

MYTH AND FANTASY IN PROPERTIUS 1.3

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In the last twenty years, several important studies of Propertius' *Qualis Thesea* have appeared.¹ Critical interpretations have varied in emphasis; but none has recognized that there is a logical progression within the poet's catalogue of sleeping heroines.² This inner logic and the relation of the mythic comparisons to the rest of the poem can best be explained if we understand verses 9–10, which supply the dramatic setting, in their literal sense. In this paper I hope to show that

¹ The most recent studies (hereafter to be cited by author's name only) are those of Luigi Alfonsi, "Una elegia di Propertio: una forma di arte," *Studi Romani* 1 (1953) 245–53: the poet recalls an experience "che assurge a celebrazione di una fede e a casto inno ad una bellezza sconsolata: che purifica lo sguardo dell'amante e dà ai suoi gesti il calore di una pudica carezza" (253); Godo Lieberg, "L'elegia I.3 di Propertio," *Giorn. Ital. Filol.* 14 (1961) 308–26: "Propertio con l'inserimento del mito nell'elegia abbia voluto significare l'intimo anelito verso la purezza nella passione dei sensi" (324); Archibald W. Allen, "Sunt Qui Propertium Malint," in *Critical Essays on Roman Literature: Elegy and Lyric*, ed. J. P. Sullivan (London 1962) 130–34: "... the realistic character of the lover fades into the unreality of dream, while Cynthia remains in a world beyond time" (134); Leo C. Curran, "Vision and Reality in Propertius 1.3," *YCS* 19 (1966) 189–207 observes hints of "gentle fun" (201) and "faintly comical exaggeration" (207) in the poem. See especially his helpful discussion of the function served by the different levels of language in 1.3; Antonie Wlosok, "Die Dritte Cynthia-Elegie des Propertius (Prop. 1.3)," *Hermes* 95 (1967) 330–52: "So ist die Grundaussage unseres Gedichts, das tragische Verfehlen und gegenseitige Nichterreichen der Liebenden ... erst mit Hilfe des Mythos zum Ausdruck gebracht" (352). Friedrich Klingner, *Propertius Elegie Qualis Thesea* (1.3) [für Heinrich Ellermann aus Anlass seines 60 Geburtstages] (Passau 1965) compares and contrasts the poem with three others: Prop. 2.29b, Paulus Silentiarius 5.275 (*Anth. Pal.*), and Goethe, "Meine Liebste wollt ich heut beschleichen"; R. O. A. M. Lyne, "Propertius and Cynthia: Elegy 1.3," *PCPhS* n.s. 16 (1970) 60–78: Cynthia "breaks in upon the eggshell world of dreams" (61). References to standard commentaries will be made by authors' names only. I wish to thank Professors Colin N. Edmonson, William C. Grummel and Louis A. MacKay for reading this paper at various stages and for offering valuable suggestions.

² Curran 193 compares it with the Hesiodic catalogue of women.

1.3 portrays an occasion upon which the poet envisions an encounter with Cynthia while exploring reality through fantasy.

Critics and commentators invariably treat verses 9–10 as a general way of indicating that the poet gives his impressions after arriving:

ebria cum multo traherem vestigia Baccho,
et quaterent sera nocte facem pueri.

In this view, *mollem spirare quietem* (7) and *non certis nixa caput manibus* (8) refer to the actual cues which prompt his mythic comparisons.³ Although line 9 means only “when I was dragging my drunken footsteps,” Cynthia seems at first to be portrayed with such realism (in contrast to the heroines) that scholars tend to slide over the apparent imprecision of the *cum* clause by supplying “in,” “to the couch,” or some other idea to complete the desired sense. It would, of course, be pedantic to insist that Propertius should have used the pluperfect or *postquam traxi* if he meant to describe what happened *after* he arrived. But a lover’s drunken reverie is a common enough motif; and there are other elements in the poem which encourage the idea that Propertius relates the fantasies which played through his imagination *as he made his way* to Cynthia’s house.

He describes a similar phenomenon—and in much the same way—in 2.29. There, too, a *cum* clause sets the stage, again with one verb referring to his gait (*cum potus . . . vagarer*, 1) and another, to his need of slaves to help him (*nec me servorum duceret ulla manus*, 2). The poet imagines that he is arrested by a band of Cupids (*pueri*), who carry out the bidding of his mistress and upbraid him for wandering astray. The Cupids entice Propertius with exotic visions of Cynthia abed as they deliver him to her doorway by torchlight. In 2.29, in a conventionally comic situation, the reveler’s unsteady passage through the street presents the occasion for a flight of fantasy, just as it does in 1.3.

Curran and others have shown that Propertius casts himself in the corresponding male roles in his heroic visions: the poet’s thumbnail portrait of himself as a second Bacchus in 1.3.9–10 evokes thoughts of

³ Rothstein 73; Butler and Barber 158; Enk 32; Klingner 9; Alfonsi 245; Wlosok 332–33; Curran 191; Lieberg 321–22; Allen 133. For *videre* used for an imaginative vision, cf. 2.26.1, 2.29.6, 3.3.1. 4.7.3.

Catull. 64, with its description of the swaggering Iacchus, escorted by his frenzied band.⁴ The lover in a Bacchic pose is a familiar sight in the literature of revelry; we think, for example, of the ivy-crowned Alcibiades, who unmistakably portrays himself as Dionysus when he bursts in upon the symposium with his *κωμασταί*, "very drunk and making a great noise" (Pl. *Symp.* 212C7-E3).⁵ Propertius, like the typical carouser, is overcome by a seizure of hyper-imagination as he returns from a bout.

In each of the first three couplets, one adjective sums up the mood of a heroine in sleep. The emphatic position of *languida* (2) and *libera* (4), which fall at the beginning of their lines, and the climactic sense which the more intense *fessa* (5) imparts to the end of the list imply that it is not merely sleep, but varying degrees or attitudes of sleep which invite comparison with Cynthia.⁶ Each of the couplets exemplifies an attitude by focusing upon one significant moment in myth or saga. The poet's technique is so highly allusive to the world of art, that scholars have tried to determine those moments more exactly by finding models for his heroines, particularly in Roman painting.⁷ But Antonie Wlosok observes that lines 1-2 echo both the beginning and end, and thus evoke the whole of the classic version of Ariadne's lament in Catull. 64.⁸ In 1.3, Wlosok concludes, the heroine sleeps in exhaustion from her outcry before Bacchus ever arrives.

There is, however, no indication that Ariadne collapses after her lament in Catull. 64; Propertius, moreover, uses an expression which, in other writers, reflects the sense of well-being that comes with the satisfaction of desire: all three of his sleeping heroines "breathe the spirit of gentle rest" (*mollem spirare quietem*). In Catullus' Attis poem (63.37-38, 43-44) *mollis quies* is the culmination of ecstasy on the mountain top; and in Ennius (*An.* 12, fr. 363-65 [ROL]), *somnus*

⁴ See Curran 196: the attendants who light the poet's way with shaking torches (*quaterent*; cf. *quatiebant*, 64.256) correspond to the god's *thiasos* in Catull. 64; see also Lieberg 321-22; Klingner 11; Wlosok 341-42.

⁵ See Stanley Rosen's discussion of Alcibiades' entrance, in *Plato's Symposium* (New Haven 1968) 287.

⁶ Lieberg 321 observes that the finite verbs—*iacuit*, *accubuit*, *concidit*—lead to a point of climax.

⁷ See Lieberg 308-17; Wlosok 335-41; Klingner 9-11.

⁸ Wlosok 338-39.

mollissimus caps a drunken celebration of victory.⁹ The visions which open 1.3 give mythic *exempla* of the rare but enviable experience: sublime rest unalloyed by care. When Catullus describes the image of the heroine, which is woven into a bedspread in his *Peleus and Thetis*, he does observe that the coverlet pictures Ariadne only moments after she has been *fallaci . . . excita somno* (64.56). Propertius' heroine, like Catullus' before she awakens to the sight of Theseus sailing onto the horizon, has been lulled to sleep by treacherous promises of ecstasy. *Languida* in the first couplet is close in meaning to *languidulos . . . somnos*, the "blissful slumbers" of Catull. 64.331.

The first heroine, sleeping in the deluded assurance that bliss awaits her in Athens, is thus a foil for Andromeda. Both Ariadne and Andromeda make us think of danger and eventual release by the seashore. But Andromeda is already *libera*, freed from her ordeal and from the heroine's lament for which she, too, was famous in antiquity.¹⁰ Frederick Locke, moreover, has shown that *accubuit* here bears the weight of its usual connotation in Propertius, "to lie beside a mate."¹¹ In Ovid's account, at least, Andromeda's marriage and, we can infer, its consummation follow *protinus*, soon after her rescue.¹² Although it is most unlikely that Propertius expects us to imagine the bride on her nuptial couch, release and consummation are somehow "fused" (as Curran puts it) in the phrase *accubuit primo . . . somno*.¹³ The picture of Andromeda, who has been released at the hands of her lover, is set against that of Ariadne, sleeping in the false assurance that Theseus is not far away. The scenes mutually complement one another and fill out the theme of the stranded and rescued girl.

⁹ The expression, in the instances which the *ThLL* gives, describes the sleep of those who enjoy a secure pastoral existence or the carefree abundance of the golden age: see Sen. *Ep. Mor.* 90.41; Tib. 1.2.74; Verg. *G.* 2.466-71, 3.435. In Catull. 68.5-6 (*mollis somnus*) and in 80.3 (*quies mollis*) describe the satisfied lover at rest; in Ov. *Met.* 1.685, Mercury's irresistible lyre brings *molles somni*; in Lucr. 3.112-16 the body utterly at rest (*molli cum somno*) contrasts with the mind which is beset by dreams; in Sen. *Oed.* 788, the phrase means "eternal rest."

¹⁰ See E. Kuhnert in Roscher's *Lexicon* 3.2 (1902-9) 1996; fr. 114 (Nauck²) from Eur. *Andromeda*; Ennius, fr. 117-18 (*ROL*).

¹¹ In *The Explicator* 18 (February 1960) item 31.

¹² See *Met.* 4.757-64: Amor and Hymen shake the marriage torches.

¹³ Curran 197.

Taken together, they in turn serve as a foil for the Maenad. Ambiguous use of the idea "possessed by Bacchus" makes the last heroine akin to the first. But we miss the slightest trace of the motif which correlates the visions of Ariadne and Andromeda. The absence of any allusion to a male figure corresponding to Theseus or Perseus can hardly be accidental: the frenzied Edonian has whirled herself *assiduus . . . choreis* to the point of collapse (*fessa . . . concidit*); her sleep, the consequence of having delivered herself up to ecstasy, owes nothing to a man.

This apparition from the grass is nonetheless the most exuberantly sensuous of all. It exemplifies a theme which G. E. Rizzo traces from the art of the fourth century to its expression in the work of the Alexandrian "pornographi."¹⁴ There is a fresco from Pompeii with striking similarities to 1.3, the "Baccante Addormentata" from the Casa del Citarista. The artist depicts an exhausted devotee who, having dropped her tambourine and thyrsus, has fallen beside them upon a grassy spot near a stream. A male figure, which Bianca Maiuri identifies as a satyr, steals upon the unsuspecting victim.¹⁵ The painting illustrates a motif which is implicit in the third distich: in works of art the sleeping Maenad inspires both lust and caution.

If the formidable side of the Maenad's personality is suppressed in 1.3 in favor of her beauty, Propertius has gone out of his way to mislead us; in the Latin poets, *Edonis* is often used in metonymy for "Thracian" and virtually always connotes the ungovernable.¹⁶ In Georg Luck's brief comment upon 1.3, she represents Cynthia's psychic temperature: "the Maenad suggests the outbreak . . . of which she is capable."¹⁷

Hertzberg's commentary of 1845 makes an unfortunate observation which continues to color interpretation of the mythic comparisons: *non κλίμακα mutatis similibus continent, sed variis visionibus dormientis Cynthiae imaginem ab omni parte illustrant*.¹⁸ The very structure of

¹⁴ *La Pittura ellenistico-romana* (Milan 1929) 60; plates 112-14. For further discussion, see Klingner 11.

¹⁵ *Museo Nazionale di Napoli* (Novara 1957) 90.

¹⁶ See Verg. *Aen.* 12.363-69; Stat. *Theb.* 12.733-34; Val. Fl. *Argonaut.* 6.339-65; Hor. *Carm.* 2.7.25-28; Sil. *Pun.* 774-78.

¹⁷ *The Latin Love Elegy* (London 1969²) 122.

¹⁸ Hertzberg 13. The comment is cited by Lieberg 318 and Wlosok 341. Luck (above, note 17) also reflects the tradition: "None [of the comparisons] really supersedes the two others."

the list, however, does lead to a point of climax. It is cast in one of the conventional forms of the priamel, which Elroy Bundy describes as a "focusing or selecting device."¹⁹ Although the priamel occurs with almost countless variations, it typically lists a number of related *exempla* which, by analogy or contrast (or sometimes by both), heighten the idea expressed in one—usually the last—item of the series.²⁰ Quite characteristically, and most often in its elaborate forms, we can see an internal logic or organizing principle within the device; indeed, some scholars have thought that, in origin, the structure expressed a pre-syllogistic mode of reasoning.²¹

The priamel of 1.3 is embedded in a dramatic context and has its own inner rationale: the thought of the heroine who has been released from an ordeal proceeds logically enough from the first; and the final comparison in the series obviously combines elements of the other two (like Ariadne, she belongs to the realm of the god and, though in a very different sense, has been "released," like Andromeda, by sleep). But in another way the Maenad, who is quite self-sufficient in her ecstasy, is an apparent anomaly in the list. She occurs, nonetheless, at its climax and is somehow no less relevant than the others. Indeed, we can infer from the next two couplets (7–10) that she is the *most* relevant analogue to Cynthia; and when we get to the verses which follow the priamel, there is good reason to conclude that *nec minus* (5) is used in litotes (as it is elsewhere in Propertius) for "even more."²²

Although the couplets are all part of one long sentence, each heroic vision is set off from the others by *qualis* or *nec minus*. But there is no

¹⁹ "Studia Pindarica I: the Eleventh Olympian Ode," in *Univ. Cal. Publ. Class. Philol.* 18.1 (Berkeley 1962) 5.

²⁰ The standard work on the subject is W. Kröhling, *Die Priamel (Beispielreihung) als Stilmittel in der griechisch-römischen Dichtung* (Greifswald 1935). Kröhling cites 1.3.1–10 as an instance of the priamel and gives other examples in which comparisons or even similes function in priamels. See (to name only a few) *Il.* 9.379–87; *Ov. Ar. Am.* 1.57, 2.517–20; *Catull.* 68a. 53–66; *Prop.* 2.14.1–10. Alva Walter Bennett, "Sententia and Catalogue in Propertius," *Hermes* 95 (1969) 222–43 offers an excellent discussion of the device in 3.9.1–20.

²¹ See Kröhling 18. One of the best examples of logical (in this case, nearly syllogistic) progression which leads to a point of climax within a priamel occurs in the opening verses of Lucretius' second book. Cf. also *Pind. Pyth.* 1.99–100.

²² Cf. 1.15.7, and see Enk 128. Bundy (above, note 19) 18–19 shows that a figure of litotes marks a climactic point in the priamel of *Pind. Ol.* 11.7–10.

encouragement to observe a similar break in thought at the end of the fourth distich:

nec minus assiduis Edonis fessa choreis
 qualis in herboso concidit Apidano;
 talis visa mihi mollem spirare quietem
Cynthia non certis nixa caput manibus,
ebria cum multo traherem vestigia Baccho,
 et quaterent sera nocte facem pueri. (5-10)

As Locke remarks, "When we begin to read line 9 the word *ebria* at first sight would seem to relate to *Cynthia* at the beginning of the preceding verse; it is not until we reach *traherem* (first person singular) that we realize that the poet is speaking of himself and that *ebria* is neuter plural. . . ." ²³

The ambiguity is transient but the image which it evokes lingers in the reader's mind. The fact that *ebria* begins the verse in which it occurs suggests that it will be analogous in function to *languida* and *libera*, especially since Cynthia alone of the sleeping women has been given no adjective to sum up her condition. *Ebria* follows and seems at first to expand upon *non certis nixa caput manibus*. Cynthia could hardly have been the picture of profound rest while supporting her head precariously upon hands which are about to falter. *Incertus* often occurs with the sense of "in random order" or "in disarray." ²⁴ Her sleep, as she pillows her head upon outsprawled hands, is most comparable to the *θαλερός ὕπνος* (Eur. *Bacch.* 692) of a Bacchant and makes one think of the abandon (*πρὸς πέδῳ κᾶρα/εἰκῇ βαλοῦσαι*, *ibid.* 685-86) of Euripides' sleeping Maenads. Although the thought of drunkenness is wholly inappropriate to the first two heroines, there is, curiously, latent resonance of the idea even there. *Languida* is often used of someone in an intoxicated daze, and *libera* (when in a pun with *Liber*) connotes wine-inspired elation. ²⁵ The thought of a woman who is the match to himself seems never to have been far from the center of the poet's attention. It is not surprising, upon retrospect, to find a Maenad as the climactic member of the list.

²³ Locke (above, note 11).

²⁴ See Camps 49; and cf. *nixa* in 1.16.33: *alterius felici nixa lacerto*. For *non certis* with the sense of "at random" see *incertus* in Ov. *Am.* 1.11.1; Tac. *An.* 1.65.4; Sall. *Jug.* 51.1; Caes. *Gall.* 4.32.5.

²⁵ See *L & S* s.v. *languidus* (the first entry of I.A.) and s.v. *liber*, ad 3.

The special appeal which this more expansive side of Cynthia holds for the poet is again the subject of a priamel in 2.3. There the device focuses upon her one indispensable quality: it is not her fair complexion or her hair which he most values, nor even her flashing eyes and silken gowns: *quantum quod posito formose saltat Iaccho / egit ut euhantis dux Ariadna choros* (17–18). The Ariadne who leads off the revels is the counterpart of the Maenad *assiduis . . . fessa choreis*, rather than of the heroine herself in 1.3. In both poems the enraptured dancer is the mythic analogue which most fully embraces Cynthia's disposition; and in 2.3 Propertius explicates the figure by putting it in the context of Cynthia's artistic bent. The dance, as Luck observes, enlarges the whole sense of being and is thus "one of the characteristic images for poetic creation in Propertius."²⁶ In 1.3 the vision of the Bacchante, who complements the poet's own nature, casts its shadow in the verses which follow.

The basic point of comparison has been that each heroine, like Cynthia, *visa mihi mollem spirare quietem*. Two references to Cynthia's soft couch echo the key adjective. In line 12 she lies *molliter impresso . . . toro* (cf. *in molli toro*, 34), and three verses later we find a similar phrase: *leviter positam* (15).²⁷ Ariadne's sleep *desertis . . . litoribus* and Andromeda's *duris cotibus* are "soft" only in a metaphorical sense. But the Maenad's resting place *in herboso . . . Apidano* is, like Cynthia's, literally *mollis*.

An analogous expression in 1.11 makes it clear that *molliter* and *leviter* belong syntactically to the participles: the poet there imagines Cynthia *molliter in tacito litore compositam* (14). But in 1.3 Propertius skillfully creates the impression that, in each case, the adverb also

²⁶ Luck (above, note 17) 135. Propertius is himself the inspired dancer in the climactic couplet of a priamel in 3.2.16: *at Musae comites et carmina cara legenti, et defessa choris Calliopea meis*.

²⁷ Enk, *ad loc.*, repeats Butler's comment that Propertius makes his advance "by pressing the couch but lightly" (i.e., as he bends over her). Allen's "so soft a burden for her couch" (132) is much more likely. *Molliter impresso . . . toro* is probably local ablative, not ablative absolute. Cf. *noto toro* (4.8.88), *strato lecto* (3.6.11), *solito toro* (Tib. 1.1.44). *Mollis* refers to Cynthia's sleep or couch everywhere else in the poem; and *premere torum* regularly describes the act of lying on or sinking deeply into a bed. Cf. Petron. 18 (*pectore torum pressit*), Ov. Her. 12.30, Ov. Am. 3.14.32, Stat. Theb. 5.252. See also Ov. Am. 3.5.16 (*cumque sua teneram coniuge pressit humum*), Ov. Met. 5.135 "(the land) on which you lie" (*quod premis*), and Pease on *os impressa toro* (Verg. Aen. 4.659).

shades the verb. The Bacchante comes just as readily to mind when we take *molliter* with *adire* (he approaches cautiously) and *leviter* with *subiecto* . . . *temptare lacerto*: the gods incite him to take Cynthia by surprise. That the world of the heroines has never been far from his mind is evident from the fact that the thought of encounter and of Cynthia's *saevitia* elicits still another mythic comparison: Propertius can only stare at Cynthia as once Argus gazed on Io's brow (*ignotis cornibus*, 20).

Since tradition makes Argus only an unblinking guard, without suggesting that he has any erotic interest in Io which he might have to suppress, he would be as inappropriate a model for the lover who contains his passion as for the one who chooses the timid over the bold approach.²⁸ The comparison is a perfect mythic analogue for the poet's drawn-out gaze; but it is really the corollary and more arresting identification of Cynthia with the heroine that becomes a governing image in the center block of the poem.

Whether *ignotis* refers to Argus' first sight of the heroine (in what would then be a novel embellishment upon the myth) or, as happens at the beginning of Ovid's version (*Met.* 1.640-41), to the fact that she is herself unaware of her sprouting horns, sudden mention of the unknown—particularly in the emphatic word before the caesura—is striking in the context of a simile which describes an encounter with the ominously familiar. In either case, Io is provocative as a counterpart to the mistress, the very thought of whose temper hypnotizes her lover. The heroine apparently comes to his mind primarily by association with Argus; but the simile also marks a point of transition: the figure of the Maenad, who had expressed all that was familiar about Cynthia, yields for a time to an analogue which represents the mystifying and distant.

With his eyes still fixed upon Cynthia's brow, for which the heroine's *ignota cornua* serve as a focusing image, Propertius transfers the wreath of conviviality from his own forehead (*nostra de fronte*, 21) to hers: *ponebamque tuis, Cynthia, temporibus* (22). In the classic portrayal of her

²⁸ Cf. Wlosok 344: "Der Argusvergleich besagt, dass Properz Abstand von seiner egozentrischen Leidenschaft gewonnen hat"; Klingner 12; Curran 203-4: the simile both foreshadows the poet's jealousy (Argus is Juno's servant) and undercuts his earlier models by substituting a new *exemplum* which suggests a timid approach for the poet, who becomes, in effect, as remote from Cynthia as the guard was from Io.

myth, the daughter of Inachus was overtaken in the night by visions (*ὄψεις ἐννυχιοί*, Aesch. *PV* 645) which terrified her virgin soul; in a sense, then, her presence in the simile foreshadows the lover's perception of Cynthia's dream, which brings his vigil at her side to a close. The garland is a token of the long night of carousal which has ended in drunken reverie: in setting the flowered crown upon her head, Propertius anticipates the gradual shift of interest from his own thoughts and fantasies to those of the sleeping girl.

In the next verse (23), he takes his delight (*gaudebam*) by caressing her hair; but in 24, if the reader is familiar with the conventions of erotic poetry, there is a possible double entendre: *nunc furtiva cavis poma dabam manibus*, "then I gave stolen apples to cupped hands." Although *furtiva* may at first suggest Cynthia, a feminine nominative, when we get to *poma*, we see that the adjective belongs literally to the apples; finally, it spreads an adverbial aura to *dabam*. Commonplace though the apple is as a metaphor for a woman's breast,²⁹ verse 25 makes it clear that the *poma* are gifts to Cynthia and not "stolen gifts" (i.e., as her breasts) to himself: *omniaque ingrato largibar munera somno*. In verse 26, however, they are significantly *munera* "tumbling from a tilting bosom." The phrase again suggests that the thought of apples in their second sense is not far from the poet's mind. And in the next verse (27), when his (sexual) fantasies re-emerge as Cynthia's own in the vision of her dream, his attention must be focused upon her swelling breast (*raro duxti suspiria motu*). The *poma* are literally gifts to Cynthia in sleep (though not exactly "a pocketful of romantic sentimentalities").³⁰ The ambiguity, however, contributes to the overriding tone of the whole passage (21-30): the poet's gestures, which contrast with his urges in 13-16 and with the act of violence of the man in the dream, are those of a frustrated lover. A sentiment not unlike that which Paulus Silentarius expresses may well lie beneath the surface of 24-26: "for I, poor wretch! am in flames, and

²⁹ See Benjamin Oliver Foster, "Notes on the Symbolism of the Apple in Classical Antiquity," *HSCP* 10 (1899) 51-55.

³⁰ Lyne 65. Perhaps the scholarly argument about where Cynthia's hands are, and whether Propertius puts the apples into *her* hands or offers them with *his* hands misses the point. The line must be deliberately ambiguous. *Cavis . . . manibus* means literally "her empty hands" and, in a subordinate sense, "my cupped hands": *dabam* works neatly with both meanings.

instead of her breasts, alas! my ineffectual hands grasp only apples" (*Anth. Pal.* 5.290). There is little in 21-30 to encourage the interpretation that the lover is somehow purified of his passion in the encounter with his "otherworldly mistress."

In Cynthia's dream, a rival carries out the fantasies which Propertius had himself only contemplated:

ne qua tibi insolitos portarent visa timores,
neve quis invitam cogeret esse suam. (29-30)

But *quis* is so inclusively indefinite that it suggests still another possibility: the poet apparently realizes, to his alarm, that *he* might be the cause of Cynthia's terrors, which may be *insolitos* for her but which are, by implication, quite well-known to him. The Cynthia who appears in the poet's more "realistic" vision is the contradiction not only of the heroines who were the image of serenity in sleep but even of Propertius himself: his fantasies of ecstasy become her dreams of terror.

When the moon bustles by the window, with its *lumina* (by metonymy, its "eyes") about to linger, its beams open Cynthia's *compositos* . . . *ocellos* (33). She gazes in turn at Propertius (*in molli fixa toro*, 34; cf. *intentis* . . . *fixus ocellis*, 19) and reveals that he has indeed been the object of her thoughts: Cynthia has been imagining how *he* has passed the night as a shut-out lover. The epithet *languidus*, though quite appropriate for an *exclusus amator*, echoes the first couplet of the poem and mirrors the reversal of roles:

languidus exactis, ei mihi, *sideribus* (38);
cf. *languida desertis* Cnosia *litoribus* (2).

In the next breath, ironically, she launches into what is almost a cameo of the conventional heroine's lament, a literary motif which is the counterpart and which answers to the male lover's *querelae* in the paraclausithyron.³¹ Compare, as Schuster suggests, Callimachus 5.23 (*Anth. Pal.*) with 39-40:

Οὕτως ὑπνώσας, Κωνώπιον, ὥς ἐμὲ ποιεῖς
κοιμᾶσθαι ψυχροῖς τοῖσδε παρὰ προθύροις·

³¹ See Ilona Opelt, *Die Lateinischen Schimpfwörter und verwandte sprachliche Erscheinungen* (Heidelberg 1965) 33.

οὕτως ὑπνώσας, ἀδικωτάτῃ, ὡς τὸν ἐραστὴν
κοιμίζεις· ἐλέου δ' οὐδ' ὄναρ ἡντίασας. (1-4)

Propertius, as an *exclusus amator*, becomes a comic foil to the tragic heroine, whose role Cynthia seems deliberately to evoke:

o utinam talis perducas, improbe, noctes,
me miseram qualis semper habere iubes! (39-40)

In light of the reminiscences of Catullus' Ariadne and Bacchus earlier in the poem, several critics find echoes in 39-40 of the curse at the end of the heroine's lament in Catull. 64 (200-1).³² The same critics suggest that, by implication, Cynthia (as a second Ariadne) casts the poet in the corresponding role of the faithless hero: though he had imagined himself as a Bacchus or a Perseus, he is (to his shame) a Theseus, the "villain" in her eyes.³³ Indeed, she may think of Propertius as a kind of parody of the hero—a Theseus who finally came back.

R. O. A. M. Lyne, however, recognizes a wifely tone in 39-40 and notes that her weaving in line 41 "can scarcely fail to evoke a picture of a trusty ancient wife."³⁴ In the stereotyped portrayal of the chaste woman (for whom *lanifica* would have been a word of praise) she does weave but normally not with exquisite purple thread. Nor does the conventional Roman matron recline on the couch and play the Thracian lyre,³⁵ a pastime which is reserved for the talented mistress (cf. Ov. *Am.* 2.11.31-2: *fovisse torum . . . Threiciam digitis increpuisse lyram*). Cynthia's weaving may imply that she is *casta* in her own enchanting fashion; but the association of weaving and domesticity is so thoroughly grounded in myth that it is appropriate, in this context, to think of the impressive list of weaving heroines. Lyne is quite convincing when he adds that we are probably here meant to think of Penelope.³⁶ But there is also Helen, who (though no model of chastity) μέγαν ἱστὸν ὕφαινε / δίπλακα πορφυρέην (*Il.* 3.125-26) and even the enticing Circe, who plied the loom as she

³² Lieberg 322; Wlosok 348; and for Cynthia's self-portrayal as almost a second Ariadne, see Curran 205.

³³ Curran 207; Lieberg 324; Wlosok 352.

³⁴ Lyne 62.

³⁵ Sallust reminds us that excessive expertise at the lyre was no badge of chastity (*Cat.* 25).

³⁶ Lyne 62.

sang (*Od.* 10.221).³⁷ Cynthia, however, weaves for much the same reason as Ovid's Hero, who describes her hours waiting for Leander (cf. *fallebam stamine somnum*, 41):

tortaque versato ducentes stamina fuso,
feminea tardas fallimus arte moras. (*Her.* 19.37-38)

Cynthia's working *purpureo stamine* enhances her likeness to the faithful, lamenting heroines.

There is, however, a trace of that playful ambiguity in her speech which Ezra Pound finds so typical of Propertius.³⁸ The verb *perducere* means only "to bring (something) to its conclusion or goal."³⁹ Although we miss the adverb or prepositional phrase which usually supplies the end, the general sense of 39-40 seems clear enough: "O that you would go through the kind of nights which you make me spend!" But verses 43-44 admit of two slightly different shades of meaning: Cynthia laments his delays with some other girl *externo* . . . *in amore*, 44.

In the context of her heroine's lament, it is difficult not to take *externus* also in the sense which it bears in other Propertian elegies. In 2.32, when Cynthia returns from a rendezvous in Tibur, Propertius follows the example of Menelaus who forgave Helen, though the heroine had left home *externo amore*, "because of her passion for an alluring foreigner" (2.32.31).⁴⁰ The couplet (43-44) *could* imply that Cynthia had embraced visions of Propertius engaged in some exotic love affair—as indeed, in his heroic fantasies, he was, though the girl was not a stranger. Cynthia's first words (35-38) make him the comic foil to her lamenting heroine; her next seem to imply that she had imagined he was spending the hours of *her* night (37) in *externo amore*,

³⁷ For a helpful discussion of the conventional weaving scenes, see Wlosok 349, who gives other examples in addition to these.

³⁸ See Mark W. Edwards, "Intensification of Meaning in Propertius and Others," *TAPA* 92 (1961) 128, who quotes Pound in the context of his discussion of ambiguity in Propertius.

³⁹ For a brief discussion of the word, see C. J. Fordyce, *Catullus: a Commentary* (Oxford 1961) ad Catull. 109.5-6.

⁴⁰ Cf. *externo amore* in *Ov. Her.* 5.101-3, 17.95-96; *Stat. Silv.* 1.2.204. In *Prop.* 1.2 the Arcadian Hippodamia is wheeled off in the chariot (*externis rotis*, 20) of her Phrygian spouse.

i.e., playing the hero to some other girl's heroine. Cynthia's visions of Propertius, if *externus* is read with its common associations, reflect the same pattern as did her lover's of her. In Cynthia's loneliness, he was the absent counterpart to her lamenting heroine. When she sees him, he becomes the *exclusus amator*, a contrasting foil to her role as the suffering heroine as the anti-heroic epithet, *languidus* implies. In much the same way, she was first the Bacchante to his Bacchus, but at the thought of encounter, a woman of a quite antithetical nature to his own.

The *exclusus amator* is a comic figure; but the lament of the abandoned heroine is a tragic motif because her plight (unless a savior should intervene) is conventionally desperate.⁴¹ The poem comes full circle in the last couplet by bringing the sleeping heroine of the first to mind once more. In Roman painting the image of Hypnos lingers over the recumbent Ariadne as a symbol of the treacherous serenity which betrayed her.⁴² It is the god who delivers Ariadne from her ordeal in Catull. 64, in which she had been beside herself with fears of imminent death. But Cynthia, not an entirely convincing Ariadne, was released from her "ordeal" on the "pleasant wings" of Sleep. *Leviter* (43), though it more surely goes with *mecum . . . querebar*, must then also lend an ironic touch to *deserta*.

In fact, the description of her collapse is most reminiscent of the Maenad's violent fall (*fessa . . . concidit*; cf. *fessa*, 42). Cynthia accompanied her lament with the music of her Orphic (Thracian) lyre until Sopor "pushed her over" (*lapsam . . . impulit*)⁴³ and, in spite of resistance, made her fall to sleep. The Bacchante, then, is indeed the most relevant of the poet's mythic comparisons. The Edonian had given expression to her deepest nature in the dance, and Cynthia, in the indulgence of her dramatic imagination. Her lament is not a stroke of sudden inspiration upon awakening: she had passed the hours as a forsaken heroine until she fell asleep (43-46). Although editorial convention attributes the last word to Cynthia, the poet may well imply that he shares the disappointment and the tears of verse 46

⁴¹ Opelt (above, note 31).

⁴² See Wlosok 337.

⁴³ So D. R. Shackleton Bailey, *Propertiana* (Cambridge 1956) 13-14, translates the phrase.

because (in his imagination) he returns too late to play her Bacchus: *illa fuit lacrimis ultima cura meis*.⁴⁴

It would be an unusually dour reader who could not appreciate the comic ethos of 1.3; yet, the poem is not without a substratum of earnestness. In her likeness to the Bacchante, Cynthia is the ideal mate or match—the *altera*, as Ortega expresses it, which belongs to the *unus*—the unique I—of the lover.⁴⁵ But the vision of the Maenad also comprehends her volatile disposition (*experta saevitia*). In the closing scene Cynthia again hovers between the world of reality and that of the poet's ideal. Propertius embroiders upon the kind of thing that she would likely say; and ambiguity undermines much of the severity of her reproach. There is the suggestion, the possibility implicit in her words not only that she shares his heroic fantasies (Cynthia acts the part of a heroine) but that she wishes he would carry those nights which he imposes upon her, to their fitting (i.e., an heroic) conclusion (39–40).⁴⁶

As he envisioned Cynthia's dream, the adjective *credulus* (28) offered a hint that he was half-aware of being taken in by his own imagination all along.⁴⁷ When the moon passes by and Cynthia awakens in his thoughts, she reveals that such terrors were unfamiliar (*insolitos*, 29) to her indeed. The Cynthia who emerges at the close of the poem is not remote and unfathomable but (at least there is the hope) a woman of kindred nature to his own. Ambiguity often contributes to the texture of a Propertian elegy. In 1.3, which dramatizes an exercise of the lover's fancy, it expresses the tension between the realms of possibility and reality.

⁴⁴ Shackleton Bailey 14 explains that the common interpretation of *cura* as a variant for *curatio* (*θεραπεῖα*) is impossible.

⁴⁵ José Ortega y Gasset, *Man and People*, tr. Willard R. Trask (New York 1957) 103–4.

⁴⁶ *perducere* frequently means "to bring [something] to a pass or to fulfillment": cf. Nep. *Dion.* 10.5; Cic. *Inv. Rhet.* 2.56; Lucr. 2.1116–17; Quint. *Inst.* 6.2.3; Plin. 19.15.44. See also Fordyce (above, note 39).

⁴⁷ *Credulus* is regularly a word of mild self-ridicule for the lover, who is the victim of his own hopes and fears. See Sen. *Phaedr.* 634: *O spes amantum credula, o fallax Amor!* Ov. *Her.* 6.21; Hor. *Carm.* 1.5.9; Prop. 2.25.21–22.