

FURTHER NOTES ON THE TEXT OF PROPERTIUS

Abstract: Several passages of Propertius are explained.
Key words: Propertius, textual criticism.

Resumen: Se explican diversos pasajes de Propertio.
Palabras clave: Propertio, crítica textual.

3.16.13-14:

*quisquis amator erit Scythicis licet ambulet oris
nemo adeo ut noceat barbarus esse volet.*

These lines appear as follows in a *graffito* which was discovered at Pompeii:

*quisquis amator erit Scythiae licet ambulet oris
nemo adeo ut feriat barbarus esse volet.*

Butrica¹ noted that scholars have been puzzled by the fact that Propertius' *noceat* appears as *feriat* in the *graffito*. I would like to point out that Propertius is alluding² to the story of Lyncus, king of Scythia. Lyncus³ was visited by Triptolemus, whom he attacked and tried to kill. Thus Propertius means that not even a barbarian from Scythia would wish to harm (*noceat*) a lover. The writer of the *graffito* altered the verb *noceat* into *feriat*. The sense is that not even Lyncus would wish to kill (*feriat*⁴) a lover.

3.11.51:

fugisti tamen in timidi vaga flumina Nili

This line refers to Cleopatra, who is said to have fled to the wandering streams (*vaga flumina*) of the timid Nile. Butrica argued⁵ that the mss. reading *flumina* is corrupt. It should be noted, however, that the words *vaga flumina* occur at Horace, *Odes* I 34, 9. Nisbet-Hubbard pointed out in their commentary on this passage of Horace that *vaga* is "a conventional epithet of rivers."

¹ Cf. J. L. Butrica, "Editing Propertius" (*Classical Quarterly* 47, 1997, page 181 f.). Butrica's paper is the starting point of my article. Most regrettably, Butrica does not seem to have understood any of the passages which he tries to explain.

² For the fact that Propertius often alluded to well-known legends cf. my *Studies In The Text Of Propertius* (Athens 2002), page 114.

³ Cf. Ovid, *Met.* 5, 648 ff.

⁴ Cf. Lewis And Short, *A Latin Dictionary* s. v. *ferio* B 1: "To kill by striking... to slay, kill".

In alluding to the legend of Lyncus, Propertius used *noceat* ("harm") in the knowledge that his readers would know that Lyncus had tried to kill Triptolemus. The author of the *graffito* has replaced *noceat* with the more specific *feriat*, which alludes to Lyncus' attempted murder.

⁵ *Op. cit.*, page 182.

3.2.7-8:

*quin etiam, Polypheme, fera Galatea sub Aetna
ad tua rorantes carmina flexit equos.*

These lines refer to Galatea, who was courted by Polyphemus. Butrica⁶ was puzzled by the fact that Mount Etna is described as *fera*. Textual alteration is, however, not necessary. Etna is said to be *fera*⁷, i. e. “wild, uncultivated” because it is a mountain.

3.13.21-22:

*ardent victrices et flammae pectora praebent,
imponuntque suis ora perusta viris.*

Butrica explained that Propertius refers here to suttee. When the pyre is ablaze, the wives compete to see who will follow their spouse. Butrica⁸ was puzzled by the meaning of the verb *ardent*. Textual alteration is, however, not necessary. Propertius states that the victorious wives (*victrices*) “burn with love” (*ardent*⁹) when they throw themselves onto the pyre.

3.7.43:

quod si contentus patrio bove verteret agros

contentus: contentos v. l.

Butrica¹⁰ noted that “the Petrarchan manuscripts” read *contentos* in line 14. I would like to point out that this reading makes perfect sense. The poet has employed adjectival *enallage*, and therefore describes Paetus’ fields as “contented”. For a similar example of adjectival *enallage* in Propertius, cf. my *Studies*, page 164.

3.10. 27-28:

*sit sors et nobis talorum interprete iactu
quem gravibus pennis verberet ille puer.*

Butler¹¹ translated these lines as follows: “Let us cast lots, let the fall of the dice reveal to us those whom the boy god lashes with heavy pinions.”

⁶ *Op. cit.*, page 184.

⁷ Cf. Lewis And Short, *A Latin Dictionary* s. v. *ferus* II: “Transf., of places ...*montes*, Verg. *E.* 5,28”.

⁸ *Op. cit.*, page 185.

⁹ Cf. Lewis and Short, *op. cit.*, s. v. *ardeo* II, C: “... Esp., to burn with love”.

¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, page 188.

¹¹ Cf. H. E. Butler, *Propertius*, ed. Loeb, 1967, reprint, page 211 f.

I would like to suggest that better sense can be made of the transmitted text if we understand that Amor is said to torment (*verberet*) the lover with painful (*gravibus*) arrows (*pennis*¹²). Cf. Plaut. *Trin.* 242-43 *saviis sagittatis percussus (percussus)* = “hit by...”; Mart. 7, 95, 6 *percussus atque verberatus*. Cf. also Horace, *C.* 3, 1, 29 *verberatae grandine vineae*.

2.33.31-34:

*tuque o Eurytion vino Centaure peristi,
nec non Ismario tu, Polypheme, mero.
vino forma perit, vino corrumpitur aetas,
vino saepe suum nescit amica virum.*

Butrica¹³ noted that the following couplet is found in a “thirteenth-century florilegium”

*omnis amans caecus, non est amor arbiter aequus,
nam deforme pecus iudicat esse decus.*

Butrica translated as follows: “every lover is blind, love is not a fair judge, for it deems an ugly beast to be a beauty.”

Butrica argued that these two lines “do not occupy their intended position”, since they do not suit the context. I would like to point out, however, that the two lines which are contained in the florilegium suit the context very well. Propertius addresses Polyphemus in line 32. The author of the additional couplet then states that love is blind, and alludes to the fact that Galatea¹⁴ fell in love with Polyphemus, who is described as an “ugly brute” (*deforme pecus*). We may therefore conclude that Butrica¹⁵ was wrong to argue that the interpolated couplet “originally stood as a comment on 2.14.18”, and was later “displaced in the copying of Reg. lat. 2120”.

2.1.15-16:

*seu quidquid fecit sive est quodcumque locuta,
maxima de nihilo nascitur historia.*

Butrica¹⁶ noted that the opening lines of this poem state that everything about Cynthia “gives rise to poetry”. The words *maxima... historia* recall 2.11.24, where Propertius mentions the story of the peacock’s proud tail (*pavonis caudae fabella superbae*). Prof. G. Giangrande has recently explained that Propertius blamed Cynthia because she wanted to adorn herself with costly jewels: cf. *Orpheus* 25, 2004, page 3 f.

¹² Cf. Lewis And Short, *op. cit.*, s. v. *penna* II, B, 2: “Meton., “an arrow”.

¹³ *Op. cit.*, page 198.

¹⁴ For the fact that, according to some ancient sources, Galatea fell in love with Polyphemus, cf. Gow, *Theocritus* (Cambridge 1965, reprint), vol. 2, page 118.

¹⁵ *Op. cit.*, page 198.

¹⁶ *Op. cit.*, page 199.

2.3. 29-32:

*gloria Romanis una es tu nata puellis:
 Romana accumbes prima puella Iovi, 30
 nec semper nobiscum humana cubilia vises;
 post Helenam haec terris forma secunda redit.*

Propertius states that Cynthia has been born to be a glory for Roman girls. Butrica¹⁷ was puzzled by the reference to Helen in line 32. However, Butrica has misunderstood the poet's words. Propertius describes Cynthia as an "excellent" (*prima*) girl and states that she will recline at table with Jupiter (*accumbes*¹⁸ ... *Iovi*). Propertius means that Cynthia will be deified because of her beauty.

Conclusion. The reader will note that none of the textual alterations which have been proposed by Butrica is warranted.

HEATHER WHITE

¹⁷ *Op. cit.*, page 201.

¹⁸ Cf. Lewis And Short, *op. cit.*, s. v. *accumbo* II, A:
 "To recline at table".

Butrica has evidently forgotten the well-known *topos*
 of the "*puella divina*".