Virgilian Intertexts and Ironic Pathos in Propertius 2.16

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Abstract

Starting from an allusion to Eclogue 1 in Propertius 2.16, the article provides a new interpretation of the entire elegy in the light of the complex intertextual play which pervades the whole poem. Eclogues 1 and 10, the Georgics and even Horace are here combined with allusions to Comedy and evoked only to be subverted and parodied in a piece of Callimachean poetry, full of ‘metaliterary’ irony.

Keywords

Propertius – Virgil – Horace – intertextuality – metaliterary irony – oppositio in imitando – poikilia

All poetry necessarily becomes verse criticism
Bloom 1975, 3

Ci sono allusioni che confrontano un diverso senso della vita
Traina 1986, 254

There are poems which because of their memorability are more than simple texts; not only alluded to by poets, but learnt by heart in schools, quoted in
inscriptions or even in everyday conversations, they constitute literary mile-
stones and significant parts of the cultural baggage of a community. When
these canonical texts, among which Virgil has a prominent place, are the
object of imitation, the intertextual relationship, immediately recognizable,
has the effect of charging the diction with meaningful echoes and sometimes
complex literary implications.

A telling example of this kind of poetry is Propertius 2.16, whose general
tone and meaning, to be fully understood, requires an in-depth analysis not
only of the single passages alluded to but also of their combined and cumula-
tive effects. I will discuss in particular the Virgilian intertexts scattered through
this elegy, starting from an allusion to a passage from Eclogue 1, a poem which
for its liminal position and its poetic values constitutes a poetic model par
excellence: ecl. 1.67–72:

en umquam patrios longo post tempore finis
pauperis et tuguri congestum caespite culmen
post aliquot, mea regna uidens, mirabor aristas?
impius haec tam culta noualia miles habebit,
barbarus has segetes. en quo Discordia ciuis
perduxit miseros? his nos conseuimus agros!

Even though this passage is one of the most controversial in the Eclogues, what is relevant
for our discussion is the general meaning of the pathetic

1 The memorisation of a text was a usual school practice, as attested, for instance, by Horace,
who, at Ep. 2.1.68 ff., recalls his training in learning by heart Livius Andronicus' text under
the ‘menace’ of his teacher, the plagosus Orbilius. Pompeian graffiti, as well as sepulchral
inscriptions, show how famous passages, such as, for instance, the Euryalus and Nisus epi-
sode, were highly popular not only among educated readers but also among common people.
See Farron 1993, 27; Horsfall 1995, 249–255 and Horsfall 2016, 31–44 (on the different readers
and the various levels of reading of Virgil’s text).

2 Virgil was a school text in his own time, as we know from Suet., Gramm. 16 on Caecilius
Epirota.

3 The exegetical difficulty concerns the expression post aliquot [...] aristas, which can be vari-
ously interpreted: 1) with a temporal value, and with post as a preposition, ‘after some years’,
intending the term arista as a metonymy for annus, an unconvincing ancient interpretation;
2) with post as posteae (recalling longo post tempore), aliquot aristas as the direct object of
mirabor, and mea regna as apposition (this is Mynors’ text: post aliquot, mea regna, videns,
mirabor aristas = ‘will I see again my homeland ... astonished to find some ears, my kingdom’.
See the similar translation by Traina in Cucchiarelli 2012, 93: 3) with a local value ‘behind
some ears’ (with the image of Meliboeus, who, hidden behind some ears, spies his home).
See Cucchiarelli 2012, ad loc., who does not exclude the need to emend the text (he proposes
to write aliquo = aliquo tempore, instead of the transmitted aliquot).
words of Meliboeus, who, leaving his beloved country, asks himself if he will ever see again his fields, the roof of his house and his crops, his beloved kingdoms. The expression *mea regna*, a poetic plural⁴ with a hint of pride or even philosophical implications,⁵ symbolizes Meliboeus’ rural world,⁶ his horizon made of simple things, even modest and poor, a reassuring everyday life which constitutes his *Cosmos*, now made impossible by the *Chaos* of History. An alert reader can not help noticing the evident allusion to this passage in Propertius, 2.16.27–28:

**Barbarus** exutis agitat vestigia lumbis  
et subito felix nunc *mea regna* tenet!⁷

In both texts, as Wistrand has rightly pointed out,⁸ a *barbarus* takes possession of the poet’s kingdoms: Meliboeus suffers because he has lost his lands assigned to a veteran,⁹ Propertius ‘would’ suffer because another ‘barbarous’ man, more precisely a *praetor* from Illyria, has now his girl, metaphorically defined as *mea regna*.

Wistrand observes that Propertius, desperate after having lost his love, “gives vent to his feelings in an elegy which contains this outburst”.¹⁰ He has the merit of having signalled this allusion, thus influencing also subsequent scholars, but, in my opinion, he failed to fully understand the particular effect of this

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⁴ *Regna* should first of all be considered as a ‘metrema’ (for the term see Traina 2004², *Index s.v. ‘metrema’*), namely a word which tends to be used in fixed positions in the line for its metrical shape, in this case for the metrical advantage of a final open short syllable in comparison with the singular form (51 occurrences of *regna* against the 9 of *regnum* in Virgil); here there is also a stylistic reason for its use, since it amplifies the meaning of the word. See Traina 2004¹, *ad loc.* and *ad ecl.* 4.6.

⁵ Cucchiarelli 2012, *ad loc.*

⁶ Virgil never uses the term *regnum* for Rome (see Traina 2004², *ad georg.* 2.498).

⁷ The lesson *exclusis lumbis* of the manuscripts (IIA) has been happily emended by Sandbach 1958–59, 4, into *exutis lumbis*, a conjecture now commonly accepted (see Fedeli 2005, *ad loc.* and Heyworth 2007, 177–178), since it fully restores the sense of the distich: the slave, who in the past was obliged to show himself in the forum naked to exhibit his physical vigour when for sale, has now become a rich *praetor*, who possesses Propertius’ kingdom. The parallels with the language and images of Prop. 4.5.51–52 *quorum titulus per barbara colla pependit / cretati medio cum saluere foro* and Tib. 2.3.59–60 *regnum ipse tenet quem saepe coegit / barbara gypsatos ferre catasta pedes* seem to be decisive.

⁸ Wistrand 1977, 55–58.

⁹ *Barbarus* probably more in a moral sense (since he profanes the rural world) than literally, given that, even though Caesar and Pompey admitted provincials in their legions, there is no evidence of auxiliary troops without Roman citizenship (Cucchiarelli 2012, *ad loc.*).

¹⁰ Wistrand 1977, 55.
intertext. Formicola, in a fine and detailed analysis of this parallel, insists on the traumatic experience of Virgil's Meliboeus and Propertius, both violated by the barbaries of history, which menaces their ways of living,\textsuperscript{11} while Syndikus, quoting Wistrand, follows him in observing that the “parallel with a military plundering campaign demonstrates the depth of the poet's anger” and that “in the literature of antiquity there is little that is comparable to this kind of outburst of uncontrolled emotions”.\textsuperscript{12} On the other hand, Fedeli, observing that in this poem there is “un'atmosfera tipicamente letteraria” and that the tone of the poem seems excessively emphatic and declamatory, raises the hypothesis that irony could be the right key to reading this elegy.\textsuperscript{13} This, I think, is the correct perspective which is worth applying to the entire elegy, a poem which is mainly a telling example of a Callimachean poetic lusus.\textsuperscript{14}

First of all, it should be observed that the poet and the persona poetae must be kept separated, especially in the second book of Elegies, where we do not find a Propertius amans, but a poeta scribens,\textsuperscript{15} who shows contemplative distance, irony and intellectualism.\textsuperscript{16} The intertextual strategy at work in this text, as I will try to demonstrate, is a literary play which aims to charge the diction with a plurality of sophisticated and refined ironic touches in the Alexandrine manner.

Firstly, it should be noticed that Propertius, a poet notoriously indebted to Virgil, usually alludes to the Eclogues for the similarity of stylistic register and especially for their erotic themes,\textsuperscript{17} but here the situation and the tone of the model are markedly different: Propertius has selected this passage from Eclogue 1 not, as usual, for the erotikon pathema, but for an intense sense of nostalgia (for home), which, ‘trespassing’ the limits of the genre, has been

\textsuperscript{11} Formicola 1985, 245.
\textsuperscript{12} Syndikus 2006, 280, note 117, and 281, respectively.
\textsuperscript{13} Fedeli 2005, 472–473.
\textsuperscript{14} I am here obviously alluding to Lefèvre's 1966 book, Propertius ludibundus, which includes our elegy among the examples of ‘Ironie und Distanz’ (see pages 65–71).
\textsuperscript{15} See Colaizzi 1993, 126 (“beginning with 2.1, Propertius frequently discusses poetics with a sophisticated air absent earlier in his work, offering a new voice whose apparent private and public concerns supplant those of his earlier distinctive persona, the miser amator”) and 127 (“The personae of poet and lover thus are far more separated in Book 2 than in Book 1”).
\textsuperscript{16} See La Penna 1951, 3.
\textsuperscript{17} For the relationship between Propertius and Virgil see Fedeli 1998, 319–321 (with bibliography). Eclogues, for their love theme, are the Virgil's most imitated work by Propertius (see Fedeli 1988, 329), as it is evident in Prop. 2.34, where, in his tribute to Virgil, the elegiac poet devotes 6 lines to Aeneid, 2 to Georgics and 10 to Eclogues (one for each poem) marking the prominence of pastoral genre in his love poetry. See Thomas 1996, 263–264.
changed into an ironic pathos for the beloved girl, in a suggestive example of Callimachean *poikilia*, that generic enrichment\(^{18}\) which is a peculiar trait of Propertius’ *carmen mixti generis*.\(^{19}\)

*Mea regna* in Virgil is a hyperbole (a modest rural farm is defined as a ‘kingdom’), with a slight metaphoric value (Meliboeus, a shepherd in his lands, is like a king in his kingdom); Propertius goes further in making this metaphor even more audacious: if Meliboeus’ realm was a physical place, his homeland, Propertius’ kingdom is identified with a person, Cynthia, a capricious and unfaithful girl.\(^{20}\) Metaphor, as usual, reflects a system of values and the everyday life-experience of the speaker,\(^{21}\) but here we should rather insist on the different tone of the two characters and on literary motifs which pervade the compositions: Meliboeus, a personage particularly inclined to pathos,\(^{22}\) is yielding to emotion, melancholic as he is about his imminent departure from his home, destined to be soon invaded by a barbarian; Propertius ‘plays’ with literature, transferring (and ‘elegizing’) this metaphor into the language of *militia amoris*\(^{23}\) and, at the same time, reducing the pathos of the model into an intellectual, witty and ironic linguistic ‘gesture’.\(^{24}\) The drama of land expropriation in *Eclogue* 1 has become nothing more than a funny situation in Propertius 2.16: a former barbarian slave, obliged in the near past to exhibit himself naked,\(^{25}\) has now become immediately a rich *praetor*,\(^{26}\) who has deprived the poet of

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\(^{18}\) On ‘generic enrichment’, a peculiar trait of Hellenistic and Augustan poetry, see the fundamental Harrison 2007 (especially on Virgil and Horace); on the relationship between Latin love elegy and other genres, see Piazzi 2013, 224–238; on Propertius, see also De Brohun 2003.

\(^{19}\) See Fedeli 2006, 20: “Propertius’ verses should be considered as a *carmen mixti generis*, as there were so many different genres and authors that influenced him”.

\(^{20}\) On Propertian *audacia*, especially in creating bold metaphors, personifications and pathetic fallacy, see Postgate 1884, lxv–lxvi.

\(^{21}\) On this function of metaphor see Lakoff and Johnson 1980.

\(^{22}\) Perkell 2008, 114–115.

\(^{23}\) On *militia amoris* in Propertius, see Maltby 2006, 158–160 (with bibliography at 158, note 12).

\(^{24}\) We can include this elegy among the examples of Propertius ‘ironic erotic’, on which see Johnson 2012, 48–50.

\(^{25}\) Fedeli 2005, *ad loc.*, underlines a point of irony in the change of status of the slave.

\(^{26}\) The unity of this poem has been contested (Havet 1916, 55–58, Sandbach 1958–59, 3–5, followed by Heyworth 2007, 177–179, but *contra* Hubbard 1974, 61–62, Wistrand 1977, Fedeli 2005, Lee and Lyne 2009), with the consequence that the *praetor* of line 1 would not be the same character as the *barbarus* of line 27. I agree with Fedeli 2005, *ad loc.*, who, suggesting that we do not have to find realism in this situation, also observes that the term *praetor* can hardly be applied to whom has covered an important position in the administration of a province.
'his kingdom', his beautiful *puella*, or, if we want to find an even more prosaic meaning for *regna*, who has occupied his bed.27

The mechanisms of intertextuality can be very subtle and various aspects should be considered when comparing parallel passages. First of all, it can be here hypothesised that possibly Propertius with the expression *et subito felix*, while indicating the unexpected fortune of the slave who has become a *praetor* and Cynthia’s lover,28 is also alluding to the equally unexpected and quick expropriation of lands in Mantua, which made foreign soldiers ‘happy’ because of their new ‘fertile’ (alluded to by *fēlix*) properties; but another and more evident point of contact must be highlighted: the word *barbarus* in both texts is placed as the first word of a hexameter line. In addition, this very Virgilian line (*ecl. 1.71*) is quoted by Propertius in another elegy, namely 1.22.5 *cum Romana suos edit Discordia cives*, in which he imitates, again in a hexameter, the Virgilian line-ending (also repeated at *Aen. 12.583*), striking as it is for its effective juxtaposition *discordia cives*.29 But there is more. In Latin poetry *barbarus* is placed at the beginning of the hexameter, over and above these two passages, only in Horace, *Epod. 16.11 barbarus heu cineres* (in a sequence with the same rhythm of Virgil’s hemistich),30 in a poem which is thematically close to Virgil’s *Eclogue 1*.31 If for Virgil and Horace the *ulcus* of the civil war is still open, Propertius sublimates this theme in the realm of elegy, completely self-contained and exclusively focussed on love and poetry.32

That the quotation from Virgil has an ironic nuance is confirmed by the general tone of this elegy, a composition where the allusions to themes and situations of Comedy33 also set the effect of a series of other allusions to various more serious, and often pathetic, passages, quoted only to be subverted through the elegant (and again Alexandrian) technique of *oppositio*

27 See Fedeli 2005, *ad loc*. On *regnum* in Propertius see Schmidt 1980, 322; in the erotic language, see Fedeli 1985, *ad Prop. 3.10.18*.
28 Fedeli 2005, *ad loc*.
29 Clausen 1994, *ad Ecl. 1.71*.
30 Cucchiarelli 2013, *ad loc*.
31 On the probable chronological priority of Virgil’s *Eclogues* over Horace’s *Epod 16*, see Cavarzere 1992, 218.
32 See Ginsberg 2017, 93–94, note 9, for the programmatic role of civil wars in the second book (with bibliography). It can be hypothesized that the difference in pathos with which Propertius experienced the diminution of his patrimony because of the civil wars, in comparison with Virgil and Horace, is probably due to the fact that Propertius could rely on the solid financial condition of his mother’s family. See Keith 2013, 98–99.
33 See Yardley 1972, 134–139, who considers Comedy as a model for some motifs of this elegy, such as for example the sheep-shearing metaphor (Plaut. *Bacch. 1121 ff.*; *Merc. 524 ff.*) or the triangular relationship, where a *dives miles* is allowed to have a *affair* with a girl only to be exploited by the couple (from Ter. *Eun. 1072–1084*). On the studies on Propertius’ dependence on Comedy, see also Fedeli 2006, 23.
in imitando.34 The irony is perceptible already at the very beginning of the poem (vv. 1–2):

Praetor ab Illyricis venit modo, Cynthia, terris,
maxima praeda tibi, maxima cura mihi.

where the two appositions, divided between the two halves of the pentameter and by the effective asyndeton adversatium, underline the different meaning of the arrival of the praetor: a praeda for Cynthia, a cura for the poet. The words are wisely selected from the poetic vocabulary to evoke different, strident atmospheres: praeda referred to a person to be exploited evokes the atmosphere of Comedy,35 cura, an elegiac word (which, differently from here, usually indicates affection and not anxiety),36 in association with maxima seems to recall a Virgilian stylistic feature, the ‘pathetic apposition’,37 which, deprived of the pathos of the model, here adds an ironic touch. Before Propertius, maxima cura is, indeed, attested only in Virgil (except for a line by the neoteric poet Ticidas, but with a different meaning),38 at georg. 4.353–356:

et procul: ‘o gemitu non frustra exterrita tanto,
Cyrene soror, ipse tibi, tua maxima cura,
tristis Aristaeus Penei genitoris ad undam
stat lacrimans, et te crudelem nomine dicit,

where Cyrene’s maxima cura (in Arethusa’s words), highlighted by the adjective tristis and the juxtapositions ipse-tibi and tibi-tua, is the affection of worry of a mother to her son. The other Virgilian apposition is at Aen. 1.677–678:

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34 On this allusive technique, defined for the first time as oppositio in imitando by Kuiper 1896, 114, see in particular Giangrande 1967, 85–97 (who shows how this kind of allusion was practised not only by Alexandrian poets towards Homer but also between themselves) and Thomas 1986, 185–188, 198, who, in a useful typologization of allusion (especially in Virgil’s Georgics) proposes to call it ‘correction’ – the oppositio is in many cases an erudite correction of the model – also noting (187) a recurrent allusive dialogue (an emulative and polemical relationship) between Horace and Propertius.
35 Yardley 1972, 137, note 11, quotes Plaut. Men. 441, Poen. 660–668 and Rudens 1262; see also Fedeli 2005, 475.
36 See Mynors 1990, ad georg. 4.353–356.
37 On Virgilian pathetic appositions see Conte 2007, 29 and 30, note 6 and Dainotti 2015, 45, note 159.
38 Frag. 2 (Morel and Baehrens) Lydia doctorum maxima cura liber, but here the context is not pathetic – cura has a positive meaning (see Manzoni 1995, 72). On cura in Virgil see Fedeli 1984, 961–962; on the use of cura in apposition, see Cuchiarelli 2012, ad ecl. 10.22.
regius accitu cari genitoris ad urbem
Sidoniam puer ire parat, mea maxima cura.

where *mea maxima cura* (in Aeneas’ words) is even closer to the Propertian allusion (*mea* is varied in *mihi*).

If it is true that *cura* alone is a common word in erotic-elegiac poetry, it is no accident that in order to find a use which recalls even more closely this Propertian passage we have to look again at Virgil, more precisely at *Eclogue* 10, a poem which constitutes a telling example of generic enrichment, indebted as it is to Latin love elegy and especially to Gallus’ poetry. In *ecl*. 10.22–23:

‘Galle, quid insanis?’ inquit ‘tua cura, Lycoris
perque niues alium perque horrida castra secuta est.’

*Lycoris*, Gallus’ *cura*, conquered by another man (still a *miles*), has followed him to an inhospitable place, facing the hurdles of cold and winter, while Cynthia, wisely, will not follow her man since she is not attracted by honour and fame: *Cynthia non sequitur fasces nec curat honores* (v. 11); on the contrary, as Propertius himself suggests, comically here in the shoes of a detached *praecceptor amoris*, she will send the rapacious praetor back to other *Illyriae*, other places to plunder. Commentators have rightly observed the *pointe* of irony in the quasi-philosophical figure of Cynthia, who, detached from political power, is only interested in money, as explained in the following pentameter which, after an ‘epic’ hexameter, clarifies, with a vivid image and in comic language, her value system (*semper amatorum ponderat una sinus*). Here, the intertextual relationship is a subtle, complex mechanism of diffraction, a play of mirrors in which the Virgilian passages are evoked only to be changed, filtered as they are through the distorting lens of irony.

There is, indeed, not only irony but also an evident ‘meta-literary irony’ if we read line 11 in the light of the famous *makarismos* of *georg*. 2.490–496:

39 There is here a double interlinguistic pun, on which see Cucchiarelli 2013, *ad loc.*: “CURa *LycOri*s, perhaps echoing Theocritus ἄ δέ τυ κόρα (id. 1, 82): one would then have the suggestion *cura*/χόρφη = κόρα*/Lycoris*. The pun *cura*/χόρφη was presumably already in Gallus’ poetry. See Keith 2012, 289.

40 The pentameter ironically lowers the stylistic register of the previous hexameter also recurring to the verb *ponderare*, which is comic in origin, rare and almost exclusively prosaic (Fedeli 2005, *ad loc.*). For other Propertian examples of conscious exploitation of the different tone of hexameter and pentameter in distich couplet, a recurrent trait in any ludic poet, see Morgan 2004, 5–6 and Morgan 2012, 214–218 (211–214 on Propertius).
Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas
atque metus omnis et inexorabile fatum
subiectit pedibus strepitumque Acherontis auari;
fortunatus et ille deos qui nouit agrestis,
Panæque Siluanumque senem Nymphasque sorores:
inimum non populi fasces, non purpura regum
flexit et infidos agitans Discordia fratres

The ironic allusion to this highly philosophical passage is evident if we consider that *fasces* before Propertius is attested only 5 times\(^{41}\) and that only in this passage from Virgil (which is the closest in meaning) is put *en relief* between the penthemimeral and hephthemimeral caesuras. This *makarismos* is further quoted, again to be parodied, by Propertius at 1.12.15 *felix qui potuit praesenti flere puellae*, a trivialization of *georg*. 2.490 *felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas*, a *nobilissimus versus* (as Augustine defines it in *ciu. Dei* 7.9), which for its quasi-proverbial nature was a common possess not only of educated readers but also of the common people.\(^{42}\)

This parallel is particularly significant if we consider that Virgil is here proposing the lifestyle of the farmer as an ethical model, a way to happiness in opposition to the evils of city life. This motif also recurs in Prop. 2.16, where the poet, following a *topos* of Augustan poetry (inserted in the poem in a brusque and desultory manner, as often in Propertius),\(^{43}\) dreams of a Rome not dominated by money and power, where love would not be bought with gifts.\(^{44}\)

The ironic tone of these themes is confirmed by another allusion, still in the same elegy (2.16.7–8), when the poet plays with another proverbial philosophical intertext, namely Hor. *carm.* 1.11.6–8 (*sapias ... carpe diem*), which is recalled only to be parodied:\(^{45}\)

\(^{41}\) Plaut. *Epid.* 28 *fasces uirgarum* (but not a symbol of political power); *Moretum* 79 *venalis umero fasces portabat in urbem*; Hor. *carm.* 1.12.35 *Tarquini fasces dubito an Catonis*; Hor. *Ep.* 1.16.34 *detulerit fasces indigno, detrahet idem*, all passages that can not be considered comparable to Propertius’ use of the word.
\(^{42}\) This parodic allusion is already noted by Mynors 1990, *ad loc.* (with a history of the motif).
\(^{43}\) On logical leaps, a peculiar trait of Propertius’ desultory style, see La Penna 1951, 41 and Syndikus 2006, 279.
\(^{44}\) Prop. 3.16.19–22 *Atque utinam Romae nemo esset dives et ipse / stramina posset dux habi-
tare casal / Numquam venales essent ad munus amicae / atque una fieret cana puella domo.* On the *elogium* of farmers’ life and the *topos* of *paupertas antiquorum* in Latin elegy see Fedeli 1985, *ad Prop.* 3.7.43–46.
\(^{45}\) See Fedeli 2005, *ad loc.* This undoubted imitation involves the assumption that Propertius had a pre-publication knowledge of the *Odes* (which is highly plausible since Propertius in 2.34 alludes to the *Aeneid* before its publication). In addition, it should be remembered...
Quare, si sapis, oblata ne desere messis
et stolidum pleno vellere carpe pecus

The Horatian *carpe diem* has become, on the lips of the *poeta praecceptor*, a practical invitation to catch and shear the stupid ‘rival-sheep’ (a comic metaphor as well as that of *messis* for a wealthy man),⁴⁶ rich as he is in luxuriant fleece: the agricultural linguistic meaning of the verb *carpo*, suggestively used by Horace in a metaphorical way to add graphic vividness to the image (it implies the metaphor of flower or fruit),⁴⁷ is made more evident in Propertius’ imitation, where, governing the metaphorical *pecus*, it equals *tondere*,⁴⁸ probably also with an erudite allusion to the technical meaning *a lanificio*⁴⁹ comic language and motifs trespassing into the elegy have also assimilated and trivialized a more elevated Horatian model.⁵⁰

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⁴⁶ See Fedeli 2005, *ad loc*. The adjective *stolidus* is also a clear point of contact with Comedy, occurring only one further time in elegy (Ovid. *Tr* 5.10.38), but 9 times in Plautus and 2 in Terence. See Yardley 1972, 137, note 11.

⁴⁷ On the semantics of the Horatian *carpe diem*, see the fine analysis by Traina 1986², 227–251, who observes (237) that *carpere* implies a dramatic process (it is synonymous with *lacero*, *distraho*, *lanio* and *uexo*) and that it means ‘to take a pinch’, with a tearing and progressive movement from the whole to the parts: such as plucking a daisy or eating an artichoke (or, I add, ‘to pluck a chicken’, stripping off feather after feather). It should be noted that *carpere*, recalling the Greek καρπίζω, a similar sounding verb also employed in philosophical contexts (e.g., Epic., *Epist. ad Men*. 3.126), “might suggest to Horace’s readers the words of a serious and austere philosopher” (Nisbet and Hubbard 1970, *ad loc.*), a serious diction, here ironically subverted by Propertius.

⁴⁸ Fedeli 2005, *ad loc*. The expression *carpe pecus* is also highlighted by its placement at line end and by the repetition of the same syllable at the end and at the beginning of two contiguous words, the so-called ‘ribattuta’ (for the definition see Simonetti Abbolito 1995, 158); this syllabic encounter was perceived by ancient readers (see for instance Servius, *ad Aen*. 2.27 *dorica castra*) as a *vitium orationis*, since it sometimes creates a *cacemphaton*. For a discussion of this figure, not avoided by Virgil, but reserved for special effects, see Dainotti 2015, 77–78.

⁴⁹ See Traina 1986², 234, who quotes an observation by Lambinus, *ad Hor. carm*. 1.11.8 (“tralatio aptissima vel a fructibus et floribus carpendis, vel a lanificio. Quemadmodum igitur ii, qui vel flores vel lanam carpunt, paulatim carpunt”), and at p. 238 also includes, among the technical meanings of the verb, ‘to fray the wool’ (“sfioccare la lana”).

⁵⁰ Also at vv. 47–48 *Non semper placidus periuros ridet amantis / Iuppiter et surda neglegit aure preces* Propertius recalls and subverts Horace, namely *carm*. 2.8.13–14 *ridet hoc, inquam, Venus ipsa, rident / simplices Nymphae ferus et cupido*, in another elegant case of *oppositio in imitando* (or better ‘correction’): if the perjurer Barine becomes more beautiful after each betrayal and the divinities laugh at love oath, Cynthia should not be so sure,
One last observation should be made on the word *cura*, which constitutes another clear point of contact with Virgil at Prop. 2.16.33–34:

\[
\text{tot iam abiere dies cum me nec cura theatri} \\
\text{nec tetigit Campi nec mea mensa iuuat}
\]

where, in the description of the uselessness of *remedia amoris*, it recalls again *Eclogue* 1 (vv. 31–32):

\[
\text{namque (fatebor enim) dum me Galatea tenebat,} \\
\text{nec spes libertatis erat nec cura peculi}^{51}
\]

since the line end *nec cura* + genitive noun before Propertius is only attested in this Virgilian passage.\(^{52}\) There is also here an elegant *Kontrastimitation*, given that in Virgil the genitive is objective, in Propertius subjective. This syntactical change contributes to subverting the situation too: *Tityrus*, whilst possessed by the capricious Galatea, was, like a (temporary) elegiac lover, unable to do anything, let alone to take care of his *peculium*, an act that would have acquired his freedom (as in the end, once abandoned by his girl, he will succeed in doing), Propertius, on the other hand, being a true elegiac lover, is completely devoted to his girl and can not – and perhaps does not want to – be healed by the *cura theatri*, a *remedium* that by extinguishing the fire of love would exclude him from his *regna*, and from the genre of elegy.

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\(^{51}\) The anaphora of *nec could also be here a point of contact between these two texts, acting as a ‘figure of allusion’. On this function of repetition, see Wills 1996.

\(^{52}\) As for the simple collocation *cura peculi*, there is only another occurrence in all Latin poetry, namely Hor. *Ars* 330–332 an, *haec animos aerugo et cura peculi* | *cum semel imbue*rit, *speremus carmina fingi* | *posse linenda cedo et leui servanda cupresso?*, which, as already noted (Brink 1971, *ad loc.*), recalls Virgil’s *Eclogue* 1, in another case of *oppositio in imitando*: if for *Tityrus* the *cura peculi* is a means of acquiring his freedom, in Horace, employed as a metaphor for Roman avarice (as *aerugo* for envy), represents a negative attitude, which constitutes an obstacle to poetic creativity.
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