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ELEGY 4.8: A PROPERTIAN COMEDY

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Propertius' elegy 4.8, the true *regina elegiarum* for Wilamowitz and many others, is a brilliantly executed comedy and one of Propertius' finest poems. Yet no detailed study of the entire elegy has appeared in this century.[1] It is the purpose of this paper to remedy that defect, to examine carefully the ways in which Propertius achieves his effects in this masterpiece.

Beginning in mock-didactic fashion with *disce*, the first four lines promise a tale of a recent scandalous quarrel, which woke up the Esquiline neighborhood and, apparently, had an adverse effect on Propertius' own reputation.[2] A vague and teasing start: Propertius tells us nothing specific, nothing that suggests the main events of the poem. The phrase that sets the tone here is *Esquilias . . . fugarit aquosas*, for, as Rothstein says, *fugarit* "lässt schon den humoristischen Ton der eigentlichen Erzählung fühlen."[3] Tränkle 76 discusses *aquosus* in the Augustan poets but does not point out

[1]Only five articles are listed in H. Harrauer, *A Bibliography to Propertius* (Hildesheim 1973). Major recent discussions, henceforth referred to by the author's last name, are: H. Tränkle, *Die Sprachkunst des Properz und die Tradition der lateinischen Dichtersprache* (Wiesbaden 1960) 178-82; S. Evans, "Odyssean Echoes in Propertius IV, 8," *G&R* 18 (1971) 51-53; H. M. Currie, "Propertius IV, 8–A Reading," *Latomus* 32 (1973) 616-22; M. Hubbard, *Propertius* (London 1974) 152-56; J. P. Sullivan, *Propertius: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge 1976) 152-58. References to the standard commentaries of Rothstein, Butler and Barber, Camps, and Fedeli are made to remarks *ad loc.* unless otherwise noted. I wish to acknowledge several acute suggestions made by *TAPA*'s referees concerning Propertius' loss of *fama* (19-20) and Cynthia's bite (65).

[2]I follow Butler and Barber, Camps, G. P. Goold, *HSCP* 71 (1966) 99, Currie 616, and Sullivan 152-53 in accepting Luetjohann's transposition of 19-20 to precede 3-4. Though there are difficulties, the *arcana taberna* of 19 and the *obscurae prima taberna viae* of 62 seem likely to be the same. The awkwardness of the two successive *cum*-clauses, observed by Tränkle 180 note 1 and D. R. Shackleton Bailey, *Propertiana* (Cambridge 1956) 254-55, could be removed by reading *tum* in 19. Hubbard 153 note 2 objects that the transposition "ruins the mock mystery of the opening section." But 19-20 are hardly less cryptic and no less mocking in tone; we need a fuller forecast of undignified events to come if the shift to a more elevated style in 3-14 is to produce the intended surprise.

[3]I cannot see why Hubbard 153 finds this preface "solemn;" even her later phrase, "mock mystery," is an exaggeration, for the lines are meant to sound unserious at first reading.

that Propertius alone uses it for man-made objects, the aqueducts and fountains of the region. *Hac nocte* also deserves our attention: the phrase at first appears to add only a sense of immediacy to the narrative.[4] When we reach the first, unexpected, mention of Cynthia (15), dismissed in elegies 3.24 and 25 and reported dead in 4.7, there is a brief shock; we then realize that Propertius is subtly informing us that this poem is indeed "retrospective" (Butler and Barber 365), that the entire poem is intended to appear to be reliving of an old experience—the poet's response we might wish to think, to the elegy now preceding it in our manuscripts. Lines 19-20, once transposed to follow 1-2, also contribute to the humorous tone. Tränkle 127 points out that *taberna* is not found in Augustan elegy except in this poem and states that it should be considered "unpoetic." In spite of Gordon Williams' criticism of Bertil Axelson's general thesis about "unpoetic" words in Latin poetry, this particular claim is probably on the right track.[5] Further evidence for the word's tone and associations comes from Catullus' use of it to deflate an otherwise impressive list of place-names at 36.12-15 (cf. Kroll *ad loc.*) and from his scene-setting phrase, *salax taberna*, at 37.1. Even Propertius' concern for his *fama* is not serious: the lover in elegy inevitably suffers a loss of *fama* because of his role in the *servitium amoris* and he usually revels in it.[6] It becomes clear as the narrative unfolds that the narrator was in fact quite pleased at the "scandalous" turn of events: Cynthia cared enough to react violently. Such wrath is after all a sure sign of love, as in 3.8.1-12, 17-18 and in Catullus 83.

This wry introduction whets our appetite for the full story, but instead we are presented with a lengthy description of a fertility ritual at Lanuvium (3-14). The shift at the word *Lanuvium* is as abrupt as could be imagined, and only a few light touches provide any continuity with the opening passage. The true purpose in mentioning Lanuvium becomes clear only in 15 ff.: Cynthia went there, using the rite as pretext (*causa*) when her real intent (*causa* again) was to be with another lover.[7] Propertius accomplishes two things at once with sophisticated wit: he presents some antiquarian material (a new and programmatic element in Book Four) as if for its own sake, then undercuts that material by contrasting it with the sordid "realities" of the situation. Such ingenious mingling of antiquarian and erotic aspects occurs also in elegies 4.4 on Tarpeia and 4.9 on Hercules and the Ara Maxima.

[4]C. Becker, *Hermes* 99 (1971) 465 note 3, notes other uses of *hic* in Book Four to convey spontaneity.

[5]G. Williams, *Tradition and Originality in Roman Poetry* (Oxford 1968) 743-50.

[6]Cf., e.g., 2.3, 2.24A, 3.11, and the proverb given at 2.16.35-36.

[7]Shackleton Bailey 254 (above, note 2) discusses the pun.

[8]Tränkle 179 calls Propertius' word choices "feierlich und kunstvoll" and presents a fine discussion of numerous details.

The text of the digression itself is carefully and effectively composed.[8] One of the few light touches is the tourist-guide-like appraisal of Lanuvium, *hic ubi tam rarae non perit hora morae* (4). The remark is virtually parenthetical (so punctuated by Butler and Barber) and its tone nearly colloquial, especially *perit* in the sense "is lost, wasted." The description of the cave and the snake is impressive. Tränkle 82 recognizes the "epic" quality of *caecus* but misses opportunities with *descensus* and *hiatus*. The latter appears to be a "poetic" word, and Propertius is bolder in using it than either Vergil (*Aen.* 6.237) or Ovid (*Metam.* 7.409), who add *spelunca* and *specus* respectively to make the meaning more explicit. For *descensus* Tränkle naturally cites the famous Vergilian phrase *facilis descensus Averno* (*Aen.* 6.126)—without further comment. Norden says nothing about the word, yet the *Thesaurus* reveals that these are the only two instances of it in surviving Latin poetry from its beginnings to the Empire, though it is found in prose from Hirtius onward. Any "poetic" force we might feel in the word must rest primarily on the power of Vergil's phrase; it seems not to be inherent. Even so, *descensus abripitur* (5) is a strange and unparalleled expression, and the whole line after *qua* is one of Propertius' most evocative, conjuring up something of the terror the ancients felt toward underground caverns.[9]

The language of 6-8 presents difficulties: (1) is *virgo* part of the parenthetical aside, *tale iter omne cave*, or is it the subject of *penetrat*, and (2) what does *ieiuni serpentis honos* mean, whether subject of *penetrat* or of *poscit*? Hubbard 154 note 1 and Fedeli argue against the idea that *virgo* is vocative. Fedeli regards *cave* as the traditional prohibition against participation of outsiders in the rite and observes that a warning to the *virgo* against such a journey "does not accord with the solemnity of the narration of the sacred rite." But we need only consider the rest of the poem to see that Propertius was not much concerned with the sacredness of the rite; rather, he chose it precisely because it contrasted so entertainingly with Cynthia's true motive. Hubbard more cogently notes the difficulty an ancient reader would have faced in interpreting an unpunctuated text of *qua penetrat virgo tale iter omne cave*. One point seems sure, that *poscit* and the vivid phrase *sibila torquet* (8) must have the same subject, whether expressed or implied. Given this, the choice is clear-cut; either *honos* has here a meaning appropriate to both *poscit* and *torquet* (in such circumstances, neither "rite" nor "offering" would do) or it is subject for *penetrat* in spite of the reader's difficulty. Hubbard, choosing the former, is forced to take *ieiuni serpentis honos* as a "grandiose locution" for "the hungry revered serpent," comparing *theôn hagnon sebas* at Sophocles,

[9]Cf. W. K. C. Guthrie, *The Greeks and their Gods* (London 1954) 223-31. He quotes in particular Paus. 9.39 on the cave of Trophonios.

Oedipus Tyrannus 830. A desperate remedy, for which the *Thesaurus* offers no support. Whatever the tone of the lofty-sounding Greek phrase,[10] the addition of *ieiunus* here makes any loftiness almost impossible, for *ieiunus* is a word rarely found in serious contexts. Far better then to accept the awkwardness of *virgo* as vocative and to supply *serpens* as subject for *posit* and *torquet*. We may then take the tone of this aside as similar to that of line 4, another example of Propertius as the genial narrator.

The remainder of the passage is free from such problems. There are fine touches in the striking phrase *anguino creditur ore manus* (10) and in the depiction of the girl's terror, *virginis in palmis ipsa canistra tremunt* (12), where the trembling is transferred to the *canistra* and reinforced acoustically by the doubled "tr" sound. The final scene of this little drama, the girl's return if judged chaste and the farmers' declaration of the coming year's fertility, is rendered plainly, but the phrase *redeunt in colla parentum* (13) neatly suggests the joyful reunion of parents and child with a simple and appealing image.

There is one general issue concerning this digression which demands consideration. Tränkle 104 attempts to refute E. Reitzenstein's comment that this narrative is free of deeper feeling and operates through external events and situations.[11] Tränkle claims that Propertius does display a qualified "Anteilnahme" for the *virgo*, as indicated by his emphasis on the test of chastity. In subsequent discussion of 15 f. he says (179) that this appearance of sympathy was illusory, that the true underlying feeling is "bitterer Hohn . . . Venus als Ursache, dass Cynthia zu dem Fest fährt, wo ein Mädchen ihre Jungfräulichkeit beweisen muss! Verkehrte Welt!" Such an interpretation does not give Propertius sufficient credit for subtlety. Propertius can hardly be seriously indignant over Cynthia's use of the Lanuvium rite, for, after all, it is most likely that he himself invented the main story of the poem and thus the connection between the story and the rite. Although recent studies of the literary antecedents of this elegy do not prove that no such events ever occurred in Propertius' own life, they certainly make caution advisable.[12] Surely in Book Four, if anywhere, Propertius was engaged in literary, not autobiographical, writing—even that difficult piece, 4.1, is as much concerned with literary issues as with

[10]Cf. also Aesch. *Suppl.* 85 *daimonôn sebas*, 755 *theôn sebê*, and perhaps more significantly, the drunken Cyclops' remarks in Eur. *Cycl.* 579 f. *tou Dios te ton thronon leussô, to pan te daimonôn hagnon sebas.*

[11]E. Reitzenstein, *Wirklichkeit und Gefühlsentwicklung bei Properz* (Leipzig 1926) 40.

[12]Cf. especially the articles of Evans and Currie and the remarks of J. C. Yardley, "Comic Influences in Propertius," *Phoenix* 26 (1972) 135 f. Roman Comedy seems to me a likelier source for the primary inspiration than the *Odyssey*.

Propertius' own history. We find brilliant scene-painting and the portrayal of a wide range of emotions in this poem, but at no point does the poet depart from his position as distant observer. Genuine moral outrage is not present; the poet's purpose is to amuse, not to condemn.

This does not mean that Propertius cannot allow his persona to indulge in invective, for the next passage (17–26) contains some memorably sharp language about Cynthia's "triumph" and her young companion. The tone of this section has already been prepared by the wordplay on *causa* (16) and by the phrase *detonsis mannis* (15). Both these words are rare, both immediately suggest the young man's luxury and preciosity.[13] Recognition of this shift in tone will permit us to contest the statement of Tränkel 35 that *mage* (16) is archaic rather than colloquial in tone since it comes "am Ende einer hochepisch stilisierten Stelle." Tränkle frequently points to Propertius' abrupt stylistic shifts from one level to another (esp. 172 ff.); if there is to be any validity in our application of such terms as "high epic style," we must be quite sure when a given "Stelle" ends. Here the "high style" concludes with line 14 and cannot extend past *detonsis mannis*, so we should probably return to the judgment of Neumann that *mage* here is an example of the *sermo cottidianus*.[14] Similarly, we must take issue with Tränkle's discussion of the apostrophe to the Appian Way, which he says is executed "mit erhobenen Worten" (179). While addresses to things and the use of alliteration may be familiar elements of the elevated style, the context does not suggest that this is a matter of epic seriousness. Propertius can hardly have expected readers to take *quantum triumphum* in anything but a sarcastic sense, especially since the image in *effusis rotis* (18) is rather at variance with the stately progression of a real *triumphus*.[15] Tränkle 180 compares *effusis rotis* with Ennius, *Annales* fr. 513, *effunde quadrigas*, and declares it a "kunstvolle Ausgestaltung eines ennianischen und epischen Sprachgebrauchs." The quotation is unfortunately selective, for the full text is *irarum effunde quadrigas*, given by Servius in his comment on Vergil's adaptation of it, *irarumque omnis effundit habenas* (*Aen.* 12.499). The metaphor is striking in both passages; Propertius' phrase is only superficially similar. His emphasis is on comic haste, not epic dignity, as we may see from Pliny's description of a refugee's flight from Vesuvius' eruption, *ultra proripit se, effusoque cursu periculo aufertur* (*Epist.* 6.20.11).

[13]All the occurrences in the poets, from Lucr. 3.1063 (obviously satirical) onward, show this, but even more revealing is Porph. *ad* Hor. *Epod.* 4.14, *nimiarum deliciarum afluentia est equos burichos habere, burichi* being another name for *manni*.

[14]E. Neumann, *De cottidiani sermonis apud Propertium proprietatibus* (Diss. Königsberg 1925) 19.

[15]For a brief discussion of this passage and full treatment of the subject in general, cf. K. Galinsky, "The Triumph Theme in Augustan Elegy," *WS* N.S. 3 (1969) 75-107, esp. 90.

The portrait of Cynthia's *triumphus* occupies six lines, two for Cynthia herself and four in the form of a *praeteritio* on the *vulsus nepos* who accompanied her. Propertius emphasizes her shameless boldness, a quality familiar to his readers, through direct statement (*spectaclum ipsa* 21, *ausa* 22) and through the posture implied in *primo temone pependit*—a rare woman indeed to drive, not ride, the *carpentum*, in which matrons were often conveyed to festivals. But while the description of Cynthia's behavior reveals Propertius' scarcely concealed admiration, there are no such ambivalences about the *nepos*, whose disgraceful luxury and effeminacy he attacks in carefully chosen expressions of unusual intensity. Tränkle 122 rightly pronounces *vulsi nepotis* "schroff und von bildhafter Schärfe;" to judge by J. L. Heller's article, *nepos* was virtually a technical term of popular philosophy in the Ciceronian period and later.[16] The phrases *serica carpenta* (23) and *armillatos canis* (24) show a precise choice of adjective, for in each case the application is unique yet perfectly appropriate for indicating "conspicuous consumption." The same is true for *colla Molossa* (24); as all commentators observe, the adjective specifies a famous and expensive breed. Even the deliberate dislocation of the adjectives in *armillatos colla Molossa canis*, noted by Rothstein, contributes something: the artificiality is so obvious that we cannot help sensing Propertius' own satisfaction at his elegantly expressed malice. Lines 25-26 develop the idea hinted at in *vulsi*, that being a *pathicus* is the source of the young man's wealth. *Dabit immundae venalia fata saginae* (25), termed "curious" by Camps, is, as often in Propertius, a combination of two ideas into one image. The *nepos* will someday sell himself as a gladiator and therefore have to eat the *miscellanea* regularly served in the training camps. *Venalia* and *sagina* are strong words, the former found only rarely in Republican and Augustan poetry,[17] the latter, as Tränkle 125 observes, "in der gehobene Dichtung einzigartig"–though one must add that this passage is hardly "gehobene" in tone. The effect of *barba pudenda* (26) becomes clear when we compare the milder phrase *invida barba* at *Priapea* 3.4. Where the latter is simple, Propertius is subtly ironic: of course, he says, the beard is *pudenda*, for this *nepos* wants to remain truly effeminate. *Vincet erasas genas* (26) is also pointedly ironic: the natural beard triumphs over the perversion and *erasas* neatly depicts the *nepos'* vain efforts to scrape it away. In four couplets Propertius has drawn a memorable portrait of Cynthia and her companion in which hardly a detail fails to contribute to the impact of the whole.

[16]J. L. Heller, "*Nepos* 'σκορπιστής' and Philoxenus," *TAPA* 93 (1962) 61-89. Heller does not mention this passage but its tone corresponds well with his observations.

[17]Of the four occurrences in Horace, the only other major poet to use it, only *dictus morte venalem petiisse laurum Caesar* (*Od.* 3.14.1-3) rises above the usual associations of the word (by virtue of *morte*). For the normal tone, cf. Prop. 3.13.49, *auro venalia iura*.

Lines 27-28 form a transition from the account of Cynthia's *iniuria* to the treatment of Propertius' reaction. The tone is neutral and very little stands out. *Totiens* (27) invites the reader to consider Cynthia's misbehavior as only one example out of many (the familiar topos of the lover's repeated sufferings at his beloved's hands) and *castra movere* (28), a playful adaptation of military phraseology, warns us that the poet's attitude is about to change. Propertius allows a couplet apiece for sketches of the two *externae puellae* with whom he planned *noctem lenire* and *furta novare* (33-34). He begins, as Rothstein suggests, with a play on the *est locus* motif: each girl appears in conjunction with a specific locale, chosen (as was Lanuvium earlier) for the piquant contrast between its respectable associations and the profession of the women. The amusing comments on the positive influence of drink upon these ladies are as economically witty as anything in Latin: *sobria grata parum; cum bibit omne decet* (30) and *candida, sed potae non satis unus erit* (32). The phrase *constitui noctem lenire* has received little elucidation from the commentators. *Constituo* seems to have been virtually a technical term in such matters;[18] the presence of the familiar word emphasizes the playful euphemism *noctem lenire*, itself a reversal of the rejected lover's *durae noctes*.

Propertius' description of his party opens casually with another variant on the *est locus* theme: *unus erat tribus in secreta lectulus herba* (35). Instead of pursuing the *descriptio loci*, Propertius teases his reader with the question *quaeris concubitus?* and its answer *inter utramque fui* (36). Only here does *concubitus* mean anything so bland as "seating arrangements;" the reader was evidently being invited to think of other things first.[19] Tränkle 116 notes that *crotalistria* (39) is used "um den kitschigen Tingeltangel beim Gelage zu zeichnen;" the same intent, the intensifying of the atmosphere of decadence and shallow revelry, may be responsible for the large number of Greek-based words in 37-39, *Lygdamus*, *cyathos*, *Methymnaei*,*Nile*, (?)*phillis*. It is unfortunate that complete sense cannot be recovered for line 40, since Propertius surely meant it to be a graceful expression. In contrast to the previous pleasantries, the dwarf's appearance produces a moment of grotesquerie in the narrative. *Breviter concretus in artus* (41) is a striking phrase—*breviter* is very rarely used of space—and *iactabat truncas manus* (42) is vivid and explicit. We approach the peripeteia with a series of ominous events, culminating in a "confession" by Propertius that, for all his efforts to the contrary, he was still under Cynthia's spell. The first two signs are external and physical: a flickering lamp-flame (an arrival omen) and the collapse of a table, rendered

[18]Cf. Mayor on Juv. 3.12, where numerous passages are cited, going back to Titinius fr. 43 and Ter. *Hec.* 195, *Eun.* 205.

[19]*Thesaurus* 4.99.78-79.

"visually" by *supina* and *reccidit in suos pedes* (44). The third sign, Propertius' continual throwing of *damnosi canes* (all ones) instead of a *Venus* (four different sides) in a dice game, suggests more strongly his guilty conscience: obviously the gods are opposed to his success. The final sign, his utter deafness to the women's enticements, is capped by his pathetic admission, *Lanuvii ad portas, ei mihi, solus* (or *totus*) *eram* (48).[20] The erotic detail *nudabant pectora caeco* (47) marks the peak of Propertius' frustration and simultaneously shows the reader that he is Cynthia's alone. Here at least (and perhaps in 4.7) we find fulfillment of Horos' prediction in 4.1.135-46 that Propertius would continue in his *servitium amoris*. It would be mistaken to speak, as some have done, of *fides* as a major theme in this poem, unless one means by it Propertius' fidelity to love elegy as demonstrated in the very act of writing 4.7 and 4.8.[21] There is no reason to think that Cynthia's return reveals any great *fides* on her part; as the military and legal language will make clear, it is the *servitium* relationship that is being stressed. Cynthia is more than ever the *domina* and Propertius little better than a would-be *fugitivus*.

The catastrophe comes quickly and memorably. Propertius takes one couplet for the mention of some ominous noises at the front of the house as Cynthia enters. *Subito* (49) and the rare collocation *nec mora, cum* (51) emphasize the swiftness of the turn of events. The depiction of her dramatic entry, *totas resupinat valvas* (51), derives its force from the exaggerated *totas* and the very rare *resupinat*, used here with a precision that Camps seems to have been the first to appreciate. A single pentameter sums up the appearance of the irate Cynthia, *non operosa comis, sed furibunda decens* (52). Propertius' handling of the familiar topos is typically ingenious: *non operosa* is unusual and effective, and the adjective *furibundus* is generally reserved in Latin poetry for such elevated subject matter as mythical heroines or beasts.[22] *Furibunda* is doubly clever, for by association with *Furiae* it continues the play on the *coma neglecta decet* motif, while the word's normal meaning adds a new twist, "attractive even when *angry*."

A couplet's pause allows the depiction of the stunned narrator's reaction: we imagine with amusement the psychological state implicit in such telling details as *digitos remissos* (53) and *palluerant labra* (54). The humor is broad and may well derive from scenes in comedy, whether Greek or

[20]Goold 60 (above, note 2) trenchantly supports Cuypers' *totus*; the psychological subtlety (if such it be) of *solus* is perhaps more than we should expect from an ancient author.

[21]E.g., P. Grimal, "Les intentions de Properce et la composition du livre IV des 'Elégies'," *Latomus* 11 (1952) 447-48.

[22]Ovid uses the less ambitious *neglecta* at *Am.* 1.14.21 and *A.A.* 3.153. Cf. also the other examples of the motif listed by R. Pichon, *De sermone amatorio apud Latinos elegiarum scriptores* (Paris 1902)=*Index verborum amatoriorum* (Hildesheim 1966) 123 s.v. *decere*.

Roman; but are we also expected to think, as has been suggested for this passage and others in the poem, of an antecedent scene in the *Odyssey*?[23] The claim that Propertius is here playing upon Homeric material deserves consideration, for Hubbard 152-56 has recently commended and enlarged upon the idea. Let us examine the proposed parallels closely. Antinoos, struck in the neck by Odysseus' arrow, falls and drops his cup as blood spurts from his nose (*Od.* 22.15-18)—a satisfyingly grim passage. Propertius also drops his cup in line 53, but the similarity consists solely in the dropping and that act is perfectly natural in its context. The association would come more easily if Propertius had added some expression to parallel the striking of the arrow, "struck by her glance" or the like. The pushing or falling of a table occurs in both narratives (*Od.* 22.19-20; 4.8.44), but in Propertius it comes ten lines "early" and the emphasis is on the event as an omen. There are indeed pleas for mercy in both episodes, by Leodes, Phemios, and Medon in *Odyssey* 22, by Lygdamus at 4.8.69, yet Lygdamus prays not to the conqueror Cynthia but to Propertius' *genius*.[24] Yardley's remarks on Lygdamus as the analogue to the cunning slave in comedy are more to the point. The purification by sulphur is more interesting but insufficient by itself, since the details here are independent of the Odyssean material, in particular the use of *pure* water (84) and the triple touching of the head (86). Evans' remaining parallels come from the other books of the *Odyssey* and are even less convincing. The ritual *changing* of the bedsheets in 87 is unlikely to depend on the inconspicuous scene where the mere *making* of the bed is involved (*Od.* 23.289-91). To compare the flickering lamp in 43 to Athena's famous golden lamp (*Od.* 19.34) is fanciful and to associate the *torus* of 28 and 88 with the *sêma* of the *Odyssey* when the former is such a common element in elegy is asking a great deal. Evans finds "epicisms" in various details, but Tränkle had already ascribed most of them to the influence of *Latin* epic, whether Ennius or Vergil. A series of weak links cannot form a strong chain; despite Hubbard's reflections on the larger meaning of 4.7 and 4.8, we must still wonder whether calling them "Iliadic" and "Odyssean" poems is really a significant gain for our appreciation of what Propertius intended.

The high point of this passage comes in 55-56, where Propertius enters into what Tränkle 180 calls "Epenparodie."[25] *Fulminat illa oculis*, an

[23]For the comic antecedents, cf. Yardley (above, note 12); for Odyssean parallels, cf. Evans and Currie. Yardley aptly compares Pl. *Asin.* 880 ff.

[24]The Odyssean scenes have "typical" features: cf. *Od.* 22.310-12, 342-44 and, e.g., *Il.* 21.71-74. A better parallel might be drawn between Medon's and Lygdamus' cowardly behavior, hiding behind things, *Od.* 22.362 and 4.8.68.

[25]C. Becker, *Hermes* 99 (1971) 468 note 4, says that this is not parody of epic, rather that love is "in epische Dimensionen emporgehoben." Is this more than a play upon the modern sense of "epische"?

almost certain echo of *fulminat Aeneas armis* (*Aen.* 12.654), likens Cynthia momentarily to some god or warrior, but her rage terrifies Propertius not because it is *like* that of a god but because it *is* that of a woman! *Spectaclum* (56) will perhaps remind us of its earlier use in 21; in both places the narrator displays admiration rather than condemnation of Cynthia's behavior. The subsequent routing of the courtesans (57-62) is brought to life by the graphic expression *in vultus conicit unguis* (57), for which the only close parallel is a phrase about lions in Pliny's *Natural History*, *coniectis in fauces unguibus* (8.46). Textual difficulties make precise appreciation of lines 58-60 impossible; still, the main points are clear enough: the frightened Teia uses a humorously inappropriate exclamation and the commotion awoke the *sopitos Quirites*, as Propertius wryly calls his neighbors. We may sense the businesslike energy of the triumphant Cynthia in the succession of "k" sounds in *exuviis victrixque recurrit* (63). Propertius enlarges the range of Cynthia's power as *domina* by granting her the "spoils" of the battle—only at Silius *Punica* 2.191 are *exuviae* again associated with a woman. The neck-bite delivered by Cynthia (*imponit notam collo* 65) is a typical feature of lovers' quarrels, used here to demonstrate the intensity of Cynthia's feelings.[26] Most of the force in these lines resides in the vivid verbs *sauciat*, *cruentat*, *ferit*. Tränkle 182 says that *cruentat* is "epic," yet it occurs only once each in Ennius' fragments, Lucretius (4.1036, a most un-epic passage), and Vergil; we can recognize the effectiveness of the word without pinpointing its "level of diction." The subtle admission of guilt in *oculos, qui meruere, ferit* (66) reminds us of the poet's distance from his persona in the poem; the address to Lygdamus in line 70 has a similar effect.

The atmosphere begins to lighten and the poem moves toward its amusing finale when the cowardly Lygdamus is dragged from behind the couch (68-70). Enjambement from pentameter to hexameter heightens the effect of *eruitur*, itself a strongly pictorial word. The unique phrase *genium adorat* (69) continues the comic tone–Tränkle 182 can hardly be right to call it simply "altertümlich." His reference to *Aeneid* 1.48 and Livy 6.12.7 only make the difference in tone and situation more obvious; everywhere else *adorare* is applied to genuine worship, sincerely practiced, but here the effect is comic hyperbole. In the scene in which Cynthia establishes her terms of peace after her "victory," Propertius plays repeatedly upon military and legal terminology. *Supplicibus palmis* (71), a familiar phrase in the context of war, is here another instance of comic hyperbole; comic also is the picture conjured up in *vix tangendos praebuit illa pedes* (72). We are invited to imagine poor Propertius on his knees (or all fours) making

[26]On bites and quarrels among lovers, cf. J. C. Yardley, *Hermes* 104 (1976) 124-28.

vain attempts to approach Cynthia's feet. In a similar scene (*Amores* 1.7.61-62), Ovid softens the grotesque element we find emphasized here. Cynthia proceeds to lay down the law for Propertius with a plain borrowing from legal language, *formula legis* (74). Her "law" turns out to be an inversion of some of the topoi of erotodidaxis soon to be treated by Ovid (*Ars Amat.* 1.67-100, 135-70). Tränkle 155 notes the alternation of moods and tenses in Cynthia's speech (*spatiabere, cave inflectas,* (?) *se det, veneat, trahat*) and suggests that it belongs "der altertümlichen, feierlichen Gesetzes- und Orakelsprache." He also claims that this is a speech "von grosser Bedeutung und Feierlichkeit," but surely it is at most a mock-solemnity. His main parallel, Livy 5.16.9 ff., has a much more striking variation in verb forms (*aquam . . . cave . . . contineri, cave sinas, rigabis, exstingues, insiste, portato, facito*); here, by contrast, all we have is a future, followed by four subjunctives, two of which are prefaced by *cave*.[27] A future imperative would have helped the case considerably. Cynthia's language is up-to-date: *cultus* (75) in the special sense "dressed up" does not appear before the Augustans and may be part of the vocabulary of the smart set of Propertius' generation. Rothstein says that *lascivum* (76) is proleptic, taking it closely with *sternet*, but it could be generic, representing Cynthia's "professional opinion" of the Forum as a place for encounters, as is suggested by Ovid's remarks at *Ars Amatoria* 1.79-80. There is a serious textual difficulty in the fourth of Cynthia's injunctions: she tells him not to do something involving a *lectica aperta* (78). Rothstein's citations show clearly that young men were wont to follow the *lecticae* of their *amicae*, and it is perhaps worth adding that *lectica aperta* was a standard phrase, as Cicero's references to Antony's mistress Cytheris demonstrate.[28] Beyond that one cannot go with confidence; there is no easy choice among the verb possibilities (e.g., *sudet* MSS, *se det* Gruter, *sidat* Palmier). Given the tone of the whole passage, it would not be surprising if Cynthia were being a bit more risqué in this line than previously, which may account for the state of the MSS and for our incomprehension.

Cynthia's final demand, that Lygdamus be sold, appears unmotivated and the phrase *omnis mihi causa querelae* (79) is odd in light of Propertius' own earlier narrative, for we have had no hint of Lygdamus' rôle in a *querela*. There is probably no reason to seek subtle explanations: as conqueror, Cynthia will exercise her *imperium* in the most extreme manner

[27]This usage seems to be as much colloquial as solemn by Propertius' time. Leumann-Hofmann-Szantyr, *Lateinische Grammatik, Syntax und Stilistik* (Munich 1965) 336, show its frequency in Cicero's letters and the collection at *Thesaurus* 3.633.70-634.28 draws mostly upon comedy and Cicero.

[28]Cf. Cic. *Att.* 10.10.5 and *Phil.* 2.58.

that comes to mind. Even Tränkle 139 admits that *veneat* is colloquial in tone, as is *in primis*.[29] The quasi-legal language concludes in line 81 with *indixit leges*, *respondi*, and *legibus utar*. The first phrase, otherwise attested only once, is comparable to the well-attested *indicere ferias*, *supplicationem*, *iustitium*; the last may be meant to suggest such expressions as *condicione uti* (Caesar, *B. G.* 4.11). Once Propertius makes his formal capitulation, what tension there was dissolves rapidly; from *riserat* (82) we are in the coda of the poem. That Cynthia should be *superba* in her triumph is no surprise, but the grant of *imperium* deserves notice. In spite of R. Pichon's statement, "imperium est saepissime puellae in amantem dominatio," there are few other cases where the poet speaks in such general terms of the *imperium* of his mistress over himself.[30] Only Tibullus 2.3.79, *ad imperium dominae sulcabimus agros*, has anything like the personal touch we find here, and even the Tibullus passage uses *imperium* in its narrower meaning, *iussum*, *praeceptum*. Cynthia follows up her *mandata* with her own version of a *lustratio*: the house and Propertius himself must be cleansed of the "stain" of the *externae puellae*. It is one of the pleasant ironies of the poem that Cynthia is unaware of the confession made by Propertius in 47-48 that his heart was not really in his feeble attempt at "infidelity." Most of the details of the mock *lustratio* (the use of sulphur and water and the triple touching) are traditional, but the changing of clothing (*totas mutare lacernas* 85) may derive from magical practices or may be intended to recall the changing of clothes in certain mystery rites such as those at Eleusis.[31] The final line shows the "rites" taking on a character more in keeping with the usual preoccupations of love elegy. It contains, much to the consternation of some critics, one last play upon legal and military language. That *respondi* in 88 echoes the *respondi* of 81 is plain to all; that it can hardly be the invention of a lascivious scribe seems to have escaped the notice of the authors of the twenty-two conjectures recorded in Smyth's *Thesaurus Criticus*. If we accept it, the poem concludes with a splendid joke as Propertius recovers the capacity he had, after a fashion, lost in the presence of the courtesans.

A few general observations are in order. Many critics have felt that more was at stake in the writing of this poem and in its position in Book Four, following the elegy on the dead Cynthia's ghost, than a mere attempt at humor. Tränkle, Becker, Hubbard, and Sullivan are among those who have regarded the work as an important index of Propertius' ideas and sensibility in his "late period." Becker 475 suggests that 4.8 was necessary

[29]Cf. B. Axelson, *Unpoetische Wörter* (Lund 1945) 94-95, and Neumann (above, note 14) 45.

[30]R. Pichon (above, note 22) 171.

[31]Cf. Schol. Arist. *Plut.* 845.

for Book Four, since 4.7 alone would not have sufficed to show "wie der Dichter vom Willen der Geliebten abhängig ist." But the poem is better taken as displaying, not Propertius dependent on the will of the beloved, but his continuing fascination with the love relationship and his deep commitment to the erotic world. Tränkle 183 expresses this well: "Das ist Cynthia in ihrer unvergänglichen, immer lebendigen Gestalt, die über den Tod hinaus dauert; . . . das ist die innere Verfallenheit des Dichters, die nicht aufhören kann." The very idea of the poem sprang, not from a recent specific event, but from a reflection on the kind of experience which had inspired so many of the elegies in Books 1-3. This reflective outlook presupposes a deeper maturity in Propertius, a sensibility which accepts and respects the experiences of the past without the bitterness of 3.24 and 25. There is a splendid generosity in this final grand tribute to the woman who had so dominated his life. His early prediction, *Cynthia prima fuit, Cynthia finis erit* (1.12.20), turned out to be, if not the whole truth, at least its better half.