

UNMASKING HERCULES: TRACING COMEDY IN PROPERTIUS' FOURTH BOOK

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Abstract. This paper centers on the ninth elegy of Propertius' fourth book, remaking a neglected case for a reading as *paraclausithyron* and establishing a further case for siting it in a comic dramatic frame. The aim is to reveal the importance of the comic background to elegy 4.9, particularly in the *paraclausithyron* topos and the use of a cross-dressed Hercules. The analysis emphasizes the elegy's sources in stage comedy and contradicts the more typical claim that 4.9 absorbs Hercules into a specifically elegiac framework. Propertius 4.9, altogether, with its myth of Hercules, serves to acclimate an epic figure into the elegiac world, to explore the fluidity of gender in elegy as well as to access the specifics of comedy and mime as a genre important to Propertian poetics. The survey on *paraclausithyron* and gender play of transvestism in ancient poetry, shall indicate the relation of theatre with Propertius, who draws elegiac settings within the frame of a theatrical scene, veiling Hercules in the appearance of a comic lover.

Much has been written about the ninth elegy of Propertius' fourth book and the way it reflects the dual nature of a book that oscillates between political and amorous themes: elegies on a Roman theme, elegies on the love theme and elegies in which the two combined are found side by side. Elegy 4.9 has attracted a fair share of scholarly at-

tention over the years, and even more so, in recent years.¹ It has been argued that the elegy shows what Propertius' sophisticated elegiac mode can do with epic material and how the poet's identification with Hercules enables him to reject love poetry for other themes.² It has been proposed that by setting the episode in a public space, Propertius participates in an ideological trend of the Augustan principate: blurring the distinction between private and public.³ Humorous details of the Bona Dea narrative are said to prove that Propertius imitates Callimachus' wit.⁴ However, there must be more reasons why an elegy, which explains the origins of the Ara Maxima and the sanctuary of the Bona Dea, turns into a burlesque episode with a seeming embarrassment for Hercules' Roman career.

W. Anderson in 1964 had argued that Propertius blended epic and elegy by assimilating Hercules to the *exclusus amator* of a *paraclausithyron*.⁵ Since then, scholars have neglected this view, suggesting political readings and programmatic theories to explain Hercules' liminal moment.⁶ However, one should excavate the comic elements of Propertius 4.9 as a way of linking both the generic and programmatic theories with the embryonic idea of a *paraclausithyron*. The figure of Hercules who doesn't fit into his surroundings introduces gender fluidity and genre transgression (*iacit ante fores verba minora deo*, 4.9.32). The account of the thirsty semi-god attempting to gain entry to the grove of Bona Dea to drink from the spring within (4.9.21ff.) is almost without precedent and articulates the progress in the literary figure of Hercules, whose machismo is finally restored towards the end of Propertius

¹ See Holleman 1977; Warden 1982; DeBrohun 1994; Janan 1998; Lindheim 1998; Fox 1999; Spencer 2001; Welch 2004; Harrison 2005; Günther 2006; Panoussi 2016.

² See McParland 1970, who bases this theory on the concluding prayer of 4.9.

³ Welch 2005.

⁴ Pillinger 1969.

⁵ Anderson 1964.

⁶ For instance, see DeBrohun 2003, 134-143 and Cairns 1992.

4.⁷ Elegy 4.9 is significant since it connects the long tradition of the *paraclausithyron* motif, originating from Greek poetry (Theocritus), with a theatrical episode of transvestism, effected through the person of Hercules, of all the heroes the most liminal. Therefore, three elements – *paraclausithyron*, transvestism, epic hero – converge in an elegy which illuminates a literary tradition that is now unknown or lost.

This paper intends to prove the importance of the comic background to Propertius 4.9, particularly in the *paraclausithyron* topos and the use of a cross-dressed Hercules. The main argument focuses on three separate points. Firstly, Propertius 4.9 seems to de-heroize the epic Virgilian Hercules in order to acclimate him into the elegiac world. Secondly, the poem explores the fluidity of gender in elegy by introducing an image of a cross-dressed Hercules. Thirdly, and more importantly, Propertius 4.9 imagines elegiac settings within the frame of a theatrical scene when shifting to a comic version of *paraclausithyron*. These points may indicate that comedy is a more important generic model for elegy 4.9 than has been previously realized, and thus making the poem distinct for its reading audience.

The examination proposes to revive a neglected case for a reading of 4.9 as mock-*paraclausithyron*, establishing a strong further case for siting it in a comic dramatic frame. In order to understand the elegy, one needs to emphasize its sources in stage comedy and down-play the typical claim that the poem absorbs Hercules into an elegiac framework. This reading deviates from the prevailing opinion that “the Hercules of 4.9 has fewer comic and more numerous serious aspects.”⁸ The paper examines closely the hero’s encounter with the worshippers of Bona Dea – the elegy’s second episode. Hercules’ thirst separates the Ara Maxima from its *aition*, the killing of Cacus, but also renders

⁷ Macrobius in his *Saturnalia* (1.12.27-28) may have cited Varro’s (now lost) account.

⁸ Cairns 2006; Harrison 2005; Warden 1982; Galinsky 1972 regards the elegy as humorous but only to an extent. Cf. DeBrohun 2003; Janan 2001; Lindheim 1998a; Holleman 1977. Anderson in 1964 does not look beyond the primary picture of the *exclusus amator* to find the hero’s burlesque characterisation and behaviour.

Hercules a *sititor amans* on a mistress' threshold.⁹ As soon as he is told the words of rejection (*limina linque*, 54), the hero pursues a violent entry, a crossing over from one genre to another – from elegy to comedy – mixing, through his movement, a variety of literary elements.¹⁰

The motif of the *exclusus amator* in Propertius 4.9 needs to be examined for its comic aspects, its epic touch, and relation to the *paraclausithyron* scene of the Roman stage. The comic traits of this episode deflate the ritual to a performance, wherein the participants (*adulescens-puella*) switch roles and where inclusivity is associated with female authority. Gender fluidity, identity simulation and the *paraclausithyron* as a scenario which turns Hercules into an actor, are aspects to be highlighted. The *exclusus amator* motif is only one elegiac theme, albeit an important one, within a larger context of comedy sketched in 4.9. When Hercules arrives on the threshold and entry has been denied to him by the priestess, he reacts in a way that offers a comic performance for his audience: he tries to convince the priestess that he may pass for a female. Thus, his mythological figure wishes to gain access to a different genre. Hercules' gendered transformation may also recall the famous Bona Dea scandal which upset Rome in 62 B.C., when Clodius, in violation of the sacred rites, disguised himself as a woman and invaded Caesar's house to pursue a sexual conquest.¹¹ Both Hercules' and Clodius' transgressions involve impersonation and the adaptation of signs of femaleness to gain admission.

The primary textual focus of this paper is elegy 4.9, but also draws on passages from throughout Book 4. The following sections survey the *paraclausithyron* and the gender play of transvestism in ancient poetry, especially comedy, covering a range of Greek and Latin texts. The first section examines previous expressions of the plea for admis-

⁹ For V. Panoussi (2016, 179-194), Prop. 4.9 connects the religious framework of the cults of the Bona Dea and Ara Maxima with geographical distinctions between East and West.

¹⁰ Rhinthon's farce (φλύαξ) under the title *Hercules* could have influenced Propertius' elegy.

¹¹ Cic. *Att.* 1.13.3.

sion to an exclusive space, focusing on key points of the Hercules episode which are of a dramatic rather than a lyric character. The second section focuses on the *paraclausithyron* components in Propertius 4.9 and the division of male and female space of dramatic action. In this elegy the female guardian, the priestess of the Bona Dea, is transformed into a comic *lena*, and the goddess' sanctuary into a lover's bedchamber. The third and fourth sections present the connection between Propertius' Hercules and comic characters such as the *meretrices*, *milites*, and *servi*. Hercules does not quite fit the effeminate role of the *amator* and thus, might be seen crossing the stage in the way of the lovers in comedy.

Before proceeding, it is worth bearing in mind that Hercules has behind him a long tradition of comic treatments. One may recall, for instance, the opening of Plautus' *Persa* with a comparison of the labours of the comic lover with those of Hercules, who is characterized by comic thirst and monstrous appetites. Moreover, in Plautus' *Bacchides* (155), a boastful *adulescens amans* warns his tutor that they might play Hercules and Linus. Well known is a lekythos, now in Vienna, that shows Hercules staging his own κῶμος: he has put down his club and is playing the flute as he is marching along, leading a procession with garlanded satyrs cavorting behind him.¹² Finally, Aristophanes' Hercules is both the champion of justice representing serious genre and a mad hero ideal for satiric treatment (*Ran.* 142-143). Therefore, reconsideration and reappraisal of an elegy like 4.9, which develops around a dramatic nucleus, could result into the "expansion" of the elegiac genre.

I. ON THE THRESHOLD

One should delve into the definition of the *paraclausithyron* to realize the combination of dramatic and elegiac tradition in the Hercules episode. The term refers to the sorrowful song of a drunk and garlanded lover who has come from a symposium and seeks vain admission at the door of his beloved. With a torch in his hand, he knocks, expecting to be granted admission or, otherwise, to be able to persuade the lady to come out. Yet the outcome is grim; the door remains closed, the

¹² Galinsky 1972, 82 (Plate 4).

lover is excluded. He protests the girl's cruelty, describes in picturesque detail his own sufferings, and scribbles verses on her door while staying awake in her doorway. The epigrams of Asclepiades, Callimachus and Meleager give a complete picture of this stock scene, which is assumed to have derived from features of the ancient κῶμος.¹³

The motif was treated in different ways, producing at times more narrative-oriented units, and at other times, truly dramatic performances. The latter gave special prominence to the lover's song while omitting details of the scene. The earliest, non-dramatic *paraclausithyron* is Theocritus' third *Idyll*, where all the violence of the κῶμος song disappears, to be replaced by the hopes and heartaches of the lover's pilgrimage to his beloved's door.¹⁴ Theocritus' komast emphasizes his desires and the girl's cruelty (8-9, 15-17).¹⁵ It is to this non-dramatic tradition that elegy owes the figure of the *exclusus amator*. The lover is never admitted and is left grieving at the doorway. It should be preliminarily stated that Hercules in elegy 4.9 is double-excluded, since his setting involves two doorways: Hercules, as another komast, rushes through the first door only to find further another gate shut.

In the hands of the Roman elegiac poets, who seem to be more daring than the Greeks, the song is transformed and new elements are added to its non-dramatic komastic version.¹⁶ The girl in the Greek tradition was a ἑταῖρα who admitted or excluded lovers as she wished. In Roman elegy, however, dating from Catullus' Lesbia, a triangular relationship involves the poet, the girl and her husband, and this gives

¹³ AP 5.167, 5.145, 5.23, 5.191. The *paraclausithyron* motif in mimic performances was called θυροκοπικόν and κρουσίθυρον (*Trypho ap. Athen.* 618c). According to Copley (1956, 28), the theme was adopted with fervour by the Romans, due to the preexistence of a Roman "door-song."

¹⁴ Copley 1956, 15. See Yardley 1978 for the Greek komastic *topoi*: inebriation, coming from symposium, torches, garlands, terrible weather, doorstep vigil, tears, kisses on door, abuse of door, invocations to gods, insults to beloved, suspicion that beloved is not alone.

¹⁵ *Id.* 3.15-17, 52, 6-9, 24-27, 33, 36, 52-54. The komast in 2.121 wears a white poplar garland, which he identifies as Ἡρακλέος ἱερὸν ἔργον.

¹⁶ Tib. 1.2; Prop. 1.16; Ov. *Am.* 1.6.

prominence to the triangle-theme of *furtivus amor*.¹⁷ Moreover, frequent personification and great concern with the door, are both characteristics of the Roman elegiac tradition. The lover's pilgrimage is also implied rather than described:¹⁸ he is always drunk and always finds the door closed, because the lady and the *ianitor* (custodian) are heartless.¹⁹

It is important to note that the element of violence and physical attack on the door plays little or no part in the non-dramatic form of the motif; Tibullus in 1.2 imagines wandering onto Delia's threshold addressing the closed door, wishing upon it the misfortunes experienced by a lover (7-8). His girl is married and, since the door belongs to a master (*dominus*, 7) Tibullus requests that it open furtively (10). Ovid (*Am.* 1.6) constructs a *paraclausithyron* in its entirety and begins by asking the *ianitor* to admit him. When time passes, the drunken lover threatens to burn down the house with his torch (57-60). Threats and prayers have led nowhere and the lover, leaving his garland as a reminder of his wasted time, bids farewell to the *ianitor* and the doors (71-74). Ovid will then elevate the humble slave (*ianitor*) to the position of the god intending the word *orare* to carry its religious overtones, providing his elegy with humorous effect.

Nevertheless, as far as the dramatic tradition is concerned, the function of a *paraclausithyron* scene is very different. In Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae* (938-975), a crowd of young men is sketched, roaming the streets and trying to gain admission to the girl's house. It is to such songs that Eupolis could have referred when mentioning Gnesippos as the inventor of $\nu\kappa\tau\epsilon\acute{\rho}\iota\nu' \acute{\alpha}\sigma\mu\alpha\tau\alpha$, which bring women out of doors.²⁰ The earliest extant Roman *paraclausithyron* is detected in Plautus' *Curculio* where the procession of the lover Phaedromus opens the scene

¹⁷ The status of Propertius' Cynthia fluctuates: at one moment she is a *matrona*, at the next she resembles a Greek-styled $\acute{\epsilon}\tau\alpha\iota\omicron\alpha$.

¹⁸ Hor. *Epod.* 11.20; Tib. 1.227.

¹⁹ *Ferreas ianitor* in Ov. *Met.* 14.712; Tib. 1.2.3; Ov. *Am.* 1.6.37.

²⁰ Fr. 366 Koch.

(1-64). The atmosphere of the original κῶμος is revealed:²¹ mock heroics, Phaedromus' elaborate courtesy to the personified door, and the theme of *furtivus amor*. Phaedromus pours wine on the threshold (an action in harmony with the κῶμος's general character), to attract the attention of the girl's *custos*, Leaena, whereas the girl is a willing partner prevented from seeing her lover by the door and the *lena*.²² Plautus also provides the young man, Phaedromus, with a slave, Palinurus, whose function is to mock his master's lament to the door.

A close reading of the *paraclausithyron* scene in the *Curculio* could establish the comic form of the practice which will be later applied in Propertius' elegy. There are specific points of convergence between the two treatments that contribute to the visuality and theatricality of Hercules in elegy 4.9. Propertius gives a clear picture of a *paraclausithyron* which involves not a complicated elegiac affair, but the failed assignation of a young man with a *meretrix*.²³ In this elegy, the door's personification and the *furtivus amor* (the most important Roman addition in the motif) revive the original scene in the *Curculio*, and Propertius presents his effort as he strives to open the door to a more dramatic incident.

In *Curculio*, Phaedromus, holding a torch, attempts to meet Planesium, a young woman in the possession of Cappadox and guarded by a *duenna*, Leaena. Knowing Leaena's weakness for drinking, Phaedromus plans to sprinkle the door with wine, so that she will be induced to open it; he pours wine on the *fores*, begging the closed doors to send out Planesium (147): "Come drink, thou jolly door, drink, be willing kindly unto me" (trans. by P. Nixon). The likeness of the door-keeper to god,

²¹ The Romans use the form *comissarii* for κῶμος (Plaut. *Persa* 567) and other terms like *occentare fores* (Plaut. *Curc.* 145; *Merc.* 408; *Persa* 569). Cf. Theophr. *Char.* 12.

²² The bribery of servants in order to obtain the girl's favour is frequent in comedy. On the contrary, in the Greek tradition it is the girl who is responsible for the lover's exclusion.

²³ In Copley's words (1956, 121), "Propertius made the motif a door-song once more, stripping it down to its basic components and bringing back the band of drunken revelers."

made openly in Tibullus, is here, in Roman drama, made implicitly; in *Curculio*, the *lena* and the door receive wine, the typical offering to the gods. The lover's lament has the strategic advantage of revealing devotion. Moreover, originating from Roman comedy, the theme of *furtivus amor* (stolen love) is one of the most important alterations on the *paraclausthyron* scene that would become conventional in the later Roman *paraclausthyron*, especially in Roman elegy. According to this, the woman, Planesium, is unable to choose for herself whom she may love, since her custodian acts as the essential impediment to the union of the lover and his beloved. In *Curculio*, the blocking character is the *custos*, Leaena. This guardian may sometimes become a harsh, unyielding obstacle in the *paraclausthyron* of Roman New Comedy, and features prominently later on in the poetry of the Roman elegists who developed the *paraclausthyron* as a prime example of male amatory persuasion.²⁴

Following the example of the comic *paraclausthyron*, Propertius' Hercules in 4.9 addresses the door with prayer-formulae as a worshipper would treat an altar.²⁵ Such deification of the *limen* goes back to the komastic song of Plautus' Phaedromus who gives the door the position of sole importance (*Curc.* 88-89). Propertius' door is addressed with a descriptive phrase in the vocative case (17) while the lover acts as a devotee (43-44), but never receives what he prayed for (*preces*, 19-20). The door is the only figure in the poem and the only point of interest. The temple of the Bona Dea is transformed into a typical erotic threshold with garlands and incense (27-28) and Hercules' encounter with the old priestess, the guardian of the threshold, gets centre stage. Propertius, aware of the Greek komastic tradition, presents Hercules addressing the *ianitor* who guards the door and who is elevated to divine status. Therefore, much of the poem's humour lies in the deification of the Bona Dea's priestess, who is the blocking character.²⁶

²⁴ Yardley 1978, 19-34.

²⁵ See Catull. 67; Hor. *Carm.* 3.10.16; Tib. 1.2.14; Ov. *Ars am.* 2.527. Cf. the highly-emotional *o* in Prop. 4.9.33 and Hor. *Carm.* 1.30.

²⁶ See the doorkeeper in Ar. *Ran.* 465-478. For *cede* (54), cf. Plaut. *Aul.* 40: *exi, inquam, age exi* and *Mostell.* 460.

Apart from comparing the doorkeeper in the comedy *Curculio* with the priestess (*alma sacerdos*, 51; *anus*, 61), this author suggests that the wine offering to the door is a gesture implicitly identifying Hercules with the comic young man, the *adulescens*. It is worthwhile that in 1.16 Propertius clearly describes the activity of a devotee in prayer (43) who brings votive offerings on his mistress' threshold. Hence, when writing both 1.16 and 4.9, the poet probably thinks of Phaedromus in *Curculio* bringing wine for the door and the *lena*.²⁷ Hercules is presented as another Phaedromus in front of a personified door (*implacidus fores*, 4.9.14).²⁸ He is afflicted with such an overwhelming thirst (*sicco torquet sitis ora palato*, 21) that his only literary counterpart is Leana in the *Curculio* (*da vicissim meo gutturi gaudium*, 106; *siti sicca*, 118). The "narrator," Propertius, plays the role of Palinurus who follows Phaedromus and whose function is to describe and mock his master's lament to the door (*Curc.* 1-160). By transferring to Hercules' song the trick which he utilized in 1.16, Propertius renders his hero a comic young man, an *adulescens* who prays to the girl inside using the conventional *lenia verbia* (*precor, preces*).²⁹

As far as the dramatic *paraclausithyron* is concerned, it should be noted that the image of inclusion/exclusion becomes a central theme and thus is emphasized. Therefore, in both Plautus' *Curculio* and Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae*, the lover is not rejected; the door is opened so that

²⁷ It is unclear on which side of the door the priestess is speaking; she may be situated outside like the Leana in *Curculio*. In Euripides' *Syleus*, the door is used differently for comic purposes; Hercules handles it as a table for his repast, helping himself to Syleus' food and best wine (fr. 687 N.2).

²⁸ The word *implacidus* is a Propertian neologism which catches the reader's attention, not only because it suggests *clausas fores*, but also because it looks back to Catull. 67, where the personification of the door is a characteristically Italian element.

²⁹ For *preces* in a komastic situation, cf. Prop. 1.16.20; Ov. *Am.* 1.6.2, 2.1.22; Hor. *Carm.* 3.10.13; Alc. fr. 374 LP λίσσομαι. Copley (1956, 123) argues that Ovid breaks with Propertius and Tibullus by addressing, in *Am.* 1.6, not the door but the doorkeeper. However, Propertius addresses both in 4.9 and thus he makes a contrast with elegy 1.16.

the plot can be developed. Terence and Aristophanes parody the exclusion theme in the *Eunuchus* (771-816) and the *Lysistrata* (845-979), and Plautus makes references to it in the *Mercator* and *Persa*.³⁰ Sometimes the young men go to the extent of breaking or burning down the door, or even of kidnapping or inflicting injury on the girl.³¹ Plautus' *Persa* (564-572) shows that the violence of the incident before the door, when the lover attacks it with axes, crowbars and torches, figures prominently for a particular dramatic effect. Other times, the comic door opens or lovers flexibly find their way around a closed *limen*.³² Conclusively, the non-dramatic and dramatic tradition of the *paraclausthyron* feature different characteristics and explore new dynamics.

The pattern or topos of a sleepless lover and the *paraclausthyron* of comedy seem to infuse the whole corpus of Propertius' elegies. The poet extensively uses the image of closed doors, of *clausae fores*, when sketching himself watching at Cynthia's closed door and singing his plaint (1.8.21-22, 2.9.41-44). Propertius also reminds Gallus of his own capacity for opening stubborn doors (1.10.15-16); Gallus is presented performing *vigilationes* at the door of his mistress (1.13.33). To Propertius, the door is *mollis* (2.14.21-24, 2.20.23) and in his lady's arms he hears the vain knocking of his rejected rivals.³³ The poet bids farewell to his love with Cynthia, by using the *exclusus* incident at the *limen*, at the shut door (3.25.9-10).

Propertius has staged an actual parody of the *paraclausthyron* scene in 1.16, where the whole poem turns out to be a monologue by the door. The Capitoline hill, and more specifically the temple to Fides, is the setting for the exclusion incident. Via the door's speech, the elegist claims to have a long history in writing *paraclausthyra* (*deduxi carmina*,

³⁰ Also, examples of *paraclausthyron* mime can be found in Herod. 2, the *Por-novoskos*. Cf. Κωμωστικής (Page 332).

³¹ Ar. *Vesp.* 1253-1255; *Eccl.* 957-977; *Lys.* 248-251; Plaut. *Bacch.* 1118-1119; Plut. *Am. narr.* 772f-773a.

³² Ar. *Eccl.* 938-975; Plaut. *Curc.* 147-190; *Men.* 698-699, 1140-1145; also in Prop. 1.8.21-46.

³³ Even the dead Cornelia is said to have passed behind doors, which cannot be opened by any power (Prop. 4.11.1-8).

41); the same door witnessed triumphal processions in the past, but now tolerates disgraceful behaviour from the mistress' lovers (5-12). In lines 17-44, the *ianua* quotes the song of a particular suppliant who complains about the door's cruelty. Propertius makes explicit references to the komasts who come with the standard equipment of *corollae* and *faces* (7-8), weeping and kissing the threshold.³⁴ The door has been subjected to the graffiti inscribed by the komasts and been unable to ward off (*defendere*) the mistress's nights of shame. It has often been wounded by the *rixae* of lovers (metapoetically, by previous poets), though not by this lover, the author Propertius, who claims (37) that he has not even verbally abused it.³⁵

II. PROPERTIUS ON THE THRESHOLD

Copley has argued that Propertius writes his single *paraclausithyron* in 1.16 as an action of revolt against Tibullus' treatment of the theme.³⁶ I argue that Hercules in elegy 4.9 represents another example of the *paraclausithyron*, as the whole poem leads up to and is motivated by the hero's final plea for admission. It should be mentioned that this elegy is introduced by the image of Cynthia purifying her threshold, as if it was a sanctuary, from the women (*puellae*) who engaged her lover and who should be excluded from her own realm (*externae*, 4.8.83). Within elegy 4.9, Propertius exploits a set of areas enclosed by the structure of the poem: the rites of the Bona Dea, which are secret and enacted by a limited number of women, and the rites of the Ara Maxima involving public male feasting.³⁷ This inclusion or exclusion caused by a door dividing the public street where the action takes

³⁴ The door sees the *faces* as the military standards (*signa*) of the komast. Yardley (1979, 157) compares the situation with that in Apuleius (*Apol.* 75) who criticizes the frequent komastic activity outside Herennius Rufinus' house.

³⁵ The elegy bears a close connection to Hellenistic examples, drawing its inspiration especially from Theocritus (*Id.* 3.6-7, 3.18); cf. Asclep. AP 5.167. The talking door, like Catullus' talking *phaselus*, can be traced back to Greek epigrams where inanimate objects are given voice.

³⁶ Copley 1956.

³⁷ Hutchinson 2006, 206.

place (male space) and the private space where offstage indoor scenes develop (female space) is reminiscent of theatre. Propertius in 4.9 uses the specific allocation of space for the dramatic plot and the depiction of his Hercules episode. His *paraclausithyron* plays with oppositions such as inside/outside; closed/open; feminine/masculine.

As already mentioned, in the non-dramatic tradition, the lover is never admitted. However, when Hercules, the *receptus amans*, crosses the stage to the shrine door, he does not confine himself to threats. He actually violates the shrine by breaking down the doors, a movement that furnishes the poem with comedy. Hercules, that is, does not play by the *paraclausithyron* rules. His violent entry indicates his eagerness to defy the elegiac pattern: he crosses over from one genre and literary style to another (from elegy to comedy and vice versa). Propertius chooses Hercules as the ideal figure since he is already related to the komastic tradition and often depicted participating with Dionysus and Hermes in Dionysiac κῶμος.³⁸ This section will underline comic elements of Hercules' episode wherein the participants switch roles as soon as the demi-god clashes with the door-keeper.³⁹

After slaying the monstrous Cacus and founding the Forum Boarium, the battle-weary Hercules is placed in a situation that is altogether appropriate to the elegiac lover; that is, begging to be admitted to the women-only Bona Dea shrine to drink from its fountain. The episode inverts the thematics of the *Hecale* in Callimachus, where Theseus is accepted by Hecale. Just as in the *Hecale*, the epic element is marginal, and the elegiac central; but where Hercules is excluded, Theseus is welcomed. Propertius converts the epic topic into an elegiac one, by devoting twenty lines to Cacus' episode and nearly fifty lines to the resulting portrait of Hercules, who is reduced to being a pathetic sufferer and a conventional *amator* outside the closed door of a *puella*. In

³⁸ Galinsky 1972, 82 (Plate 3).

³⁹ The priestess episode in 4.9 becomes more humorous based on the door's religious and magical significance in Rome. The *lena* who craves wine is replaced by a thirsty suppliant, Hercules. Cf. Yardley 1979, 159 and DeBrohun 2003.

the elegy, the enclosed space (*loca clausa*, 24; *lucus*, 23; *luci sacro ... antro*, 32; *lucoque ... verendo*, 52) is a locus of female authority and power:

*lucus ubi umbroso fecerat orbe nemus,
femineae loca clausa deae fontesque piandos
mpune et nullis sacra resecta viris* (4.9.24-26)

Scholars have come close to the truth arguing that Propertius intends a story congenial to elegy for Hercules' major adventure.⁴⁰ However, the generic interplay of elegiac conventions and epic not only renders the hero a mediator between lyric and epic, but also offers a thirsty, amorous, unprecedented comic Hercules who smashes the entrance of the shrine (*et cava suscepto flumine palma sat est*).⁴¹

The poem borrows the outline of its story from Hercules' encounter with Cacus from the *Aeneid* (8.184ff.). Evander recounts the story while urging the proto-Roman Aeneas to align himself with Greek Hercules as an icon of masculine austerity (*haec limina victor Alcides subiit*, 362).⁴² Propertius chooses to reshape Hercules' victory and to suppress heroic aspects of the battle which are fully described in Vergil and Livy.⁴³ In Vergil, Hercules is reinvented and his foundation of the Ara Maxima symbolizes the re-foundation of Rome by Augustus. Hercules' defeat of Cacus offers an allegorical reworking of Actium in which Cacus takes the role of Antony.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the hero of Propertius 4.9 may not be such an honorific parallel for the princeps because he seems undignified and exists alongside more comic elements.⁴⁵ He resembles a

⁴⁰ Anderson 1964, 3; Grimal 1952, 14ff.; Heinze 1919, 81ff.

⁴¹ Ath. 10.441: An Italian woman tries to persuade her husband to give the thirsty Hercules water, not wine.

⁴² Hercules' patronymic *Amphtryoniades* creates a tone more appropriate for epic.

⁴³ In Liv. 1.7.10 and Ov. *Fast.* 1.583-584, Hercules learns directly after killing Cacus that he will become a god.

⁴⁴ Morgan 1998; Spencer 2001, 263-73. Within the developing Augustan city, there are six places of Hercules' worship.

⁴⁵ On the contrary, Harrison (2005, 125) argues that the encomiastic aspect of the comparison of Hercules and Augustus, established in previous poetry, holds in 4.9.

small-scale hero like the “world-beating mini-Hercules” praised in Statius’ *Silvae* 4.6.⁴⁶

Why does Propertius bring the particular masculine voice and relate him to the aetiology of the origins of Rome? Is this narrative more or less political than Vergil’s? An epic-comic Hercules invades elegy and becomes the poet’s right hand and guardian of his poetry (72), exactly because he adopts the figure of an *exclusus amator*. Propertius is not backing off from writing a political/epic work; he is rather reestablishing epic by means of comedy and by using an increasingly ludicrous Hercules. Bona Dea’s cult and image get pushed away when the hero takes revenge on the *puellae* who excluded him, wishing for them to be always stuck outside the threshold. The position of the word *feminae* at the beginning of the couplet (25-26) and *viris* at the end underlines the separation of women from men. The god is sanctified as a result for his actions, for cleansing not just the world (*orbem*, 73) but also the Bona Dea’s grove (*orbe*, 24). He points to his encounter with Atlas (*tergo qui sustulit orbem*, 4.9.37) and his journey to the underworld (4.9.41). He then adopts a new feminine identity next to a “dominating” queen (4.9.48) whose role is that of the *domina puella* in love elegy.

The prominent issue is the link between Augustus and the Ara Maxima.⁴⁷ Hercules’ route via the Velabrum (5) passing the Ara Maxima repeats the way taken by the victorious Augustus on his return to Rome in 19 B.C.⁴⁸ Even if the reference to the Bona Dea is somehow erased, this does not hinder Propertius in lavishing his attention on Hercules’ adventure at the shrine. The establishment of the Ara Maxima is postponed until after the less heroic, albeit major, adventure of

⁴⁶ Henderson 2007.

⁴⁷ The prominent issue is the reason why women are not permitted to worship in the Ara. The temple of the Bona Dea on the Aventine was restored by Livia but it is uncertain whether this event predates Propertius’ elegy (*Ov. Fast.* 5.148-158). The next day of Hercules’ rites at the Ara Maxima (29 B.C.), Augustus began his triple triumph, *CIL* 244.

⁴⁸ Harrison 1995, 127.

Hercules.⁴⁹ The hero rushes towards the sacred grove pleading with the women to give him access to the water within (34). The tale of Hercules before the shrine mirrors the story of his duel with Cacus and together they introduce the image of closed doors and intrusion.⁵⁰ Hercules' elegy becomes a double *paraclausithyron*. The superlative *exclusissimus* coined by Plautus (*Men.* 698-700) for the caricature of the scorned, "thirsty" lover would be ideal for the hero. Propertius sets the reader before the door and keeps him there. Hercules' expectations of hospitality in both Cacus' cave and the Bona Dea's shrine are thwarted and the hero ends up angrily breaking down the doors of the cave (9) and finally the shrine (61).

Hercules occupies a liminal moment on the threshold – *iacit ante fores verba minora deo* (32) – where he adopts the pathetic figure already sketched for him in the lament of Megara.⁵¹ His exact phraseology will be later adopted by Latona in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (6.352-368), who is thirsty and begs the Lycians to permit her to drink: *supplex peto ... verba minora dea tollensque*. The laughter and merriment that Hercules hears from within the shrine signify amatory situations and echo victorious Cynthia's laughter near the end of 4.8, from within her threshold. Married Roman matrons and the Vestal Virgins carried out the rites of the Bona Dea.⁵² Since the *paraclausithyron* incident traditionally belongs to the world of the ἐταῖρα, the women enclosed within the Bona Dea's grove are not called *virgines*, but *puellae*, the term of elegy's beloved.

Elegy 4.9 provides an example of the poet's shifting voice, for he assumes two roles: one a larger than life masculine figure and one a female priestess, on opposing sides of the threshold. There are two sides of the door; there are the *exclusus amator* and the *inclusae puellae*. Similarly, in Plautus (*Curc.* 147-152), the lover Phaedromus is locked out;

⁴⁹ Unlike Vergil, Livy and Ovid who all insist that the conquest of Cacus accounts for the origin of the Ara Maxima.

⁵⁰ In Varro's version, Hercules is described neither as lingering before the doors nor as breaking down the entrance of the cave-shrine (in Macrob. *Sat.* 1.12.28).

⁵¹ Mosch. *Meg.* 4, esp. line 11. If in Varro Hercules invaded the sanctuary, we should expect Macrobius to include it.

⁵² Spencer 2001, 274.

his lover Planesium locked in. Horatian *paraclausithyra* also turn the door around, with amusing results. Horace's favoured variation is the *inclusa amatrix*. When the poet tells Chloris (*Carm.* 3.15) to stop playing love-games (4-5), go home and attend the household tasks (13-140), he effectively shuts her in behind the door. Chloris' daughter, Pholoe, an *exclusa amatrix*, assumes a position of power exactly the opposite of Lydia (*Carm.* 1.25). The door's duplicity is what makes Propertius' *paraclausithyron* lock certain authors (the poet, the hero) and certain audiences (the reader, the priestess) inside and outside the text. Pindar's *Pae-an* 6 presents a similar situation to the Bona Dea's incident. A κῶμος is performed by young men who beg the elderly priestess Pythia for admission to Delphi from within they can hear the sound of water. Κόρραι sing and dance (16) in Apollo's grove which nourishes garlands and banquets. The same way the Bona Dea's grove is forbidden to men (26, 55) the grove of Delphi is "bereft of the dancing of men."

The rites of the Bona Dea were reserved for married women but in their elegiac version *meretrices* or unmarried *puellae* are also present. Women prayed to Vesta, the virgin goddess of the hearth, home, and family in Roman religion who represented the nucleus of the house and kept enclosed private spaces safe.⁵³ However, in a poem of the same book (4.4), Propertius has Vesta rather than Venus inspiring Tarpeia's forbidden passion for Tatius. According to Propertius' version of the legend, Tarpeia is an impure Vestal Virgin (just like Rhea Silvia) who betrays Rome to be Tatius' lover.⁵⁴ This elegiac mingling of what is proper and what is forbidden is typical of Propertius who seems to question the Roman national representation of sexuality: Bona Dea and the Vestals were associated with chastity and fertility in Roman women. However, in both elegies, 4.4 and 4.9, Propertius pic-

⁵³ Even if the rites of the Bona Dea are enclosed into Hercules' story and nothing is said about the goddess and her cult, the feminine element is elaborately treated and predominates in the poem. On the contrary, Hutchinson (2006, 205) argues that the elegy as a whole subordinates females to males.

⁵⁴ Welch 2005; Janan 1999, 430.

tures the force of elegy to disrupt Roman binary oppositions and violate female, sacred realms.

Hercules' *πάθος* and reference to weariness achieve no results and thus he resorts to what Tibullus calls *fortia verbia* (2.6.12). He boasts of his *fortia facta* (39) and calls attention to his feat of carrying the world on his back (38-39).⁵⁵ The change of tone from threatening to wheedling is a common feature of the *paraclausithyron*. The great hero begs to be admitted, but unsuccessfully once again, on the grounds that he had been a proper maiden, an *apta puella*, in the past, as Queen Omphale's slave, sewing feminine attire and sporting a luxurious shawl (47-50).⁵⁶ Instead of warning the girl inside, Hercules is determined to refashion himself (changing from a virile and epic hero carrying his *Maenalius ramus* (15) and wearing his facial hair (*siccam barbam*, 31) to evoke a feminized figure in the service to Deianeira.

The lover, Hercules, is given his answer by the gatekeeper who substitutes for the hated *lena*. When she speaks the words of rejection, (*limina linque*, 54), the formerly pathetic lover who spoke as a *minus deus* (32) and as a *homo* (41), puts the *blanditia* aside, assaults the house of the *domina* and rushes inside to satisfy his anger and desire.⁵⁷ He infuses life into Terence's portrait of a young rapist, sketched in the *Hecyra* and *Eunuchus*. Hercules demolishes the entrance and recovers his figure as the super-male, who had once deflowered fifty virgins in a single night.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Both Mercury, when entering Herse's private space (*Met.* 2.733), and Sun, entering Leucothoe's apartment (*Met.* 4.226), declare their divinity.

⁵⁶ Hercules' self-presentation as a credible woman fails. Clodius' acquittal on charges of sacrilege in 61 B.C. proves his failure to act out a female role successfully. Callimachus in AP 5.23 upbraided Conopium for refusing him admission, and prayed that she suffer similar unhappiness

⁵⁷ Cf. Plut. *Amat.* 759b: τὴν δ' ἐρωτικὴν μανίαν τ' ἀνθρώπου καθαψαμένην is the description given for the madness of love in the context of a *paraclausithyron*.

⁵⁸ Paus. 9.27.5-7. In Aristophanes (fr. 287 Edm.), Hercules "breaks the front door in, doorposts and all."

Like a comic *adulescens*, Hercules violates norms and, unable to tolerate limits, behaves idiotically by subjecting himself to his passion (*aestus*, 63).⁵⁹ This is not his first description of attempting a violent entry. Domestic violence features in Rhinthon's farce *Hercules*, where the hero pounds with his club on the door of Zeus' shrine. As soon as he is inside, he drags off a woman from the altar.⁶⁰ His companion, Iolaos, piously pours a libation on the altar while Hercules gobbles up the sacrificial offerings.⁶¹ Menander also alludes to the portrayal of Hercules in the last extant fragments of the *Epitrepontes*, citing the speaker Hercules, who, having raped Auge in Euripides' lost play *Auge*, explains that he "always likes a change from his labours."⁶² Menander plays with his allusions to tragedy, implying discrepancies between the genres as well as in tone. Similarly, Propertius' fashioning of Hercules' identity enables the elegist to play with the farcical quality of the hero's theatrical representation.

III. OPPORTUNA CUNCTIS NATURA FIGURIS

It seems that the key to reading 4.9 lies in the figure of Hercules fixing his gender, using a collection of masks, properties and adornments reaffirming his weakness. Hercules defies his reading as a unified character: he is the epic hero who does not quite fit into the elegiac framework that he enters; he is the thirsty Hercules who does not quite fit the effeminate role of the *exclusus amator* and the cross-

⁵⁹ The punishment is more in the spirit of the rejected lover than that of the defender of justice: he excludes the eroticized *puellae* of love elegy (see Plut. *Quaest. Rom.* 60). In Greek cities, the exclusion of women figures among the special traits of Hercules' cult. Arethusa in 4.3 is as much excluded from the camps of war as the *puellae* Hercules expels from his altar.

⁶⁰ Bieber 1961, 134, as attested on the phlyakes in figs. 488a-b.

⁶¹ Bieber 1961, 132, fig. 482. In comedy, Hercules' voraciousness is equivalent to male sexuality. In Euboulos' *Kerkopes* (fr. 54 Kock), the hero tells of his journey to the land of pleasure, where he "ate" Okimon-Basil (a prostitute-an aphrodisiac plant).

⁶² Anderson 1982, 165-77.

dressed figure in female clothing.⁶³ Even though the image of the cross-dressed hero appears for just a few lines in Hercules' speech, it is still an important moment in elegy 4.9, since the question of gender identity is central to the poem and to the whole book in which it appears.

Hercules' episode is the most famous incident of transvestism in ancient literature. This section will examine the method of Propertius, who, by sartorial means, fashions Hercules either as a masculine hero or as a female slave. A closer look at comic travestitism will help shed light on the way in which Propertius constructs characters and assigns gender identity by combining wardrobe and behaviour.⁶⁴ Hercules' episode is intertextually connected with another virile hero, Achilles, who has a myth with a major cross-dressing scene. In Statius' *Achilleid* (1.260-265), Thetis invokes the example of Hercules to soften Achilles' reluctance to wear female dress and to demonstrate that transvestism can be a noble option.⁶⁵ Statius takes the contrast of the soft weaving and the hard hands of Hercules from Propertius, and he adds the thyrsus, which is considered as a "soft spear" (*molles hastas*, 1.261). In association with Thetis' admonition to the hero (*animos submitte viriles*, 1.259), the reference to the "soft spear" reveals a clear phallic joke.⁶⁶

Hercules in 4.9 uses as an argument for admission to the shrine of the Bona Dea his proven ability in the past to cross-dress. He is sketched delivering a eunuch's song, calling attention to his "unphallic" persona (*apta puella*). This dramatic device of transvestism works

⁶³ Lindheim 1998a, 48; DeBrohun 1994. Euripides had already portrayed him as desolate, seated like a woman to escape every glance (*HF* 1214-1215, 1159, 1198, 1205). Ovid in *Ars. am.* 1.691-696, entreats Achilles to drop the wool, the basket and the spindle in favour of the spear and shield.

⁶⁴ The crossdressing of Propertius' characters can be associated as an idea with the gods swapping their accoutrements in *Ov. Am.* 1.1.

⁶⁵ In Thetis' next example, Bacchus' gender-indeterminate dress is his golden gown; Jupiter disguised as Diana pursues Callisto. Caeneus having once been female did not interfere with the male Caeneus' strength as a hero.

⁶⁶ See *brevior hasta* in *Achil.* 1.879. Cf. Heslin 2005, 240. See also *Ar. Nub.* 537ff.: σκύτινον καθεΐμενον.

intertextually, recalling vested interests that are prominent in Plautus' comedy. *Casina*, for example, is a comedy that questions gender and reveals that the ways in which comedy defines the construction of masculine/feminine are similar to those of Roman elegy. The action of crossdressing parodies the notion of gender and reveals it as a mode of presentation. The figure of Chalinus/Casina attracts all the attention: the male actor playing the male slave Chalinus dresses up as a bride named Casina, and interacts throughout with males and females, creating gender slippage between him and the other characters.⁶⁷ Three genders are represented in *Casina*: male, female, and a continually third gender (like the one that enables Hercules to transgress female space).⁶⁸ At the end of Plautus' performance, female characters drop their cross-dressed roles so that the audience comes to know them as the men they really are.

Hercules' episode features verbal reference to emasculated men or "eunuchs" of comedy. Terence's *Eunuchus*, for instance, corresponds to boundary-crossings within the action of elegy 4.9;⁶⁹ in fact, in the comedy *Eunuchus* there are explicit references to Hercules' episode of transvestism at Omphale's (1026-1027), but also to the comparison with Zeus' rape of Danae. Hercules in Propertius 4.9 is not unlike a eunuch or Zeus, who many a time disguised himself as a woman.⁷⁰

A short overview of transvestism connected to the threshold scene could make clear that it is a characteristically dramatic motif running

⁶⁷ Gold 1998, 19, 26.

⁶⁸ The transvestite ceremony was possibly taken from Diphilus' *Kleroumenoi*.

⁶⁹ Even though verbal reference hardly licenses intertextuality with Terence's *Eunuchus*, it should be noted that Chaerea, disguised as a eunuch (a semi-*vir* or semi-*femina*), breaks into the house of Thais. He finds his mistress in her chamber sleeping and rapes her and so he exercises violence like Hercules. Chaerea, having donned the costume of the eunuch, must learn the nature of his act from a *meretrix*, Thais, and wearing his disguise, is exposed to the ridicule of the public. The deed of entering the private chamber of Thais' female household attendant is itself called a *flagitium* (383).

⁷⁰ Nor does Hercules differ from Aktaeon, who accidentally witnessed a nude Artemis and her company of nymphs in their own sacred space.

through literature and picked up by modern playwrights. Images of doorways that define women's space pervade in Shakespearean plays along with transvestism, parallel elements with Hercules in elegy 4.9. The serenade of the *paraclausithyron* features in *The Merchant of Venice* (2.5.28ff.). Both *Othello* and *Hamlet* are associated with uncovering and opening the women's "secret place," spying on their secrets. The doorkeeper is repeatedly stationed on a threshold, ushering the characters in and out (Iago in *Oth.* 4.2.27-29).⁷¹ Propertius' Hercules has something of the flexible power inherent in the structure of Shakespeare's theatre. *Twelfth Night* for instance, is much concerned with gender and its masquerade centers on two cross-dressers: Gender cross-casting is much developed and, on the Renaissance stage, the transvestite becomes a fixture; it acquires dramatic power producing humour.⁷²

Propertius presupposes the reader's collective knowledge of the contradictions inherent in the Hercules' figure, as well as his comic qualities presented in a torrent of satyr plays, farces and comedies.⁷³ Thus, Propertius's very first word, the traditional patronymic *Amphytrionides*, not only establishes Hercules as an epic hero, but also introduces the character as master of disguise possibly echoing Plautus' *Amphitruo*, the comedy of the disguised Zeus (8.202). That comedy was Hercules' own story of birth, in which the controlling theme was the violation of entrance through disguise: Zeus entered Alcmena's house

⁷¹ Reynolds also perceives the power of the transvestism and the fundamental way dramatic representation works. He warns against "beautiful boys transformed into women by putting on their feature, looks and facions ... because a woman's garment being put on a man doeth vehemently touch and move him with the imagination of a woman [since] it stirs up desire." See Goodman 1998, 177.

⁷² In *As You Like it*, Rosalind develops Celia's plan by proposing to disguise herself as a man (1.3.104-106). Sexual disguise is considered the major development that the Italians made on classical plots. See Newman 1978, 62-63.

⁷³ The title of Sophocles' satyr play *Hercules at Taenarus* has survived, as well as of Nicochares' *Hercules as the Bride*. Hercules appears in five comedies of Epicharmus and speaks the prologue in Diphilus' *Hercules* (fr. 15 Edm.).

as *amator* by taking Amphitruo's form, came into her bed, and exited as omnipotent god. Meanwhile, Mercury, as the feigned Sosias, violated Alcmena's space.

The mythical Hercules is a figure which assembles a set of cross-dressing incidents in Greek mythology, especially the tale of the hero and Omphale that underscore his "femininity."⁷⁴ There is also evident and necessary connection between Hercules' episode and the κῶμος whose traits have survived in the comic *paraclausithyron* in *Curculio*: the procession of the *ornatus* protagonist in garlands and ornaments (*Curc. 2: ornatus Phaedromus*). Hercules remains decked out as a heroic performer of epic deeds, albeit the elegy sketches three different portraits of him which stand side by side.⁷⁵ The elegy begins by fitting Hercules out in the garb of a masculine hero, describing a hero willing to battle and cloaking him in epic *ira* and *furor* (14).⁷⁶ The next two self-portrayals of Hercules present the manliest hero next to a feminine servant of Omphale. Hercules appears as a self-styled female servant. He recounts the tale of his time spent in servitude to the Lydian Queen, when he dressed in a woman's clothes and engaged in women's work

⁷⁴ Propertius in 3.11 has already explored the possibilities that Omphale's story offers for fashioning a "feminine" identity for his "male" *amator* (Catull. 55.23; Prop. 3.23.8). Hercules was thought the hero of πόνος, that is, of pain as glory, and the hero of pleasure (Ath. 12.512e, cited by Licht 1949, 9-10). For Hercules' polyvalence, see Ov. *Fast.* 6.812. According to Loraux 1990, 122, "myths offer the disruption of the distribution of the characteristics of man and woman, by expressing the experience of the feminine lived out by man or the terrifying conquest of the masculine by woman."

⁷⁵ Unlike Ovid's Mercury, who carefully spruces up before approaching Herse's room like a regular dandy (*Met.* 2.782: *cura*). Likewise, Evander, before beginning his tale of Hercules and Cacus, seats Aeneas on a lion-skin, which is the emblem of Hercules (*Aen.* 8.177).

⁷⁶ See Hor. *Carm.* 1.38; Juv. 3.58-125; Plin. *HN* 29.13.

⁷⁶ See Cyrino 1998.

⁷⁶ Diod. Sic. 4.14.3.

(4.9.47-50). For his transvestism, gender is conceived as a performance, while prop exchanges get the hero's theatre under way.⁷⁷

In mythical tradition, Hercules is connected to transvestism and shift of power, but also to the feminine πέπλος which often competes with the lion's skin as Hercules' official garment.⁷⁸ Each of the gods equipped the hero with an attribute: Hephaistos gave him a club and a cuirass, Poseidon gave horses, Hermes a sword, Apollo bows and arrows; but the gift of Athena was a πέπλος.⁷⁹ Euripides emphasizes the femininity of this garment in the scene of Pentheus' transvestism in the *Bacchae* (821, 833).⁸⁰ The episode of Hercules in the palace of Omphale and their exchange of clothing resemble the story told by Plutarch: Hercules hides in the home of a Thracian woman, having disguised himself as a woman. After defeating his enemies, the Meropes, he puts on a flowery robe to marry the princess Chalciopé.⁸¹

Propertius' readers "see" the exchange of properties that Hercules holds in 4.9, as if on the Plautine stage or in mime.⁸² When Hercules has arrived at the shrine and the door does not swing open, Hercules uses the third person and the indefinite pronoun *aliquem*, to construct an image, a mirror of himself as the very man who supported the world on his back (*ille ego sum*, 38). He emphasizes the effectiveness of his weapons to enable his performance of heroic deeds (*fortia facta, tela, Herculea clava*, 39). Since his heroic approach fails, he recognizes that his face and lion-skin garment and hair parched by the Libyan sun

⁷⁷ See Hor. *Carm.* 1.38; Juv. 3.58-125; Plin. *HN* 29.13.

⁷⁸ See Cyrino 1998.

⁷⁹ Diod. Sic. 4.14.3.

⁸⁰ According to Loraux (1990, 37), the *peplos* and the *krokotos* of the hero paradoxically emphasize his virility which remains untouched by wearing what is the most feminine disguise.

⁸¹ *Quaest. Graec.* 58. Hercules is presented clad in a long woman's dress and been served by transvestite priests in Lydus, *Mens.* 4.46. Also the cult of Magna Mater is performed by eunuch priests who pay much attention to ornaments and are called *semiviri* (*Aen.* 4.125, 12.97-100: *semivir* Aeneas).

⁸² In mimes, the actions of low characters mirror those of mythological figures (cf. Cynthia in Odysseus role in 4.8).

might appear frightening. Thus, the performer of epic deeds adopts an unheroic *persona*, dressed like a female slave (*servilia officia, pensa diurna*), wearing the saffron tunic (47) – with which Propertius formerly dressed Cynthia (2.29.15) – and a soft breast band (49), performing a comedy of feminine masquerade.⁸³ The priestess of the Bona Dea, presented in her costume is a counterpart to the transvestite Hercules: Carthaginian crimson links with Sidonian purple, hair-band with breast-band (51-52).⁸⁴ Ovid will take up a similar comic scene in the *Fasti* (2.303-358), recounting what he refers to as an *antiqui fabula plena ioci*, “a tale full of old jokes” (3.304). Faunus, attempting to climb into bed with Omphale, does not realize that Hercules has swapped clothes with the queen, and pays the price for lifting the “woman’s” tunic (2.347-358).

The semiology of dressing as a female to play a female role is drawn from Roman comedy. On the Roman stage, cross-dressing is the norm, since women do not perform in most dramatic roles. This does not mean there is no threat in cross-dressing to masculine identity since actors (unlike their Athenian counterparts) suffer diminished citizen rights at Rome.⁸⁵ Male actors could absorb and appropriate the powers ascribed to women. Hercules wearing a brassiere is a humorous image but also is a feature of ancient κῶμοι for komasts to wear female dress.⁸⁶ Each significant visual detail of the hero is attended to: face, hair, chest, hands. Dressed and behaving as a *puella*, he becomes a *puella*, although he possesses a hairy chest (*hirsutum pectus*, 49) and spins wool with rough hands (*duris manibus*, 50). He comments on how badly-fitting feminine clothing is; he complains about that like a

⁸³ Cf. Euripides' *Syleus* (fr. 687 N.2) in which Hercules pretends to be a slave with appropriate clothing, so that Hermes can pass him on to Syleus.

⁸⁴ Hutchinson 2006, 215. Artemidorus (2.3) listed priests, musicians, actors and devotees of Dionysus as men who were eligible to wear the elaborate dress (*krokotos*) that Hercules appears to have.

⁸⁵ Edwards 1993, 98-136.

⁸⁶ Philostr. *Imag.* 1.2, 1.3.5.

comic character.⁸⁷ The hero is connected with Dionysus in myth, in cult and art. In the *Ranae* of Aristophanes (550-563), Dionysus goes to the underworld and makes himself look like Hercules; he reversely takes on the attire of Hercules, when he receives Persephone's invitation to a dinner with dancing virgins. He puts on a lion's skin over his *krokotos*. Dressed up like this, he meets the real Hercules who bursts into laughter (45-47, 108-109).⁸⁸

The hero drops the club with which he fatally struck Cacus (*ramo*, 15).⁸⁹ The replacement of the *clava* with the *Lydus colus* of line 48 is a nice detail, since each will be carried over Hercules' shoulder.⁹⁰ Hercules' description is given last position in his speech, which makes it a prominent image, present in the reader's eye, though distant as a narrative in perfect tense. Hercules serving Omphale because he has fallen in love with her is an altered version of the story in Sophocles' *Trachiniae* (357). Hercules expects to convince the priestess and the reader that he is suitable to join the girls within the shrine, and the elegiac discourse they represent.

The specific plot of cross-dressing is the original plot of Euripides' *Bacchae*. Propertius' Hercules resembles Euripides' Pentheus who desires to spy upon the female space, the women of Thebes and thus, must trade his military tactics for an undercover operation that involves adopting a disguise. Dionysus dresses Pentheus as a woman in flowing wig, headdress, a long pleated robe and belt, along with the

⁸⁷ Cf. Pleusicles in Plaut. *Mil.* (1286): *verear magis / me amoris causa hoc ornatu incedere.*

⁸⁸ Dionysus wears his *krokotos* in the *Bacchae* where he is called θηλύμορφος (351). Also, Pentheus' costume is described as imitating a woman's (γυναικόμοιοι, 981). When Dionysus is afraid to knock on the door of Pluto's hall, Xanthias eggs him on to remember the lion hide and pride of Hercules (*Ran.* 463). Aeacus, the doorkeeper, bursts into a tirade of threats against him.

⁸⁹ See Menander's *Sham Hercules*, fr. 517A-525 Edm., where (according to Plut. *Mor.* 59c) the braggart soldier comes on stage with a hollow club.

⁹⁰ DeBrohun 1992, 64. In Hor. *Carm.* 2.12.6, one of the poet's hard topics is the victory of the "Herculean hand" during the Gigantomachy. *Herculea manu* echoes the Propertian *Herculea clava*.

typical *insignia* of the maenads. Following Dionysus' advice, he abandons his desire for violence and accepts the tactics of deception in order to face women on their own terms. His figure is a parallel for Dionysus who in Aeschylus is called γύννης and ψευδάνωο (that is, a counterfeit man).⁹¹

Hercules' description offers a glance back to Vertumnus in 4.2, who is the first new character of Book 4 and places great emphasis on his appearance: "Clothe me in Coan silks, and I shall become a compliant girl (23)." Vertumnus indicates his protean capacity to assume a diversity of identities, using a list of clothing, fabrics and accoutrements (*opportuna mea cunctis natura figuris*, 21). In the characteristic dress of Cynthia, the god could pass for a *non dura puella*;⁹² a *toga* turns him into a man (24). He claims he can steal the guise of Bacchus and Apollo (31-32). Carrying a sickle transforms him into a reaper, bearing arms turns him into a soldier (25-27). Vertumnus is programmatic and symbolic of the transformation of identities that has taken place under Augustus; Propertius' Book 4 is overall set to underline the re-contextualizing of old ideas. Noticeable too is the fact that both Vertumnus and Hercules were very old Roman deities, although the former was a native god, while the other was an imported one.

Poem 4.9 focuses on the division of gender categories through the exploration of two different religious experiences which limit participation to persons of one gender. Both the priestess of Bona Dea and Hercules advocate the exclusion of the opposite sex from their rites, playing upon the notions of inclusion and exclusion. Propertius' episode reactivates the scenario of the Thesmophoria and the situation of the male intruder into women's ritual space. Thesmophorion (like the Bona Dea shrine) is analogous to the domestic space of women, and so

⁹¹ Frag. 61 N.2; see Aelius Aristides (*Or.* 34: Κατὰ τῶν ἐξορχουμένων), who refers to the cross-dressed Sardanapallus who vainly sang battle hymns while weaving and doing women's work.

⁹² See in section V the discussion about phallic humour. In 4.9, the gatekeeper threatens Hercules with Tiresias whose significance rests on his portrayal as transsexual. The myth of Tiresias glimpsing Athena's bath marks the goddess out as gender transgressive: strong limbs, absence of the Gorgon (58).

the intrusion into their ritual enclosure replicates the intrusion of theatre into another forbidden female domain. Its trespass by men recalls the founding plot of the theatre itself, best known from the *Bacchae*. The tragic side of the Dionysiac is seen in the consequences of violating ritual limits, when the male, who comes to spy on women's secrets, arouses their bacchant madness. The comic side is the delight in violating ritual solemnity that can deflect a potential Dionysiac tragedy into comic farce.

The enabling power of fashion is revealed throughout Propertius' Book 4 and through the effort to fit novel characters and themes into poetic settings. This last book is indeed the world for a cast of characters who, once established in elegiac reality, attempt to adjust to their background by accessorizing themselves with recognisable properties.

The cases of three feminine personae (4.3, 4.4, 4.6) offer to the elegist a fertile field to experiment with the signifying power of costume. In elegy 4.3, Propertius "dresses" his own persona in the female voice of Arethusa. This *inclusa matrona*, in an attempt to infiltrate her husband's martial world, is willing to switch her sewing equipment with *arma* (29-33), and to join her lover, who also equipped his delicate shoulder with unfit weapons. She pictures herself acting as an Amazon, with breasts bared and a helmet hiding her soft feminine features (43-44). Thus, she usurps the part of a "cross-dresser" in the world of *militia amoris*. In her elegy, the on-going shifting of boundaries where-in Arethusa positions herself should be noticed. This is indicative of a broader uncertainty, and confusion of identity that also troubles Hercules.

The Vestal Tarpeia of elegy 4.4 handles a series of disguises: she is the *virgo* and the *inclusa puella* who evolves into a would-be *matrona* (62). Her costume enables the "false exchange" of her status as a Vestal with that of a bride, while her torn garment renders her an Amazon (72). In elegy 4.6, Cleopatra, a "real" character who enslaves the emasculated Antony, takes up *arma* and leads the army of a man.⁹³ The *pila*

⁹³ In 4.8 the warrior Cynthia wages battle and in line 27 is described as taking over the reins of her chariot, leading her own "triumphal procession."

do not fit in the feminine hand of Cleopatra (*turpiter apta manu*, 22), who in 3.11.48 had been called *regina meretrix* in her shameful adultery with Antony (2.16). Meanwhile, Apollo exchanges his identity as god of poetry for that of god of war and back again as he enters and exits the Battle of Actium.⁹⁴ He changes his attributes and is transformed from a Castalian Apollo who learned unwarlike song on his lyre and ordered Propertius to stay away from epic (3.3, 4.1) to an Apollo armed with his bow and arrows in Augustus' service. Thus, the elegist's cast of characters consists of women who wield weapons and masculine figures who take on female traits as if they were theatrical properties.

Propertius must have in mind the Roman Mime, the only dramatic genre which features women on stage and plays with the concept of transvestism. This genre probably influences the profile of Hercules and the female "cross-dressers" of Book 4. Omphale as a dominatrix who wears Hercules' lion skin and club is also an implied image. In Roman mime the *archimimus* and *archimima* either dress lavishly or perform naked. They are actors who do not play just their own sex, since there are references to mimes donned a *ricinium* (shawl) and impersonating women in mourning.⁹⁵ Appropriate μίμησις of the other sex requires costume: the representation of men is accomplished with padded bodysuits and an oversized φαλλός, while naked women are represented by "genital tights." As Mime becomes obscener, female mimes, catering to the audience's demands, take their costume off displaying their identity on stage.

Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazousae* centers on the issue of transvestism as a device to further the plot. It is worth mentioning that both the Aristophanic play and the Propertian poem are composed under crucial political circumstances; Athenian anti-militarism and Augustan discourse about ongoing *pax*. *Thesmophoriazousae* features a carnival located at the intersection of the relation between male and female, between comedy and ritual. Dressed as a woman, with a costume borrowed from Agathon's wardrobe, Mnesilochus makes his way up the

⁹⁴ DeBrohun 1992, 99.

⁹⁵ Marshall 2006.

sacred hill to mingle with other women on the Pnyx. Androgynous in appearance, he wears an incongruous assortment of male and female accessories.⁹⁶ When women are in a position to rule men, men must become women.⁹⁷ Likewise, Propertius turns the table on Hercules and puts him precisely in the place of Aristophanic characters. The temple of the Bona Dea conveniently serves as the “theatrical space” within the play on which to stage a parody of the Herculean myth.

In festivals outside Athens, men and women changed their costumes for a day, each imitating the behaviour and appearance of the other.⁹⁸ Bacchic rites allowed women in controlled circumstances and for a sustained period to “play the other.”⁹⁹ The quest for Hercules’ connection to dramatic cross-dressing can go much further, but the conclusion will always be that more than one purpose is accomplished in Hercules’ enactment of cross-dressing in the controlled comic and mime setting of the Bona Dea’s threshold.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Ar. *Thesm.* 134-140: “A lute and saffron gown, an animal skin and hair net, an athlete’s oil flask and a brassiere, a sword and a mirror.”

⁹⁷ The women in the *parabasis* (Ar. *Thesm.* 821-829) joke by transferring the names for women’s articles to their masculine counterparts: “we women have kept safe at home our weaving rod (*kanōn*) and sunshade (*skiadeion*), while you men have lost your spearhead (*kanōn*) along with your shield (*skiadeion*).”

⁹⁸ Zeitlin 1996, 344 (e.g., the Cretan Ekdysia and the Argive Hybristika). In addition, in initiation rites at puberty, young men temporarily adopt women’s dress and behaviour.

⁹⁹ Male-to-female cross-dressing rituals occurred in the Oschophoria, where noble youths dressed in women’s dress, carried grape clusters to the priestess of Athena Skiras in Phaleron. Ant. Lib. *Met.* 17.6. Cf. Simon 1983, 90-92. During the Ekdysia festival in Phaistos, boys wearing feminine clothes took them off and donned those of their own sex. The cult had to do with Dionysus’ transvestism – since the god was among the recipients of cult – and was connected with the myth of Theseus’ returning from Crete and having to disguise two young men and to teach them to act like girls; *Vit. Thes.* 23.2-3. Also, the priests of Hercules at Anthimachia in Cos wore a woman’s robe and headdress (μίτρα) commemorating Hercules hiding in female disguise.

¹⁰⁰ Also, *καλλίνυκος* was a dance in honour of Hercules performed by a chorus in women’s dress who were either initiates or a thiasus attached to the

IV. PROPERTIUS ON STAGE

More comic episodes can be detected throughout Propertius' work in specific elegies that reveal direct comic influence and in which the poet assumes the role of the character. Elegy 1.3 for instance, appears as an amusing episode in which the drunken poet returns from a night out to find Cynthia nagging him for staying out late with another woman. Propertius, as *auctor*, provides a comic view of the poet as actor. He is described as having *ebria ... multo vestigia Baccho* (9), and plays himself the Bacchus role, finding his Ariadne alone and asleep.¹⁰¹ The *puella's* suspicions of infidelity recall comedy as well as adultery mimes.¹⁰²

According to the poet's drunken fantasy, Cynthia resembles the Maenad in her potential for violence when awakened; this sleeping devotee of Bacchus is gazed upon by the Bacchic drunk poet. Sleeping Maenads are often depicted next to voyeuristic satyrs who are sexually aroused, in vase-painting related to ancient drama. It is worth noting that a lot of vases depict Hercules and satyrs in performances; satyrs are dressed as Hercules and the hero himself is pictured next to Dionysus, the god of wine, clutching an oversized drinking cup.¹⁰³ The poet's reactions to Cynthia's moans in sleep are amusing for the reader (27-30), as well as Cynthia's rebuke of the poet on waking, that suggests her own possible infidelity (35-40). Cynthia's self-portrait is dubious; she resembles not only a *matrona*, but also a *puella* and *meretrix* of comedy. She claims a list of occupations with which she spent her hours: spinning wool makes her a virtuous *matrona*, whereas her luxurious purple garment suggests the extravagance of an elegiac *puella*.¹⁰⁴ Cynthia's skill on the lyre is an aspect which marks her as a disputable

shrine. In the parabasis of the *Vespaie*, there is reference to this dance (1029-1050) at the point where Aristophanes himself is compared to Hercules. Cf. Ar. *Ach.* 1227-1234; Eur. *HF*, 687; Sen. *HF*, 827-894.

¹⁰¹ Harrison 1994.

¹⁰² See, in particular, Apul. *Met.* 9.26, where a baker's wife declaims against adultery to her husband while her lover is hidden in the house.

¹⁰³ Brommer 1960, 144-145; Galinsky 1972 (Plate 3).

¹⁰⁴ Tib. 2.3.58, 2.4.28.

professional party-entertainer similar to a *meretrix*, who often signals the festival end of Plautine comedies (for instance, in *Stich.*).

It is possible that Propertius adopts a comic situation when writing poem 1.8, the *propempticon* to Cynthia. The triangular relationship involving the lover, the unfaithful courtesan and the soldier is revealed within this episode, where Cynthia refuses to run off with Propertius' soldier rival.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, the same soldier features in elegy 2.16; he is called *barbarus* and comes from the Illyrian campaign to town to rival the poet for Cynthia's affections. He is given the description of a typical comic *miles gloriosus* (*dives*, 19, *stolidus*, 8, which occurs only once elsewhere in elegy, whereas it is a well-established word in comedy). As in Plautus' *Epidicus* and *Curculio*, the rich, stupid braggart comes to town from overseas to buy the lover's girl. The poor lover urges his mistress to exploit the enemy (2.16.7-12) the same way that Phaedria does so with Thais against the *miles* Thraso in the comedy *Eunuchus*.¹⁰⁶ Similar love triangles (subject-object of desire-rival) can be found in comedies such as the *Miles Gloriosus* (*adulescens* Pleusicles, *meretrix* Philocomasium, *miles* Pyrgopolinices) and *Curculio* (*adulescens* Phaedromus, *meretrix* Planesium, *miles* Therapontigonus).

Elegy 3.6 recalls a characteristic episode of Terence's *Heauton Timorumenos* (285-310). Like Lygdamus in Propertius's poem, Syrus finds Antiphila faithful to Clinia and working at the loom in her house. Cynthia cries and gives strong indications of her love and fidelity. The *adulescens amans* of comedy promises the clever slave his freedom in order to obtain his services (*Poen.* 428; *Merc.* 152; *Mil.* 1192). Similarly, Propertius offers this stock bribe to Lygdamus if his quarrel with Cynthia is patched up. In addition, elegy 3.8 adapts a situation provided by comic poets, the *dulcis ira*. Cynthia assaults the poet with furniture and cups and the basic themes revealed in the poem are jealousy, fide-

¹⁰⁵ The same triangular relationship occurs in *Ov. Am.* 3.8, where the poet's rival is described as *dives eques*.

¹⁰⁶ *Pauper amans* is a phrase that occurs frequently in *Prop.* 1.8, 1.14, 2.13b, 2.24c, 2.34, 3.2.

lity and rivals.¹⁰⁷ The ἐρωτοδίδαξις of line 17ff. in elegy 3.8 is reminiscent of scenes in Roman comedy with language that occurs repeatedly in theatre (and only once in Propertius).

Book 4 explores a variety of female figures, ranging from the loyal *matronae* of 4.3 and 4.11 to the prostitutes of 4.5 and 4.8. In elegy 4.5, the physical attack on one's sexual partner occurs in the mouth of the *lena* (31), in an erotodidactic context.¹⁰⁸ The procuress Acanthis is the speaking character in her inserted speech, giving advice to the elegiac *puella*, the way the vile *lenae* do so in Plautus (Syra in *Cistellaria*, Cleareta in *Asinaria*). The procuress enters Book 4 as if already a familiar literary figure, to prepare the ground for elegy 4.9. Her didactic posture is an essential feature of her characterization in comedy.¹⁰⁹ The poet's curses upon her involve thirst, hunger, poverty and death (2-4, 75-78).¹¹⁰ Like the Leana in *Curculio* (*multibiba, merobiba*, 77) and Syra in *Cistellaria* (*multiloqua et multibiba*, 149), Acanthis is described as bibulous, mercenary, and having magical powers over nature (4.4.9-18). To these powers Propertius will turn, seeking an explanation for his lack of erotic success.

The dramatic situation in 4.5 resembles more that of Scapha in the comedy *Mostellaria*, who advises Philematium not to devote herself exclusively to Philolaches.¹¹¹ The young man overhears the conversation and reacts with curses against the *lena*. The dramatic objectivity, with which one sees the poet in Propertius 4.5, resembles the objective perspective the audience had on the lover in the *Mostellaria*.¹¹² Propertius' Acanthis refers to Thais (*comic moecha*, 44) and promotes adultery

¹⁰⁷ The situation goes back to Ar. *Plut.* 1013. Polemon in Menander's *Perikeiromene* is a violently jealous lover. The heroine of the *Rapizomene* suffered violence at the hands of her lover.

¹⁰⁸ Propertius curses the dead *lena* and his verbal abuse echoes her scorn in Ar. *Ecl.* 877-1111. The old procuress was a stock character of the mime, known as *μαγωδία* (Ath. 621c-d). Cf. Ovid's *Dipsas* in *Am.* 1.8, and *Tib.* 1.5, 2.6.

¹⁰⁹ Myers 1996, 3.

¹¹⁰ See Plaut. *Mostell.* 192ff.

¹¹¹ *Mostell.* 168-169, 173.

¹¹² Gutzwiller 1985, 107.

(15). She has been herself a courtesan in her younger days.¹¹³ Her list of luxuries imported from the east takes up parallels in New Comedy, as well as her advice that the mistress should accept a soldier or even a former slave if he has money (4.5.49-52).¹¹⁴ It is worth noting that due to elegy 4.5, the topic of money becomes more pervasive in Propertius' poetry, for it is the cause of the *dolor* that besets Propertius' affair with Cynthia. Acanthis' list of luxuries tallies with the expensive jewels Cynthia demands from Propertius but receives from the *praetor* in 2.16 (17, 43, 55).¹¹⁵ That the lover prefers his mistress unadorned is a motif developed in Propertius 1.2, motivated by fear of rivals who furnish Cynthia with expensive presents (23-26).

Poem 4.8 is a brilliantly executed comedy with Cynthia performing, even though she was dismissed in elegies 3.24 and 3.25 and reported dead in 4.7. The poem, with all its door images, could be read as some kind of reverse *paraclausithyron* (48, 49, 51, 84). Cynthia is situated outside the house's *limen* where she cannot be controlled, and the *exclusus* Propertius utters a cry as he waits for her at the gates of Lanuvium. The poet gets revenge on the woman who has left with another lover, and encloses himself inside. He plans *noctem lenire* and *furta novare* with a pair of *viles puellae* (33-34). The revelry's description is humorous enough to recall comic banquets (a flickering lamp, the table collapsing, Propertius' continual throwing of *damnosi canes* in a dice game, flute players, a castanet player and a dancing dwarf).¹¹⁶ The *exclusa* Cynthia bursts into the house. Hercules' action in 4.9.14 is thus countered (*cum subito rauci sonuerunt cardine postes*, 48). Cynthia can aptly be compared with Artemona in Plautus' *Asinaria* (880ff.), who bursts into the house of Cleareta to catch her husband Demanaetus with the *meretrix* Philaenium, engaged in an after-dinner game of dice.

¹¹³ See *Cist.* 564.

¹¹⁴ Plaut. *Truc.* 51-56, 530-540.

¹¹⁵ *Aurum et ornamenta* are the properties emphasized as identifications of the *meretrix* Philocomasium in Plaut. *Mil.* 981, 1127, 1148.

¹¹⁶ The poet's figure recalls Plato Comicus' Hercules, who combined wenching with eating while playing a dice game with a few prostitutes (*Zeus Afflicted*); cf. Galinsky 1972. See Ov. *Tr.* 2.497-500, 505-506.

Lygdamus appears as an analogue of the stock cunning slave, serving his master, while appearing quite innocent to the furious Cynthia. Cynthia reacts violently and beats her rivals (the comic Phyllis and Teia, 57-62), a moment reminiscent of the violent scenes in *Aulularia* (53ff.) and *Rudens* (759ff.). The poet's purpose is to amuse through the depiction of Cynthia's dramatic entry (*totas resupinat valvas*, 51). The story includes expansive asides on the setting and principal actors. In the final scene, furnished with comic hyperbole, the *puella* establishes her terms of reconciliation (*supplicibus palmis*, 71) and her instructions are intended, like Hercules' at 4.9.67-70, to determine future behaviour. She cleans the threshold, reestablishes herself inside, prepares the setting for Hercules' story and seals the comedy of 4.8 which ends Cynthia's poetry of Book 4. Thus as culmination of comedy in Book 4 comes the incident of Hercules breaking into the sacred enclosed female space, blending gender and tropes, and crossing typical elegiac boundaries.

CONCLUSION

Like certain cross-dressers in other times and cultures who take on another identity for the duration of a performance, Hercules in Propertius 4.9 dons a persona and is veiled with the appearance of a comic lover. Propertius chooses to stage a male victory and aetiology of two different festivals within a book in which feminine "heroines" prevail (4.2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11).¹¹⁷ Exactly because the feminine element predominates, Hercules' effeminacy is necessary for the hero's entry into a "women's space." It is undeniable that elegy 4.9 grants a widened perspective on the relationship of Propertius with theatre. The *paraclausithyron* motif is animated within new contexts and has more to do with its traditional dramatic version. Elegy interacts with comedy and the hero goes out of focus in that second doorway which renders him the protagonist of a comic *paraclausithyron*.

¹¹⁷ Even if the rites of the Bona Dea are enclosed into Hercules' story and nothing is said about the goddess and her cult, the feminine element is elaborately treated and predominates in the poem. On the contrary, Hutchinson (2006, 205) argues that the elegy as a whole subordinates females to males.

The poet takes liberties with the episode and with the cults of Hercules and the Bona Dea. Hercules arrives “loaded” with previous literary treatments (*fessus*), with elements from satyr and mime, to be transformed on the threshold of comedy. His revised myth becomes a comedy of gender fluidity, crossdressing and transgression. Rhinthon’s farces and other lost plays could have contributed elements to this transgressive hero of Propertius. Prop exchange becomes an enabling device throughout Book 4, which reflects the elegiac lover’s refusal to conform to prescribed gender roles in his love poetry. Thus, Propertius manages to link the exclusion episode, which caused much merriment in Roman comedy, with transvestism. Propertius’ awareness of and allusions to comedy throughout his corpus, is intensified in this last book, in which comic figures feed into thematic concerns. The elements tracked in this paper, reveal Propertius imagining his elegiac settings within the frame of a theatrical scene.¹¹⁸

In the process of the hero becoming a “woman,” the elegy plays with the extreme limit of its own premises and identifies intersexuality with intertextuality. Why is Propertius using a comic Hercules? The hero’s image is carefully selected from a wide range of options in the tradition. Only an *exclusus* Hercules could evoke resonances taking the reader back to Clodius’ masquerade episode, to *Thesmophoriazusae*’s political drama and carnivals within ritual settings. With an *exclusus amator* as his actor, Propertius ruptures the boundaries of epic and elegy and establishes a heroic/masculine world, being himself camouflaged as a rejected *adulescens*.¹¹⁹

The use of comic elements allows the poet to enrich Book 4 with entertaining topics which form a climax and a resolution. This is an advance on modern scholarship, whose key point has so far been the generic fusion of fitting the un-elegiac Hercules to the framework of

¹¹⁸ According to D. Spencer (2001), Propertius’ Hercules is an important stage in the hero’s ongoing redefinition.

¹¹⁹ Propertius as Arethusa, Tarpeia, Acanthis, Cynthia (4.7, 4.8) and the Bona Dea priestess, invades amorous spaces within his new “political/aetiological” poetry.

Book 4. Accepting that the masculine and heroic prevails in 4.9, then it becomes clear that Book 4 gradually transcends elegy by means of comedy: the poet takes leave of a dead *lena* (4.5), a dead *meretrix* (4.6) and an episode of exclusion. These elements converge on revealing a “transvestite poet” who once having entered Cynthia’s enclosed realm, now attempts to disengage from amorous topics. Elegy 4.9 initiates a sequence of three closure-poems closely relevant to Augustan political and social interests. Just as the *vigilatio ad clausas fores* marks the beginning of Propertius’ love for Cynthia, its triumph (2.14.31-32) and its end (3.7.71-72), a mistress’ threshold in 4.9 signals a comic climax, an end, and the beginning of the “more” political remainder of Book 4.

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