

PROPERTIUS' PROGRESS OF ROME: ELEGIES 4.4 AND 4.9

Abstract: *The fourth book of Propertius' Elegies marks the progress in the genre of elegy itself, introducing an aetiological aspect. At the same time Propertius' poetic voice expands in order to include a number of different mythological voices. Elegies 4.4 and 4.9 are two representative examples of this, giving voice to Tarpeia and Hercules. The current paper aims to show the progress in the literary figures of Tarpeia and Hercules: Tarpeia will be given her own voice for the first time, inscribing herself in elegy, while an epic struggle of Hercules with Cacus will be replaced by that of Hercules with elegy. It will also be argued that, apart from employing the same literary background, these two elegies are connected through the motives of conflict between female and male, elegy and epic, space and space, and also through the game of appearance and social status. Propertius plays with the expectations of the reader, well acquainted with the 8th book of Virgil's Aeneid and Livy's Ab Urbe Condita, and like a new Evander, he takes us on a journey in time, giving his own account on the progress of locus in Rome. Going backwards in time, from the story of Tarpeia to the one of Hercules and Cacus, the progress in the formation of contemporary Rome and its most recognizable monuments is seen by Propertius as a result of a struggle between mythological figures, who wish to gain access to different genres: the elegiac Tarpeia in the epic space of the epic Tatius and the epic Hercules in the elegiac worship space of Bona Dea.*

Elegies 4th and 9th of the 4th book of Propertius may be in line with the new poetic venture of Propertian aetiological elegy we find throughout the whole book, but their main stories concern two characters who actually don't fit into their surroundings. Tarpeia in the 4th elegy, falling in love with the enemy, will betray Rome and eventually will be punished. Hercules in the 9th elegy, after defeating Cacus, will attempt to enter the shrine of Bona Dea, and in the end will establish the Ara Maxima.

At the beginning of 4.4, Propertius places Tatius and his army in a specific place in the geography of Rome, in the future Forum Romanum (12: *stabant Romano pila Sabina Foro*). Tarpeia, however, is set, in the lines immediately following, in a place almost imaginary, and with arcadian overtones (11-14).

lucus erat felix hederoso conditus antro,
multaque natiuis obstrepit **arbor aquis**,
Silvani ramosa domus, quo dulcis ab aestu
fistula poturas ire iubebat ouis. (4.4.11-4)

Tarpeia is located on this territory, her own liminal space,¹ which appears almost out of nowhere, and so separate from the rest of the Capitoline hill and from any known monument – Propertius never actually names the Capitoline hill. A similar situation occurs in the 4.9. After defeating Cacus and establishing Forum Bovarium, a sudden thirst overcomes Hercules and simultaneously a new sacred arcadian *lucus* appears. Puellae, just like Tarpeia, occupy this imaginary space, a place also difficult to pinpoint on the Aventine hill.

lucus ubi umbroso fecerat orbe nemus,
femineae loca clausa deae fontesque piandos
impune et nullis sacra resecta uiris. (4.9.24-6)

Propertius goes to great lengths to highlight the heroes' ambiguity and liminality. Following Livy, he too makes Tarpeia a Vestal, an equivocal status in itself: the appearance of the vestals was that of a matron and a bride, while at the same time they enjoyed some of men's privileges.² Hercules is in turn also an ambiguous hero traditionally, representing a coexistence of various oppositions.³ In 4.9 he is seen both as a savior, as he defeats Cacus and as a destroyer, when he smashes the entrance of the shrine. Attention is drawn, through his appearance, to his ambiguity throughout his heroic career: virile and epic Hercules carries his *Maenalius ramus* (4.9.15) and wears his facial hair in a true masculine manner (4.9.31: *siccam barbam*). But in his attempt to gain entrance in the *lucus*, Hercules himself will remind the readers his one-time transgendered appearance in the episode of Omphale.

In these liminal and imaginary *loci* where no less ambiguous characters live and interact, elegy as a genre will emerge, as a means of strategy for the heroes to achieve their entrance into a new space. Tarpeia is characterized not as a *virgo*, as it would be proper for a Vestal, but as a *mala puella*. She represents the elegiac chasm between public duty and *amor* and shows the typical reaction of an *exclusus amator*.⁴ Everytime Tarpeia abandons her territory to access a better glimpse of her beloved Tatius, she physically suffers the wounds of love, *vulnera amoris*.

dumque subit primo Capitolia nubile fumo
rettulit **hirsutis bracchia secta rubis**,
et sua Tarpeia residens ita fleuit ab arce
vulnera, uicino non patienda loui. (4.4.26-30)

¹ Stahl (1985) 285 Tarpeia lives in an apolitical, individual, lyrical and pastoral world of her wishes and Welch (2005) 76-7.

² Beard (1980) 12-27, (1995) 165-177

³ Loraux (1990) 24-35.

⁴ King (1990) 233 the scene is set as a *paraklausithyron*.

Equally literally she understands one of the basic *loci* of elegiac poetry, *servitium amoris*: she wishes she could be captured and brought in front of Tattius as a war prisoner. In her imagination she is literally captured.

o utinam ad uestros **sedeam captiua** Penatis,
dum **captiua** mei conspicer ora Tati! (4.4.33-4)

Situated in a non-literary defined space, Tarpeia gradually identifies herself and her one-sided relationship to elegy, and perceives epic Tattius through the distorted lens of the genre. Tattius is seen to engage in military exercises (4.4.19: *uidit harenosis Tattium proludere campis*), but *proludere* here points also to the common meaning of the verb in elegy, which is that of amorous playing.⁵ Tarpeia is infatuated by the epic appearance of Tattius and schemes to find a way to approach him and inscribe him to elegy. Through their marriage she imagines she will have the power to “soften” his *arma* with her embrace (4.4.62: *credite, uestra meus molliet arma torus*) - notice the metapoetic use of the word *molliet* which points to the light themes of elegy and *arma* to the *dura* characteristics of the world of epic respectively.⁶ Tarpeia in the end decides to lead (and in a way enclose) Tattius inside her territory and genre, by showing him the hidden passage to the Capitolium, through a *via lubrica, perfida*, where hidden waters flow underneath (4.4.49-50) – here Callimachean poetics appears to be the way through which Tarpeia will try to inscribe Tattius in elegy.

When Tarpeia manages to seal a deal with Tattius (4.4.82: *pacta ligat*), the reader assumes that Tattius, having his own purpose to fulfill, that of entering the Capitolium, momentarily agrees to the terms proposed by Tarpeia. Propertius, though, constantly reminds the reader of Tattius’ epic character and the military space he had created (4.4.31-2), rushing to violent acts like slaying the guard dogs of the citadel (4.4.84). Tattius’ dishonesty is implicit throughout and when eventually utters his only words in this elegy (4.4.90), readers already know that no happy end will come to Tarpeia. In her real life encounter with Tattius, Tarpeia will be crushed under epic *gravitas* (4.4.91: *ingestis comitum super obruit armis*) and restored, in a way, to her initial status of *virgo* (4.4.92).

Epic Hercules faces a similar situation to Tattius, when after completing his epic *labor* against Cacus, arrives at the shrine of Bona Dea. He is also a kind of *exclusus amator* - the shrine hides a group of enclosed *puellae* (4.9.23). The term *puella* like in the case of Tarpeia, is also here problematic,

⁵ Welch (2005) 73.

⁶ De Brohun (2005) 182.

considering the status of the Vestae and aristocratic *matronae*, who traditionally practiced the cult of Bona Dea in the day of Propertius.⁷

Our hero arrives in *limina divia*, a liminal space, like the one where Tarpeia lived (again Callimachean poetics characterizes this space), inside which Hercules for the first time is challenged to enter.⁸ In order to accomplish this new *labor*, he realizes he has to diminish his epic status - he will speak as a *minus deus* (4.9.32) and then as a *homo* (4.9.41). But as a newcomer in this place, Hercules doesn't know how to behave and speak properly. Contrary to Tarpeia, Hercules sees the situation through an epic lens, and he opens his speech in elevated style as he moves on to the enumeration of his epic *labores* – he concludes, however, with the literal introduction of a basic elegiac motive, that of *labores amoris*.

audistisne aliquem, tergo qui sustulit orbem?
Ille ego sum: Alciden terra recepta vocat.
quis facta Herculeae non audit fortia clauae
et numquam ad uastas irrita tela feras,
atque uni Stygias homini luxisse tenebras? (4.9.37-41)

And once again, like Tarpeia, he displays his experience with elegy in pointing out his *servitium amoris*, literally his enslavement to Omphale.

The reference to the Omphale-episode contains the official attempt on Hercules's part to inscribe himself into the elegiac shrine, by effeminizing himself.

idem ego Sidonia feci **seruilia** palla
officia et **Lydo pensa** diurna **colo**,
mollis et hirsutum cepit mihi **fascia** pectus,
et **manibus duris apta puella** fui. (4.9.47-50)

As a slave to the oriental queen, the hero used to wear a *Sidonian palla*, a garment worn mostly by the Propertian *puella*⁹, and his *officia* (duties) were those of spinning wool. Still, his elegiac credentials do not convince the priestess of the Bona Dea shrine. Like in the case of Tattius, the virile and epic elements of his persona are clear to see in Hercules, as well: the image of the dress covering his hairy chest certainly does not point to an *apta puella*, while his weaving skill has strong metapoetic connotations: his 'rough' *dura* hands which point to epic poetry, attempt to produce a *levis textum*, but these two elements put together is incongruous and unrealistic. In the next line, the apostrophe Alcides increases the epic tone; as a result, the priestess of the shrine tells the hero that this is not a place for him. In the end, Hercules

⁷ Welch (2004) 69-75.

⁸ De Brohun (2005) 202.

⁹ De Brohun (2005) 160.

will go back to what he knows best, being the masculine and epic hero he always was, and so he enforces his entrance, by destroying the shrine.

The first instance of progress noticed here, is that of the literary evolution of the characters. The story of Tarpeia had received a brief treatment in Livy's first book of *Ab Urbe Condita*. There, Tarpeia never speaks and the motive of her betrayal is greed.¹⁰ The fight of Cacus and Hercules was also known to Propertius from Livy, and of course from Virgil, *Aeneid* 8. Both the story of Tarpeia and the Herculean *adventus* at Rome, appear in some way in the leading episode of *Aeneid* 8, the encounter between Aeneas and Evander, by which Virgil foreshadows the future glory of Aeneas, Augustus and Rome. Propertius provides the *aetion* for the Tarpeian rock, which Evander points to Aeneas during their tour in the early site of Rome (8.347-8), a tour that follows his narration of the Hercules-Cacus episode¹¹ (*Aen.* 8.347-8: *Hinc ad Tarpeiam sedem et Capitolia ducit aurea nunc, olim silvestribus horrida dumis*). The Tarpeian rock is mentioned a second time in *Aeneid* 8, in the *ecphrasis* on the shield of Aeneas, where it is linked with another story of betrayal of the Capitoline hill, by Manlius, which led to Gallic invasions (*Aen.* 8.652: *in summo custos Tarpeiae Manlius arcis stabat pro templo et Capitolia celsa tenebat*). Previously in the same *ecphrasis*, Virgil mentions the *captatio* of the Sabine women and the peace treaty between Romulus and Tatius (*Aen.* 8.635-638). Hercules may not appear on the shield, but scholars have noted the link between Aeneas and Hercules and subsequently with Augustus: Hercules brings safety to primitive Rome, defeating monstrous Cacus, while Augustus brings safety and peace to Rome, defeating the monstrous Egyptian gods, as depicted in the Actium episode on the shield.¹² For Virgil, the Evander episode provides him with the opportunity to insert in the narrative early landmarks familiar to the contemporary reader – Arcadia may be an imaginary place, but Virgil pays attention to the presentation of the topography of Rome; he wants the reader to have a clear visual image in his mind, so he can realize that the image of contemporary Rome is the organic continuation of what Aeneas sees.¹³ The same notion of progress runs through the *ecphrasis*, where through the shift in focalization different historical aspects of Rome appear,¹⁴ given in chronological order.¹⁵ Propertius wants to comment on the cyclical progress we see in Virgil, when he chooses to include in his 4th book these two episodes. Propertius is the new

¹⁰ Ogilvie (1965) 74-5.

¹¹ Wyke (1987) 162.

¹² Galinsky (1990) 287-91.

¹³ Rothwell (1996) 832.

¹⁴ Barchiesi (2005) 299.

¹⁵ Woodman (1989) 132-4.

Evander, and picks up from the king of Pallanteum the task to guide us through his Rome, but he distorts the linearity of time: the reader is surprised to find first the episode of Tarpeia and then the one of Hercules. And he will be even more confused upon finding elegy 4.6 almost in the middle of this set of poems, narrating the battle of Actium and then the elegy 4.10, with the *aetion* for the temple of Jupiter Feretrius. In my opinion, Propertius provides through the arrangement of these elegies a counterpart not only for the Evander episode, but also for the *ecphrasis* on the shield of Aeneas: he narrates stories with different focalization and point of view each time, various moments in the history of Rome, giving in the middle the same major episode of Rome's history- the battle of Actium.

Just like Virgil in the episode of Evander, Propertius creates the atmosphere of an imaginary place, an Arcadia, the ideal setting for contemporary poetry in order to introduce poetic and topographic changes. The narrative of 4.4 begins with the epic term *labor* (4.4.2). Respectively, 4.9 starts in elevated tone.

Amphitryoniades qua **tempestate** iuuenos
 egerat a stabulis, o **Erythea**, tuis,
 uenit ad inuictos pecorosa Palatia montis,
 et statuit fessos fessus et ipse boues,
 qua Velabra suo stagnabant flumine quoque
 nauta per urbanas uelificabat aquas.
 sed non infido manserunt hospite **Caco**
 incolumes. (4.9.1-8)

Amphitryoniades points to *Aeneid* (*Aen.* 8.214: *Amphitryoniades armenta abitumque pararet*), and *tempestate* is common in Cicero and Livy, but rare in Augustan poetry.¹⁶ The description of the place composes an Arcadian image set in front of us, while the first mention of Cacus (7), leads the reader mentally back to the Virgilian Arcadia. However, Arcadia is a poetic construction and Propertius inserts the same motive in elegy,¹⁷ thus contributing to the genre's progress. This progress is marked by the *lucus*, as we just saw earlier, inside which Tarpeia and Hercules are inspired to exhibit their elegiac selves. This *lucus* suggests that we are not going to read again an epic, Virgilian story. 4.4. records the elegiac *aetion* of the Tarpeian rock that Evander points to Aeneas. In 4.9, Hercules may seem to have arrived in Rome to defeat Cacus once again, for the third time in his literary career (4.9.15: *tria tempora*), but the defeat of Cacus is executed in no time. The reader can almost picture the surprise of the Virgilian Hercules, who after finishing this last labour, comes face to face with a *lucus* that was never there in his previous "visits" in Livy or Virgil. And his surprise will be even greater when in juxtaposition to his reception by Evander,

¹⁶ Hutchinson (2006) 206, 210 and equally heroic-pastoral is *ite boves* (4.9.16).

¹⁷ Papaioannou (2013) 145.

the priestess –who addresses him, like Evander *hospes* (4.9.53)- will deny him entrance. This Propertian Arcadian grove is not a place for the Virgilian Hercules.

By constructing in his topography these two *luci*, Propertius manages to find a place where elegy can emerge and find a place in early Rome. In 4.4 the Parilia, the birthday of the city of Rome, are celebrated in the city, and in 4.9, elegy appears the day Hercules arrives to Rome and establishes Ara Maxima, a cornerstone for the city as this day was linked later by Augustus with his own arrival in the city after his triple triumph. The elegiac behavior of the two heroes that comes as a result of these *luci*, creates the topographic monuments. Propertius manages to demonstrate the re-foundation and progress of the genre by choosing landmark periods of Rome and showing this new elegy almost to be created then. Apart from that, the aetiology of basic motives of elegy is present here too: we've already seen the literary use of the motives of *vulnera amoris*, *servitium amoris*. Propertius created a link from the past to the present, in order to show the progress of these themes; the actual enslavement to their beloved or the physical pain that the heroes suffer, become from now on, common poetic motives of the genre of elegy.

As he has already stated in the first programmatic elegy of book 4th, Propertius constructs his own version of a Rome. This version emerges gradually from elegy to elegy. Although representation of space in Propertius is generally vague and impossible to locate with precision, the poet singles out landmarks of contemporary Rome. He provides a new portrait of his city, a counterpart to the city Augustus had created.¹⁸ In his time, Augustus reorganized the city, creating an urban identity and a visual homogeneity through the restoration of the Palatine hill and the urban space of Rome.¹⁹ In every aspect of everyday life in Rome like art, architecture, religion and even the calendar, Augustus created a united and seamless image that linked him to Aeneas and the foundation of Rome to the contemporary glory of the city. Propertius comments on this progress in Rome not as a straightforward linear procedure, but as the result of the interaction between opposite forces.

This paper tried to depict Propertius' own attempt, like his heroes, to enter unknown territory for the genre of elegy, to create a notion of progress in the development of conventional motives, themes, and stories. Elegy becomes the ideal genre for representing Rome's progress through time, a progress, which for Propertius, when unveiled, is a result of ambiguity and conflict, both characteristics of the genre itself.

G. FERENTINOU
University of Athens

¹⁸ Fantham (1997) 129, 132.

¹⁹ Wallace-Handrill (2005) 77-78, Raucci (2011) 59-60.

Bibliography

- Barchiesi, A. (2005), "Learned Eyes: Poets, Viewers, Image Makers" in Galinsky, K. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Augustus*, Cambridge University Press, New York: 281-305.
- Beard, M. (1980), "The Sexual Status of Vestal Virgins", *JRS* 70: 12-27.
- Beard, M. (1995), "Re-reading (Vestal) Virginité" in Hawley, R. — Levick, B. (eds.), *Women in Antiquity: New Assessments*, Routledge, London/New York: 165-177.
- De Brohun, J.B. (2003), *Roman Propertius and the reinvention of elegy*, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.
- Fantham, E. (1997), "Images of city: Propertius' new old Rome" in Habinek, T. — Schiesaro, A. (eds.), *The Roman Cultural Revolution*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 122-135.
- Galinsky, K. (1990), "Hercules in the *Aeneid*" in Harrison, S.J. (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Vergil's Aeneid*, Oxford University Press, Oxford/New York: 277-294.
- Hutchinson, G. (2006), *Propertius' Elegies: Book IV*, Cambridge University Press, New York.
- King, R. (1990), "Creative Landscaping: Inspiration and Artifice in Propertius' 4.4", *CJ* 85 (3): 225-246.
- Loroux, N. (1990), "Heracles: the super-male and the feminine" in Halperin, D.M. — Winkler, J.J. — Zeitlin, F. (eds.), *Before Sexuality: The construction of erotic experience in the ancient Greek world*, Princeton University Press, Princeton: 21-52.
- Lindheim, S.H. (1998), "Hercules Cross-Dressed, Hercules UnDressed: Unmasking the Construction of the Propertian "Amator" in Elegy 4.9", *AJP* 119 (1): 43-66.
- Ogilvie, R.M. (1965), *A Commentary on Livy: books 1-5*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Papaioannou, S. (2013), "Embracing Virgil's 'Arcadia': Constructions and Representations of a literary topos in the poetry of the Augustans", *Acta Ant. Hung.* 53: 145-170.
- Rauci, S. (2011), *Elegiac eyes: vision in Roman love elegy*, Lang, New York.
- Rothwell, K. S. Jr. (1996), "Propertius on the site of Rome", *Latomus* 55 (4): 829-854.
- Stahl, H.P. (1985), *Propertius: "Love" and "War": Individual and State under Augustus*, University of California Press, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London.
- Wallace-Handrill, A. (2005), "Mutatas Formas: The Augustan Transformation of Roman Knowledge" in Galinsky, K. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Augustus*, Cambridge University Press, New York: 55-84.
- Welch, T.S. (2004), "Masculinity and Monuments in Propertius 4.9", *AJP* 125 (1): 61-90.
- Welch, T.S. (2005), *The Elegiac Cityscape: Propertius and the Meaning of Roman Monuments*, The Ohio State University Press, Ohio.
- Woodman, A.J. (1989), "Virgil the Historian: *Aeneid* 8.626-662 and Livy" in Diggle, J. — Hall, J.B. — Jocelyn, H.D. (eds.), *Studies in Latin literature and its tradition: in honour of C.O.Brink*, Cambridge Philological Society, Cambridge: 132-145.
- Wyke, M. (1987), "The Elegiac Woman at Rome", *PCPhS* 33: 153-178.

Keywords

Roman elegy Propertius Propertian cityscape Aeneid Augustan Rome