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ADONIS AND AUGUSTAN POETS*

Summary: Adonis presents a special case of Romans' wide interest in Eastern religions during the Augustan age: he was brought to Rome by poets, and for this reason his 'existence' in Latin culture was exclusively literary. His worship never had the same importance as in Hellenistic Egypt, but the pathos of this figure, and his story of love and death aroused the interest of the elegiac poets, in particular, who used his *exemplum* to illustrate certain τόποι of their genre and to emphasize the originality of their poetry. Through the analysis of his treatment in Propertius and in Ovid a series of reflections on elegy's nature and sense can be reconstructed in an interesting dialogue between the two poets.

Key words: Adonis, Neoteric poets, Latin elegy, Virgil, Cornelius Gallus, Propertius, Ovid

Among the several divine or semi-divine figures who reached Greece from the East, Adonis had a special fate: in Mesopotamian religions he was a god of vegetation, linked to seasonal cycles, but in Greece he lost his autonomy and was worshipped only in the shadow of Aphrodite, with whom he shared some cults.[1] In classical Athens his name is connected only to a festival, the *Adonia*, celebrated exclusively by women in a private sphere, clearly distinct from the official cults.[2] His lack of prestige made

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[1] ATALLAH, W.: *Adonis dans la littérature et l'art grecs.* Paris 1966, 21 and 317–319; REED, J. D.: The Sexuality of Adonis. *Classical Antiquity* 14 (1995) 317–347, here 317–318 and 320; SIMMS, R. R.: Mourning and Community at the Athenian *Adonia*. *Classical Journal* 93 (1997–1998) 121–141, here 124.

[2] ATALLAH (n. 1), 100; REED: The Sexuality (n. 1) 319 and 339; REITZAMMER, L.: Aristophanes' *Adôniazousai*. *Classical Antiquity* 27 (2008) 282–333, here 283; REED, J. D.: *Bion of Smyrna. The Fragments and the* Adonis. Cambridge 1997, 19; SIMMS (n. 1) 125. Adonis was worshipped also at Locri (TORELLI, M.: Adone a Locri. L'oikema arcaico locrese di Afrodite a Marasà. In RAVIOLA, F. – BASSANI, M. – DEBIASI, A. – PASTORIO, E. [eds]: *L'indagine e la rima. Scritti per Lorenzo Braccesi* [Hesperìa 30]. Roma 2013, 1311–1332) and Gravisca (TORELLI, M.: Les Adonies de Gravisca. Archéologie d'une fête. In BRIQUEL, D. – GAULTIER, F. [éds]: *Les Etrusques, les plus religieux des hommes. Etat de la recherche sur la religion étrusque. Actes du Colloque international, 17–19 novembre 1992.* Paris [1997] 233–291).

Adonis a harmless target for comic poets in 5th and 4th century BC, and this probably gave rise to some aspects of his mythical story.[3]

In the general religious syncretism of the Hellenistic age, Adonis regained importance especially in Egypt, due to his contamination with Osiris:[4] Theocritus 15 shows the passage of the cult under the protection of the Ptolemies, who probably used it to promote the image of their dynasty.[5] In parallel with this religious aspect, there was a growing interest among the poets in his myth: we know that Euphorion and Parthenius, in addition to Theocritus, Antimachus, Lycophron, Callimachus, Phanocles, and Nossis wrote about Adonis, probably emphasizing the erotic aspect of the myth and especially Aphrodite's love for the beautiful boy, whereas her feeling for him was perhaps more traditionally a motherly affection than an erotic passion.[6] The literary consecration of Adonis, however, came in the 2nd century BC in the *Adonidis Epitaphium*, unanimously attributed to Bion of Smyrna. Here, in a text of the post-Theocritean bucolic tradition, partly influenced by Theocritus 1, the story and the figure of Adonis (and Aphrodite) are presented with an emphasis on pathos and in an entirely literary manner, indifferent to the religious aspects of the myth, and only superficially respecting the external features of the rite. The mixture of sensuality, languid beauty and suffering gives the text its unmistakable character, which was later fully taken up by the Latin poets.

ADONIS IN ROME

This is the literary context which proved highly attractive to young Latin intellectuals of the 1st century BC (including the poets who mention Adonis). It is as part of this literary context that Adonis seems to come to Rome. The role played in this process by Parthenius of Nicaea is still debated, but he undeniably contributed in a key way to the dissemination at Rome of the most refined and learned Alexandrian poems. Specifically in relation to Adonis, Parthenius' mediation may have been fundamental. He not only made known the works of authors who had dealt with the Adonis myth (we know, for example, how greatly Euphorion influenced Gallus), but he also seems to have treated Adonis himself in his poetry,[7] and so he may have been a direct model for the Latin poets. Cinna's *Zmyrna* is the clinching proof that Parthenius played a key role in the knowledge of Adonis in Rome, a poem which was surely inspired by Parthenius: this epyllion about Smyrna's incestuous relationship with her father,

[3] ATALLAH (n. 1) 98; REED: The Sexuality (n. 1) 335–336; REED: Bion (n. 2) 199; DILLON, M.: 'Woe for Adonis' – but in Spring, not Summer. *Hermes* 13 (2003) 1–16, here 3.

[4] REED, J. D.: Arsinoe's Adonis and the Poetics of Ptolemaic Imperialism, *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 130 (2000) 319–351, here 324 and 328–333; REED, J. D.: The Death of Osiris in *Aen.* 12. 458. *American Journal of Philology* 119 (1998) 399–418, here 411.

[5] ATALLAH (n. 1) 106 and 134–135; REED: Arsinoe's Adonis (n. 4) *passim* and esp. 333–334; 339–340 and 344.

[6] The love of Venus for Adonis is described in this way by the mythographers: see EMELJANOW, V.: Ovidian Mannerism: An Analysis of the Venus and Adonis Episode in *Met*. X 503–738. *Mnemosyne* 22 (1969) 67–76, here 68.

[7] See fr. 29 Light.; fr. 42 Light.

resulting in Adonis' birth, shows the attraction for Latin intellectuals of the refined Callimachean style (it seems that the *Zmyrna* shared the abstruse and obscure style of Euphorion and Parthenius), but also of the pathetic and sordid themes favoured by Parthenius and his models. The success of the *Zmyrna*, attested by Catullus 95 and proven by its influence on the narration of the same myth in Ovid *Met*. 10. 298–502 and on the *Ciris* in the *Appendix Vergiliana*, obviously also implies a widespread knowledge of the figure and the story of Adonis. I believe, however, that Myrrha and Adonis had independent influence in Rome and that the story of the beautiful young man, appreciated mainly for its erotic theme, had come to the poets mainly through the Hellenistic authors who spoke about it, and through Bion's *Epitaphium*.

ADONIS IN GALLUS?

Adonis seems particularly to influence the extant Latin elegists of the 1st century BC, probably due to the myth's erotic content, the conflation of love and death, and the fact that these two topics lead to a theme upon which the Roman elegists placed great emphasis: the funeral of the poet and the grief of his beloved *puella*. It is, however, possible that these poets followed Gallus, the first Latin elegist, who probably wrote about Adonis and introduced his figure and his myth into Latin poetry, understanding and emphasizing the aspects which best suited the tones and themes of his own new genre of elegy. Granted, we cannot be sure of the presence of Adonis in Gallus' poetry; but several hints seem to support this.

The starting point is Propertius 2. 34. 91–92 (*et modo formosa quam multa Lycorida Gallus / mortuus inferna vulnera lavit aqua*, 'and recently how many wounds from fair Lycoris did Gallus after his death wash in the waters of the underworld'): in a series of Latin love poets, Propertius describes Gallus, after his death, as washing, in the underworld, wounds inflicted by Lycoris. In theme and diction, the couplet is very similar to a fragment of Euphorion[8] in which the infernal stream washes the wounds of Adonis.[9] Since we know that Gallus admired Euphorion's poetry, which he *transtulit in sermonem latinum* ("he translated [*sc*. Euphorion] into Latin", Serv. *ad Ecl*. 6. 72), the most plausible inference is that Gallus imitated or translated this passage from his *auctor*[10] and that in turn Propertius, as a tribute, imitated Gallus' poetry (far less likely is the suggestion that Propertius alludes directly to Euphorion), adapting it to Gallus and his bloody death.

[8] See Euphor. fr. 47 Light. (= fr. 43 Powell): Κώκυτος <θ' ὃς> μοῦνος ἀφ' ἕλκεα νίψεν Ἄδωνιν, "Cocytus <who> alone laved Adonis' wounds").

[9] However, the proper name Κώκυτος could be referred not only to the infernal river, but also to a physician who tried to treat the wounds of Adonis: see ATALLAH (n. 1) 59; LIGHTFOOT, J. (ad. and transl.): *Hellenistic Collection. Philitas, Alexander of Aetolia, Hermesianax, Euphorion, Parthenius*. Cambridge, MA – London 2009, 279–281.

[10] Due to the presence of Adonis also in Parthenian poetry, CAIRNS, F.: *Sextus Propertius. The Augustan Elegist*. Cambridge 2006, 81, n. 56, supposes that the source of Gallus could be the poet of Nicaea, who, in turn, may have reworked the Euphorionic verse; so Gallus could allude to both his models at the same time.

Propertius 2 .34 is not the only clue to the presence of Adonis in Gallus' poetry. In fact, another important text is Virgil *ecl*. 10. 18 (*et formosus ovis ad flumina pavit Adonis*, "even fair Adonis by the rivers fed his sheep"), which is the only occurrence of this name in Virgilian poetry. It does not seem accidental that this occurrence comes in the *Eclogue* dedicated to Gallus, which is certainly interwoven with references to his poetry: although Virgil shows Adonis as a shepherd, recalling the characterization made by Theocr. 1. 109–110, and 3. 46–48,[11] there are reasons for thinking that the verse is also related to a Gallan text (the same one quoted by Prop. 2. 34?). This can be deduced from the similarities between *Ecl*. 10. 18 and Euphor. 43 Pow., which could be the archetype of the Gallan verse alluded to by Virgil: both Virgil's and Euphorion's lines end, for example, with the verb followed by 'Adonis', although in two different cases (*ad flumina pavit Adonis*; ἀφ᾽ ἕλκεα νίψεν Ἄδωνιν), and since the Greek νίψεν would be equivalent to the Latin *lavit*, the natural translation of Euphorion's line would be *lavit Adonin*, with remarkable similarity in sound to the Virgilian *pavit Adonis*. Moreover, the phrase *ad flumina* in *Ecl*. 10. 18 shows an uncommon usage of the plural: another interesting occurrence of this expression in the *Eclogues* concerns Gallus: *errantem Permessi ad flumina* ("wandering by Permessus' stream") in *Ecl*. 6. 64, in the scene of his poetic consecration, which almost certainly reworked Gallan poetry: we might think that *ad flumina* is also an imitation of Gallus, inserted in the verse on Adonis by Virgil to strengthen the reference to the elegiac poet?

Another noteworthy element in *Ecl*. 10. 18 is *formosus*, which seems to be a standard epithet of Adonis in Latin poetry:[12] in the *Bucolics* it is often employed in contexts related to Gallus[13] and also occurs in Prop. 2. 34. 91 for Lycoris. Might this also be Gallus' diction, perhaps used by the poet to describe Adonis (we should not forget that καλός is a recurrent epithet of Adonis in the *Epitaphium*)? The answer may not be clear, but cumulatively these points must support my tentative reconstruction. If Virgil truly had a Gallan model for *Ecl*. 10. 18, one would have a further example of his combining models, in a manner typical to this eclogue, where he habitually conflates Theocritean and Gallan verses: here the depiction of Adonis as a shepherd,

[11] See Theocr. 1. 109–110: ὡραῖος χὠδωνις, ἐπεὶ καὶ μᾶλα νομεύει / καὶ πτῶκας βάλλει καὶ θηρία πάντα διώκει ("Adonis too is in his bloom; either he tendes the sheep, / or shots the hare and chases every wild beast"); 3. 46–48: τὰν δὲ καλὰν Κυθέρειαν ἐν ὥρεσι μῆλα νομεύων / οὐχ οὕτως Ὥδωνις ἐπὶ πλέον ἄγαγε λύσσας / ὥστ᾽ οὐδὲ φτίμενόν νιν ἄτερ μαζοῖο τίθητι; ("did not Adonis, shepherding his flock upon the hills, / lead on the fair Cytherea down frenzy's path so far / that even now, though he is dead, she clasps him to her breast?").

[12] See Ov. *Met*. 11. 522–523 (*nuper erat genitus, modo formosissimus infans, / iam iuvenis, iam vir, iam se formosior ipso est*, "that man, only just born, so recently a most beautiful baby, now a youth, now a man, now is more beautiful than himself"): here the repetition may allude to some lost poem, in which the adjective (or the tecnique of repetition) was perhaps characteristic (one thinks to *flentem … flentem* in Cinna fr. 6) and characterises *formosus* as a typical epithet for Adonis. See also Prop. 2. 13. 55 (*illis formosus iacuisse paludibus, illuc / diceris effusa tu, Venus, isse coma*, "there in the marsh, they say, his beauty lay, and you, Venus, ran there with out-spread hair"). *Formosus* obviously recalls the Greek καλός, a standard epithet for Adonis, see REED: Bion (n. 2) 194.

[13] See e.g. the frequent occurrences in *Ecl*. 2, a poem closely connected to Gallus (see vv. 26–27 and the Gallus papyrus, vv. 8–9). On *formosus* in the *Bucolics,* see GAGLIARDI, P.: *Formosus* in Virgilio e dintorni. *Eirene* 51 (2015) 45–58.

derived from Theocritus, may have been fused with features of Gallus' poetry, to create a hybrid image of the legendary young man.

In my view, the way in which the mention of Adonis functions as an *exemplum* in *Ecl*. 10 is also important: it appears to be a common usage in Latin poets,[14] but it was already there in the two instances in Theocritus and perhaps even in the fragment of Euphorion[15] (and therefore also in Gallus?); the similarity between *Ecl*. 10. 17 should also be added, introducing Adonis (*nec te paeniteat pecoris, diuine poeta*, "nor be thou ashamed of the flock, divine poet")[16] and *Ecl*. 2. 34 (*nec te paeniteat calamo trivisse labellum*, "nor with the reed's edge fear you to make rough your dainty lip"), a poem strongly indebted to Gallus, where Alexis, a city-dweller, is urged, just like Gallus in *Ecl*. 10, to love the pastoral world. To complete this picture, we should recall another elegist, Tib. 2. 3. 11 (*pavit et Admeti tauros formosus Apollo*, "even the handsome Apollo fed the bulls of Admetus"): here, the relationship to *Ecl*. 10. 18 (*pavit* and *formosus*, with the personal name also at the line-end) may also suggest a reminiscence of the Gallan verse imitated by Virgil: just as in Virgil, the verse is an *exemplum*.

The presence of Adonis in Gallus' poetry can also be deduced from another comparison, albeit less securely: Propertius' claim at Prop. 1. 19. 11–12 (*quicquid illic ero, semper tua dicar imago: / traicit et fati litora magnus amor*, "whatever I am there, I will ever be known as your shadow: a great love crosses the shores of death") can be seen to contrast with the hypothesized Gallan model of Prop. 2. 34. 91–92: Gallus, using the *exemplum* of Adonis, probably postulated that only death could put an end to his love for Lycoris.[17] Taking the theme of devotion to the beloved to its logical extreme, Propertius seems to have replied that, on the contrary, he would continue to love Cynthia even after his death, even in Hades. The argument cannot be proved, but it fits well with Propertius' positioning: in more than one case, he seems to push Gallus' precepts to their extreme;[18] if this is an instance of his doing so, we would have a demonstration of the importance and the role Adonis may have had in Gallus' work, perhaps in imitation of Euphorion and under Parthenius' influence. This train of

[14] See Prop. 2. 13. 53–56; Ov. *ars* 3. 85; *her*. 4. 97–98; *Fast*. 5. 227–228.

[15] We know that the verse was in a poem entitled Ὑάκινθος, in which Adonis might have been mentioned as analogous to the the central figure (both are mortal young men loved by gods who unwittingly cause their premature death), but he could not be the main character: see CAIRNS (n. 10) 68.

[16] DU QUESNAY, I. M. L. M.: From Polyphemus to Corydon: Virgil, *Eclogue* 2 and the Idylls of Theocritus. In WEST, D. – WOODMAN, T. (eds): *Creative Imitation and Latin Literature*. Cambridge 1979, 35–70, here 62, suspects a quotation from Gallus here.

[17] So FEDELI, P. (a cura di): *Sesto Properzio*, *Il primo libro delle elegie*. Introduzione, testo critico e commento. Firenze 1980, 439; *contra*, CAIRNS (n. 10) 213, n. 81, affirms that the very act of washing the love wounds in the underworld could testify their duration even after death.

[18] This seems to happen at Prop. 2. 1. 3–4 (*non haec Calliope, non haec mihi cantat Apollo: / ingenium nobis ipsa puella facit*, "neither Apollo nor Calliope sang verses to me; / the girl alone inspires my genius"), which may be a polemic response to Gallus' *tandem fecerunt carmina Musae / quae possem domina deicere digna mea* ("Finally the Muses have made poems that I could call worthy of my mistress", vv. 6–7), see GAGLIARDI, P.: *Non haec Calliope, non haec mihi cantat Apollo*: Prop. 2, 1 e il papiro di Gallo. *Hermes* 145 (2017) 159–173; another polemic statement of Propertius may be the concept of *domina iudex* at 2. 13. 14, in response to the vv. 8–9 of the Gallus papyrus. On this point, see GAGLIARDI, P.: *Carmina domina digna*: riflessioni sul ruolo della domina nel papiro di Gallo. *Museum Helveticum* 69 (2012) 156–176.

argument would explain the elegists' interest in Adonis and the rapid oblivion of his myth by the time of the next generation of poets.

ADONIS IN PROPERTIUS

While Virgil's sole reference to Adonis may be a tribute to Gallus' poetry and part of Virgil's confrontation of bucolic and elegiac genre, Propertius uses the myth to support his vision of love elegy and perhaps to enter into a "dialogue" with his predecessor, both in 2. 34. 91–92, and in 1. 19. 11–12, if he really alludes to Gallus there. The only explicit mention of Adonis in Propertius, however, is at 2. 13. 53–56,[19] and it is emblematic of his use of myth. Perhaps it is no coincidence that it is in an elegy clearly influenced by Gallus, at least in the first part; if one admits the unity of the text – but the issue is highly debated[20] – the concluding *exemplum* of Adonis could also relate to Gallus.[21] But the unity of 2. 13 is not critical to our discussion: more important are the aspects of the myth of Adonis stressed by Propertius, the erotic ones, already highlighted by the Greek poets, that he newly reworked into an elegiac context. Propertius' model is clearly Bion's *Adonidis Epitaphium,*[22] to which he alludes several times in the poem, making explicit the poem's relationship with it at the end in the *exemplum* of Adonis at 2. 13. 53–56, both with the sorrowful representation of Venus' pain, imitated from the Greek poem, and with accurate quotations, of which the most striking is the unusual adjective *niveus* (53), which translates the equally unusual Greek χιόνεος (*AE* 10 and 27).[23] The choice of the *Adonidis Epitaphium* is justified by the theme, the foreshadowing of the poet's own death and funeral, a topic of special interest for the elegiac sensitivity. In exploiting the conflation of love and death in the *Epitaphium*, Propertius adapts it to his situation, and makes the story a mythical paradigm of eternal pain and devotion to the dead lover: the distressed Venus thus becomes an idealized figure of an elegiac lover, reflecting the pattern of behavior that the poet wants to propose to Cynthia, to support the claim:

[19] *Testis, qui niveum quondam percussit Adonem / venantem Idalio vertice durus aper, / illis formosum iacuisse paludibus; illuc / diceris effusa tu, Venus, isse coma* ("witness the fierce wild boar that once wounded the white Adonis, as he hunted along the ridge of Ida; there in the marsh, they say, his beauty lay, and you, Venus, ran there with out-spread hair").

[20] FEDELI, P. (a cura di): Properzio, *Elegie. Libro II*. Introduzione, testo e commento. Cambridge 2005, 361–365.

[21] According to CAIRNS (n. 10) 144, the *exemplum* of Adonis at vv. 53–56 can descend from a Gallan source.

[22] See PAPANGHELIS, T. D.: *Propertius: a Hellenistic Poet on Love and Death.* Cambridge 1987, 64–70, and FANTUZZI, M. – HUNTER, R.: *Tradition and Innovation in Hellenistic Poetry*. Cambridge 2004, 187–190. Among the most striking imitations of the Greek text there is the image of Venus wandering with her hair unbound (v. 56), that recalls *BE* 19–20 (ἁ δ᾽ Ἀφροδίτα / λυσαμένα πλοκαμῖδας ἀνὰ δρυμὼ ἀλάληται, "and Aphrodite, with her hair down, rushes through the woods").

[23] ANDRÉ, J.: *Étude sur les termes de couleur dans la langue latine.* Paris 1949, 375, n. 39, thinks that *niveus* would be created by the Latin poets just to imitate the unusual χιόνεος; but he does not quote this Propertian verse among the occurrences of the adjective.

tu tamen amisso non numquam flebis amico:
fas est praeteritos semper amare viros. (Prop. 2. 13. 51–52)[24]

yet you, when your beloved is dead, will weep:
it is a law of the gods, this care for past lovers.[25]

It is on this representation of the goddess Venus that Propertius describes the image of Cynthia in the foreshadowing of his own death and funeral, "re-reading" in an elegiac manner some of the subjects of Bion's *Epitaphium*, such as kissing the corpse, a scene to which, although it reflects a traditional feature of the funeral rite, Propertius gives a heightened erotic emphasis.[26] In this way the *exemplum* performs its usual function in Propertius, namely to ennoble his personal vicissitudes and the figures of the protagonists (the poet himself and Cynthia) by elevating them to the rank of mythical characters.[27] But he is also warning the woman he loves to behave in a morally irreproachable way, maintaining her *fides* and love even after her lover's death.

The relevance given to the Adonis *exemplum* in the text is noteworthy: with a learned juxtaposition, in fact, Propertius creates a contrast between it and the other *exemplum* of the elegy, that of Nestor, placed just before (2. 13. 45–50[28]) to justify the assumption that a too-long life results in too much suffering. Between these two figures is established a series of oppositions: Nestor is grieved, Adonis causes grief (in this sense Nestor is comparable to Venus, who similarly suffers a bereavement, and so human and divine beings are united by sorrow); Nestor is the symbol of a too-long life, Adonis of a too-short one; they represent two opposite ways of love, the purely emotional affection of a parent and the passion of a lover, to show perhaps the two-fold face of elegiac love, both spiritual and physical.[29] Thus the choice and presentation of Adonis in this elegy derives from a careful study and a refined compositional technique.

The quotation of Adonis in this elegy is therefore part of Propertius' usual technique with respect to myth, but also reveals the great skill of the author in selecting and reworking his models, originally adapting them to the purpose and meaning of his poetry. The Propertian approach, here and in his other implicit references to Adonis, once again demonstrates the mainly literary nature of the character and the substantial indifference to the religious aspects of his myth. That is, Adonis is chosen for the features which accord with themes and tones of Latin elegy, and is used as a paradigm of key concepts or as a starting point for a dialogue between poets on crucial aspects

[24] FEDELI: Properzio (n. 20) 408.
[25] FEDELI: Properzio (n. 20) 408.
[26] FEDELI: Properzio (n. 20) 391.
[27] FEDELI: Properzio (n. 20) 382.
[28] *Nestoris est visus post tria saecla cinis: / cui si longaevae minuisset fata senectae / Gallicus Iliacis miles in aggeribus, / non ille Antilochi vidisset corpus humari, / diceret aut 'O mors, cur mihi sera venis?'* ("Nestor's pyre was seen after three generations: yet, if some Phrygian soldier, from the walls of Troy, had cut short his fated old age, he would have never have seen his son, Antilochus, buried, or cried out: 'O Death, why do you come so slowly?").
[29] Remember Catull. 72, where the opposition between *amare* and *bene velle* is expressed by the trivial relationship of the *vulgus* with the *amica* and the pure feeling of the father to his children and sons in law.

of their art.[30] The emphasis on Venus and her pain rather than on Adonis (who remains a passive and marginal figure), confirms the trend of Hellenistic and Latin poets to consider the young god a purely literary presence.[31] But from Bion's *Adonidis Epitaphium* Propertius inherits also another aspect, albeit just hinted in the short space he devotes to Adonis, i. e. the feminized representation of his figure, characterized by whiteness and softness (*niveus* is emblematic[32]); only the physical appearance of the young man is underlined (he is already dead when the poet quotes his *exemplum*),[33] according to an old trend, attested in Latin poetry since Plautus and Catullus, who tend to show Adonis in this light.[34] Conversely, Ovid will give a more virile representation of the boy, referring to another tradition related to Adonis[35] and establishing in this way a dialogue with Propertius, although in some respects even the Adonis of the *Metamorphoses* will somehow turn out to be feminized.[36]

ADONIS IN OVID

The depiction of Adonis in Ovid, especially in his elegiac works, follows in many ways the Propertian model. Generally the young god is mentioned only *en passant*, always as an *exemplum,*[37] confirming the trend of the Latin poets in this regard. In two cases,

[30] FEDELI: Properzio (n. 20) 408.

[31] FEDELI: Properzio (n. 20) 408.

[32] FEDELI: Properzio (n. 20) *ad loc*., 408.

[33] Similarly Virg. *Aen*. 9. 431–437 alludes to *AE* in his description of Euryalus' death, which is also characterized by a softness and an aesthetic emphasis that make the young man only the physical object of the gaze of others. Also in depiction of Lausus' death in *Aen*. 10, the reference to *AE* is recognisable. On the relationship between *AE* and the death of Virgilian young warriors, see FANTUZZI, M. (a cura di): *Bionis Smyrnaei: Adonidis epitaphium.* Testo critico e commento. Liverpool 1985, 103; REED: Bion (n. 2) 61; 201 and 233.

[34] Catullus mentions Adonis at 29. 8 (*et ille nunc superbus et superfluens / perambulabit omnium cubilia, / ut albulus columbus aut Adoneus?*, "And now shall the man, arrogant, overbearing, flit through all of the beds like a white dove or an Adonis?") in a very scornful way, as a *cinaedus*, and he was already represented in a similarly passive role at Plaut. *Men*. 143–144 (*Dic mi, enumquam tu vidisti tabulam pictam in pariete, / ubi aquila Catameitum raperet aut ubi Venus Adoneum?*, "Tell me, did you ever see a picture painted on a wall, where the eagle is carrying off Ganymede, or Venus' Adonis?"). For this characterization of Adonis, likely derived from the comic poets of 4th century BC (REED: The Sexuality [n. 1] 336), which the Latin elegists refuted, showing him as a brave, bold even, young man ((but *niveus* in Prop. 2. 13. 53 has been read in this sense, see FEDELI: Properzio [n. 20] *ad loc*., 408), see also, in Greek, Dio Chrysost. *Or*. 29. 18. 62. 6.

[35] REED, J. D.: At Play with Adonis. In MILLER, J. F. – DAMON, C. – MYERS, K. S. (eds): *Vertis in Usum. Studies in Honor of Edward Courtney*. München–Leipzig, 2002, 219–229, here 224; FANTUZZI (n. 33) 99.

[36] See EMELJANOW (n. 6) 72.

[37] See *ars* 3. 85; *her*. 4. 97–98; *Fast*. 5. 227–228. Remarkable is *ars* 1. 512 (*cura deae silvis aptus Adonis erat*, 'Adonis was dear to the goddess, and fit for the woods'), where Adonis is presented as *incultus* (*silvis aptus*) in an unusual way: the model may be the Theocritean and Virgilian Adonis shepherd. Also interesting, although Adonis is only briefly mentioned, is the hint to the *Adoniae* in *ars* 1. 75 (*nec te praetereat Veneri ploratus Adonis*, "and don't forget Adonis, mourned by Venus") but only as an opportunity to meet girls. I find interesting here the phrase *nec te praetereat* because of its analogy with *nec te paeniteaet* at *ecl*. 2. 34 and 10. 17, maybe to be connected to Gallus: could Ovid also be evoking, although by hints, the language which Gallus used in referring to Adonis?

however, Ovid dwells on him at greater length, at *Amores* 3.9 and in the long narration of the myth at *Met*. 10. 519–559; 681–739. Of course, the significant generic difference between the two texts implies a different approach to the subject. The recourse to Adonis at *Amores* 3. 9, in his elegy (*epicedium)* mourning the death of Tibullus, deserves special attention. Here Ovid pursues a complex allusive strategy: not only does he refer to Tibullus' own poetry, with its frequent foreshadowing of death,[38] but he also uses Bion's *Adonidis Epitaphium* as a model for the death of the poet. The imitation of this text allows the author to focus on the figure of Tibullus dead or dying, on aspects of the funeral rite, and on the women who mourn him: not only Delia and Nemesis, but also his mother and sister, who all share the role of Venus. The reasons for this choice of model are many and they are carefully judged: first, Bion's poem shares the languid atmosphere of the *epicedium* and a taste for the mixture of sensual love, beauty and the pathos of death. Furthermore, by equating the mythical young Adonis to the deceased poet, Ovid stresses the characterization of Tibullus as an elegiac lover in his subordinate and passive role with respect to his beloved woman.

Finally, the allusion to the *Adonidis Epitaphium* in *Amores* 3. 9 suggests a relationship with the *Bionis Epitaphium*, which imitates the poems of Bion in style, imagery and themes, transferring them to the death of a poet loved and admired by the author.[39] In this way, by assimilating Tibullus to Bion and – less directly – himself to the author of the *Epitaphium*, Ovid celebrates the greatness of the deceased Roman poet just as Bion is celebrated in the *Bionis Epitaphium*, and so he pays tribute to Tibullus, but at the same time he presents himself as his successor in elegiac poetry, just as the author of the *Bionis Epitaphium* presents himself as a pupil and successor to Bion.[40] So with remarkable finesse Ovid, by alluding to the two *Epitaphia* summarizes the key features of an elegist, who is both lover and poet.[41]

In the introduction of Adonis into the poem, there seems to be a connection between *Amores* 3. 9 and Prop. 2. 13: just as in Propertius 2. 13 the character Adonis is evoked with several allusions to the *Adonidis Epitaphium*, and at the end he is directly mentioned at *Amores* 3. 9. 15–16, in the depiction of the sorrowful Venus,[42] while at vv. 45–46 the mourning of the goddess is reported with a vague *verbum*

[38] On the imitation of Tibullus in the poem see TAYLOR, J. H.: *Amores* 3, 9: a Farewell to Elegy. *Latomus* 29 (1970) 474–477, 475; PERKINS, C. A.: Love's Arrows Lost: Tibullan Parody in *Amores* 3.9. *Classical World* 86 (1993) 459–466, here 459–460; REED, J. D.: Ovid's Elegy on Tibullus and Its Models. *Classical Philology* 92 (1997a) 260–269, here 260.

[39] In this anonymous poem the author presents himself as a pupil and an admirer of Bion, the author of the *Adonidis Epitaphium*, and complaints his death imitating his style and recalling the *AE*. So unavoidably the reference to one of the two *Epitaphia* recalls the other one.

[40] REED: Ovid's Elegy (n. 38) 264–266. In his opinion *BE* is alluded by Ovid also by the similar technique to stage in the text the characters of the celebrated poet, and so, as in *BE* figures like Galatea, most likely treated by Bion, are staged, in *amor*. 3.9 Delia and Nemesis, the two female figures of Tibullan poetry, participate in the funeral of the poet (REED: Ovid's Elegy [n. 38] 266).

[41] According to REED: Ovid's Elegy (n. 38) 261, instead, Ovid uses the two *Epitaphia* to analyze his relationship with the Tibullan poetry.

[42] *Nec minus est confusa Venus moriente Tibullo, / quam iuveni rupit cum ferus inguen aper* ("Venus herself grieved no less for the death of Tibullus, than for the death of her young lover, whose groin was pierced by a wild boar, before her eyes").

dicendi, *sunt qui negant,*[43] like *diceris* in Prop. 2. 13. 56.[44] These analogies clearly imply that Ovid is actively engaging with his predecessor, focusing on the image of Venus and its meaning. In Prop. 2. 13 – as we saw – the *exemplum* of Adonis and, in particular, the figure of Venus in mourning provided a paradigm of faithful love beyond death, which the poet hoped Cynthia would have for him. In *Amores* 3. 9 the role of Venus is distributed among four female figures: the mother, who closes the eyes of the dying Tibullus, his sister, who tears her hair, Delia, who claims to have made him happy, and Nemesis, who gives him the last kiss. This is a significant and palpably ironic departure from Propertius' poem: the mention of the two women loved by Tibullus in fact refutes the idea of eternal fidelity to a single *puella* proclaimed by the elegists.[45] In the bickering between Delia and Nemesis there is an undeniable irony;[46] we have a glimpse of Ovid in his *Amores* humorously unmasking some of the elegiac conventions which he inherits, exposing contradictions and falsities. Promises of eternal fidelity, of love beyond death are empty words, and the myth of Adonis, employed by Propertius to affirm these ideals in 2.13 (and possibly also at 1. 19), is now reversed by Ovid to disprove the statements of his predecessor. So once again Adonis proves itself to be a poetical inheritance, and the poets use it, without any interest in the religious aspects of the myth, to enter into a dialogue with each other and to highlight their originality.

The latest and most complete occurrence of Adonis in Ovid's poetry is at *Met*. 10, where there is an extended narrative of the myth, following that of his mother Myrrha. It is one of many mythological stories in the poem in which Ovid gives proof of his usual versatility in contaminating models, both in modifying or inventing details,[47] and in attributing to the events meanings congenial to him. Even here, however, there are interesting elements, again, as always, on a literary level. There is no interest in the rituals or in the religious messages of the myth (one single possibility is a connection at *Met*. 10. 519–520 to the symbolism of Adonis ἄωρος ("untimely"), paradigm of ephemerality of beauty and of premature death). The mortal nature of the young man is deliberately emphasized and there is neither mention of his annual resurrection or of his life spent half in the underworld and half on earth.[48] Even the mention of the

[43] *Amor*. 3. 9. 45–46: *avertit vultus, Erycis quae possidet arces; / sunt quoque qui lacrimas continuisse negant* ("Venus, who possesses the citadels of Eryx, turned away her head, and someone affirms that she could not restrain her tears").

[44] On this technique of indicating an allusion to a previous literary tradition, see HINDS, S.: *Allusion and Intertext.* Cambridge 1998, 1–5. The allusion to Prop. 2. 13. 56 is underlined by REED: Ovid's Elegy (n. 38) 263, n. 7. Among the other analogies between the two poems, see the last kiss (Prop. 2. 13. 29; Ov. *amor*. 3. 9. 53–54), the little cinerary urn (Prop. 2. 13. 32–33; Ov. *amor*. 3. 9. 40).

[45] So CAHOON, L.: The Parrot and the Poet: the Function of Ovid's Funeral Elegies. *Classical Journal* 80 (1984) 27–35, here 33.

[46] See RAND, E. K.: *Ovid and His Influence*. Boston 1925, 17; DU QUESNAY, I. M. L. M.: The *Amores*. In BINNS, J. W. (ed.): *Ovid*. London 1973, 1–48, here 24; PERKINS (n. 38) 464.

[47] See, just to give an example, the alleged hatred of Venus for lions (vv. 551–553): REED, J. D. (a cura di): Ovidio, *Metamorfosi*. Testo latino a fronte. Vol. 5, libri X–XII. Traduzione di Gioachino Chiarini. Milano 2013, 114 ad v. 552.

[48] So EMELJANOW (n. 6) 68; REED: Ovidio (n. 47) 105–106 ad vv. 519–739; 135 ad v. 724. Actually in the Greek cult of Adonis the resurrection is not clearly attested: see ATALLAH (n. 1) 139; 261–269; 273; REED: The Sexuality (n. 1) 331–332.

Adoniae[49] does not focus on Venus' grief, renewed every year, but on the collective commemoration of the boy's death, devoting greater attention on learned and etiological themes.[50] The focus of the story is on the goddess of love,Venus' own love, as she paradoxically falls victim to her own power and suffers as most do.[51]

But Ovid is not insensitive to the literary suggestions which emerge from the Adonis myth and its erotic aspects, particularly from the usage made by the elegists. So, not surprisingly, in the same book he narrates the story of Orpheus, lover and poet of love, who represents a synthesis and a symbol of elegiac poetry, and within that narrative, Orpheus relates the story of Adonis, developing the theme of hunting as *servitium amoris* ("being a servant of love"), often present in Latin elegy.[52] To accompany her beloved, Venus shows an interest in hunting, and so she equates herself to Diana (*Met*. 10. 533–536), but urges him to avoid the wild beasts (*Met*. 10. 537–552): the reference here may be to Prop. 2. 19, where Propertius also follows Cynthia as she is hunting, worshipping Diana, but choosing only easy and harmless preys, perhaps by contrast to the bold Adonis too late reproached by Aphrodite at *AE* 60–61.[53] In this way, Ovid mixes allusions to Greek and Latin models and engages specifically with Propertius on this point. But the topic of hunting as a form of *obsequium* to the beloved also features in an important Propertian poem, 1. 1. 9–16: here, in fact, there is a strong programmatic meaning in the *exemplum* of Milanion who, to win the harsh Atalanta, faces labours and hunts wild beasts on the mountains. Its analogy to Virg. *Ecl*. 10. 55–60 suggests a possible lost model in the poetry of Gallus, and, therefore, a theme through which the three poets entered a dialogue, albeit difficult to reconstruct.[54] Sure enough, interwoven into the tale of Adonis, Ovid inserts, at *Met*. 10. 560–680, the story of Atalanta. She is not – it is true – the Atalanta loved by Milanion, but the one won by Hippomenes in a foot-race, but the two figures of the same name and their myths are often confused, and it is not unlikely that Ovid here intends to allude, by way of homage, to the Atalanta of Propertius and perhaps of Gallus.[55] This would be further evidence of Adonis' presence in Gallus, whose poetry may have passed the myth to the elegists.

[49] *Met*. 10. 725–727: *luctus monimenta manebunt / semper, Adoni, mei, repetitaque mortis imago / annua plangoris peraget simulamina nostri* ("my grief, Adonis, shall have an enduring monument, and each passing year in memory of your death shall give an imitation of my sorrow").

[50] REED: Ovidio (n. 47) 135–136 ad vv. 725–727.

[51] On this point see EMELJANOW (n. 6) 71.

[52] Several historians of religions underscored the opposition between lover and hunter also by mentioning archaic hunting taboos (see e.g. PICCALUGA, G.: Adonis, i cacciatori falliti e l'avvento dell'agricoltura. In BENTILI, B. – PAIONI, G. (a cura di): *Il mito greco. Atti conv. Urbino 1973*. Roma 1977, 77–94). They recognized, thus, an extremely ancient core in the myth of Adonis' death.

[53] FANTUZZI–HUNTER (n. 22) 188–189.

[54] See GAGLIARDI, P.: Virgilio e l'*extremus labor* dell'*Ecl.* 10. *Prometheus* 39 (2013) 117–136, with bibliography.

[55] See MORGAN, L.: Underhanded Tactics: Milanion, Acontius and Gallus. *Latomus* 54 (1995) 79–85, who plausibly suggests that Gallus conflated the two myths.

CONCLUSION

The suggestion that Adonis reached Rome through the Hellenistic poetry disseminated by Parthenius and through Gallus' treatment seems to be supported by several considerations: first, Adonis appears only sporadically in Latin literature before the neoteric poets,[56] if we imagine, on the basis of fr. 9 Hollis (*at scelus incesto Smyrnae crescebat in alvo*, "but the wicked thing was growing in Smyrna's incestuous womb") that Cinna mentioned him in his *Zmyrna*. This obviously coincides with the arrival of Parthenius in Rome, about in 72 BC,[57] and with the beginning of his teaching. Second, the spread of this myth among the poets appears limited to authors of refined Alexandrian culture such as Virgil, Propertius and Ovid, all connected in different ways and for different reasons to the poetry of Gallus. After this appearance, as brief and fleeting as the young god, himself, he disappears from Latin literature by the time of the next generation of poets, confirming that his appearance was an eminently literary phenomenon. Particularly striking is the elegists' interest in him, perhaps motivated by the Gallus example. Certainly the figure of Adonis seems associated, perhaps because of the genre's origins, specifically within the elegiac poetry, and acquires notably consistent features, such as its function as an *exemplum* and an exclusively literary nature, and assumes traits more fitting for that sensitivity. Adonis even seems to share his short life with love elegy, and in fact he disappears along with its demise,[58] marking the end of a unique literary season and of a refined and learned taste unparalleled in subsequent Latin culture.

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[56] A hint of Adonis can be read in Plaut. *Pseud*. 38–39 (*quasi solstitialis herba paulisper fui: repente exortus sum, repentino occidi*, "for a short season have I been like a summer plant; suddenly I have sprung up, suddenly I have withered"): S. O'BRYHIM (Adonis in Plautus' *Pseudolus*. *Classical Philology* 102 [2007] 304–307) convincingly traces this back to the Greek model. Laev. fr. 6 Courtney belongs to a taste and to a milieu not far from the Neoterics, while the fleeing reference at Cic. *de nat. deor*. 3. 21–23 is dated later than the composition and publication of the *Zmyrna*, for which the obvious *terminus ante quem* is the death of Catullus, to be located within the 50's. Even Varr. *Menipp*. fr. 540 Astbury (*Sic ille puellus Veneris repente Adon / cecidit cruentus olim*, "so once that boy of Venus suddenly fell bloody") belongs to an indefinable period of the 1st century, when Adonis seems already known in Rome.

[57] See FRANCESE, C.: *Parthenius of Nicaea and Roman Poetry*. Bern 2001, 21–22.

[58] Among the scarce later references, see, again in function of *exemplum*, Gratt. *Cyneg*. 67–68 (*flet adhuc et porro flebit Adonin / victa Venus*, "Venus, baffled, still weeps and long will weep Adonis"), although this is within the chronological limits of Ovid's life; afterwards the mythical young man will become a literary heritage for grammarians and commentators: see e.g. Serv. *ade cl*. 10.18; Fest. *De verb*. 310. 45–48.