

PROPERTIUS'
CASTAE PUELLAE (I, i, 5)

To A. W. Allen's bibliography of the more important discussions in the long controversy over Propertius I, i, 5¹⁾ there should now be added J. P. Sullivan's Freudian interpretation, which explains *castas odisse puellas* in terms of Propertius' *amor* for Cynthia seen as "a form of *Dirnenliebe*"²⁾ and the more recent return to Allen's view by Brooks Otis³⁾ – this view being essentially a revival of B. O. Foster's explanation: "Cynthia and such woman as, like Cynthia, turn a deaf ear to their lovers' wooing."⁴⁾

My aim in this note is to support Allen's interpretation that "*castae puellae* are girls who, like Cynthia, coldly reject a lover"⁵⁾ against Lachmann's idea that the phrase implied *quaerere viles*⁶⁾ and, incidentally, against Sullivan's reading of the elegy. The support comes from what I believe to be a hitherto unnoticed point in favour of the applicability to Cynthia of the notion in *castas odisse puellas*. The argument begins from the Milanion *exemplum* (vv. 9–16). I take it, with Allen and Otis, that the point of this is to illustrate that Propertius' passion for Cynthia is unrequited,⁷⁾ against the strange interpretation to which Sullivan's understanding of *castae puellae* leads: "The Milanion illustration does not preclude any earlier granting of Cynthia's favours to the poet."⁸⁾ This, to say the very least, runs counter to the sense of vv. 7–8 and 17–18.

Further than this, it can be shown that the parallel between

1) *Yale Class. Stud.*, 11 (1950), p. 255.

2) *W.S.*, 74 (1961), pp. 96–112; cf. now *Arethusa*, 5 (1972), pp. 23–24

3) *H.S.C. Pb.*, 70 (1965), pp. 40–41.

4) Cited by Butler and Barber, *The Elegies of Propertius* (Oxford, 1933), p. 153.

5) *op. cit.*, p. 266.

6) *Sex. Aurelii Propertii Carmina*, praef., p. xxiv. This view prevailed when Allen wrote his article; cf. D. van Berchem, *Mus. Helv.*, 5 (1948), p. 139.

7) Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 269: "his love is unrequited". Otis *op. cit.*, p. 40: "he cannot win her by 'labors' as Milanion won Atalanta."

8) *op. cit.*, p. 111.

Propertius and his mythological exemplar in this elegy can be pressed more closely than discussions of the poem have indicated. Milanion's case does illustrate the general principle that a lover's *labores* have power to win his beloved, and proves that in Propertius' case "the laws which normally govern human experience have been violated".⁹⁾ But Milanion does more than simply to stand in successful contrast to Propertius' lack of success with Cynthia. The point is that, before his encounter with Atalanta, Milanion constituted a model of that very *fastus* which characterized Propertius (v. 3) before the onset of his *furor* of unrequited love (v. 8). At least once in literature before Propertius he had been exactly so depicted, by the chorus of old men in the *Lysistrata* of Aristophanes:¹⁰⁾

οὐτως ἦν ποτε νέος Μελανίων τις,
 ὃς φεύγων γάμον ἀφίκετ' ἐς ἐρημίαν,
 καὶ ἐν τοῖς ὄρεσιν ὤκει
 κᾶτ' ἐλαγοθήρει
 πλεξάμενος ἄρκυς
 καὶ κύνια τιν' εἶχεν,
 κοῦκέτι κατήλθε πάλιν οἴκαδ' ὑπὸ μίσους.
 οὕτω τὰς γυναῖκας ἐβδελύχθη ἔ –
 κεῖνος

vv. 785 ff.

The quotation is from the text of van Leeuwen, whose note on Milanion *ad loc.* includes the remark *alter Hippolytus mulieres aspernatus*.¹¹⁾ But in terms of elegy I, i Milanion can be seen also as an *alter Propertius* by virtue of this same characteristic.

Granted a parallel as close as this between Milanion and Propertius at the outset, I would suggest that the poet intended a correspondingly close parallel to be drawn from the same *exemplum* between Atalanta and Cynthia. This parallel would be precisely (*pace* Sullivan to the contrary)¹²⁾ the one between Atalanta's refusal of Milanion (*saevitiam; durae*, v. 10) before his

9) Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 269.

10) I owe this reference to notes from lectures at Edinburgh University by Mr. Francis Cairns (1964); he did not at that time favour the view of *castae puellae* for which I argue here from the reference. [See now *C. Q.*, n. s. 24 (1974), pp. 98–9]

11) *Aristophanis Lysistrata*, (repr. Leiden, 1968), p. 112.

12) *op. cit.*, p. 111.

resort to *preces* [*fides*?¹³] et *benefacta*, and Cynthia's agonising lack of response to Propertius' *furor* (vv. 7–8; 17–18).

It scarcely needs to be said that there is rueful irony in both the parallels thus drawn. Propertius' implied desire to become a man of action like Milanion is ironic; such violent and brutal wooing is not the aim of the elegiac lover whose lot is the *servitium amoris*¹⁴, the passive acceptance of the *saevitia* of his *domina*. So too the point of similarity between the virgin huntress Atalanta and the non-compliant *domina* Cynthia must be rueful. But even so, the degree of comparability thus implied – that as Propertius is to Milanion, so is Cynthia to Atalanta – is offered as another argument in favour of the application of *casta* to Cynthia within the economy of this elegy.

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13) So A.E.Housman, *J.P.* 16 (1888), pp. 23–25. See now *Latomus* 29 (1970), p. 685.

14) See F.O.Copley, *T.A.Pb.A.*, 78 (1947), pp. 285–300