INTRODUCTION

Book III belongs almost exactly to the middle of Propertius'
poetical career, if the comparatively few datable references in
his works are a fair guide. For Elegy xviii appears (see note
below on line 32 of the poem) to have been written at the very
time of the death of Marcellus, which occurred late in 23 B.C.
Elegy xi may have been suggested by the quadrennial cele-
bration of the victory of Actium held (Dio C. LIII, 2) in
24 B.C.; and the emphasis in Elegy iv on military preparation
against the Parthians suits the period about 22 B.C. Datable
references in Book I point to the year 30 and thereabouts; those
in Book IV to the year 16. Book III is thus a mid-point. We
can suppose with probability that it was begun not earlier than
25, because Elegy x of the preceding Book II mentions as
impending an expedition against Arabia which set out in
that year. On the other hand Elegy xii of this book and
Elegy iii of Book IV both imply a time before the settlement
reached with Parthia in 20 B.C. but later than the first prepa-
rations. It seems therefore safe to fix the limits of Book III as
not wider than 25–20, perhaps 24–21.

In Books I and II Propertius had presented what in appear-
ance at least is the record of a personal experience of love in
various phases and aspects; this is 'subjective love-elegy' in the
natural sense of the term. In Book III a curious development
occurs. The poet insists firmly and repeatedly (see for instance
III, i, 9, III, ii, 2, III, iii, 47, III, v, 21 ff., III, ix, 45) that love-
elegy is and must be his sphere; and of the twenty-five elegies
that compose the Book all but two (the *epicedia* vii and xviii)
are in fact related somehow or other to the love-theme. But
in nine of these (i, ii, iii, v, ix on the poet's literary views and
intentions, and iv, xi, xiii, xxii on national and patriotic topics)

this relation is either indirect, as in the literary elegies, or tenuous and artificial, as for instance in Elegy xi where four lines on the poet's subjection to a woman lead to a review in eighteen lines of legendary female tyrants and thus to a declamation in thirty-four lines on Rome's escape from Cleopatra. Moreover, of the fourteen poems to which, in virtue of their professed subjects, the term 'love-elegy' would more naturally apply, nearly half (xii, xiv, xv, xvii, xix, xxi) are impersonal in character (e.g. the 'essays' xiv and xix) or composed substantially of matter extraneous to the subject of love (e.g. xv consists chiefly of the tale of Dirce and Antiope, xvii chiefly of a recital of the attributes of Bacchus, etc., xxi chiefly of a traveller's tour recounted in anticipation). And in the remainder, love-elegies proper (vi, viii, x, xvi, xx, xxiii, xxiv, xxv), the tone is light, varying from the cynical to the mildly sentimental, and the sense of involvement is correspondingly small, except in the last two, which purport to say an angry farewell to Cynthia. This heroine and inspiration of Book I is in the present book named only three times, and then in a context of dismissal (xxiv and xxv) or escape (xxi). Hence it is clear that in this Book the author is no lover in search of a means of expression, but a poet in search of subjects. He seems to feel the need of an identified department of poetry within which to work, and the need of the love-theme to provide the identifying label, and so he persists in presenting himself as a 'love-elegist'. But he proceeds to extend the limits of the department 'love-elegy' in such a way as to make it no longer meaningful. It is thus no surprise to us to find (in Book IV) that the farewell to Cynthia in Elegies xxiv and xxv of this Book is also a farewell to the role of love-elegist, despite the protestations of Elegies i–v.

The reader of Book III may be struck from time to time with the feeling that here is an elegiac counterpart to Horatian lyric; and indeed we find here many of the same poem-types,

subjects and leading motives: the dramatic monologue (in Horace a dramatic dialogue also), the hymn to a god, the birthday poem, the appeal to a friend to return from abroad (in Horace it is welcome to a friend returning), the boast of the poet's achievement, the forecast of his immortality; the declamations on the fall of Cleopatra, on the evils of mounting extravagance, on the praises of Italy, on the poet's comparative poverty not regretted, etc. Another feature of the book which everyone will remark is the strongly rhetorical character of some of the poems: especially the essay-form (corresponding to known rhetorical exercises) of Elegies xi, xiii, xiv, xix and xxii, and the methodical enumeration of instances to illustrate a point, both in these elegies and in others (e.g. III, i, 25 ff. Homeric subjects, III, v, 25 ff. subjects of didactic poetry, III, ix, 9 ff. sculptors and painters, III, xii, 23 ff. Ulysses' adventures, III, xvii, 21 ff. attributes of Bacchus and his worship, III, xxii, 7 ff. wonders of Greek legend and 29 ff. horrors of Greek legend). It will be noticed that the thought of these and of many other elegies in this Book is organized in a very simple and almost prosaically business-like way. Thus in Elegy xxii the thought is 'Abroad you may see many legendary marvels: but the marvels of Italy are better: and in Italy there are no marvels of evil as there were in Greek legend'; these propositions, few, simple and consequent, are then each supported with a stock of parallel illustrative instances. This methodical simplicity of the layout is sometimes accompanied by a quantitative balance in the component parts. For instance Elegy ii, after an introductory couplet, falls into line-groups of 8+8+8; Elegy iii into 26+26; Elegy xvi into 10+10+10; Elegy xviii into 10+10+10(+4). Sometimes there is balance about an unbalanced central section, as in Elegy vi, where the pattern is 8+26 (the Report)+8, or in Elegy xxi, where the pattern is 10+14 (the Journey)+10. There seems no doubt that this was intended by the poet, or at least corresponded to

some instinctive inclination on his part. But it does not seem to have been a general principle of composition with him, for in some elegies (e.g. xiv and xix) no system of balance is apparent, at least to me. In others again (and these a good many) it is hard to determine with certainty the exact limits of the parts into which an elegy appears to fall; and the reader is therefore asked to treat with critical reserve the analyses offered in some of the notes below.

The order of the elegies in the book is evidently considered, but not in any important sense significant. The first five elegies (i–v) stand apart (as in a different way do the first six odes of Horace's third book), being concerned with the poet's literary views and ambitions. In the following eight elegies (vi–xiii) erotic and non-erotic pieces appear to be set in alternation (with the result that the whole first half of the book contains only three examples of love-elegy in the normal sense of the term); but this alternation does not continue after Elegy xiv. The last five pieces of the book (xxi–xxv), though they show no sign of having been composed to form a group, have probably been selected to stand together because they all can be read as pointing to the end of Propertius' career as a lover and love-poet: in xxi he is setting out for Athens in the hope of forgetting Cynthia; in xxii he looks forward to the return from abroad of Tullus, whom we know from Book I as a representative of the conventional Roman virtues; in xxiii the tablets used for love-letters have been lost; and xxiv and xxv profess to dismiss Cynthia for good. The two *epicedia* (vii and xviii) are set apart from one another in roughly corresponding positions. The lack here of any clearer principle of arrangement, such as we find in Books I and IV, may be due to the diversity of the matter which this book comprises.

The diversity of subject-matter is matched by the diversity of the diction. In elegies such as vi and xxiii, which might be speeches from comedy, the language is a metrical version of

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crisply styled conversation: e.g. III, vi, 21–2 *ille potest nullo miseram me linquere facto, et qualem nolo dicere habere domi?* Consider, on the other hand, III, xi, 9–12 *Colchis flagrantis adamantina sub iuga tauros egit et armigera proelia seuit humo, custodisque feros clausit serpentis hiatus, iret ut Aesonias aurea lana domos*; here, while almost every word is from the vocabulary of prose, the application in almost every case is unprosaic. But on their different levels the two passages both exhibit properties of style which are characteristically Propertian: firmness of texture, organized sound, and a high degree of expressiveness. These are independent qualities of style *per se*; but the first two are often found contributing to one another and to the third.

Firmness of texture is achieved both by avoiding idle words and by extracting as much effect[1] as possible from those which are at work. One means to it is the suppression of terms of syntax or of sense which can be supplied by the imagination. Thus in the example III, vi, 22 above, a term of *syntax* is omitted, the antecedent to *qualem*; in III, xi, 55 *tanto...ciue* is an ablative absolute, with ellipse of a participle of the verb 'to be'; in III, xxi, 33 *seu moriar, fato* there is ellipse of a second *moriar* with *fato*. These ellipses are syntactical. But there may also be ellipse of terms of *meaning*; thus in the example from III, xi, 9–10 quoted above Medea is said to have yoked the bulls, when what is understood is that she enabled Jason to yoke them; and she is said to have sowed battles, when what is understood is that she emboldened Jason to sow the dragon's teeth from which then sprang the armed men who engaged in battle together. In III, ix, 41 the Wooden Horse is said to plough the site of fallen Troy because it brings about

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[1] The effect desired is usually one of meaning. But sometimes it may be purely stylistic. Hence in a passage such as II, i, 63–4 *Mysus et Haemonia iuuenis qua cuspide uulnus senserat, hac ipsa cuspide sensit opem* the repeated words are not idle. One does not want too much of this, of course, and from Propertius one does not get too much.

the victory which in turn brings about this result. Both these forms of ellipse are common in Propertius in numerous variations.[1] But firmness of texture is achieved in other ways than by ellipse. For instance, the value of significant words may be enhanced by packing them closely together, as in III, vi, 33 *putris et in uacuo texetur aranea lecto*; III, xi, 39 *incesti meretrix regina Canopi*; III, xviii, 24 *torui publica cumba senis*. Or the length of words as well as their juxtaposition may be exploited to make them yield more meaning, as in III, xxb, 11–12 *tu quoque, qui aestiuos spatiosus exigis ignis, Phoebe, moraturae contrahe lucis iter*; or their order as well as their juxtaposition, as in III, xvii, 25–6 *curuaque Tyrrhenos delphinum corpora nautas in uada pampinea desiluisse rate*.

In the last example quoted the nimble dactylic movement of the pentameter accompanies appropriately, if it does not express, the springing of the sailors overboard. The sonority of III, ii, 21 *nec Mausolei diues fortuna sepulcri* assists the statement that it contains about the splendour of the monument.[2] A similar intention is evident in III, xxii, 21–2 *nam quantum ferro tantum pietate potentes stamus*, in which as well as sonority there is a very obvious alliterative pattern. Alliterative patterning in Propertius is seldom of this obvious kind, but as a phenomenon it is ubiquitous;[3] see for instance

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[1] Some more examples: III, xvi, 6 *ut timeam audaces in mea membra manus*; III, xvii, 21 *maternos Aetnaeo fulmine partus*; III, vi, 26 *staminea* (i.e. *spun by its thread*) *rota*; III, xvii, 26 *pampinea* (i.e. *overgrown* with vine) *rate*; III, v, 44 (*num*) *Tityo iugera pauca nouem* (i.e. whether the story is true of a giant so huge that nine acres are too small a space for his outstretched body). In III, xv, 18 *uilem ieiunae saepe negauit aquam* the epithet *ieiunae* has the value of a separate statement: 'she starved her, and...'. In III, i, 28 *Hectora per campos ter maculasse rotas* a brief and in itself cryptic phrase acquires and conveys an abundance of meaning through recall of two passages in the *Iliad*.

[2] The whole passage III, ii, 19–26 illustrates admirably the value of sound in relation to sense.

[3] It is produced of course by the poet's ear guiding his choice of words in quest of a total sound effect that will satisfy it; not by his mind searching for combinations of particular vowels and consonants, though such combinations in fact are the basis of the sound effect and are (as the sound effect is

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III, i, 26 *fluminaque Haemonio comminus isse uiro*; III, xiii, 15 *felix Eois lex funeris una maritis*; III, xvi, 2 *Tibure me missa iussit adesse mora*; III, xvi, 15 *luna ministrat iter, demonstrant astra salebras*; III, xx B, 25–6 *ergo, qui pactas in foedera ruperit aras, pollueritque nouo sacra marita toro*; III, xxiv, 8 *cum tibi quaesitus candor in ore foret*. In these instances the patterning is simply a quality of style. In others, as in the first example above (from III, ii, 21), it assists the sense; e.g. III, xxiv, 13 *correptus saeuo Veneris torrebar aeno*; or is positively expressive, as in III, xvii, 33–4 *mollia Dircaeae pulsabunt tympana Thebae, capripedes calamo Panes hiante canent*, or in the sigmatic hissing of the snake in III, xi, 11.

These qualities of texture and sound are general properties of Propertius' style. Sometimes, as has been seen, they contribute to its expressiveness. The basic constituent, however, of this expressiveness is the poet's feeling for the strongly significant word, whether in metaphor or in direct statement. See, for instance, III, xv, 9 *sepeliuit*, III, xvii, 9 *custodit*, III, xiii, 64 *serpere* (*dixit equum*), III, xv, 14 *fixit* (*in ora manus*), III, xviii, 1 *ludit* (*pontus*), III, xiii, 31 *uestitas* (*frondibus uuas*), III, xvi, 5 *obductis* (*tenebris*), III, xi, 5 *praesagit*, III, xiv, 11 (*gyrum*) *pulsat*, III, xiv, 29 *uadit*, III, xvii, 18 *inquinet*, III, xv, 41 *cruentantur*, III, xv, 33 (*sonitus*) *rarescit*, III, ii, 8 *rorantis* (*equos*), III, vi, 27 *turgentis* (*ranae*), III, v, 36 (*Pleiadum*) *spisso* (*cur coit*) *igne chorus*. In most of these examples the word chosen communicates something very clearly and exactly recognizable by the mind's eye. And in fact the poet's control of language is

not) demonstrable on paper. The patterning found in Propertius resembles in kind and degree that found in Virgil and Horace, though each has his individual character; by contrast, the patterns in Lucretius are much more pronounced (tending to be based on initial letters), those in the hendeca-syllables of Catullus more delicate. On the subject in general and its importance for the appreciation of much Latin poetry see L. P. Wilkinson, *Golden Latin Artistry* (Cambridge, 1963).

co-operating with a characteristic property of his imagination, which tends to work through particular visible or audible images. When Propertius thinks of the wine-harvest, he sees the juice staining the legs of the pressers. When he thinks of the defeat of the Suevi, he sees the mangled bodies of the dead swept along in the blood-dyed waters of the Rhine. This tendency is nowhere more apparent than in Elegy vii, the *epicedion* for Paetus lost at sea, in which Propertius' sensibility, responsive always to the thought of death, is excited especially by the horror of the circumstances. This prompts a succession of images: the fishes nibbling curiously at the floating corpse, the sea-birds perched on it (or on the skeleton on the beach), the nails torn from his hands, the choking water, the sharp rocks on to which he sees himself swept, the swirl of the sea as he goes under for the last time.

The above does not profess to be a complete account even of the limited aspect of Propertius' poetry which it discusses. But it may help to explain some judgements in the text and notes which follow; for instance those in favour of *delinisse* in III, ii, 3, of *cane* in III, xi, 49, of *cumulus* in III, xvi, 29, of *utroque toro* in III, xvii, 12, of *rapta* in III, xvii, 24, and of *tuae* in III, xviii, 32.

VARIANTS FROM THE OXFORD TEXT (1960)

ii, 2 gaudeat ut   3 delinisse   16 nec defessa

iii, 17 hinc   42 cingere

iv, 3 magna uiris merces

v, 2 sat mihi   8 caute   14 ab inferna...rate   18 Parcae (*and remove obeli*)

vi, 9 sicin eam   22 ...domi?   23 ...lecto?   28 exuctis   30 cinctaque...toro

vii, 21–4 *no square brackets*   22 Athamantiadae   29 curuate et   47 non tulit hic Paetus   49 sed   50 ecfultum   52 ...aquam?   53 ...ligno?   54 ...mala?

viii, 13 seu   16 *colon at end of line*   26 tua   27 quos   29 grata   35 ff. *separate and print as* viii b

ix, 9 ecfingere   38 Cadmi, nec semper   55 claustraque   57 mollis   59 *comma at end of line*

x, 6 minax   13 at primum   26 perstrepat   28 grauius

xi, 5 uentorum...motus   29 nexerit   49 cane   55 non haec, Roma, fuit   58 femineas...minas?   65–8 *after* 58   59 *remove obeli*

xii, 12 armato   25 et Ciconum mors Ismara capta

xiii, 2 ...opes?   39 Arcadii

xiv, 10 and 16 *semi-colons at end*   15–16 *after* 12 (*with Scaliger*)

xv, 3 praetexti pudor est releuatus amictus   10-11 *division, not lacuna*   11 sero   33 litore sub tacito   42–3 *division*

xvi, 29 cumulus

xvii, 2 pacato   3 flatus   12 utroque toro   16 carpent (*and comma at end of line*)   17 tumeant   18 *full stop at end of line*   24 rapta   38 libabit

xviii, 8–9 *no lacuna*   29–30 *no square brackets*   32 huc... portant...tuae   33 qua...qua

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VARIANTS FROM THE OXFORD TEXT (1960)

xix, 21–2 teque, o...tondens...coma ?   25–6 *no brackets; and colon at end of 25*   27–8 *no transposition*

xx, *print* 1–10 *as* xxa *and* 11–30 *as* xxb

xxb, *transpose* 13–14 *before* 11–12, *do not transpose* 19–20

xxi, 6 possit   32 situ

xxii, 3 fabricata in uite (*and no obeli*)   6 at desiderio (*and full stop at end of line*)   38 curtatas

xxiii, 20 diras

xxiv, 8 *full stop at end of line*   11 haec ego   12 fatebar (*and no parenthesis*)