An Ancient Portrait of a Jealous Woman¹

— Critical Notes on Propertius, *Elegia* 3,15

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Introduction

The task of editing the classics is continually attempted by scholars who have neither enough intellect nor enough literature. Unless a false reading chances to be unmetrical or ungrammatical they have no means of knowing that it is false. Show them these variants,

inmittens
moliaque { } fixit in ora manus,
inmites

and they cannot tell which is right and which is wrong; and, what is worse, they honestly believe that nobody else can tell.

The words are Alfred Edward Housman’s, quoted from the Preface to his Edition of Juvenal (Cambridge 1905, p. xii). It is subtitled *Editorum in usum* (“for the Use of Editors”) — its ostensive purpose being thus to teach, not to state or conclude.

Housman offers no clue at all as to the author of the words quoted² nor to the work where they will be found, doubtlessly regarding intimate knowledge of every line of the classic authors as a prerequisite for learned discussion. Modern readers, who are probably far less well-read than Housman and his contemporaries, compensate for their lack of literature by the advantage of digital data bases of texts. The quotation, we soon find, is from Propertius (*Elegia* 3,15,14). This will set our warning bells ringing, as the *Elegies* of Propertius are known to raise many difficult questions on the wording and interpretation of the text. The basic, modern treatise on the history of the text and the manuscript tradition is the dissertation by Butrica³ (1978, ix + 364 pages including Indices); to start off the present paper we may well quote a few words from his Introduction (p. viii): “Obviously all our copies of Propertius do derive from a single very corrupt manuscript; there is no contamination until 1427, common errors and common sense are useful guides at least through the next few decades; and the choice of errors involves very few controversial examples.”

Our paper is not, however, primarily intended to elucidate the textual tradition but rather to take up and examine Housman’s challenge, which is why we begin our

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¹ This paper was originally published in *Eranos, Acta philologica Suecana*, CIV:2 (2006/2007) pp. 73-82. It is re-published here under a slightly different title and with some minor changes to the text.
² We do understand at least that this line, the second line of an elegiac couplet, cannot be culled from the *Satires* of Juvenal.
³ Unfortunately for our discussion, his dissertation is based on a collation of about half the text of Propertius, *Elegy* 3,15 not being part of that number. We are compensated for this defect by his later paper on *Elegy* 3,15 (1994).
The Challenge

This passage actually exhibits not only the word offered in Housman’s challenge but no less than three different problems, as identified by modern editors: on line 11 uero (“true”) is unanimously offered by the manuscripts, but uano (“groundless”) and even other emendations have been proposed as a more credible reading; on line 13 uulsit (“pulled”) originally proposed by Roberto Titi, a Florentine scholar of the 16th century, is offered by Fedeli against ussit (“singed” or “burnt”), which is the reading of the manuscripts; and finally on line 14 we find the problem stated by Housman, viz. a choice between immites (“merciless”) proposed by Fedeli and others as an emendation of immittenis (“slapping”) of the manuscript tradition.

Housman only touches upon the third of these readings, and we shall therefore begin our discussion here. Unavoidably, however, the two first two problems will form part of the subject-matter of our discussion. We shall, in fact, attempt to

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4 All translations into English are by the author of the present paper, this being the only way to ensure that the various points under discussion can be followed by readers without Latin.

5 By translating uulsit by “wrench out” Gold 1990 is rather overstating the action, as vellere has a multitude of meanings, from “pull or tug at, pluck” to “pull or pluck out” (OLD). Propertius uses the same verb in 3,24,33 (= 3,25,13) vellere tum cupias albos a stirpe capillos “then you may wish to tear out your white hairs by their roots”, the words a stirpe confirming the action of tearing out rather than just pulling.
demonstrate that it is difficult to isolate one of the problems from the two others and that they are most profitably discussed if considered as a single complex.

If we follow the wording of FeDELI’s edition we have very strong stylistical arguments ready at hand: in the six lines quoted we have a series of no less than six pairs of words, containing one noun and its attribute: uero crimine (“well-founded charge”), pulchros capillos (“lovely locks”), mollia ora (“her tender face”), immites manus (“merciless hands”), pensis iniquis (“harsh tasks”), dura humo (“the hard ground”). Line fourteen offers us a stylistically satisfying contrast of Dirce’s “merciless hands” pinching Antiope’s “tender face”. If, on the other hand, we prefer to follow the reading of the manuscripts, immittens fixit manus, we lose this contrast (and one element of repetition) but gain instead the picture of Dirce’s first slapping and then pinching Antiope’s tender face: an image of battering that increases the force of the image offered on line 13, where Dirce pulled (aulsit) or, possibly even singed (ussit) the girl’s “lovely locks”.

Back to HOUSMAN

When formulating his statement, HOUSMAN obviously took a number of things for granted: that his readers would be able to identify the passage at once, that they would recall the mythological background to the situation described, and that they would be able to identify the underlying learned controversy. Four questions therefore offer themselves: ‘what reading did HOUSMAN consider “right”,’ ‘what did Propertius actually write?’, ‘what was the mythological background’, and ‘did HOUSMAN take part in a learned controversy over the choice of immites and immittens, and, if so, with whom?’

Tackling last question first — as this will inevitably give us a clue to HOUSMAN’s position concerning the first question —, we soon realise that there is no immediate answer, for in the Index to The Classical Papers of A.E. Housman (vol. III, p. 1287-1307), enumerating all the classical passages discussed by him in 194 papers, long and short, we look in vain for reference to the problem under discussion. We assume, nonetheless, that HOUSMAN was opposed to a theory propounded by some other

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6 It may be argued that the expression immites manus, although formally the object of fixit, actually only serves as an adverb of method, and should be translated: “mercilessly pinched”. The hands are not described as physically hard or pitiless but rather as the instruments of violent action.

7 To HOUSMAN this lengthy explanation of the problem would in all likelihood have appeared ludicrously superfluous and pedantic; we owe no apology to his manes, however, as we do not write our paper for the same readers as he did.

8 Were HOUSMAN’s words caused by a reminiscence? Seneca, Phaedra, 227: immitis etiam contugi castae fuit: / experta saeuam est barbara Antiope manum “He was ungentle even to his chaste wife: foreign Antiope had to endure his cruel hand.” Seneca’s Antiope, however, was not the daughter of Nycteus, but the Amazon queen, seduced by Theseus and eventual mother of Hippolytus (therefore often called Hippolyta), and it is hardly to be believed that Seneca would have confused the two ladies. If we believe it possible that he considered immitis and saevus as proper qualifiers of any disagreeable thing happening to a Hippolyta, we should recall the same work, line 273: meus iste labor est aggredi iuuenem ferum / mentemque saeuam flectere immitis uiri “it is my very own task to approach that wild youth and turn the cruel mind of that ungentle man”, a passage where Hippolyta is not mentioned.

9 DIGGLE & GOODYEAR 1972.

10 He only mentions three textual problems belonging to Elegy 3,15 (cf. DIGGLE & GOODYEAR 1972:243f, 232, and 300). It is quite possible he intended to offer his own solution in the edition of Propertius he is known to have prepared; following the polemic with J.P. POSTGATE, he shelved his plans to publish his edition, and the manuscript is known to have been destroyed after his death (BUTRICA 1978:8-10, with note 30).
This scholar, hence took the opposite stand. As to the most important questions of all, namely, “what was the background and what did Propertius actually write?” we must start off by assessing the situation described at the beginning of Elegy 3,15, lines 1-10 (FEDELI’s edition):

Sic ego non ullos iam norim in amore tumultus,
   nec veniat sine te nox uigilanda mihi!
   ut mihi praetexti pudor est sublatus\textsuperscript{11} amictus
   et data libertas noscere amoris iter,
illa rudis animos per noctes conscia primas
   imbuit, heu nullis capta Lycinna datis!
tertius (haud multo minus est) cum ducitur annus,
   uix memini nobis uerba coisse decem.
cuncta tuus sepeliuit amor, nec femina post te
   utta dedit collo dulcia uincla meo.

These words appear to be written as a peace offering after a stormy lovers’ tiff (which Propertius hopes will never recur): the poet concedes that Lycinna\textsuperscript{12} was his calf love, but swears that they have hardly talked at all during the nearly three years of his affair with Cynthia. He goes on to adduce Queen Dirce and her jealousy as a warning \textit{exemplum} for Cynthia’s use and for this purpose provides the details, quoted above, of Dirce’s treatment of Antiope\textsuperscript{13} — at this point we might discuss whether the example offered would be stronger if the charge against Lycus and Antiope is described as true or false. He then offers Cynthia his own impressions of how this Greek Queen vented her sexual jealousy against a captive and subjugated woman of the same nominal rank. The thing Propertius omits to mention is the degree of jealousy that Cynthia exhibited, and what expression it took.

Questions and Tentative Answers
We may choose to formulate the three textual problems, identified by modern editors in this section, as three separate questions: Was Dirce’s charge groundless or true?\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{11} This is one of many different emendations of \textit{uelatus}, which is the incomprehensible reading offered by the manuscripts.
\textsuperscript{12} Lycinna’s name indicates that she may have been Greek, possibly a prostitute (who, however, did not charge Propertius for her services; a fact that the poet does not wish to hide even from Cynthia).
\textsuperscript{13} The story of Antiope, daughter of the river Asopus or King Nycteus of Thebes, is partly known to us through Homer’s \textit{Odyssey} (11,260ff.) and Euripides’ \textit{Antiope}, of which some 200 lines have been preserved (ed. KANNICHT 2004). Neither of these two works offers us any information bearing on our present perplexity. Pacuvius wrote a drama entitled \textit{Antiope}, which survives in fifteen very short fragments (KANNICHT 2004:278-280); Hyginus, who probably belonged to the 2\textsuperscript{nd} century AD., mentions Antiope by name sixteen times in his \textit{Fabulae}.
\textsuperscript{14} Antiope is known from our sources to have born twin sons to Zeus, who had approached her in the shape of a satyr. Nycteus is not mentioned as the father of any children of hers.
Did she singe or merely pull at Antiope’s hair? Did she mercilessly pinch Antiope’s tender cheeks or did she slap and pinch them?

On the other hand, we may prefer to formulate two theories that appear to be mutually exclusive, each of which comprises all three questions first formulated; the first is that Dirce, driven by well-founded jealousy towards Antiope, singed her “lovely locks” and battered her face by slapping and pinching it; the second is that Dirce gave vent to her unfounded jealousy by pulling at Antiope’s hair and mercilessly pinching her face. The theories may be varied, as will become clear when we study the readings offered by different modern editors, commentators, and translators, but there are — in the eyes of the author — valid reasons for setting up these two theories as polar opposites: one offers a consistent picture of a violent jealousy, one that is, moreover, justified (as Cynthia’s jealousy of Lycinna was not, according to Propertius’ protests); the other is a polite, toned-down version, where Dirce’s jealousy is unfounded and her means of expressing it are milder.

Our choice between the two inevitably dictates our choice of readings in the Latin text; if we adhere to the former theory, we will believe in and retain the readings offered by the manuscripts: uero, ussit, and immittens; if we adhere to the latter, we will print uano, uulsit, and immites. Quite fortuitously, the former theory will make us conservative critics, in the sense that we hold on to the wording offered by the two manuscripts, while the latter will make us radical critics, the kind who emend the text offered by the manuscript sources on the strength of an opinion of what the author actually wished to or ought to have written, against the evidence of the manuscript sources.

Some slight help may be culled from words given in the sequel, as from line 17, Propertius continues the story of Antiope: her flight, her prayers for help from Jove, the father of her twin sons, Zetheus and Amphion. These two, after some initial hesitation, capture Dirce and, on lines 39-40, punish her severely: “Antiope, recognize Jove: as an honour to you Dirce is led away to find her death in many places.” The cruelty of this punishment suggests that the original crime was commensurate. Furthermore, Propertius’ comments on lines 43-44

are a hint that Cynthia’s jealousy, as perceived by Propertius, was not of the everyday kind that is manifested by the slapping of cheeks and a storm of tears, but of the continuous kind that is as cruel as the grave.

The stand we finally take on the question of Dirce’s jealousy and the reading of Propertius Elegy will be guided by many factors: the quality of our intellects; our knowledge of Latin and Roman literature; our assessment of the nature of Dirce’s jealousy (this, in its turn, is dictated by any preconceived notions we may have of women’s ways of expressing jealousy, assuming that this can be considered a constant through the millennia); our propensity for believing that a Greek King of
Classical Antiquity must inevitably seduce or be seduced by an attractive woman\textsuperscript{16} slave, who was also the daughter of his brother; and finally our opinion on how seriously Propertius, a Roman nobleman of the early Principate, ranked his current lady-love’s fits of jealousy towards the woman whom he describes as the object his very first erotic experience. In the last-mentioned instance we have to query whether Propertius considered Cynthia’s jealousy to be so fiery as to constitute a physical danger to Lycinna, or whether he thought himself the witness of a minor outbreak of peevishness. Our way of answering these questions inevitably affects our view of Dirce’s actions against Antiope, and therefore our selection of readings in this elegy.

It will be clear by now that the author of the present paper has, willy-nilly, found himself to take a conservative stand on this question, as he cannot find any really weighty reason to depart from the text as handed down by our manuscript sources. Housman’s conundrum is, of course, not of major importance, but it has nonetheless turned out to be difficult enough to merit discussion, not only by itself but as part of a larger issue; it therefore seems rather remarkable that four modern commentators, viz. Butler-Barber 1933, Shackleton Bailey 1956, Camps 1966, and Butrica 1994, pass this passage by without any explicit discussion of the problems it offers.

Having noted this, we will find it interesting to study how a number of modern editors, commentators, and translators, publishing their works before and after Housman’s conundrum appeared in print, handled this group of problems.\textsuperscript{17} Did they, or did they not, notice and attack the challenge he offered? We shall answer this question by drawing a chronological table showing the choices they made\textsuperscript{18} in the matter of the three readings:\textsuperscript{19}

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{llll}
 KEIL 1867 & \textit{vero} & \textit{ussit} & \textit{inmittens} \\
 MUELLER 1874 & \textit{vero} & \textit{ussit} & \textit{inmittens} \\
 BAEHRENS 1880 & \textit{uero} & \textit{uulsit} & \textit{inmites} \\
 PHILLIMORE 1907 & \textit{sero} & \textit{ussit} & \textit{inmittens} \\
 BARBER-BUTLER 1933 & \textit{uero} & \textit{uulsit} & \textit{inmites} \\
 PAGANELLI 1947 & \textit{vero} & \textit{ussit} & \textit{inmittens} \\
 CAMPS 1966 & \textit{sero} & \textit{uulsit} & \textit{inmitis} \\
 BARBER 1960 & \textit{uero} & \textit{uulsit} & \textit{inmitis} \\
 HANSLIK 1979 & \textit{sero} & \textit{ussit} & \textit{inmites} \\
 FEDELI 1984 & \textit{uero} & \textit{ussit} & \textit{inmites} \\
 GOOLD 1990 & \textit{vano} & \textit{vulsit} & \textit{inmitis} \\
 BJÖRKESON 1992 & \textit{vano} & \textit{vulsit} & \textit{inmites} \\
 LEE\textsuperscript{20} 1994 & \textit{vano} & \textit{vulsit} & \textit{inmites} \\
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{16} It would be wrong to think of Antiope as a young girl: she was, after all the mother of two grown-up sons, both sired by Jove. Propertius does describe her as a girl \textit{(puella)}, but only at the end of the elegy (lines 21 and 34).

\textsuperscript{17} Propertius’ modern Swedish translator, Björkeson 1992, reads \textit{uano, ussit}, and \textit{immites}, thus choosing a middle way; the translation like its Latin original is in elegiac couplets and therefore, by necessity, rather free in its wording.

\textsuperscript{18} In the case of Latin texts with parallel translations (Paganelli 1947, Björkeson 1992), we follow the Latin text without regard for the translation.

\textsuperscript{19} Cf. also \textit{TLL}, s.v. \textit{inmitis} (vol. VII 1,467,57ff.), where this passage is quoted. The editors of \textit{TLL} clearly take a stand in reading \textit{inmitis} instead of \textit{inmittens}. It is perhaps necessary to remark that \textit{inn-} and \textit{imn-}, \textit{-is} and \textit{— es} (\textit{inmitis} — \textit{immites}, and \textit{immittens} — \textit{inmittens}, are orthographic variants and offer no difference in meaning.

\textsuperscript{20} Lee’s translations “untrue charge” — “tore” — “cruel hands”, demonstrates which Latin readings he prefers.
The table gives us clues to the controversy concerning *inmittens* — *inmite*, and what stand Housman probably took. It shows that Keil and Mueller, the two earliest among the editors listed, took a conservative stand, radicalism only setting in with the edition of Baehrens. This scholar’s influence — for better or worse — on Housman is described by Butrica (1978:7), who in his paper of 1994 comments on *vulsit*: “Titius’ necessary correction of *ussit*”. Phillimore prefers to believe that Antiope was charged with an accusation that came late (*sero crimine*), rather than with one that was true, *vero*, or unfounded, *falso*, but otherwise reverts to the conservative list; thereafter the radical editors form a majority, at least when it comes to choosing between *ussit* and *uulsit*; Camps and Hanslik follow Phillimore in printing *sero*. Butrica and Heyworth follow Barber. Paganelli is actually alone, among the later editors, in holding on to the readings offered by the manuscripts themselves; his translation — demonstrating exactly how he read this passage — is therefore worth quoting:

> J’en atteste l’histoire de Dirce ; sa cruauté cependant s’exerçait contre une coupable: la fille de Nyctée, Antiope, avait partagé la couche de Lycus. Ah ! que de fois la reine brûla les beaux cheveux, que de fois elle marqua de ses mains le tendre visage!

> “... contre une coupable”: Paganelli makes a point of stressing Antiope’s guilt — probably as against the innocence of Lycinna (here, he was probably thinking of the wording of line 43 *non meritam ... Lycinnam*) —, but he also finds it reasonable to assume that Cynthia’s jealousy was expressed in a way that Propertius found excessively and intentionally cruel; his translation of *inmittens fixit*, “marca de ses mains”, is, on the other hand, rather free.

The tendency, among the radical editors, appears to follow a tendency towards a more polite diction, toning down expressions of harsh and cruel behaviour. We have no way of knowing, at this stage, whether this is a general tendency, possibly adopted during the Victorian era.

As already stated, our own observations on the passage just quoted have led us independently to the same readings as those most recently printed by Paganelli; our view of the episode is therefore that Propertius viewed Cynthia’s jealousy with grave concern, that he expressed Dirce’s battering of Antiope in the gravest possible terms as a warning example for Cynthia against making excessive demonstrations and that, therefore, we are compelled in this instance to defend the readings offered by the manuscripts against any attempts to amend them.

Having reached this conclusion we may sum up our discussion: this short passage offers, in a nutshell, a very good illustration of the difficulties besetting the critical editor of a classical text. Having managed to translate the text as it is offered by the manuscript, we may remark, with a certain sense of wonder, that so many modern editors have considered it necessary to change in so many places the wording of this Elegy. We also wonder at the fact that the modern attempts at emendation so easily gain the same status as the transmitted text. This observation leads us to the further

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21 Butrica 1994:138, note 11, remarks that Fedeli “reads *vero* in his Teubner text but *vano* in his commentary”.

22 Butrica 1978 lists Phillimore’s edition of 1901 (not that of 1907) but does not appear to discuss it.
conclusion that a new edition of Propertius would profit making a completely new start, founded on a new reading of the five manuscripts necessary for reconstructing the text of the archetype. That this work can be undertaken is very much to the credit of BUTRICA (1978); he himself published a set of sample texts, which do not include *Elegy* 3,15. Following his results we know “that the archetype and its exemplar were probably in Carolingian minuscule” (BUTRICA 1978:170); for *Elegy* 3,15, the tradition follows two lines of descent, one represented by the still extant N (Wolffenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Guelferbytanus Gudianus Lat. 224), and the other by A (Leiden, University Library, MS. Vossianus Lat. O.38); as the latter in its extant state is only a fragment that ceases after 2.1.63, its text can be reconstructed by means of its indirect23 daughters, F (Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurentiana plut. 36,49), L (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Holkham Misc. 36), and P (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS. Lat. 7989).

**Conclusion**

As will be clear from our reasoning above, we do not follow HOUSMAN in trusting that the problem he poses really admits of an incontrovertible solution. We are nonetheless in debt to him for compelling us to abandon “the sloth and distaste for thinking which are the common inheritance of humanity”24 in general, and editors of classical texts in particular. The subtitle he gives to his editions of Juvenal and Lucanus, *editores in usum*, is therefore best understood as meaning “to the profit of editors.” By provoking our anger he has forced us to think; even though we do not reach the same conclusion as we suspect that he did, his provocation — bridging the space of over a century — did serve its purpose.

As this paper was never intended to expand into a monograph we will take the liberty of halting the discussion of the main problem at this point. Two quite obvious questions, fundamental to the understanding of this text, will therefore be left unanswered, the author hoping that some younger scholar will find an opportunity here. The first question is, how women’s jealousy is normally described by male authors of Greek and Roman love lyrics and elegies. The second question is, how men express their ambition to chastise jealous women, also in Greek and Roman love lyrics and elegies. Taking into account the possibility — or even likelihood — of modern editors’ having trivialized the text, we must remember that whoever accepts the task of examining these questions, will only receive meaningful results by paying strict attention to questions of textual tradition and textual criticism — this is another result of the present paper.

In this paper we have challenged, to our own satisfaction, HOUSMAN’s provocation which was our original inspiration. As we have restricted our discussion to this *Elegy* alone, without entering into a monograph-length treatise on jealousy in Classical Antiquity, we cannot state that we understand the poem as HOUSMAN, with his superior literature, undoubtedly did. We hope, however, that we have pointed at the difficulties besetting the editor of a critical edition; although we found ourselves taking a conservative line in our treatment of the four lines that form the nucleus of HOUSMAN’s conundrum, this does not necessarily mean that we would take a

23 Between A and its surviving daughters stands “a lost copy made for and perhaps by Petrarch, who both annotated and emended the text” (BUTRICA 1978:37).

conservative stand on all problems offered by the textual tradition. Any reader of Propertius should, however, do well to ponder the significance of the words of PHILLIMORE:

"But if, all in all, we reject the trustworthiness of the manuscripts, on what will one then stand? ... If everybody takes the liberty of restoring — not understanding — according to his own judgement the Poet’s thoughts, there will be as many Propertiuses as there are editors."

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Version date: December 9th, 2017

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25 PHILLIMORE 1907: Praef. (end): Quid si in summa re codicum fidem respuerimus, quo denique stabitur? ... Sin autem poetae cogitationem suo cuique arbitrio resarcire licet, non interpretari, quot editores tot Propertii.
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