STRUCTURE AND SENSE IN PROPERTIUS III

BY

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I. Structurally Book III differs from Book I ¹ in that there does not appear to be any deliberate balancing or counterpointing in the number of couplets assigned to poems or groups of poems. However the order of the poems throughout the book is not random, still less is it chronological. There is an underlying pattern of balance by which the 25 poems are grouped loosely in 5 groups of 5 ²), and within each group there are deliberate connexions and antitheses for literary effect.

A. 1-5 Programme poems

1. P's poetic intentions—to continue writing love elegy—prophecy of his future fame.
2. The power of poetry to confer immortality.
3. P's reasons for writing only love elegy. Motives from Callimachus.
4. P hails Augustus' impending military campaign in the East—he himself will have role of spectator and lover.
5. P rejects the life of 'action' in favour of poetry and love, and later, natural philosophy.

B. 6-10 Relationship poems, P and individuals


¹) On which see B. Otis, Propertius' Single Book, HSCP 70 (1965), 1-44.
C. **11-15 On Women. P as moraliser**

- 12. Remarks to a friend absent abroad. Pro-women (Postumus and Galla).
- 15. A warning to his mistress backed up by a mythological narrative. Anti-women. (Dirce and Antiope).

D. **16-20 Poems on various themes**

- 16. Erotic situation, light tone. (P is summoned by his domina).
- 17. Prayer (to Bacchus) with material from legend.
- 18. Epicedium for Marcellus, non-erotic, serious tone, a commissioned work occupying central position in group.
- 19. Essay (on the lust of women) with material from legend.

E. **21-25 Farewell poems to Cynthia (and love elegy)**

- 22. Non-erotic background, serious tone, geographical and mythological details. (P advises Tullus to return to Italy).
- 23. Erotic background, light tone, symbolic? (P has lost his love-letter tablets).

The collection of poems in Book III is generally associated with the date 23 B.C. and is thus not obviously separated chronologically from the poems of Book I (30 B.C.) and II (26 B.C.) in the way that Book IV (16 B.C. at earliest) is marked off from the rest.

However it has not always been appreciated just how far Book III marks a transition in tone, style and subject matter from the earlier work. Only three poems (8, 24 and 25) in the whole book can be viewed as typical subjective love elegies as exemplified in Books I and II. Five others (6, 10, 16, 20 and 23) are set in erotic situations, real or imagined, but the tone is noticeably light, foreshadowing