

This paper will examine Propertius' use of the myth of Hercules and Hylas (1.20) as a programmatic statement on Propertian poetics and a commentary on certain kinds of male relationships. It will also explore the ramifications of this poem for our understanding of male same-sex relationships in ancient Rome.

The poem begins by describing the homosocial (to use Sedgwick's term) relationship between Propertius and Gallus as a kind of *amor* (Oliensis 1997, Janan 2001); it then elaborates that *amor* through a version of the myth of Hylas. As Hylas goes off in search of water, the winged sons of Boreas hover over him, swooping down to steal kisses as the boy fends them off. In the context of a poem warning Gallus that he may lose his own Hylas, these figures may represent rivals to whom the boy might be lost. In one of the poem's twists, however, Propertius suggests that Hylas is safe only until he turns away these potential suitors. Hylas is next caught and drowned by nymphs in a parody of heterosexual intercourse that here represents not so much a failed attempt at sexual maturation as the result of a misguided departure from a world defined by erotic relationships with men. Moreover, when the poet leaves the world of myth to address Gallus once again, he warns not of male rivals but of female "nymphs" who might threaten Gallus' own lover.

Hercules' loss of Hylas is held up not as a model of the inevitability of the younger partner's maturation (and thus inevitable ineligibility for an erotic relationship with an older man) but instead as a warning to Gallus not to let go of the beautiful youth. Thus the poem unexpectedly uses the myth to suggest the potential durability of a relationship between a Roman citizen and another male.

In addition to functioning as a paradigmatic text for Propertian homosocial relationships, poem 1.20 also provides a paradigm of sexual relationships that is unexpected in a Roman context. Whereas Catullus (61.119-43) suggests that affairs between adolescent citizens and their slaves must come to an end for both parties' sakes and Martial (5.48) uses Hylas to hint at the necessary impermanence of relationships with *pueri*, who will pass beyond the conventionally accepted age limit for same-sex relationships, Propertius recommends not that Gallus learn to let go but that he take care that his *puer* is not lured away from him. The Boread episode shows that the boy must be kept not from erotic rivals generally, but specifically from women. The role of Hylas in this homosocial world is notable: whereas much modern scholarship views the sexually penetrable *pueri* of ancient Rome as playing, if only temporarily, a culturally feminine role, Propertius' text makes clear that they could also be seen as males who belong in a male world.