

NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

THREE NAUGHTY GIRLS (PROP. 2.28.9–12)

PETER E. KNOX

CYNTHIA IS SICK. Could this be punishment for an offence committed against some divinity?

*num sibi collatam doluit Venus? Illa peraeque
prae se formosis inuidiosa dea est.
an contempta tibi Iunonis templa Pelasgae?
Palladis aut oculos ausa negare bonos?*

An allusion to the myth of the Proetides was discovered in line 10 by Postgate.¹ On the other offenders commentators are silent, but, as Shackleton Bailey notes (119), "it is probable that these lines also allude to particular myths, though they may not now be identifiable." Perhaps they may. Propertius would certainly have known of a notorious case of a beautiful girl who was punished for comparing herself to Venus. According to the scholion on Theocr. 1.109, Zmyrna was inflicted with an incestuous passion for her father because of the comparison she drew between herself and the goddess: ἥτις κατὰ μῆνιν Ἀφροδίτης ἠράσθη τοῦ πατρός, ὅτι λύσασα τὰς τρίχας οὐδὲ Ἀφροδίτην ἔχειν ἔφη τοιαύτας.² The story had probably been told in a Hellenistic poem, perhaps by Parthenius,³ but, in any event, would have been well-known to Propertius' readers from Cinna's celebrated *Zmyrna*.

An insult about Athena's appearance is more surprising. Although it is widely attested that Athena's gray eyes were not considered an attractive feature, none of the references adduced by commentators tells of an insult delivered by a mortal woman.⁴ But they have overlooked the story of Meropis, which is preserved only by Antoninus Liberalis in his collection of tales of metamorphosis (no. 15). Merops lived on Kos with his three children, Byssa, Meropis, and Agron. They farmed the land and did not visit the

¹W. A. Postgate, "On Propertius II 28,11," *CR* 14 (1900) 449–450. This suggestion has since been accepted in the commentaries of Enk, Camps, and Richardson, and in D. R. Shackleton Bailey, *Propertiana* (Cambridge 1956, cited below by author's name) 118–119.

²Cf. Hyg. *Fab.* 58, where the unfavorable comparison is made by Zmyrna's mother. For further references to the μῆνις Ἀφροδίτης, see my "Cinna, the *Ciris*, and Ovid," *CP* 78 (1983) 310, n. 7.

³See W. Clausen, "Callimachus and Latin Poetry," *GRBS* 5 (1964) 190–191; T. P. Wiseman, *Cinna the Poet* (Leicester 1974) 49.

⁴Lucian *Dial. Deorum* 8, 20.1, and Hyg. *Fab.* 165 tell of criticism by other gods. Lucr. 4.1161, Cic. *N.D.* 1.83, Priap. 36.4, Ovid *Ars* 2.659 simply note the defect.

town, not even for the feasts of the gods: ἀλλ' εἰ μὲν Ἀθηνᾶ τις ἱερὰ ποιῶν καλέσειε τὰς κόρας, ἀπέλεγεν ὁ ἀδελφὸς τὴν κλήσιν· οὐ γὰρ ἀγαπᾶν ἔφη γλαυκὴν θεόν, ὅτι ταῖς αὐταῖς κόραις ὀφθαλμὸς ἐνὴν μέλας, ἐχθαίρειν δὲ παράπαν γλαῦκα τὴν ὄρνιν (Ant. Lib. 15.2). It is the brother, Agron, who insults Athena's eyes and makes the unfavorable comparison between his sisters and the goddess, but it is Meropis who will be punished for the slight. Artemis and Hermes, also offended by the children of Merops, visit Kos in disguise with Athena. Hermes then tries to persuade the two girls to attend the sacred grove of Athena and Artemis: Μεροπίς δ' ὥς ἤκουσεν, ἐξύβρισε πρὸς τὸ ὄνομα τῆς Ἀθηνᾶς, ἣ δὲ αὐτὴν ἐποίησεν ὄρνιθιον γλαῦκα (Ant. Lib. 15.4). The form of bird chosen by Athena is obviously meant to recall the earlier insult. Antoninus collected and summarized: the scholiast on this story informs us that it had been related in the *Ornithogonia* of Boio, in what manner we cannot say.⁵ This obscure work experienced something of a revival in Rome at this period in the form of an adaptation by Aemilius Macer.⁶ It was perhaps in Macer's poem that Propertius came across the story of a young woman punished for criticism of Athena's grey eyes.

These two girls would seem to consort ill with the daughters of Proetus, who insult, not Juno's appearance, but her temple, as we learn from the scholion on *Od.* 15.225 (from Pherecydes) adduced by Postgate: περιγενόμεναι εἰς τὸν τῆς θεοῦ νεῶν ἔσκωπτον αὐτὸν λέγουσαι πλουσιώτερον μᾶλλον εἶναι τὸν τοῦ πατρὸς οἶκον. The identification may be correct anyway.⁷ But one other candidate ought, perhaps, to be considered. In the pseudo-Vergilian *Ciris* Scylla's infatuation with Minos is punishment for her violation of the temple of Juno:

*cuius periura puella
olim (sed meminere diu periuria diuinae)
non ulli licitam uiolauerat inscia sedem.* (Ciris 139–141)

⁵The marginal notations in the single manuscript of Antoninus are not necessarily indications of the sources for his narrative. They indicate only that the story was found in one form or another in the work cited. See M. Papathomopoulos, *Antoninus Liberalis: Les Métamorphoses* (Paris 1968) xv–xix.

⁶Macer was a contemporary of Vergil, who, according to Jerome, died in 16 B.C. F. Leo, at "Nochmals die *Ciris* und Vergil," *Hermes* 42 (1907) 66, thought it possible to detect his influence in the *Georgics*. At *Trist.* 4.10.43–44, Ovid puts Macer at the head of his list, immediately before Propertius. There can be no certainty in the matter, but it does seem likely that Macer's *Ornithogonia* was available to him.

⁷The various attempts at emending *templa* are no improvement: *membra* Waardenburgh, *planta* Alton, and *pepla* Bonazzi are among the more interesting efforts found in W. R. Smyth, *Thesaurus Criticus ad Sexti Propertii Textum* (Leyden 1970, *Mnem. Supp.* 12) 70. Shackleton Bailey suggests (119) that Propertius hit upon the Proetides because he could not think of a myth involving an insult to Juno's appearance. If that is the case, the Proetides were an unhappy choice, for there was apparently a version of the myth in which that was in fact their offence: see Servius on Vergil *Ecl.* 6.48.

Apparently, Scylla was more interested in her ballgame than the ceremonial procession. Loosening her robe, she chased after her ball and inadvertently touched Juno's shrine. She then denied the act on oath (*Ciris* 142–157). The *periurium* also formed grounds for the punishment inflicted by Juno.⁸ These details are not attested elsewhere, but there is no reason why the wrath of Juno might not have figured in an earlier version.⁹ Parthenius, again, is a possibility.¹⁰ If Propertius had this version of the Scylla myth in mind, we have an explanation for the otherwise puzzling couplet introducing these three girls:

*hoc perdit miseras, hoc perdidit ante puellas:
quidquid iurarunt, uentus et unda rapit.* (Prop. 2.28.7–8)

Of the candidates proposed for the allusions in these lines, only Scylla's offence involved a false oath.

DEPARTMENT OF CLASSICS,
HAMILTON HALL,
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY,
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10027.

⁸This is essentially the interpretation by Housman of this difficult and corrupt passage in "Remarks on the *Ciris*," *CR* 17 (1903) 305–306 (= *Classical Papers* 587–588). See too R. O. A. M. Lyne, *Ciris: A Poem Attributed to Vergil* (Cambridge 1978) 154.

⁹Lyne attributes the entire episode to borrowing from Cinna's *Zmyrna* and Calvus' *Io* (154–155). See too S. Sudhaus, "Die *Ciris* und das römische Epyllion," *Hermes* 42 (1907) 496–501, W. Ehlers, "Die *Ciris* und ihr Original," *MH* 11 (1954) 77–78. This is almost certainly true of much of the phrasing and many details of diction, but the basic outline of the plot need not be entirely invention. Divine wrath played a role in the parallel story of Pisidice (Parth. 21), and some other details in this section of the *Ciris* seem to fit this type of story. For example, the description of Scylla, *patris miseri patriaeque inuenta sepulcrum*: cf. Euphorion, *SH* 415 2.17 (not noted by Lyne) ὡς δὴ ῥ' ἄταφος τάφος εἶο πέλουτο, of Comaetho, another parallel story.

¹⁰See Lyne (above, n. 8) 13–14. For other treatments of the myth, see A. S. Hollis, *Ovid: Metamorphoses VIII* (Oxford 1970) 32–35.