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AS WITH MANY PASSAGES in modern editions of Propertius, one can perceive the general drift of 1.20.25-30, but details are hard to fix. Closer examination reveals logical, linguistic, and artistic flaws, and the strenuous gymnastics of the commentators, more than matching those imagined of Hylas and the Boreads, confirm the impression that the paradosis is corrupt. The following is the text as presented by the manuscripts and the overwhelming majority of editions:¹

*hunc duo sectati fratres, Aquilonia proles,
hunc super et Zetes, hunc super et Calais,
oscula suspensis instabant carpere palmis,
oscula et alterna ferre supina fuga.
ille sub extrema pendens secluditur ala
et uolucres ramo submouet insidias.*

The other Argonauts are making camp; as Hylas helpfully goes off in search of water, Zetes and Calais fly after and attempt to kiss him; he offers some resistance, whereupon they leave. No other extant account of the expedition of the Argonauts includes such an incident, and it is therefore likely, albeit not absolutely certain,² that Propertius invented it to distinguish from the many others his own version of the popular story.³ It might be related in some now unknowable way to the circumstances of Gallus and his *puer*. Artistic representations do not exist. The passage must therefore be evaluated without recourse to external criteria.

The first and last lines are beyond reproach; difficulties are generally recognized in 27 and 29, but 26 cannot be sound as it stands, despite the unanimity of editors. What is the syntactical connection of the line with

I should like to thank the *Phoenix* readers for their constructive comments.

¹The only significant discrepancy among the manuscripts is that A gives *ali* for *ala* in 29. F and P are to be ignored here, since they descend from A. Among editors, only Richmond (Cambridge 1928) and Luck (Zürich 1964) in this century have departed from the paradosis, reading in 27 *plantis* and *plumis* respectively.

²Calais figures in Phanocles fr. 1 as an *eromenos* of Orpheus; there is no telling what other entanglements the same work might have depicted. Usually Hercules is made to kill the Boreads because they persuaded the Argonauts to abandon him while he made a lengthy search for Hylas; perhaps there existed another version in which sexual jealousy also played a part.

³The familiarity of the material is attested by Virgil's well known *cui non dictus Hylas?* (*Georg.* 3.6). Unfamiliar variants of myths are a notorious feature of Propertius' style; cf., among others, J.-P. Boucher, *Études sur Properce* (Paris 1965) 250-251; A. La Penna, *L'integrazione difficile* (Turin 1977) 200-201.

what precedes and what follows? Postgate and Enk were surely right to observe that *sectati* in 25 is a participle and not a finite verb (with omission of *sunt*); *instabant* (27) is the verb whose subject is announced in 25. What then is to be made of Zetes and Calais in 26? The use of commas to set off the line implies that they are in further apposition to the subject ("Zu *fratres* ist *hunc* . . . *Calais* nähere Bestimmung"—Rothstein): but is this double apposition likely or desirable? Line 26 does not continue the grammatical structure of 25 but must be parenthetical; the naming of Zetes and Calais clarifies *Aquilonia proles*, and the line as a whole ought to clarify the pursuit indicated by *sectati*. As a parenthesis, 26 must have its own grammatical structure. With the text printed above, one must supply *est* in each half: "both Zetes is over him and Calais is over him." Poetically this is flat⁴ and lacks the vigorous movement emphasized elsewhere by *sectati*, *instabant*, and *fuga*. The only completely satisfying conjecture yet proposed is Rossberg's substitution of *superat* for *super et* in both places: the Boreads, following after, "overtake" Hylas. This is still not all the remedy required, for one naturally expects that the alternation of attack later expressed in *alterna* . . . *fuga* (28) will be exploited in the context, especially in a pentameter so artfully balanced. To achieve this, two attractive conjectures have been proposed. *Hinc* . . . *hinc* (Heinsius, Vivona) suggests alternation in space, but not necessarily in time, and so might describe simultaneous attack; *nunc* . . . *nunc* (Rossberg) suggests more immediately alternation in time, but does not exclude alternation in space. The latter is arguably more apposite in the context and therefore should be adopted. The corruption to *hunc* . . . *hunc* would be easy even if *hunc* did not begin the previous line.

The more generally acknowledged difficulties of the passage begin with 27. What did Zetes and Calais hold "suspended" as they culled Hylas' kisses? According to the manuscripts and nearly all editors it was their hands; the absurdity of this has been stated best in the pungent observation of Housman that "when a man walks along the street, except he goes on all fours, his *palmae* are no less *suspensae* than if he flew."⁵ Something that will more distinctively characterize the advances of the Boreads is clearly necessary; since *palmae* will not do it, scholars seek some special point in the participle. Butler and Barber render the phrase "with hovering hands," Enk "in aere se sustinentibus manibus." Both fail to meet Housman's objection; one might as well observe that an eagle flies with soaring beak. Hertzberg and Postgate asserted that the hands were

⁴Some of course might prefer to retain it for that very reason, arguing that flatness is a peculiarly Propertian trait and invoking Postgate's observations on "weakness of will," "use of 'potentials,'" and "periphrases" (*Select Elegies* xl-xlv).

⁵"The Manuscripts of Propertius," *JP* 22 (1894) 110.

kept outstretched to hold Hylas' face while it was kissed. Both cited 1.3.16 in support of this (*osculaque admota sumere et arma manu*), but the difference in the two situations is too great. A stealthy and timorous Propertius can easily touch the face of an immobile Cynthia; it will be difficult for these winged beings to grasp the face of a love object who not only is in motion but actively resists. Moreover, had Propertius wished to make the Boreads hold out their hands, he would have done so by writing *oscula et extensis instabant carpere palmis* (cf. Venantius Fortunatus 6.5.71 *extensis palmis quis currat ad oscula*). The only conjecture to find any favour has been *plumis* (Livineius); certainly the presence of wings distinguished Zetes and Calais from the other Argonauts, but wings, no less than hands, would always be in the air. In support of *plumis* Burman cited a passage of Sidonius Apollinaris (C. 11.58) in which *libratos per inane pedes aduerberat alis* describes Cupid hovering in the air to kiss his mother Venus. Burman took *alis* to correspond to *plumis* and missed the parallel of *libratos per inane* and *suspensis*; this suggests that Propertius perhaps wrote not *palmis* but *plantis* (corresponding to *pedes* in Sidonius). The conjecture, supported by a passage of Statius which was adduced by Housman,⁶ appears in several mss, though modern editions cite it, if at all, under the *siglum* V2.⁷ The corruption could have occurred through an intermediate stage *plamis* (misreading of *nt* as *m*) or simply by the substitution of one word for another of similar appearance.

The precise activity described in 27–28 is open to question; I offer the following suggestion with no special conviction that it is right. If Shackleton Bailey is correct in taking *oscula ferre* to be the equivalent not of *oscula auferre* but of *oscula dare*,⁸ Propertius states in 27 that the Boreads take kisses, in 28 that they give them: is there any true contrast, or does he simply say the same thing twice? The implication of *oscula ferre* may be that Zetes and Calais plant kisses where they can. On the other hand, *oscula carpere* suggests the removal of kisses from a place that can supply them and offers no resistance. Only one part of the body can give a kiss,

⁶Statius *Theb.* 6.638–640, especially 639 *exilis plantis interuenit aer*.

⁷The earliest manuscripts to read *plantis* are Brescia, Bibl. Civ. Queriniana A.VII.7, London, British Library Harley 2574 (these two, which contain Catullus as well, are members of Mynors's class epsilon), and Leiden Voss. lat. O.13. The last also contains Catullus but seems to have drawn its text from a different tradition; cf. D. F. S. Thomson, *Catullus: A Critical Edition* (Chapel Hill 1978) 49 no. 39. Mynors noted that the manuscripts of this class contribute some twenty-five corrections to the text of Catullus; for their equally important contribution to the emendation of Propertius, cf. J. L. Butrica, *The Manuscript Tradition of Propertius* (Diss. Toronto 1978) 313–318. Many of the corrections of this family passed into another that coincides with Mynors's class eta; V corrected (that is, V2) represents a collation of some manuscript of this group (318–322).

⁸"Interpretations of Propertius," *CQ* 41 (1947) 89.

the mouth, and it may be that in 27 the Boreads take kisses from Hylas' mouth and in 28 plant them elsewhere. *Oscula carpere*, without further qualification, seems to imply willingness or passive acceptance on the part of the one kissed; perhaps Hylas teases his pursuers by relenting from time to time.

The most controversial part of the passage is 29: what does *ille sub extrema pendens secluditur ala* mean? The obvious sense is "but he, hanging, is confined under the tip of the wing and" (as the pentameter continues) "fends off the winged attack with a branch." No proposed explanation has clarified every detail of the scene. Most commentators follow one of two lines of interpretation. On the one hand some claim, following Lachmann, that Hylas seizes the wing of an attacking Boread by its tip and is lifted into the air, then fights off the other with a branch. Probably Propertius did not trouble to calculate Boread wing-spans or flexibility or strength, and so did not consider whether hanging at wing's end would protect Hylas from the osculatory range of his attacker. It is a more serious objection to ask why, if he is avoiding his attackers' attentions, Hylas attaches himself to one of them. Moreover, this hypothesis conflicts with the *alterna fuga* of Zetes and Calais. The action of each must be equal and alternate, and what Hylas does with one he must be able to do with the other (note that 29-30 are not later in time than 25-28: they simply depict the other side of the same scene).

Hertzberg initiated the second line of interpretation. This depends upon understanding *ala* not as "wing" but as one of several junctures of side and appendage. According to Hertzberg himself, the *ala* of 29 is not the wing of Zetes or Calais but the "wing-pit," the point at which the wing joins the side. This interpretation falls under the same difficulties as Lachmann's; in addition, Hylas now places himself all the nearer to his ravisher's mouth. Postgate and Butler and Barber accept this line but paraphrase rather than explain. Wratislaw⁹ modified this view to take the *ala* as Hylas' own armpit; this has in turn been amplified and defended by Camps. According to him, Hylas thrusts his head under his arm. Now, at least, with Hylas on the ground, the alternate attack can take place against an unwilling victim. Questions of heroic-age hygiene aside, thrusting one's head into the arm-pit is a challenging feat. Camps sought to avoid the difficulty by showing that *ala* can mean something like "pectoral development" or the area around the arm-pit; the extension of the sense of the noun also gives more point to its epithet *extrema* ("the boy ducks his head down as far as he can"). Yet even the extension envisaged by Camps does not seem great enough to allow the required

⁹A. H. Wratislaw and F. N. Sutton, *Catulli, Tibulli, Propertii poemata selecta* (London 1869).

distinction between edge and centre, especially when an object so large by comparison as the head is placed against it. Nor would such an act protect Hylas; according to one of Camps's own interpretations of *supina* (28), the Boreads kissed him as they came up from a dive, and to such an attack his face would still be vulnerable. Moreover, if only the boy's head is protected, why did the poet not specify as much with an accusative or ablative construction? Lastly, *pendens* remains to be accounted for. It fit easily so long as Hylas rose into the air, but is awkward if he remains upon the ground. Hence Camps interprets it as "leaning forward." The Latin examples that he cites (Prop. 4.8.21; Virgil *Ecl.* 1.76, *Aen.* 10.586) are not apposite, since they all refer to leaning over an edge, which can readily be understood as "hanging." His Italian example is still less appropriate; Hylas surely does not adopt the stance of the *Torre Pendente* of Pisa. Crouching with the head defended as Camps suggests would protect Hylas, but *pendens* cannot describe crouching.

I hope to have demonstrated that all attempts to defend the transmitted text of 29 have been in vain; when interpretation fails so completely, surely we may suspect corruption. I believe that no entirely satisfying emendation of the line has been proposed, but the general lines of restoration were adumbrated by Nicolaus Heinsius. If we visualize the scene, we realize that Hylas must remain on the ground, that the Boreads must hang in the air, and that the *ala* must be theirs. All of this is respected in Heinsius' conjecture *ille sed extrema pendentes ludit in ala*: "but he, at wing's length, mocks them as they hover." *Sed* for *sub* is a minor improvement; Rothstein, who supported the paradosis, noted that one expects an adversative and offered an ingenious but unconvincing explanation for the lack of one. If Hylas is entirely the innocent victim of his attackers, then *ludit* will aptly describe the way in which he cheats their hopes by keeping his distance; if he alternately resists and relents, then it will just as aptly describe how he teases and tantalizes them. As any lexicon will show, *pendere* is the proper verb for anything that floats or flies in the air; it is a favourite of Ovid for describing a human being at the moment of transformation into a bird (*Met.* 5.676; 6.667, 668; 7.379; 8.145; 9.219; 11.341). The only part of Heinsius' conjecture that fails to satisfy completely is *extrema . . . in ala*. The preposition defines too precisely the position of Hylas; neither poetry nor logic will place him so consistently at wing's end, and it seems harsh to require the phrase to mean that Hylas lets them approach that near and no nearer. One might therefore depart only a little farther from the *ductus litterarum* and read *extremam . . . ad alam*: "at about the extension of the wing," to render it prosaically. *Extremam . . . alam* differs from *extrema . . . ala* by only two horizontal strokes if abbreviated

(*extremā . . . alā*). The corruption of *pendentes ludit ad* to *pendens secluditur* is not so extreme as might seem at first glance. An original reversal of two letters, *t* and *s*, could have initiated it by creating *pendensetluditad*; dittography and a simple corruption suffice to make this *pendens secludit ad*. The corruption of *ad* to *ur* is not so easy as that of *in* to *ur*; here paleographical causes and interpolation might both be at work. The corruption as a whole might be regarded as arising from the difficulties of reading *scriptura continua*, the source of at least one other similar corruption in Propertius.¹⁰

After attempting to restore, insofar as possible, this passage of Propertius, we may return briefly to the line of Sidonius already discussed and cite it in context (C. 11.56–59):

at ille
cernuus et laeuae pendens in margine palmae
libratos per inane pedes aduerberat alis,
oscula sic matris carpens . . .

“But he (*sc.* Cupid), leaning forward and hovering at the edge of her left hand, beats with his wings his feet balanced in the air, taking thus his mother’s kisses,” while she reclines half asleep. Such a scene—an air-borne creature kissing one earth-bound—seems to occur only in these two passages in classical literature.¹¹ There is one clear verbal parallel, not striking in itself but perhaps made more so by the similarity in line-position, *oscula . . . carpens* in Sidonius and *oscula . . . carpere* in Propertius. This resemblance, supported by the rarity of such scenes in Sidonius’ possible literary models, may permit the suggestion that Sidonius is imitating Propertius. To the two parallels already noted we can then add a third (*cernuus* in Sidonius reversing Propertius’ *supina*) and a fourth (Cupid, in the air, is described as *pendens*, as Propertius must have described the Boreads). If this is so, Sidonius becomes a witness to the text of Propertius who predates our earliest extant manuscript by some eight hundred years; it is interesting to observe that the text he seems to

¹⁰This is 4.7.61, where Turnebus elicited *quaque aera rotunda* from the paradosis *qua querar* (or *querat*) *ut unda*. There may be another at 2.8.31 (*fugas tractos O: fuga stratos Passerat*), but such corruptions, when they are of short extent, do not necessarily derive from this cause.

¹¹Enk *ad loc.* cited as an imitation of *suspensis palmis* Claudian 10.116 (an epithalamium for Honorius and Maria), where Cupid is described as *suspensus in oscula matris*. A glance at the context shows that this cannot be the case: in 97–98 Cupid clearly lands (note *passuque superbiior intrat*), Venus embraces him in 110 (*sinu puerum complexa*), and then releases him in 122 (*gremio natum . . . remouit*). Unless Claudian was an extremely forgetful or extremely bad poet, Cupid cannot be hovering at 116. Nor is he “hanging upon his mother’s kisses,” as Platnauer’s Loeb translation has it; rather he is “lifted up for his mother to kiss,” raised up by Venus from her lap to be kissed, a gesture common among mothers of all periods.

have known resembled less what the manuscript tradition has transmitted than what literary convention, linguistic usage, and common sense suggest that Propertius must have written.

To summarize: the efforts of commentators to defend the transmitted text of 1.20.25–30 fail at certain points, especially 27 and 29; corruption is likely, and ways in which it may be healed have been discussed. If all the conjectures advocated here are adopted, the passage now reads as follows:

*hunc duo sectati fratres, Aquilonia proles
 (nunc superat Zetes, nunc superat Calais),
 oscula suspensis instabant carpere plantis
 oscula et alterna ferre supina fuga,
 ille sed extremam pendentes ludit ad alam
 et uolucres ramo submouet insidias.*

“Pursuing him two brothers, the children of Aquilo (now Zetes overtakes him, now Calais), were pressing on with air-borne feet to take and to give upside-down kisses in alternate flight, but he, at wing’s length, mocks them as they hover and fends off with a branch the winged attack.”

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