

PROPERTIUS, I 16, 37-38

A new conjecture on Propertius.

A talking door quotes a locked-out lover's plaintive claim:

te non ulla meae laesit petulantia linguae
38 quae solet † irato dicere tota † loco.

Such is E. A. Barber's Oxford text (second edition, 1960), and there are good grounds for his despair at line 38. W. R. Smyth collected more than fifty conjectures on it in his *Thesaurus criticus ad Sexti Propertii textum*, Leiden 1970, p. 20. Where so many have failed to convince, one more attempt on the crux will have to be made with all due diffidence.

Perhaps the lover may be imagined telling the door that he has never insulted it with the sort of language which vulgar lovers use when they find themselves in his situation — locked out and forced to spend the night lying on a chilly threshold (22-24):

turpis et in tepido limine somnus erit?
me mediae noctes, me sidera plena iacentem,
frigidaque Eoo me dolet aura gelu.

If he thinks of the *limen* as his *lectus* or *torus* for the night's vigil¹, he then might be said to claim:

te non ulla meae laesit petulantia linguae
quae solet *ingrato* dicere *turba toro*.

¹ For the lover's vigil on the *limen*, compare, e.g., Cat., 63, 65, *mihi ianuae frequentes, mihi limina tepida*; Hor., *Odes* III 10, 19-20, *non hoc semper erit liminis aut aquae / caelestis patiens latus*. The conceit may be traced back to Greek writers; cf., e.g., Plat., *Symp.* 183 A, *οἷα περ οἱ ἐρασταὶ πρὸς τὰ παιδικὰ... ποιούμενοι... καὶ κοιμήσεις ἐπὶ θύρας*; Callimachus, *AP* V 23 = *Ep.* LXIII Pf., 1-2, *οὕτως ὑπνώσας, Κωνώπιον, ὥς ἐμὲ ποιεῖς / κοιμᾶσθαι ψυχροῖς τοῖσδε παρὰ προθύροις*. See F.O. Copley, *Exclusus Amator. A Study in Latin Love Poetry* (APA Monographs 17), pp. 121, 163.

«No impudence of my tongue has ever hurt you (with the words) which the common mob is accustomed to utter on this heartless bed...» The antecedent of *quae* (instrumental *uerbis*) may be readily supplied from *petulantia linguae* and *solet... dicere*. For *torus* = an improvised bed, compare, e.g., III 13, 36, *altaque natiuo creuerat herba toro*; Tib., II 5, 99-100, *sibi quisque dapes et festas extruet alte / caespitibus mensas caespitibusque torum* (see *OLD*, s.u., 4); here, the local ablative will find a parallel in (e.g.) I 8, 22, *tuo limine querar*. For Fruter's *ingrato* = 'unwelcoming', 'heartless', 'hard' (*TLL*, s.u., II B), compare I 3, 25, *ingrato... somno*; I 10, 23, *neu... ingrata fronte negaris*; I 17, 4, *omniaque ingrato litore uota cadunt*; and, with specific references to doors and thresholds and locked-out lovers, Colum., I *Praef.* 10, *saepe nocte sera foribus ingratis adiacere*, and Iuven., 4, 222, *limina clausa / nequiquam ingeminant precibusque ingrata frequentant*. And for the humanists' *turba*, compare III 1, 21, *inuida turba* = the fine poet's detractors; here also the lover will distinguish himself from the *turba*, for he too is a poet (cf. 41, *at tibi saepe nouo deduxi carmina uersu*). One might also compare *uulgus* in Cat., 72, 3, *dilexi... te non tantum ut uulgus amicam*.

None of the emendations is palaeographically difficult. For my own *toro*, I would appeal to Housman's defence of Otto's (and his own) *torum* for *locum* at I 1, 36, *neque assueto mutet amore locum*; he illustrates the confusion of *t* and *l* and of *r* and *c* from Propertius' own manuscripts (*Journ. Philol.* 16, 1888, p. 35 = J. Diggle & F. R. D. Goodyear [edd.], *The Classical Papers of A. E. Housman*, I, Cambridge 1972, p. 54). It may be worth adding that Heinsius proposed *toro* for *loco* at III 6, 16, *medio nebat et ipsa loco*. For the alliterative jingle in *turba toro*, compare, e.g., III 15, 21, *tibi turpe tuam*.

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