

## VIRGILIAN THEMES IN PROPERTIUS 4. 7 AND 8

In the seventh and eighth poems of Book 4 of Propertius it is possible to detect aspects of comedy, aetiological poetry, tragedy, epigram, and eulogy within the anticipated themes of love elegy.<sup>1</sup> But the atmosphere of both is established and maintained through the use of epic motifs. The similarity between the setting of 7 and Patroclus' ghostly visit to Achilles is well known. Most recently S. Evans, followed by M. Hubbard, has proposed that the eighth poem stands in relation to the seventh as the *Odyssey* does to the *Iliad*; in poem 7 the Cynthia/Patroclus, Propertius/Achilles representations are replaced in 8 by the Cynthia/Odysseus, Propertius/Penelope male/female reversal.<sup>2</sup>

This interpretation is imaginative and lends support to the view that 8 was placed after 7 by the poet himself.<sup>3</sup> There may be another important source of the epic elements in poems 7 and 8, namely, the *Aeneid*. There appears to be ample evidence that the *Aeneid* afforded Propertius some imaginative ideas which contributed to the successful creation of an elegy in epic garb. That Propertius uses Virgilian language, particularly in Book 4, is well attested, but as far as I can ascertain no one has studied the many allusions to the *Aeneid* in these two poems in order to consider the question of their relationship to one another.<sup>4</sup>

Hubbard discusses the role reversals in 8. Even more striking is the reversal in 7 of the traditional elegiac role, in which the male lover complains of sickness, debility, and, especially in Propertius, imagines his own demise.<sup>5</sup> In 4. 7 the elegiac lover has outlived his cruel mistress. Virgil is the only other contemporary poet who deviates from the neoteric *mise-en-scène* to depict the death of the woman.<sup>6</sup> The resemblance between Dido and Cynthia in their respective relations to Aeneas and Propertius is notable. The man is accused of perfidy; the woman has died; there is an encounter with the shade. But there are also interesting verbal echoes which underscore the similarities.

For both pairs of lovers there are kingdoms at stake and for both poets the

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1. For discussion of the deliberate weaving of divers genres in Book 4, see in particular C. Becker, "Die späten *Elegien* des Properz," *Hermes* 99 (1971): 449-90; E. Burck, "Zur Komposition des vierten Buches des Properz," *WS* 79 (1966): 405-27; E. Reitzenstein, *Wirklichkeitsbild und Gefühlsentwicklung bei Properz*, *Philologus Supplement* 29 (1936), pp. 1-16, *passim*.

2. S. Evans, "Odyssean Echoes in Propertius IV, 8," *G&R* 18 (1971): 51-53; M. Hubbard, *Propertius* (London, 1974), pp. 149-56.

3. Most recently the case for the poet's organization of the poems in the books has been reinforced by J. T. Davis, *Dramatic Pairings in the "Elegies" of Propertius and Ovid*, *Noctes Romanae* (Bern, 1977), pp. 15-22, *passim*.

4. See H. Tränkle, *Die Sprachkunst des Properz und die Tradition der lateinischen Dichtersprache*, *Hermes Einzelschriften* 15 (Wiesbaden, 1969), pp. 49-50; F. Solmsen, "Propertius in His Literary Relations with Tibullus and Vergil," *Philologus* 105 (1961): 273-89; J. Dee, "Elegy 4.8: A Propertian Comedy," *TAPA* 108 (1978): 41-53; and Becker, "Die späten *Elegien*," p. 467, who asserts that the aetiological poems would not have come about without the *Aeneid*.

5. The metaphorical connections among death, love, and poetry are examined by S. Commager, *A Prolegomenon to Propertius* (Cincinnati, 1974), pp. 3-36.

6. The question of Cynthia's actual death is moot. J. P. Boucher, *Études sur Propertius* (Paris, 1965), pp. 436-38, warns against the literal interpretation. While Burck, "Zur Komposition," p. 419, agrees with Boucher that 8 represents a final homage to elegy and the woman who inspired the poems, he stresses the need to view 7 and 8 with the others in the book on the basis of their connections with poetry itself.

concept of *regnum* is inextricably tied up with love and death. Propertius connects the three ideas in lines 5 and 6 of 4. 7:

cum mihi somnus ab exsequiis penderet amoris,  
et quereretur lecti frigida regna mei.

The oxymoron, "exsequiis amoris," is highlighted by the parallel phrase, "frigida regna." "Frigida regna" out of context clearly conveys the significance of "under-world," but here Propertius has sublimated that meaning by making *regna* the realm of love. In doing this Propertius carries the juxtaposition of death and love in 5 over to line 6. In Book 4 of the *Aeneid* Aeneas proclaims that Italy is his new *amor* (347), immediately connecting love with kingdom (as in line 350: "et nos fas exera quaerere regna"). Dido replies to this comment in pained anger (381-86):

i, sequere Italiam uentis, pete regna per undas.  
spero equidem mediis, si quid pia numina possunt,  
supplicia hausurum scopulis et nomine Dido  
saepe uocaturum. sequar atris ignibus absens  
et, cum frigida mors anima seduxerit artus,  
omnibus umbra locis adero.

The balance of *sequere* (381) and *sequar* (384) makes the parallel explicit: you follow Italy, I you; you seek *regna*, I *frigida mors*. In spite of the anger and jealousy over the new love which motivate the words, we are led to foresee that Dido will relinquish her kingdom for death. Both poets equate *regnum* with *amor* and use the attributive *frigida* to refer to death and to the death of love.

One of the most obvious similarities in the two is the charge of *perfidus* leveled by the women (4. 305, 366, and 7. 13). Although these instances are not the only ones in Latin love complaint, it is a commonplace in elegy to hold the mistress suspect.<sup>7</sup> In this case the emphasis on the word would not be as striking were it not for the appearance in both poems of a subsequent insistence on the power of *fides*. In 4. 7 Cynthia asserts her loyalty by an oath "iuro . . . me seruasse fidem" (51-53), while luckless Dido regrets her broken promise "non seruata fides cineri promissa Sychaeo" (552).<sup>8</sup> This line represents the moment of recognition that what she affirmed at 4. 29, "ille habeat [amores] secum seruetque sepulcro," has been undone. Yet we now realize that Sychaeus will indeed hold and keep the love in death. Cynthia, who has sworn her *fides*, also proclaims the permanency of love in death: "nunc te possideant aliae: mox sola tenebo" (93). For both *fides* is substantiated against a backdrop of death as if that were somehow confirmation or a token of renewed trust.

In Book 6. 442-49 Virgil includes a catalogue of women who are to be found in the *lugentes campi*. Propertius likewise has Cynthia tell of the women who have perished "for" love (7. 55-69). In each there is disparity among the women in

7. See Catull. 64; *perfidus(e)* occurs in the fifth foot of Catull. 132 and Virg. *Aen.* 4. 305 and in the first foot in Catull. 133 and Virg. *Aen.* 4. 366. Further, Virg. *Aen.* 4. 306 and Catull. 133-34 have as their subjects desertion. The long series of questions in Catull. 64. 132-38 is mirrored in Virg. *Aen.* 4. 306-14.

8. The phrase *seruare fidem* is found in only one other place in Virgil, in the deceptive speech of Sinon, where it appears in the form of an oath (*Aen.* 2. 160-61).

terms of the kind of love for which they either perished or were renowned. They are not all deserving of the same fate. Virgil, however, has not tried to justify one's passion or crime, but seems to consider death from *amor* degrading whether the passion was criminal or not. Perhaps Propertius tried to set this right by dividing the women into groups (55–57). Only Pasiphae, who had by this time become the best *exemplum* of excessive passion, occurs in both catalogues.<sup>9</sup> The second point of similarity is in the aspects of the dead “heroines”; as shades they look as they did during their fateful experiences. Both poets, using Homeric paradigms (see especially *Il.* 23. 66 *καὶ ὄμματα*), point out the unchanged appearance, particularly their eyes. Virgil does so with a verbal echo from Book 4. Dido reflects the torment, not the release of death (6. 467–69):

talibus Aeneas ardentem et torua tuentem  
lenibat dictis animum lacrimasque ciebat.  
illa solo fixos oculos auersa tenebat.

Compare 4. 362–64:

talìa dicentem iamdudum auersa tuetur  
huc illuc uoluens oculos totumque pererrat  
luminibus tacitis et sic accensa profatur.

Propertius is emphatic about Cynthia (7. 7–8):

eosdem habuit secum quibus est elata capillos,  
eosdem oculos.

By stressing her hair and eyes with the *eosdem* in synizesis, he recalls the two attributes which most enchanted him and with which he began the first two poems in the collection.<sup>10</sup>

At lines 87–88 of 4. 7 Cynthia orders Propertius not to reject dreams coming from *piae portae*. Though a reference to *Odyssey* 19. 562–67 is warranted, a description of gates of dreams within a narrative of the underworld must recall the end of the sixth book of the *Aeneid*. Moreover, Propertius styles the gates *piae*, which not only refers to the sanctity of the Elysian souls who send forth the dreams and the *fides* of Cynthia, but also seems a deliberate, though general, reminder of *pious* Aeneas and the weightier *fides* he kept to the destiny of Rome.

The final image, the shade of Cynthia slipping through the poet's embrace (“inter complexus excidit umbra meos” 7. 96) closes the seventh poem with an unmistakable multiple echo of well-known epic passages and futile embraces, namely *Iliad*, 23. 97–104 (Achilles and Patroclus), *Odyssey* 11. 206–8 (Odysseus

9. D. R. Shackleton Bailey, *Propertiana* (Cambridge, 1956), p. 253, and Solmsen, “Propertius in his Literary Relations,” pp. 284–85, see the connection with Virgil. The latter looks to Tibullus (1. 3) for a description of Elysium “sub specie amoris.” Propertius' catalogue has more to do with Virgil than Homer: Pasiphae does not appear in *Od.* 11. Interestingly, however, the *hapax* Chloris (*Od.* 11. 281) occurs in Propertius 7. 72.

10. 1. 1 of the *Monobiblos* ends with *ocellis* and 1. 2. 1 with *capillo*. W. A. Camps, *Propertius, “Elegies” Book IV* (Cambridge, 1965), p. 116, and more recently L. Richardson, Jr., *Propertius, “Elegies” I–IV* (Norman, 1976), p. 456, both cite Pliny's observation that the eyes, which are closed in death, open again on the pyre. This seems to me to be grotesque as an explanation of these lines, and it ignores the Homeric model. The understanding appears to be both twofold and simple: the shade's eyes are the same as when he last saw her and they are the same eyes which he always gazed upon.

and Anticleia), *Aeneid* 2. 792–94 (Aeneas and Creusa), and *Aeneid* 6. 700–702 (Aeneas and Anchises).

Thus, while 4. 7 is clearly an adaptation to elegy of Homeric themes taken from *Iliad* 23, *Odyssey* 11, and 19, the adaptation is made more complex and compelling by the use of *Aeneid* 4 and 6.

Poem 8 continues in a less serious vein the use of Virgil's Dido and the theme of *fides*. A key word borrowed from political catchwords by the neoterics and connected with *fides* by Catullus is *foedus*.<sup>11</sup> Virgil has Aeneas in 4. 338–39 profess "... nec coniugis umquam / praetendi taedas aut haec in foedera ueni"; and Propertius, trapped in a similar *coniugium*, which is no marriage, relinquishes his freedom with the telling phrase in the same metrical position: "... tum demum ad foedera ueni" (8. 71).

Evans calls the entrance of Cynthia in 8 "catastrophic"; as such it is like the disclosure of Odysseus to the suitors.<sup>12</sup> The language used by Propertius at this moment of revelation may be paralleled in the *Aeneid* by Virgil's description of the entrance of Dido to face her self-imposed doom. Whereas Dido pales before approaching death, Propertius' lips turn pale at the approach of Cynthia. Virgil describes his queen (4. 643–47):

... maculisque trementis  
interfusa genas et pallida morte futura,  
interiora domus inrumpit limina et altos  
conscendit furibunda rogos enseque recludit  
Dardanium.

and Propertius his conqueror (8. 51–54):

nec mora, cum totas resupinat Cynthia ualuas,  
non operosa comis, sed furibunda decens.  
pocula mi digitos inter cecidere remissos,  
palluerantque ipso labra soluta mero.

In addition to the general similarities (the noise from within, mention of the entrance ways), the women are described as *furibunda*. Although Propertius has used the word before (3. 8. 3), there can be little doubt that he here has Virgil in mind and that the allusion is intended to underline the mock epic nature of this description.<sup>13</sup> The *furor* conveyed by this uncommon word comes from the same source: the conflict of *amor* and *fides*.<sup>14</sup>

11. The connection is made by Catullus in 76. 3 and 87. 3. Propertius seems to be borrowing from Virgil, who again is looking to 64—"nullus amor tali coniunxit foedere amantes" (Catull. 64. 335) and 373 where *foedus* is connected with marriage.

12. Evans, "Odyssean Echoes," p. 53.

13. E. Pianezzola, *Gli aggettivi verbali in -bundus* (Florence, 1965), p. 118, notes in his discussion of Catull. 63. 31 and 54 that the word *furibunda* picks out the central theme of the poem: *furor*. This is true for Virgil and Propertius also. Propertius certainly intends the reader to recall 3. 8, since both the vocabulary and the mood of 4. 8 reflect that poem. But the appropriateness of the mood of 3. 8 for the epic tone of 4. 8 is underscored by the appearance of the Virgilian "precedent."

14. Amata, a victim of *furor belli*, is infused with the poison from Allecto's serpent—"quo furibunda domum monstro permisceat omnem" (7. 348)—and, like Dido, possessed of the *furor*, calls Aeneas *perfidus*; the word again occurs in the first foot (7. 362). Thus, Virgil had used *furibunda* in two situations which are analogous to what we find in Prop. 8.

Propertius goes on to describe Cynthia and the battle which broke the quiet of the night (8. 55–60):

fulminat illa oculis et quantum femina saeuit,  
spectaculum capta nec minus urbe fuit.  
Phyllidos iratos in uultum conicit unguis:  
terrata uicinas Teia clamat aquas.  
lumina sopitos turbant elata Quiritis,  
omnis et insana semita nocte sonat.

At *Aeneid* 4. 300–301 Dido rages throughout the city:

saeuit inops animi totamque incensa per urbem  
bacchatur. . . .

and an even stronger parallel occurs between line 55 of Propertius and *Aeneid* 5. 5–6:

. . . duri magno sed amore dolores  
polluto, notumque furens quid femina possit

where the last three and one-half feet are echoed in “quantum femina saeuit.” In addition storm imagery appears in Book 4 within a context of a quiet night; while nature sleeps, Dido (529–32):

. . . neque umquam  
soluitur in somnos oculisue aut pectore noctem  
accipit: ingeminant curae rursusque resurgens  
saeuit amor magnoque irarum fluctuat aestu.

In each case the metaphor of a storm conveys the wrath and *furor*. *Fulminat* in Propertius is juxtaposed with *saeuit* (55) and looks back to *saeuit* . . . *fluctuat* in Virgil.

The storm/battle imagery continues. Lines 55–60 of Propertius’ poem compare Cynthia’s attack to the taking of a city by force. The blows from her hands and the noise of the women yelling receive emphasis. Lines 667–70 of *Aeneid* 4 emphasize similar sounds and compare the clamor at Dido’s death to the destruction of the city:

lamentis gemituque et femineo ululatu  
tectae fremunt, resonat magnis plangoribus aether,  
non aliter quam si immissis ruat hostibus omnis  
Karthago.

Furthermore, in both cases the parallel is expressed through a negative comparison and not by a positive simile. Virgil introduces his comparison with “non aliter quam si,” Propertius with *nec minus* + ablative.<sup>15</sup> In both cases the results of *furor* in relation to *regnum* are explicit. Virgil fixes the fate of Carthage in the historical future by finding its source in the *furor* of Dido. In the elegist’s scheme of things, however, *furor* leads to the reassertion of Cynthia’s *regnum*.

15. Although he does not mention the Virgil passage, Tränkle, *Die Sprachkunst des Propertius*, p. 181, notes Ovid’s use of a similar comparison: “Eurytus Hippodamen, alii, quam quisque probabant / aut poterant, rapiunt; captaeque erat urbis imago. / femineo clamore sonat domus” (*Met.* 12. 224–26). The last line here recalls Prop. 8. 60 and Virg. *Aen.* 4. 667–68.

One further allusion along these lines: at 63–64 of poem 8 Cynthia *victrix* now turns on Propertius “et mea peruersa sauciat ora manu.” The verb *sauciat* deserves our attention. It occurs only here in Propertius and not at all in Virgil. The verb is more common in prose where it usually refers to some violent action. It is a strong word and surely provides just the right note of epic hyperbole which is so characteristic of this poem. The context is a lovers’ quarrel and it inevitably recalls the metaphoric use of the adjective to describe a particularly savage wound of love, originated most probably by Ennius: “Medea, animo aegra, amore saeuo saucia” (Cic. *Cael.* 8. 18). Catullus uses the adjective only once (64. 250) to describe Ariadne—“multiplices animo uolebat saucia curas,” a line which Virgil explicitly recalls in the first line of *Aeneid* 4.

Virgil usually conveys causes of crucial events in one or two line *sententiae*.<sup>16</sup> In 8. 79 we have a Propertian example. Cynthia blames Lygdamus for Propertius’ nocturnal gambit: “Lygdamus in primis, omnis mihi causa querelae.” We are not told in what respect he is the cause, but it is interesting to observe that in both 7 and 8 he pours the wine. This fact taken with the use of the word *querelae* in poem 8 may be an allusion to 7 where he truly is the *causa querelae*. In Book 4, following the success of the plot of Juno and Venus, Virgil prophesies Dido’s death (169–70):

ille dies primus leti primusque malorum  
causa fuit.

Here Juno has been instrumental in the catastrophe, but we should not forget that the *furor amoris* was instigated by Venus. In Propertius 8 there occurs a line for which an exact parallel from the *Aeneid* is lacking, but which rouses suspicion if one is alive to the Virgilian echoes and in particular the relationship of *amor* and *fides* to the women. Of Cynthia’s disappearance to Lanuvium Propertius grandiloquently, that is, in the manner of Virgil, says: “causa fuit Iuno, sed mage causa Venus” (16).

Whereas poem 7 of Propertius is an elaborate description of the lost *regnum amoris* and a subsequent promise of its permanency from the underworld which Propertius dreams, 8 is a hyperbolic narrative of the restoration of that *regnum* in reality. In the former the claim of *fides* is attested by an oath from the underworld; the success in 8 rests on a vehement assertion of *fides*. In 7 the *furor* of love becomes the *furor* of a lovers’ war in 8. A similar pattern emerges from the two halves of the *Aeneid*: the depression over the loss of Troy and the collapse of Dido’s *regnum* gives over to the promise of future greatness in Book 6 and the successful founding of the new *regnum* is approached in the war of Books 7–12.<sup>17</sup>

No claim is made that Propertius has attempted a systematic adaptation of the scheme of the *Aeneid* or a recasting of the Dido story. The Homeric motifs are outstanding. But it seems that he has composed a diptych in which he has made provocative use of the general themes and structure of the *Aeneid* including

16. 2. 248–49, 324 “uenit summa dies et ineluctabile tempus”; 7. 117–19 “ea uox audita laborum / prima tulit finem, primamque loquentis ab ore / eripuit pater”; 481–82 “quae prima laborum causa fuit”; 9. 107, 447, 759 “ultimus ille dies bello gentique fuisset”; 10. 467; 11. 479–80 iuxtaque comes Lauinia uirgo, / causa mali tanti.”

17. Dee, “*Elegy* 4. 8,” pp. 49–50, notes the Virgilian *fulminat Aeneas* (12. 654) in comparison with 8. 55 (*fulminat*). With this and line 63 (*victrix*) see also *G.* 4. 560–62: “. . . Caesar dum magnus ad altum / fulminat Euphraten bello uictorque uolentes.”

specific references to that section most easily adapted to the elegiac mode, namely, Book 4. Poems 7 and 8 are not parodies of epic, though poem 8 may verge on parody at times, but they are, as Becker says, "elegy raised to epic dimensions."<sup>18</sup> As such they conform to the programmatic dicta of 4. 1, since the *fides* and *regnum* themes of these two poems answer to the national outlook forecast there in very clear references to Virgil.<sup>19</sup>

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18. "Die späten *Elegien*," p. 468, n. 4. Propertius had already experimented with this form before; see 1. 20 and 3. 15. Burck, "Zur Komposition," p. 420, similarly characterizes the poems: "die 'elegische Erotisierung' eines epischen Themas."

19. E.g., the comparison of the past and future Rome on the site of Evander's home (*Aen.* 8. 313-69 and Prop. 4. 1. 1-28); the compact history from Lycmon (Lucumo?) through Augustus can be compared to the account in *Aen.* 6 and especially the shield description in 8. See H. E. Butler and E. A. Barber, *The "Elegies" of Propertius* (Oxford, 1933, repr. Hildesheim, 1964), ad loc., for more detailed line references.