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GHOSTWRITING ELEGY IN PROPERTIUS 4.7

Propertian elegy is not an obstinately male genre. It is engendered as masculine in its discursive mastery over the female object of its erotics and poetics, but engenders itself as effeminate in its association with softness, submissiveness, and impotence, and as feminine especially in its self-critique and its interrogation of Roman gender and sexuality.

M. Wyke, *The Roman Mistress* (Oxford, 2002), 189

As W.R. Johnson puts it neatly, Cynthia 'is not even supposed to be in this volume'.[1] Yet Cynthia's startling return to Propertian verse in 4.7—after being tossed out of elegy at the end of Book 3—is staged brilliantly. Cynthia comes back to life (for it seems she has died) in a manner that is just as disturbing for the reader as it is for Propertius himself. The mistress' ghost appears unbidden at the poet's bedside, scorched and scarred by the funeral pyre, her bones rattling and her voice crackling with rage. Cynthia rebukes Propertius for the shoddy funeral he gave her; but she seems especially galvanized to give her own radical version of the life they spent together in a way that threatens to upend the truths that readers have accepted from Propertius himself. If Cynthia's sudden reappearance is shocking, what she has to say is more shocking still. We are invited to rethink elegy from the very beginning.

Critical opinion has long wrestled with what to make of Cynthia's ghost. In an era influenced by biographical criticism, readers were perturbed by an ambiguous tone in the poem (does it intend a serious lament? or is it an inappropriate satire, offered in what must be bad taste?);[2] concern was also expressed at the poem's position, for not only does Cynthia turn up dead in 4.7 after being dismissed in 3.24, she also appears very much full of life in the next poem, 4.8.[3] Focus shifted subsequently to Propertius' deft artistry in characterizing his mistress' ghostly visitation, and, in particular, to the elegist's complex cross-genre interaction with comedy and mime, epigram and epic as a means of enriching Cynthia's character, and so the character of the poetry narrating her.[4] The most recent shift has been to examine Cynthia as a speaking character in

[1] W.R. Johnson, 'Final exit: Propertius 4.11', in D.H. Roberts, F.M. Dunn and D. Fowler (edd.), *Classical Closure: Reading the End in Greek and Latin Literature* (Princeton, 1997), 163–80, at 177.

[2] A. La Penna, *Properzio* (Florence, 1951), 84–5; E. Lefèvre, *Propertius Ludibundus* (Heidelberg, 1966), 108–19.

[3] A.K. Lake, 'An interpretation of Propertius IV, 7', *CR* 51 (1937), 53–5 wonders accordingly whether 4.7's report of Cynthia's death might have been simply artistic licence on Propertius' part, and the poem therefore 'a satirical comment on the character of a still quite vigorous Cynthia' (53), and an attempt by the poet 'to justify his decision to leave her' (54).

[4] M. Hubbard, *Propertius* (Bristol, 1974), 149–53; F. Muecke, '*Nobilis historia*? Incongruity in Propertius 4.7', *BICS* 21 (1974), 124–32; J.C. Yardley, 'Cynthia's ghost: Propertius 4.7 again', *BICS* 24 (1977), 83–7; J.W. Allison, 'Virgilian themes in Propertius 4.7 and 8', *CP* 75 (1980), 332–8; J. Warden, *Fallax Opus: Poet and Reader in the Elegies of Propertius* (Toronto, 1980); P.E. Knox, 'Cynthia's ghosts in Propertius 4.7', *Ordia Prima* 3 (2004), 153–69.

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her own right, who, along with other female narrators of Book 4, seeks to expose 'the discursive mastery' (in Maria Wyke's apt phrase from the opening epigraph) that elegy's male narrator has exerted over female representation in elegy, even as he continues to do so.[5]

In the present article, Cynthia's penultimate poem benefits from bringing together these disparate perspectives into a coherent interpretation. Moreover, I argue for a new way of reading the significance of Cynthia's final speech that seeks to reconcile the infamous contradictions present not only in the poem but also in its characterisation in Propertian scholarship. For instance, a prominent concern of most recent analysis has been the way in which a narrating Cynthia offers a radically *different* version of the affair from the one that Propertius has offered. In Micaela Janan's reading, in particular, when Cynthia narrates her own story she seeks to evade the (masculine) systems through which her male poet, and Roman society more broadly, seek to categorize women and to confer meaning upon female behaviour.[6] In the following discussion I combine this approach to Cynthia as an autonomous speaker with a reading that acknowledges the paradoxical similarity to Propertius' own discourse that Cynthia's speech also displays. Here I propose that Cynthia's exemplary elegiac performance in 4.7—coming (nearly) at the end of Propertian elegy, and offering a sweeping reorganisation of the existing poetry, right back to the beginning—presents itself provocatively as the model after which Propertian elegy has itself been shaped. Cynthia's acute awareness of her vulnerability to others' representational control, and her concern to destabilise the cultural apparatus that has determined her biography, offer retrospective commentary on the origins of Propertius' own emasculated persona and the broader critique his poetry offers of Roman authority and ideology (in Wyke's terms, elegy's 'effeminate' and 'feminine' character, respectively).

In her closing remarks, Cynthia certainly mounts a vehement attack on elegiac verities. But she also significantly furthers the way in which Book 4 as a whole develops and reflects upon elegy's existing complexities. In the end—for all that she supposedly should not *be* in Book 4—Cynthia's belated presence helps to make sense of a collection that, in its first six poems, never quite manages the clean break from Propertius' erotic past that he had promised it would.

CYNTHIA RETURNS

I begin with the short introductory section of 4.7, in which Propertius allows the poem's reader a programmatic glimpse of Cynthia before she speaks. Most of all, Cynthia's ghastly appearance—twinned with the epic and elegiac texts that her return invokes—places in the foreground the question of distance between the latest incarnation of Propertian elegy and its earliest roots. But Propertius' own opening narration also highlights the themes that will shape discussion of what Cynthia herself has to say: the

[5] In particular, B. Flaschenriem, 'Speaking of women: 'female voice' in Propertius', *Helios* 25 (1998), 49–64; M. Janan, *The Politics of Desire. Propertius IV* (Berkeley, 2001), 100–13; M. Wyke, *The Roman Mistress* (Oxford, 2002), 178–88; G. Liveley, '*Cynthia prima fuit, Cynthia finis erit.* Time and narrative in Propertius 4', *Helios* 37 (2010), 111–27. S.L. James, '*Ipsa dixerat*: women's words in Roman love elegy', *Phoenix* 64 (2011), 314–44 offers relevant discussion of female speech in Propertius, but does not discuss 4.7 specifically.

[6] Janan (n. 5), 107–9.

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interplay of similarity and difference, the inversion of early elegiac tropes and the consequent *lack* of closure that Cynthia's death provides for Propertian elegy.

Propertius' graphic description of Cynthia as the poem begins is, of course, significant.[7] Looking at Cynthia once again through the poet's eyes measures her reappearance against her history as Propertius has written it and shared it with his readers. In particular, Propertius' semi-conscious vision dramatizes the difficulty (for us) of reconciling this grim apparition with the living Cynthia that he (and so we) had known. Preparing us for the enigmatic contents of her ensuing speech, Cynthia re-enters Propertius' poetry as a vivid but elusive echo of earlier writing (4.7.1–12):[8]

sunt aliquid manes: letum non omnia finit,
  luridaque exstinctos effugit umbra rogos.
Cynthia namque meo uisa est incumbere fulcro,
  murmur ad extremae nuper humata tubae,
cum mihi somnus ab exsequiis penderet amoris
  et quererer lecti frigida regna mei.
eosdem habuit secum quibus est elata capillos,
  eosdem oculos; lateri uestis adusta fuit,
et solitum digito beryllon adederat ignis
  summaque Lethaeus triuerat ora liquor.
spirantisque animos et uocem misit (at illi
  pollicibus fragiles increpuere manus):

Ghosts are something: death does not finish everything, and a ghastly shade escapes the burned-out pyre. For Cynthia seemed to lean over my couch, she who had been buried just lately to the sound of the final trumpet, when sleep was broken for me owing to the funeral of my love, and I was lamenting the cold kingdom of my bed. She had with her the same hair with which she was carried out, the same eyes; her dress was seared to her side, and the fire had eaten away the usual beryl-ring on her finger and the Lethean water had worn away the surface of her face. She gave forth living breath and voice (but her thumbs rattled on her fragile hands):

Initially, Propertius' decision to identify Cynthia's ghost by her hair, eyes and dress reintroduces Cynthia by those very features which earlier programmatic poems assert to be inseparable from the poetry written about her (esp. 2.1.5–12; also 1.1.1)—so Propertius invites the poem's readers to recall the very version of Cynthia from which Cynthia is about to distance herself. At the same time, Cynthia's frightful appearance already seems to suggest the way in which elegy's mistress will prove caught between the character's inscribed history and the woman's desire to be freed from Propertius' poetic clutches. In some instances her emblematic features persist: Propertius' first-foot repetition *eosdem … eosdem* (7–8) draws our attention to the sameness of Cynthia' eyes and hair. Yet she is changed, too: her body is charred by fire (8–9), and the upper surface of her face has been worn down by the water of Lethe (10). With her domineering eyes unaltered but her facial features rubbed away (the significant verb *triuerat*, to which I return) by water that begets oblivion, Cynthia is presented as a partly blank canvas that recalls—yet has begun to lose—the identity which Propertius has written for her. All in all, Cynthia's familiar but indefinite manifestation at the start of 4.7 seems designed precisely to play with the ability of the poem's readers to

[7] T.D. Papanghelis, *Propertius: A Hellenistic Poet on Love and Death* (Cambridge, 1987), 149 is quite right: 'Being the visual "embodiment" as well as the exponent of the poem's aesthetics, [Cynthia's] figure must be scrupulously scanned.'

[8] I use Heyworth's 2007 OCT (= S.J. Heyworth, *Sexti Properti Elegos* [Oxford, 2007]) throughout, except where noted (see below, n. 34).

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recognize the poet's mistress as she returns. This is a point perhaps symbolized best by the ring that still adorns Cynthia's finger (9). Here Propertius gives a precise and intimate (and arresting)[9] detail. Cynthia's ring is presented as a recognisable accessory that, seemingly, must confirm her identity: the ring is her 'usual' one (***solitum*** *beryllon*). But here Propertius chooses to present as 'usual' precisely a detail of which the reader can have no memory, for such a ring has never been mentioned before either by the poet or by his mistress. Rather than confirming Cynthia's identity, the sudden appearance of her ring instead shows up the gaps in our knowledge, and in Propertius' past narrative;[10] it signals that we might not know Cynthia as well as we think we do.

The epic background that provides generic elevation[11] for Cynthia's penultimate performance is now well known. The opening verse of 4.7 translates Achilles' anguished realisation that ghosts exist, after the dead Patroclus appears to him in a dream in *Iliad* 23;[12] while, for a Roman audience, the remarkable post-mortem disfigurement that Propertius also sees in his mistress links Cynthia with Hector's bloodied ghost as it appears to the slumbering Aeneas in *Aeneid* 2.[13] But the way in which the introductory passage of 4.7 engages key moments of early elegy itself is less commonly explored. As a late poem containing Cynthia's longest speech, 4.7 seeks irresistible association with 1.3, the first poem in which she speaks, and in which she first defends her own *fides* while attacking that of her lover. It is valuable to note the *mise en scène* shared by these two poems as they begin.[14] Here the later poem continues to focus its readers' attention on the 'familiar' paradigm of Propertius' early elegy in order to show the poetry's later development and divergence in sharper relief. As in 4.7, 1.3 opens with Cynthia appearing as a vision to Propertius (1.3.1–12):

qualis Thesea iacuit cedente carina
  languida desertis Cnosia litoribus;
qualis et accubuit primo Cepheia somno
  libera iam duris cotibus Andromede;
nec minus assiduis Edonis fessa choreis
  qualis in herboso concidit Apidano:
talis uisa mihi mollem spirare quietem
  Cynthia non certis nixa caput manibus,
ebria cum multo traherem uestigia Baccho,
  et quaterent sera nocte facem pueri.
hanc ego, nondum etiam sensus deperditus omnes,
  molliter impresso conor adire toro.

[9] Papanghelis (n. 7), 151–2.

[10] G. Hutchinson, *Propertius. Elegies Book IV* (Cambridge, 2006), 174. Similarly, the details Cynthia will provide explicitly as *reminiscences* of the affair at 4.7.15–20 ironically differentiate her recollection from the one the reader recalls from Propertius: see esp. Warden (n. 4), 23–6 and Papanghelis (n. 7), 153–9; Knox (n. 4), 159–60.

[11] J. Warden, 'The dead and the quick: structural correspondences and thematic relationships in Propertius 4.7 and 4.8', *Phoenix* 50 (1996), 118–29, at 127; for viewing 4.7–8 as Homeric sequence, see Hubbard (n. 4), 152–3.

[12] Hom. *Il*. 23.103–6: Hubbard (n. 4), 149–52; Muecke (n. 4), 125–6; Warden (n. 4), 14–16; M. Komp, *Absage an Cynthia. Das Liebesthema bein späten Properz* (Frankfurt, 1988), 42–7, 64–7; R. Dimundo, *Properzio 4,7. Dalla variante di un modello letterario alla costante di una unità tematica* (Bari, 1990), 27–43; Knox (n. 4), 155–7.

[13] Verg. *Aen*. 2.270–6. While ancient literary ghosts often retain physical marks connected with their deaths (e.g. the ghost of Dido's murdered husband Sychaeus at *Aen*. 1.355–6), evidence of injuries received *after* death is less common: cf. Tib. 1.10.37–8, with Muecke (n. 4), 126; Yardley (n. 4), 84–5.

[14] Warden (n. 4), 70–8.

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Just as the Cretan girl lay languid on the deserted shore as Theseus' ship departed; just like Cepheus' daughter Andromeda lay down, too, in her first sleep, now free from the harsh rocks; and no less like a Maenad who, wearied by the ceaseless dancing, falls down by the grassy Apidanus: so Cynthia seemed to me to breath a soft peace, resting her head on faltering hands, when I was dragging my steps unsteadied by much wine, and the boys were shaking the torch late at night. Not yet deprived of all my senses, I try to approach her, resting softly against the bed.

In 1.3 Cynthia is first likened to women of myth; in 4.7, finally she joins these women, becoming one of them in the underworld.[15] But in both poems Propertius thus introduces Cynthia as a figure just out of reach of objective identification—Cynthia merely 'seems', instead, to begin each poem as the indefinite interpretation of the viewing lover-poet (*uisa mihi Cynthia*, 1.3.7–8; *Cynthia uisa est*, 4.7.3); while in both poems Propertius also draws attention to Cynthia's breathing (*mollem spirare quietem*, 1.3.7; *spirantis animos*, 4.7.11) as a prominent element of her characterisation.[16] Yet, here 4.7 does more than simply provide a late echo of 1.3—it opens as the reverse of the earlier poem. Cynthia's peaceful breathing in 1.3 shows her as unconscious and absent to the poet's attentions, but in 4.7 Cynthia's spirited breath grants the appearance of liveliness to the dead mistress' ghost, and underlines her vivid presence at the poet's bedside. The later poem also switches the roles played by poet and mistress. In particular, in 1.3 it is Propertius who approaches Cynthia, leaning over the couch and his mistress' sleeping figure (*hanc ego ... molliter impresso conor adire toro*, 1.3.12), but it is Cynthia who leans over the couch of a sleepless Propertius in 4.7 (*Cynthia namque meo uisa est incumbere fulcro*, 4.7.3).[17] In the end, both difference and similarity matter here. In one sense, the initial lines of 4.7 emphasize that now Cynthia—rather than Propertius—will control the narrative and, especially, the characterisation of the beloved. At the same time, we should see this belated exchange of roles taking place in a poem that otherwise—and for all the radical disturbance that must arise when Cynthia has her own say[18]—largely revoices the mutual distrust and passionate defence of fidelity for which 1.3 is the programmatic model par excellence.

Dialogue with a second early poem—this time from near the end of Book 1—furthers the sense in which Cynthia usurps Propertius' place in 4.7, but also the way in which 4.7 resists any clear sense of closure for amatory verse. As Frances Muecke has pointed out, the first line of 4.7 recasts Achilles' Iliadic cry of anguish into a quasi-philosophical *sententia*—'ghosts do exist'—which is then illustrated by

[15] Here Cynthia's own narrative in 4.7 offers the realization of what had been Propertius' *fantasy* for Cynthia (e.g. 2.28.25–30): Muecke (n. 4), 129–30; also Papanghelis (n. 7), 173–4; Flaschenriem (n. 5), 49–50.

[16] In both poems, the poet also introduces himself—half-drunk in 1.3 and half-asleep in 4.7—in a couplet governed by a temporal clause with two imperfect subjunctives (*cum traherem ... et quaterent*, 1.3.9–10; *cum penderet ... et quererer*, 4.7.5–6).

[17] As a whole 4.7 inverts notable aspects of all earlier poetry in which Cynthia speaks at length (once in each book: 1.3, 2.29B, 3.6). In addition to the role-reversal noted above, 1.3 ends Propertius' narration with Cynthia's twelve lines of direct speech, while 4.7 begins with twelve lines voiced by Propertius as introduction to Cynthia's narration. In 2.29B, a suspicious Propertius makes an early morning visit to Cynthia only to find her sleeping alone, while in 4.7 Cynthia calls upon Propertius at night accusing *him* of infidelity—and it is now Propertius who chastely lies alone in bed. Lastly, 4.7 is linked to 3.6 not only by Cynthia's speaking but also by the first reappearance of the slave Lygdamus—but in 3.6 Lygdamus belongs to Cynthia while he is Propertius' slave in 4.7 (Warden [n. 4], 35).

[18] Janan (n. 5), 100–1.

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the *exemplum* of Cynthia's return from the dead.[19] But in doing so, Propertius also offers late confirmation of the earnest belief he explores in 1.19—his conviction that love is able to transcend death (1.19.5–12):

non adeo leuiter nostris Puer haesit ocellis,
  ut meus oblito puluis amore uacet.
illic Phylacides iucundae coniugis heros
  non potuit caecis immemor esse locis;
sed cupidus falsis attingere gaudia palmis
  Thessalus antiquam uenerat umbra domum.
illic quidquid ero semper tua dicar imago:
  traicit et fati litora magnus amor.

Not so lightly has Cupid clung to my eyes that my dust could forget and lie free from love. There in the dark regions, Protesilaus the hero was not able to forget his charming bride; but, eager to grasp joys with insubstantial hands, the Thessalian had returned as a shade to his ancient home. Whatever I shall be in that place, I shall always be called yours when I am an apparition: great love crosses even the shores of death.

While imagining his own eventual residency in the underworld, in 1.19 Propertius had explored the capacity of lovers to escape death's limits by drawing on the myth of Protesilaus (7–10), who had gained divine permission to visit his wife Laodamia as a ghost after his death at Troy. Cynthia's own visit from the underworld in 4.7 seems now to provide dramatic proof of such capacity in lovers; and, in doing so, Cynthia once again assumes a role that, as Flaschenriem notes pertinently, Propertius 'had imagined for himself'.[20]

But Cynthia's post-mortem monologue in 4.7 also resolves the elegiac crisis that gives 1.19 its emotional centre. The poignant threat that death holds for the lover-poet is the splitting of the twin aspects of his personality, permitting him still to love (1.19.5–6) but rendering his remains unable to speak.[21] To put it another way, in 1.19 Propertius addresses the imminent end of Book 1 by facing off, in his own imagined death, a particularly elegiac form of annihilation: a feared inability to ensure Cynthia's continued faithfulness to him through the production of persuasive elegiac speech (1.19.1–4, 1.19.21–4). Seen in this context, Cynthia's return from the grave in 4.7 as a female Protesilaus acts against the poetic-erotic closure that should be symbolized by her burial. Rather, Cynthia's faithful and potently talkative ghost offers the poet the significant consolation that death seems not to stop elegiac performance either as love or as poetry.

ELEGY ACCORDING TO CYNTHIA

The narrative authority which 4.7 grants Cynthia by reversing key moments in early Propertian elegy—and the implication that Cynthia in Book 4 might not be quite as we remember her—establish a crucial frame for what elegy's mistress has to say.

[19] Muecke (n. 4), 126. For an inversion here of the 'conventional scepticism' of epigrams, see Yardley (n. 4), 83.

[20] Flaschenriem (n. 5), 54. On reading 4.7 against 1.19, see also Warden (n. 4), 28; Dimundo (n. 12), 40–3.

[21] Cf. 2.13 (esp. lines 57–8): Propertius asserts that, for lovers, the pain of death lies ultimately in an inability to communicate.

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Indeed, one of the most frequent observations about Cynthia's speech in 4.7 is that it proposes a radically alternative version of the affair that Propertius has so far been responsible for narrating; and that, in this way, Cynthia unites with the other female speakers of Book 4 in laying siege to the elegiac 'truths' expressed in the first three books.[22] Micaela Janan describes well Cynthia's part in the fourth book's revisionist programme: 'Bringing Cynthia's ghost back from the grave to depose her lover's faithlessness and attest to her own faithfulness, against Propertius' record of the affair, is but one way that elegy 4.7 ambushes the elegy-reading audience by revealing that "everything you know is wrong".'[23] Above all, Cynthia's speech reveals a woman who is anxious to set the record straight by telling her story in her own way.

In this section I emphasize the attention Cynthia gives to the cultural difference created by female speech, and to the strategies she employs for evading and critiquing the mechanisms of masculine authority.[24] As Cynthia's speech moves into its second half, her focus shifts towards notably women-authored narration that not only promotes female perspective but also tends to displace male presence altogether. Cynthia initially develops her empathy with female speech by depicting her fellow-female inhabitants of the underworld specifically as storytellers (4.7.63–4):

> Andromedeque et Hypermestre sine fraude marita
> narrant historias, foedera nota, suas.

Andromeda and Hypermestra, married without deceit, narrate their histories, well-known unions.

In myth, both of these women are famously implicated in narratives centred on others, and especially on men associated with them. Hypermestra is judged for better or worse as a woman who did not follow the script given her by her father,[25] while Andromeda is remembered for being sacrificed by her father to a sea-monster (for her mother's impiety, as we will see: ***maternis*** *catenis*, 4.7.65) and rescued subsequently by Perseus. Cynthia links the narratives to which these women relate not with tragic or heroic (or erotic) masculine interests but with the status *they* claim as married women of blameless status (*sine fraude marita*, 4.7.63). From the content of Cynthia's speech as Propertius records it, Cynthia seems not only to have become one of these mythic women but also to identify with their virtuous status as *uniuirae* and their desire now to tell their stories on their own terms (as the final word of line 64, *suas* confirms at the last moment that the narratives these women tell are now *their own*).

All the same, Cynthia seems determined to join these women only to a certain extent. Importantly, at least when it comes to Hypermestra and Andromeda, the attention Cynthia gives to female storytelling also betrays the(ir) difficulty of extricating such

[22] See esp. Wyke (n. 5), 197.

[23] Janan (n. 5), 107.

[24] For the financial dependence women like Cynthia had on men like Propertius, see S.L. James, *Learned Girls and Male Persuasion. Gender and Reading in Roman Love Elegy* (Berkeley, 2003), 35–107. For readings of 4.7 that expose the dependence women have on men for the representation (and reputation) in art, see Janan (n. 5), 107–8; also Wyke (n. 5), 185.

[25] Cf. the extended *exemplum* afforded Hypermestra at Hor. *Carm.* 3.11.33–52. Male interests are conspicuous here: Horace's Hypermestra voices the paternal retribution she expects as a consequence of her actions (45–8), while Horace himself cites Hypermestra in the first place as a 'noble girl', who treats wedlock with due respect (33–6)—but in the context of a poem in which he seeks Mercury's assistance in making one Lyde similarly receptive to the poet's own overtures of marriage.

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narrative from its history of male narration. While these women gain the right now to voice their own tales, they seem also fated never to surpass—or even to vary—the elements in their stories that cause them suffering (4.7.65–8):

> haec sua maternis queritur liuere catenis
> bracchia nec meritas frigida saxa manus.
> narrat Hypermestre magnum ausas esse sorores:
> in scelus hoc animum non ualuisse suum.

[Andromeda] complains that her arms are bruised by her mother's chains, and that her hands are undeserving of the cold rocks. Hypermestra relates that her sisters dared a great deed: and that her own heart was not sufficient for such a crime.

Cynthia's Elysium seems riven with an unending lamentation that is ill-matched to the virtuous status with which the women are introduced.[26] Gaining their own voice has not replotted these women's tales toward any emancipated closure—rather, Andromeda's narrative in particular now entraps her sorrow in the present tense, always to be experienced and yet never exceeded.[27] In fact, for both Andromeda and Hypermestra, there is added poignancy in the inability of their tales, as now told by the women themselves, even to reach the 'positive' ending that is transmitted in their male-authored narratives.[28] On this point, Cynthia seeks to align herself with her colleagues, and yet to distinguish herself from them (4.7.69–70):

> sic mortis lacrimis uitae sancimus amores;
> celo ego perfidiae crimina multa tuae.

So we sanctify life's loves with death's tears; but I conceal the many crimes of your faithlessness.

Cynthia joins with Andromeda and Hypermestra to weep in the hope of closing the wounds their faithful loving has earned them (*sancimus*, 4.7.69). But, unlike her mythic companions, whose narratives stall at the moment that others intervene in their plots, Cynthia reveals a more potent capacity to manipulate her own narrative by choosing which elements to promote and which to repress (*celo ego,* 4.7.70). And, although Cynthia clearly presents her 'gracefully reticent'[29] silence about her lover's infidelity as a kindness to Propertius, her decision to leave Propertius *out* of the stories she tells in the underworld effectively foreshadows the air-brushed persona that Cynthia will soon style for herself in the upper world she has left behind.

Cynthia turns from other women's story-telling to introduce a piece of writing of her own. At 4.7.85–6 Cynthia dictates an epitaph which she instructs Propertius to inscribe over her tomb:

[26] In this geographically vague representation of the underworld, Propertius seems to infuse his Elysian fields with Virgil's depiction of female sorrow in the *lugentes campi* at *Aen*. 6.442–9: F. Solmsen, 'Propertius in his literary relations with Tibullus and Vergil', *Philologus* 105 (1961), 273–89, at 284–5; Allison (n. 4), 333–4; Knox (n. 4), 157–8. For Janan (n. 5), 109–11, Cynthia's portrait of an undelimited underworld eschews the (male-authored) categories by which female virtue is judged; cf. Warden (n. 4), 39.

[27] Janan (n. 5), 110–11, following Warden (n. 4), 43.

[28] Papanghelis (n. 7), 181. Cf. Janan (n. 5), 112–13.

[29] Papanghelis (n. 7), 183 thus distinguishes Cynthia's behaviour in the underworld from Virgil's 'ominously incommunicative' Dido in *Aeneid* 6.

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HIC SITA TIBVRNA IACET AVREA CYNTHIA TERRA:
ACCESSIT RIPAE LAVS, ANIENE, TVAE.

HERE LIES GOLDEN CYNTHIA PLACED IN THE EARTH OF TIBUR: PRAISE HAS BEEN ADDED, ANIO, TO YOUR BANK.

By composing an inscription, Cynthia overtly undertakes an act of self-commemoration.[30] Here, as she memorializes what Flaschenriem calls her 'public' self,[31] Cynthia takes a step seemingly unavailable to Andromeda and Hypermestra in liberating her narrative from its male-centered history. While, in her 'private' message to her former lover, Cynthia is just as keen as her mythic colleagues to acknowledge her faithful (quasi-)wifely status, the *public* monument that will commemorate Cynthia to a wider audience eschews mention of any such defining relationship with a man. Indeed, inasmuch as she seeks closure in her ghostly visit to Propertius, Cynthia's epitaph represents the culmination of a strategy that would sever all ties to her former poet and to his characterization of her (as Ramsby puts it, Cynthia wants her epitaph 'to express only her accomplishments in her own words, for once'[32]). In the verses immediately before she asks Propertius effectively to 'publish' the poem she has written for herself (*hic carmen media dignum me scribe columna*, 4.7.83),[33] Cynthia asks that he burn the poetry *he* has written in her name, and that he ensure her tomb is kept free of the (poetic) ivy which would otherwise (continue to) bind her bones (4.7.77–80):[34]

et quoscumque meo fecisti nomine uersus,
ure mihi: laudes desine habere meas.
pelle hederam tumulo, mihi ne praegnante corymbo
mollia contortis alliget ossa comis.

And whatever verses you have composed in my name, burn them for me: cease to receive praises that belong to me. Keep ivy from my tomb, lest in its spreading cluster it should bind my delicate bones with entwining leaves.

[30] See esp. T.R. Ramsby, *Textual Permanence. Roman Elegists and the Epigraphic Tradition* (London, 2007) for analysis of an 'epigraphic consciousness' in Augustan poetry, where frequent incorporation of literary epitaphs accords with a desire that poetry be, at least in part, a vehicle for permanent public self-representation. Cf. the qualification of Ramsby's discussion of the 'monumental durability' evoked by literary epitaphic writing in L.B.T. Houghton, 'Epitome and eternity: some epitaphs and votive inscriptions in the Latin love elegists', in P. Liddel and P. Low (edd.), *Inscriptions and their Uses in Greek and Latin Literature* (Oxford, 2013), 349–64 (esp. 357–61).

[31] Flaschenriem (n. 5), 60; pages 56–62 are an excellent discussion of the significance of Cynthia's epitaph; also Ramsby (n. 30), 66–70. Cf. Papanghelis (n. 7), 188–9, who sees the text on Cynthia's monument as encapsulating the cheap aspirations of a courtesan whose final speech 'sizzles with womanish vanity'.

[32] Ramsby (n. 30), 69.

[33] Cynthia's instruction that Propertius inscribe her poetic epitaph 'in the middle of a column' recalls Propertius' own 'publication' motif from the closing stages of the previous book (3.23.23–4), which itself draws upon the final line of Horace's *Satires* 1 to indicate that the work in question is ready for public consumption: S.J. Heyworth and J.H.W. Morwood, *A Commentary on Propertius: Book 3* (Oxford, 2011), 330.

[34] Here I follow the text as printed in Hutchinson (n. 10). Heyworth (n. 8) adopts Sandbach's emendation *pone* for *pelle* at 79, so having Cynthia request the *planting* of ivy on her tomb; for argumentation, see F.H. Sandbach, 'Some problems in Propertius', *CQ* 12 (1962), 163–76, at 273–4. As I argue above, seeking the removal of ivy from her tomb accords with the literary emancipation that Cynthia seeks in the surrounding couplets: see here Warden (n. 11), 121–2 with n. 18; Hutchinson (n. 10), 186.

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These lines bring together two powerful symbols of poetic emancipation. In asking that her tomb be kept from ivy, Cynthia signals her desire for release from the entangling tendrils of Propertian poetry by pointedly reversing a usually positive symbol for poetic writing.[35] At the same time, if we remember that Propertius had stated early in Book 3 that he intended his poems as 'monuments' to his mistress' beauty (*carmina erunt formae tot monumenta tuae*, 3.2.18), then Cynthia prepares space for the epitaph from which she will exclude Propertius precisely by instructing that he destroy those verses which would be his testament to her.[36]

ELEGY IN THE IMAGE OF CYNTHIA

We have just seen Cynthia in 4.7 insisting on her own version of affairs—and, especially, asserting (the difference of) her own voice and the ending for erotic elegy that this should entail. Yet the remarkable thing about this poem is that, in doing so, Cynthia creates an elegiac voice, which not only displays a marked *similarity* to the kind of voice Propertius himself has always used, but which also shows a keen interest in perpetuating elegy's core erotic values; this is a seeming contradiction that largely evades scrutiny within individual readings of the poem. In the remainder of this discussion I seek to show how these divergent aspects of 4.7 can be brought together in a way that will prove valuable in clarifying the way in which 4.7 interacts not only with earlier Propertian poetry but also with the fourth book itself.

In the first instance, the effect of ceding so much elegiac space to a narrating Cynthia is always to suggest her as a poet in her own right. More than this, however, in 4.7 Propertius is clearly concerned to confirm Cynthia as a creative figure who employs elegiac rhetoric in Propertius' own manner;[37] to the extent that bringing Cynthia back in Book 4 does more than merely challenge Propertius' version of elegiac history—it threatens his role as controlling poet, as well. In the opening twelve lines, intratextual inversions of 1.3 and 1.19 already suggest that poet and mistress are switching roles; now, as Cynthia begins to speak, her appeal to conspicuously 'Propertian' subjects seemingly affirms that *she* now plays the poet's part, leaving Propertius himself in the (almost) voiceless and objectified position typically occupied by elegy's *puella*. Echoing a signature motif in Propertius' writing, Cynthia announces erotic perfidy as her primary theme with her first word (*perfide*, 4.7.13);[38] and Cynthia swears an oath right at the middle of her speech that she, by contrast, herself 'has kept faith' (*[iuro ego] me seruasse fidem*, 4.7.53),[39] reprising in her own voice Propertius' repeated claim always to (have) be(en) faithful to Cynthia.[40] At 4.7.23–34 Cynthia accuses

[35] E.g. Prop. 2.5.26, 3.3.35, 4.1.62, with S.J. Heyworth, *Cynthia. A Companion to the Text of Propertius* (Oxford, 2007), 471.

[36] Cf. Flaschenriem (n. 5), 58–9.

[37] Flaschenriem (n. 5), 55.

[38] Propertius habitually alludes to Cynthia as perfidious: e.g. 1.11.16; 1.15.2; 1.15.34; 2.5.3; 2.9.28; 2.18B19. For the range of elegiac behaviour covered by *perfidia*, see A.W. Bennett, 'The elegiac lie: Propertius 1.15', *Phoenix* 26 (1972), 28–39.

[39] A literally central claim: 4.7.53 is the forty-first line of Cynthia's 82-line monologue.

[40] e.g. 1.12.19–20, 1.15.29–32, 2.7.19, 2.20.34, 2.26.27, 3.6.39–40, 3.15.9–10. Significantly, the much-observed 'difference' in 4.7 between the Cynthian and the Propertian versions of elegiac history is largely brought about by rhetorical *similarity* in the two speakers: each accuses the other of lack of faith.

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Propertius of not performing for her (almost) precisely those funeral rites that Propertius had feared Cynthia would not perform for him at 2.13.27–30. Then, as Cynthia's speech comes to an end, Propertius himself flags Cynthia's performance as elegiac by categorizing her speech as 'querulous' (*haec querula*, 4.7.94). Here Propertius flags Cynthia's long monologue as the characteristic lament of an elegiac lover, left behind or forgotten by their beloved;[41] and, significantly, he also equates Cynthia's behaviour with his own at the poem's beginning, where we meet the male poet 'lamenting' (*queritur*, 4.7.4) the chill kingdom of his bed in emblematically elegiac fashion.

Cynthia saves her most far-reaching Propertian performance, though, for the very end of her speech. In her last couplet, Cynthia conjures the uneasy image of eternal erotic friction in the grave (4.7.93–4):

> nunc te possideant aliae; mox sola tenebo,
> mecum eris et mixtis ossibus ossa teram.

Now other women may possess you; soon I alone will hold you, you will be with me, and I shall rub bones on mingled bones.

These lines refine the sense of closure that Cynthia otherwise attempts to impose, fulfilling Propertius' opening claim that 'death does not finish everything' (*letum non omnia finit*, 4.7.1). Here Cynthia tempers her desire for release with a threat of erotic renewal: Cynthia's 'closural' strategy is not simply to escape Propertius' poetic control but to begin a new chapter in which she subsumes and replaces him.[42] Just as her first word announces her appropriation of a central Propertian theme, Cynthia's eerie final word—*teram* ('I shall rub')—knowingly signals her co-option of Propertius' eroto-poetic agency, renewing it on *her* terms in perpetuity. The verb *terere* is an emblematic word in which the disparate elements of Propertian discourse coalesce: love, artistic production and sex itself.[43] Propertius' particular use of verbs such as *terere* elides the difference between the physical and the literary, enabling elegiac writing to become a metaphor for sex, and elegiac sex to be a metaphor for writing, in an ongoing self-referential cycle. Propertius uses the word and its compounds in explicitly erotic passages (for example, 3.11.30, 3.20.6),[44] as well as in programmatic passages where love and poetry are least distinguishable (for instance, 1.7.9, 2.1.46, 2.30.14). In the final couplet of her speech, Cynthia's graphic imagery of physical possession (and her marked grammatical agency)[45] already suggests the extent to which, from now on, she would turn the tables on her poet. In this context, Cynthia's climactic use of *teram* at 4.7.94 affirms the same point, enabling her very deftly to demonstrate her intended appropriation of Propertius' role as controlling poet, artist and lover by calling upon the male poet's own symbolic language.[46]

[41] See generally C. Saylor, '*Querelae*: Propertius' distinctive technical name for his elegy', *Agon* 1 (1967), 142–9, for the use of *queror* as a technical term for elegiac speech. For Cynthia's use of *queri*, see S. Kaufhold, 'Propertius 1.3: Cynthia rescripted', *ICS* 22 (1997), 87–98, at 95; Flaschenriem (n. 5), 53; and James (n. 5), 335.

[42] Liveley (n. 5), 124.

[43] See esp. Papanghelis (n. 7), 22–4.

[44] Metaphorical context and other usages discussed at J.N. Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (Baltimore, 1982), 183–4.

[45] Flaschenriem (n. 5), 54–5.

[46] There is a possible irony available here. In the opening section above I flagged Propertius' use of *triuerat* (4.7.10) to describe the way in which the water of Lethe 'had worn away' the surface of Cynthia's face. At the time, I linked this with Cynthia's desire for literary emancipation, noting the

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Recognizing Cynthia's performance in 4.7 as an incarnation of elegiac discourse accords with a now long-standing approach to Roman elegy more generally; critics have noted for some time that Cynthia (often quite literally) embodies elegy itself, and reflects the elegiac values of the genre's male author.[47] Readings of this kind have offered important lessons in the 'scripted' nature of elegy's mistress;[48] yet, there is little consensus about what Cynthia's most developed performance in 4.7 might contribute, besides the clear challenge it presents to Propertius' own way of seeing things.

In this context, Sharon James' recent reading of imitation in female elegiac offers food for thought.[49] Though she does not address 4.7 directly, James argues that female impersonation of the elegiac lover should be seen as a strategic move by the women in question. James places particular significance on the advice given in 4.5 by Acanthis, the ancient *lena* on her deathbed who pre-empts Cynthia in exposing the one-sidedness of Propertius' version of erotic history well before Cynthia herself has drawn ghostly breath. Provocatively, Acanthis urges elegy's mistress to adopt for herself the characteristics of her suitor (4.5.45–6):

> in mores te uerte uiri: si cantica iactat,
> i comes et uoces ebria iunge tuas.

Change yourself into the character of your man: if he sings songs, go as his companion and drunkenly join in with your own voice.

Acanthis' advice, rooted in practicalities necessary for a woman who relies for her livelihood on winning financial favours from men, would turn elegy's *puella* into (as James puts it) 'a mirror of her lover's predilections'.[50] Acanthis purports to depict elegy's mistress as motivated by her desire to cajole, flatter or frustrate as many gifts out of the male elegiac lover as possible; here, then, the *puella*'s tendency to resemble the elegiac genre becomes a calculated appeal by her to her lover's literary taste.

This is a valuable reading. In particular, James urges important appreciation of the many implied interactions outside elegy's narrative that provoke poems from elegy's lover-poet. Nevertheless, we grant too much authority to Acanthis if we use her *apologia* as a neatly retrojected explanation for *all* aspects of female behaviour in elegy. To do so underplays the significance of Acanthis' foray into metapoetry (and Cynthia's in 4.7, and Cornelia's in 4.11) coming at the end of the Propertian corpus: the effect is not simply to 'explain' how elegy has worked from the start but rather to challenge readers to 'think again' about what they already 'know'—setting up an ongoing cycle of

symbolic erasure of the identity Propertius had written for Cynthia; and the verb itself foreshadows Cynthia's usurpation of the poet's authoritative role with *teram* just now at 4.7.94. Yet, even as Cynthia strives to assert control of her own identity, Propertius seemingly reminds us of (the reality of) Cynthia's inscribed nature: the striking verb *triuerat* links Cynthia's features with the poet's writing-tablets, which he described in 3.23 as similarly being 'worn down' by the use of his hands—and so the tablets remain recognisably *his*, even when lacking a seal (*has quondam nostris manibus* ***detriuerat*** *usus,* | *qui non signatas iussit habere fidem*, 3.23.3–4).

[47] See esp. D.F. Kennedy, *The Arts of Love: Five Studies in the Discourse of Roman Love Elegy* (Cambridge, 1993), 83–100; and K. O'Neill, 'Symbolism and sympathetic magic in Propertius 4.5', *CJ* 94 (1998), 49–80, at 1, with n. 2 for representative bibliography.

[48] Esp. M. Wyke, 'The elegiac woman at Rome', *PCPhS* 33 (1987), 153–78; and ead., 'Written women: Propertius' *scripta puella*', *JRS* 77 (1987), 47–61; ead., 'Mistress and metaphor in Augustan elegy', *Helios* 16 (1989), 25–47.

[49] James (n. 5).

[50] James (n. 5), 339.

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re-reading, as both end and opening of the corpus begin to offer comment equally upon each other.[51] More importantly—and ironically, given the vehemence with which Acanthis and Cynthia in Book 4 seek to provide a different and particularly female way of looking at the elegiac system—we risk undermining the reader's ability to hear any independent substance in what elegy's women have to say; by placing too much weight on Acanthis' words, then (as James argues) 'even what may seem singular behavior belonging to a singular female turns out instead to be a performance reflecting the male speaker'.[52] James is right to see Cynthia's speeches as imitative 'performance', a point to which I return in closing; but, all the same, we can do more justice to Cynthia's defiant role as elegy's foremost female speaker. In the final part of my discussion I propose that, in addition to seeing Cynthia ape her poet's *mores* in the way that Acanthis urges, we should also view Cynthia's bravura performance—especially in 4.7—as a kind of elegiac blueprint that Propertius himself has been imitating all along; that is, we should see elegiac characterisation in the end as very much a two-way street.

Just before she commences her closural instructions to Propertius to burn his poetry and inscribe her epitaph, Cynthia alludes to her intended manumission of her maid, Latris (4.7.75–6):

> deliciaeque meae Latris, cui nomen ab usu est,
> ne speculum dominae porrigat illa nouae.

Don't let my beloved Latris, whose name comes from her service, hold out a mirror for a new mistress.

As Heyworth points out,[53] Latris shares a close association with Propertius, in that Cynthia is *domina* to both; and, at the beginning of her speech's closural sequence, the release of Latris from Cynthia's service parallels Propertius' own emancipation from erotic servitude to Cynthia (*nunc te possideant aliae*, 'Now *others* may possess you', 4.7.93). Here Cynthia emphasizes that it has been Latris' job to hold a mirror to her mistress (and she should not do so for a new mistress: *ne speculum dominae porrigat illa nouae*, 4.7.76). This is a strongly suggestive moment. At the least, it shows Cynthia highly protective of her own image; she takes measures to ensure that her likeness in the mirror will not be 'destroyed' by the appearance there of a new mistress' face—a mistress who has already melted down another representation of Cynthia in the form of a golden statue, apparently with Propertius' sufferance (*te patiente* ***meae*** *conflauit* ***imaginis*** *aurum*, 4.7.47).[54] But it is Cynthia's reference to a mirror in a poem dominated by literary reflections that most obviously reverses the imitative dynamic underpinning Acanthis' advice that the mistress should emulate the character of elegy and its lover. Instead, and in keeping with the active role Cynthia claims for herself throughout 4.7, here we find Cynthia as the caster of reflections, rather than as a reflection of others.

Let me dwell on this point a little. What if, as part of her radical revision of elegiac history, Cynthia's insistence on reclaiming her own identity builds on the implication

[51] Perceptive here is Johnson (n. 1), 180; also Liveley (n. 5), 119, for the way in which Book 4 toys with its readers' desire to construct an extra-textual chronology of elegiac events.
[52] James (n. 5) 341.
[53] Heyworth (n. 35), 471.
[54] M. Bettini (trans. L. Gibbs), *The Portrait of the Lover* (Berkeley, 1999), 112–16.

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that elegy itself has been modelled after her likeness, rather than the other way around? Should we not see that the essential similarity of Latris and Propertius is not simply that they serve the same mistress but that each has been responsible for 'creating reflections' of Cynthia?[55] Here Cynthia's mirror would take its place not (only) as the last instruction that concerns Cynthia's household but (also) as the first of a triptych of poetic symbols which gather as Cynthia herself seeks release from Propertian elegy: burn the verses (4.7.77–8), remove the ivy (79–80), but before all *ensure there be no further images of a mistress* (75–6)—all of which assert very much the same thing.

Approaching elegy from this direction allows the reader, paradoxically enough, to come full-circle—to rehabilitate Cynthia's actions and words as belonging to her once more, instead of regarding them (or, more accurately, as well as regarding them) as a realization of Propertius' own amatory fantasies. It also elides meaningful distinction between Cynthia's rhetorical similarity to Propertius and the defiant difference of her message, since we can see her very dissent as a figure for the subversive genre in which she is embedded and, effectively, as further correspondence with Propertius' own elegiac insubordination. Most of all, it helps us grasp more fully the programmatic function that Cynthia undoubtedly possesses from the start. When Cynthia speaks for the first time in 1.3, for instance, a typical move is to identify Cynthia's rhetoric as 'adopting' the manner of Propertius himself.[56] Yet, when we look back at the start of Book 1 from the middle of Book 4, the way in which Cynthia reclaims elegiac speech in 4.7 helps us to recognize Cynthia's first performance as anticipating Propertius' manner, at the same time. At a simple and thematic level, it is Cynthia in 1.3 who introduces the *topos* of infidelity (and defence of one's own faithfulness) into Propertian elegy, and who first uses that verb *queror* to categorize (her) speech as 'lament'. Far more significantly, when in her first speech Cynthia voices her powerlessness and tearful frustration at her faithless lover's erotic freedom, she is the first in Propertian elegy to do so; and she provides an initial programmatic expression of feminine dependence and marginalization which anticipates the famously feminized subject-position that the Propertian lover later reproduces.[57] Perhaps most fundamentally, in all of this Cynthia flags her own affinity with elegiac discourse—and so prepares us from the beginning for her devastating fourth-book return in which she laments fluently as 'an aggrieved though faithful lover',[58] not so much imitating as authenticating the elegiac voice.

Finally, when we follow the prompt in 4.7 to revisit Propertius' meditation on love and death in 1.19, we might just hear a new whisper hinting at the template Cynthia has provided for elegy since the beginning. In 1.19 Propertius imagines his own ghost in the underworld (1.19.11–12):

> illic quidquid ero semper tua dicar imago:
> traicit et fati litora magnus amor.

As he will in 4.7, in this poem Propertius uses death to explore love as a timeless and eternal theme; and, as ever when he writes about his own death, Propertius contemplates

[55] Heyworth (n. 35), 471.
[56] E.g. Kaufhold (n. 41), 95; James (n. 5), 335.
[57] For finding a 'female subjectivity' in elegy's male *ego*, see the remarks at Wyke (n. 5), 168, 180; and more generally M. Wyke, 'Taking the woman's part: engendering Roman love elegy', *Ramus* 23 (1994), 110–28; also P.A. Miller, 'Why Propertius is a woman: French feminism and Augustan elegy', *CPh* 96 (2001), 127–46.
[58] Flaschenriem (n. 5), 53.

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his literary legacy as a poet as much as his lover's imperishable desire. In this context, of course, it will surprise no one that Propertius envisages his posthumous reputation resting on connection with Cynthia: *semper tua dicar imago* ('as an apparition, I shall always be called yours', 4.7.11). But when re-reading this passage from the perspective of 4.7, it becomes clear that the narrative Propertius imagines for himself—that of love surviving the funeral pyre—is in fact borne out in *Cynthia*'s story. Here the striking novelty in 4.7 of Cynthia herself as the original subject of reflections and other simulacra (recall ***meae imaginis*** *aurum*, 4.7.47) suggests a new resonance in the phrase ***tua*** *dicar* ***imago*** in 1.19. When we look back at Propertius expressing *his* intention to return from the underworld in order to give voice to his undying desire, it is possible (now) to hear the elegist admitting that he will be said to be 'your *likeness*'[59] —the spitting image of Cynthia herself, the mistress who did it first.

AT THE END

Of course, it is not as simple as this. For all that an effeminate Propertius subsequently reprises the feminine disempowerment that his mistress claims for herself in 1.3, the lover-poet has already eschewed the symbols of conventional masculinity in 1.1; and, by the same token, Cynthia herself does indeed 'recall' elegiac language in 1.3—most famously echoing Propertius' *miserum me* (1.1.1) with her own *me miseram* (1.3.40). Then again, if this moment of mirrored behaviour in Cynthia's first speech might (now) seem strategic in the manner that Acanthis will advise in 4.5 (*in mores te uerte uiri*, 'change yourself into the character of your man, 4.5.45), in her second speech Cynthia is at pains to dispel suggestion of similarity between her behaviour and that of her lover: *me similem uestris moribus esse putas?* ('do you think that I resemble *your* character?' 2.29B.32), as she asserts her own fidelity in the face of Propertius' suspicions. (Yet, Cynthia's rhetorical attempt in this poem to distinguish herself from Propertius has an ironic corollary, as metapoetry, of inviting the poem's reader precisely to consider the affinities between the two characters—'*do* you think I behave like Propertius?'—especially when reading back after Cynthia's final speech in 4.7—and, of course, Acanthis in 4.5.) In truth, elegiac reflection works both ways, and it is important to recognize that both 'Cynthia' and 'Propertius' offer potential models for ways of behaving and speaking. In gender terms, particularly, one of the riches of Propertian elegy comes from its interrogation of gender norms by switching them (albeit selectively) between the sexes, as Miller observes: 'Propertius, as has been widely recognised, frequently assumes the feminine discursive position and promotes Cynthia to a pseudo-masculinity without ever forfeiting his phallic privileges.'[60] I add to this that, in Book 4, the customary 'feminine discursive position' of the male elegist is repeatedly exposed, returning again and again to a voice that is literally female, rather than effeminate.

And this is the point that I emphasize in closing. For all that Cynthia does threaten to pull elegy to pieces, in many ways her speech in 4.7 also offers a natural space for elegiac performance. In common with other fourth-book elegies, 4.7 already possesses a

[59] Cf. ***tuast imago***, 'he's the image of you' (Plaut. *Men*. 1063); *tuum filium,* ***imaginem tuam***, 'your son, the image of you' (Cic. *Qfr*. 1, 3.3).
[60] Miller (n. 57), 135

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strong performative pedigree: Peter Knox emphasizes the narrative's affinity with ancient mime,[61] and numerous commentators observe the rhetorical significance of Cynthia's speech[62] (indeed, the greatest value of Cynthia's speech lies in its staging; the prominent reference to Lethean water in line 10 must bring into question how much Cynthia has 'forgotten' of her life with Propertius, and so the value of her alternative history as belated 'truth'). Maria Wyke notes the importance of costumed gender play to the programme of Book 4 as a whole through Vertumnus in 4.2: 'Vertumnus programmatically represents the construction of character in the elegiac discourse of Propertius' fourth book as a form of dramatic disguise: if the *amator* or the *puella* speaks here, it is because an author is impersonating them.'[63] This is a valuable insight into the knowing nature of Propertius' elaborate ventriloquism in 4.7, and yet is as much true of Cynthia herself, whom we have seen here playing the (male) parts of Patroclus and Hector and Propertius himself, as well as the unlikely role of the chaste wife with all the ghostly vehemence she can muster, in the face of three books of poetic evidence to the contrary.[64]

More than this, however, Vertumnus offers a peerless exploration of the fraught lines of continuity in elegy that connect Self and Other, a virtuosic allegory for a poet ever assuming new identities and yet being always himself (4.2.21–48). Indeed, Ovid will remind us at *Met*. 14.765–71 that Vertumnus' final and most successful transformation is in fact *into* himself—and there is more than a little of this about Propertius' final collection of poetry. Rather than reinvent elegy *ab initio*, the disparate speakers of Propertius' fourth book frequently isolate, develop and continue to juxtapose disparate voices that are already immanent in the earlier discourse of elegy's paradoxical topsy-turvy narrator.[65] And when Propertius 'impersonates' Cynthia in 4.7, there is an important sense in which he poses most nakedly as himself, at the same time. To put it another way, not only does Propertius' Cynthia put on a well-practised elegiac performance in 4.7, she also gives us the quintessential elegiac performance.

To be sure, 4.7 shows us the extent to which elegy's scope has developed over four books: when compared with 1.3 especially, there is now a shared (if contested) history upon which each character can call, and an increased cast of supporting characters as well, the daily apparatus of the two households that used to be ignored by elegy's close focus on its two leading actors. But 4.7 also lays bare aspects of elegy's essential nature. Revealingly, Cynthia performs elegy as a partial and paranoid monologue, which figures the beloved as a projection of the fantasies and fears of the lover. Cynthia's mastery of (male) rhetorical performance in 4.7 positions elegiac speech as fundamentally a persuasive act designed to maintain control of the beloved. Most importantly, Cynthia's *female* role as a betrayed heroine, vulnerable to the representational control of others and

[61] Knox (n. 4); more generally, see J.C. McKeown, 'Augustan elegy and mime', *PCPhS* 205 (1979), 71–84.

[62] Muecke (n. 4), 127 (a 'distinctly forensic flavour'); similarly Warden (n. 4), 37; and B. Dufallo, 'The Roman elegist's dead lover or the drama of the desiring subject', *Phoenix* 59 (2005), 112–20, at 116. For oratorical value in elegy more broadly, see B. Dufallo, *The Ghosts of the Past* (Columbus, 2007).

[63] Wyke (n. 5), 180.

[64] W.R. Johnson, *A Latin Lover in Ancient Rome. Readings in Propertius and His Genre* (Columbus, 2009), 79–84 approaches Cynthia's self-defence in 4.7 with entertaining cynicism.

[65] Again, Wyke (n. 5), 180 is instructive; in Book 4 'the presentation of old elegiac poses now becomes a matter of putting on costumes, of play-acting'; and Flaschenriem (n. 5), 49: 'The innovative elegies of Book 4, with their array of female speakers, have their origins in Propertius' earlier attempts to dramatize a feminine erotic psychology.'

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concerned with her own reputation as *uniuira*, foregrounds at the end the feminine model Propertius has used for himself in his exploration of the troubles of Roman masculinity,[66] and in elegy's paradoxical obsession with 'traditional' sexual mores. In reclaiming elegy's *literal* feminine side, Cynthia paves the way for the matron Cornelia in the last poem of all at 4.11—perhaps the most unexpected and yet most natural way for elegy to end.

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[66] Cynthia's opening *perfide* (4.7.13) not only appropriates Propertius' language, it also offers an echo of (Catullus') Ariadne as she curses Theseus *twice* at the beginning of her speech at Cat. 64.132–3: Muecke (n. 4), 127; Hutchinson (n. 10), 174. Cynthia thus converts Propertius' own use of *perfide* into a 'window allusion' to Cat. 64, highlighting the feminized nature of elegiac vituperation by reference to a poem in which a male poet has already used female lament as an allegory for the emasculated discourse he presents elsewhere in his erotic verse.

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