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RESCUING CYNTHIA: DREAM AND COMMEMORATION IN PROPERTIUS 2.26

BARBARA L. FLASCHENRIEM

IN ROMAN LOVE ELEGY, as in other narrative modes, fictions of dreaming hold a privileged place, for they herald moments in the elegiac narrative when it reflects upon its own methods and premises as erotic fiction. Propertius' Book 2, for example, contains two poems that incorporate the motif of dreaming. In Elegy 2.29b, the poet-lover gazes at his sleeping mistress and makes mention of her dreams, while in 2.26a, the text that I will be examining here, the narrator himself is the dreamer.¹ As do other literary dreams, that of Poem 2.26a demands a response; it announces itself as significant. Indeed the dream opens at a moment of crisis, as Cynthia flounders in the waves after being shipwrecked and the poet-lover imagines ways in which she might be either saved, or commemorated if attempts at rescue fail.² Cynthia's death or loss would, of course, mark the end of the lovers' shared experience together, yet it would provide a vantage point from which the narrator could contemplate their story retrospectively and pronounce upon its meaning.³ Her rescue, on the other hand, would permit the love story to

I would like to thank the anonymous referees of *Classical Philology* for their exceptionally helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper. For citations of Book 2 of Propertius, the text is that of Fedeli 2005. Unless otherwise noted, quotations from other books of Propertius follow Fedeli 1994. Translations are based, sometimes very loosely, on Goold 1999 and Hubbard 1975, 167.

1. Other dream poems in the Propertian corpus are Elegies 1.3, 2.29b, 3.3, and 4.7. Cynthia appears as a dreamer in the first two of these poems, while 3.3 and 4.7 recount dream visions experienced by the poet-lover. Although the manuscripts do not begin a new poem at 2.26.21, the majority of Propertius' modern editors treat the first ten couplets of 2.26 (2.26.1–20) as a separate elegy. Barber 1960, Enk 1962, and Hanslik 1979 divide 2.26 into two poems (lines 1–20 and 21–58), while Camps [1967] 1985, Giardina 1977, Goold 1999, Fedeli 2005, and Viarre 2005 print 2.26 as three texts (1–20; 21–28; and 29–58). Heyworth (2007a, 223) observes that lines 1–20 form a natural unit, "rounded off by the waking from the dream and the echo in *visa* (20) of the opening *Vidi*"; cf. his recent OCT edition of Propertius (Heyworth 2007b). By contrast, Richardson (1977, 286) argues for the unity of 2.26, though he posits a two-line lacuna after line 28. For a good, concise discussion of the poem's editorial history, see Papangelis 1987, 80–81. In this paper, I follow those scholars who take 2.26.1–20 as a poem separate from 2.26.21–58, although I agree with the critics who argue that, thematically, the texts are closely related. On the unity of 2.26, see (in addition to Richardson 1977) Macleod 1976; Lefèvre 1977, 47–51; Wiggers 1980; and Williams 1980, 129–31. Cf. White 1958, 152–66, and Hendry 1990, 83–95, who propose that Prop. 2.26.1–58 and 2.27 should be read as one continuous elegy.

2. Although the *puella* addressed in this poem is not named, I refer to her here as Cynthia, since her characterization is consistent with that of Cynthia in other elegies.

3. Brooks (1984, 95) has described the "deathbed scene" in the nineteenth-century novel as embodying "a key moment of summing-up and transmission." One could extend this observation to other kinds of death scene, such as the one intimated here, in which one character contemplates what are—or what appear to be—the last moments of another.

I saw you in my dreams, my love, your boat in pieces, dragging your exhausted hands through the Ionian foam, and confessing the lies—the ones you'd told in my despite—and no longer able to lift your water-laden locks, like Helle tossed by the violet waves, whom the golden sheep carried on its soft back. How afraid I was that the sea, perhaps, would have your name, and that a sailor gliding on your waters would weep for you! What vows I made to Neptune then, what vows then to Pollux along with Castor, and what to you, Leucothoe, now a goddess! But you, lifting your fingers with effort from the sea, call my name repeatedly, about to die. Yet if by chance Glaucus had seen your eyes, you would have become a *puella* of the Ionian Sea, and the daughters of Nereus would upbraid you in their envy, radiant [or "white"] Nesaeae, sea-blue Cymothoe. But I saw a dolphin rushing to help you, the dolphin that, I believe, had carried Arion's lyre before. I was already trying to hurl myself from the peak of a cliff, when fear shattered visions such as these.

Given its context, the phrase *mea vita* ("my life") in line 1 has special weight. Although *mea vita* is a common endearment in Propertius—so common, in fact, as to be almost a cliché—the expression is restored to its literal significance here, for the dream explores the elegiac commonplace that insists that the lover's life depends upon that of the beloved. Cynthia cries out in terror and distress; her rescue would also save the poet-lover.

Yet despite the speaker's fear for his beloved, his reaction to the dream is a divided one: in the dream narrative, Propertius the lover remains curiously at odds with Propertius as the viewer of his beloved's distress. Nancy Wiggers has observed that the dream presents Cynthia in a double role. Not only is she the focus of the narrator's loving concern, but she is also the object of his aesthetic contemplation.⁶ Even on the lexical level, in fact, the *somnium* emphasizes the act of looking. Whereas Propertius regularly begins his dream narratives with a form of *videre*, 2.26a gives the verb a prominence lacking in the other dream poems, where it serves as a more neutral formula of introduction.⁷ The poem opens with the declaration "I saw" (*Vidi*, 1), and the same form of the verb reappears in the emphatic final position of line 17, at a climactic moment in the dream vision, when Cynthia's rescue seems possible.⁸ At key thematic points, then, the dream sequence calls attention to the narrator's role as eyewitness, as the viewer and interpreter of the scene that unfolds before him.

Thus, in addition to recounting the discrete events of the dream, the narrator begins almost immediately to explicate it and to create a context for it, both geographic and mythological. Hence he surmises (or knows) that Cynthia's ship has gone down in the Ionian Sea, the very sea, perhaps, over which in

6. For the way in which the speaker aestheticizes Cynthia's anguish, see Wiggers 1980, 123–24; Papanghelis 1987, 81. On the poet-lover as observer, cf. also Lefèvre 1966, 39, and Quinn 1963, 195, who notes that Propertius is first "spectator," then "actor" in the dream.

7. *Videre* is used to introduce the poet's dream encounter with Apollo and the Muses in 3.3 (*Visus eram*, 3.3.1), and his nocturnal vision of Cynthia's shade in 4.7 (*Cynthia . . . visa est*, 4.7.3). On the elevated tone of the formula *videre in somnis*, see Quinn 1963, 189, who remarks that it "has a verse pedigree extending back to Ennius."

8. Beginning the poem with the word *vidi*, as Walde (2001, 242) observes, immediately stresses "the visualizing of an event." The active voice makes the verb all the more emphatic.

her "real" life she has been contemplating a journey.⁹ He also invokes the fate of Helle, who slipped from the back of the golden sheep and suffered the death by drowning that his beloved now faces. The allusion to Helle increases the admonitory force of the dream narrative, of course, but just as importantly, it gives the poet-lover an opportunity for fantasy and aesthetic elaboration. Thus in the simile likening Cynthia to Helle, he depicts the drowning *puella* in loving and "painterly" detail, taking time to describe the hue of the waves and the texture of the golden fleece.¹⁰ As Margaret Hubbard has suggested, the dream narrative follows the compositional logic of a painting or a mosaic, presenting first those features that would be most likely to strike a viewer's eye, and saving the more peripheral elements for later.¹¹ The shipwrecked Cynthia is introduced in the first line, and the poem devotes most of its narrative space to her, much as a painting might make the drowning Helle its compositional center, giving her a prominent place in the tableau. As the dream narrative develops, it introduces figures and elements situated, at varying distances, around the struggling Cynthia: the gods of the sea, the swimming dolphin, the crags that border the scene, and—most distant of all from the drowning *puella*—her lover watching in terror from a precipice. Extending Hubbard's observations, then, one might say that in the course of explicating his dream, the narrator imposes order on it, organizing its constituent features on familiar aesthetic principles. He turns nightmare into a species of *ecphrasis*.

The speaker's depiction of his dream is thus an organized, self-conscious production, and one that betrays a considerable element of wish fulfillment. If the poet-lover should fail to bring about his beloved's rescue through his vows and prayers, he is present nonetheless to record the final chapter in their mutual story, to celebrate her beauty and describe the circumstances of her death.¹² He is ideally positioned, in short, to commemorate his *puella* in the event of her demise, as he himself suggests during the course of the dream narrative. In his opening couplet, in fact, through the phrase "Ionian foam" (*Ionio . . . rore*, 2.26a.2), the speaker delicately introduces the prospect of commemoration, an idea that he will broach more explicitly a few lines later when he compares his beloved to Helle (5–6).¹³ The Ionian Sea received its name from the heroine Io, who, persecuted by Juno, reached its shores in

9. Cf. Rothstein [1920] 1979a, 375; Enk 1962, 2: 329.

10. Wiggers 1980, 123; cf. Quinn 1963, 191; Hubbard 1975, 167.

11. Hubbard (1975, 167) compares the imagery and composition of 2.26a to a mosaic found at Naples. She also speculates (167–68) that Propertius might well have had "representations of the drowning of Helle" (167) in mind when he composed the elegy; cf. Camps [1967] 1985, 177. My analysis of the painterly features in lines 1–20 is indebted to Hubbard's sensitive treatment of the passage; see also Rothstein [1920] 1979a, 374, 375, and 377, for the influence of visual art in the poem. Rothstein ([1924] 1979b, 24, 26) and Boucher (1980, 62) suggest that the description of the Muses' grotto in Propertius 3.3, another dream poem, may likewise be indebted to visual representations. In the later elegy too, the dream is a privileged mode of fiction, linked in this case to the venerable topos of the poet's initiation into his art.

12. On Propertius' propensity to aestheticize death, see Papanghelis 1987, 81 (on 2.26a) and *passim*.

13. For Io's story, see Apollodorus (*Bibl.* 2.1.3), who tells us that the Ionian Gulf was named after Io. I am grateful to one of the referees of *CP* for alerting me to the way in which Io initiates the motif of commemoration in the poem.

the course of her maddened wanderings. Although Io did not drown in the body of water that now commemorates her, as Helle did, her name and the story of her sufferings live on, enshrined in the very topography of the Hellenic world.

Significantly, moreover, the Cynthia who precipitates the narrator's fears is not the imperious Cynthia of his erotic *querelae*. Rather, the Cynthia of 2.26a has been reduced, as Io was, to an abject state, though she has not lost her erotic charisma. The speaker lingers on his beloved's hair (*comas*, 4), made heavy now by water, on her hands and fingers (*lassas* . . . *manus*, 2; *primas* . . . *palmas*, 11), and on her eyes (13), features that are often singled out for special praise in his amatory *laudes*.¹⁴ Indeed, Cynthia's vulnerability only heightens her appeal, as it does in those poems in which the poet-lover comes upon her as she lies sleeping, immersed in dreams of her own.¹⁵ Further, and more importantly to the *amator*, she proffers a confession *in extremis*. Humbled emotionally as well as being in physical danger, Cynthia now concedes that she had deceived her lover during the course of their relationship: [*vidi te*] . . . , *quaecumque in me fueras mentita, fateri* (2.26a.3). Here the dream Cynthia, presented elsewhere as a practiced manipulator of the truth, as an able maker of fictions in her own right, abjures her former stories as untrue.

As he develops the image of a remorseful Cynthia, the narrator carefully shades his rhetoric so as to build a case for his own point of view. As Holt Parker has emphasized, the indicative *fueras*, the reading of the superior manuscripts, carries a sting lacking in the alternative reading, the subjunctive *fueris*.¹⁶ The indicative makes it clear that the clause introduced by *quaecumque* does not form part of the indirect statement dependent upon *Vidi* (2.26a.1). Rather, the clause is a "parenthetical comment by the narrator," in which he insists, through a nuance of grammar, that Cynthia's falsehoods belong to an objective reality beyond the imaginary world of the dream. Cynthia's confession may be a "vision," but her lies were "real."¹⁷ Once the source of the poet-lover's own stories of betrayal and deception, Cynthia now conforms, or appears to conform, to her lover's script: her many falsehoods yield to the truth that he purports to express.

From the outset, then, the speaker strives to control the record.¹⁸ He presents a Cynthia stripped of her autonomy, both physical and verbal, who

14. For the features that the Roman elegists praise in their beloveds, see Lilja 1965, 119–32, and Richlin 1992, 45–47. Cf. Prop. 2.1.5–14; 2.3a.9–14; 2.12.23–24; and Ov. *Am.* 1.5.19–22. On how the features of the elegiac beloved can serve to illustrate the author's poetic program, see Wyke's influential articles (1989a, 1987, 1989b), now revised as chaps. 1, 2, and 4 (respectively) in Wyke 2002.

15. See Prop. 1.3 and 2.29b.

16. Parker 1992, 92, 94.

17. Parker 1992, 94. Sharrock's general remarks (2000, 272) about the representation of character in Propertian elegy are relevant here. As she justly observes, when the poet-lover alludes to his beloved's capriciousness or falsehoods, he is "not so much exposing as *constructing* Cynthia's hypocrisy" (emphasis hers).

18. Although I agree wholeheartedly with Walde's claim (2001, 242) that the dream narrative reflects the speaker's desire to exercise control over his beloved, I am interested here in exploring the ways in which this narrative also acknowledges significant *failures* of control on the speaker's part.

depends for her survival upon the efficacy of the words that he utters to the gods.¹⁹ As he does in other poems, moreover, the speaker rewards Cynthia's fidelity to him—or to the story that he wishes to propound—with the prospect of enduring renown. Yet the offer of posthumous glory has, at least in Propertian elegy, its inevitable corollary, for the poet-lover reserves for himself the option of revoking this offer if his mistress should displease him. Near the close of Poem 2.5, for example, the speaker threatens to lampoon Cynthia, immortalizing in a single, epigrammatic line the duplicity that, he claims, accompanies her potent beauty: *Cynthia, forma potens: Cynthia, verba levis* ("Cynthia, beauty supreme, Cynthia, fickle of tongue," 2.5.28). The poet-lover goes a step further in Elegy 2.11. There, he contemplates ceasing to write about his mistress altogether, thus denying her the life in verse, the poetic epitaph, that would bring her perpetually to mind. One might say that in the dream sequence of 2.26a, the lover panics, while the poet-narrator adheres to the terms of an implicit bargain with his mistress.

As the dream progresses, the narrator imagines one way in which the promise of commemoration might be fulfilled: "How afraid I was that the sea . . . would have your name, / and that a sailor gliding on your waters would weep for you!" (2.26a.7–8). In this fantasy, Cynthia drowns, as Helle did before her, and like both Helle and Io, she gives her name to a body of water. Indeed the speaker's beloved will supplant Io as the eponymous heroine of the Ionian Sea: the sailor crossing its waters will now remember Cynthia and give her the tribute of his tears. To readers of Propertian elegy, the scene that the speaker imagines here is a familiar one, though it transfers the graveside encounter to the surprising locale of midocean.²⁰ In fact, earlier in Book 2, Propertius places himself at the center of a graveside tableau, when he refers to his own humble tomb and imagines Maecenas bringing his chariot to a stop on the road beside it and shedding tears (2.1.71–78). In the dream sequence at 2.26a.7–8, however, Cynthia occupies the place that the poet-lover holds in the preceding poem. The sailor guides his ship past the site of her watery grave; her death, and not that of the poet-*amator*, causes the passerby to weep.

But while the poet-lover imagines Cynthia's survival in a name if she should drown, he also strives to bring about her rescue, pleading frantically with the gods and powers of the sea: Neptune, Castor and Pollux, Leucothoe. In context, of course, it makes good sense for the speaker to invoke deities like the Dioscuri and Leucothoe, who have a special role in helping victims of shipwreck or of storms at sea. Yet in the imaginative world of his dream, the gods he calls upon have a resonance that goes beyond their function as powers of the ocean. Thus the allusion to Castor and Pollux develops a motif

19. As Jacobson (1984, 138–40) has emphasized, the Romans did not practice lifesaving techniques in which one person entered the water in order to save someone in distress; on the point see further Williams 1980, 131.

20. In epic poetry, by contrast, death at sea is the quintessential inglorious and unrecorded death; cf. the *locus classicus* at *Od.* 5.299–312. Propertius will repeat the topos of lamentation for a death at sea in his elegy for the shipwrecked Paetus (3.7).

broached in the expression *mea vita* of the opening line, since the two young heroes represent, in its fraternal form, the kind of deep attachment that outlasts the demise of the loved one. In their mutual story, Castor's survival beyond the grave literally depended upon his brother. After Castor had been killed, the distraught Pollux gave a portion of the immortality allotted him to his mortal twin, refusing to let death separate him from his sibling. Sailors in distress now invoke the two brothers as one, summoning them together as the Dioscuri.²¹ Just as Castor was able to participate in immortality because of his brother's love, moreover, so the poet-lover imagines Cynthia living on in the homage of those (like himself) who mourn her. The weeping sailor embodies the speaker's own grief.²²

Like Castor and Pollux, Ino too is now celebrated and summoned in prayer in her divine form as the goddess Leucothoe (2.26a.10).²³ Apollodorus tells us that, in a state of insanity, Ino's husband Athamas killed their son Learchus; the terrified Ino leapt into the sea with their other child, Melicertes (*Bibl.* 1.9.2). Again, death fails to divide the loving pair, for Ino and Melicertes are subsequently deified, winning a second life as powers of the sea.²⁴ Of the marine deities that the poet-lover invokes here, moreover, Ino-Leucothoe is the most important. In fact he calls attention rhetorically to Leucothoe's significance, establishing an aura of intimacy with her by addressing her directly: she is the only figure in the poem, besides Cynthia herself, to receive an apostrophe. More to the point, Ino's story hints at ways in which the dream narrative about Cynthia might develop. The tale of the former's torment and drowning implies one possible outcome to Cynthia's story, while her posthumous deification suggests that Cynthia might earn similar compensation for her own sufferings.²⁵ The phrase *iam dea* ("now a goddess," 10) underscores the second possibility, emphasizing the fact that Leucothoe herself was once a mortal.²⁶ Cynthia's deification will, of course, be achieved figuratively and through the medium of poetry, as Propertius hints very delicately a few lines later, when he makes the dolphin that helped the poet Arion a potential savior for Cynthia as well.²⁷

In Elegy 2.26a, then, the speaker both punishes his beloved for her alleged duplicity, and rewards her by offering her a kind of immortality in song.²⁸

21. On Castor and Pollux, see Pind. *Nem.* 10.49–90; Hom. *Od.* 11.302–304; Verg. *Aen.* 6.121–22; Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.11.2; Hyg. *Fab.* 80. At Prop. 2.26c.45–50, Neptune is also presented as a deity who is disposed to empathize with the lover's plight. *Amator* himself of Amymone, Neptune would prevent the speaker and his beloved from dying at sea, rather than show himself "cruel to so great a love" (*tanto crudelis amori*, 2.26c.45).

22. Walde 2001, 240.

23. Commentators note that Propertius has substituted "Leucothoe" for the more familiar "Leucothea," the name the goddess bears, for example, at *Od.* 5.334. For further discussion see, e.g., Rothstein [1920] 1979a, 376; Fedeli 2005, 740–41.

24. See also Ov. *Met.* 4.481–542; Hyg. *Fab.* 2.4–5.

25. On Ino-Leucothoe as a mythic analogue for Cynthia, see Quinn 1963, 193, and Wiggers 1980, 125, who also draws parallels between Ino-Leucothoe and the poet-lover.

26. Quinn 1963, 193.

27. Wiggers 1980, 124, 125.

28. Quinn (1963, 196) suggests that the *sonnium* reveals a degree of "resentment" on the poet-lover's part; cf. 189. Walde (2001, 241–42) likewise comments on the aggression latent in the dream, where the

The dream sequence enacts a fantasy of control in the poetic and the erotic spheres alike. As the dream continues, moreover, Cynthia herself seems to acknowledge the poet-lover's authority over their shared narrative: her story, at least at this juncture, appears to be summarized and contained within a single word—the cry “Propertius”—which she utters repeatedly: *saepe meum nomen . . . vocas* (12). On the verge of drowning (*iam peritura*, 12), Cynthia fills her surroundings with her lover's name, much as the poet-lover had made the deserted landscape echo “Cynthia” in the pastoral Elegy 1.18. The abrupt shift to the present tense in *vocas*, and its emphatic placement at the end of the pentameter, underscore the line's significance in the narrative of the lover's dream.

But though lines 11–12 literally describe Cynthia's final and desperate cries, they also mark a shift of emphasis within the poem as a whole. Whereas in lines 7–8 the speaker contemplates the possibility of his beloved's being immortalized, here he raises the same prospect for himself: *meum nomen* (12) echoes the phrase *tuum . . . nomen* (7) and supplants it.²⁹ Instead of being commemorated indirectly, through the name of his *puella*, the poet's own name is invoked. In other ways, too, these lines pay homage to the poet-lover rather than to his beloved. In the dream narrative, Propertius' *nomen* follows those of Cynthia's potential saviors, the Dioscuri and Leucothoe. The juxtaposition is telling: just as these marine deities have the power to aid those who are in danger of dying at sea, so the poet can rescue and preserve through his art.

Yet it is striking that, although these lines point to the poet's artistic powers, the dreamer is unable to rescue his *puella*, at least through his own unaided efforts. Indeed the dream sequence suggests the narrator's lack of control both as a lover, a human actor in the scene, and as the privileged or final interpreter of his and his beloved's mutual story.³⁰ In the dream, the commemorative impulse, the longing to fix a name or a version of a story in time, exists in tension with the desire to embrace exigency and to create new narratives as occasion demands. Cynthia's death would mark the point at which the lovers' shared story, shaped and interpreted by the poet-lover, could be relinquished to posterity, but it would also mark the irrevocable end of that story, the point beyond which it can have no further development.³¹ Imagining Cynthia's possible rescue, by contrast, as Propertius does in the remainder of the dream, allows their story to continue, but Cynthia's “living” presence makes demands of its own, for it forces the poet-lover to confront the limits

beloved's shipwreck serves as “punishment” for her “breach of trust” (242). On the male lover's resentment as a constituent feature of elegiac fiction, see, e.g. (recently), James 2003, 110, 130–31, chap. 5 and passim; for the pleasure that the *amator* takes in dominating his *puella*, see Greene 1998, esp. chap. 4 (on Ovid's *Amores*).

29. I would like to thank one of the anonymous referees of *CP* for pointing to this “shift in thought,” and to the way in which lines 9–12 juxtapose Propertius' *nomen* with those of Neptune, the Dioscuri, and Leucothoe, thus associating the poet-lover with these marine powers and “savior god[s].”

30. For the dreamer's inability to intervene personally in the scene that he sees before him, cf. Wiggers, 1980, 124–25, although her conclusions about this element of the dream differ from my own.

31. Propertius imagines a way around this impasse in another dream poem, Elegy 4.7, which brings Cynthia back, albeit only briefly, from the grave.

of his mastery over her and over the story that he is endeavoring to tell. He faces the prospect of losing her in ways other than by death, as well as the possibility that her version of their mutual story may contradict his. The narrator acknowledges the second possibility himself early in the dream, when he states that Cynthia confessed the “lies” that she had told (2.26a.3). Needless to say, the reader has no way of knowing whether Cynthia did indeed lie to her lover, as he claims, or whether, in the wish fulfillment of the dream, she merely utters the words that he longs to hear. Clearly, however, her stories have not always dovetailed with his own.

As the dream develops, then, the narrator recoils from the vision of a drowning Cynthia, yet he also tries to have it both ways: he entertains the prospect of Cynthia’s rescue while striving to maintain control. Far from dying and giving her name to the Ionian Sea, Cynthia becomes a goddess of that body of water: *Quod si forte tuos vidisset Glaucus ocellos, / esses Ionii facta puella maris* (“Yet if by chance Glaucus had seen your eyes, / you would have become a *puella* of the Ionian Sea,” 2.26a.13–14). In this fantasy, Cynthia’s eyes have the power to captivate even a god, the marine deity Glaucus, much as they had captured the poet-lover himself in the programmatic opening to the *Monobiblos*.³² Tellingly, however, it is not Glaucus who is presented here as the initial agent of Cynthia’s deification; rather, the rhetorical organization of the passage confers that role on Propertius. When the poet-lover tells Cynthia that if Glaucus had glimpsed her eyes, he would have made her a sea nymph, Cynthia’s metamorphosis is already effected in the language of the poem: in his contrary-to-fact condition, the speaker invites us to picture his beloved, now transformed into a Nereid (*puella maris*, 14). This fantasy of Cynthia’s deification thus performs two parallel gestures. In imagining Cynthia’s rescue through Glaucus, the poet-lover also imagines her loss: he will no longer have access to her as his human *puella*; she now belongs to the sea.³³ At the same time, however, he compensates for this lack of contact and control in the erotic sphere by endeavoring to reassert it in the realm of language. In a linguistic sense, the dream narrator anticipates Glaucus in making Cynthia a goddess.

Significantly, however, although moments at which his loss of control becomes apparent often cause the elegiac lover anxiety and distress, they do not necessarily eliminate the possibility of pleasure. In fact Cynthia’s power to withhold access to her bed—or, when she sees fit, to grant it—is an enabling condition of Propertian love elegy. If the poet-lover often rails against what he sees as his beloved’s indifference or duplicity, he also finds solace and gratification in his own words of complaint.³⁴ Here, in a similar fashion,

32. Fedeli 2005, 742.

33. As one of the referees of *CP* has suggested to me.

34. Frequently, in addition to consoling the poet-lover and giving him an emotional outlet, these complaints serve an instrumental purpose as well: the *amator* strives to convince his beloved to yield to him. On the latter aim of elegiac discourse, see esp. Stroh 1971 and now (from the perspective of the elegiac *puella*) James 2003. Kennedy (1993, 74) outlines the double bind in which the elegiac lover’s complaints place his beloved: “The lover, by making . . . a spectacle of his suffering, and by implying that this pain is knowingly afflicted by someone hard-hearted, is trying to impose on the beloved a self-image of hard-heartedness which she may very well wish to reject as not being ‘really’ her.” The beloved is forced either to accept—or disprove—this image of herself “in the same way, by ‘giving’ herself to the lover.”

the prospect of losing Cynthia enhances, and indeed inspires, the aesthetic pleasures of composition.³⁵ After describing his mistress' transformation into a *puella maris* (13–14), the speaker imagines how the Nereids would receive the new goddess into their circle. If she had become a sea nymph, he tells Cynthia, *tibi ob invidiam Nereides increpitaient, / candida Nesaeae, caerula Cymothoe* ("the daughters of Nereus would upbraid you in their envy, / radiant [or 'white'] Nesaeae, sea-blue Cymothoe," 15–16). The point of this compliment—that Cynthia's beauty would make the Nereids jealous—is conveyed in the hexameter line (15).³⁶ Although the ensuing pentameter reinforces this claim, it does not carry any new information essential to the narrative of the dream. Rather, in that lushly modulated line, marked by its Greek appellations, the narrator revels in the properties of language. He lingers on the envious sea nymphs; their names and epithets fill the entire pentameter, while the line itself ends with the four-syllable "Cymothoe"—a strikingly Alexandrian metrical gesture.³⁷ The alliterated *c*'s and chiming vowels of line 16 bind the two nymphs aurally, while distinct color terms individuate them—white and sea blue, the colors of the waves.³⁸ Here the narrator translates the nymphs' physical beauty into another register: that of patterned sound. Dazzling as the Nereids are, however, Cynthia is yet more lovely.

A second fantasy of rescue follows the dream of Cynthia's apotheosis, and there too the speaker indulges in the pleasures of narrative elaboration. At lines 17–18, he tells us that he saw a dolphin rushing to help Cynthia, the dolphin "that, I believe, had carried Arion's lyre before" (*qui, puto, Arioniam vexerat ante lyram*, 2.26a.18). With his interjected *puto* ("I believe"), the poet-lover indicates that he is not simply a witness to the event, but also its interpreter. This dolphin, he suggests, was the one that came to Arion's aid

35. See the related observation by Quinn (1963, 190), who remarks that the danger in which Cynthia finds herself "stimulates" the narrator's imagination. Cf. Wiggers 1980, 123, who comments on the "almost painterly pleasure" that the narrator takes in comparing Cynthia to the drowning Helle in lines 5–6.

36. This is not to imply, however, that line 16 is totally without point: the pentameter shows, among its other features, an Alexandrian delight in mythological detail. Fedeli (2005, 742) remarks that Nesaeae and Cymothoe would have particular reason to envy and resent Cynthia's beauty. As deities who themselves were loved by Glaucus (V. Fl. 2.607), they fear that, in addition to making this human *puella* a Nereid, the notoriously amorous sea god will also make Cynthia his mistress. Although the phrase *puella maris* (14) serves as an elegant periphrasis for Nereid, the noun *puella*, as Fedeli observes, still retains the erotic implications that it normally has in love elegy. On the latter point, see also Quinn 1963, 194, and Richardson 1977, 287. For Glaucus' amorousness, cf. Enk 1962, 2: 332. Furthermore, the vignette of Nesaeae and Cymothoe also redounds upon the poet-lover: Holleman (1970, 179) has suggested that the speaker reveals his own displaced jealousy in the allusion to the jealous nymphs.

37. Cairns (2006, 158) proposes that in Propertius, such "polysyllabic pentameter endings . . . reflect and signal his imitations of earlier elegists, and especially of Cornelius Gallus," although Cairns (164) does not pinpoint a Gallan parallel for Prop. 2.26a.16. What I wish to emphasize, however, is that in this line, Propertius is employing a metrical refinement that would have had specific associations for his Roman readers. For the Hellenistic qualities of line 16, see Quinn 1963, 194–95; Fedeli 2005, 743. Fedeli notes that here, Propertius combines Hellenistic craftsmanship with "una figura di suono tipicamente latina," alliteration.

38. Hubbard (1975, 167) points to the "pictorial character" of the "colour contrast[s]" at 2.26a.5–6 and at line 16. Rothstein ([1920] 1979a, 377) comments that *candida* and *caerula* denote the hue "der Welle und des Wellenschaumes." On the significance of these color terms, see also Quinn 1963, 195 n.1; Fedeli 2005, 743.

when that storied poet dove into the sea to escape the pirates who had plotted to kill him.³⁹ Here, as in the fantasy of Cynthia's metamorphosis into a Nereid, speculation evolves into a form of erotic mythmaking, an act of homage to the beloved. In associating Cynthia's dolphin with that of Arion, the speaker imagines a highly suitable rescuer for his *docta puella*.⁴⁰ Yet the wording of line 18 is tellingly expressive of how the speaker views his relationship with this *puella*, for it celebrates the dolphin that streaks toward Cynthia not, at least explicitly, as the savior of Arion, but as the rescuer of Arion's lyre. The phrase *Arioniam . . . lyram* equates Cynthia, as the object of rescue, with the poet's instrument.⁴¹ Thus even as the dream of Cynthia's rescue pays tribute to her, it subordinates her to the poet-lover: she is his means of expression, the physical entity that animates his particular form of song and gives it its unique quality. In this fantasy too, however, the prospect of Cynthia's rescue also introduces the possibility of her loss. If Cynthia is associated with the production of song, her departure on the dolphin's back raises the threat of her departure as the medium of his poetry. The dream implies that she may be conveyed beyond his reach and there become, at least potentially, the "instrument" of another.⁴²

In the final moments of his dream, then, before he is startled awake, the poet-lover struggles to hurl himself into the sea and be reunited with his beloved, there to share her fate, whether she dies or is rescued.⁴³ But despite his efforts, no lovers' reunion takes place within the time span of the dream, since the dreamer yearns and tries, but is unable, to initiate his plunge from the cliffs. Nor is there any rescue: the *somnium* comes to an abrupt end before the dolphin actually reaches Cynthia. Here, it is as if the narrator does not allow his beloved to be rescued because he does not wholly believe that such rescue is possible. Although love elegy aspires to commemorate, as do other forms of art, the conclusion of the dream betrays a marked anxiety about the commemorative powers of poetry, about its ability to rescue and preserve what time would otherwise obliterate. *Metus*—fear—shatters the dream, and provides the dream narrative with its final, resonant word.

By having terror dispel the speaker's vision, Propertius gives the dream an aura of verisimilitude. The dreamer censors the moment at which Cynthia's death—or her possible appropriation by another—appears imminent to him, when the dream impinges too closely upon his own deepest fears. In narrative terms, too, the outcome of the dream is by no means certain, for Cynthia's fate still hangs in the balance when the *somnium* abruptly ends. The dream narrative remains incomplete, never coalescing into a finished whole. Thus,

39. Herodotus (1.23–24) recounts the full story.

40. Baker 1970, 687; Macleod 1976, 134.

41. Holleman 1970, 179.

42. My thanks to one of the anonymous referees of *CP* for drawing my attention to this possibility.

43. As does Baker (1970, 684, 686–87), I see the "ideal"—or the fantasy—of the lovers' being "reunited" as one that informs the conclusion to the dream. Unlike Baker, however, I do not think that we must necessarily view the reunion suggested in this passage as a posthumous one, experienced "on the other side of death" (686). Although the poet-lover is "ready to die" with Cynthia if she drowns (Macleod 1976, 132; cf. Williams 1980, 131), the dolphin, an image and potential agent of rescue, keeps in play possibilities other than that of the lovers' mutual deaths.

just as the end of the dream suggests unease about the efficacy of poetry as a mode of commemoration, so it resists closure. Because the dream stops at a crucial juncture, before it has achieved a definitive conclusion, the story that it tells remains open and subject to further elaboration. Indeed, the wording of the dream's final line is suggestive: *discussit talia visa metus* ("fear shattered visions such as these," 20).⁴⁴ As the phrase *talia visa* indicates, the speaker does not retreat from *all* visions, but rather from certain kinds of vision, such as those initiated in the *somnium*. The phrase allows for different *visa* and for the possibility that the lovers' shared story could unfold in other ways.

In 2.26a, then, through the medium of a dream, the poet-lover confronts the limits of his control both as *amator* and as a maker of compensatory fictions. Threatened with the prospect of losing his beloved, he turns for solace to the idea of commemoration. Here too, however, control—the power of poetry to rescue something meaningful from time—is by no means assured: modes of commemoration may well fail. Furthermore, the desire to continue a narrative, or to tell it in a different way, opposes the longing to commemorate, to fix an event, a person, or a version of a story in time. It is significant that, while Propertius imagines various means of effecting Cynthia's rescue, this rescue is never completed within the time span of the dream. But though the dreamer's failures of control cause him intense unease, they also prove to be productive and a catalyst to the pleasures of narrative elaboration. At the close of the *somnium*, the poet-lover acknowledges that other, different forms of dream are possible. Although he cannot claim mastery over his *puella* and the story that they share, he can leave that story unclosed and available for development in new, perhaps unforeseen, directions. If the dreamer does not manage to rescue Cynthia, neither does he lose her.

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44. Again, my thanks to one of the referees of *CP*.

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