

THE USE OF MYTH IN LATIN EPITHALAMIA FROM STATIUS TO VENANTIUS FORTUNATUS

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The article on the Latin epithalamium in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* lists seventeen extant Latin verse epithalamia. Of these, all but four are by poets of late antiquity. Included are most of the best known names of the period: Ausonius, Claudian, Paulinus of Nola, Sidonius, Dracontius, Ennodius and Venantius Fortunatus.¹ Common to many of the poems is the fusion of the world of myth—especially of Venus and her attendant divinities—with everyday reality. Where such mythical references are absent that absence itself is significant, for instance, in the poem written by Paulinus of Nola for the wedding of Julian of Eclanum and Titia (C. 25), or the so-called *Epithalamium Laurentii*, presumably also for a Christian couple (*App. Cl.* 5).² It is these mythical references in late Latin poetry, and in their first-century A.D. model, Statius' epithalamium for his patron, Stella, and bride Violentilla (*Silv.* 1.2), which will form the subject of the present paper.

Statius' poem is the first in the new tradition of verse epithalamia.³ His innovation lay precisely in the role attributed to myth, in particular to the

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¹ For the habit of composing epithalamia in late antiquity, see Augustine, *En. In Ps.* 44.3 (CCL 38; 495.9–12), "solent dici ab scholasticis carmina quaedam uxores ducentibus et nubentibus, quae vocantur epithalamia; quidquid ibi cantatur, ad honorem cantatur sponsi et sponsae"; cf. Remo Gelsomino, "L'epitalamio di Paolino di Nola per Giuliano e Titia (Carme 25)," in *Atti del Convegno, XXXI Cinquantenario della morte di S. Paolino di Nola (431–1981)*, Nola 20–21 marzo 1982 (Rome 1983) 221.

I use the following critical editions for poets discussed in the body of the text: Claudian, *Carmina*, ed. John Barrie Hall (Leipzig 1985)
Ennodius, *Opera Omnia*, ed. Wilhelm von Hartel, CSEL 6 (Vienna 1882)
Fortunatus, *Opera Poetica*, ed. Friedrich Leo, MGH. Auctores Antiquissimi 4.1 (Berlin 1881)

Paulinus of Nola, *Carmina*, ed. Wilhelm von Hartel, CSEL 30 (Vienna 1894)

Prudentius, *Carmina*, ed. Maurice P. Cunningham, CCL 126 (Turnhout 1966)

Sidonius Apollinaris, *Opera*, ed. André Loyen, 3 vols (Paris 1960–70)

Statius, *Silvae*, ed. Aldo Marastoni (Leipzig 1970).

² Gelsomino (above, note 1) 219. The bride's name is *Maria*. Mythical references are also rare in Ausonius' nuptial cento, in part, no doubt, because of its cento form. I have excluded the wedding poems of Ausonius and Luxorius from consideration in this article because of their cento or centoesque form.

³ See Zoja Pavlovskis, "Statius and the Late Latin Epithalamia," *CP* 60 (1965) 165, "Statius was...the founder of the later Latin epithalamium." There are two other important surveys of late Latin epithalamia, Camillo Morelli, "L'epitalamio

divinities traditionally attendant on marriage. We cannot know for certain that Statius was the first to extend these divinities' role—it is perhaps unlikely he was. But a comparison of the Flavian poet's use of myth with the recommendations of rhetorical treatises will demonstrate the special nature of this tradition of poetic epithalamia.

Menander Rhetor (late third/early fourth century) gives the fullest account. His teaching probably has roots in the Hellenistic period.⁴ Two uses of myth can be distinguished. The first is in the form of a comparison; such mythical comparisons may admit circumstantial narratives,⁵ for instance, of the marriage of Peleus and Thetis, but they are quite distinct from the actual historical marriage that provides the occasion for the composition, and serve only the purpose of rhetorical amplification. A second use of mythical figures is in the description of the bridal chamber itself. Here may be mentioned the actual presence of divinities associated with marriage, Aphrodite, Cupids, Graces, for instance. This is the only intermixing of divine and human sanctioned by Menander, and even this concession is not unqualified. The speaker is to state it as his belief that the Cupids are present, rather than declaring their presence straight out.⁶

The new feature in Statius' epithalamium is that he extends the intermingling of gods and humans, cautiously sanctioned by the rhetorical tradition for the description of the bridal chamber, back in time to provide mythical antecedents to the marriage ceremony and a chronological and hence narrative dimension to the role of the gods in human marriage. His poem begins at Stella's house, in the presence of Apollo with his lyre. The bride, Violentilla, makes her appearance conducted by torch-bearing Muses, including Elegg as a tenth member, and escorted by Venus as *pronuba*. The participation of gods in the marriage ceremony itself is no special innovation. It is a natural extension of rhetorical teaching, which sanctioned the gods' presence in the immediate context of the bridal chamber as embodiments of the spirit and institution of marriage. So Apollo, Dionysus and Mercury bring garlands to Stella's house, and *Amor* and the Graces scatter flowers over the pair as Stella carries his bride over the threshold. But this joyful scene arouses in the poet memories of the sufferings Stella had to endure to win his bride.⁷ With an invocation of the Muse Erato, Statius proposes to describe the cause of the bridegroom's present "unlooked-for joys" (*inopina...gaudia*, 46).

Incorporated in the poem, then, and clearly marked off by the invocation, is a narrative, set in past time, that purports to trace Stella's love from initial sufferings to happy outcome. The events are not set on earth among humans, but in heaven among the gods. The next 160 or so lines describe a sequence of events that gradually converge on the scene at Stella's house as described at the beginning of the poem. Chronologically the movement is from past to present,

nella tarda poesia latina," *SIFC* 18 (1910) 319–432, and R. Keydell, "Epithalamium," *RLAC* 5 (1961) 927–43.

⁴ Keydell (above, note 3) 930.

⁵ For the possibility of incorporating mythical narratives into an epithalamium, see Menander Rhetor 2.6 (400.11–20, 401.28–402.2 and 11–15). I quote Menander from the edition of D. A. Russell and N. G. Wilson (Oxford 1981).

⁶ πείθομαι δὲ καὶ ἔρωτας παρῆναι 2.6 (404.20; see also 2.7; 407.5–8 and 411.12–13).

⁷ Stella's poetry apparently recounted the elegiac lover's typical suffering for his beloved Asteris (i.e., Violentilla; cf. 34–36, 195–200). It is unclear whether there is anything but poetic reality to Stella's *labores*.

spatially from heaven to earth and on earth from Violentilla's mansion to the house of Stella. Cross references establish the convergence of narrative time with the dramatic time of the poem. We hear of Apollo and Dionysus setting out on the journey that will bring them to Rome, where we find them at the beginning of the poem (219–24; cf. 1–3 and 17–19). Crossroads in the city are aflame with bridal torches (231), recalling those carried by the Muses (4–5), and crowds are on hand to celebrate the wedding (230–37; cf. 47–48), for the long awaited day has come (*hic fuit ille dies*, 241; cf. *ergo dies aderat*, 24).⁸

In the narrative space thus created Statius sets an account of the love affair of Stella and Violentilla, couched not in the language of the elegiac lover, as Stella himself must have described it, but in terms of mythological fantasy. The action takes place in two locations: in the bedchamber of Venus in heaven (51–52), and in the rich mansion of Violentilla on earth (147–57). There is already a marked tendency, one that will become more noticeable in the poets of late antiquity, to dissolve narrative into static tableaux that provide the setting for rhetorically elaborated speeches (65–102, 106–40, 162–93—the first and last are technically *suasoriae*), or the opportunity for set-piece descriptions (e.g. of Violentilla's palace). In particular, each speech is preceded by a visually realized description of the scene that suggests pictorial inspiration: Venus reclines exhausted on a couch, surrounded by perching *Amores*, from the midst of whom Cupid addresses his mother (63); Cupid hangs round Venus' neck caressing her breasts with his wings while she turns her face toward him to tell him his wish is granted (103–5); and Violentilla reclines alone on a couch, as Venus urges her to abandon her opposition to Stella's love (161).

Each of these vignettes is intended to encapsulate the mood and play of emotions in the scene that follows. First we see a lethargic Venus, subjected to the gentle cajolement of Cupid and the attendant *Amores*. Then Venus is aroused to movement by her son's more immediate demonstrations of affection. Her gesture anticipates the granting of Cupid's requests—hence the juxtaposition of gesture and mental reaction in “*illa refert vultum non aspernata rogari*,” 105. Finally Violentilla is portrayed solitary on her couch—interpreted by Venus as an indication of *sopor vacuique modestia lecti*, 162—in a setting of extravagant splendor worthy of the love-goddess herself. Quintilian recognizes such encapsulating properties of visual detail in his discussion of the quality of *enargeia*, or visual immediacy. Of the two sources of immediacy he identifies, the first “in which the whole picture of the event is somehow represented in words” (8.3.63)⁹ depends on just this selection of telling detail. His example is Virgil's description of two boxers: *constitit in digitos extemplo arrectus uterque* (*Aen.* 5.426). Although Quintilian does not in this case mention the function of visual detail as an index of mental state, his example seems chosen with such considerations in mind. The boxers' posture is a clear indication of the alert intensity with which they prepare for combat.

By comparison with the space devoted to set-piece speeches and descriptions, the treatment of action and movement is much reduced. Thus Venus' descent from heaven to earth occupies merely six lines (141–46) and is treated purely as a transitional passage between speech and description. Narrative

⁸ Some of these parallels are noted by David Vessey, “Aspects of Statius' Epithalamium,” *Mnemosyne* 25 (1972) 184–85.

⁹ “Est igitur unum genus, quo tota rerum imago quodam modo verbis depingitur.” The second technique of achieving *enargeia* involves the multiplication of detail (*ex pluribus efficitur*, 8.3.66).

continuity is, however, secured at a different, psychological, level. In the vignettes we have just discussed the reader can trace Venus' mental progression from exhausted lethargy to active participation in furthering the marriage of Stella and Violentilla. Violentilla herself, first seen lying sleepily on her couch (cf. *sopor*, 162), replicates in her own person the sequence of emotions experienced by Venus.¹⁰ Indeed the whole poem suggests a close identification between the two figures, to the point that it is no great exaggeration to talk of Venus as standing for the bride.

Violentilla's home is worthy of the goddess herself (*digna deae sedes*, 147); so much so that Venus feels as though she is in her own temple when she enters it (159–60). The same point is made by verbal repetition (*nitidos... penates*, 145 : *nitidis... ab astris*, 147). Instead of describing Venus' palace, as was to become traditional in later epithalamia, Statius shifts the description to the home of her human counterpart. Venus raised Violentilla from the ground and reared her when she was born (109–10); she attended to the maiden's hair with her own hands; looking at her favorite was like looking at her own reflection (*mihi dulcis imago / prosiluit*, 112–13). Venus gave her human counterpart beauty and good looks; she gave her, in fact, herself (*tibi tale decus vultusque superbos / meque dedi*, 167–68). This last passage suggests that the identification of Venus and Violentilla is to be interpreted primarily in terms of their shared beauty, and indeed in subsequent epithalamia description of the bride as a second Venus becomes a panegyric topos. But Statius' assimilation of the two figures is more thoroughgoing than this. The reader is invited to see events in heaven as an encoded version of the courtship of Violentilla on earth.

With this in mind we should turn to the most unexpected passage in Statius' mythical narrative, its beginning (51–60). Description of Venus' dwelling, whether it was situated in heaven or on earth, was to be a commonplace in subsequent epithalamia. But there is no equivalent in later poets to the circumstantial detail included by Statius. It is early morning; Venus is lying in her bed, just recently released from the harsh embrace of Mars, her husband (*amplexu duro Getici resoluta mariti*, 53). The bed, we learn, is that on which she was caught in adultery by Vulcan (59–60). She is perhaps to be imagined as exhausted by Mars' sexual attentions.¹¹ All in all, the details amount to something less than a ringing endorsement of conjugal love, and seem strangely out of place in an epithalamium.

The problem is one I cannot entirely resolve. But the parallel between Violentilla and Venus provides a point of departure. Violentilla is not a typical bride. She was married before and her first husband, we learn, has died (138–39). Her grief mentioned in that passage may be for her former husband (*maerens*, 139), but it could equally well reflect the gloomy situation of the unwed young woman, as opposed to the *laetitia* predicated in epithalamia of the married couple. Moreover, Violentilla has been the subject of love elegy. Her affair with Stella is described by Statius as *ille solutus amor* (29).¹² Whatever her real conduct, in Stella's poetry Violentilla/Asteris may well have been

¹⁰ This parallel is noted by Vessey (above, note 8) 185.

¹¹ Though Vollmer, in his commentary (Leipzig 1898) 244, refers *fessa* (59) to Venus' general drowsiness. But line 53 may carry sexual connotations, and *fessa* is not the natural word for "half-awake."

¹² Vessey (above, note 8) 181 n. 3, is surely right that *ille solutus amor* refers to Stella's elegies—cf. the epithet *petulans* given to *Elegea* in verse 7—rather than to Stella's real amatory adventures.

represented as deceiving a *durus maritus* in the course of her affair with the poet. To that degree the insistence on Venus' past erotic intrigues and her difficulties with her husbands may have special point. Stella and Violentilla were scarcely a conventional married couple.¹³ Thematically the harshness of Mars' embrace (*amplexu duro*) finds a reflection on the mythical plane in Venus'/Cupid's cruel torturing of Stella (83–84), and on the human level in Violentilla's resolute refusal of her suitor; both are examples of comparable *duritia*.¹⁴ Venus' (Violentilla's) harsh treatment of Stella must be softened by the tender attentions of Cupid and his attendant *Amores*.¹⁵ The emotional transformation Venus undergoes in the course of the mythical narrative takes its starting point from her mood as she awakes from the embrace of her husband in her marriage chamber on the Milky Way (51–53).

Already consideration of the mythical narrative in Statius' epithalamium suggests a subtlety in the poet's attitude to the world of myth, reflecting the unconventional sophistication of the bridal couple. This impression is confirmed by consideration of the second category of mythical references recognized in rhetorical treatises, the amplifying comparison. Characteristically in Statius such comparisons are grouped in clusters. The reward Stella received for his sufferings, i.e., marriage to Violentilla, was worth enduring the Labors of Hercules, or daring the monsters of the Underworld, the Symplegades or the chariot race of Pelops (38–42). His prize outdid that won by Paris (Helen, 43–44) or Tithonus (Aurora and heaven, 44–45). Stella's pallor exceeded that of Hippomenes in his foot race for the hand of Atalanta (85–86), his passion surpassed that of Leander swimming the Hellespont (87–90). Had they seen Violentilla, Phoebeus would have quit his chase of Daphne, Dionysus would have deserted once again the unlucky Ariadne, and Jupiter would have employed his amatory tricks upon Stella's future bride (130–36). Violentilla awaiting her husband is likened to Ilia asleep on the Tiber bank before the coming of Mars, to Lavinia blushing modestly when she sees Turnus, and to Claudia who in 204 B.C. "proved her maidenhood by causing the vessel to move that brought the image of the Great Mother to Rome" (243–46).¹⁶

Not all these comparisons are unambiguously complimentary and the suspicion grows that Statius is not concerned to use myth simply as a means of elevating the love of Stella and Violentilla and amplifying the lovers' status. In the first cluster (38–45) the most obvious difficulty is presented by the comparison with Paris and Helen. While the main point perhaps is to praise Violentilla by suggesting her beauty is the equal of Helen's, the relationship between the two mythical figures is scarcely the conjugal ideal. At the same time, the choice of language hints at humorous detachment from the exemplary quality of myth: Paris is alluded to in a deprecating antonomasia as "the hot-headed shepherd" (*pastor temerarius*, 43).

¹³ Martial 6.21, also written for the wedding, suggests that the pose of promiscuity may have been maintained by Stella even after marriage.

¹⁴ Represented lexically by repetition of the adjective *durus*: *duras...noctes* (37), *iam sibi dura videri* (200); *durum permensus iter* (202; cf. 91). Cf. the remark of Cupid: *duro nec enim ex adamante creati, / sed tua turba sumus* (69–70).

¹⁵ *Tenerum...agmen Amorum* (54); *tenera...voce* (63–64); *blandus* (104; cf. *tenera matris cervice*, 103).

¹⁶ The wording is Mozley's, in his Loeb edition (London 1928) 34. In this last cluster of comparisons in particular Statius once again uses the technique of the expressive gesture or posture, i.e., the encapsulating visual detail.

Helen was, of course, taken from her husband by a lover. We have already seen reason to believe that Stella's elegies to Violentilla/Asteris may have contained a similar husband-figure as obstacle to the couple's love. That Violentilla was not an inexperienced lover is also implied by the cluster of comparisons from Roman historical legend used to describe her awaiting Stella in the bridal chamber.

...sic victa sopore doloso
 Martia fluminea posuit latus Ilia ripa;
 non talis niveos strinxit Lavinia vultus
 cum Turno spectante rubet; non Claudia talis
 respexit populos mota iam virgo carina. (242–46)

Rhea/Ilia lies in feigned sleep¹⁷ on the bank of the Tiber, awaiting Mars' embrace. The word *doloso*—in paradoxical association with *victa*—suggests a certain knowingness on her part. Statius refers to this episode earlier in the poem (191–93), as he rewrites the founding myths of Rome in erotic terms. In his version Rome is a city founded on adulterous love—of Venus for Anchises, from which union is descended the family of the Julii (188–90)—and of Mars for Ilia, an adulterous affair (*furto*, 192), but one at which Venus winked (*nec me prohibente*, 193). In the circumstances Rhea can scarcely be taken as an exemplar of maidenly modesty.

Lavinia, however, is such an exemplary figure. Statius here refers to the famous passage in *Aeneid* 12 (64–69). But it is by no means clear that Violentilla is being unambiguously likened to Lavinia. There is first of all the *non talis* to deal with. Mozley, the Loeb translator, takes the phrase to mean “not such as,” i.e., “still more.” He translates “less fair was Lavinia.” But I suspect we should entertain the possibility of other differences between the situations of Lavinia and Violentilla. Lavinia blushed at the glance of Turnus, but it was Aeneas whom she married. Like Violentilla, she had more than one suitor/husband. Is there not a suggestion here of a distinction between the young, inexperienced maiden's first modest blush, and the situation of a more experienced bride?

This reading finds support in the final example. Claudia, accused of unchastity, proves her virginity when the ship carrying the Magna Mater moves. This is the traditional story. But there are reasons, I believe, for suspecting that once again Statius has his tongue firmly in his cheek. The phrase *mota iam virgo carina* (246) is unusual. Presumably, with the traditional interpretation, it is to be translated “now [proved] a virgin by the movement of the ship.” Commentators admire the placing of the words:¹⁸ *iam virgo* artfully situated between *mota* and *carina*. But does it not rather draw attention to the incongruity of virginity being demonstrated by such naval manoeuvres? Moreover, there is no equivalent in the Latin to “proved” in my translation; *iam* qualifies *virgo*. A second interpretation is possible: that whatever Claudia really was before, with the implication that she was no virgin, the movement of the ship has now given her credit for chastity. This interpretation would also fit Violentilla's situation more closely: awaiting her husband in the bridal bed she

¹⁷ Vollmer (above, note 11) 259, ad loc, understands the *dolus* to be Mars'. It is surely more natural to take it of Ilia, especially in the light of 192–93, which presupposes an active role for Rhea/Ilia in the affair with Mars.

¹⁸ Vollmer (above, note 11) 260, ad loc.

is as it were an "honorary virgin," whatever her true sexual status.¹⁹ One last detail confirms my reading of the reference to Claudia: the contrast with Lavinia. While the latter blushes at the mere glance of Turnus (*Turno spectante*), Claudia directs her gaze straight at the people (*respexit populos*). However the latter phrase might be interpreted historically, the verbal antithesis strongly implies a similar antithesis in the moral character, and hence, in the particular context, sexual status of the two figures.

Vessey, writing of *Silvae* 1.2, has this to say about Statius' use of myth:

In the epithalamion, he utilises the myth to bring the marriage of Stella and Violentilla out of the particular moment of time into a reality that transcends time, into the world of the divine and heroic, into a world where love, constancy, marriage, beauty, are hypostatized.²⁰

Vessey's comments, it seems to me, are only half true. Certainly the use of myth, especially the mythical narrative, confers on historical reality an extra non-realistic dimension and transfers the marriage to the plane of transcendental ceremonial. This validating of ceremonial plays an important role in Statius' use of myth, not only in this poem, but in others of the *Silvae* as well.²¹ But it is equally true that myth is humanized by being brought into contact with the everyday realm. The transaction is two-way: myth confers a special validity on human events; but at least in this poem myth itself is contaminated with some of the particularity of the terrestrial world.

One aspect of this demystification of myth is the humorous treatment mythical paradigms often receive. Here Statius follows a tradition represented by Ovid in the *Ars Amatoria* and *Metamorphoses*. His creation of an erotic legend for the founding of Rome is in the spirit of Ovid's treatment of the Rape of the Sabines as an inspired recruiting measure (*Ars Amatoria* 1.131–32). At the same time his use of deprecatory antonomasia for mythical figures (Paris as *pastor temerarius*, 43, Aeneas as *ardentumque deorum / raptorem*, 188–89, Alpheus as *transfuga Pisae / amnis*, 203–4) anticipates the same technique in Juvenal.²²

Any consideration of Statius in the tradition of late Latin epithalamia inevitably emphasizes what the Flavian poet has in common with his imitators: the use of mythical narrative as an encoded and idealized version of human relations, serving to elevate both the marriage ceremony itself and the participants in it. But such treatment fails to do justice to the individual qualities of Statius' poem. Statius' use of myth reflects the sophisticated flouting of conventional morality—whether pose or reality we cannot know—that must have

¹⁹ Remo Gelsomino, "La Violentilla di Stazio (*Silvae* I, 2) ed una signora della sesta satira di Giovenale (474–507)," in *Studi di poesia latina in onore di Antonio Traglia*, 2 vols., Storia e letteratura, raccolta di studi e testi 146–47 (Rome 1979) 2.846, comments: "it seems that Violentilla...has regained her virginity." He misses the ambiguity and humor of Statius' mythical comparisons.

²⁰ Vessey (above, note 8) 183.

²¹ For Statius' blending of mythical and human elsewhere in the *Silvae*, see Hanna Szelest, "Mythologie und ihre Roll in den 'Silvae' des Statius," *Eos* 60 (1972) 315–17; for the mythical treatment of elegiac fiction in *Silvae* 1.2, see Beert C. Verstraete, "Originality and Mannerism in Statius' Use of Myth in the *Silvae*," *L'Antiquité classique* 52 (1983) 197–99.

²² For example, 1.54 (Daedalus), 3.118 (Pegasus), 10.112 (Pluto), and 257 (Ulysses).

characterized the image Stella presented to the world in his poetry. Martial, in fact, writing of this same marriage, attributes to Venus a warning that Stella avoid marital infidelity: *Tu ne quid pecces, exitiose, vide* (6.21.4). *Exitiose* presumably implies Stella's constancy as a lover is open to question.²³ Statius' epithalamium is an accurate reflection of this cultivated milieu to which the subjects of his poem belong. No better divinity could be invoked as inspiration for the poem, with its insistently non-serious tone, than the Muse *Erato iucunda* (49).²⁴

II

If Statius is the originator of the late Latin epithalamium, Claudian is its second founder. His poem for the marriage of Stilicho's daughter Maria to the fourteen-year old emperor Honorius and to a lesser extent his composition for Palladius and Celerina (*C. Min.* 25) were influenced by Statius. In turn, these two poems, along with the Statian poem, were to acquire almost canonical status for subsequent exponents of the genre. In the longer of the two works, the imperial epithalamium, Claudian had a bridal pair to celebrate very different both in status and character from the worldly Stella and Violentilla. Moreover the marriage, which took place early in the year 398, played an important role in the dynastic policy of Stilicho, Honorius' chief minister and Claudian's patron.²⁵ The marriage was not without its critics²⁶ and the circumstances called for praise of Stilicho's wisdom and statesmanship as much as or more than the traditional praise of the married couple. This is what Claudian delivers. His poem ends with an unusual wedding song (295–341), sung not by a chorus of boys and maidens or Cupids, but by soldiers; its subject is not the bride and groom, but for most of its length the father of the bride, Stilicho. This is the most obvious example of pro-Stilicho propaganda in the poem. Once again the epithalamium form shows itself flexible in adapting to the particular circumstances of composition. Propaganda elements surface continually, however, throughout the text. It will be no surprise if such considerations, and in particular the special demands of an imperial marriage, influenced Claudian's handling of myth also.

²³ Martial, in attributing to Venus the claim that since their marriage she has enforced fidelity of Mars (5–8), explicitly contradicts Statius (*Silv.* 1.2.193). For the relationships of Martial and Statius with Stella, see Peter White, "The Friends of Martial, Statius, and Pliny, and the Dispersal of Patronage," *HSCP* 79 (1975) 267–72.

²⁴ The invocation, as Vollmer notes (above, note 11), 243, ad loc, contains a witty tautology: *iucunda* is virtually a translation of *Erato*. The phrase sets the tone for the poem as a whole. It is appropriate that a poem so full of *ioci* should be under the aegis of *Erato iucunda*. Although the poem does contain its share of straightforward panegyric, especially in the speeches of Venus and of Cupid, the playful treatment of myth does much to lighten the tone.

²⁵ Fundamental for Claudian's poetry as propaganda is Alan Cameron, *Claudian: Poetry and Propaganda at the Court of Honorius* (Oxford 1970)—on the epithalamium 98–102; for the date see Udo Frings, *Claudius Claudianus, Epithalamium de nuptiis Honorii Augusti: Einleitung und Kommentar*, Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie, 70 (Meisenheim am Glan 1975) 23–28.

²⁶ Cf. *Fesc.* iii.10–11, Cameron (above, note 25) 98–99, and *Pr. Nupt.* 13–14; Morelli (above, note 3) 347.

Statius describes (209–18) how Stella impatiently awaits the day of his marriage. At the beginning of Claudian's poem the young Honorius is in a similar state of fevered anticipation,²⁷ breaking out into a lament that his future father-in-law is delaying his marriage (20–46). Two hundred and forty lines further on we return to Honorius (287–94). He is still impatient, and can scarcely wait for the sun to set. In between is situated Claudian's mythical narrative, for Honorius' lament is heard by Cupid, who carries the news of Honorius' love to Venus.

Even before considering the substance of Claudian's narrative, differences from Statius begin to emerge. In the first place Claudian's mythical scenes are not set back in time: poetic sequence and narrative sequence coincide. The poem follows a linear chronological structure. As in Statius, there is a tendency, still more marked in Claudian, to reduce narrative to independent compositional units. Descriptive passages are preferred in the first, celestial, half of the mythical narrative, and extended speeches, incorporating large elements of panegyric, in the second, terrestrial, half.²⁸ In visual description Claudian prefers the exhaustive enumeration of ecphrasis to the single encapsulating gesture or posture. The embrace of Venus and Cupid is described briefly (110 and 116) and without any suggestion of the paradigmatic. Finally Claudian's gods lack the humanizing detail of Statius' Venus, jaded after a hard night in the marital bed. Cupid's first appearance is described as follows:

Risit Amor placidaeque volat trans aequora matri
nuntius et totas iactantior explicat alas. (47–48)

We have no idea where *Amor* is located when he overhears Honorius' lament. There is no question of a fully realized dramatic situation. In their first active role in the *Nupt.*, the gods operate at a different level of reality from human participants. Two words only characterize *Amor*: *risit* and *iactantior*. Of these the first is a constant attribute of Cupid; although appropriate to the present situation it lacks any particularity.²⁹ The second, *iactantior*, is the first of three similar epithets; the others are *superbior* (98), and *ferocem* (110). Cupid's mood is explained by his conquest of a *durum magnumque...deum* (115–16), the emperor Honorius.³⁰ Characterization serves the purpose of panegyric, rather than lending greater human credibility to the figure of the young god.

Cupid touches down and enters Venus' palace in verses 97–98. The preceding passage, almost fifty lines in length, is devoted to an elaborate ecphrasis of

²⁷ Compare especially Statius, *Silv.* 1.2.217–18, "quam longa morantur / sidera! quam segnis votis Aurora mariti!" with Claudian, *Nupt.* 14–15, "incusat spes aegra moras longique videntur / stare dies segnemque rotam non flectere Phoebe." The parallel is noted by Frings (above, note 25) 117, ad loc.

²⁸ The observation of the predominance of "description and discourse" in Claudian, and the limitation of action to brief transitional passages, received an early and influential formulation in Friedrich Mehmel, *Virgil und Apollonius Rhodius: Untersuchungen über die Zeitvorstellung in der antiken epischen Erzählung* (Hamburg 1940) 105–9; see further Frings (above, note 25) 1–2, and Alessandro Fo, "La tecnica poetica e lo stile di Claudiano nell'ultimo secolo di critica," *Cultura e scuola* 68 (1978) 46–47.

²⁹ For laughter as an attribute of Cupid, see Frings (above, note 25) 130, ad loc.

³⁰ I leave aside the question of whether this description is appropriate for the young Honorius. There is a tradition going back to Gibbon that finds Claudian's treatment of Honorius in this poem incongruous in the extreme; cf. Frings (above, note 25) 59, 86 and 224, ad v. 287.

the palace, situated on Cyprus,³¹ and its surroundings. The description is of the constant appearance of Venus' palace; it lacks all specification of time, and is instead an eternally valid evocation of the realm of Venus. Geographically the palace is similarly detached. Claudian's description progresses sequentially from the encircling to the encircled; the layout is described in terms of a series of concentric rings of ever-diminishing diameter. Outermost is a steep mountain, still tenuously linked to geographical reality—it overlooks the Ionian shore (*latus Ionium*, 49) and the coast of Egypt (50–51)—but already distanced from the real world by its height (cf. *obumbrat*, 49 and *despectat*, 51) and the perpetual springtime of its climate (52–55). The movement from a real to a spiritual landscape is already well under way.

On top of the mountain is a plateau, surrounded by a circuit wall of gold, within which springtime meadows blossom continuously. The whole description is orchestrated to embody the power of Venus. Claudian chooses his words as carefully as Venus chooses the birds to be admitted to her grove. While the susceptibility of plants and trees to love is a commonplace of the rhetorical tradition,³² Claudian translates the *topos*, used either as an illustration of the universality of love's power or figuratively for the bridal couple's embrace, into a sensually realized symbolic landscape. Verbs applicable to both the human and the arboreal are carefully selected to lend credence to the picture (66–68).³³ The focal point of the grove, as often, is a spring, or in this case a pair of springs. Once again visual detail is dictated by symbolic significance, for two springs are needed to impregnate Cupid's arrows with sweet or bitter love. The whole is populated not only by the normal amatory divinities—Venus, *Amores*, Nymphs—but also by personifications of the emotional perturbations to which love is subject (78–85). There could be no clearer demonstration of the tendency in Claudian for descriptive detail to be dictated by the allegorical meaning such details convey. In the case of Venus' mountaintop walled grove the whole landscape embodies *Luxuria* and *Venus*, as Claudian himself tells us (*luxuriae Venerique vacat*, 54). Luxuriance of vegetation and moral luxuriousness are homologous in the worlds of nature and man.

Claudian emphasizes self-containment and self-sufficiency throughout his description of the grove and palace. The mountaintop on which the grove is situated is set off by its height from its surroundings, and the grove itself is "defended" (*defendit*, 57) by a wall of shining gold. The walls of Venus' palace reflect the light and the green of the forest by which they are surrounded (85–86).³⁴ There is no entry into the building even for the sun's rays. *Luxuria* is once again embodied in descriptive detail: in this case, in the richly jeweled architecture of Venus' palace and the expensive spices growing in a courtyard within its confines. The whole movement of Claudian's description, moving from periphery to center, is contrived to increase the reader's sense of Venus' majesty. The progression is reminiscent of the organization of imperial palaces, or Christian basilicas, which, though axially rather than concentrically

³¹ Whether western or southern is unclear; see Frings (above, note 25) 131–32, ad v. 49.

³² Menander Rhetor 2.6 (402.7–10 and 404.6–8).

³³ *Nutant, suspirat, adsibilat*, as well as the adjective *felix*, are appropriate to both vegetation and human loves; *amat* and *ad mutua.../foedera* apply predominately to human love.

³⁴ *Procul* I take to mean that rays of light are reflected far from the building, not that the palace is situated far from the grove or its springs.

organized, employ every device of architecture and decoration to direct movement and attention to the ceremonial reception room of the emperor or the apsed holy of holies of the basilica.³⁵ The comparison with the latter suggests that Claudian may intend the jeweled construction of Venus' palace to be visible only in the interior of the building, just as the relatively plain exteriors of Christian basilicas gave little hint of the splendors within.

The focus of Claudian's description is Venus herself, sitting on her glittering throne, in the company of her attendant Graces. I say in the company of, but Claudian's description is more precise: one is to her right, one is to her left, one behind her (100, 103). There is nothing casual about the arrangement. The three Graces form a niche, in which Venus is set, raised on her throne, as if in the apse of an imperial palace or Christian basilica. This sense of the hierarchical significance of the arrangement of human figures is very marked in late antiquity. We need think only of the relationship between the Emperor Theodosius, subordinate Augusti, and troops on the Misorium of Theodosius in Madrid (figure 1), or of the later sixth-century representation of the corteges of Justinian and Theodosia in the nave of S. Vitale in Ravenna (figure 2).³⁶ Venus retains qualities appropriate to the goddess of love. She is, after all, engaged in arranging her hair when Cupid arrives, and prefers a coiffure of studied negligence. But it is the hieratic content of the description which predominates. Claudian's Venus is an impressive and powerful figure, not subject to the human susceptibilities of her Statian counterpart.

Venus' self-absorption is broken by the sight of Cupid. She presumably sees her son in the reflecting surfaces with which she is surrounded.³⁷ With this the mood changes, from static tableau to motion, from spatial to predominantly temporal organization of the narrative. We even have a brief disruption of chronological continuity in the account of Triton's courtship of the reluctant Cymothoe: the imperfect tenses, *ibat* and *petebat*, in verses 136 and 137 suggest that the sea-god's pursuit of Cymothoe has been going on for some time, predating Venus' command that Triton be found. The episode, in fact, has something of the playful nature of Statius' handling of myth; Claudian makes

³⁵ Cf. H.P. L'Orange, *Art Forms and Civic Life in the Late Roman Empire* (Princeton 1965) 70–85, and Ramsey MacMullen, "Some Pictures in Ammianus Marcellinus," *ABull* 46 (1964) 435–36 and 452–54. The rhetorical techniques of the ecphrasis are also influential here; it was recommended that landscapes be described from the outside working inwards; cf. Aphthonius, *Progymnasmata* 12 (37.13–14 Rabe) and, for an example, Libanius, *Progymnasmata* 12.9.2–5 (485.10–486.13 Foerster)—a garden with a spring at the center.

³⁶ Theodosius and his imperial colleagues are seated under a three-bay, columned gable, on thrones which vary in height according to their status. Figures are set off by columns from each other, and by size—once again in proportion to their status. In the mosaics from Ravenna attendants flank the imperial couple in a niche-like manner, though there is some ambiguity in the relative prominence of the figures, especially in the case of the Justinian mosaic. For description, see Kurt Weitzmann (ed.), *Age of Spirituality: Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century* (New York 1979) 74–78.

³⁷ The word *umbra* (109) can mean "reflection" as well as "shadow" (*OLD* 2088 s.v.). Since 107 (*similis tecto monstratur in omni*) seems to imply she is surrounded by reflecting surfaces, I should prefer this translation. It is tempting, however, to interpret 107 also in a figurative sense. The whole building—and indeed we might say the whole grove—is an image of Venus in that it symbolizes her power. In that case the phrase, coming at the end of Claudian's ecphrasis, would balance *luxuriae Venerique vacat* at the beginning (54).

particular capital of Triton's monstrous appearance (144–47).³⁸ This narrative, twice removed as it is from the reality of Honorius' court, apparently could accommodate a certain lightness without detracting from the high dignity of imperial marriage.

Despite the overall lightening of tone, Venus herself is little affected by the bustling activity around her. She ties up her hair, and gathers up her dress with a girdle—*itself the instrument of her power over the elements* (125–26)—but otherwise retains her statuesque dignity. Poor Triton is petrified into a posed quasi-architectural setting to carry the goddess over the sea with appropriate majesty: *umbratura deam retro sinuatur in arcum*, 149; cf. *hoc navigat antro / fulta Venus*, 151–52.³⁹ The sea god's metamorphosis persists until he brings Venus safely to land where, no doubt thankfully, he “stretches his weary coils” (*lassosque fretis extenderat orbes*, 181). Venus progresses over the sea accompanied, like a powerful state official, by an extensive train of attendants, in her case of *Amores* (*prosequitur...late comitatus Amorum*, 153) and Nereids (171–72). They alone, along with other attendant sea-divinities, are permitted some animation on the journey (154–58), although the Nereids imitate their mistress in riding on sea monsters, albeit of more humble status than Triton (159–64). The whole is designed to communicate differences of degree between Venus and her attendants. A similar distinction is given a genealogical foundation earlier in the poem, when Cupid is said to be the son of Venus, but the other *Amores* to be children of the nymphs (73–75).

The second leg of Venus' journey is by air—we remember she travelled by air in Statius—and is briefly told (182–84). From this point on it is Venus' role to communicate to earth the joyful abundance that characterizes her dwelling on Cyprus. The key word is *laetitia*. On her arrival the soldiers feel a thrill of joy, though they do not know its cause: “*laetitiae causas ignorat dicere miles / laetaturque tamen*” (186–87). Like a fairy godmother with her magic wand, Venus transforms everything with which she comes into contact by her presence, actions and instructions. The joy she engenders is immoderate and unrestrained: “*solvantur habenis / gaudia nec leges pudeat ridere severas*” (200–201); in other words, *luxuria*, for which the sense of “extravagantly joyful conduct” is well documented in late Latin.⁴⁰

Venus' effect on nature has already been established in the description of her grove on Cyprus (52–55, 60–61, 65–68). Her girdle, with its gentle power (*blando spirantem numine*, 124), has the ability to still the violence of water, wave and weather. As she travels, the sea is peaceful beneath her (154); when she is at Milan the air is clear, and the clouds round the Alps disperse (184–85). Such miracles of nature prepare the way for the animation of inanimate objects that follows: the soldiers' standards blossom with flowers, and their spears sprout leaves (187–88). Expressed in mythical terms, Mars is banished from the realm of Venus (190–91). In the economy of the poem, the miracle

³⁸ Compare Statius' description of the centaur Chiron's first sight of Thetis approaching Thessaly (*Silv.* 1.2.216–7), especially the phrase *erecto...equo*. I find it difficult to resist the impression that this phrase contains a sexual double-entendre; *erigo* is used regularly of arousal of the passions, if not specifically with a sexual connotation. It is also, however, the *vox propria* for a rearing horse.

³⁹ *Arcus* and *antrum* also occur in close proximity in the preface to the epithalamium (1 and 10), of the bridal chamber of Peleus and Thetis (cf. *C. Min.* 25.2). Claudian's usage is inspired by Statius, *Ach.* 1.107.

⁴⁰ *ThLL.* 7.1925.37–70.

symbolizes the transformation of the soldiers from men-at-arms to attendants of Venus, who will sing the bridal hymn at the end of the poem while showering their general, Stilicho, with a rain of flowers (296–98).

It is characteristic of the mentality of late antiquity that a message of general application—in this case the role of Venus as embodiment of *laetitia* and *luxuria*—should be realized consecutively in a variety of semantic codes: the natural, the architectural, the mythical, for instance. At a certain level of generality, many of the descriptions and speeches in the epithalamium communicate the same message. In the case of Venus' activities after she reaches Milan, both her instructions for decking the bridal chamber (213–17) and her adorning of the bride (282–85; the finery itself has been detailed earlier, 165–71) index the *luxuria* appropriate to marriage, especially imperial marriage. In the role assigned to divinities in this section of the epithalamium Claudian is consistent with rhetorical tradition,⁴¹ though the narrative elaboration is poetic, and specifically Statian, in inspiration.

The other category of mythical reference noted in Statius and recommended by rhetorical precepts plays a very limited role in Claudian in the epithalamium proper.⁴² Comparisons between the human participants in the marriage and mythical figures are few and limited in scope. Honorius is like Achilles in love with Deidamia (16–19; in the *Preface* he is implicitly likened to Peleus); Cupid's joy at wounding the emperor makes Venus think he has subdued a Jupiter, *Sol* or *Luna* (112–15). Maria's bridal finery exceeds that of Thetis or Amphitrite (174–76), in beauty her fingers are like Aurora's, her shoulders like Diana's, she deserves *katasterismos* like Ariadne (270–73). The marriage chamber's rich adornments exceed what the wealthy Pelops or Dionysus with his Indian spoils could construct (215–17). Maria taking lessons from her mother is like Diana receiving instruction from Latona or Thalia from Mnemosyne (236–37). All comparisons are unambiguously panegyric. Claudian is careful to exclude detail not relevant to the main point of the comparison,⁴³ and thereby to restrict the opportunity for demeaning speculation. He takes care to maintain a tone appropriate to the high dignity of the bridal pair. In the majority of these cases mythical comparison is followed by a reference to the contemporary Roman world: to the extent of the Roman Empire (277–81) or to Stilicho's conquests (177–79, 218–27). According to Claudian's panegyric perspective, the reality of Stilicho's Rome outdoes the world of myth. Maria's beauty excels the charms of goddesses. But the greatest possible praise is that she excels even her mother (271).

Despite its Statian inspiration, Claudian's epithalamium is very much a product of its time in its tendency to allegory, personification, and the assimilation of Venus to the abstract qualities she embodies. Like Statius' poem, however, Claudian's composition is adjusted to the status (personality) of the bridal pair he is to celebrate—hence the hieratic quality of his treatment

⁴¹ Menander Rhetor, in his instructions for the λόγος κατευναστικός (2.7; 407.5–6), mentions that the Graces may be said to have adorned the marriage chamber and (407.7–8) Aphrodite to have brought the bride to the groom.

⁴² As opposed to the first Fescennine verses and the preface to the epithalamium. But the use of the myths in those texts does not contradict the impressions gained from the epithalamium proper.

⁴³ The one possible exception is verse 113, where Cupid is said to have made Jupiter "low among the Sidonian heifers." For reservations about the treatment of Honorius in this poem, see above, note 30.

of Venus—while the prominence of Stilicho marks an adaptation of the genre epithalamium to the purposes of political propaganda. Dracontius' *Romulea* 7, written for the marriage of Joannes and Vitula in the last decade of the fifth century, is another example of the flexibility of the genre and its use for purposes other than pure celebration. Dracontius' poem becomes a plea for the families of the bridal couple to secure his release from prison, where he has been consigned by the Vandal king Gunthamund.

In the case of Claudian, a second epithalamium (*C. Min.* 25), written for the marriage of a fellow tribune and notary, Palladius, and his bride, Celerina, allows us a further perspective on the influence status had on the composition of such works. While it is true that Claudian acknowledges in his Preface the superior rank of the bride's father, this remains a private work lacking the high political overtones of the epithalamium for Honorius and Maria. Although written hurriedly (*pr.* 1)—the implication is that the composition is what we would call occasional poetry—it is a professional job, with a central dialogue between Venus and Hymenaeus (44–99) devoted largely to paucyric of the families of bride and groom.⁴⁴ Already at the beginning of the poem with the description of Venus' bower it is clear that we are in a different world from Claudian's imperial epithalamium. Venus, it is true, is reclining in an arched setting (*antrum*, 2; cf. *Nupt.* 151), but the emphasis is not on hieratic formality but on studied negligence, an aspect of the goddess that surfaces only briefly in the longer composition in the treatment of her hair (*Nupt.* 105–6). Certainly there is no trace of the almost geometric regularity of the imperial poem in the relaxed informality of Venus here. The Graces are present close by, but resting together under an oak (8–9), not posed round the figure of Venus. Venus' own soporific state recalls Statius, but Claudian makes no attempt to locate the scene temporally or spatially. Instead it communicates a permanent quality of Venus, a mood of sensuality barely suppressed⁴⁵—even the grapes perspire in the heat (5)—which attracts the lascivious gaze of rustic voyeurs, the gods of country and forest (17–20). No doubt the reader is meant to share something of the country divinities' reaction.

Similarly, in his description of Venus' aerial cortege, Claudian is less concerned to communicate the hierarchical relationship between its constituents, despite the obvious subordination of swans and *Amores* to Venus. Instead the latter show off before their goddess in boisterous rough and tumble (111–15). Their joy (*laetantur*, 110) is communicated in lively activity reminiscent of the putti of Roman wall-paintings.

Once more Venus' arrival brings to earth something of her world—the world of sensuous beauty and joyful fertility. The flowers which the *Amores* shower from baskets and from quivers over the bridal chamber were picked “in the meadow of Venus” (*collectas Veneris prato*, 119). The goddess joins the hands of the couple in the *dextrarum iunctio* and pronounces the *allocutio sponsalis*. The last scene of the poem confirms in the visual language of myth the injunction of Venus to the couple to live in *concordia*. Both bride and groom are shot with arrows dipped in pure honey. Formally the scene falls somewhere between the encapsulating visual detail of Statius and the fully developed ecphrastic description of the imperial epithalamium. The effect is of slow

⁴⁴ Cf. Cameron (above, note 25) 341, who speaks of Claudian's “research on the pedigree of bride and groom—a necessary part of his trade.”

⁴⁵ The word *aestus* (7) encapsulates both aspects of the scene: it can mean both heat and passion.

motion: the two *Amores* take aim; they draw back their bows which reverberate as they are fired; the arrows drive through the air and find their mark (143–45). The minute detail of these lines slows the narrative and also gives special emphasis to the poem's concluding scene, in which the ideal of conjugal harmony finds expression in the imagery of myth.

A final peculiarity of the epithalamium for Palladius and Celerina is the character and role of Hymenaeus. Where, on the analogy of other epithalamia, we expect Cupid to announce the future husband's love and to initiate Venus' journey to earth, we encounter instead Hymenaeus.⁴⁶ He is a Hymenaeus, moreover, with unusual properties. He is a son of a Muse—Catullus (61.2) had called him son of Urania—and is found reclining under a plane tree playing on the pipes of Pan (34–38). The association with pastoral is surprising (cf. also 47–49), though a pastoral note has already been struck at the beginning of the poem with figures sheltering in the shade from the heat, a scene that has affinities with the setting of some of Virgil's *Eclogues* (1 and 7), however different the mood. Fauns and rustic deities, we are told, are excluded from Venus' grove (17–20), but Hymenaeus apparently can move between the two worlds. The detail concerning Hymenaeus is unusually specific and apparently original to Claudian; it is also insisted on at some length. I wonder whether there is not a reference here to one of the participants in the marriage. Cameron has noted that a line in the Preface (5) can be taken to mean that Palladius shared Claudian's literary interests.⁴⁷ Might he have been a writer of pastoral verse? In that case Venus' exhortation to him to abandon his exclusive devotion to pastoral poetry for an interest in matters amatory would take on special point. If I am right, it is interesting that mythopoeia is stimulated by the desire to compliment a patron. In this way individualizing detail is reintroduced into the sometimes rather silhouette-like figures of Claudian's gods.

III

So far no account has been taken of the influence of Christianity on the Latin epithalamia, although, as Cameron notes,⁴⁸ all the principals in Claudian's imperial epithalamium, bride, groom and parents on both sides, were Christian. Under the circumstances the predominance of mythical imagery may seem surprising.⁴⁹ But, in fact, mythology, especially in a stylized context like the epithalamium, had long been deprived of all substantial pagan belief. The process of secularization is already complete in Statius. It was this detachment of artistic representations of the pagan gods from any system of religious belief that furnished, at least among the cultural elite, the conditions for the reappropriation of mythical schemata as an encoded model of human

⁴⁶ For Hymenaeus in this poem, see Morelli (above, note 3) 369–71. That Venus institutes a search for him would suggest an analogy with Triton in the earlier poem, but if so the similarities are purely formal and local in scope.

⁴⁷ Cameron (above, note 25) 401, though the words (*hunc mihi coniungit studiis communibus aetas*) are capable of another interpretation.

⁴⁸ Cameron (above, note 25) 194.

⁴⁹ Recently a case has been made for the influence of the biblical story of the Annunciation, in the version of the New Testament poet Juvenecus, on Venus' visit to Maria (*Nupt.* 228–57): Alessandro Fo, "La visita di Venere a Maria nell' Epithalamium de nuptiis Honorii Augusti di Claudiano," *Orpheus*, n.s. 2 (1981) 157–69. The reference is possible, at least to the general story of the Annunciation, though by no means obtrusive.

relations. Although rigorous Christians might object to any use of mythical imagery, for many more flexible members of the educated classes such images must have seemed religiously neutral and aesthetically attractive. With the closing of the temples and interdiction of cult practice by Theodosius even official attitudes changed: from the abolition of paganism to the preservation of its edifices and fittings, now cleansed of direct association with religious cult. Thus, in the year after Claudian's epithalamium, an imperial constitution was issued under the name of Honorius and his fellow Augustus to the vicariates of Spain and the Five Provinces of Gaul, ordaining the preservation of "ornaments of public works" (*publicorum operum ornamenta*), i.e., of temples and other structures of pagan association.⁵⁰ A text of the Christian poet Prudentius (*C. Symm.* 1.501–5) provides a commentary on the imperial legislation.⁵¹

Marmora tabenti respergine tincta lavate,
o proceres. Liceat statuas consistere puras,
artificum magnorum opera. Hae pulcherrima nostrae
ornamenta fiant patriae nec decolor usus
in vitium versae monumenta coinquinet artis.

The point emphasized is that the cleansing of pagan artefacts of their offensive religious connotations by the abolition of cult practice permits their reappropriation as works of art.⁵² The aesthetic perception of the pagan gods—long achieved in practice by the educated classes—and the disassociation of those gods from religious belief now achieve definitive form through imperial legislation. For Prudentius pagan religious artefacts represent the artistic legacy of the Roman world (*artificum magnorum opera*; *nostrae ornamenta patriae*; *monumenta artis*); once secularized they are equally the inheritance of *Romanitas Christiana*.

The analogy between art and literature is striking. In both, mythical imagery is neutralized as aesthetic ornamentation and deemed appropriate to pagan and Christian alike. The mid-fourth century Casket of Projecta, part of the Esquiline Treasure, is a case in point (figure 3). Although no longer believed to be decorated with scenes from a wedding, the casket was probably a wedding gift.⁵³ An inscription identifies the bridal pair as Christian. Yet the iconography includes a marine *thiasos* of Venus: she rests in a conch shell, attending to her hair, flanked by Erotes and Centaurotritons, one of whom is

⁵⁰ *CTh* 16.10.15; cf. 16.10.19, also issued in the west and concerned with the preservation of temples.

⁵¹ Cf. Prudentius, *Pe.* 2.481–84. The passage from the *C. Symm.* is discussed by Jacques Fontaine, "Le mélange des genres dans la poésie de Prudence," in *Forma Futuri: Studi in onore del Cardinale Michele Pellegrino* (Turin 1975) 769–70 (= Fontaine, *Études sur la poésie latine tardive d'Ausone à Prudence* [Paris 1980] 15–16), and "Société et culture chrétiennes sur l'aire circumpyrénéenne au siècle de Théodose," in Fontaine, *Études* 292–93.

⁵² Cf. *CTh* 16.10.8 (A.D. 382) issued in the East, to the dux of Osrhoene, which speaks of "images...which must be measured by the value of their art rather than by their divinity" (trans. Clyde Pharr, *The Theodosian Code and Novels and the Sirmondian Constitutions* [Princeton 1952] 473). For the historical context of this edict, see John Matthews, *Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court, A.D. 364–425* (Oxford 1975) 141.

⁵³ The Projecta casket is already cited by Morelli (above, note 3) 417 n. 2. For a recent treatment of the iconography and date, see Kathleen J. Shelton, *The Esquiline Treasure* (London 1981) 26–29 and 53–55.

holding up a mirror for her. Directly below, on the body of the casket, is a similar scene of a woman fixing her hair with the aid of servants. Equivalences of gesture establish the cross-reference between the two figures. We are reminded of the close association between Venus and Violentilla in Statius' epithalamium. Venus' marine cortege and the participation of divinities of love in the toilet of human female figures had long been traditional in Roman art.⁵⁴ In the case of the casket the juxtaposition of scenes from the divine and human spheres rather than their intermingling has something of Claudian's attitude to the divine world as a separate and idealized version of the human realm.⁵⁵ As a document in the history of the Christian reception of mythical imagery the casket of Projecta demonstrates that for many of the cultured classes the appropriation was unproblematic. As far as they were concerned such scenes had long since been purged of all pagan religious connotations.

One Christian poet, Paulinus of Nola, did write a wedding poem⁵⁶ that was exclusively Christian in its content, in which he renounced the mythical trappings of secular epithalamia:

absit ab his thalamis vani lascivia vulgi,
luno Cupido Venus, nomina luxuriae.⁵⁷ (C. 25.9–10)

I am reluctant to see this as a global denunciation of contemporary practice, however. There are special circumstances here. Paulinus is no ordinary Christian, but a convert to an ascetic, monastic style of Christianity. The couple for whom he is writing are children of clergy, a point which is repeatedly made in the poem, in particular right after the lines quoted (11–12). Introduction of divine machinery in a wedding song for such figures would indeed be a kind

⁵⁴ Cf. the role of Venus in the central scene of the Aldobrandini Wedding, with the discussion of Karl Schefold, *La peinture pompéienne: Essai sur l'évolution de sa signification*, trans. J.-M. Croisille, Collection Latomus 108 (Brussels 1972) 107–9; in this case the scene may be entirely mythical in content, but Venus' role illustrates how in marriage scenes the appropriate divinities may be employed around the bride to "make visible the essence of the event" (Schefold 109). For further artistic parallels to the scene of Violentilla's toilet in Statius, see A.-M. Taisne, "L'art d'être aimée...ou une toilette de mariée sous Domitien," *Caesarodunum* 9 (1974) 117–18.

⁵⁵ Cf. Shelton (above, note 53) 27: "The toilet of Venus is the visual simile of the toilet of the Roman matron; what might once have been seen as a pagan reference to the goddess and her cult of love and fertility is here a flattering analogy."

⁵⁶ I hesitate to describe the poem as an epithalamium. The generic affiliation of Paulinus' composition has been the subject of critical contention. For contrasting views, see Reinhart Herzog, "Probleme der heidnisch-christlichen Gattungskontinuität am Beispiel des Paulinus von Nola," in *Christianisme et formes littéraires de l'antiquité tardive en occident*, Fondation Hardt, Entretiens 23 (Vandoeuvres 1977) 381–89, and Anna Sbrancia, "L'epitalamio di S. Paolino di Nola (Carme 25)," *Annali della Facoltà di lettere e filosofia dell' Università di Macerata* II (1978) 83–129. From the point of view of the present paper it is significant that Paulinus' poem, largely protreptic in nature, lacks any equivalent of the mythical narrative found in all verse epithalamia since Statius.

⁵⁷ The prominence of *luxuria* looks as though it may be a reference to Claudian's imperial epithalamium, written only a few years before. Paulinus' poem probably dates from the first years of the fifth century, with a *terminus ante quem* of 408. For the possibility that Paulinus intends a polemic against Claudian, see Gelsomino, "L'epitalamio" (above, note 1) 226–29.

of blasphemy, a trivialization of the high dignity of marriage in the Christian church.⁵⁸ But this does not necessarily mean Paulinus would be equally offended by such poetry if its subject was the wedding of Christians of more worldly character.

Something similar is evident in Prudentius. Despite his legitimization of the use of myth as *ornamenta*, in his own practice he avoids such references unless they are pejorative or dramatically justified, e.g., by putting them in the mouths of vices in the *Psychomachia*. There are a number of references in the fifth century to the different standards of behavior that might be expected from clergy, especially bishops, and the laity. Attitudes to poetry are one area in which such differentiation was expected. Thus, at the end of the century, the biblical poet and bishop of Vienne, Avitus, renounces both mythical reference and concern with stylistic finish as a whole as inappropriate to his episcopal status.⁵⁹

Paulinus' Christian wedding poem had no imitators in late antiquity. The next composer of epithalamia, the Gallic poet Sidonius Apollinaris, was Christian (he was later to be bishop of Auvergne), but his poems reveal no reluctance to incorporate mythical reference. Two epithalamia survive, for the marriages of Ruricius and Hiberia and Polemius and Araneola. Both husbands were men of learning and correspondents of Sidonius, while their brides also came from the highest ranks of Western Roman society.⁶⁰ As is well known, an important factor in the self-definition of this class was its shared literary culture. Sidonius himself gives memorable expression to this ideal—*solum erit posthac nobilitatis indicium litteras nosse* (*Ep.* 8.2.2). No doubt his abundant use of mythical reference is one index of the shared status of poet and bridal couple. It is not too much to say that Sidonius' epithalamia are as much a celebration of class as of marriage.

Sidonius' poem for the marriage of Ruricius and Hiberia (*C.* 11) is a virtuoso reworking of the Statian/Claudian tradition.⁶¹ The canonical distinction between scenes set in the purely divine sphere and those set in the terrestrial world of the here and now, where in the special circumstances of a wedding gods and humans may intermingle, is retained. But the disproportion is great. All but the last ten lines of the poem, which is 134 lines in length, are given a divine setting. And only in these last ten lines is there any reference to the traditional ceremonial of Roman marriage.

⁵⁸It is not that the use of such mythical imagery implies pagan belief, Paulinus knows better than that, but rather that the values they embody are inconsistent with Christian *gravitas*; so too Paulinus, *C.* 10.33–42—such matters are vanity for the true Christian.

⁵⁹In his dedicatory letter addressed to his brother Apollinaris, bishop of Valence (201.16–202.16 Peiper), on which see Michael Roberts, "The Prologue to Avitus' *De spiritualis historiae gestis*: Christian Poetry and Poetic License," *Traditio* 36 (1980) 399–407. For parallels in Sidonius and Ennodius, and a fifth-century canon (*Statuta ecclesiae antiqua* 5), see Pierre Riché, *Education and Culture in the Barbarian West, From the Sixth through the Eighth Century*, trans. John J. Contreni (Columbia, S.C. 1976) 96–98.

⁶⁰Cf. André Loyen, *Sidoine Apollinaire et l'esprit précieux en Gaule aux derniers jours de l'empire* (Paris 1943) 68–69 and 83–85. He dates both poems to the 460s.

⁶¹See the assessment of Frings (above, note 25) 15–17.

Sidonius' poem, like Claudian's for the marriage of Palladius and Celerina, begins with an ecphrasis set in the world of the gods.⁶² But the description of Venus' palace, with its rich materials, is more reminiscent of Claudian's imperial epithalamium. There is, however, no comparable attempt in Sidonius to define the space in carefully articulated, geometric terms; at most the antithesis *exterior: interiore loco* (27–29) provides some spatial organization to the description. Such hieratic formality would be inappropriate to a private poem written for a social equal. It is significant that Sidonius avoids the associations of Venus with marital infidelity that are positively paraded by Statius. The late antique poet is careful to say that Venus' palace was constructed by Vulcan before his wife's adultery with Mars (32–33).⁶³ In the scene that follows, Sidonius' constructive engagement with the model of Claudian is especially marked. Triton swims to Venus' palace carrying the goddess (34–36), and in the company of the *Amores* (42–46). But he is simply acting as divine transportation; he has no special mission. In Claudian the sea monster suffers unrequited love for the Nereid Cymothoe; in Sidonius Triton is accompanied by Galatea. Their erotic byplay, with humorous allusions to Triton's non-human physique (38, 41), promises a happy marriage for the pair (39).

The obligatory appearance of Cupid, with news of the forthcoming marriage, is postponed to follow the marine cortege of Venus to which it gives rise in Claudian. Transition is achieved with Ovidian inconsequentiality.⁶⁴ Cupid, alone of the *Amores*, was absent from Venus' train. He was in Gaul supervising preparations for the wedding. As day dawns, he flies back to Venus' palace, for the customary dialogue between mother and son in praise of the bridal couple (61–93). From there the poem is completed by an ecphrasis of Venus' chariot (93–110), apparently taking as its text Statius' synecdochic *gemmato temone* (*Silv.* 1.2.144), and a second progress of Venus, this time aerial (111–23; cf. the two-stage journey in Claudian, *Nupt.*). The final ten lines are set on earth and combine decorative detail worthy of the grove of Venus with allusions to the reality of the Roman marriage ceremony (124–33).

In his extensive use of ecphrasis, and his understanding of visual detail as symbolic expression of the power of Venus, Sidonius is close to Claudian. But in his playful, non-serious use of myth, he recalls the manner of Statius. Also Statian is his taste for the posed vignette, with pictorial detail: the loveplay of Triton and Galatea (37–41), or the uncertain "horsemanship" of the *Amores* (42–46), each described in terms of gesture or posture;⁶⁵ Venus stretched out, her head resting in the curve of her arm (47–48). The brief vignettes encapsulate qualities of their subjects: the erotic assertiveness of the sea-divinities; the more generalized playfulness of the *Amores*; the suppressed sensuality of Venus herself. In the absence of the psychological development that characterizes Statius'

⁶² Though apparently given earthly location. The opening lines of the poem are obscure and probably corrupt.

⁶³ More exactly, "before he knew of that adultery." The Latin would bear the meaning that Venus had already embarked on her affair, but so far kept it secret from her husband. I suspect, however, this would be to put too much emphasis on *noverat* (32).

⁶⁴ I am thinking especially of *Met.* 1.583, a transition that also depends on the absence of an expected participant.

⁶⁵ The idea for the passage is Claudian, based on the epithalamium for Palladius and Celerina (110–15), but the execution is Statian. Claudian is more dynamic, less posed.

epithalamium, however, they lack the dynamic and dramatic nature of such scenes in the Flavian poet, instead embodying permanent attributes of the divinities in question. Most Statian is the pose of Cupid as he wakes his drowsy mother with a kiss and the light touch of a wing on her eyes:

oscula sic matris carpens somnoque refusae
semisopora levi scalpebat lumina penna. (59–60)

The passage looks as though it was inspired by Statius, *Silv.* 1.2.103–4: “tenera matris cervice pependit / blandus et admotis tepefecit pectora pennis.” But the preciseness of realization—Cupid hovers above and to the side of Venus’ left hand, his feet suspended in the air by his beating wings—is Sidonian, implying a vivid visual imagination or a specific model in the pictorial arts.

Sidonius’ playful attitude to myth also finds expression in his use of mythical comparisons, which make a reappearance after their complete elimination from Claudian’s epithalamium for Palladius and Celerina. As in Statius, mythical comparisons appear in clusters (65–71, 73–80, 86–90); the women lovers of myth would have preferred Ruricius to their mythical favorites; the beauty of Hiberia would have converted Bellerophon and Hippolytus from misogyny, would have condemned Venus in the judgment of Paris, or, if offered as a prize, assured Venus the victory;⁶⁶ heroes would have readily competed for her bed. The last passage (86–90) is characteristic of Sidonius’ use of mythical comparisons:

Te quoque multimodis ambisset, Hiberia, ludis
axe Pelops, cursu Hippomenes luctaque Achelous,
Aeneas bellis spectatus, Gorgone Perseus;
nec minor haec species, totiens cui Iuppiter esset⁶⁷
Delia, taurus, olor, Satyrus, draco, fulmen et aurum.

It is immediately clear that panegyric motives play a subordinate role in such Sidonian passages; Hiberia is beautiful, that we know, but the apparent exhaustivity of Sidonius’ mythical comparisons defies any attempt to attribute a serious point to each. There is, in verse 89, the subversive suggestion that the wars that occupy the second half of the *Aeneid* were undertaken for a woman not a city; similarly Perseus’ great exploit, the killing of the Gorgon, is interpreted, in defiance of mythical tradition, as undertaken for a woman, i.e., Andromeda.

Also striking in Sidonius’ use of myth is the strong element of lexical virtuosity. Such passages of enumerative exhaustivity are frequent in Sidonius’ poetry. In the present epithalamium, they are particularly used to describe the rich materials of Venus’ palace (17–26) and the scents of the bridal chamber (124–25). It is worth recalling here a line of Paulinus’ wedding poem, already quoted: “Iuno Cupido Venus, nomina luxuriae” (C. 25.10). Paulinus presumably has in mind the use of the pagan divinities as symbols of *luxuria*, in the manner of Claudian. The Sidonius passage before us, however, suggests

⁶⁶ The verbal point is Ovidian in manner: “me quoque Rhoetea damnasset pastor in Ida; / ‘vincere’ vel ‘si optas, istam da, malo, puellam’” (80–81).

⁶⁷ I would translate “no less was this beauty of hers (i.e., no less than the beauty for which the heroes just mentioned competed), for which Jupiter would so many times become Diana, a bull, a swan, a Satyr, a snake, thunder and gold.” Loyen’s interpretation of line 89 (*Sidoine Apollinaire*, t.I. *Poèmes* [Paris 1960] 188) seems unnecessarily complicated.

another sense. Sidonius uses the names of gods and mythical figures, as he does the names of jewels. Each lexical item, with its unusual foreign-sounding form, and in the case of myth, cultural prestige, becomes an element in the adornment of the text. Mythical names are to poetry what jewels are to visual decoration;⁶⁸ each is endowed with its own particular brilliance, which is independent of the syntactical or conceptual link with its context. Sidonius' use of the mythical comparison is a natural consequence of the tendency in late antique Christianity to reduce myth to the aesthetic and decorative. In Sidonius' poem, the names of gods and heroes in mythical comparisons are, like the names of jewels, *nomina luxuriae*: they serve as a figurative equivalent of the rich appointments of the bridal chamber, as well as an assertion of the high cultural values to which the participants in the marriage aspire.

Sidonius' second epithalamium (C. 15), for Polemius and Araneola, takes even greater liberties with the epithalamium form. In a letter to the groom, printed with the poem in modern editions, Sidonius declares his intention to exclude from his composition the soft tones (*teneritudo*) of the epithalamium and to banish Venus and the fictitious coloring (*commenticia pigmenta*) of the *Amores*. So far it could be Paulinus speaking. Such frivolity is inappropriate for Polemius, not because he is a member of the clergy, but because he is a philosopher. But then a surprise, Sidonius does not abandon mythological machinery entirely. Instead Minerva, appropriate as goddess both of wisdom and weaving, takes over the role of *pronuba* usually assigned to Venus. The retention of a mythical context, however untraditional, for the epithalamium is further evidence of the cultural prestige that myth continued to enjoy in fifth-century Gallo-Roman society.

The poem ends with a few lines containing reference to the Roman marriage ceremony (196–201). Otherwise there is little of the conventional epithalamium in Sidonius' poem. The poem is almost entirely ecphrastic in nature. Athena does address a few words to Araneola and Polemius, urging them to marry (186–91 and 193–95), but the greater part of the composition (36–184) is devoted to description of two temples, dedicated to Minerva and located in Athens, and of their inhabitants. In the former are the great philosophers of Greece, including the seven sages; the latter is the weaving-hall of Minerva (*textrinum Minervae*, 126) where the hands of maidens produce clothing for the gods (144–45). Among the maidens is Araneola weaving a consular *trabea* for her father. In this way Sidonius is able to incorporate in his text the obligatory panegyric of the bride's family. Such ecphrases operate outside time. The temples of philosophy and weaving embody the atemporal ideal of each discipline. The presence of bride and groom in the temples is to be interpreted allegorically, as figurative representation of their devotion to and skill in those particular attainments (cf. 118–19 "hoc in gymnasio Polemi Sapientia vitam / excolit"). This disregard of temporal logic runs through the whole poem. If we attempt to situate the events described chronologically we run into an impasse. The poem begins with Athena returning to Athens after taking vengeance on

⁶⁸ For the analogy between jewels and verbal ornamentation in late antiquity, see Michael Roberts, *The Jeweled Style: Poetry and Poetics in Late Antiquity* (Ithaca, N.Y. 1989), especially 51–55. *Lumen* is a quality common to both jewels and (metaphorically) to rhetorical *ornatus*.

the Greek ships returning from Troy (1–3). It ends in the here and now, with the goddess initiating the *dextrarum iunctio* (198–99).⁶⁹

Such disregard of spatial and temporal logic is most likely to be explained by a discrepancy between the perspectives of the poet and the modern critic. Sidonius, I suspect, gives preference to the thematic over the historical. His poem begins with images of strife and violence: Athena is returning from taking vengeance on the Greeks; her breastplate carries a threatening image of the Gorgon (7–12), her shield shows scenes from the Gigantomachy (17–31), replete with *furor* and *irae* (30–31). But the poem ends with an image of *concordia*, the human marriage ceremony, attended now by benign and peace-bringing gods. The olive, which had furnished Athena's spear at the beginning of the poem (32–33), is transformed into the symbol of peace (198–99). This thematic continuity establishes the poem in a realm that transcends historical reality; it becomes an atemporal representation of the struggle between violence and harmony, a struggle for which the Gigantomachy often acts as mythical model. The references to warfare at the beginning of the poem involve in part, no doubt, a play on the groom's name, Polemius. But if so, this jeu d'esprit is subordinated to a larger structuring principle.

A second antithetical pair is set within this thematic framework: the two temples, one devoted to reason, the second to the textile arts. The first, and more lofty (36–37), temple is peopled entirely by men; the second by women, specifically by maidens (145). The relevance of such ecphrastic embodiments of the male and female world to an epithalamium is evident, though it is not a subject which has played a large role in the poetry we have examined hitherto. The superior eminence of the temple of philosophy expresses the conventional superiority of the male to the female. This male perspective is undercut in the account of the mythical scenes on the garment Araneola is weaving. Araneola shares something of the iconoclastic spirit of her near namesake, Arachne, the account of whose web in the *Metamorphoses* is Sidonius' inspiration in the present text. Woven into the web are mythical exemplars of female marital virtue: Penelope (159–61), Alcestris (165–67), Hypermetra (168–73). In this respect, they play something of the role traditionally assigned to mythical comparison in the epithalamium, though now in an ecphrastic setting. Even these myths suggest some criticism of the comparative valuation of male and female worlds as communicated by the situation of the two temples. Penelope's use of weaving is after all non-traditional: she uses it to flout the will of her suitors; Alcestris' heroism can reflect discredit on her husband;⁷⁰ Hypermetra resists the impious frenzy of a wicked father (169–70) in order to save her husband. In the last case in particular the contrast between male and female behavior is marked. While Hypermetra feels no fear for herself, only for her husband, Lynceus's role is to run away (*effugit*, 172), saved (*servatus*, 171; cf. *dimisso*, 173) by his wife. Araneola's scepticism about the superiority of male *virtus* comes most clearly to the fore in the second mythical exemplar she weaves into her tapestry. It is the only one of the first four scenes which centers on a man, Orpheus—referred to by antonomasia as the Thracian, *Thrax*:

⁶⁹ Cf. Loyer, *Sidonius Apollinaire* (above, note 67) 189–90: "La localisation de la scène dans le temps...comme dans l'espace...est des plus fantaisistes et choque même le bon sens."

⁷⁰ In the case of Alcestris' reflection of discredit on Admetus must be derived from the context. Sidonius' wording is neutral (*hic novet Alceste praelato coniuge vitam / rumpere*, 165–66).

Taenaron hic frustra bis rapta coniuge pulsat
 Thrax fidibus, legem postquam temeravit Averni,
 et prodesse putans iterum non respicit umbram. (162–64)

Orpheus seems entirely ineffectual by comparison with the heroic female figures with whom he is surrounded. His descent to the underworld is represented as a rash, illegal act (*legem...temeravit Averni*); his vain hope that the trick of not looking back will work a second time only serves to remind the reader of the Thracian's culpability in the failure of his first attempt. In this context the enumeration of Jupiter's amatory metamorphoses with which the cluster of mythical comparisons ends must certainly have a derogatory ring. These changes of form are not attributed to the agency of Jupiter. Instead it is Araneola who puts the god through his paces (*iamque Iovem in formas mutat*, 174). As artist, Araneola asserts control over the world of myth, and in so doing proposes a different view of male-female relationships within marriage from the superiority-inferiority model implied by the situation of the two temples.

Minerva is unimpressed. She continues to look toward the temple of philosophy (*doctisonas spectare libentius artes*, 180). But with a final scene in her tapestry Araneola succeeds in getting the goddess' attention; Lais, conqueror of philosophers (*philosophi victricem*, 182), tweaks the beard of a "wild Cynic" (*Cynici...feri*, 183) with her scented scissors. Her action brings a smile to Minerva's face (*subrisit Pallas*, 185). Araneola's irreverence makes a charming contrast with the somewhat self-important austerity of the philosophical calling, represented by unkempt beard and rough philosopher's cloak (*tetrica pallia*, 197). With this, Minerva takes on the role of matchmaker and *pronuba* and we finally find ourselves in the world of the epithalamium. In the larger framework of the poem, the final joining of hands in a pact of *concordia* represents not only the victory of harmony over strife but also the sublation of the opposition between male and female in an image of equality: (*diva*) *nectit dextras ac foedera mandat*, 199.

From the perspective of the epithalamium tradition Sidonius' poem is an aberration. Marriage and the amatory make their first appearance in the scenes on Araneola's tapestry; the notion of a match between Polemius and Araneola is first broached by Minerva, some fifteen lines from the end of the poem. It is true that the metrically discrete *praefatio* prepares the reader's expectations. But in this poem of Sidonius we have an impressive illustration of the creative use of myth that owes little to the characteristic modes of the epithalamium. Myth is used in an original way to explore oppositions basic to human experience. The impulse for Sidonius' poem will partly have been the contrast between Polemius' devotion to philosophy and his own love of literature and poetry. However, the wedding context encouraged him to associate the poetic and mythical with the female; it is, after all, usual in the epithalamium to devote sections to the attainments of both bride and groom. At the same time, the representation of Araneola obviously owes a great deal to Ovid's Arachne, an association suggested by her name. From this combination of motives and impulses Sidonius creates a poem that uses myth once more to universalize contemporary experience. From this point of view, the world of legend with which the poem begins and the world of the present day with which the poem ends do truly meet. Like Ovid, Sidonius combines a far from reverent attitude to the world of myth with a recognition of the continuing relevance of its stories to the world of his own day.

Sidonius' epithalamium may almost be termed an apology for poetry and, with it, for myth. In the literary historical context Sidonius' employment of myth in the epithalamium for Polemius and Araneola may almost seem anachronistic. It certainly contrasts sharply with the treatment of myth in the Ruricius-Hiberia poem.⁷¹ Viewed in a broader historical perspective, the overall trend is to the reduction of the role of myth in epithalamia. This can be illustrated from the compositions of two poets on whom Sidonian aesthetics—though not particularly his epithalamia—had a strong influence. They are the Gallic born, but Italian educated, Ennodius (early sixth century), and Venantius Fortunatus, educated in Ravenna, but who sought his literary fortune in Frankish Gaul (mid to late sixth century).⁷²

Ennodius' poem, written in 510 for the marriage of a correspondent and friend, Maximus, is polymetric in form. The gods figure as personified agents only in six Sapphic stanzas, which describe the beauty of the scantily clad Venus, and in the longest section, seventy hexameters, containing the mythical narrative. The reason for the inactivity of Venus and her son becomes clear as Cupid addresses his mother. So powerful is the appeal of celibacy that the divinities of love are no longer honored: "perdidimus, genetrix, virtutis praemia nostrae" (54). What is needed is to make an example of somebody. In response to Cupid's words Venus literally and metaphorically pulls herself together (cf. 80–81). She arrays herself in her multicolored finery (76–79), as an expression of her power, and in the course of a brief monologue (82–94) determines that Maximus is the proper person on whom to reassert her power. Cupid is despatched to shoot Maximus and his (unnamed) bride with his arrows. The poem ends with the love god addressing an abbreviated *allocutio sponsalis* to the pair, dwelling in particular on the promise of offspring from the union (119–22).

The shooting of Maximus (104–8) has something of the slow-motion effect we have already noticed in Claudian's epithalamium for Palladius and Celerina. However, there is a significant difference. In Claudian the shooting of the bridal pair follows the *allocutio* and is an expression of marital *concordia*. In Ennodius the shooting precedes any marriage ceremony and retains its original, non-marital sense. It makes Maximus fall in love. This change of focus, from the nuptial to the more generally erotic, is one to which we shall return.

Only two divinities play an active role in Ennodius, Venus and Cupid. There are no *Amores* or other attendant divinities, no cortege of Venus, and no mythological comparisons.⁷³ This reduction of the role of myth is still more

⁷¹ I mean to imply no evaluative criterion here. In their use of myth the two poems conform to a different aesthetic.

⁷² C. 1.4 and 6.1 in the editions of Hartel and Leo (above, note 1) respectively. For the influence of Sidonius on Ennodius, see Augustin Dubois, *La latinité d'Ennodius: Contribution à l'étude du latin littéraire à la fin de l'empire romain d'Occident* (Paris 1903) 79–80 and 83–85. The epithalamia of Dracontius do contain a large mythical element, but stand rather outside the mainstream Western tradition. Keydell (above, note 3), 938–41, citing the large role played by Dionysus and his followers in Dracontius' poems, aligns the African poet, along with his fellow-countryman Luxorius, with Greek literary models; cf. Morelli (above, note 3) 401.

⁷³ See Morelli (above, note 3) 398 and Lilia Trilli, "Brevi note sull' epitalamio di Papinio Stazio ad Arrunzio Stella e su quello di Ennodio di Pavia a Massimo,"

marked in the case of Fortunatus. His epithalamium was written in 566 for the marriage of Sigebert, king of the Austrasians, and Brunichilde, daughter of the Visigothic royal house of Spain. Cupid's arrow, we are told (37–38), was responsible for the king's passion. The god returns to heaven to announce excitedly his conquest to his mother (49–58). This done Venus flies down to earth prepared to deck the bridal chamber, where she engages in a debate (*litem...piam*, 66)⁷⁴ with Cupid over the respective merits of the bridal pair. From this point on the poem is largely given over to panegyric and reflections on the dynastic implications of the marriage. There is little in the two speeches that is specially appropriate to the characters of the speakers. Indeed the words *divina* (117) and *divinis* (sc. *armis*) (121) are most naturally given a Christian interpretation. Fortunatus' poem has a number of familiar elements: Cupid's proud announcement of his conquest to Venus, the decking of the chamber, and speeches by the two divinities praising the bridal pair. The detail is at times reminiscent of Statius:⁷⁵ Brunichilde is a second Venus (*altera nata Venus*, 103); her beauty is compared to Nereids and Nymphs. Sigebert, on the other hand, is a second Achilles (50)—here the parallel is with Claudian (*Nupt.* 16). Even some movement of time and place is retained. The hexameter section of the poem begins on earth, at the dawn of the wedding day (25–36). It then moves to Cupid and to the time in the past when he shot Sigebert. When Cupid realizes his conquest he flies to heaven to tell Venus (47–49); Venus' response is to return to earth to deck the bridal chamber (62–63). We are back at the time and place of the beginning of the poem although, as with his use of myth, Fortunatus' employment of such narrative elements tends to be vestigial and desultory. One further point: for Fortunatus, as well as for Ennodius, Cupid's arrow is an amatory motif (40–46), not specifically nuptial.

If the contribution of myth to our last two epithalamia is much reduced, it is compensated for by the elaboration of another source of imagery for the *laetitia* and *luxuria* appropriate to marriage, the vernal. Both Ennodius and Fortunatus compose elegiac prefaces describing the fertility of spring. In Ennodius' case the world is said to derive its vernal aspect from Maximus ("de te quod vernat sortitur, Maxime, mundus," 15); in Fortunatus' case the rich fertility of springtime is an image of the rejoicing which greets the royal marriage:

sic modo cuncta favent, dum prosperitate superna
regia Caesareo proficit aula iugo. (15–16)

Menander, in his instructions for the *logos kateunastikos*, makes a special point of recommending that the speaker should elaborate on the season of the year at which the wedding takes place.⁷⁶ He gives examples for each season. It is clear here that no one season is thought of as particularly appropriate to marriage; the orator takes his cue from the real time of year. Yet in the poetic tradition spring receives preference; indeed no other season is described. The first example is Claudian's second Fescennine, which urges spring to celebrate

in *Studi di Poesia latina in onore di Antonio Traglia*, 2 vols., Storia e letteratura, raccolta di studi e testi 146–47 (Rome 1979) 2.873–75.

⁷⁴ For the implications of this amoebean element for medieval epithalamia, see E. Faye Wilson, "Pastoral and Epithalamium in Latin Literature," *Speculum* 23 (1948) 38–40.

⁷⁵ For the Statian influence on Fortunatus, see Frings (above, note 25) 13–15.

⁷⁶ Menander Rhetor 2.7 (408.8–26).

the imminent nuptials (1–5). There is no reason to doubt that Honorius' wedding did indeed take place in the spring.⁷⁷ The point of the verses would be much reduced otherwise. In the epithalamium proper spring takes on a different significance. In Venus' grove it is perpetual spring: "pars acrior anni / exulat; aeterni patet indulgentia veris," 54–55 (cf. 60–61). In this case perpetual springtime is symbolic of the fertility and luxuriance that always accompany Venus and that bring springtime to the terrestrial bridal chamber when Venus descends to earth, whatever the real season of the year.

The principle is enunciated by Sidonius in his epithalamium for Ruricius and Hiberia. Venus has just descended to the bridal chamber:

Proxima quin etiam festorum afflata calore
iam minus alget hiemps, speciemque tenentia vernam
hoc dant vota loco, quod non dant tempora mundo. (C. 11.126–28)

The marriage in question must have taken place close to winter, but the vernal aspect of the bridal celebrations has the power temporarily to disrupt the calendar of the seasons. Sidonius attributes this unseasonal thaw to *festorum calor*, but in mythical terms it is attributed to the coming of Venus. It is no accident that two lines earlier Venus had arrived at the bridal chamber (*sic ventum ad thalamos*, 124). Her presence brings springtime wherever she goes.

In the light of this figurative employment of spring imagery in marriage poetry, it would be hazardous in the absence of other evidence to deduce from the elegiac accounts of spring in the epithalamia of Ennodius (1–14) and Fortunatus (1–14) that the weddings in question did historically take place in that season. As the use of mythical imagery fades, spring becomes a favored alternative for communicating the ideas of luxuriance and fertility associated by Claudian with Venus. Such imagery presumably was without any residual implications of paganism, and therefore it was entirely acceptable to Christian opinion.⁷⁸ It is interesting to observe that in Ennodius Venus herself is not entirely distinguishable from the natural world she is said to inspire: her nipples are the color of roses (*roseis papillis*, 42), her naked body is radiant like a cloudless sky (*proditum risit sine nube corpus*, 45; cf. *serenum*, 46).⁷⁹ We should bear in mind, too, the tendency we have already noted in Ennodius and Fortunatus to convert the epithalamium into love poetry. The combination of spring and love looks forward to a common theme in medieval Latin lyric. Venus is already on the way to losing her status as an independent agent and becoming just one motif in the springtime landscape of love.⁸⁰ In the case of

⁷⁷ Cf. Frings (above, note 25) 25. In the Claudian poem there is confirmatory evidence.

⁷⁸ For Christianity's positive attitude to spring, see Alan Cameron, "The *Pervigilium Veneris*," in *La poesia tardoantica: tra retorica, teologia e politica*, Atti del V corso della Scuola superiore di archeologia e civiltà medievali, Erice 6–12 Dicembre 1981 (Messina 1984) 229–31.

⁷⁹ Venus' body is also likened to another source of *luxuria* imagery, jewels (39, 42).

⁸⁰ Wilson's remarks on the interaction of eclogue and epithalamium are also relevant here (above, note 74), 35–57. Claudian and Sidonius were admired models in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, while the poetry of Fortunatus had always been well known in the Middle Ages. The association of love, spring and (metaphorical) marriage is already found in the *Pervigilium Veneris*, recently dated by Cameron, "The *Pervigilium Veneris*" (above, note 78) 209–34, to the early

Ennodius' epithalamium, there may be an additional reason for his use of metaphors drawn from the natural world. His poem has a distinct subtext, a protest against excessive devotion to Christian celibacy. Maximus' marriage is represented as a victory for Venus and Cupid. But it also brings them into conformity with the law of nature; in springtime nature celebrates its own marriage (*in rerum vultu lex iungit pronuba taedas*, 11). It is difficult to avoid the impression that a debating point is being made here, however appropriate otherwise the description of spring is to the epithalamium.

Looking back over five centuries of Latin epithalamia, we can see lines of continuity and development in the tradition. Already in Statius mythological reference had a decorative element and was certainly detached from any systems of belief. With the recognition of Christianity as state religion in the fourth century, such apparently pagan motifs came under challenge, but the use of divinities and mythological references in epithalamia was too well entrenched, their cultural and aesthetic prestige too strong, for the taste of the newly converted aristocracy to be changed overnight. Only with the poets of the sixth century do we see an appreciable withering away of the role of mythical narrative in the Latin epithalamia.

This is not to say that the distinctive mental world of late antiquity did not leave its mark on the fourth- and fifth-century epithalamia. There is a marked progression from the more humanizing treatment of the gods of love in Statius to Claudian's understanding of the amatory divinities as embodying abstract qualities and powers. In Claudian the individual gods, especially Venus, approximate more closely to personifications; and, vice-versa, personifications usurp some of the roles of the individual gods. Claudian's phrase *luxuriae Venerique* encapsulates the situation (*Nupt.* 54). At the same time, Claudian's sensitivity to the hieratic value of carefully posed figures is characteristically late antique. On the other hand, a more playful, less idealized, attitude to the figures of myth can always emerge, especially in mythical comparisons. Statius points the way in this regard and Araneola's tapestry is a delightful return to that spirit in late antiquity. The inspiration is the Ovid of the *Metamorphoses* and *Ars Amatoria*.

One of the impressive aspects of the epithalamium tradition is the degree of originality and variety possible in what might be expected to be a restrictive genre. An important impulse for such originality is the status and character of the bridal pair. All the epithalamia I have studied are individual, adjusted to suit their particular addressees. In the case of Claudian's portrayal of Hymenaeus as a singer of pastoral, I have suggested that the interests of the groom may have been the impulse for mythopoeic invention. In the case of Sidonius' epithalamium for Polemius and Araneola, one of the most original we have studied, the mere names of the bridal pair provided an incentive to innovation. A further reason for variety is the comparative status of poet and bridal couple: it makes a difference whether one is writing for/about a friend and correspondent, or a patron—even an emperor. Paulinus of Nola is the only writer we have mentioned who is actually writing for a couple of inferior status. Paulinus enjoyed high prestige as a spiritual exemplar among western Christian aristocrats at the beginning of the fifth century. This is surely one explanation for the large element of protreptic and serious moral instruction in Paulinus, *C.* 25; it fits the *ethos* of the speaker.

fourth century and attributed to Tiberianus. Verses 13–26 (Cameron) of that poem look as though they influenced Ennodius' Sapphic stanzas on Venus.

As we come to the end of our period, the mythical narrative, as inaugurated by Statius, has lost its vitality. Natural imagery, particularly descriptions of springtime, are taking over the role hitherto assigned to the mythical; and the epithalamium is becoming increasingly detached from marriage ceremonial. In the process the distinction between the wedding song and love poetry is less clear cut. In the Middle Ages, I suggest, the true legacy of the late Latin epithalamium can be recognized in its contribution to the landscape of love.