

Aphrodite's Secret Weapon (Colluth. *Rapt. Hel.* 95)

In this section of Colluthus' epyllion¹ Aphrodite is preparing herself for the famous beauty contest with Athene and Hera which Paris is to judge. She has arranged her hair glamorously: ἀναπτύξασα καλύπτρην / καὶ περόνην θυόεντα διαστήσασα κομάων / χρυσῶ μὲν πλοκάμους, χρυσῶ δ' ἐστέψατο χαίτην (81-83)². She proceeds now to address her children, the Erotes: the structure of her speech follows the standard pattern of a general's exhortation to his troops before battle³, and its diction plays constantly on the theme of the *militia amoris*⁴. She first announces that battle is imminent: ἐγγὺς ἀγών, φίλα τέκνα, and urges the Erotes περιπτύξασθε τιθήνην (85) – not simply to 'embrace' her, but also to 'surround' her as a bodyguard⁵. She reports the rumours currently being circulated about her enemies' strength (ἐνέπουσι 88, φασί 89, καλέουσιν 90) and her own alleged deficiencies⁶: μούνη Κύπρις ἀναλκίς ἔην θεός· οὐ βασιλῆων / κοιρανίην, οὐκ ἔγχος ἀρήτιον, οὐ βέλος ἔλκω (91f.). But then she goes on to compare her enemies' apparent advantages with her own decisive superiority:

ἀλλὰ τί δειμαίνω περιώσιον; ἀντὶ μὲν αἰχμῆς
ὡς θοὸν ἔγχος ἔχουσα μελίφρονα δεσμὸν Ἑρώτων,
κεστὸν ἔχω καὶ κέντρον ἄγω καὶ τόξον ἀείρω, 95

¹ In using this convenient term I am unmoved by the strictures of A. Cameron, *Callimachus and his Critics*, Princeton 1995, 447-452.

² Cf. V.J. Matthews, *Aphrodite's Hair: Colluthus and Hairstyles in the Epic Tradition*, «Eranos» XCIV (1996) 37-39, amplified by E. Livrea, *La Gigantomachia greca di Claudiano: tradizione manoscritta e critica testuale*, «Maia» LII (2000) 415-451.

³ Of the many examples available, cf. Thuc. II 87, where Brasidas and Cnemus address the demoralized Peloponnesian forces.

⁴ On which see now McKeown on Ovid, *Am.* I 9, Arnott on Alexis fr. 236 K.-A., both citing earlier literature.

⁵ Orsini («Les Belles Lettres» edition, Paris 1972), p. 5 [left] n.1 is wrong to rule out the first sense: both are present here. Cf. F. Vian, *L'Enlèvement d'Hélène de Collouthos*, «REG» LXXXII (1969) 590-597, on 594.

⁶ This would seem to be the significance of the problematic imperfect ἔην, which, as Vian, *o.c.* (n. 5) points out, is a quotation of *Il.* V 331 ἀναλκίς ἔην θεός; cf. Orsini's note (p. 22). In support of this interpretation, cf. W.W. Goodwin, *Moods and Tenses of the Greek Verb*, London 1889, 13, § 39; Kühner-Gerth I 146, § 383, 5.

κεστόν, ὅθεν φιλότητος ἐμῆς ἐμὸν οἶστρον ἐλοῦσαι
πολλάκις ὠδίνουσι καὶ οὐ θνήσκουσι γυναῖκες⁷.

There are numerous difficulties in the passage, which has attracted many conjectures, but none is greater than the crux of 95. In the words of Enrico Livrea, Colluthus' most thorough commentator⁸, «è strano che al v. 95 siano enumerate tre diverse armi (cesto, κέντρον, ε τόξον), mentre Afrodite possedeva solo la prima, come ribadisce del resto il v. 94». Basically, two solutions have been proposed for this problem: (a) Hermann's heavy punctuation of the pause after ἔχω, marking off the first phrase in the line from the second and third, thus: κεστόν ἔχω· καὶ κέντρον ἄγω καὶ τόξον ἀείρω⁹, and (b) Tiedke's change (accepted by Livrea, Vian, and Orsini) of ἔχω to ἐγώ, which is meant to produce the sense «cestum ego et *tamquam* stimulum gero et arcum tollo» (the italics are mine).

However, both of these proposals do violence to the carefully balanced structure of the line. In its transmitted form, the line consists of three phrases, each comprising a singular noun governed by a verb in the first person singular. It forms, that is, a tricolon, and as such is parallel to the earlier tricolon οὐ βασιλήων / κοιρανίην, οὐκ ἔγχος ἀρήιον, οὐ βέλος ἔλκω (91f.) both in structure and in sense (the first lists Aphrodite's deficiencies, the second her assets). If we adopt Hermann's punctuation, we ruin the internal balance of the line; if we change ἔχω to ἐγώ, we destroy the correspondence with the earlier tricolon.

If the soundness of ἔχω thus appears to be guaranteed, where does the corruption lie, and can it be healed? The internal structure of line 95 should lead us to expect all the three terms to be equipollent, but in our present text, as Livrea pointed out, the second and third terms are clearly different in kind from the first: they refer to weapons which, at least in a literal sense, Aphrodite does not possess, whereas the first refers to the κεστός, that weird and wonderful garment or magic charm which is indubitably her own special attribute¹⁰. Again, the apparent parallelism of 91f. and 95 is worked out exactly in the second terms of each tricolon

⁷ I print Orsini's conservative text so as not to prejudice the argument.

⁸ *Colluto. Il Ratto di Elena*, Bologna 1968, 114.

⁹ Hermann was followed by E. Abel in his edition of C. (Berlin 1880).

¹⁰ On the nature of which see Campbell Bonner, *κεστός ἰμάς and the Saltire of Aphrodite*, «AJPh» LXX (1949) 1-6; that Colluthus envisaged it as a «saltire», a magic charm worn around the breasts (rather than as a synonym for the ζώνη or girdle, that is, an actual garment) seems to be borne out by Christodorus' descriptions of two statues of Aphrodite at AP II 100f.: ἐπὶ στέρνων δὲ θεαίνης / ἀχένοσ ἐξ ὑπάτοιο χυθεις ἐλελίζετο κεστός and 289f.: ἀμφὶ δὲ μαζοῖς / κεστός ἔλιξ κεχάλαστο, χάρις δ' ἐνενήχατο κεστόῳ. Cf. also Antiph. Mac. AP VI 88, 1f. αὐτῆ σοι Κυθήρεια τὸν ἱμερόεντ' ἀπὸ μαστῶν, / Ἴνώ, λυσαμένη κεστόν ἔδωκεν ἔχειν, and Lucian, *Deor. Iud.* 10, where Athene regards Aphrodite's undressing and her removal of the κεστός as two separate operations: μὴ πρότερον ἀποδύσης αὐτήν, ὃ Πάρι, πρὶν ἂν τὸν κεστόν ἀπόθηται – φαρμακίς γάρ ἐστιν – μὴ σε καταγοητεύσῃ δι' αὐτοῦ.

(κέντρον, a pointed thrusting weapon, corresponds to ἔγχος) and in the third terms (τόξον corresponding to βέλος); it is the first terms which fail to match, that is, κεστόν and κοιρανίην. The conclusion seems to follow that κεστόν in line 95 is suspect.

Now even after accepting Tiedke's conjecture (ἐγώ for ἔχω), both Vian and Orsini were unsatisfied. They were so keenly aware (and rightly so) of the need for Aphrodite to counter Hera's κοιρανίη in the same way that she claims to transcend Athene's weaponry that they were driven, logically enough, to toy with the notion of foisting yet another lacuna into the text after line 97¹¹. But such a lacuna is unthinkable there, after the obviously climactic line πολλάκις ὠδίνουσι καὶ οὐ θνήσκουσι γυναῖκες (its status as a *clausula* seems to be assured by Νηιάδες ζώουσι καὶ οὐ κτείνουσι γυναῖκας at line 362, an elegant piece of *Selbstvariation*). Instead of positing such an implausible lacuna, we should seek to restore Aphrodite's logic in the place where we have already concluded that the transmitted text is suspect: in other words, we need ideally to replace κεστόν as the object of ἔχω in line 95 with a single word which will convey the notion of royal status. The requisite word is, I suggest, σκῆπτρον, the essential embodiment of royal sovereignty already used by Aphrodite herself to denote one of Hera's attributes in line 89: φασὶ δὲ κοιρανίην μεθέπειν καὶ σκῆπτρα φυλάσσειν, and again, as a symbol of royalty, in line 160.

It is not difficult to account for the corruption of σκῆπτρον to κεστόν. It presumably arose from an *errore di pensiero*: the periphrasis μελίφρονα δεσμὸν Ἐρώτων caused the copyist, not entirely unreasonably, to think of κεστόν, at which point the second factor in the corruption, the mechanical, came into play: by pareplepsy, at the beginning of the succeeding line he saw that very word, and since κεστόν ἔχω is in fact the burden of Aphrodite's speech, κεστόν was able to supplant its metrical equivalent σκῆπτρον¹².

With σκῆπτρον restored to the text, Aphrodite's rhetoric is revealed to be as elegant as her coiffure. Line 95 is seen to consist of three balanced terms, in each of which the verb used is appropriate to its object, ἔχω being used in the sense of 'hold'; the two tricola of 91f. and 95 are exactly parallel. What Aphrodite says is: «Since, instead of a javelin I have as my swift spear the delicious bond of the Erotes, I *do* hold a sceptre, and I *do* carry a lance and I *do* deploy a missile – the *kestos* ...».

¹¹ Cf. Orsini's note (on p. 22 of his edition) reproducing the exact words of Vian (*o.c.* 594): «Aphrodite dit bien comment elle pense triompher de l'ἔγχος d'Athéna et de son βέλος, mais ne fait aucune allusion à la κοιρανίη d'Héra. Y a-t-il une lacune après 97?».

¹² The process may have been assisted if the copyist were sufficiently well-read to remember that on some occasions Aphrodite is said to wield a κέντρον (*e.g.* at Eur. *Hipp.* 39, Nonn. *D.* XLIII 6; cf. Plat. *Phdr.* 252e ἀναπνοὴν δὲ λαβοῦσα κέντρων τε καὶ ὠδίνων ἔληξεν), and that both she and the Erotes were often imagined as skilled archers (Pind. *P.* 4,213, Eur. *Med.* 530f., 632-634, etc.; cf. E. Rohde, *Der griechische Roman und seine Vorläufer*, Leipzig 1914, 159 n. 4).

The motif of the equivalence (or superiority) of physical beauty to weapons of war is frequent in all periods of Greek literature, and is worked out with particular elaboration in a number of passages of Late Epic; a few examples will suffice: Nonnus, *D.* XXXV 21-40, where the corpse of a beautiful Bassarid mesmerizes the Indian warrior who has killed her; note especially his reactions (37-40):

«ἔγχος ἐνικήθη σέο κάλλει· σείο προσώπου
μαρμαρυγαὶ κλονέουσι, ὅσον γλωχίνες ἀκόντων·
στήθος ἔχεις ἅτε τόξον, ἐπεὶ σέο μᾶλλον οἰστῶν
μαζοὶ ἀριστεύουσιν, οἰστευτήρες Ἴερώτων».

Again in *D.* XLII 234-237 (part of Pan's *erotodidaxis* addressed to Dionysus):

εἰπέ, τί σοὶ ρέξει μία παρθένος; οὐ δόρυ πάλλει,
οὐ ροδέη παλάμη τανύει βέλος· ἔγχεα κούρης
ὀφθαλμοὶ γεγάσιν ἀκοντιστήρες Ἴερώτων,
παρθενικῆς δὲ βέλεμνα ροδώπιδές εἰσι παρειαί.

Musaeus 92-95 (where see Kost's commentary):

κάλλος γὰρ περίπυστον ἀμωμήτοιο γυναικὸς
ὀξύτερον μερόπεσσι πέλει πτερόεντος οἰστοῦ·
ὀφθαλμὸς δ' ὁδὸς ἐστίν· ἀπ' ὀφθαλμοῖο βολᾶων
κάλλος ὀλισθαίνει καὶ ἐπὶ φρένας ἀνδρὸς ὀδεύει.

The motif reaches its apogee in Claudian's *Gigantomachia* 43-54, a passage which shares many of the detailed features of the scene in Colluthus, as well as its *militia amoris* theme¹³:

Κύπρις δ' οὔτε βέλος φέρει οὔθ' ὄπλον, ἀλλ' ἐκόμιζεν
ἀγλαΐην· θεμένη γὰρ ἐπ' ὄμμασιν ἄγγελον αὐγὴν,
πρῶτα μὲν ἀπλεκέας περόνη διεκρίνατο χαίτας,
καὶ πλεκτάς ἔσφιγξε πυκνῶ περὶ πλέγματι σειράς,
στίμμεϊ δ' ὀφθαλμῶν ἐρατοῦς ὑπεγράψατο κανθούς·
λεπτὰς δ' εὐανέμοιο ραφὰς χαλάσασα χιτῶνος
πορφυρέων οὐ κρύπτειν ὑφ' εἵμασιν ἄνθεα μαζῶν
ὄμματος εἰς ἄγρην ὀπλισμένη· εἶχε γὰρ αὐτὴ
πλέγμα κόρυν, δόρυ μαζόν, ὄφρῦν βέλος, ἀσπίδα κάλλος,

¹³ See Livrea, *o.c.* (n. 2). I am most grateful to Professor Livrea for letting me read this article before publication, and for discussing with me this problem in Colluthus, even though my own proposed solution differs from his own.

ὄπλα μέλη, θέλγητρον ἐν ἄλγεσιν. εἰ δέ τις αὐτῇ
ὄμμα βάλοι, δέδητο, βέλος δ' ἀπὸ χειρὸς ἐάσας
ὡς ἼΑρεως αἰχμῇ τῇ Κύπριδος ὄλλυτο μορφῇ¹⁴.

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¹⁴ My colleague Dr M.J. Alden has learnedly uncovered an intriguing 20th-century metamorphosis of the κέστος into an item of lingerie: see her article *The Beguilement of Zeus – In all the Better Shops*, «Costume: the Journal of the Costume Society» XXXIII (1999) 68-73, in which she points out that its manufacturers used the advertising slogan 'Woman has no surer ally'; I have been unable to ascertain if they were inspired by this passage of Colluthus.