

Greek Words and Myth in Propertius 1.20

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EVERY POET inevitably writes within a literary tradition, although there is great variation in the extent to which the poet's awareness of his place in the tradition enters explicitly into his poetry. It is a truism of criticism that the Roman poets were especially self-conscious in this respect and particularly concerned with defining and stating in their poems what they conceived to be their relationship to a literary tradition that was as much Greek as Roman. For the Roman poet, the Greek strand of this tradition included, among other things, a long succession of authors from among whom one might choose his model, a wealth of mythological and other kinds of learning, and, of course, its vehicle, the Greek language. Each Roman poet had to come to terms in his own way and in his own poetry with the opportunity and the challenge offered by Greek and its literature.

Propertius, in defining his position, finally decided that he was the Roman Callimachus [4.1.64], but he did not make this proud claim until he had produced four books of elegies and had turned to aetiology. In the first book, Callimachus is not even mentioned and in Books Two and Three the identification may be implicit, but it is not asserted. This reticence in the first book may be a reflection not so much of humility as of the fact that the search for a poetic voice was still going on. The twentieth elegy in the first book is a product of the early stages of this search: it is an experiment in the use of Greek and Greek myth in poetry which purports to deal with the personal experience of a Roman poet and his friends. The language of the poem exploits the plastic qualities of words, especially Greek words, as tangible, physical objects, whatever their meanings, and their rich potential, purely as successions of sounds, to be manipulated and fashioned into a work of verbal art. The handling of Greek myth is not the one Propertius finally adopted for his first three books, viz. a

series of brief, allusive references in the same poem to several myths or mythological figures. Here he treats a single myth at some length, largely for its own sake, exploring in detail all of its imaginative and suggestive implications. Certain elements of the Hylas myth, especially the boy's name and the role of water, are transmuted from mere particulars in a narrative into images and motifs that reverberate through the poem.

The poem is a warning to Gallus to take care lest he lose the boy he loves by exposing him to heterosexual attractions. The warning takes the form of a splendidly exaggerated comparison of the lovers with Hercules and Hylas, climaxing in the mock-heroic injunction to save the boy from "ravishing" by "Ausonian Adryads" and himself from grief of Herculean proportions [1-16].¹ The advice serves as an introduction to the main business of the poem, an exquisite adaptation of the Hylas myth to the style and tone of elegy.² In Propertius' version of the familiar story³ Hylas first resists the attack of the Boreads (standing in the myth for Gallus' *male* rivals), only to succumb to the enticements of a sylvan spring and its nymphs (standing for the elegant waterside resorts of Augustan Italy and their *female* denizens, the "Ausonian Adryads").⁴

The poem is a virtual *tour-de-force* of elaborate sound effects. An exotic flavor is produced by the accumulation of a large number of Greek proper names, in addition to whatever importance the names may have by virtue of their meanings. Especially effective are words containing sounds not native to Latin, such as *th* and *ph*: *Theiodamanteo*, *Nympharum*, *Phasidos*, *Athamantidos*, *Orithyiae*, *Arganthi*, *Nymphis*, *Thyniasin*, and *Nymphis*.⁵ Greek has many words in which a long vowel retains its original quantity before another vowel, but in classical Latin such vowels had been shortened.⁶ This non-Latin sequence is

¹ G. Krokowski rightly characterizes the tone of this passage in "De Propertio ludibundo," *Eos* 29 (1926) 85.

² See R. Heinze, *Ovids elegische Erzählung*, *Ber. ü. d. Verhand. d. Sächs. Akad. d. Wiss. zu Leipzig* 71 (1919) 84ff; and E. Reitzenstein, "Wirklichkeitsbild und Gefühlentwicklung bei Propertius," *Philologus*, Suppl.-bd. 29.2 (1936) 70.

³ Most familiar are the versions of Theocritus and Apollonius, but since, as Virgil said, *cui non dictus Hylas?*, the question of Propertius' source is not a profitable one. Cf. W. Steidle, *Anzeiger f. d. Altertumswissenschaft* 9 (1956) 85 n.3.

⁴ D. M. Jones, "Three Notes on Propertius," *CR* 75 (1961) 197ff.

⁵ For the pronunciation in Augustan Rome of *th* and *ph* see M. Niedermann, *Précis de phonétique historique du Latin*⁴ (Paris 1959) 85f; cf. J. Marouzeau, *Traité de stylistique latine*² (Paris 1946) 91.

⁶ See Niedermann §38.

exploited in words like *Theiodamantēo*, *Gigantēa*, *herōum*, and *Pandioniae*. Foreign names are even more impressive when they are lengthy; for this reason, and not merely for metrical convenience, some names are used in expanded patronymic or adjectival forms: *Theiodamanteo*, *Gigantea*, *Athamantidos*, *Pandioniae*, and, a Latin example, *Aquilonia*.

Purely Greek inflectional endings, while not involving non-Latin phonemes, nevertheless increase the foreign flavor of the language; e.g., *Phasidos*, *Athamantidos*, and *Pege*.⁷ Three pentameters end in a kind of refrain formed by a Greek dative plural found nowhere else in Propertius' work and extremely rare in the rest of Latin literature: *Adryasin*, *Hamadryasin*, and *Thyniasin*. It is no objection that the corresponding Latin forms would be metrically unsuitable in these positions or that Propertius may simply be transliterating grammatical forms found in his Greek original. A Greek accusative form, and one that is very rare even in Greek,⁸ appears in *Argon* [17]; a commoner Greek form is the accusative *Hylan* [52]. These datives and accusatives in *nu* produce five lines in which the last word ends with a consonant rarely found in final position in Latin, which at least one other Roman also found especially agreeable to the ear.⁹

Manipulation of sounds is not confined to phonemes or phoneme combinations rare or non-existent in Latin. A broad range of effects involving native phonemes serves, in a general way, to call further attention to the words in the poem *as sounds* and, in a more particular way, to enhance the contrast in the listener's ear between Greek and Latin sounds. For example, the sequence *n* plus dental stop in *Athamantidos* is echoed in the Latin words framing it:

labentem Athamantidos undis... [19]

Note also the exact metrical correspondence: in each case the syllable ending in *n* is the first syllable of the foot and the accented syllable of the word. In 38ff there is an almost incantatory repetition of *p* and *p-r*:

...*purpureis mixta papaveribus.*
quae modo decerpens tenero pueriliter ungui
proposito florem praetulit officio.

⁷ The reading accepted by most modern editors because of the singular verb.

⁸ See F. Bechtel, *Die griechischen Dialekte I* (Berlin 1921) 67 and 271; C. D. Buck, *The Greek Dialects* (Chicago 1955) 93.

⁹ Quintilian 12.10.31, *at illi (sc. Graeci) ny jucundam et in fine praecipue quasi tinnientem illius loco ponunt, quae est apud nos rarissima in clausulis.*

Note also the subtle variations on this alliterative sequence in the occurrences of labial consonants other than *p*: *m* (a nasal *p*), *b* (a voiced *p*), and *f* (a labiodental fricative).¹⁰

There is a good deal in this poem of what may appropriately be called rhyme. Eleven of the hexameters and five of the pentameters contain internal rhyme.¹¹ Since, however, this proportion agrees roughly with Propertius' general practice, there is more significance in a similar but more elaborate kind of rhyme. In several distichs, an internal rhyme in one of its lines is enhanced by the repetition of the rhyming syllable either before the caesura of the hexameter or before the diaeresis of the pentameter:

hoc pro continuo te, Galle, monemus amore,
(id tibi ne vacuo defluat ex animo) [1f].
et jam praeteritis labentem Athamantidos undis
Mysorum scopulis applicuisse ratem [19f].
et modo formosis incumbens nescius undis
errorem blandis tardat imaginibus [41f].

The rhyming of syllables at caesura and diaeresis of adjacent lines also occurs where neither of the lines contains an internal rhyme of its own to be anticipated or echoed:

ne tibi sit duros montes et frigida saxa,
Galle, neque expertos semper adire lacus [13f].
at comes invicti juvenis processerat ultra
raram sepositi quaerere fontis aquam. [23f].

This variety of rhyme can hardly be fortuitous, for in all five cases it occurs *within* the couplet, thus strengthening the couplet's internal coherence. It is interesting to note that, although adjacent lines rhyme at their mid-points, end-rhyming in the couplet is strictly avoided. A more complex instance of rhyme occurs in 25ff:

hunc duo sectati fratres, Aquilonia proles,
hunc super et Zetes, hunc super et Calais,
oscula suspensis instabant carpere palmis.

¹⁰ For the notion of alliteration of "cognate" sounds, see K. Burke, "On Musicality in Verse," *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, rev. ed. (New York 1957) 296ff.

¹¹ By internal rhyme I mean the rhyming of the last syllable before the main caesura of the hexameter or before the diaeresis of the pentameter with the final syllable of the line. This is not the place to argue the large question of how important this kind of rhyme was to the Augustan elegists; it may be pointed out, however, that in line 35, where the normal

Not only do *Zetes* and *Calais* produce a near rhyme with each other, but rhymes at emphatic positions anticipate the final syllable of *Zetes* and repeat the final syllable of *Calais* (with slight variation in length of vowels).

Repetition of sound in the form of anaphora takes place four times: *sive...sive...sive...sive* [7ff]; *hunc...hunc super et...hunc super et* [25f]; *oscula...oscula* [27f]; and *ibat...ibat* [32].

Fascination with abstract patterns of sound is paralleled by an abstract correspondence of form. The whole poem is enclosed within a highly artificial frame. The last hexameter echoes the first in an almost word-for-word correspondence in sound, sense, and word order:

hoc pro continuo te, Galle, monemus amore [1]
his, o Galle, tuos monitus servabis amores [51].

Only *Galle* is an exact repetition, but *his* answers to *hoc*, *tuos* to *te*, *monitus* to *monemus*, and *amores* to *amore*. A similar frame encloses the assertion of the comparison between Hercules and Gallus [5–16] which introduces the Hylas story. In *dixerit Ascanius* [4] and *fleverat Ascanio* [16] there is an exact metrical equivalence and a matching of verb-noun phrase.¹²

Much is made in this poem of the name Hylas, the meaning of which will be discussed shortly. It also inspires some of the most interesting sound effects. It is introduced in such a way as to call our attention to it as a name and thus as a word: *est tibi...non nomine dispar/...proximus ardor Hylae* [5f]. It is the last word in the poem and stands twice more at the emphatic final position of the line [6 and 48]. In 32, its single occurrence within a line, Propertius alliterates *Hylas* and *Hamadryasin*. In 49 the name is described as echoing through the landscape.

Hylas contains a vowel that does not occur in Latin, *upsilon*.¹³ Its strangeness continued to charm the Roman ear in the time of Quintilian.¹⁴ Propertius clearly wished to play upon this somewhat

classical form *nulli* would have fitted the meter, it is replaced by the form that produces internal rhyme:

quam supra nullae pendebant debita curae.

¹² The epithets of the Ascanius, *indomito* and *crudelis*, correspond loosely with each other.

¹³ For the pronunciation of *y* by educated Romans of this period, see E. Sturtevant, *Pronunciation of Greek and Latin*² (Philadelphia 1940) 122.

¹⁴ Quintilian 12.10.27f: *namque est (sc. Latina facundia) ipsis statim sonis durior, quando et jucundissimas ex Graecis litteras non habemus, vocalem alteram (sc. y), alteram consonantem (sc. z), quibus nullae apud eos dulcius spirant; quas mutuari solemus, quotiens illorum nominibus utimur.*

exotic sound, for he has chosen again and again to include in this poem proper names containing it: *Minyis*, *Nympharum*, *Adryasin*, *Mysorum*, *Orithyiae*, *Hamadryasin*, *Nymphis*, *Thyniasin*, *Nymphis*, and *Dryades*, in addition to the four instances of *Hylas* itself. He reinforces the effect by placing such words in clusters or in contexts where Greek *v* contrasts with Latin *u* and *i*:

crudelis Minyis [4]

proximus ardor Hylae [6]

Nympharum semper cupidus [11]

Mysorum scopulis applicuisse ratem [20]

jam Pandioniae cessit genus Orithyiae:

a dolor! ibat Hylas, ibat Hamadryasin. (31f; note the sequence in 32 of *i-a*, *y-a*, *i-a*, *ya*.)

grata domus Nymphis umida Thyniasin

quam supra nullae pendebant debita curae [34f]

cuius ut accensae Dryades candore puellae [45]

tum sonitum rapto corpore fecit Hylas [48]

formosum Nymphis credere visus Hylan [52].

In the last example, both the beginning and the end of the line contain these same three vowels in juxtaposition: *u-y-i* and *i-u-y*. The foreign *y* is set off against the two native vowels it most resembles.

Alpha is the other vowel in *Hylas*. It is echoed in the numerous proper names in the poem containing *a* and in the assonance of *a* in this passage:

...*Ascanio.*

namque ferunt olim Pagasae navalibus Argon

egressam longe Phasidos isse viam,

...*labentem Athamantidos....*[16ff]

The combination of the two vowels in *Hylas*' name is echoed throughout the poem in words containing the Greek *y* (or its Roman approximations *i* and *u*) and *a* in adjacent syllables (a number of examples are included in the lines quoted above).

Such complex manipulation of the sounds of language can only be deliberate. However, attempts to assign specific expressive values to sounds are notoriously prone to subjectivity. The listener's personal response and the meanings of the words inevitably color his reaction

to their sounds. No attempt will be made, therefore, to assign individual meanings or connotations to the sound effects discussed in this paper. They are in part due to the poet's interest in the physical properties of sounds and words for their own sake, whatever their meanings. Such a phenomenon is especially characteristic of the early stages in a poet's career and the early stages in a nation's literature. One finds in this poem, written by a young poet, and in the language of Plautus and Ennius, writing in the youth of Latin literature, a similar excitement in the discovery that the sounds of language have a tangible reality which can be exploited in an abstract and plastic manner. It is only a slight exaggeration to say that this poem is as much about the sounds of Greek and Latin as it is about the experiences of Gallus and Hylas.

This is only a part of the answer, for there is a special reason for the verbal and acoustic games Propertius plays with the name *Hylas*. The boy Gallus loved must in fact have been named Hylas.¹⁵ We are pointedly told that Gallus' beloved is *non nomine dispar* to the legendary Hylas [5]. Whatever the common figurative meanings of *nomen*, the plain meaning of *non nomine dispar* is 'not unlike in name,' i.e., 'like in name.' The natural interpretation of the last line in the poem is "you who have been seen entrusting Hylas to the Nymphs." The probability that the boy's name actually was Hylas gives much more point to the mocking insistence with which Propertius plays with the sounds of the name and its etymology.

Propertius is no less a philologist than a composer of verbal music and the meaning, real and pretended, of the name Hylas is central to the poem. It provides opportunities for witty puns, learned allusions, and imaginative associations. The Greek root *ὕλα-* means 'howl' or 'shout.' Propertius alludes to this meaning when he describes the shouting of the name by Hercules in 49. It is also probable that he is making an aetiological allusion to ceremonies in the cult of Hylas, although the aetiological element of the story is not otherwise given much prominence in the poem.¹⁶

A punning meaning given to the name explains why Propertius makes wood nymphs major characters in a story that calls for water nymphs. Although it is true that ancient poets are not always precise

¹⁵ Although not necessarily the actor of this name mentioned in Macrobius, *Sat.* 2.7.12.

¹⁶ See J. G. Frazer/T. H. Gaster, *The New Golden Bough* (New York 1959) 285 n.337; P. Kretschmer, *Glotta* 14 (1925) 33ff.

in assigning functions to the various categories of nymphs, Propertius seems to go out of his way to insist by means of three different Greek terms that his nymphs are wood nymphs. He calls them Dryads, Adryads, and Hamadryads. For one thing, the correct term for water nymphs, Naiads, does not reproduce the *upsilon-alpha* sequence of *Hylas* as do Dryads and its variants. Of greater importance is the fact that the replacing of water nymphs by wood nymphs reinforces a punning etymological connection between *Hylas* and ὕλη (or, in dialects other than Attic-Ionic, ὕλα), 'woods,' which his readers, knowing Greek, would have immediately appreciated. By virtue of his very name, *Hylas* is the woods. His proper place, therefore, is in nature, not on a heroic expedition, and it is only right that he become united with the sylvan spring. The treatment of the Boreads incident, an important addition to the story which seems to be original with Propertius, reinforces the identification of *Hylas* with the woods. In describing *Hylas*' struggle with them, the poet uses the word *pendens* [29] which will shortly be applied to real trees [35]; in resisting the Boreads with a branch [30], the boy strongly suggests the resistance of a tree's branches to the winds.¹⁷

At the spring itself, the identification takes three forms. First, the initial presence of *wood nymphs in water* is a purely symbolic anticipation of *Hylas*' physical union with the scene. Second, there is an intermediate stage in which the boy is implicitly identified with the sylvan setting by the description of his appearance and action [39ff]. The picture of the boy, leaning over the water (*incumbens... undis*, 41) and distinguished by his *candor* [45], recalls in visual terms that of the trees whose fruit hangs over the water (*quam supra... pendebant*, 35) and the *lilia candida* around it [37f]. His appearance is thus in complete harmony with the surrounding vegetation. Third, there is the actual physical union, when he enters the water. Although Propertius is by no means attempting to give poetic expression to a philosophical idea, there is implicit in the poem the notion that *Hylas* is exactly the same kind of being as the Boreads and the Nymphs. *Hylas*, the Boreads, and the Nymphs all have a double existence. They can all be either regarded as anthropomorphic beings who personify elements in nature or reduced by a rationalizing process to those elements themselves: the woods, the winds, and the water.

An intellectual exercise in etymology has become an imaginative

¹⁷ A familiar subject in epic similes since Homer, e.g., *Iliad* 12.131ff, 16.765ff.

exploitation of the implications of Hylas' identification with the woods. It is quite possible that it was the pun on *Hylas-ῥλη* that inspired Propertius in the first place to dwell upon the charm of the wooded scene for Hylas and upon the sympathetic interaction of youth and scene as others who treated the Hylas story did not.¹⁸

Learning is deployed in other ways than in connection with Hylas' name. Having decided to make his nymphs wood nymphs for the reasons discussed, Propertius proudly displays his knowledge of three different ways of referring to such creatures: Dryads, Adryads, and Hamadryads. One of the ancient etymologies of the name *Pagasae*, recorded in Strabo,¹⁹ is ἀπὸ δὲ τῆς ναυπηγίας τῆς Ἀργοῦς. In

namque ferunt olim Pagasae navalibus Argon [17]

Propertius neatly inserts between the Greek words *Pagasae* and *Argon* the Latin word that translates part of this etymology, and ties the whole together by the assonance of *a*. Where he designates the beginning and end of Hylas' journey, he uses a chiasmic repetition of sounds:

Pagasae...Argon [17]

Arganthi Pege [33].

This association of *Pagasae* and *Pege* may be an allusion to the other etymology Strabo gives for *Pagasae*: ἀπὸ τῶν πηγῶν, αἱ πολλαὶ τε καὶ δαμυλεῖς ῥέουσι. The first proper name in the passage describing the sylvan scene, *Arganthi*,²⁰ whose elements mean 'bright flower,' receives its etymology in the course of that description in the phrase *lilia candida* [37f]. In

Herculis indomito fleverat Ascanio [16]

there is both an ironic contrast and a witty allusion. The epithet *indomito* belongs grammatically with *Ascanio*, but its juxtaposition with *Herculis* intensifies the ironic contrast between the Hercules of heroic legends, who is *indomitus*, and the Hercules of this poem, weeping over frustrated love. The juxtaposition of *Herculis* and *indomito* also constitutes a witty allusion to Hercules' familiar titles, *Victor* and *invictus*, the latter of which he is in fact given in 23. The general effect

¹⁸ For some sensitive observations on Propertius' presentation of this scene and Hylas' response to it, see L. Alfonsi, *L'Elegia di Propertio* (Milan 1945) 11ff.

¹⁹ 9.5.15.

²⁰ This rare variant of the name of the mountain is itself another display of abstruse learning; see A. La Penna, *Propertio* (Firenze 1951) 141f.

of these displays of wit and learning is to illuminate the soft, rather romantic colors Propertius has used in his telling of the Hylas story with flashes of hard, intellectual brilliance.

In adapting the heroic myth to elegy, Propertius selects one part for particular emphasis: the manner of the boy's disappearance. His passage through the water is the climax of the story, as the poet presents it, and the climax of the metaphorical structure of the poem: it determines the dominant imagery, water and motion in or near water, and suggests the choice of several details and turns of phrase in the poem. The water imagery is introduced in the first couplet:

id tibi ne vacuo defluat ex animo.

One of the meanings of *defluere* is 'float down.' Vergil three times uses it of smooth, effortless motion downstream.²¹ Propertius' choice of *defluere* aptly anticipates the movement both of the Argo and of Hylas as he will shortly describe them. What seems at first to be simply a not uncommon metaphor for forgetfulness gradually takes on larger significance as the poem progresses and as the water imagery is developed.

References to water are used to set off the real Italy against the landscape of Greek legend, the former evoked by mention of its fashionable watering places [7ff], the latter by naming its rivers, lakes, and springs [16ff, 33]. Wandering through a space defined by reference to bodies of water is a recurrent motif: Gallus [7ff], Hercules (15ff, where the *error* itself is personified), the Argonauts [17ff], and Hylas [31ff]. The river Ascanius is personified to join Propertius in his warning to Gallus [4] and to listen to Hercules' grief [16]. If Gallus fails to heed him, part of his punishment will be wandering about unfamiliar lakes [14]. In the voyage of the Argonauts Propertius singles out the detail of the Argo gliding through the waves of the Hellespont [19]. The task of Hylas is

raram sepositi quaerere fontis aquam [24].

This emphasis on water is maintained in numerous particulars of the description of the scene at the spring.²²

All these references to water constitute not only a unifying thread of imagery but also look forward, with varying degrees of explicitness,

²¹ *Geor.* 3.447; *Aen.* 7.495, 8.549. Cf. Suet. Nero 27.

²² *Pege, domus umida, roscida poma, irriguo prato, formosis undis, haurire flumina, facili liquore, fontibus.*

to the watery end of Hylas. There is an especially clear instance of foreshadowing in the description of the Argo. There is a verbal parallel between the movements of the ship and of the boy:

(*sc. Argon*) *labentem...undis* [19]

(*sc. Hylan*) *prolapsum...liquore* [47].

Another resemblance between boy and ship is expressed in language which has provoked some criticism.²³ We are told of the ship:

Argon...scopulis applicuisse ratem [17, 20].

The use of the name of the ship as subject and a common noun referring to the same ship as object of the same verb is admittedly harsh. Yet it does tend to personify the ship and make it seem to perform human actions. An unusual expression is used for an unusual event. A ship, as an inanimate object, moves only by external force (winds, oars, currents). Yet as Propertius pictures it coming into land, it seems to be acting on its own. As he puts it, it brings itself to shore. This is exactly the same combination of force from without and coöperation that Propertius imputes to Hylas:

prolapsum leviter facili traxere liquore [47].

As the Argo has been described in language appropriate to a human agent, so Hylas' movements are described as if they were those of a ship. The technical nautical term for 'downstream' or 'with the current' is *secundus* with *aqua, flumen, amnis, fluvius, mare*, etc.²⁴ *Facilis liquor* would then be a poetic version of the nautical term. Hylas glides through the water as easily and as naturally as a ship moving with the current. Enk objects that in this line Propertius

*non diserte dicit Hylam a nymphis in fontem detractum esse; verbum prolapsum, adverbium leviter, vocabula denique facili liquore legentes paene in eam opinionem adducunt, ut putent Hylae accidisse, ut in aquam prolaberetur.*²⁵

Surely what Propertius is trying to convey is the idea of half-active passivity; Hylas is pulled but he is also half-willing. At the dramatic climax of the poem Propertius wishes to emphasize at the same time

²³ See, for example, La Penna, 134f and W. A. Camps, *Propertius, Elegies, Book I* (Cambridge 1961) *ad loc.*

²⁴ Lewis & Short, *s.v.1. SECUNDUS*, B.1.

²⁵ P. J. Enk, *Sex. Propertii Elegiarum Liber I (Monobiblos)* (Leiden 1946) *ad loc.*

and in as concentrated a way as possible both the power of nymphs and seductive places and the susceptibility of a boy who is as beautiful as the scenery, who is psychologically predisposed (*proposito florem praetulit officio*, 40), and whose very name is a pun on 'woods.' Another deft indication of Hylas' coöperation is the echo of *suspensis...palmis* [27] in *demissis...palmis* [43]. In the former case, the *palmae* are the Boreads' and Hylas succeeds in fighting them off; in the latter the *palmae* are the boy's own and his lowering them into the water is the immediate prelude to his rape.²⁶

The mythological frame of reference is expanded to include by implication other figures of Greek legend whose stories are significantly concerned with water. This technique of allusion to several myths, rather than the narration of a single myth at length, comes closer to the poet's general practice in his first three books. Hylas is characterized in ways that bring to mind other mythological personages. He is Narcissus in fatal contemplation of his own reflection on the surface of the water [41f]. Like the heroine of the same myth, his name becomes an echo [49f] and the whole poem, as we have seen, is a tissue of echoes of one kind or another. Unlike other versions of the Hylas myth, Propertius' Hylas plucks flowers in the shade beside water: this is exactly what Persephone was doing before her rape.²⁷ There is a further allusion to the gradual way Europa was carried out into the water.²⁸ *Athamantidos undis* [19] is more than a geographical designation. It is a reference to another story of disappearance by water, and thus a foreshadowing of Hylas' fate. So, too, *Orithyiae* [31] alludes to another rape story in which the victim is carried off by one of the elements, although in this case not by water. Such then is the range of mythological parallels lying only a short distance below the surface of Propertius' handling of the Hylas myth. The fact that these implied comparisons with other myths involve both boys and girls agrees with the attraction Hylas has for both Boreads and Nymphs and Gallus' Hylas has for both men and women.

Propertius has indeed made full use of the possibilities latent in the Hylas story, both as myth and as language. He has made the plot of the Greek myth into a mock-heroic parallel for amatory affairs in Italy and a warning to a friend, animating it with sly, affectionate

²⁶ Compare 44 (*trahens*) where Hylas is the agent and 47 (*traxere*) where he is the object.

²⁷ Cf., for example, Ovid *Meta.* 5.385ff.

²⁸ Cf., for example, Ovid *Meta.* 2.870ff.

humor directed at the friend (and perhaps at Cynthia, who may well be one of the predatory Ausonian Adryads Propertius has in mind). With a touch that is always light, he plays the game of learned allusion with his reader, ranging over the meaning of Greek names and other bits of mythological lore contained or implied in the story and fashioning associations, identifications, and connections between the disparate parts of the myth and the poem. Greek words and Latin words are played against each other in an exuberant display of sound effects unparalleled in Latin elegy. Finally, the whole poem is unified by a mature and confident handling of a sustained image. It succeeds as a poem and not just as an exercise in the rôle of things Greek in a Latin elegy.

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