Antoni Bobrowski 🆔

Jagiellonian University in Kraków

Faces of Loneliness in Propertius 1.18

ABSTRACT: In Propertius' Elegy 1.18, the speaker arrives at an empty, desolate grove so that he may complain loud about being an abandoned lover in solitude. The work is positioned in the mainstream of the Augustan love elegy, but apart from elegiac concepts, it contains numerous topoi and intertextual references to the tradition of bucolic poetry. This article discusses the functioning of the motif of loneliness, which in 1.18 combines various elements that make up the image of the depicted world and enables the selection and modification of interpretative clues.

KEYWORDS: Propertius, Roman elegy, pastoral poetry, Callimachus, Cornelius Gallus, Virgil

Even on a cursory reading, Elegy 1.18 stands out in two respects against Propertius` poetic output contained in the four books. The first is the relatively good state of preservation of this poem in the manuscript tradition, which in the case of Propertius is characterised by some ambivalence. On the one hand, we seem to have Propertius' entire legacy at our disposal, which makes it possible to count him among the small group of ancient authors who have been treated kindly by time. On the other hand, the state of the text preserved in

medieval manuscripts has always aroused serious controversy.[1] The history of critical editions in the last century reveals the frequency and scale of various editorial interventions to which individual elegies by the poet of Assisi were subjected. In a great many cases, these procedures were not limited to the standard and frequent measures included in textual criticism, such as choosing a version of the text from among several *lectiones*, suggesting conjunctures or establishing hypothetical *lacunae*. They also included such radical actions as cutting a single elegy into several independent parts (usually two or three, denoted by the publisher with the consecutive letters A, B, C), changing the order of verses within a single work and even cutting several or more verse segments from one elegy and incorporating them into the structure of another work. However, Elegy 1.18, from the debut volume of the *Monobiblos*, published in 29/28 B.C., has never been divided or otherwise transformed by the publishers, as there is a common consensus on the integrity of the text of this work. If there are any doubts they concern only a few mainly lexical details which are not serious enough to make different attempts to dispel them and affect the essential course of the interpretative line.[2] The conviction that we study the text in a form consistent with the author's intention, or at any rate very close to this intention, creates a starting point which is very convenient for making any analysis and interpretation, and which will also not be relevant to our present considerations.

The second distinguishing aspect of 1.18 is its clear location in the current of the Greco-Roman tradition of bucolic poetry, with which Propertius conducts a kind of dialogue preserving all formal and content distinctions characteristic of the elegiac genre. In the course of an

---

[1]   "The text of Propertius is one of the worst transmitted of the classical Latin authors" (Heyworth 2007: VII) – in these words, the publisher of Propertius, Stephen J. Heyworth, expressed a view that seems to have been the *opinio communis* of publishers and scholars for more than a century; while pointing out that in preparing the latest critical edition, Heyworth made much more use of the results of manuscript research than his predecessors (see Butrica 1984).

[2]   A novelty is the diagnosis of *lacunae* of two lines after verse 23 in Heyworth's 2007 edition, which so far has not met with universal approval; e.g., Hunt 2013: 44 n. 38 notes Heyworth's suggestion but stays with the text from Fedeli's edition.

intertextual dialogue supplied by two sources, elegiac and bucolic, there emerges an image of amorous enslavement,[3] in which the relationship between lovers is based on the girl's privileged position. The poet in love is placed at the centre of a space transposed from the world of the Arcadian myth and adapted to the rules of the elegiac genre. Elegies on love themes written in Rome of the Augustan period usually mark the character of the speaker with a sense of acute estrangement caused by an intense experience of feeling unwanted, unrequited, rejected or betrayed. The poet-lover's loneliness in Elegy 1.18 stems directly from the situational context, but on closer analysis other ways of defining it can also be discerned. Our consideration aims to attempt to present the concept of the loneliness of the speaker's character in this poem as a factor that links the various interpretative clues that emerge from a deeper analysis of the text, taking into account intertextual references.

The first and most obvious direction to achieve this is to observe how the content and formal elements characteristic of bucolic poetry were used for elegiac purposes. At the same time, it should be borne in mind that bucolic entourage was not one of the means eagerly used by the Augustan elegists to whose works we have access – neither Propertius himself nor Tibullus, otherwise locating his projection of dreams of a happy life and fulfilled love in a rural space, let alone Ovid, an enthusiast of a metropolitan lifestyle. The *Monobiblos*, however, as a collection with which Propertius began his poetic career, provides an opportunity to observe the Augustan variant of the elegiac genre, if not *in statu nascendi*, then at the stage of development and 'solidification' of the general poetic concept and detailed artistic solutions. It has long been noted[4] that the three elegies in this book, which follow one another and are numbered 16, 17 and 18, form a kind of group characterised by structural similarity and by similarity in the shaping of the character depicted. All three contain an extended complaint, articulated by a lonely, abandoned and suffering

---

[3] Although the concept of *servitium amoris* has not been particularly prominent in previous reflections on the poem 1.18, there is also no shortage of opinions such as that formulated by King 1975: 117: "poem 18 represents the culmination of Propertius' own acceptance of this servitude"; see also Lyne 1979: 128.

[4] Solmsen 1962; Williams 1968: 547; King 1975–1976: 120. King speaks of a cycle formed by four contiguous elegies (1.15–18).

poet-lover.[5] Loneliness determines the tone and mood and is the unifying element of the three otherwise vastly different works. In Elegy 1.16, which is (like the earlier work 67 by Catullus, or the later elegy, *Am.* 1.6 by Ovid) a transformation of the *paraclausithyron* genre, a peculiar voice produced by the gates of the house is introduced. The woman living in the house is accused of promiscuity (since no name is mentioned there is no suggestion of identifying her with Propertius' beloved Cynthia), and plea of a young man waiting in vain at night outside the locked house of his beloved is quoted to support the accusation. Another poem (1.17) is filled entirely with the poet's mournful complaint about his separation from Cynthia. He is on a desolate, distant coast and imagines that the sea storm is a punishment suffered from fate for undertaking the long journey that separated him from his beloved. Elegy 1.18, on the other hand, depicts the poet singing his despair in an empty grove after being abandoned by Cynthia and trying to guess the reasons for the girl's departure.

In this poem, the author employed a strategy based on contrasting the highly emotional tone of the speaker's speech with the desolate, cold and inhospitable environment. Such a strategy appears several times in *Monobiblos*, while in the later books of the collection it gives way to the more frequently used technique of a sham dialogue assuming the presence of an interlocutor (usually the poet's beloved Cynthia or one of his close friends), from whom a direct reaction to the speaker's confessions can be expected. The prominence of the motif of loneliness in 1.18, as in the two preceding pieces, contributes significantly to the strengthening and sharpening of emotional expression.

Propertius placed the figure of the poet who is unhappily in love in a bucolic landscape, which from the beginning signals his intention to construct a poetic discourse using two sources of poetic inspiration, although the bucolic nature of the setting is not immediately apparent to the reader. The elements forming the setting differ from the standard

---

[5]   Solmsen 1962: 79–82 considers the possibility of reading the elegies in question in an autobiographical key, wondering whether the speaker can be identified with the authorial voice; he concludes that such a possibility can be accepted for 1.17 and 1.18, more difficult for 1.16; such considerations, however, seem to have no particular relevance, and the method is generally difficult to accept.

appearance of the *locus amoenus*,[6] where the shepherds known from Theocritus' eclogues usually were present. Identifying the literary affinity of the precisely constructed four opening verses[7] is not an easy task, especially as this segment contains elements whose meaning will only gradually become fully clear as further distichs are read. The poet finds himself in a desolate and quiet place (*deserta loca*, 1), with only the wind and lonely rocks (*vacuum Zephyri possidet aura nemus*, 2; *sola*[8] ... *saxa*, 4) present in the space of the empty grove. In such a setting the poet will be able to speak 'with impunity' about his hidden sufferings (*occultos proferre impune dolores*, 3). The meaning of the term *impune* – i.e., without restraint and without exposing oneself to unpleasant, one must guess, consequences – is partially clarified in the next line, which expresses the hope that the solitary rocks, the only listeners to the complaints, will manage to keep the secret. At this point, the *taciturna* used earlier also takes on a fuller meaning, as the phrase *loca ... taciturna quaerenti* (1) becomes completely comprehensible – the surroundings 'silent' (i.e., indifferent, or even insensitive towards the lamenting poet), begin to be perceived as a place 'responding with silence' to the complaints, and thus maintaining a discreet silence.

The initial feeling of the hostility of the surroundings is thus alleviated, since solitude and remoteness turn out to be an ally of the poet, who needs such a place to vent his repressed complaints. An emotional outcry *a quotiens teneras resonant mea verba sub umbras* (21) also follows, and one will notice that this time the reference is made to the 'gentle' shade of the trees. This verse, moreover, repeats much of the content of the two opening distichs in a shortened form, adding information that is important for us at this point. The *quotiens* leave no doubt that the poet has come to

---

6   Cf. Grant 1979: 49: "The description in the opening verses suggests a pastoral setting, though hardly the *locus amoenus*"; Hunt 2013: 136: "despite frequent comparisons to pastoral, this is no *locus amoenus*."

7   See the discussion of the opening distichs in Stahl 1968: 442–443; a detailed analysis of verses 1–4 with additional interpretative tropes is offered by Phillips 2011: 111–112, who also sees an intentional use of ring composition in the final verses.

8   The semantic identity of *sola* = *deserta* is emphasised in the commentaries by Enk 1946: *ad loc.* and Fedeli 1980: *ad loc.*; this choice of terms and their placement in lines 1 and 4 looks like a deliberate compositional closure of the segment that begins the elegy.

this desolate grove many times to sing out his complaints in the past. Towards the end of the poem there is again an evocation of fragments describing the scenery evoking the effect of abandonment and solitude.[9] The utterance exposes elements of inanimate nature (*pro quo dumosi montes*[10] *et frigida rupes* / *et datur inculto tramite dura quies*, 27–28) to emphasise the solitude of the speaker (*cogor ... dicere solus*, 30) and resound a repetition of the opening phrase of the elegy in the last verse (*deserta loca*, 1 – *deserta ... saxa*, 32). This closes the carefully thought-out composition of the piece in which the motif of loneliness thus acquires a structural function that completes the interpretative clue.

The bucolic features of the setting were modified under the influence of the concept of elegiac love, which is initially signalled in the first verse by the reference to the verbal *queri* (the poet's 'utterance of complaint' – *querenti* – is mentioned here),[11] then underpinned by words of hidden

---

[9]   Solsmen 1962: 74 suggests that towards the end of the piece there is an escalation of the effect of discomfort and alienation due to the lack of empathy on the part of nature, from which the speaker expected consolation; this suggestion does not seem to be sufficiently supported by the text.

[10]   I adopt here *dumosi montes* after Heyworth's most recent critical edition, which chose to accept a conjecture considered many times before (but usually not accepted by publishers) in place of the *divini fontes* version handed down by the manuscripts (so without much reservation Camps 1961; with the text marked as corrupted but without conjecture: Butler, Barber 1933; Enk 1946; Richardson 1977). The scale of the interpretive difficulties associated with this phrase and the multiplicity of proposed solutions is shown by the juxtaposition of conjunctures in Smyth 1970: 22–23; the list of proposals is further augmented by Eden 1981; Allen 1985; see also Shackleton Bailey 1956: 54–55; Grant 1979: 53 n. 19; Fedeli 1980: 436.

[11]   The combination of the formal concept of spoken complaint (*querela*) with the topos of solitude should be considered particularly characteristic of elegy 1.18 (as it was earlier in 1.16 and 1.17). Sarah James (2003: 108–121) devotes a great deal of space in her book to a consideration of the identity of the literary phenomenon known as the *querela*, but it is hard to resist the impression that the researcher herself is not fully convinced by her own proposals. On the one hand, James singles out the *querela* as an 'overarching unifying element' in the parts addressed by the poet in love to the girl, an element defined by the presence of specific topoi (a representative tabulation on p. 111, but incomplete, as the author points out). On the other hand, the formal status of the phenomenon is not clear: the separation of topoi constituting a formal identity could indicate a desire to grant the lament (*querela*) the status of a genre, but the author hastens to point out that only Prop. 1.18 meets the outlined criteria, which puts these considerations into question. See also McCarthy 2019: 62–66.

suffering and the necessity to keep confessions secret (vv. 3–4). Vv. 5–6 (*unde tuos primum repetam, mea Cynthia, fastus? / quod mihi das flendi, Cynthia, principium?*) express a sense of excessive grief filling the poet's heart and combine imitation of a phrase taken from Theocritus[12] with a typically elegiac complaint about the loftiness and inaccessibility of his lover. They are at the same time an introduction to the main theme of the song, the complaint of the abandoned lover, who makes a kind of self-presentation (*qui modo felices inter numerabar amantes / nunc in amore tuo cogor habere notam*, 7–8)[13] in the next distich.

The double question that fills verse 9 evokes both the speaker's subjective point of view based on inner feelings (*quid tantum merui?*) and the change in Cynthia's attitude, perceived, as it were, 'from the outside', caused by her lover's alleged misdeeds (*quae te mihi crimina mutant?*). The adoption of the conjecture *crimina*, instead of the version *carmina,* used in the manuscripts, is a solution often (though not unanimously[14]) accepted by commentators, and it reinforces the possibility of enriching the passus with additional legal-procedural meaning.[15]

---

[12] Cf. Theocr. *Id*. 2.64–65: Νῦν δὴ μώνα ἐοῖσα πόθεν τὸν ἔρωτα δακρύσα; / ἐκ τίνος ἄρξωμαι; ("Now that I am alone, from what point shall I lament my love? whence shall I begin?", transl. A.S.F. Gow).

[13] The sociolegal meaning of the phrase *notam habere* was pointed out by Enk 1946: *ad loc.* Tränkle 1960: 24 was the first to suggest that the phrase was probably taken over from Gallus (cf. Cairns 2006: 99, 119), but he did not engage in a discussion of its meaning, contenting himself with noting that Propertius used the phrase in a different sense from his predecessors. Lyne 1979: 128 connects the meaning of the phrase to the metaphorical sphere of amorous bondage (*nota* as *stigma*), Fedeli 1980: *ad loc.* points to a meaning in the metaphorical sense equivalent to the term *nota censoria* – a sign of exclusion, of deprivation of rights (electoral in the primary sense); see also Stahl 1968: 444.

[14] Shackleton Bailey 1956: 52 points out that "*crimina* is a popular but unnecessary conjecture" and leaves *carmina* in the sense of 'magic spells, sorcery' ("What have I done? Is it magic? Or jealousy") – contrary to the opinion of J.P. Enk (1946, vol. 2: *ad loc.*), who adopts *crimina* justifying: "absurdum est inter has quaestiones quae inter se cohaerent neque distrahi possunt subito de cantibus magicis vel incantationibus loqui", see Solmsen 1962: 85 n. 3; cf. Butler, Barber 1933: *ad loc.*; Camps 1961: *ad loc.*; Hanslik 1979 (*crimina*); Richardson 1977: *ad loc.* Fedeli 1980: *ad loc.* (*carmina*) speaks in a similar vein to Shackleton Bailey earlier: "Orbene, è vero che lo scambio tra *carmina* e *crimina* è facile, ma occorre chiedersi se sia veramente necessario correggere" (p. 423).

[15] The semantic connotations of the term *crimen* as an act of a criminal nature during the Roman republic and principate period showed strong links with the procedural

These two points of view, internal (obtained through introspection) and external (obtained through the perception of received messages), precisely frame the subsequent argument, during which they will intertwine in a continuous discourse based on questions and answers. A sudden change of status from a lover enjoying fulfilled affection to a sidelined wretch provokes a desperate search for the causes of the love drama. The main part of the monologue revolves around this problem. Lost in conjecture, the poet tries to guess the motives that caused the girl's outburst of anger and made her decide to break off the relationship. He continues hypothesising in the form of questions addressed to Cynthia, asking whether she suspects him of infidelity (*an nova tristitiae causa puella tuae?*, 10), accuses him of not being sufficiently emotionally involved (*an quia parva damus mutato signa colore / et non ulla meo clamat in ore fides*?, 17–18), or of any unfair acts she committed against him which triggered anger in her impure conscience (*an tua quod peperit nobis iniuria curas?*, 23). Each of these three hypothetical accusations is then vigorously refuted by the poet: the first employing a solemn oath affirming his unbreakable fidelity to Cynthia, the second by invoking the confessions of love for Cynthia previously made by him repeatedly in the presence of the trees in the empty grove, the third by logical reasoning: the poet did indeed complain about the suffering he was experiencing because of Cynthia, but he did so in front of the closed door[16] of his beloved's house, so the girl did not hear the complaints.

---

sphere, these links being mainly in specialist contexts and weakened over time; the term *crimen* (*crimina*) appears more than twenty times in Propertius' work and was mostly used in the colloquial sense of 'transgression' or 'misconduct' (cf.: 1.4.20; 1.18.9; 1.11.30; 1.12.1; 1.26.19; 2.6.19; 2.6.34; 2.25.18; 2.28.2; 2.29.5; 2.30.24 (twice); 2.32.2.; 2.32.30; 2.34.21; 3.11.3; 3.11.27; 3.15.11; 3.18.7; 3.19.15; 3.23.14; 4.4.43; 4.7.70; 4.8.59; 4.11.45); on the ranges of meaning and use of the term *crimen* in Roman love poetry, see Pichon 1902: 116.

[16]   To see in the words of *quae solum tacitis cognita sunt foribus* (1.18.24) a direct intertextual reference to the lover's song in *paraclausithyron* 1.17 would certainly be an extremely tempting hypothesis, but one that is completely implausible: the opinion in this work about the promiscuity of the lady owner of the house is so critical that it cannot be reconciled with the image of Cynthia contained in the *Monobiblos*.

A passus of capital importance for our consideration is the argumentation used to refute the second of the aforementioned objections.[17] The poet's constant and fiery affection for Cynthia can be attested to by the trees growing in the empty grove. They have heard the lover's words spoken in solitude and have the girl's name carved on their trunks:

> *vos eritis testes, si quos habet arbor amores,*
> *fagus et Arcadio pinus amica deo.*
> *a quotiens teneras resonant mea verba sub umbras,*
> *scribitur et vestris Cynthia corticibus!* (19–22)

In the passage, significant references to the tradition of the elegiac genre represented by the work of Callimachus can be identified. Propertius does not mention his name even once in the poems contained in the *Monobiblos*, but it can be encountered in the consecutive books.[18] In Book II it appears twice, each time in a special place, as the first and the last elegy of the book both deal with issues of the poetic programme. In both cases the name of Callimachus is accompanied by a statement concerning the peculiarity of his work (2.1.39–40 – Callimachus' talent is incompatible with the monumental epic forms: *angusto pectore Callimachus*; 2.34.31–32 – the model to follow is the work of Philitas of Cos and the 'subtle' Callimachus: *non inflati somnia Callimachi*). Callimachus appears two more times in relation to Philitas in Book III, each time also in a programmatic context of poetic creation (3.1.1–2 and 3.9.43–44); a solemn request for admission to the 'grove of Callimachus and Philitas' (*Callimachi manes et Coi sacra Philitae, / in vestrum, quaeso, me sinite ire nemus*), which inaugurates the whole of this book, makes a particularly strong impression. In Book IV, the poet from Cyrene is only mentioned once, but in a highly distinctive way. In the words *Umbria Romani patria Callimachi* (4.1.64), Propertius himself is referred to as 'the Roman Callimachus', which appears as the fulfilment of a desire expressed at the beginning of the previous

---

[17]   Hunt 2013: 143 ("The allusive richness of lines 19–22 together with the shift from taciturn to vocal surroundings mark the passage as a transitional moment in the poem"), Pincus 2004: 180–181.

[18]   Hollis 2006: 106–107; Barchiesi 2011: 526–527; Acosta-Hughes, Stephens 2012: 244–258.

book and as a promise of the aetiological character of the current book. It is therefore impossible to overlook the fact that the invocation of Callimachus' name in Books II–IV is each time postulated in those elegies which concern the issues of the poetic programme. In Book I, on the other hand, the reference to Callimachus' work is made not by name but indirectly, using intertextual links.

Francis Cairns identified a plot motif from the third book of Callimachus' *Aitia,* related to the story of Acontius and Cydippe[19] in the distich about the carving the lover's name in the bark (1.18.21–22). He convincingly demonstrated this analogy by juxtaposing a small fragment of Callimachus' text with a chronologically much later but well-preserved account of Aristaenetus[20] which contains the same tale. Cairns' findings, partly referring to earlier research,[21] have gained widespread acceptance[22] as clear evidence of the Hellenistic provenance of the motif incorporated into Elegy 1.18. Cairns also saw the possibility of considering Propertius' use of this motif as a trace of the process of romanisation of the Hellenistic elegy. Carving a name of the beloved

---

[19]   Callim. 73 (Pf.) = 73 (Har.): ἀλλ᾽ ἐνὶ δὴ φλοιοῖσι κεκομμένα τόσσα φέροιτε / γράμματα, Κυδίππην ὅσσ᾽ ἐρέουσι καλήν ("but may you bear so many letters, engraved in your bark, / as will tell that Cydippe is beautiful", transl. by A. Harder).

[20]   Aristaen. 1.10: εἴθε, ὦ δένδρα, καὶ νοῦς ὑμῖν γένοιτο καὶ φωνή, ὅπως ἂν εἴπητε μόνον· ʿΚυδίππη καλήʾ. ἢ γοῦν τοσαῦτα κατὰ τῶν φλοιῶν ἐγκεκολαμμένα φέροιτε γράμματα, ὅσα τὴν Κυδίππην ἐπονομάζει καλήν ("If only, O trees, you were to acquire a mind and a voice, just to be able to say, 'Cydippe is lovely'. Well, may you at least bear as many letters inscribed in your bark as spell out 'Cydippe is lovely'" (transl. by P. Bing, R. Höschele).

[21]   Jacoby 1905: 58 identifies as "ein bekanntes Beispiel" the passage with Akontios from Callimachus' Aitia in juxtaposition with the Gallus portrayed by Virgil in *Ecl.* 10. 52ff., Prop. 1.18.21–22 and Ov. *Her.* 5.21ff.; Cairns (1969: 132 n. 2) mentioned this observation by noting that Jacoby "declined to illustrate and demonstrate his position". La Penna 1977: 29 cites his own earlier publication and, not without some malice, reproaches Cairns for his ignorance of this position: "Un po' piú d'informazione bibliografica potrebbe talvolta risparmiare fatiche inutili" (n. 7). See also Zetzel 1996: 80–81; Fantuzzi, Hunter 2002: 81–88; Keith 2008: 65ff.

[22]   Stroh 1971: 45 n. 103 raises some objections to Cairns' findings ("Zu Unrecht hat man den Properz von 1.18 mit dem Akontios des Kallimachos identifiziert"), but this is a rather isolated position. Cf. Fedeli 1980: 418: "Per quanto riguarda l'elegia 1.18, la dipendenza di Properzio dall'elegia callimachea di Aconzio e Cidippe non dovrebbe più essere messa in dubbio (ha tentato di farlo Stroh 45 n. 103, ma non mi sembra che i suoi argomenti abbiano un qualche peso)".

on the bark of trees – a detail of the story of the love relationship between Acontius and Cydippe, which originates from the Hellenistic objective elegy – has been attributed here to the speaker characteristic of the Roman subjective elegy.[23] David O. Ross, not essentially denying Cairns's findings, concluded that the intermediate link between Callimachus and Propertius was Cornelius Gallus, inferring based on the coincidence of Elegy 1.18 with Virgil's 'Gallan' eclogue 10.[24] In the earlier distich (1.18.19–20), the poet assures his fidelity to Cynthia and takes the trees growing in the grove, the pine and the beech, as witnesses of his amorous confessions. In the phrases *si quos habet arbor amores* (19) and *Arcadio pinus amica deo* (20), he refers to the story of the unhappy ending of the love of the Arcadian god Pan to the nymph Pitys, who turned into a pine tree. In this case, the links with the Roman tradition of bucolic poetry are clear, as Virgil mentions *Pan deus Arcadiae* (10.26) in eclogue 10 and mentions beeches[25] several times in his collection of eclogues.

Since the poems of Cornelius Gallus have not survived apart from a few small fragments, several detailed hypotheses about his influence on Propertius' work cannot be adequately substantiated and must remain in the realm of guesswork.[26] Studying the functioning of the motif of solitude in Elegy 1.18, however, one can find the most relevant comparative material its direct model, linking the works of Virgil and

---

[23] See also Hollis 2006: 106.

[24] Ross 1975: 71–74, 88. A clear scepticism towards Ross's position was shown by Grant 1979: 53 n. 18, who pointed out that the assumption of the existence of an (un-preserved) work on Akontios and Kidippe by Gallus (as an intermediate link between Callimachus and Propertius) is based on a too tenuous premise.

[25] Verg. *Ecl.*: *Tityre, tu patulae recubans sub tegmine fagi* (1.1); *tantum inter densas, umbrosa cacumina, fagos / adsidue veniebat* (2.3-4); *Aut hic ad ueteres fagos cum Daphnidis arcum / fregisti et calamos* (3.12–13); *in viridi nuper quae cortice fagi / carmina descripsi* (5.13–14); *usque ad aquam et veteres, iam fracta cacumina, fagos* (9.9). Williams 1968: 318-19 points out that the name beech appeared very rarely in Roman literature before Virgil, while beech found its way into poetry as a result of the erroneous identification of the Latin word *fagus* (beech) with the Greek φηγός (variety of oak); see also Kennedy 1987: 51; Hollis 2006: 107. It should be noted that in Ovid, the continuator of the Augustan love elegy, the name of the beloved is also carved on the bark of the beech: *incisae servant a te mea nomina fagi / et legor Oenone falce notata tua* (*Her.* 5.21–22).

[26] Cf. Cairns 2006: 112; Acosta-Hughes, Stephens 2012: 247–248; Hunt 2013: 143.

Cornelius Gallus, namely Virgil's eclogue 10,[27] in which Gallus is introduced as a literary character. As it was mentioned in Propertius' elegy, the poet, rejected by his beloved girl, comes to an empty grove to cry out his grievances, and his loneliness is exposed against the background of a cold, inhospitable landscape. He encounters no response from the desolate rocks, and at the end of the song, which neither solved his problems nor gave him solace, he declares that no matter what he will continue to visit this wilderness and repeat the name of his beloved. In Virgil's eclogue 10, Gallus appears in the Arcadian world 'dying for love' (*indigno cum Gallus amore peribat*, 10.10). The cause of the misfortune is soon revealed by Apollo: his beloved Lycoris has abandoned Gallus and become involved with another man (*tua cura Lycoris / … alium … secuta est*, 10.22–23). Gallus is therefore well aware of what has happened, while in Propertius the abandoned lover is lost in conjecture and looks for the reason for the girl's departure in himself and his behaviour.

Both poets have been abandoned by their beloved, both are situated in Arcadian space (Arcadia is referred to directly in Virgil and in Propertius only by a minor indirect allusion: *Arcadio pinus amica deo*, 20), and both express themselves through their songs. However, while Cynthia's lover stays in the wilderness in deep melancholic solitude, Gallus is surrounded by compassionate nature and the inhabitants of Arcadia (*illum etiam lauri, etiam fleuere myricae, / pinifer illum etiam sola sub rupe iacentem / Maenalus et gelidi fleuerunt saxa Lycaei. / stant et oves circum … / uenit et upilio, tardi uenere subulci, / uuidus hiberna uenit de glande Menalcas. / omnes 'unde amor iste' rogant 'tibi?'*, Verg. *Ecl.* 10.13–16, 19–21) and even some deities appear (Apollo, Silvanus, Pan).[28] Despite the feeling of compassion and sincere desire to

---

show help, the Arcadians around him are unable to understand the nature of the fiery and unconditional love that does not pass away even in the face of betrayal and abandonment. Gallus finds no consolation and leaves; he returns to his world, ending his song with the famous words: *omnia vincit Amor: et nos cedamus Amori* (10.69). In Propertius, the ending of the song is essentially similar in meaning:

> sed qualiscumque es, resonent mihi 'Cynthia' silvae
> nec deserta tuo nomine saxa vacent (31–32)

The lonely lover's summary in a sense invalidates his earlier divagations: whatever Cynthia has done and whatever she will do will not affect the attitude of the speaker. In Virgil, the representative of the elegiac world pays a visit to the bucolic world, and in an impulsive move he declares his wish to remain in bucolic Arcadia permanently, but he soon realises that there is nothing to be found there. In Propertius, the poet, rejected by his beloved girl, goes to a desolate place to see Arcadia there for a moment, at least long enough to find a safe and discreet respite. It seems he does not feel disappointed that the setting is cool and indifferent, and remains so to the end. Thus, in Elegy 1.18, we can observe an action that is, as it were, the reverse of that employed by Virgil in eclogue 10. Gallus loving the unfaithful Lycoris introduces elegiac discourse into bucolic Arcadia; Cynthia's unfortunate lover introduces bucolic discourse into the world of elegiac love. In both cases, this is only a temporary change, not eliminating the suffering experienced.

The path along the route of the interference of elegiac and bucolic concepts that we have followed in the above discussion of the motif of solitude of the elegiac lover figure is not the only interpretive option for Propertius' work 1.18. However, it is characteristic that the loneliness of the speaker will also mark itself clearly when the interpretive filter is modified. Many scholars discussing work 1.18 have emphasised Propertius' use of legal and procedural terminology. At times, the unfortunate poet's speech has also been seen to have features of a defensive

---

versus Galli sunt de ipsius translati carminibus) to v. 46 of the tenth eclogue, so it would be highly risky to relate it also to the initial part of the work (the description of the poet in the Arcadian space is found in the text before verse 46).

speech (*defensio*) delivered before a tribunal, where further charges are made and refuted.[29] Looking at the text from this angle it will be possible to see that this image of the trial sets the poet in the place of the accused who does not know the charges, does not know what his misdeeds are (*quid tantum merui? quae te mihi crimina mutant*?, 9) and desperately seeks more hypotheses, modifies his line of defence and even calls witnesses (*vos eritis testes*, 19), wanting to avoid a conviction that has already been decided by the victim and the judge in one person. The sense of acute loneliness of the participant in such a trial harmonises with the empty and hostile setting.

In turn, some scholars, in their analyses, are inclined to move towards metaphorisation of the message of work 1.18, to which the involvement in the discourse of the double meaning of the word 'Cynthia' (the name of the beloved girl and the title of the Book I by Propertius) makes the starting point.[30] In this kind of reading, the carving of the girl's name on the bark of trees can also be understood as the writing of love poems, thus raising the prospect of including the aspect of the artist's loneliness in the analyses. Finally, and also somewhat in relation to the artistic context, there is the possibility hinted at (in a not entirely serious tone), by a remark thrown *en passant* by David O. Ross, who for a moment describes the scenery presented in the first couplets of Elegy 1.18 as an "entirely unreal landscape", which brings to mind the stage setting in an opera.[31]

In that case, the beginning of the piece (1–4) would have to be read as theatrical *didascalia* with scenographic and directorial cues. And from there the singer's performance proper already begins: the

---

[29] Smyth 1949: 121; Cairns 1969: 134; Fedeli 1980: 419; Pincus 2004: 183–184; Hunt 2013: 137–139.

[30] Kennedy 1993: 50–51 and some scholars who refer to Kennedy's concept, e.g., Miller 2004: 65; Phillips 2011: 106–107; Hunt 2013: 145 ("Cynthia as a poetic project"), and esp. 148–150, to some extent also Mayor 2017: 130–132 and Paraskeviotis 2017: 152.

[31] Ross 1975: 71: "After these almost mundane probings into what has no more dignity, humor, or interest than a housewife's bad temper, the poem closes with a return to the operatic stage scenery of natural desolation (27–32), Propertius alone, lamenting to the birds, the woods echoing 'Cynthia'. What explains this curious mixture of stylized fantasy with the all too real?"

introductory *recitativo* (5–8) develops into a grand aria, which, after a dramatic climax (9–26), quiets down into an atmosphere of bitter reverie (27–30), and the end of the aria (31–32) resounds at full *forte* when the soloist's voice is joined by a chorus of trees in a characteristic *da capo*. The song, whose score was written on rocks, will be spread *senza fine* across the forest spaces.[32] In such an 'operatic' reading – certainly not rooted in antiquity – the singer on stage would be alone only in a conventional sense, for the duration of the performance, until the curtain falls.

References

Primary sources

Bing P., Höschele R., 2014, *Aristaenetus, Erotic letters*, P. Bing, R. Höschele (intro., transl. and annotated), Atlanta, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1287mzn.

Butler H.E., Barber E.A., 1933, *The Elegies of Propertius*, H.E. Butler, E.A. Barber (ed. with an intro. and comm.), Oxford.

Camps W.A., 1961, *Propertius: Elegies: Book I*, W.A. Camps (ed.), Cambridge, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511552519.

Clausen W., 1994, *A Commentary on Virgil, Eclogues*, W. Clausen (ed., intro. and comm.), Oxford.

Enk P.J., 1946, *Sex. Propertii Elegiarum liber I (Monobilos)*, vols 1–2, P.J. Enk (ed.), Leiden.

Fedeli P., 1980, *Sesto Properzio, Il primo libro delle elegie*, P. Fedeli (ed., intro. and comm.), Firenze.

Gow A.S.F., 1952, *Theocritus*, vols 1–2, A.S.F. Gow (ed., transl. and comm.), Cambridge (repr. 1973).

Hanslik R., 1979, *Sex. Propertii Elegiarum libri IV*, R. Hanslik (ed.), Leipzig.

Harder A., 2012, *Callimachus: Aetia*, vols 1–2, A. Harder (intro., text, transl. and comm.), Oxford.

Heyworth S.J., 2007, *Sexti Properti elegos critico apparatu instructos*, S.J. Heyworth (ed.), Oxford.

Pfeiffer R., 1949, *Callimachus*, vol. 1, *Fragmenta*, R. Pfeiffer (ed.), Oxford.

Richardson L., 1977, *Propertius: Elegies I–IV*, L. Richardson (ed., intro. and comm.), Norman.

---

[32] Here it should still be mentioned the meaning and importance of the echo in elegy 1.18; see Paraskeviotis 2017: 154.

Secondary sources

Acosta-Hughes B., Stephens S.A., 2012, *Callimachus in Context: From Plato to the Augustan Poets*, Cambridge, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511919992.

Allen A., 1985, 'Propertius, *Founts Divine*', *Phoenix* 39/3, pp. 271–272, https://doi.org/10.2307/1088640.

Barchiesi A., 2011, 'Roman Callimachus', [in:] *Brill's Companion to Callimachus*, B. Acosta-Hughes, L. Lehnus, S. Stephens (eds), Leiden – Boston, pp. 509–533, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004216976_027.

Butrica J.L., 1984, *The Manuscript Tradition of Propertius*, Toronto – Buffalo – London.

Cairns F., 1969, 'Propertius i. 18 and Callimachus, *Acontius and Cydippe*', *The Classical Review* 19/2, pp. 131–134, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009840X00329110.

Cairns F., 2006, *Sextus Propertius: The Augustan Elegist*, Cambridge.

Eden P.T., 1981, 'Propertius, 1, 18, 27f.', *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 28/1, p. 122, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2041-5370.1981.tb00423.x.

Fantuzzi M., Hunter R.L., 2002, *Muse e modelli. La poesia ellenistica da Alessandro Magno ad Augusto*, Roma – Bari.

Grant J.N., 1979, 'Propertius 1.18', *Phoenix* 33/1, pp. 48–58, https://doi.org/10.2307/1087851.

Hollis A., 2006, 'Propertius and Hellenistic Poetry', [in:] *Brill's Companion to Propertius*, H.-Ch. Günther (ed.), Leiden – Boston, pp. 97–125, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047404835_006.

Hunt J.M., 2013, 'Elegy in a Landscape: Propertius' Poetic Program in I.18', *Latomus* 72/1, pp. 135–151.

Jacoby F., 1905, 'Zur Entstehung der römischen Elegie', *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 60, pp. 38–105.

James S.L., 2003, *Learned Girls and Male Persuasion: Gender and Reading in Roman Love Elegy*, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London, https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520928664.

Keith A., 2008, *Propertius: Poet of Love and Leisure*, London, https://doi.org/10.5040/9781472540034.

Kennedy D.F., 1987, '*Arcades ambo*: Virgil, Gallus, and Arcadia', *Hermathena* 143, pp. 47–59.

Kennedy D.F., 1993, *The Arts of Love: Five Studies in the Discourse of Roman Love Elegy*, Cambridge, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511620256.

King J.K., 1975–1976, 'Propertius' Programmatic Poetry and the Unity of the *Monobiblos*', *The Classical Journal* 71/2, pp. 108–124.

La Penna A., 1977, *L'integrazione difficile. Un profilo di Properzio*, Torino.

Lyne R.O.A.M., 1979, 'Servitium Amoris', *The Classical Quarterly* 29/1, pp. 117–130, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009838800035229.

Mayor J.M.B., 2017, *Power Play in Latin Love Elegy and Its Multiple Forms of Continuity in Ovid's 'Metamorphoses'*, Berlin – Boston, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110490282.

McCarthy K., 2019, *I, the Poet: First-Person Form in Horace, Catullus, and Propertius*, Ithaca – London, https://doi.org/10.7591/cornell/9781501739552.001.0001.

Miller P.A., 2004, *Subjecting Verses: Latin Love Elegy and the Emergence of the Real*, Princeton, https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400825936.

Paraskeviotis G.C., 2017, 'The Echo in Propertius 1.18', *Acta Classica* 60, pp. 145–161.

Phillips T., 2011, 'Propertius and the Poetics of the Book: 1.18 and 3.15-17', *The Cambridge Classical Journal* 57, pp. 105–135, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1750270500001299.

Pichon R., 1902, *Index verborum amatoriorum*, Paris (repr. Hildesheim 1991).

Pincus M., 2004, 'Propertius's Gallus and the Erotics of Influence', *Arethusa* 37/2, pp. 165–196, https://doi.org/10.1353/are.2004.0013.

Rosen R.M., Farrell J., 1986, 'Acontius, Milanion, and Gallus: Vergil, Ecl. 10.52-61', *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 116, pp. 241–254, https://doi.org/10.2307/283919.

Ross D.O., 1975, *Backgrounds to Augustan Poetry: Gallus, Elegy, and Rome*, Cambridge.

Shackleton Bailey D.R., 1956, *Propertiana*, Cambridge.

Smyth W.R., 1949, 'Interpretationes Propertianae', *The Classical Quarterly* 43/3–4, pp. 118–125, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009838800028093.

Smyth W.R., 1970, *Thesaurus criticus ad Sexti Propertii textum*, Leiden.

Solmsen F., 1962, 'Three Elegies of Propertius' First Book', *Classical Philology* 57/2, pp. 73–88, https://doi.org/10.1086/364673.

Stahl H.-P., 1968, 'Doppeldeutigkeit bei Properz (Elegie I, 18)', *Poetica* 2, pp. 438–450, https://doi.org/10.30965/25890530-00204003.

Stroh W., 1971, *Die römische Liebeselegie als werbende Dichtung*, Amsterdam.

Tränkle H., 1960, *Die Sprachkunst des Properz und die Tradition der lateinischen Dichtersprache*, Wiesbaden.

Williams G., 1968, *Tradition and Originality in Roman Poetry*, Oxford.

Zetzel J.E.G., 1996, 'Poetic Baldness and Its Cure', *Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici* 36, pp. 73–100, https://doi.org/10.2307/40236079.