

Feminine speech in Roman love elegy: Prop. 1.3^{*}

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ABSTRACT: This paper offers a critical reassessment of Prop. 1.3 through a careful re-examination of the poem's representational mechanisms of erotic desire. So far, critical attention has concentrated primarily on the poet's manipulative rhetoric. My investigation focuses on Cynthia's feminine speech (language, structure and content) and its rhetorical efficiency in view of the poem's gendered antagonism between male desire and feminine subjectivity.

Propertius 1.3 is an elegy which has never ceased to attract critical attention. The poem is about the poet's belated drunken return to Cynthia's bed after a night-long revelry. Cynthia, worn-out by the long and aimless anticipation, has already gone to sleep. Upon arrival the poet, struck with awe at her beauty, fears waking her up. Cynthia's sleep is eventually interrupted by moonbeams, and when Cynthia wakes up, she delivers a fervent reproach against her lover. The poem seems to be based on a bipolar antithesis between what is 'fantasy' and what is 'real', an antithesis evident in the contrast between the description of Cynthia's fantasized beauty and her vehement rebuke against the poet's erotic infidelity.¹ Almost two thirds of the poem (lines 1-34) is dedicated to Cynthia and her unparalleled physical beauty, which receives almost mythical dimensions right from the very beginning.² The poet's detailed references to her hands (line 8), head (line 8), temples (line 22), hair (line 23), palms (line 23), bosom (line 23), eyes (line 32), combined with his worship-like approach towards Cynthia, who receives gifts similar to the gifts offered to the statues of the gods (lines 24-5),³ help to establish a dream-like version of Cynthia.

^{*} This is an enhanced and substantially revised version of a paper delivered at the 2006 'Feminine Speech International Conference', which was hosted by the Department of Greek Philology of the Democritus University of Thrace (Komotini, Greece). To the members of that audience I owe thanks for their comments and enlightening suggestions. That paper appeared at the Proceedings of the Conference (V. Kontogianni (ed.), *Women's Speech: Proceedings of an International Conference* (Athens 2008) 369-81) under the title: «Ο λόγος της σιωπής: η 'γυναικεία' φωνή στη ρωμαϊκή ερωτική ελεγεία. Η περίπτωση της ελεγείας 1.3 του Προπερτίου (Πρώτη Προσέγγιση)» [The speech of silence: 'feminine' speech in Roman love elegy. The case of Prop. 1.3 (A preliminary approach)]. I would also like to thank the anonymous reader for his constructive suggestions and improvements on a first draft of this paper.

¹ So Allen (1962) 133-4; Curran (1966) 189-90; Lyne (1970) 61; *id.* (1980) 99-100; Stahl (1985) 75; McKeown 1989 on *Ov. Am.* 1.10.1-8; Harrison (1994) 19. Kaufhold (1997) 88 by drawing attention to the textuality of the elegiac *puella* alternatively suggests an antithesis 'between an idealized and a realistic representation of Cynthia'.

² For the text I am using Camps (1961). On the poem's structure see Curran (1966) 190; Wlosok (1967) 351 n.1; Richardson (1976) 153; Fedeli (1980) 112-3; *id.* (1983) 1874-5 with bibliography; Baker (2000) 76. For the purposes of my discussion I divide the poem in two parts: a) the poet's speech (lines 1-33), and b) Cynthia's speech (lines 34-46).

³ See Curran (1966) 203; Lyne (1970) 72. On the ambiguous syntax of *cauis... manibus* (line 24) and *de prono... sinu* (line 26) see Shackleton Bailey (1949) 23; Lyne (1970) 64-5; Harmon (1976)

A preliminary yet crucial remark needs to be made here.⁴ In Roman love elegy feminine voice should be understood primarily, but not solely, as a literary construction: as the outcome of the male poet's re-enactment of feminine voice according to the needs and constraints of his erotic rhetoric. This, however, does not necessarily mean that feminine speech cannot be heard anywhere in the poem. Feminine and male speech are not mutually excluded; on the contrary, it is their intersection and the resulting expressive multiplicity that I will try to investigate. My argument benefits from the insightful findings of a study of feminine speech in Roman comedy conducted fairly recently by Dorota Dutsch.⁵ Dutsch has convincingly argued for a critical re-assessment of Plato's idea of *chôra* (*Tim.* 48e-53c) as 'a metaphor of communication' that outdoes the prevailing theoretical marginalization of women's speech as an exercise in rhetorical *ethopoeia*.⁶ Her review of modern interpretations of the platonic *chôra* by Derrida, Kristeva and Irigaray aims at the appropriation of the *chôric* space as an alternative 'third' which offers the opportunity to detect *echoes* (no matter how distant and distorted) of Roman feminine speech in male-authored texts, like Roman Comedy and—I would also argue—Roman Love Elegy.⁷ Along these lines of interpretation, Cynthia's speech in the poem becomes all the more meaningful as an in-between space, where gendered representational strategies intersect in a struggle for power.

Cynthia is introduced to the poem through an impressive triad of similes at lines 1-6, where she is compared successively: a) with Ariadne, abandoned by Theseus (lines 1-2); b) Andromeda, just liberated with the help of Perseus (lines 3-4); and c) with an anonymous maenad lying on the shores of river Apidanus, exhausted by her manic dance (lines 5-6). The high style of this introductory section with the carefully chosen vocabulary and its dense intertextual (mainly epic)⁸ resonances contribute significantly to Cynthia's elevation to the realm of

160-61; Baker (1980) 255-7. Also cf. Prop. 1.3.24 and 26 with Camps (1961); Richardson (1976); Maltby (1980) and Baker (2000). For the Catullan echoes of this offering see Zetzel (1996) 84.

⁴ For detailed discussions on the vexed issue of gendered representation of feminine experience in Roman love elegy see Kennedy (1993); Gold (1993); Flaschenriem (1998); James (1998); McCoskey (1999); Janan (2001); Wyke (2002) 11-114. For an annotated review of scholarly research on feminine linguistic mannerisms in Latin see Dutsch (2008) 4-12.

⁵ Dutsch (2008).

⁶ Dutsch (2008), esp. Chapter 5, 'Father Tongue, Mother Tongue: the Back-Story and the Forth-Story' (187-227), and the Epilogue (228-31).

⁷ Cf. Dutsch (2008) 231: 'The notion of a *chôric* split would aptly describe the interval between the actor's identity and his female role, the space between "his" body and "her" words. It is in this ambivalent space, oscillating between the masculine and the feminine (but leaning towards the latter), that the "feminine" discourses of comedy seem to operate... "The third" is thus a tool we can use to analyse those intersections where the playwright's monologue touches upon the feminine. By conceptualizing the interval between the author and his feminine style as a space of contiguity as well as separation, we can hear in these theatrical "women" distant echoes of women speaking.'

⁸ Curran (1966) 193.

myth.⁹ This is Cynthia's mythological time and space, which is soon to be invaded by the poet's somewhat unstable and drunken steps at line 9.¹⁰

Critics so far have adopted—almost unanimously—the poet's male perspective and have understood the impressive triad of similes as part of the poet's strategy to idealize Cynthia. Fairly recently Ellen Greene, keeping close to the feminist critique of Luce Irigaray and Jessica Benjamin,¹¹ has openly challenged such a reading by suggesting instead a gendered approach, which puts emphasis on a close examination of the representational mechanisms of erotic desire operating in the poem. Greene has argued that the poet's description of Cynthia's exceptional physical beauty is not aiming at her idealization, but rather at her depreciation and her consequent objectification.¹² As she enters the realm of myth, Cynthia loses her authority and autonomy, and ultimately turns into a mere projection of the poet's male erotic desire.¹³ What is more, the passivity and the immobility of the *puella*, by fuelling the poet's male desire, enable his identification in the role of her saviour and protector.¹⁴

The mythological opening of the poem (lines 1-6) has a distinctively erotic coloring, which sustained by the sexual implications of a carefully chosen vocabulary,¹⁵ has as a result the idealization of Cynthia as an object of sexual

⁹ For critical discussions of the vocabulary, style and intertextual character of lines 1-6 see Allen (1962) 134; Curran (1966) 191-7; Lyne (1970) 66-9; *id.* (1980) 98-102; Giangrande (1974) 30; Harmon (1974) 152-9; Fedeli (1980) 111, 114-15; Noonan (1990); Kaufhold (1994) 88-90. The choice of the specific myths and the static quality of the description possibly betray an influence from visual arts, painting most probably: see Curran (1966) 195, 199 with n.13; Lyne (1970) 66; Wlosok (1967) 335-40; Harmon (1974) 153 n.7 with bibliography, 155; Maltby (1980) 66; Richardson on Prop. 1.3.5; Harrison (1994) 25 n.5 with bibliography *ad loc.*; Valladares (2005) 209-24.

¹⁰ Hodge and Buttmore (1977) 87 stress the fact that 'throughout the poem Propertius modulates between myth and reality, subjectivity and objectivity, evocation and exact observation'. Along the same lines of interpretation Maltby (1980) 65 remarks that 'the constant interweaving of the mythical and the real... gives vivid representation of a real situation as experienced by one in a dreamlike (or drunken) state'.

¹¹ Benjamin (1988) and Irigaray (1991).

¹² For more see Greene (1998) 51-9 followed by Valladares (2005) 232-5.

¹³ Greene (1998) 53 and 57. For similar strategies which contribute to the objectification of the elegiac *puella* and her manipulation by the male poet see Kennedy (1993) and Wyke (2002).

¹⁴ The poet's control over Cynthia is also facilitated through vision. The poet's gaze is prominent throughout the poem, as he portrays himself more in the role of the viewer rather than that of the participant (Curran (1966) 191, also 195, 203-4). In this respect, his identification with Argus at lines 19-20 is important. For more on this mythological *exemplum* see Curran (1966) 201; Lyne (1970) 70-1; Hering (1972) 62-4; Harmon (1974) 159 with n.28; Maltby on Prop. 1.3.20; Valladares (2005) 224-8. Also see Noonan (1990) 331-2 on the role of vision in Andromeda's *exemplum* (lines 2-3). Cynthia in the poem is the object of the poet's gaze. She is passive; she is seen (*uisa mihi*, line 7), but she cannot see. Her eyes are closed. Only the moon (not even herself) can cause her eyelids to open (*compositos... ocellos* line 33; syntactically her eyes are an object) and yet again only for a short while, as she will soon drift away to sleep. For an exceptional discussion of the role of the moon as the poet's rival and the subsequent reversal of the traditional gendered roles in the poem see Valladares (2005) 228-32.

¹⁵ Cf. e.g. terms like *iacuit* 1, *languida* 2, *accubuit* 3, *fessa* 5, *mollem spirare quietem* 7. For a detailed analysis of the sexual innuendos in this section see Curran (1966) 197; Harmon (1974)

desire and not as a person of certain prestige and grandeur. The poet's drunkenness brings an additional serious blow to Cynthia's splendor. The poet's reference to his drunken stumble at line 9 (following immediately after the mythological *exempla*), taken together with the emphatic reference to Bacchus at lines 13-4, leaves no room for doubts: Cynthia's myth-like portrait and the romantic atmosphere at the opening of the poem are nothing more than the products of the poet's drunken state of mind. In fact, the poet's drunkenness can potentially harm his credibility throughout the poem.¹⁶ From this perspective, the boundaries between what is 'fantasy' and what is 'real' become extremely precarious, so far as this opposition becomes contingent on the 'sobriety—drunkenness' polarity.¹⁷ Is this the 'real' portrait of Cynthia or a fragmentary version of her manufactured by the poet's intoxicated mind?

All three mythological figures at the opening of the poem, despite their partial similarities and/or disparities, have one major thing in common: they are voiceless. Cynthia's close intertextual correlation with Catullus' Ariadne through a series of numerous and carefully chosen intertextual allusions demands our attention.¹⁸ It is my contention that this correlation plays a programmatic role by

153-5; Hodge and Buttimore (1977) 87-8; Baker (1980) 250-3; Harrison (1994) 19-21; Kaufhold (1997) 89-93. For an opposite view see Lyne (1970) 67.

¹⁶ For a detailed discussion of the poet's drunkenness in the poem see in particular Baker (1980) 253-8. Cf. also Allen (1962) 133; Curran (1966) 196; Lyne (1970) 69; Harmon (1974) 152; Rudd (1981) 149; Harrison (1994) 18. For the poet's metonymic use of the god's name for wine (*cum multo... Baccho* 9) as an attempt to lend some dignity to his drunkenness see Hodge and Buttimore (1977) 90 and Maltby on Prop. 1.3.9.

¹⁷ Granting this train of thought one might wonder whether Cynthia's speech at lines 35-46 is what Cynthia actually said or what the drunken poet thinks she said. The reader might well wonder whether her speech, like her initial portrait, is but another product of the poet's drunkenness.

¹⁸ Cf. Prop. 1.3.1 *Qualis Thesea iacuit cedente carina* ~ Catul. 64.249 *quae tum prospectans cedentem maesta carinam* and 53 *Thesea cedentem celeri cum classe tuetur*, Prop. 1.3.2 *languida desertis Cnosia litoribus* ~ Catul. 64.133 *perfide, deserto liquisti in litore, Theseu?* and 172 *Cnosia Cecropiae tetigissent litora puppes*, Prop. 1.3.1 *Qualis... // 3 qualis... // 6 qualis... / 7 talis* ~ Catul. 64.200-1 *sed quali solam Theseus me mente reliquit, / tali mente, deae, funestet seque suosque*, Prop. 1.3.10 *et quaterent sera nocte facem pueri* (the poet's company) ~ Catul. 64.251-6 *at parte ex alia florens uolabat Iacchus / cum thiaso Satyrorum et Nysigenis Silenis, / te quaerens, Ariadna, tuoque incensus amore. / cui Thyades passim lymphata mente furebant / euhoe bacchantes, euhoe capita inflectentes. / harum pars tecta quatiebant cuspide thyrsos* (Bacchus' company), Prop. 1.3.46 *illa fuit lacrimis ultima cura meis* ~ Catul. 64.250 *multiplices animo uoluebat saucia curas* (just before the arrival of Bacchus), Prop. 1.3.13 *et quamuis duplici correptum ardore iuberent* ~ Catul. 64.253 *te quaerens, Ariadna, tuoque incensus amore*, Prop. 1.3.21. the garland (*corollas* 21) offered by the poet to Cynthia ~ the crown offered to Ariadne, which was later catagorized by Bacchus in her honour (cf. e.g. Epimenides *Cretica* fr. 3 B 25 Diels-Kranz; Ap. Rhod. 3.997-1003; Call. *Aet.* fr. 110.59-61; Arat. *Phaen.* 71-3 with Kidd, Catul. 66.59-61; Ov. *Met.* 8.177-82; Hyg. *Astr.* 2.5), Prop. 1.3.41 *nam modo purpureo fallebam stamine somnum* ~ the purple coverlet decorated with the scene of Ariadne's abandonment by Theseus (Catul. 64.47-9 *puluinar uero diuae geniale locatur / sedibus in mediis, Indo quod dente politum / tincta tegit roseo conchyli purpura fuco*), Prop. 1.3.5-6 ~ Catul. 64.61 *saxea ut effigies bacchantis, prospicit, eheu* (Ariadne compared to a Bacchant). For more on the association between Prop. 1.3 and Catul. 64 see Curran (1966) 196-7 and 207 with n.22; Wlosok (1967) 338-9; Harmon (1974) 162 n.32; Harrison (1994) 25 n.6. Cynthia's association with Ariadne inevitably causes the poet's association with Theseus and/or Bacchus. On this double association see: a) for the poet as Theseus: Curran (1966) 207; Wlosok (1967) 352; Harmon (1974) 162 n.33; b) for the poet as

making Cynthia's speech look like a miniature of 'a woman's lament abandoned by her lover', of the type we usually come across in epyllia. The ineffectiveness of the Catullan lament casts a bleak shadow over Cynthia's speech. In addition, the sensuous overtones of the parallel between Cynthia and the maenad, tired-out by her wild, orgiastic ravings (lines 5-6), also entail a discreet warning for the potentially violent and ferocious behaviour conventionally associated with Maenads (especially in pictorial arts).¹⁹

With respect to structure, Cynthia's speech seems to be organized in two sections following a pattern of 'ascent-descent'. Section one ('ascent', lines 35-40) contains Cynthia's accusations against the alleged unfaithfulness of her beloved; section two ('descent', lines 41-46) offers a certain release from the accumulated tension by focusing more on Cynthia rather than the poet and by offering a portrait of self-pity. The poet's choice to give Cynthia's words in direct speech, and not in reported, is surely not haphazard, as it helps to further underline the contrast between 'fantasy' and 'reality'.²⁰ The disruptive role of Cynthia's speech reflects on the violation of the elegiac couplet's cohesion at lines 33-4, where the hexameter concludes part one of the poem (lines 1-34), while the pentameter looks forward to the second part of the poem by introducing Cynthia's speech (lines 35-46). The structural discontinuity is further sustained by the lack of any conjunction between the two parts. Moreover, the emphatic placement of the archaic verb *ait* to introduce Cynthia's speech at line 34 should not pass unnoticed.²¹ It is true that the poet, after the vocative address to Cynthia by name at line 22, uses only second-person expressions to refer to her (*tuis... temporibus* 22, *duxti* 27, *tibi* 29).²² Hence, the transition from the second-person expressions to the third-person *sic ait* seems to suggest emotional detachment.²³

The great majority of modern critics read behind Cynthia's speech the end of the poet's fantasy and the beginning of the girl's reality. Cynthia's world seems to have nothing in common with the poet's romantic universe; their relationship is turned upside down now that she is given a voice. It is the premise of my argument, however, that the suggested opposition between the poet's fantasy and the girl's reality is but a false pretense. As it proves, Cynthia's speech is dotted

Bacchus: Curran (1966) 196; Harrison (1994) 19; Kaufhold (1997) 90 with n.22 and bibliography *ad loc.* For the poet in the role of Theseus and Bacchus simultaneously see Maltby on Prop. 1.3.2. Harrison (1994) 19-20 assumes a rival lover, who is identified with Bacchus. Further on this matter see the bibliography compiled by Harmon (1974) 153 n.4.

¹⁹ See Lyne (1970) 67-78; Harmon (1974) 155; Lyne (1980) 99; Maltby (1980) 65-6; Harrison (1994) 21. Following Harmon (1974) 157 the mythological triad reaches its climax with the Maenad, whose role is programmatic.

²⁰ Greene (1998) 58.

²¹ Cf. Hodge and Buttimore (1977) 95: 'Line 34 then contrasts harshly with the mellifluous flow and gentle imagery of the previous line. The opening "sic ait" has a brutal brevity.'

²² Wlosok (1967) 346; Maltby on Prop. 1.3.22; Kaufhold (1997) 93; Baker on Prop. 1.3.34.

²³ The verb *ait* is frequent in Latin poetry, especially in higher genres. For more on its frequency see McKeown on Ov. *Am.* 1.6.12. On the cacophony of line 34, mainly due to the accumulation of consonants, and on the poem's structural discontinuity at this point see Lyne (1970) 75 and 77 respectively.

with verbal and syntactical repetitions from the opening section of the poem.²⁴ These repetitions have been interpreted as Cynthia's fervent polemic against her 'fantasized' portrait drawn by the poet.²⁵ Against such an interpretation, I contend that the re-employment of the same vocabulary does not necessarily produce contrast, but similarity as well. Cynthia does not recall her 'fantasized', almost 'dreamy' portrait, to invalidate it, but rather to confirm it. Cynthia is essentially saying what she believes her lover would expect her to say. Hence, she takes up a role prescribed by male dominance and voices complaints which aim at fulfilling almost exclusively not her own but her lover's desire. To be more precise, her carefully chosen repetition of sexually charged terms, like *languidus* 38 (~ *languida* 2),²⁶ *fessa* 42 (~ *fessa* 5),²⁷ *deserta* 43 (~ *desertis* 2), *lapsam* 45 (~ *lapsos* 23),²⁸ inevitably brings to mind the sensuality and sexuality of her portrait at the opening of the poem.²⁹ Cynthia's feminine speech combined with the description of her physical beauty is manipulated by the poet's male dominance. As if she was granted access to the poet's inner thoughts or as if she has read (has she?) the first part of the poem Cynthia describes herself in accordance with the poet's dictates and desires.³⁰ Doubts are raised regarding the speaker's gender: is it Cynthia herself or the poet-as-Cynthia who is employing male speech? Her use

²⁴ Cf. 1 *Qualis...* // 3 *qualis...* // 6 *qualis...* / 7 *talis* ~ 39-40 *o utinam talis perducas, improbe, noctes, / me miseram qualis semper habere iubes!*, 2 *languida desertis* *Cnosia litoribus* ~ 38 *languidus exactis*, *ei mihi, sideribus* and 43 *interdum leuiter mecum deserta querebar*, 3 *qualis et accubuit primo Cepheia somno* ~ 41 *nam modo purpureo fallebam stamine somnum* and 45 *dum me iucundis lassam Sopor impulit alis*, 5 *nec minus assiduis Edonis fessa choreis* ~ 42 *rursus et Orpheae carmine, fessa, lyrae*, 23 *et modo gaudebam lapsos formare capillos* ~ 45 *dum me iucundis lapsam Sopor impulit alis*, 13 *et quamuis duplici correptum ardore iuberent* ~ 40 *me miseram qualis semper habere iubes*, 15 *subiecto leuiter positam temptare lacerto* ~ 43 *interdum leuiter mecum deserta querebar*, 19 *sed sic intentis haerebam fixus ocellis* (also 7 *talis uisa mihi mollem spirare quietem* and 8 *Cynthia conseris nixa caput manibus*) ~ 34 *sic ait in molli fixa toro cubitum*. For a detailed analysis of the above verbal and syntactical repetitions see Curran (1966) 205-6, esp. Lyne (1970) 76-7; Harmon (1974) 161; Richardson on Prop. 1.3.38; Harrison (1994) 23.

²⁵ So Curran (1966) 206: 'At the end of the poem Cynthia herself is made to recall the vision, only to contradict it', and Lyne (1970) 76: 'Cynthia's dream-shattering speech that concludes the poem is made to re-use elements of the wording of the elaborately idealistic opening section. The ironical effect of this is clear: Cynthia, crushingly and conclusively flings back in Propertius' face his own idealization of her.'

²⁶ Hodge and Buttimore (1977) 87-8; Maltby on Prop. 1.3.2; Harrison (1994) 25 n.10.

²⁷ *fessus* is an epic adjective, popular with Vergil. This is its sole appearance in the first two books of Propertius' elegies.

²⁸ Cf. the poet's love stricken reaction in Prop. 1.1.25-6 *et uos, qui sero lapsam reuocatis, amici, / quaerite non sani pectoris auxilia*.

²⁹ Also cf. the following verbal repetitions (though without any sexual implication): *iubes* 40 (~ *iuberent* 13), *leuiter* 43 (~ *leuiter* 15), *fixa* (34) ~ *nixa* (8) (at the same metrical position), *molli* (34) ~ *mollem* (8). Also note the repetitions between lines 1-10 and 11-20: *Liber* and *durus* 14 ~ *libera iam duris* 4 and *turbare quietem* 17 ~ *spirare quietem* 7 (so Curran (1966) 200). For more on these intra-textual repetitions see Curran (1966) 205-6; Harmon (1974) 161-5; Cairns (1977) 335-6.

³⁰ Cf. Hodge and Buttimore (1977) 97: 'Her words here... recall[ing] words she had not heard, thought by the poet over her sleeping body.'

of the interjection *ei mihi* (line 38), which in Roman Comedy was exclusive to men,³¹ is perhaps another instance of Cynthia's ventriloquism of male speech.

Cynthia, despite the impression given that she is fighting against her current erotic misfortune, proves to be rather reluctant to take up a more energetic role in her relationship. Soon after having hurled her accusations against the poet, she retreats to a self-description which aims primarily at raising pity and compassion. Thus, she manages to maintain the portrait of a miserable, helpless and abandoned woman which (so she believes) will make her even more desirable in her lover's eyes.³² The repetition of *deserta* at line 42 (from line 2 *desertis*), the highly emotional *miseram* (line 40) and the reference to her tears (line 46)³³ facilitate Cynthia's self-depiction as another Ariadne, a victim of male desire. Hence, her accusations against the alleged unfaithfulness of her beloved, so far as they remain unanswered and speculative, are practically self-annulled.³⁴ The poet's reference to the frequency of Cynthia's complaints at line 18 (*expertae... iurgia saevitiae*) further undermines the sincerity and the emotional impact of her words, which now appear as the preplanned product of careful deliberation rather than the ardent outburst of the moment. Cynthia becomes trapped in the role of a hysterical, jealous woman ceaselessly repeating the same stereotypical complaints of betrayal and abandonment. On the other hand, the poet cannot rebut such accusations either because they lack justification or because they are simply considered as stereotypical accusations of erotic unfaithfulness. In this respect, lines 17-8 constitute a turning point in the poem, since the reader comes to realize that the deconstruction of Cynthia's glorious portrait can be attributed to the poet himself rather than to Cynthia. The poet's fear of her violent tongue is a serious blow to her dreamy portrait.³⁵ As Maltby characteristically remarks: 'It is not Cynthia's beauty but her wrath which now has mythological proportions for Prop[ertius].'³⁶ Cynthia's furious outburst does not come as a surprise, but rather as a manifestation of her violent character, which the poet knows too well (*expertae*). It turns out that the cohesion of her character makes Cynthia—through repetition and predictability—all the more susceptible to the dominance of the male poet.

³¹ So Adams (1984) 54-5; he notes, however, that 'when it [sc. *ei*] degenerated into a poeticism, it lost its exclusively male character', quoting among others Prop. 1.3.38.

³² Cf. Hodge and Buttimore (1977) 98: 'She does not reject Propertius... Cynthia's reaction is not necessarily a douche of cold water to her lover as some critics have supposed. It is a complaint, but an erotic complaint, a devious but unmistakable invitation to a sophisticated lover.'

³³ For tears as means of erotic rhetoric in Roman love elegy see Tib. 1.4.71-2 with Smith; 1.9.29-30 with Murgatroyd; Prop. 3.24.26 with Fedeli; Ov. *Am.* 1.8.83-4 with McKeown; *Her.* 2.51-2, *Ars* 1.659-62 with Hollis on 661-2; 3.291-2 with Gibson; *Rem.* 689-90 with Henderson; James (2003b).

³⁴ See Curran (1966) 206; Lyne (1970) 61-2, 76; Hering (1972) 70-71; Harmon (1974) 163-4; Greene (1998) 58; Harrison (1994) 20. Kaufhold (1997) 89-92 contends that the implications of *conuiuium* in the poem do not necessarily justify a case for unfaithfulness. I cannot agree with Harrison (1994) 20 and 23, who suspects behind Cynthia's accusations against her beloved a transference of her own guilt for a similar misdemeanor.

³⁵ So Baker (1980) 252-4. Also see Curran (1966) 200.

³⁶ Maltby (1980) 65.

Cynthia's combined reference to wool spinning and lyre playing at lines 41-2 should also be read against the gendered dynamics of male power versus feminine helplessness in the poem. The possibility of a Homeric reminiscence behind this specific reference to weaving is tempting; so is the association of Cynthia with Penelope, the archetype of marital faith.³⁷ Cynthia, like Penelope, keeps herself busy with wool-spinning in an attempt to fill the long hours of waiting.³⁸ The Homeric influence aside, the reference also strikes a distinctively Roman tone, since the spinning of the wool, which was numbered among the dignified duties of a respected Roman matron, ultimately became a symbol of Roman feminine marital loyalty and chastity.³⁹ The combined reference, however, to lyre playing causes certain uneasiness, since this skill recalls the image of a professional feminine entertainer in symposia and other gatherings of the sort, which is totally incongruous with the ethos of a respected Roman *matrona*.⁴⁰ The purple colour of the wool is equally problematic given its implications of excess and sartorial luxury, which lie conventionally at the target of criticism by the elegiac poets.⁴¹ Set against the backdrop of a possible Homeric influence, the purple colour distances Cynthia from Penelope and brings her closer to the Iliadic version of

³⁷ So Fedeli on Prop. 1.3.41; Wlosok (1967) 349, 350 with n.2; Lyne (1970) 62 and *id.* (1980) 119; Harmon (1974) 162; Maltby on Prop. 1.3.41; Harrison (1994) 26 n.22; James (2003a) with bibliography *ad loc.*

³⁸ Penelope in Hom. *Od.* 2.93-109, esp. 104-5 ἔνθα καὶ ἡματίη μὲν ὑφαίνεσκεν μέγαν ἰστόν, / νόκτας δ' ἀλλύεσκεν, ἐπὶν δαΐδας παραθεῖτο, 19.136-58. Cf. also Prop. 2.9.3-6 *Penelope poterat bis denos salua per annos / uiuere, tam multis femina digna procis; / coniugium falsa poterat differre Minerua, / nocturno soluens texta diurna dolo.*

³⁹ Wool spinning was traditionally associated with Roman wifely virtue. For more on this association see Lilja (1965) 133-4; Wlosok (1967) 349 n.2; Treggiari (1976) 83-4; Lyne (1980) 7; McKeown on Ov. *Am.* 1.13.23-4; Clark (1996) 41-2; Larrson-Lovén (1998); Baker on Prop. 1.3.41; Maltby on Tib. 1.3.83-9; Hor. *Carm.* 3.15.13-4 with Nisbet-Rudd. Wool spinning as a demonstration of feminine virtue and as a praise (*laudatio*) of women also appears in Roman sepulchral epigrams: e.g. *CLE* 52.8 *domum seruaui, lanam fecit* (Claudia's epitaph); *CLE* 63.4 *grauitatem officio et lanificio praestitei*; *CLE* 1988.14 *lana cui e minibus nunquam sine caussa recessit*; *CLE* 492.16 *nec labos huic defuit nec uellerum inscia fila*. Lyne (1970) 62 and 76 draws attention to the 'marital' quality of the relationship between the Cynthia and the poet, which he attributes to the elegiac (mainly Propertian) convention of describing the erotic liaison in terms of 'marriage'. So Richardson (1976) 153; Maltby on Prop. 1.3.35-6 and 41; Greene (1998) 58-9.

⁴⁰ So Wlosok (1967) 350 and Harrison (1994) 23 with n.26. Cf. Sallust. *Cat.* 25.2. *haec* (sc. Sempronia) *mulier genere atque forma, praeterea uiro liberis satis fortunata fuit; litteris Graecis Latinis docta, psallere [et] saltare elegantius quam necesse est probae, multa alia, quae instrumenta luxuriate*; Ov. *Am.* 2.11.31-2 *tutius est fouisse torum, legisse libellos, / Threiciam digitis increpuisse lyram*; Her. 3.117-8 *tutius est iacuisse toro, tenuisse puellam, / Threiciam digitis increpuisse lyram*. For women lyre-players see Treggiari (1976) 90-91 Cynthia's musical pursuits can be justified on the fact that she is a *docta puella* (cf. Corinna's similar interests in Ov. *Am.* 2.11.31-2). For more on musical pursuits as indication of Cynthia's poetic competence see Lilja (1965) 134-5; Valladares (2005) 234. According to Lyne (1970) 76 the picture of Cynthia playing the lyre adds a certain emotional tone to the text: 'Likewise 42 maintains the picture of her own pathos, as she depicts herself, still keeping awake through weary, whiling away the time on a lyre in hope of her love's return'.

⁴¹ Harrison (1994) 23 with nn.23-4. For the Romans' negative attitude towards sartorial excess see C. Michalopoulos on Ov. *Her.* 4.71 with bibliography *ad loc.*

Helen, whom Iris finds at her loom weaving purple thread.⁴² It is my contention that Cynthia's ambiguous combination of chastity with promiscuity aims once again at heightening the male sexual desire of the poet. Cynthia's contradictory self-description both as a paradigm of moral integrity and as a paradigm of feminine wantonness makes her even more desirable, as it appeals to the male erotic fantasy of the desired woman being both a virgin and a whore.⁴³

Cynthia at the opening of her speech (lines 35-6) attributes to the poet characteristics of an *exclusus amator* and she proves to be an adequate reader (once again), when she picks up the metaliterary implications of the garland offered to her by him. Despite, however, her initial attempt to associate the poet with the *exclusus amator*, it is Cynthia and not the poet who is inscribed in the poem as the *exclusus amator*.⁴⁴ In view of the close generic affiliation of Cynthia's complaints with the κῶμος⁴⁵ the verb *querere* at line 43 becomes a significant poetological marker, which is employed—more or less—as a synonym for 'elegiac lament'.⁴⁶ This is surely an unexpected twist, which unsettles the gendered dynamics of the poem. Cynthia in the role of the *exclusus amator* is surely an unexpected twist, which unsettles the gendered dynamics of the poem. However, this should not be taken as an attempt to undermine the poet's prominence in the poem. On the contrary, Cynthia seems eager to withdraw from her somewhat advantageous position, since at the closing part of her speech she maintains the portrait of a helpless and abandoned woman looking for sympathy and compassion. I contend that her exchangeability with the poet in the role of the *exclusus amator* implies their mutual compatibility instead of their exclusivity.⁴⁷

Despite Cynthia's artful ventriloquism of male speech, the poet—perhaps in an attempt for more credibility—also allows for certain linguistic traits in her speech, which are typical of the feminine discourse. Cynthia's words are much more emotional compared with the somewhat stiff and high styled language of the poet, at the opening of the poem in particular.⁴⁸ The accumulation of two

⁴² Wlosok (1967) 349; Harmon (1974) 162-3. Cf. Hom. *Il.* 3.125-6 τὴν (sc. Helen) δ' εὖρ' ἐν μεγάρῳ· ἦ δὲ μέγαν ἰστὸν ὕφαινε / δίπλακα πορφυρέην, πολέας δ' ἐνέπασσεν ἀέθλους, cf. Ov. *Her.* 17.223-4 *donaque promissis uberiora feram; / purpura nempe mihi pretiosaque texta dabuntur* with A. Michalopoulos 2006 *ad loc.* Cf. also the sea-nymphs: Hom. *Od.* 13.107-8 ἐν δ' ἰστοὶ λίθειοι περιμήκεες, ἔνθα τε Νύμφαι / φάρε' ὑφαίνουσιν ἀλιπόρφυρα, θαῦμα ἰδέσθαι.

⁴³ For more on this (self-contradictory) opposition of virtue and licentiousness in the representation of the *puella* in elegy see Greene (1998) 80-81 on Ov. *Am.* 1.5.

⁴⁴ So Harmon (1974) 161-2; Baker (1980) 257-8; Maltby on Prop. 1.3.39-40; Kaufhold (1997) 93.

⁴⁵ For elements of κῶμος in the poem see Cairns (1977); also see Curran (1966) 203 and Giangrande (1974) 32-4.

⁴⁶ For more on the poetological content of the terms *queror* and *querela* in Roman love elegy see A. Michalopoulos on Ov. *Her.* 17.11 and C. Michalopoulos on Ov. *Her.* 8.89 with bibliography *ad loc.*

⁴⁷ Cynthia's use of *me miseram* at line 40 constitutes another implicit identification with the poet through an echo of the poet's programmatic use of *miserum me* at the opening line of Prop. 1.1. The attribution of the adjective *Orpheae* (42) to her lyre also helps Cynthia's subtle identification with the poet through her association with Orpheus, the archetypal poet. For more on the identification of *puella* with the poet see Dalzell (1979) 34-5.

⁴⁸ For a detailed stylistic analysis of the poem's opening see Curran (1966) 191-4 and Fedeli (1983) 1873. To recapitulate I simply note: the use of Greek proper names (*Thesea*, *Cnosia*,

questions at the opening of her speech combined with her use of interjections, like *ei mihi* (line 38) and *o utinam* (line 39) give away Cynthia's emotional turmoil and emphasize the urgency of her appeal. The same effect is further sustained: a) by her use of the somewhat excessive *semper* (line 40)⁴⁹ when referring to the sleepless nights she is forced to spend waiting for the late return of her beloved, and b) by the verb *iubes*, which is emphatically placed at the end of line 40. Furthermore, the two elisions at lines 37 (*namque ubi*) and 44 (*saepe in*), the syncopated form *consumpti* (instead of *consumpsisti*) at line 37,⁵⁰ and the use of expressions with colloquial coloring, like *namque tibi* at line 37 and *ei mihi* at line 38⁵¹ infuse Cynthia's speech with a certain feel of naturalness and spontaneity.⁵² Cynthia's use of *me miseram* (line 40) deserves our attention for being a remote echo of genuine feminine speech (or at least a remote echo of a stereotypical expectation of feminine speech), since *me miseram* as object of verb seems to have been a feature of the feminine idiom.⁵³ Donatus' comment on the use of *miseram* as a marker of feminine speech⁵⁴ and his remarks about women's particular predilection for the expression of self-pity further support my argument.⁵⁵ In particular, his comment that female complaints usually substitute lesser worries for greater hardships seems to find its application here as well. Cynthia, when realizing her partner's erotic cheat, wishes for his endless psychological torment, instead of working towards the break-up of their liaison. Being a woman, Donatus would suggest, Cynthia fails to prioritize her needs and ultimately 'expresses a lesser wish to substitute for her deeper desire'.⁵⁶

Cynthia's reference to the common bed (*nostro... lecto* line 35) placed emphatically at the very first line of her speech also calls for attention. Her use of the first person possessive pronoun, even if this is a case of poetic plural dictated by metrical needs,⁵⁷ with its implications of 'marital relationship' is symptomatic of a mutuality which seems to be absent from the male poet's words in the rest of

Andromede (the last one recalls the epic-ionic form Ἀνδρομέδη, so Giangrande (1974) 35), *Edonis*, *Apidano*, *Baccho*, *Argus*, *Inachidos*, *Orpheae*), the use of names not having Latin sounds (*Thesea*, *Cepheia*) or Latin openings (*Cnosia*), the use of synecdoche (*carina* instead of *navis*, *choreis* instead of the rather prosaic *chorus*), archaisms (like *carina* και *cotibus*), epic diction (like *fessa*, a popular Vergilian adjective), *spirare quietem* (a favourite epic iunctura), the triple simile *qualis... qualis... qualis* (which in all probability echoes the ἦ οἴη of the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women*).

⁴⁹ Later in the poem *semper* is replaced by the moderate *saepe* (line 44).

⁵⁰ The syncopation of vowels and a certain form of stammer must have been popular tricks of erotic seduction employed by Roman women, cf. *Ov. Ars* 3.293-6 with Gibson. For more see Adams (1984) 44-5.

⁵¹ For *ei mihi* as a colloquial iunctura see Maltby on *Tib.* 2.1.70 with bibliography *ad loc.*

⁵² So Curran (1966) 205. Following Lyne (1970) 76 *namque* gives away Cynthia's worries, since she attributes (not without reason) the poet's late return to erotic unfaithfulness.

⁵³ Adams (1984) 73.

⁵⁴ *Don. Ter. Hec.* 87.2 *Muliebris interpositio τὸ misera*. Also cf. *Don. Ter. An.* 685.1.

⁵⁵ *Don. Ter. Ad.* 291 4.4 *MISERAM ME proprium es mulierum, cum loquuntur aut aliis blandiri, ut (Verg. Aen. 4.643) 'Annam, cara mihi nutrix, huc siste sororem', aut se commiserari, ut (Verg. Aen. 4.420-1) 'miseram hoc tamen unum / exsequere Anna, mihi'. Nam haec omnia muliebria sunt, quibus pro malis ingentibus quasi in aceruum rediguntur et enumerantur nullius moment querellae.*

⁵⁶ Dutsch (2008) 23.

⁵⁷ For the use of poetic plural in elegy see C. Michalopoulos on *Ov. Her.* 4.15.

the poem. The same applies to her use of *meae... noctis*, at line 37 through which Cynthia seems to assert her place in her relationship.⁵⁸

The poem's closure is by no means less important. Contrary to common elegiac practice, the poem does not conclude with the—more or less—expected couplet of gnomic character. Cynthia, and not the poet, has the last word, since the end of her speech coincides with the end of the poem, just like her introduction to the poem (mediated by the poet) coincided with the beginning of the poem. One might contend that by doing so the poet promotes the feminine speech of his beloved over his own.⁵⁹ However, the poet's feigned withdrawal from the stage in the second half of the poem (lines 34-46) does not necessarily make him quit his control of the narrative altogether. If we look closely, we see that Cynthia ends her speech not on her own will, but rather because (once again) she succumbs to sleep.⁶⁰ The poem ends in ring-composition with feminine frailty and sexual languor providing a strong link with the opening. The poet's male dominance prevails.⁶¹ Cynthia's demands and her accusations are practically annulled by her drift to sleep; as a result her seriously undermined short speech is practically cancelled.

To conclude, the poet's male speech is the only dominant speech in Prop. 1.3. Cynthia, the object of the poet's sexual desire, is pushed to the margins and her feminine speech is scarcely heard. What guarantees Cynthia's exquisite beauty is silence: Cynthia is charming so long as she remains voiceless. Her attempt to break her silence is doomed to fail. Set within the narrow and oppressive framework of the poem's male orientated rhetoric Cynthia hardly manages to articulate her voice, which is constantly manipulated towards the fulfillment of the poet's sexual desire. In the poem Cynthia is travelling from silence to silence, with the unique exception of a ventriloquized speech (lines 35-46), which effectively confirms the poet's male rhetoric to the extent that it makes even the attribution of the concluding couplet of the poem (lines 45-6) to the poet or to Cynthia a matter of editorial choice.

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⁵⁸ So Hodge and Buttimore (1977) 96: “‘Meae noctis’ asserts her absolute claim to his time of night (with ‘meae’ revealing a more one-sided concept of the relationship than did ‘nostro lecto’).”

⁵⁹ So Curran (1966) 206.

⁶⁰ Cynthia's surrender to sleep recalls Ariadne, whose artistic depiction in the company of Sleep was a particularly popular theme of Roman painting (see Curran (1966) 195 and esp. 199 n.13; Wlosok (1967) 335 with nn.1-2; Lyne (1970) 66 with n.3; Warden (1980) 73; Harrison (1994) 25 n.5). Moreover, in both stories the abandoned girl is saved by a god (Bacchus, Sleep). In view of Cynthia's subtle identification with Penelope Hodge and Buttimore (1977) 97 suggest an interesting identification of Sleep in the role of Cynthia's suitor.

⁶¹ So Allen (1962) 133; Harmon (1974) 164.

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