

This paper reexamines Propertius' version of the myth of Hylas and argues that a poem of homoerotic content is best analyzed when it is viewed not as a medium for the reconstruction of the sexual mosaic in ancient Rome, but as an inseparable part of a poetic collection and, therefore, as an appropriate place for the expression of the poet's ideology about issues related to his art, ethics, and the state. Through an exploration of 1.20's generic antecedents and a reassessment of its position within the *Monobiblos*, it will emerge that Propertius constructs for his addressee Gallus the image of a male beloved who is so deeply subordinated to the protocols of writing elegy in antiquity that he cannot have a life in his present form outside the text, but who can still bear witness to the precarious position of a Roman elegist in literary and sociopolitical hierarchies.

Theocritus and Apollonius Rhodius are regarded as the main prototypes for Propertius 1.20. The topography of the poem, however, suggests as an additional model the myth of Arganthe with which Parthenius of Nicaea closes his *Erôtika Pathêmata*, a collection of stories dedicated to Cornelius Gallus as a source for poetic inspiration. In borrowing motifs from this myth, Propertius produces a role reversal since he assimilates Hercules, the symbol of hypermasculinity, to Parthenius' homonymous heroine who mourns over the death of her husband Rhesus. The fluidity of gender, an idea illustrated by the image of a demasculinized Hercules who is situated next to the river Ascanius and helplessly weeps over the absent body of his male beloved Hylas, carries a message of moral and political difference given the hero's employment as a symbol for Augustus' propaganda (Galinsky 1972; 1996).

The physical characteristics Hylas is allocated cast him as an embodiment of the genre's aesthetic principles: *tener* (39) recalls the delicacy Callimachus advocated and denotes the plasticity of the elegiac text; *formosus* (41), on the other hand, signifies a desirable poetic style. The boy's name also suggests a lexical/aural affinity with *hylê* (= piece of wood, material) which brings to mind Virgil's *Eclogues* 10.49-54 where Gallus is portrayed as carving love verses on the trunk of a tree. Nympholepsy can thus be read as a symbol for a poet's anxiety about the temporal and posthumous endurance of his *corpus*, an idea which Martial pursues in a number of epigrams where the nymphs represent a threat for the erasure of poetry in water (Roman 2001). Ironically enough, Cornelius Gallus' work did not survive the test of time. By self-consciously placing the myth of Hylas towards the end of his *Monobiblos*, Propertius, I shall argue, discusses his literary anxieties in an apotropaic manner, seeking to cast away the fluidities of publication and the threat of poetic mortality.