

When Margaret Hubbard wrote in 1974, “no doubt Propertius was more like, say, Ovid than his manuscripts suggest,” she had a clear notion of what a Propertian poem should be. It should be like Ovid: i.e., rhetorically persuasive, ironic, and lucid. Abrupt transitions, discontinuities, and internal contradictions were not aesthetic choices, but signs of corruption. The irony of course is that Hubbard’s criteria, while informed by deep learning, are themselves the product of aesthetic choices, of a set of assumptions about what a Propertian poem should be. She is not alone.

Boucher (1980), who argues for a more conservative approach to the text and against what he terms its “banalisation croissante,” possesses his own contrary set of assumptions. More recently, Heyworth in his *Cynthia* (2007) sought to avoid “more literary aspects of interpretation except when they seemed ... to bear on textual issues.”

My argument, however, is that every time a judgment is made about where a poem begins or ends or whether one textual variant is to be preferred to another, “literary aspects of interpretation” are unavoidable. The task of determining the text, I contend, is always interpretive and always involves judgments about what the nature of a Propertian poem should be. I illustrate my position by examining both the explicit statements of recent editors and critics and the assumptions behind their editorial decisions, with special reference to Propertius 4.4.