of poetry in general and love poetry in particular. But in guarding themselves carefully against this fallacy, more recent critics are retreating to critical vantage points of such moderate elevation that we are in danger of losing as much as we gain. The naive acceptance of a poem as a biographical document to be literally interpreted is being replaced by an obsession with form and structure and a greater dependence than ever on that stand-by of the classical critic, *Quellenforschung*.

Now the formal analysis of any work of art is all very well, but if it stops there it has no means of distinguishing between major and minor art, between the trivial and the significant, and it can, in extreme cases, result in some strange perversions of literary taste which base themselves on 'technical perfection'. At some point one has to reassert in some form or other the primacy, even in literature, of *life*, the parity of content with form and the parity of feeling with technique.

To take a simple example, poets frequently write on historical themes. A knowledge of poetic convention will allow us to discount comparisons of leaders with gods, exaggerated accounts of the events on the battlefield, or the water, but the invocation of poetic *personae* or artistically autonomous 'sincerity' cannot blur the fact that such and such an historical event took place and that the poet may be representing a general social reaction to that event. Were the poems of Propertius and Horace on the Battle of Actium the only evidence for that battle, would we be justified in denying its reality because of the poetic nature of the evidence? There are times and circumstances when it makes no sense for the poet to produce fiction instead of fact, however much the poetic licence he arrogates to himself. We must therefore distinguish in the light of our knowledge between those areas where poets are reliable witnesses because they have no motive for being otherwise and those areas where artistic conventions allow us to draw no inferences from the work itself.

'Who is Cynthia, what is shee . . . ?'

If this premise is allowed, then although we cannot determine

dates in the affair or pinpoint the quarrels and the infidelities that occurred in the decline of the relationship, yet from both the internal and external evidence there emerges a fairly plausible portrait of Propertius' mistress. Whether in reality she had, to such a high degree, all the traits which Propertius attributes to her is a matter of small consequence. But assuming even a minimal relationship of literature to life and allowing for all the liberties and exigencies that poetic conventions impose, we may piece together a picture of Cynthia from our scanty literary evidence, our knowledge of the social and historical situation in Rome, and even Propertius' own words, where truth or poetic fiction would not be at issue.

Cynthia's real name, according to Apuleius (*Apol.* 10), was Hostia, which might imply a decent background. If we believe Propertius' reference to her literary grandfather (3.20.8 *docto avo*) and his praise of her own poetic and musical talents, this *docta puella* may have been the grand-daughter of Hostius, the author of an epic poem on the Istric War of 129 B.C., fought against the people inhabiting the peninsula above the modern Jugoslav town of Pula.[2] This is not very likely and it is, perhaps, better to assume that Propertius is simply flattering his mistress and associating her on the basis of her name with the poet.

Another, even less plausible, suggestion is that her name was Roscia and that Apuleius' text is corrupt.[3] This would link her to the comedian Q. Roscius Gallus, who was called *doctus* by Horace (*Ep.* 2.1.82) and whose family was connected with Lanuvium and the temple of Juno Caprotina there.[4]

What is clear from Apuleius' remarks is that the elegists and the other love poets were wont to give meaningful, and usually metrically equivalent, pseudonyms to their ladies. So Catullus' Clodia became 'Lesbia', in honour of Sappho, the poet's lyric model. Tibullus chose 'Delia' to pun on his *inamorata's* name, Plania, but the name had also connotations deriving from Apollo, the god of poetry and music. Ovid's 'Corinna', an imaginative

2 See R. Helm, *RE* 27 (1957) 761.
3 Proposed by A. Marx, *De Sexti Propertii vita et librorum ordine temporibusque* (diss. Leipzig 1884) 47.
4 See further J.-P. Boucher, *Etudes sur Properce* (Paris 1965) 460–8.

composite if there ever was one,[5] incorporates a tribute to the Boeotian poetess of that name. 'Perilla' was the literary name of Ticidas' girl friend Metella, herself a poet (Apul. *Mag.* 10; Ov. *Trist.* 3.7.1,29; 2.437), just as 'Cytheris' was the more euphonious *nom de guerre* of Antony's mistress, Volumnia, whose stage name was Lycoris.[6] Nor were such pseudonyms limited to women. Even Lygdamus, the post-Augustan poet[7] of the Tibullan corpus, may have chosen his *nom de plume* to incorporate a Greek allusion to Albius, Tibullus' gentile name. The Romans were not meticulous in their etymological puns and Bentley's 'Law' of the metrical interchangeability of name and pseudonym describes only a tendency. Indeed, in the Tibullan corpus, Sulpicia's Cerinthus may well be a pseudonym for Cornutus, Tibullus' friend and a member of the so-called Messalan circle. Propertius, like many of his fellow love poets, presumably chose Hostia's (or Roscia's) pseudonym out of deference to Apollo, whose cult name Cynthius derives from his birth on Delos, where Mt Cynthus stands. Indeed, because his sister Artemis, identified with Diana by the Romans, was also born there and so could be referred to as 'Cynthia' (Hor. *Od.* 3.28.12; Ov. *Met.* 2.465; *et al.*), and since Diana was also Luna, the goddess of the moon (Sen. *Herc. Oet.* 641; Luc. *Phars.* 1.218), the choice of the name was perhaps, in current parlance, 'over-determined', although it does not, to my mind, justify the ingenious speculation about the connection, in Propertius' mind and poetry, between his mistress and that celestial body. His friend, Tuscus, is perhaps addressed in his second book as 'Demophoon', because his lady-love had been given the pseudonym 'Phyllis' and Theseus' son, Demophoon, had loved the Thracian princess of that name (cf. Ov. *Pont.* 4.16.20). For similar linguistically allusive reasons, Lynceus (2.34) has been identified as the famous L. Varius Rufus, friend of Vergil and Horace.

Cynthia's real name, then, was probably Hostia and Proper-

5 See my 'Two problems in Roman love elegy', *TAPA* 92 (1961) 522–8; *contra* P. Green, 'Venus Clerke Ovyde' in *Essays in Antiquity* (London 1960) 109–35.
6 See *RE* 4 (1345) *s.v.* '*Cornelius*'.
7 See A.G. Lee, 'The date of Lygdamus and his relation to Ovidius', *PCPhS* 5 (1958/9) 15–22.

tius' flattering comments about her background were intended to take advantage of this fact. But what of her appearance and character?

Over-valuation of a love object is to be expected in both lovers and poets. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that a poet will describe a blonde mistress as a brunette, even if, like Propertius, he is ready enough to compare her to goddesses and heroines. We may therefore take Propertius' description of his mistress' appearance and character with no more than a grain of salt. Cynthia's eyes and beauty attracted him first as elegy 1 of Book 1 makes clear. She had a milk-and-roses complexion. Her long blonde hair was either over-elaborately groomed or else, in less guarded moments, it strayed over her forehead in disarray (2.1.7). Those attractive eyes were black. She was tall, with long slim fingers, and it would seem that she was extravagantly fond, to Propertius' dismay, of cosmetics and elegant clothes. Propertius' distress seems largely due to his suspicion of her motives in adopting her extravagant style of adornment. More charitably one might suppose that the real reason for her interest in such extraneous aids was her advancing years.[8]

Propertius, however, does not defend his violent passion simply because of Cynthia's striking physical characteristics. He constantly stresses her sensuality, her interest in the arts, both domestic and cultural, and her passionate, if violent, disposition. He realizes that the fury of their relationship is part of Cynthia's attraction for him. Her unpredictability, her lies, and her infidelities, are part of this disposition and he seems, at times, to be aware of the part these traits play in the relationship. He frequently professes forgiveness for her wayward ways and curses those lovers who have a peaceful relationship with their mistresses:

> a pereat, si quis lentus amare potest. (1.6.12)

Not for Propertius the joys of a tranquil relationship. For the

8 For further details and the references, see Saara Lilja, *The Roman Elegists' Attitude to Women* (Helsinki 1965) 122–6. One may note that, because of its rarity in Italy, blonde hair at this period was particularly fashionable. Imported blonde hair was in frequent use, particularly among disreputable women, and we discover from 2.18 that Cynthia's blondness came out of a bottle.

causes of this, as we shall see later, Propertius' psychohistory must be investigated.

Roman love poetry

I alluded earlier to the necessity of asserting the primacy of *life*, in its broadest sense, in our judgements of literature. We cannot, I believe, restrict ourselves, as is the current fashion, to not-so-New Criticism and to the explication of individual poems as though they existed in a literary and social vacuum.

Latin elegy, where we must include Catullus since Propertius regards him as a forerunner, is a key case. We might imagine it, simplistically, as the product of a sentiment parallel to modern sentiment; we might see it as artificial and unsympathetic because of the poetic conventions and mythological themes it utilizes, forgetting how highly artificial in certain ways are some of our own paradigms of love poetry, such as Donne's elegies and Shakespeare's sonnets; we might dismiss it, as does C. S. Lewis,[9] as the product of exhibitionism, the product of what are taken to be simply the traditional classical attitudes to sex, the frankly sensual or the timorously distrustful, according to which love is simple physical pleasure or plain madness, and the Palace of Love a brothel or a bedlam.

But good poets are more than the skilful manipulators of forms and literary traditions and do more than represent with documentary fidelity the standard attitudes of the culture from which they emerge. The best poets are usually the growing points of a culture and at least bear witness to its sensibility at its most developed, even when they are not themselves moulding it. For any age except our own (where we have privileged access), how society thinks and feels on the most important human topics can be most clearly judged from its literature; yet it is in its literature too that we must look for the finest and most sensitive (and the most unorthodox) developments of an age's attitudes. We may also, it is true, find in its literary works apparently representative norms, which, when backed by factual evidence such as the Pompeian *bordelli*, are easily taken to be

9 *The Allegory of Love* (Oxford 1936) 5.

the sexual *mores* of a society. But because literature does more than represent standard attitudes, such literary evidence has to be handled very carefully. Would we judge, on the one hand, Victorian sexual morality by the novels of Dickens or, on the other hand, twentieth-century *mores* by Nabokov's *Lolita* or Henry Miller's *Tropic of Capricorn*?

The Roman elegists have suffered from assimilation, both to each other and to very different writers like Horace and Juvenal, and this had led to a false picture of their work and the society from which it emerged. Classical attitudes to sex and love *did* differ considerably from our own – marriage and homosexuality are obvious areas of difference. And it would be true to say that two main attitudes to heterosexual love can be distinguished: the conception of love simply as a physical appetite on a par with the appetites for food and drink, and the conception of love as a dreaded madness – whose object is undifferentiated, now a blood relative, now a social inferior, now a person of the same sex, now a member of a different species. Phaedra, Pasiphae, and Tereus are familiar mythological examples. Horace's *parabilis Venus facilisque*, sex with the prostitute and the slave, a mode of loving which Propertius' once contrasted favourably with his own in 2.23, and which was completely acceptable to models of Roman rectitude like Cato the Elder, represents the sensibility generally accredited to ancient civilization. Romantic homosexual alliances, examples of marital fidelity, self-sacrifice, and mutual love are not allowed to interfere with this general picture. But the truth is that the period covered by classical Greek and Roman literature, roughly a period of a thousand years, saw revolutions of sentiment comparable to certain revolutions in the modern period. A case could be made for Lesbian poetry, for the Greek novel, for Alexandrian epigram as indications of such revolutions, but at least one revolution, very adequately documented, took place in the last decades of Republican life.

The new women

Sentiment is dependent on social conditions, and cavemen no doubt lacked certain feelings we regard as basic. The first century B.C. in Rome witnessed the emergence of a new type of emancipated woman. In the Roman upper class there had always been women of strong character and influence, despite the theoretical supremacy of the *paterfamilias*. Legend had its Camillas and Lucretias, and history recorded its Gracchan Cornelias. But in the last century of the Republic and beyond, it is evident, there were women of strong character who did not follow the traditional pattern of dutiful daughter and patriotic wife. There were as well women of considerable personal power (exercised socially and politically), whose private lives departed considerably from traditional standards of feminine behaviour. Among such women may be mentioned the sisters of the wicked Clodius (one of whom is perhaps to be identified with Catullus' Lesbia) and Servilia, mistress of Caesar and mother of Brutus, a woman who exercised no little political influence. The phenomenon may be accounted for, along with so much else in late Republican Rome, by the freedom and moral laxity, the degeneration of the *prisca virtus*, so deplored by writers of the time as the consequence of the Punic wars. The explanations are matter for the social historian. But what is clear from the literary evidence is the high degree of social mobility at this period. The social turmoil of civil wars had for some its compensations. One result was certainly the growth of a recognizable *demi-monde*, which permeated upper- and middle-class society. Ex-slaves, lower-class free (or freed) women, actresses like Volumnia, the mistress of Gallus and Antony, even women of some family and independent means, but all women of some talent, comprised this group. They did not wear out their shoes along the Via Sacra or lurk in the tiny dens of the Subura. Their talents admitted them into the society of better-placed Romans, whether for *concubinatus* or more casual liaisons. Given such women, of high and low degree, naturally the classical views on the inferiority of woman became a little harder to uphold, and a Cleopatra did nothing to redress the balance. Women became persons rather than things, with characters of their own, not aggregations of ancient virtues.[10]

10 For a feminist interpretation of Propertius' attitude to Cynthia, see Judith P. Hallett, 'The role of women in Roman elegy: counter-cultural feminism', *Arethusa* 6 (1973) 103–20.

Catullus and Lesbia

A social revolution, of course, in no way necessitates a revolution of sentiment, but it is arguable that a certain sentimental revolution did take place. The first witness is Catullus and the poetry that emerges from his affair with Lesbia. The genius necessary for transmuting passion and experience into (good) art must not be underrated, but that some kind of revolution of sensibility has taken place seems undeniable, unless we approach his poetry with an eye prejudiced by the study of literary influences or by the belief in one simple classical attitude to love. In Catullus we have an analysis of an overpowering love, which is at first gladly accepted and gloried in:

> fulsere quondam candidi tibi soles,
> cum ventitabas, quo puella ducebat
> amata nobis, quantum amabitur nulla. (8.3–5)
>
> *Once bright suns shone on you, when you used to go where the girl took you, loved by you as no other girl will be loved.*

Then we have the dialectic of disillusion, disillusion with someone who is not only heedless of him, but unworthy of his love:

> nullum amans vere, sed identidem omnium
> ilia rumpens;
> nec meum respectet, ut ante, amorem,
> qui illius culpa cecidit . . . (11.19–22)
>
> *loving no one truly, but time after time breaking all of their groins. Let her not think of my love as before; it is dead, thanks to her . . .*

This dialectic is as much occupied with the qualities and behaviour of Lesbia as it is with the subjective feelings of Catullus:

> nunc te cognovi: quare etsi impensius uror,
> multo mi tamen es vilior et levior. (72.5–6)
>
> *Now I know you. And so, although I am more extravagantly on fire for you, yet you are much cheaper and less faithful in my eyes.*

It cannot be assimilated to the usual classical analysis of passionate love as a simple madness, even though – and the cliché survives in more modern love poetry – Catullus, once disappointed, can pray to be delivered of it:

> o di, si vestrum est misereri, aut si quibus umquam
> extremam iam ipsa in morte tulistis opem,
> me miserum aspicite et, si vitam puriter egi,
> eripite hanc pestem perniciemque mihi . . .
> (76.17–20)
>
> *O gods, if you have any pity, or if you have ever brought help to those at death's door, look down on me in my misery, and if I have led a pure life, take from me this destructive plague . . .*

But Catullus realizes that his problem is psychological, not theological:

> Huc est mens deducta tua, mea Lesbia, culpa
> atque ita se officio perdidit ipsa suo,
> ut iam nec bene velle queat tibi, si optima fias,
> nec desistere amare, omnia si facias. (75)
>
> *To this pitch has my heart been brought through you, Lesbia, and it has destroyed itself through its own steadfastness: it can no longer wish you well, though you became the best woman in the world, nor stop loving you, though you acted like the worst.*

Our love language too reflects the primitive belief in love as something sent from outside, something akin to madness, yet with us, and the same is arguably true of Catullus, it is accepted as part of the personality, as something worth defending and worth accepting. Lesbia is important not as a sexual object, but as a person:

> illa Lesbia, quam Catullus unam
> plus quam se atque suos amavit omnes . . . (58.2–3)
>
> *the Lesbia that Catullus loved alone and more than himself and his family . . .*

and it is not with the passion but with this person that Catullus

is eventually at variance. The evidence is there in poems 5, 7, 8, 11, 43, 51, 58, 72, 76, 85, 92, 107 and 109. This is no love independent of the changes in its object nor is it a sensuality which can be purged or slaked:

> Nulla potest mulier tantum se dicere amatam
> vere, quantum a me Lesbia amata mea est.
> nulla fides ullo fuit umquam foedere tanta,
> quanta in amore tuo ex parte reperta mea est. (87)
>
> *No woman can say she has been loved as much, truly, as Lesbia has been loved by me. Never was there such fidelity in any union as was found on my side in loving you.*

Lesbia is important as an object of tenderness, of affection:

> dilexi tum te non tantum ut vulgus amicam,
> sed pater ut gnatos diligit et generos. (72.3–4)
>
> *I loved you then not just the way anyone loves a mistress, but as a father loves his sons and sons-in-law.*

She is the object of a *romantic* love which can contemplate a permanent alliance:

> ut liceat nobis tota perducere vita
> aeternum hoc sanctae foedus amicitiae. (109.5–6)
>
> *that we may be able for the whole of our lives to live eternally in this bond of holy affection.*

The trouble lies not in the utter absurdity of the passion (which should be the classical attitude), but in the misdeeds and callousness of the object of the passion (see 11.19–22 above).

Romantic love

It is unfortunate for the literary historian that we do not have the works of Varro, Calvus and Gallus, who were also Propertius' predecessors as love poets. Yet it is patent that Catullus had a good deal of effect upon Roman love elegy in general and Propertius in particular; he is clearly the pioneer. The lover

represented in Propertius' poetry is, in subtle ways, different from the lover we descry in the Catullan poems, but both belong to the category of romantic lover; both fly in the face of classical attitudes to love. The tenderness of Catullus, the admiration and complaisance of Propertius, are typical of the romantic over-estimation of the love object. Their mistresses are their equals, if not, as Propertius pretends, their superiors. They are valuable not simply as beauties, but as possible friends and intellectual companions.

We are dealing with a revolution of feeling comparable to the sudden appearance in the Languedoc, at the end of the eleventh century, of Courtly Love, as represented in Troubadour poetry. And the comparison is instructive because Courtly Love has been partly explained as 'Ovid misunderstood'.[11]

The characteristics of Courtly Love have been described as Humility, Courtesy, Adultery, and the Religion of Love, and it has been called the 'feudalization of love'. Its object is another man's wife; its despairs spring from the obduracy of the lady or the possibility of a rival. Only men of culture could feel such love, and it necessitated a wilful flouting of the attitudes towards sex recommended by medieval Christianity. Some vestiges of this older attitude remain with us, but Courtly Love in general has been taken over and tamed by religious and social requirements – marriage is now conventionally, although less so in literature, the crown of our attenuated Courtly Love. This has social consequences best seen in America and parts of western Europe where the decay of romantic love inside a marriage or a new romantic attachment becomes a reason for divorce.

If 'Ovid misunderstood' is a way of looking at Courtly Love, it is also arguable that, for the modern reader, the earlier concentration on Ovid as a representative of elegiac love poetry has perhaps obscured the revolution of sensibility which may be seen in Catullus and Propertius. There is a real distinction between Ovid and the other practitioners of elegy. Ovid has been described as the generalizer of Roman love elegy; he is the 'general lover' and his Corinna has been usually regarded as a composite figure. But, of course, the 'general

11 See Lewis (n. 9 above), 7ff.

lover' is the seducer; one who adopts, for his own purposes, all the postures of the genuinely enamoured romantic lover. Ovid was an artist who followed in the steps of the *poetae novi*, such as Catullus, and their heirs, such as Propertius. It was not unnatural that he should also adopt one of their most important themes – Love. But the gulf between the love poetry of Catullus and Propertius and the love poetry of Ovid is immense. For Ovid seems to revert to 'classical' attitudes to women: Ovid, despite some liberated views about sex, degrades women, as the first book of the *Ars Amatoria* makes clear. They are not to be idealized: at best they are human, and at worst there is Pasiphae, the uncontrolled bestialist. Ovid offers her as a paradigm case to prove that women are easy prey for the predatory male. It is not mere chance that after Ovid Roman elegy was finished as a literary form. The amorous sensibility of the elegists was replaced by the sexual, if more human, cynicism of Ovid, which is present also in satirists like Petronius and Juvenal; and Ovid's over-facile versification made it impossible to return to the manner of the older elegists. Ovid was ready not only with advice on how to achieve 'the right true end of love,' but also with advice on the *Remedia Amoris*, the ways of extirpating a passion that was unproductive of happiness. This is not the frame of mind of the poet who said:

> mi neque amare aliam neque ab hac discedere fas est:
> Cynthia prima fuit, Cynthia finis erit. (1.12.19–20)
>
> *I have no right to love another or leave her: Cynthia was the first, Cynthia will be the end.*

If the formula 'Ovid misunderstood' is useful for an understanding of Courtly Love, then a correct view of that humorous, ironic parody of didactic poetry and love elegy will help us towards an understanding of earlier Roman love elegy. But it will be by way of contrast. In fact, when the troubadours 'misunderstood' Ovid they were returning to the sentiments and attitudes of the earlier Roman love poets. The similarities between Courtly Love and Propertius' attitude to love are closer to each other than either is to the traditional classical attitudes which Ovid so persuasively represents *(arte regendus amor)*.

Roman *gravitas*, in one case, and Christianity, in the other, put Propertius and the troubadour on the defensive; each worked through highly formalized poetic conventions. Beneath these conventions a similar sensibility may be discerned in both literatures, and both pose the same pseudo-problem of 'sincerity'. The 'feudalization of love', the humility of the lover, exemplified in the poets of the Languedoc, is paralleled by the *servitium amoris* of the Roman elegist; serf or slave, the human situation is roughly the same. Even the adulterous nature of Courtly Love may be paralleled in the elegist; the *vir*, the husband or the established lover, moves, a vague and thwarted figure, through the elegies of Tibullus and Ovid and the poetry of Catullus. Jealousy of course needs no dwelling upon, and the religion of love that we see in Troubadour poetry is paralleled by the frequent invocations and descriptions of Venus and Amor in Roman elegy (Tib. 1.6, Prop. 2.12, Ov. *Am.* 3.15) and the special religious status enjoyed by a lover (Prop. 3.16.11ff.), nor should it be overlooked that even the most sceptical Roman thinkers, such as Lucretius, were fully aware of what was symbolized by Venus and Cupid.

There are, of course, differences between the two sensibilities. There is little trace of some aspects of 'courtoisie' in the Roman elegists: blows and scratches are regarded as the common coin of reciprocated love and repeated reproaches part of it; there is less obvious *social* snobbery about who could and could not be a lover. But this should not hide the similarities between the love that we see in the Roman elegists, and Courtly Love, and therefore between the elegists' love and our own Romantic love. What to the truly classical author is an undesired madness becomes in the elegists a way of life, which they are prepared to defend against the claims and strictures of the more prudish older generation, against the claims of imperialist patrons, and indeed against the nagging doubts of their own Roman consciences. In an age in which individualism is automatically accepted as the right and obvious thing, it is easy to forget the tremendous strains imposed on the individual in a politically oriented society. Propertius seems to work hard to defend his poetic claims against various demands that he should write more national poetry, that he should choose more patriotic and

imperial themes. But Propertius regarded his love poetry as inspired, and inspired by Cynthia *(ingenium nobis ipsa puella facit);* it was not a catharsis of an unworthy passion. It was defensible by the new canons of erotic poetry and the new standards of personal feeling.

The sensibility of Propertius is then much nearer that of our own age and the age of Courtly Love than it is to what are accepted as classical attitudes. We must be wary of approaching Roman love elegy backwards through Ovid, in whose work the counter-revolution had been already effected. It is not without significance that the appeal of Catullus and Propertius has steadily grown by contrast with the appeal of Ovid, despite his enormous popularity in the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and even later. Ovid had to be misunderstood by the troubadours to be adopted as their master; the psychological novel has made our perceptions too clear for us to be taken in by him as a real romantic. Ovid is anti-romantic, the cynical, worldly-wise seducer, who loves women, not a particular woman. Compared to Iseult, or indeed to Lesbia or Cynthia, Corinna is unreal. Even if we assumed that all the elegists in real life shared the same attitude to women, their literary creations would remain radically different. Such a difference can only be claimed as a difference of literary sensibility. Ovid may have been a tender husband, but as a poet of love he is, in a way he did not mean, merely a *tenerorum lusor amorum.*

'Romantic' is a confused term: if opposed to the classical conception of love, then Propertius, like Catullus, qualifies for it; if opposed to commonsense views, then all the Roman love poets in their work, except Ovid, qualify for it. They are all, except the sensible Ovid, as miserable as their poetry and perhaps their dispositions dictated. The term of course covers many things – an elopement, an adulterous liaison, even an unrealistic view of a future legal partner, may all be characterized as 'romantic'. The common element is that passion overmasters judgement, destroys the usual patterns of behaviour, and is impervious to friendly advice, social pressure, religious injunctions and personal standards. Such passion may be seen in most of the Roman elegists, just as it is found in more modern works of fiction as a socially acceptable motive which provides

an alternative to the purely practical choice of a partner. Here, admittedly, it is domesticated and manages to compromise with older views of the emotion as anti-social and dangerous. There exists however in literature, as well as in life, a more disreputable form of romantic love which serves as an even better analogy for the splendours and miseries of the elegists, and which allows us to penetrate more deeply into the sensibility expressed in Propertius' poetry.

The pathology of passion

In a paper written in 1910,[12] Freud described a special type of love object chosen by some lovers and enumerated the conditions of love necessary for such men. These lovers are frequent characters in poetry and fiction and the classic example is the Chevalier des Grieux in Prévost's *Manon Lescaut.* The same type of lover may be seen in Dumas fils' *La Dame aux Camélias,* Proust's *Du Côté de chez Swann,* Dostoevski's *The Eternal Husband,* Somerset Maugham's *Of Human Bondage,* John O'Hara's *Butterfield 8,* and William Styron's *Lie Down in Darkness.* Freud's discussion, however, which is based on clinical observation, is clearer and more specific, for writers naturally have before them other aims than purely objective description. Nevertheless a familiarity with literary exemplars of this type of man will perhaps reconcile the reader to the use of Freud's *schema* for the investigation of a literary problem: How does Propertius characterize his relationship with Cynthia?

The conditions necessary for this type of man to fall in love are, according to Freud, as follows:

1 There must be an injured third party, whether a husband or a fiancé or an already established lover who has right of possession.

2 The woman must be one who is more or less sexually discredited, whose fidelity and loyalty admit of some doubt. She may be anything from a married woman to whom some breath

12 S. Freud, 'A special type of choice of object made by men', in *Collected Papers* IV (London 1953) 192–202.

of scandal attaches to a *grande amoureuse* or even a prostitute. Hence Freud's characterization of the passion as *Dirnenliebe*, the love of a harlot.

3 In normal love and in social convention a woman's value is measured by her sexual integrity. But this type of lover shows a striking departure from the norm, for they set the highest value upon the women they love. They do not use them and despise them, but regard them as the only women whom it is possible to love. Their relationships with them often absorb the whole of their mental energy to the exclusion of everything else.

4 These lovers set up an ideal of their own fidelity to the beloved, however often it may be shattered in reality.

5 Feelings of jealousy are a necessity for such men. Not until they have an occasion for jealousy does their passion reach its height and they never fail to seize upon some incident whereby this intensity of feeling may be called out. Most often this jealousy is directed against new acquaintances or strangers whom they suspect.

6 Most astonishing of all to the observer is a desire to 'rescue' the beloved. Such men are convinced that their beloved has need of them, that without them she would lose all hold on respectability and rapidly sink into degradation. They are saving her from this by not letting her go. And this trait is no less plain even when there is no real occasion for it. Freud instances a man who in such relationships devoted endless pains to composing tracts to keep his beloved on the path of 'virtue', that is, fidelity to himself.

Naturally the relative strength and prominence of these traits may vary in a given real (or fictional) case. Freud offers aetiological explanations of the genesis of this character-type. A high regard for the maternal image makes it impossible to fuse affection, respect, and sensuality. Passion is therefore only possible with a woman who is the unmistakable opposite of that maternal image.

Whatever the deeper psychoanalytical ramifications, we are, obviously, dealing with a recognizable class of men, common in both literature and life. And this purely descriptive summary

is all that needs be accepted in order to proceed with the investigation. For the character of the lover that emerges from Propertius' poetry fits exactly the character-type described by Freud, as is seen when the characteristics of the lover in Propertius are compared with the general traits enumerated by Freud.

1 Although most of the poems probably deal with the period when Propertius is already deeply involved with Cynthia, it is plain that at some point, presumably early on in the relationship, the deception of another was necessary. Cynthia's ghost recalls their early meetings:

> 'iamne tibi exciderant vigilacis furta Suburae
> et mea nocturnis trita fenestra dolis?' (4.7.15–16)
>
> *'Had you forgotten already our stolen meetings in the watchful Subura and my window-sill worn by our nocturnal deceptions?'*

Elsewhere he speaks of the door furtively opened to let him in (2.9.42). Elegy 2.23 is an important document. Love entails slavery (*nullus liber erit, si quis amare volet*, line 24), and this slavery is compounded of dependence on another's whims and the necessity of waiting until the lover or husband of one's mistress is absent before one can see her:

> ingenuus quisquam alterius dat munera servo,
> ut promissa suae verba ferat dominae? (3–4)
>
> *What free man gives presents to another man's slave, so that he will take his promised message to his mistress?*

The lover will hear his mistress say:

> '. . . Timeo, propera iam surgere, quaeso:
> infelix, hodie vir mihi rure venit.' (19–20)
>
> *'I'm afraid, hurry and get up now, please; hard luck, today my man is coming back from the country.'*

Yet despite his protests against the clandestine nature of his living and loving (*nolim furta pudica tori*, line 22) and his occasional wistfulness for a girl who is openly for sale (*cui*

saepe immundo Sacra conteritur Via socco, line 15) or for the freer atmosphere of ancient Sparta (3.14.23–4), cuckolding is one of the didactic themes imposed upon him by Apollo:

> 'ut per te clausas sciat excantare puellas,
> qui volet austeros arte ferire viros.' (3.3.49–50)
>
> *'so that he who will wish to strike an artful blow at respectable husbands may know, through you, how to charm out cloistered young ladies.'*

and the subject of rivals replacing established lovers is not infrequent:

> Iste quod est ego saepe fui: sed fors et in hora
> hoc ipso eiecto carior alter erit. (2.9.1–2)[13]
>
> *What he is I often was: but, come chance and in an hour, another will be dearer than he, now cast out himself.*
>
> vinceris aut vincis: haec in amore rota est. (2.8.8)
>
> *you are conquered or you conquer: this is the wheel of love.*

2 It should be plain from Cynthia's character as depicted by Propertius that his feelings for her must be regarded as a form of *Dirnenliebe*. But it should be emphasized that this form of *Dirnenliebe* is to be distinguished from the grosser forms it can take, where harlots are regarded at their proper worth and simply used for sexual gratification and where there is no question of any over-estimation of the beloved that love or passion entails. This use of the *parabilis Venus facilisque*, as Horace describes it (*Sat.* 1.2.119), was one of the ways of avoiding the *furor* of real love and one of the traditional *remedia amoris*.[14] No doubt Propertius knew of contemporaries who thus avoided his torments and he expressed his envy of them (2.23.13–14ff.), but this was not his real sexual orientation.[15] His was the pas-

13 Cf. also 1.8; 1.15; 2.8; 2.16; 2.34; 3.8.37ff.

14 See A.W. Allen, 'Elegy and the classical attitude toward love, Prop. I.1', *YCS* 2 (1950) 295–64.

15 This other sort of lover is described by Freud in a later paper, 'The most prevalent form of degradation in erotic life', *Collected Papers* IV (1953) 203–16.

sionate and romantic *Dirnenliebe*. And in no sense could Cynthia be regarded as a respectable woman, whatever her virtues. During the time of her affair with Propertius at least three rivals are specifically recorded as enjoying her favours, not to mention the frequent references to possible infidelities on her part (e.g. 1.8; 2.16; 3.8; 2.5.1ff.; 2.34.11). She was hardly a *grande amoureuse* like Catullus' Lesbia; she did not have the social standing for that. Indeed there are frequent references to her avarice, such as:

> Praetor ab Illyricis venit modo, Cynthia, terris,
> maxima praeda tibi, maxima cura mei. (2.16.1–2)
>
> *A praetor has just come from Illyria, Cynthia, a great prize for you, a great worry for me.*

This poem and other references (e.g. 1.8.38; 2.8.11; 2.23.8; 2.24.11–16) indicate that in some ways she was almost a harlot. But in any event Propertius had no illusions about her character. She is *perfida* (2.5.3) and he says

> aut tecum aut pro te mihi cum rivalibus arma
> semper erunt: in te pax mihi nulla placet. (3.8.33–4)
>
> *With you or for you against rivals, it will always be war for me: where you are concerned, there are no joys of peace for me.*

Yet he accepts her for what she is.[16] And this is not because he has no conception of fidelity or chastity (an ancient as well as a modern ideal) or that he does not value it in the conventional way. Not only does he cite mythological examples of fidelity, such as Penelope, Evadne and Hypsipyle (cf. 1.15.9ff.), when encouraging Cynthia to be faithful, but he also describes in glowing terms the fidelity of Aelia Galla (3.12).

3 Despite his portrayal of Cynthia as *dura* and *perfida*, there is no question of Propertius despising her for her lack of sexual integrity. Quite the contrary: however tormenting and painful be-

16 For the character and status of Cynthia, see also J. Fontenrose, 'Propertius and the Roman Career', *U. of Cal. Publications in Class. Philol.* 13 (1949) 373–6.

cause of her faults, his passion is for no unworthy object. Cynthia deserves his love, but unfortunately she does not behave as he thinks he would like her to behave, hence his sufferings, his complaints and his envy of those who are not in the grip of this *furor* (2.23). Once he is cured of his passion, he can then take a more objective view of her and realize he once over-valued her (3.24), but while in love with her he can at intervals rejoice in his state (e.g. in 2.5) and praise her many attractions, while deploring her less endearing characteristics. She is beautiful:

> et quascumque tulit formosi temporis aetas,
> Cynthia non illas nomen habere sinat. (1.4.7–8)
>
> *and whatever women the age of Beauty produced, Cynthia does not allow them a reputation to stand on.*

She is *rara* (1.8.42) and his utter absorption in her to the neglect of all others and all prudential counsels is plain:

> ah, mihi non maior carae custodia matris!
> aut sine te vitae cura sit ulla meae?
> tu mihi sola domus, tu, Cynthia, sola parentes,
> omnia tu nostrae tempora laetitiae. (1.11.21–4)
>
> *Ah, my protectiveness for my dear mother would be no greater! Or without you would there be any care for my own life? You are my only household, Cynthia, you are my only parents, you are every moment of my happiness.*

Her literary taste is not the least part of her attractions:

> nam mea cum recitat, dicit se odisse beatos:
> carmina tam sancte nulla puella colit. (2.26.25–6)
>
> *For when she recites my works, she says she hates rich men: no girl honours poetry so religiously.*

and to her he attributes his own poetic inspiration:

> nam sine te nostrum non valet ingenium. (2.30.40)
>
> *For without you my genius has no force.*

The happy times together are rapturously commemorated:

> quanta ego praeterita collegi gaudia nocte:
> immortalis ero, si altera talis erit! (2.14.9–10)
>
> *What great joys I gathered this past night: I will be a god, if there will be such another.*

Yet the satisfactions are not purely physical:

> quam multa apposita narramus verba lucerna! (2.15.3)
>
> *How long we talked with the lamp by us!*

In fact so far from despising her he can claim:

> quod mihi si ponenda tuo sit corpore vita,
> exitus hic nobis non inhonestus erit. (2.26.57–8)
>
> *Yet if I must lay down my life on your body, this will be no dishonourable end for me.*

4 Propertius constantly sets up an ideal of his own fidelity to Cynthia, although she herself is notoriously unfaithful to him even in the *Monobiblos*. His vows of fidelity are reiterated throughout the first two books; he sees it almost as a moral matter:

> mihi neque amare aliam neque ab hac desistere fas est:
> Cynthia prima fuit, Cynthia finis erit. (1.12.19–20)
>
> *It is not right for me either to love another or leave this girl: Cynthia was first, Cynthia will be the end.*

and he considers their relationship to be as binding as any more conventionally legitimated ties:

> nos uxor numquam, numquam seducet amica:
> semper amica mihi, semper et uxor eris. (2.6.41–2)
>
> *A wife will never, a mistress will never lead me away: you will always be my mistress, always my wife.*

Even though she rejects him, still he will feel bound to remain celibate:

> nec domina ulla meo ponet vestigia lecto:
> solus ero, quoniam non licet esse tuum. (2.9.45–6)

Nor will any mistress leave her traces in my bed: I shall stay alone, since I may not be yours.

Yet no less easy to substantiate is the shattering practice of this ideal. One elegy (2.22), perhaps not entirely serious, expresses his weakness for women in general:

sic etiam nobis una puella parum est. (36)

So also I find one girl too little for me.

And there is the frustrated attempt, so vividly described in 4.8, to revenge himself for Cynthia's infidelities by playing her false with Phyllis and Teia. Propertius' sentiments then are not those of a lover who sees infidelity as utterly unthinkable, but rather of a lover who sets up an ideal which is not always lived up to. And Cynthia seems to recognize this in complaining of *his* possible infidelities (2.20; 3.6.19ff.; 3.16).

5 Jealousy is of course everywhere apparent. Obvious examples are the tirade against the praetor from Illyria (2.16) and other unnamed rivals (2.9 and 18). General fears of Cynthia's infidelity, sometimes of a very unreal nature, are constantly in evidence. When looking at Cynthia asleep, Propertius is afraid

neve quis invitam cogeret esse suam. (1.3.30)

lest anyone should force her to be his against her will.

He is jealous of Gallus and Lynceus (1.5 and 2.34), of the dangers of Baiae (1.11), of the opportunities offered by the games and temples of Rome. He is delighted when she is in the country out of harm's way:

nullus erit castis iuvenis corruptor in agris,
qui te blanditiis non sinat esse probam . . .
illic te nulli poterunt corrumpere ludi
fanaque, peccatis plurima causa tuis. (2.19.3–4, 9–10)

There will be no young seducer in those pure fields, who by his blandishments will not let you be faithful . . .

There no games can corrupt you, no temples, the main cause of your sins.[17]

6 The desire to 'rescue' the beloved which Freud found so surprising a feature in lovers of this type takes various forms in Propertius. There is, for example, a concern for her reputation, to be seen particularly in 2.32.21–2:

sed de me minus est: famae iactura pudicae
tanta tibi miserae, quanta meretur, erit.

But it matters less about me: the loss to your good name will be as great, you poor thing, as you deserve.

The elegies for her safety in time of illness (2.28) cannot of course be cited as evidence – they would be compatible with any deep relationship. But the example quoted by Freud of the lover who wrote tracts to keep his mistress on the path of 'virtue' prepares us for the subtler forms this instinct can take. A number of Propertius' elegies read like such tracts; their hortatory character distinguishes them from the poems prompted simply by jealousy. There are protests against her ways of dressing and her use of cosmetics, largely because they lead to or imply moral degradation (1.2; 2.18.23–38). He pleads with her to remain faithful to him (2.5; 2.16) and warns her of the possible dangers and penalties (1.8.5–8; 2.5.3–4). And he praises her when she avoids the temptations of the town by staying in the country (2.19).

Such concern for her has even subtler manifestations. The mythological examples which begin elegy 1.3 are Ariadne and Andromeda (a favourite myth with Propertius). These symbolize very well the protective feelings clearly revealed in lines 27–30:

et quotiens raro duxti suspiria motu,
obstupui vano credulus auspicio,
ne qua tibi insolitos portarent visa timores,
neve quis invitam cogeret esse suam.

17 Cf. also 1.8, 1.13, 2.15, 2.1.47–8, 2.8, 2.24.15–16, 30–3, 2.29, 2.32, 2.34.1–24, 3.8.33–4, 37–40, 3.19, 4.8.15–16.

> *And when, now and again, you moved and heaved a sigh, I froze numb, believing it an omen, lest some vision bring you strange fears, or lest someone force you to be his against your will.*

But the most striking manifestation of his desire to 'rescue' her is the strange poem 2.26 (*Vidi te in somnis fracta, mea vita, carina*). This has many of the marks of a genuine dream.[18] This is not unexpected, for the dream exactly symbolizes the desire to 'rescue' the beloved from possible dangers.[19]

Thus all of the traits described by Freud can be adequately paralleled in Propertius. If this is accepted, much about his liaison with Cynthia becomes clear. It is for example easy to understand why so much of his poetry is openly concerned with the degrading emotion of jealousy: it was a necessary ingredient in the relationship. Sometimes indeed Propertius seems aware of this. The complaisance he shows in 2.32.62 (*semper vive meo libera iudicio)* is otherwise most surprising. He does not, despite his jealously, find her infidelities as unbearable as Catullus found Lesbia's.

The portrait of Cynthia, which varies from the highest praise to unflattering reflections on her sexual morality, becomes more explicable. She had to be sexually tarnished for Propertius to love her, yet she is praised and over-valued for all her other talents and attractions – her beauty, her dress, her culture and poetic taste. Until his love abates and the scales drop from his eyes (3.24.2, 6), Propertius was genuinely in love with her and his writings provide one of the earliest and clearest examples of this type of Romantic passion. This is not to claim that Propertius is unique among Roman elegists in his sensibility[20] or to deny his debts to his Greek and Roman predecessors. But what may be justly asserted is that he uses his material to express a coherent attitude to Cynthia and to offer us a consistent picture of himself as a certain type of lover. Unlike Ovid, Propertius, along with Catullus and perhaps Gallus, represents a revolution in sentiment akin to the rise of Courtly Love in the eleventh-century Languedoc, whereas Ovid represents a counter-revolution and a return to more conventional classical attitudes. After Ovid, one must reiterate, there is no elegiac love poetry in the classical period worthy of the name.

18 Notably the vagueness of the location and the abrupt awakening when Propertius tries to throw himself from a rock. If it is based on a real dream, it has of course been considerably added to. Typical additions would be the comparisons in lines 5–6 and the poetic ornament of lines 9–10 and 13–16. For the abrupt ending, cp. Lucretius 4.1020–4.

19 There may indeed be more symbolism discernible in the dream. The connection with water might point to her maternal aspect for Propertius, particularly in view of her age and Propertius' claim, *tu mihi sola parens* (see Freud, n. 12 above, p. 202). Nevertheless, the straightforward interpretation (which seems undeniable) is all we require here.

The problem of elegy 1.1

If our analysis is correct, it should be possible to elucidate certain general and particular problems in Propertius through our understanding of the character of the lover exhibited in the *oeuvre*. It has been suggested earlier that, given Propertius' particular romantic sensibility and male vulnerability, his Alexandrian interest in mythological themes as a poetic mode of expression would run into certain difficulties in the erotic elegies. With some few exceptions, the Milanion–Atalanta myth, for example, significantly deployed in the opening of Book 1, most classical mythology involving love and passion cast the heroines into the roles of the abandoned or maltreated lover. Even where adultery is in question, the wronged man or god tends to be a *husband* (Vulcan, Theseus etc.), rather than a pitiful and passionate lover. This central fact may account for some of the strangeness of Propertius' use of mythological *exempla*, for the very glancing and obscure implications he has to rely on. (It may also account for the insubstantial and rarely symbolic use of mythology by Tibullus and Ovid when dealing directly with their passion as ill-treated lovers: the *exempla* were not there as they were for, say, fidelity or perverted passion.) This however is a large topic and it is better here to apply the analysis to a more limited problem which is capable of a simpler solution.

20 Se A. V. Rankin, '*Odi et Amo*', *American Imago* 17 (1960) 437–48, for a similar analysis of Catullus' relations with Lesbia.

The opening lines of Propertius' first elegy present precisely such a problem:

> Cynthia prima suis miserum me cepit ocellis
> contactum nullis ante cupidinibus.
> tum mihi constantis deiecit lumina fastus,
> et caput impositis pressit Amor pedibus,
> donec me docuit *castas odisse puellas*
> improbus et nullo vivere consilio.
>
> *Cynthia was the first who captured lovesick me with her eyes, me untouched before by passionate desires. Then love cast from my eyes their steadfast aloofness and pressed down my head with his feet upon it, until he, the villain, taught me* to hate chaste girls *and live without thought or plan.*

The great and real difficulties of this elegy, in particular of the first eight lines, have gradually yielded to the efforts of critics. But about one phrase at least, *castas odisse puellas* (line 5), there is still no general measure of agreement.[21]

Two explanations of *castas odisse puellas* may be immediately rejected: (1) the interpretation of the phrase as implying that Propertius has turned to common prostitutes in despair *(quaerere viles)* and (2) the various suggestions that the *castae puellae* are the Muses and that he has had to give up poetry. Against the first it may be objected that it is incompatible with line 8 *(cum tamen adversos cogor habere deos)*; and also that *furor* would not be the correct description of such a way of living, and finally that it is too much out of key with the mythological example of Milanion; against the second, that this would be a strange way of beginning a book of poems which are positive evidence that Propertius had not come to hate the Muses. Thus we are left with the following possible explanations: (*a*) that the *castae puellae* are virtuous women of some sort, whereas Cynthia is not; (*b*) that they are women who are faithful to their lovers, and Cynthia has rejected Propertius because she already has another lover; or (*c*) that they are women who (for whatever reason) deny sexual favours to their suitors as Cynthia has denied Propertius.

21 For the literature and the detailed arguments, see my '*Castas odisse puellas*: a reconsideration of Propertius 1.1', *WS* 74 (1961) 92ff.

Both (*b*) and (*c*) are open to serious objections. Against (*b*) it may be urged that on the evidence of Book 1 alone Cynthia is not one who would be faithful to any lover – she is certainly unfaithful to Propertius and he reflects that she will be *perfida* in all situations (cf. e.g. 2.9.1–2). Moreover, the tone of the complaints made by Propertius in his unhappy state does not fit this interpretation. He speaks of *ira* (line 28) and of a desire to get away from all women (lines 29–30). In one who has the conventional estimate of fidelity such *ira* is hardly justified; it must be caused by Cynthia's *saevitia*.

(*c*) may be taken in slightly different ways. But such explanations are all open to the criticism that *casta* cannot mean simply a woman who says no in a particular case to a particular suitor (line 36). Furthermore, the natural interpretation of *castas puellas* would exclude Cynthia – she is emphatically not chaste (except perhaps intermittently) and *casta* cannot simply mean *dura* or 'uncompliant' even in its weakest sense. Propertius is summing up a whole year's experience in this opening poem; he is already quite aware of her sexual character and devotes several elegies in Book 1 to expostulating with her for unchastity. Were Cynthia included in the *castae*, it would make nonsense of the feminine character he builds up in the *Monobiblos*. The reader will soon know her for what she is (cf. 1.2.23, *non illis studium vulgo conquirere amantes*), just as Propertius *already* knows her for what she is. Moreover Propertius cares for a good deal more than the satisfaction of desire. He has a high opinion of Cynthia for all her sexual delinquencies and he is jealous of her favours.

Purely philological considerations then exclude interpretations (*b*) and (*c*), but the difficulty about (*a*) may well have been the strangeness of the sentiment when the phrase *castas odisse puellas* is taken literally. The literal interpretation avows openly an emotional attachment to someone who is *incesta*, and an unconventional reaction *(odisse)* to what is generally accepted as a woman's crowning glory, sexual fidelity. But if Propertius is the sort of lover described earlier, then the strangeness of the

sentiment vanishes, and we see instead a clear-eyed recognition of Propertius' psychological orientation. He has, for the first time, found himself in love with a woman who has all the qualities requisite to arouse in him the compulsive passions of love and jealousy. And love has taught him to despise what would be naturally regarded as proper love-objects, namely women who would be faithful to their lovers or husbands *(castas puellas)*. These are the sensible choices for anyone who wishes to be happy in love. Hence his advice to other lovers (lines 31ff.). Where love is mutual, with kindness and fidelity as natural consequences, men should be content with their happy situation:

> vos remanete, quibus facili deus annuit aure,
> sitis et in tuto semper amore pares. (31–2)
>
> *stay where you are, you to whom the god has given his consent with willing ears, and may you be always equal in a safe passion.*
>
> hoc moneo, vitate malum: sua quemque moretur
> cura, neque assueto mutet amore locum. (35–6)
>
> *this evil, I warn you, avoid: let each man's darling hold him and let him not shift from the love he is used to.*

To leave a long-familiar mistress with whom one is happy to pursue someone who is perhaps another's, and who is, in any case, an unknown quantity, is folly: yet this is what Propertius has done.

Romantic love as a passion is compulsive and irrational: Propertius naturally sees his situation in classical terms, nor could he do otherwise. Love is externalized as Amor and the reproaches a modern man would direct at himself or his emotions are naturally directed against the external forces to which the Roman attributes his helpless plight. For Propertius it is an external and divine power that has robbed him of his former *hauteur* for such women as Cynthia (lines 3–4); thus he sees himself in the grip of *furor*, and it may be noted that modern ways of speaking about love reflect a similar attitude to the stronger passions. The interesting difference between Propertius' and the more conventional classical attitudes to love is the greater depth and fidelity of his self-analysis – he is aware that he is in love with someone who is *incesta*, yet recognizes his inability to cure himself of this disease. His over-estimation of Cynthia does not rise to the heights of disbelief in her unfaithfulness and cruelty. Yet clear-sighted though he is about Cynthia and his feelings towards her, there are elements in the situation which he is unaware of. We can see, as Propertius could not, that his sufferings, his jealousy, his acceptance of Cynthia's evil qualities, are psychologically *necessary* to him, despite his complaints and his longing for surcease: his agonies are real, but granted his nature they are necessary concomitants of his falling in love. The wise advice he gives other lovers is not advice he could himself follow. For this is *love*, not a sensual liaison, and in common with most of the ancient world he is ready to see it as disease. Cynthia is the first to have infected him with it, as he claims in line 2: *contactum nullis ante cupidinibus*.

The possible other objections against this interpretation of *castas odisse puellas* are of no great weight. It is true that on this view a slur is cast upon Cynthia, but then much of the *Monobiblos* casts even more specific aspersions on her (e.g. 8 and 15) and Cynthia, of course, could not justifiably take such offence as a virtuous woman or more faithful mistress might; although even the truth can wound. But in any case the mood of the opening elegy is angry and resentful *(sit modo libertas, quae velit ira, loqui)*; why should he hesitate to contrast her with more virtuous women and himself with lovers who are not under the sway of *improbus Amor*?

How far does this interpretation tally with the myth of Milanion and Atalanta? It could be argued that Propertius' mythological parallels are not always very apt. Obvious examples are Alphesiboea (1.15.15–16) and the story of the Centaurs and Pirithous (2.6.17–18), which do not properly illustrate their respective subjects, sexual fidelity and suspicious jealousy. But provided it is understood that only a certain facet of the situation of Milanion is throwing light on Propertius' relations with Cynthia, the illustration becomes not unreasonable. The stress is not on Atalanta's refusing to grant Milanion her favours or accept his honourable proposal, but on the *sufferings* (*nullos fugiendo . . . labores*, line 9) he underwent before he could tame his beloved

(*domuisse*, line 16). Propertius has undergone similar or worse suffering but has not similarly succeeded. The Milanion illustration does not preclude any earlier granting of Cynthia's favours to the poet; the difference is that Cynthia *continues* to maltreat him. The parallel is not between Atalanta's initial refusal to marry Milanion and a similar refusal on Cynthia's part, but between her *saevitia* and Cynthia's. The course of true love has not run smoothly:

> in me tardus Amor non ullas cogitat artes,
> nec meminit notas, ut prius, ire vias. (17–18)
>
> *in my case, sluggish Love thinks up no devices, and forgets to go his familiar ways as before.*

Cynthia, unlike Atalanta, will not be softened and will not reciprocate his passion. So he invokes witchcraft to make her fall in love with him (*et facite illa meo palleat ore magis*, line 22). But if this fails and his passion is hopeless, his friends must try to cure him of his madness.

Elegy 1 then is best taken as an analysis of Propertius' passion and a summary of a year's experience with Cynthia. All the complaints of the elegy will be documented at length in the rest of the *Monobiblos*. It is not the frustrated outcry of a rejected lover, who is later to be accepted by Cynthia, for there is no evidence in the poem that he has not so far been granted her favours at all. With a mistress like Cynthia even the accepted lover may suffer from her *saevitia* and *duritia*, and jealously as well as rejection may bring *amaras noctes* (line 33). But the safety of a reciprocated and equal love, confirmed by time and familiarity (lines 31–2, 35–6), is not for him. Just as the anonymous Pompeian claimed (with Propertius' verse in mind) that a fair beauty had taken away his taste for her darker opposites,[22] so Propertius confesses that his love for an *incesta* had made her opposites, the *castae puellae*, similarly unattractive.

22 *Candida me docuit nigras odisse puellas* (*CIL* IV.1520).

4
ROMAN CALLIMACHUS

Preliminary considerations

'Properce! . . . quel merveilleux sujet!' wrote Julien Benda in the opening paragraphs of his book.[1] 'Les transformations de l'élégie, l'alexandrinisme à Rome, les écrivains latins au lendemain de la bataille d'Actium ou une génération de la victoire!' A voice stops him: 'Perds-tu le sens? . . . Quoi! tu tiens un auteur dont l'oeuvre est expressément le cri d'une âme, d'une passion, et, au lieu de t'employer de toute ta force à devenir cette âme, à vivre cette passion, tu vas faire de l'histoire littéraire?' His answer to the romantic voice, defending Propertius as a poet of passion, not literature, was: 'mais cette âme est celle d'un poète, cette passion celle d'un homme de lettres. Elle s'exprime dans des formes littéraires.'

I have chosen in these pages to present Propertius first in his political and counter-cultural aspect, because we are nowadays aware that *Make Love, Not War* is primarily a political rather than an erotic declaration. But the critical approach Benda proposed goes also to the heart of Propertius' work and his imaginary interlocutor is simultaneously raising (and stifling) all those doubts about Propertius' genuine passion and 'sincerity' that appear, in various guises, in critical discussions of Propertius' poetry, particularly when focusing on his mythology and aetiology.

Benda's answer, that his passion, however profound, was the passion of a man of letters and a man of his age, which was therefore transmuted in his work, without invalidating its reality or sincerity, would seem a superficial answer to a question rarely raised in post-romantic criticism.

We no longer apply a *simpliste* criterion of 'sincerity', that of

1 *Properce, ou les amants de Tibur* (Paris 1928) 7ff.

PROPERTIUS

A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

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