

Boundaries and Religion in Propertius Book 4

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M.A., University of Kansas, 2018
B.A., Baylor University, 2016

Submitted to the graduate degree program in Classics and the Graduate Faculty of the
University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Date Defended: 10 May 2018

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ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on Propertius' use of the imagery of physical boundaries in Book Four, specifically walls, doors, and gates. Propertius' fourth book of poetry engages closely with the culture of his time, perhaps representing the change wrought on the republic through a changed form of poetry, and in exploring the intangible shifts through the tangible city which is around them all, and which is the epicenter of a new series of problems. Through the repeated imagery of boundaries destroyed, created, and manipulated, Propertius emphasizes how the powerful are those with the ability to manipulate boundaries. Although his examples of this power remain primarily in the realm of physical boundaries, the metaphor clearly extends to societal and religious divisions as well. I argue that the continuous appearance of boundaries is more than incidental but can be read as a commentary on Rome at this time. This project thus examines how physical and religious boundaries factor into Propertius' reflections on Roman identity, reflections which seem especially focused on the changed meaning of "Roman" from antiquity to his time.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank especially Tara Welch, my thesis and life advisor, for her endless encouragement, kindness, and wisdom. Her guidance has helped me to grow as a teacher, a scholar, and a person throughout my time in the Master's program. Additionally, I owe a debt of gratitude to Emma Scioli, whose thoughtful comments and advice have been invaluable and for which I am exceedingly grateful. I also appreciate Craig Jendza's feedback on this project, and general good-humor. I am exceedingly grateful for the chance to learn alongside my friends and cohort members, Rachel Morrison, Katri Niemi, and Michael Fons, who are all amazing humans with an unending capacity for therapeutic complaining. I would not be here without the strong academic foundation I gained at Baylor University under the mentorship of Alden Smith, Meghan DiLuzio, and Julia Hejduk. Finally, I would like to thank the entire Classics department at the University of Kansas for this amazing opportunity to study and flourish in a challenging yet encouraging environment.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
POEM 4.1	6
POEM 4.4	17
POEM 4.7	28
POEM 4.9	35
POEM 4.10	41
CONCLUSION	45
BIBLIOGRAPHY	50

Introduction

Roman Elegiac poetry was a short-lived genre, flowering and dying in only about 50 years. In its developed form, it began with Gallus likely around 50 BCE and ends with Ovid's *Amores* by the end of the century. The genre is characterized by This was a period filled with intense military, societal, political, and religious conflict. Rapid and far-reaching military conquests added a new dimension to the question of Roman identity, as people from the Near East to Britannia found themselves subjects of the Roman empire. Facing the dissolution of the republic and political restructuring following decades of civil war, traditional understandings of the role of elite men was thrown into disarray. The city of Rome itself underwent massive changes, as Augustus rebuilt many and important monuments to reflect his own ideology. These appear to have been necessary conditions which, once resolved in the Augustan peace of the early 1st c. CE, signaled the end of the elegiac era. It has been noted that, as a genre and throughout all individual authors, elegiac poetry becomes more explicitly politically involved after the 20s BCE.¹ Characteristically, the setting of elegy is the city of Rome itself. It is intensely tied to the culture and physicality of this particular place, which nevertheless is representative of the vast Roman empire as well. Elegy thus is a response to a culturally and temporally particular turmoil, a mode of artistic expression developed to understand to understand the rapidly shifting Roman status and identity.

Sextus Propertius wrote in the middle of this period, and his first book of poetry reflects a fully formed elegiac style. Thought to have been born in the mid-to-late 50s and to have died sometime around 15 BCE, he published four books of poetry in approximately 29/8, 25, 23, and

¹ Harrison (2013) 140-144.

16. Born to an elite family from Umbria, following the death of his father and the confiscation of the family's land, he was raised and educated by his maternal relatives. Although a resident in Rome for his adult life, he nevertheless proudly claims Umbria as his homeland in several poems, and expresses sympathies for Etruria as well.² As a member of the inner circle of Maecenas, Augustus' close friend and patron of poets such as Virgil and Horace, Propertius had close access to other prominent poets and the realm of elite politics in Rome.³ His poetry thus reflects an interaction with that of his contemporaries and shows his viewpoint from the epicenter of the changing city of Rome.

This thesis focuses exclusively on the poetry of Book 4, which has received much scholarly attention due to its quirky and self-reflective nature. In contrast with the first three books, Book 4 does not focus on the poet's relationship with his mistress, Cynthia. Rather, in the programmatic first poem he announces a shift to a new subject: Rome. Instead, he states that he will tell of the history of Rome through aetiology of places and religious rites: *sacra diesque canam et cognomina prisca locorum* (I shall sing of sacred rites and days and the ancient names of places 4.1.69).⁴ It is these two aspects, the physical locations and their religious resonances, which this project will examine. Aware of his poetry's own departure from custom, Propertius begins his book by addressing the reader as a stranger, recognizing that despite any familiarity with his previous works, all are unfamiliar with what he is about to present: *hoc quodcumque vides, hospes, qua maxima Roma est* (Here, whatever you see, stranger, in this place is great Rome 4.1.1). *Roma* falls at the end of the line due to the elision with *est*, providing a bookend to the beginning of the very first poem, 1.1: *Cynthia prima suis miserum me cepit ocellis* (Cynthia

² Prop. 1.21, 1.22, 4.1

³ For more biographical information, see Keith (2013) 97-113.

⁴ I use the text from Barber (1957).

first seized me, miserable, with her eyes 1.1.1). This captures the change from Book 1 to 4, as he turns from Cynthia to Rome, and from largely inward facing personal poetry to that which looks out at society and engages with it on its own grounds (literally). Book 4 has also intrigued scholars because despite his recusal of elegy, many poems in this book have clear elegiac themes. The interaction of genres, including epic, elegy, and aetiology, has received copious attention. The focus on Rome, her history, and monuments in this book makes it inherently more political than previous books, and poem 4.6, on Augustus' victory at Actium, is the most explicitly laudatory of all. Scholars debate the sincerity of Propertius' praise, but all agree that the Princeps and the transformations he brings about in Roman society are at the forefront of book 4. Propertius' fourth book of poetry engages closely with the culture of his time, perhaps representing the change wrought on the republic through a changed form of poetry, and in exploring the intangible shifts through the tangible city which is around them all, and which is the epicenter of a new series of problems.

Unfortunately, the scope of my project is not sufficient to address every poem in book 4. Thus I have chosen a selection of poems which best represent my argument, although I believe my claims are applicable to book 4 as a whole. I will examine poems 1, 4, 7, 9, and 10. Others, notably Tara Welch (2005), have examined how Propertius' fourth book interacts with the physicality of Rome and its monuments, arguing that they function as a commentary on the changes made during the transition from republic to empire. I, however, will focus on Propertius' use of the imagery of physical boundaries, specifically walls, doors, and gates. I will argue that their appearance is more than incidental, but can be read as a commentary on Rome at this time.

I will examine how these boundaries factor into Propertius' reflections on Roman identity, reflections which seem especially focused on the changed meaning of "Roman" from

antiquity to his time. These reflections are perhaps based in Augustus' desire to reinvigorate ancient and forgotten religious cults and rituals at the same time as the empire is the largest and most diverse it has yet been. Roman discourse of the 1st c. BCE filtered this incongruity and instability of identity through the over-simplified dichotomy of Roman/Not Roman, a division which changed throughout Roman history. As those who were excluded have become included, the word "Roman" has been harder to define. The ability to include or exclude someone as a Roman is the ultimate power, and the number of people who have the ability to create divisions and exclusions has become more and more restricted throughout the 1st c. BCE as power consolidated in the hands of a few men. This culminated with Augustus who, as stated earlier, used his power to project an antiquated definition of "Roman" in a (successful) attempt to keep himself in power. Perhaps due to a connection between living through change and then seeing things that were seemingly immutable suddenly able to be manipulated, Propertius is especially attuned to the power of manipulating boundaries, both physical and societal. His fourth book of poetry both reflects on this and draws attention to those who are excluded and punished for challenging divisions.

While this thesis is primarily focused on Propertius' imagery of physical structures, it will also touch on something a bit more intangible—religion. What exactly the 'religion' of the Romans was is a topic of great debate, which will likely never be resolved entirely. Nevertheless, numerous scholars have done extensive work on individual facets of the various and multifaceted religious practices of the Romans, with the result that many rituals, priesthoods, festivals, and other aspects of religious practice are understood and agreed upon, although the meaning tends to remain more elusive.⁵ Furthermore, scholars such as Bruce MacBain and Eric Orlin have

⁵ Beard, North, Price (1998); Cumont (1956); DiLuzio (2016); Orlin (1997), (2010); Palmer (1974); Rüpke (1997); Scheid (2003); Schultz (2006); Turcan, Nevill (1996).

argued persuasively that the Romans used religious practice as a tool for manipulation of foreign policy and domestic politics. It has long been recognized that religion and politics were closely connected for the Romans, with those in the positions of greatest political power also holding important priesthods.⁶ Thus it is not a far leap to believe that representations of religious practice or power could also be used to comment on (or participate in) that manipulation.

Despite some gaps in our knowledge, it is clear that religious practice was a prevalent force throughout the Republic and empire and should not be ignored as a tool for creating meaning and imagery in written works.⁷ I will thus also examine religious imagery in Book Four of Propertius' elegies, but in the context of the discussion of boundaries. My examination will focus on how the Romans used religious practice to create or remove divisions in society to maintain order and control, and conversely how Propertius' use of the religious imagery challenges these divisions and their implications. I will posit that Book Four's imagery of boundaries, as a whole, ultimately reveals the arbitrary nature of these divisions and of the binary understanding of *Romanitas*, allowing for Propertius to represent the complex reality of the late Republic and early Empire.

Book Four is saturated with references to the physicality of Rome: its monuments, topography, and the structures that demarcate its spaces. The most notable and frequently mentioned structures are walls (*mur* and *moenia*). This is significant because walls are the prime example of a man-made physical boundary, designed to keep the chosen in and the undesired out. Propertius' emphasis on walls is restricted to city walls, and his imagery often involves the construction or destruction of these walls. I shall first argue that Propertius evokes

⁶ MacBain (1982); Orlin (1997); Schultz (2006).

⁷ Scholars have analyzed the role of religious practice in individual authors or genres: Marquis (1974); Levene (1993).

literal, physical walls in Book 4 to help illustrate various divisions in contemporary Roman culture and to draw attention to the boundaries, physical or not, that create them.

Poem 4.1

Poem 4.1, the programmatic introduction to Propertius' most unusual book wherein he lays out his aetiological aims and the first history of Rome's beginning, contains the highest concentration of evocations of physical walls. The emphasis on walls in the introductory poem signals to the reader the importance of walls throughout the book, similarly to the way in which other sections from 4.1 introduce characters and themes that will be discussed in subsequent poems.⁸ The usage of walls in this poem also demonstrates the variety of ways that Propertius will use them throughout Book 4: the walls of Rome, foreign walls, and metaphorical walls. His treatment of walls in this poem also encapsulates the perspectives on boundaries that he will explore in Book 4. He will both praise and castigate walls, recognizing simultaneously their usefulness and the problems inherent in creating divisions. He begins to address themes that will resurface throughout Book 4, questioning whether Rome's walls in particular, and Roman cultural boundaries more generally, are additive (constructed for the purpose of including) or exclusionary.

Rome's walls are intimately bound up in Rome's early history and are metonymic for the city itself. Rome's beginning is understood in terms of Romulus' construction of the walls, celebrated in the Parilia, which is by the late Republic a celebration of the establishment of Rome by Romulus. According to legend, on the 21st of April in 753 BCE Romulus drew out the

⁸ Hutchinson (2006) 1-23.

pomerium, intimately linking Rome's very existence with its first boundary, and placing emphasis on the walls as an important aspect of their identity.⁹ Through his poetry, Propertius casts himself as the creator of walls, a new Romulus, usurping the idea of walls for his own benefit. He acknowledges that they have benefits for protection and for creation of identity, among other benefits, but he does this without ever fully endorsing them.

Poem 4.1: Religion Destabilized

As discussed above, the introductory and programmatic nature of poem 4.1 coincides with its establishment of themes that will continue throughout Book Four. A division established from the outset of the poem is that between past and present, considered in a strict binary wherein the past is vastly superior. The poem begins with an invitation to the reader, imagined as a total stranger to the city of Rome: *hoc quodcumque vides, hospes, qua maxima Roma est, / ante Phrygem Aenean collis et herba fuit* (Here whatever you see, stranger, where great Rome is, was hills and grass before Phrygian Aeneas 4.1.1-2). In the first line the reader learns that the city of Rome will feature prominently in the book. Rome is called "great" both in respect to quality and size, contrasting with the following description of the non-existence of Rome. The contrast between past and present is also made clear through the parallel line-endings of this first couplet: *est* and *fuit*. Additionally, attention is drawn to the Phrygian origins of Aeneas, the second reference to a non-Roman in two lines (the other being the *hospes*). The divide between past and present exists not only in the physical form of the city, but in the customs of its inhabitants.

Propertius draws attention next to the changes in religious practice:

Atque ubi Navali stant sacra Palatia Phoebos,
Evandri profugae procubere boves.
Fictilibus crevere deis haec aurea templa,

⁹ All Latin text from Barber (1957).

Nec fuit opprobrio facta sine arte casa;
Tarpeiusque pater nuda de rupe tonabat,
Et Tiberis nostris advena bubus erat.

Also where the Palatine stands sacred to Naval Phoebus, the wandering cows of Evander lie down. These golden temples arose from clay gods, nor was a cottage built without skill a cause for shame; and the Tarpeian father was thundering from the bare cliff, and the ox was a foreigner to our Tiber. (4.1.3-8)

Propertius particularly showcases the changes and expansions to physical temples that have occurred since the foundation of the city, all three mentioned in the hexameter. These are contrasted with examples of rural domesticity in the pentameter. The first mention is of the temple of Palatine Apollo, here called “Naval” in reference to the cause of its construction. Dedicated by Augustus in 28 BCE in fulfillment of a vow made at the battle of Actium, Propertius thus begins with mention of one of the newer temples in Rome, and one with a politically charged history. The temple of Palatine Apollo will also receive its own poem in Book Four, five poems later. In line 5 the imagery is more vague, lacking an explicit referent, but makes clear the changes that time has wrought through the imagery of gold replacing simple clay.

The third example comes in line 7 and references the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus. As in line 3 when Apollo was referred to obliquely, here the temple is indicated by an archaic title, the “Tarpeian father.” The emphasis is on not the modern temple to Jupiter on the Capitoline, which was originally called the *Mons Tarpeius*, but on the original temple on the site. Most scholars believe Tarpeius to be etymologically related to the Sabine Tarquinius, given the name following the Sabine habitation in the northwest portion of Rome. In addition to emphasizing the archaic nature of Jupiter Capitolinus, Propertius also is hinting at the potentially non-Roman origins of the cult. Thus in three references to temples there is a contemporaneous example, a bridge

between past and present, and an example situated in the past, as Propertius shows the constancy of change and the prevalence of non-Roman practices throughout Rome's religious history.

Additionally, these lines signal the use of a rhetorical technique which will continue throughout poem 4.1—Propertius' elision of all of Rome's past into one condensed "time." There is no awareness of the passage of hundreds of years in his presentation of former Rome; it is as if everything happened simultaneously and no changes occurred during that time. This phenomenon makes the contrast with present Rome more severe, but also more jarring as the only distinction presented is "then" and "now." Yet Propertius' general "past" is not consistent either. Rather, it groups Evander, Aeneas, the temple to Jupiter on the Capitoline, Remus, the Curia, the Quirites and the senate together in 14 lines, all of which are incompatible in the same place at the same time. This lack of distinction between different points in Rome's history sheds doubt on Propertius' seemingly stark presentation of the divide between past and present, leading the reader to question whether the boundary between past and present is as secure as Propertius presents it to be.

The Foundation of Rome: Romulus' walls

The first mention of walls in the poem, significantly, concerns Romulus' founding of Rome and equates Rome and Romulus with the walls: *optima nutricum nostris lupa Martia rebus, / qualia creverunt moenia lacte tuo* (the best of nursemaids for our affairs, the wolf of Mars, what great walls grew from your milk 4.1.55-56). Propertius' she-wolf nourishes the walls with her milk, a metaphor that identifies Romulus with the *moenia*. The image of the she-wolf nursing the city is very physical, and Jeri Debrohun has observed that it reverses the usual

metaphor in that the city is not the nourisher but the nourished.¹⁰ This adds to the imagery of the city growing and expanding as if a living being nursed by a mother, imagery which is present in Propertius' juxtaposition of past and present Rome.¹¹ Propertius thus emphasizes the boundaries of Rome as additive, expanding to categorize more people and territory as "Roman." Earlier in the poem a seemingly incongruous view of the she-wolf is presented: *nil patrium nisi nomen habet Romanus alumnus: / sanguinis altricem non putet esse lupam* (The Roman foster child has nothing of his fathers except the name: He would not think that a wolf was the nourisher of his blood 4.1.37-38). Propertius here characterizes his contemporary Romans as disbelieving of the old Roman history/myth, and potentially as having lost sight of what it is to be a 'Roman.' According to Propertius, Romans are foster children, as was Romulus. Thus their lack of belief in the reality of their foster mother also perhaps indicates a disenchantment with this traditional Roman narrative and the values of war and foreign conquest (values present through the she-wolf's description as "of Mars" and Romulus' descent from the same god), which are initiated by Romulus himself in order to found the city of Rome.¹² This skepticism about the foundation narrative combined with the use of *alumnus* also draws attention to the large percentage of the Roman state which was foreign-born, even including Romulus himself. This incorporation of the word *alumnus* in combination with the dismissal of the myth of the she-wolf challenges whether Romans from other places are still able to participate in the narrative. If they do not think of the she-wolf as a mother, according to the standard set forth by Propertius, they are not truly 'Roman,' because the she-wolf is not just the mother of Romulus, but of Rome itself (lines 55-56). The she-wolf, in addition to being the best nursemaid at line 55, is also described as the *lupa*

¹⁰ Debroun (2003) 92.

¹¹ 4.1.1-36.

¹² Janan (2001) 135: She notes the "impassable gap" this couplet creates between the Romans of Propertius' era and their ancestors.

Martia, referencing Romulus' descent from the god Mars. This reference to the god of war characterizes the walls as important to conflict, and draws attention to the offensive nature of city walls, which expand outward to conquer and claim new territory. This conflicting imagery of the she-wolf, as nurturing mother and fierce animal, illustrates the dualistic nature of Roman boundaries, which are either inclusive and accepting (to Rome's allies) or fiercely oppositional (to their enemies).

Significantly, this discussion of Rome's foundation by Romulus follows immediately upon two couplets which vividly portray Rome's other foundation myth, that of Aeneas and the Trojan refugees:

aut si Pergamae sero rata carmina vatis
longaevum ad Priami vera fuere caput:
'vertite equum, Danaï! Male vincitis! Ilia tellus
vivet, et huic cineri Iuppiter arma dabit.' (51-54)

Or if the lately spoken prophecies of the Trojan prophet were told to the old head of Priam truly: 'Turn around your horse, Danaans! You conquer poorly! The Trojan land shall live, and Jupiter will give arms to this ash.'

Both Romulus' and Aeneas' myths are referenced obliquely, eliding the main characters from the story and focusing on the previous generation, Priam, and the she-wolf/Mars. Propertius draws attention to the ashen ruins of Troy (*huic cineri*), and describes the destruction of the city, also evoking the associated tearing-down of its famous walls.¹³ Propertius focuses on the necessity that Troy must fall for Rome to rise, because without the destruction of Troy, Aeneas does not have the divine compulsion to move his Penates to Italy, which Virgil had recently established as the beginning of the Roman people.¹⁴ Rome's basis in violence and murder is especially relevant because Cassandra is the *vates* who speaks the prophecy in 4.1; Cassandra is cursed that her

¹³ Book 2 of the *Aeneid*, published around 19 BCE, would be fresh in the minds of Propertius and his readers.

¹⁴ Book 4 was likely published around 16 BCE. For further discussion of the *Aeneid*'s influence on 4.1, see Debroun (2003) 33-85.

prophecies never be believed, and she is ultimately murdered herself. Additionally, the evocation of Rome's walls in the following couplet perhaps calls to mind Remus' death as he transgressed his brother's wall, linking both foundation narratives to violence. The final aspect of Cassandra's prophecy specifies that Jupiter will favor Troy, which lives on as Rome, specifically by giving weapons. Seemingly, the fate of Rome to excel in war is in retribution for the loss in the Trojan War, and similarly the rising of Rome's walls follows upon the destruction of Troy's. Taken together, these two references to Rome's foundation myths credit their successes to arms, walls, and Mars.¹⁵ Just as Rome's foundation is based in the violent destruction of walls, the creation of any boundary often necessitates the destruction of another.

The Prophet of Umbria and Metapoetics

The second mention of walls in 4.1 comes in the following couplet, emphasizing the importance of the imagery through the close proximity: *moenia namque pio coner disponere versu: / ei mihi, quod nostro est parvus in ore sonus* (For I shall attempt to set out walls with a pious verse: alas for me, that there is a small sound in my mouth 4.1.57-58). The use of *disponere* works with *moenia* to create a vivid metaphor. The literal meaning of *dis-ponere* (to distribute, position, lay out) also refers to the function of walls, to keep things apart, as walls divide.¹⁶ The close repetition of *moenia* juxtaposes the two variant uses, line 56 of the literal walls of Rome, and line 57 of metaphorical ones. The use of language with metapoetic significance, such as *disponere*, *parvus*, *prio versu*, and *exiguo rivi* (59), indicates not only a switch in the meaning of *moenia*, but a switch from the language and themes of epic (Aeneas,

¹⁵ Debroun (2003) 51-57.

¹⁶ OLD s.v. *dispono*, 1a, 2a.

Cassandra, Troy) to Callimachean language and themes.¹⁷ Thus this couplet brings about a transition from the ostensible praise of early Rome to the metapoetic statement of Propertius' purpose that constitutes the end of 4.1a. Propertius' abrupt turn to discussing himself and his poetry also casts him in the role of the Sibyl and Cassandra, the *vates* who sing concerning the fate of their people and their countries.¹⁸ As another point of similarity, these three figures all speak about physical places: the Sibyl speaks of the *rura* and Cassandra of the *Ilia tellus*; likewise Propertius will use his holy verse (*pio versu*, 57) to discuss the *moenia* previously identified with the city of Rome itself. Following this, there also seems to be a shift in focus from Rome to Umbria, as Propertius turns to also identify his *patria* as Umbria in lines 63-64.

As the poem moves on, Propertius continues to conceptualize his work in relation to physical structures: *scandentis quisquis cernit de vallibus arces / ingenio muros aestimet ille meo!* (Anyone who sees citadels rising from the valleys, may he value their walls by my talent! 65-66). Scholars debate whether the *arces* are those of Rome, Assisi, or any unspecified Umbrian city, which affects how one reads the confusing web of allegiances Propertius presents in 4.1.¹⁹ Line 64 best encapsulates this confusion of identity: *Umbria Romani patria Callimachi* (Umbria, fatherland of the Roman Callimachus). Here Propertius claims to be a Roman, but the juxtaposition with *Umbria* results instead in an emphasis on the multiple contributors to his heritage. Nevertheless, whichever city's citadel is described by *arces* (and perhaps no real city is

¹⁷ Debroun (2003) 68: She argues that founding the walls in pious verse (*pio versu*) evokes earlier descriptions of Aeneas, giving Propertius' project epic associations. This does not eliminate any Callimachean associations; rather it adds to the confusion of genre in 4.1, a blurring of generic boundaries that will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

¹⁸ The Sibyl speaks from 49-50: *si modo Avernalis tremulae cortina Sibyllae / dixit Aventino rura pianda Remo*. Cassandra speaks from 51-54, quoted above:

aut si Pergamae sero rata carmina vatis
longaevum ad Priami vera fuere caput:
'vertite equum, Danaï! Male vincitis! Ilia tellus
vivet, et huic cineri Iuppiter arma dabit.' (51-54)

¹⁹ Hutchinson (2006) 73: defends the citadels as Umbrian. Newman (1997) 269: defends the citadels as Roman.

even intended), Propertius presents himself as giving it glory through his own poetic talent. As noted by Newman and Welch, contrary to expectations, the walls are the recipient, not the grantor, of fame.²⁰ Propertius thus claims that he can manipulate his environment, even the highly politically charged walls of rebellious Umbrian cities or the ideologically heavy walls of Rome, so that their perception is dependent on Propertius' poetry, making his far more impactful.²¹ The use of *muros* instead of the previously used *moenia* may gain significance through the strict associations of each word: a *murus* generally refers to any type of wall, while *moenia* are used specifically of defensive city walls.²² Not only will Propertius glorify the outer city walls, but the whole city itself through his representation.

Rome and the Parilia

Propertius makes explicit the contrast between his literary representation of walls and the physical structures in the following couplet: *Roma, fave, tibi surgit opus, date candida cives / omina, et inceptis dextera cantet avis!* (Rome, be favorable, this work arises for you; citizens, give shining omens and may an auspicious bird sing at my beginnings 67-68). *Surgo* is used specifically to refer to building, and although it can take on a literary meaning, the image of a physical structure rising (and the connected meaning 'build') cannot be ignored in the context of the previous couplet.²³ Thus Propertius' *opus* of line 67 is likened to the *murus* of line 66, a verbal equation that furthers the image that Propertius' poetic walls will rival physical

²⁰ Newman (1997) 269; Welch (2005) 26-27.

²¹ Welch (2005) 27: "The poet chooses to reverse the common trope about his talent—instead of his subject conferring fame on his talent, his talent confers fame on his subject. The astrologer Horos will mimic Propertius' language with the same message at 4.1.125-126."

²² OLD s.v. *murus* 1a, 1b; *moenia* 1, 2.

²³ OLD s.v. *surgo* 6.a; 6.b: (of a literary work) to increase in size outwards, swell, expand.

structures.²⁴ Horos later uses *consurgo* in 4.1b when speaking of Propertius' ancestral home, Umbria: *scandentisque Asis consurgit vertice murus, / murus ab ingenio notior ille tuo* (and the wall of rising Assisi climbs on a cliff, that wall more known by your talent 125-126), blending the *surgit* of line 67 (*tibi surgit opus*) with the language of lines 65-66, discussed above (*scandentis quisquis cernit de vallibus arces / ingenio muros aestimet ille meo!*) confirming the link between Propertius' *opus* and the literary walls he will build with his poetry and further complicating the relationship between Rome and Umbria/Assisi.

The sudden change in location in line 67, initiated by *Roma* at the beginning of the line, further strengthens the comparison between Propertius' *opus* and Romulus' walls. The reference to augury in line 68 (*dextera avis*) in combination with the rising walls/*opus* recalls the legendary contest of Romulus and Remus for the control of their new city. According to divergent traditions, this brotherly antagonism results in Romulus' sole rule either because he received a more favorable bird-omen or because of his fratricidal murder of Remus, who leapt over his brother's half-finished walls.²⁵ Roman tradition commemorates this legend in the festival of the Pales, called the Parilia. Propertius at the beginning of 4.1 describes the early celebration of the Parilia: *cum tremere patrio pendula turba sacro / annuaque accenso celebrante Parilia faeno* (When the swaying crowd was trembling at the ancestral rite and the annual Parilia, by celebrating flaming hay 4.1.18-19).²⁶ The importance of boundaries is deeply implicated in both mythical variants. In the first variant, Remus' transgression of the walls is a justifiable reason for death. Micaela Janan observes: "the walls divide not (proto) Roman from foreigners, but the

²⁴ Debroun (2003) 98: "Propertius' desire to found and build the walls of Rome with his poetry immediately involves him also in an endeavor to mirror the unprecedented growth of Rome with a similarly dramatic expansion of his own elegy."

²⁵ Livy 1.7.1-3.

²⁶ The myths of the augury scene and the wall jumping are related in combination by Ovid in *Fasti* IV.

“true Roman” ... from his identical rival.”²⁷ In the second, boundaries are essential because the process of augury, which is used to determine the city’s leader, is dependent upon the use of a *templum*, a ritual boundary.²⁸ Thus at the end of 4.1a Propertius draws strong parallels between Romulus and himself, who intends to re-found Rome through his poetry.

The Two Halves of 4.1

The final physical boundary in 4.1 is that between the two traditional halves of the poem, commonly denoted 4.1a and 4.1b. Controversy exists as to whether these two halves are in fact two separate poems,²⁹ one continuous poem,³⁰ or one poem with two distinct halves.³¹ While modern editions of the text follow traditional numbering, wherein 4.2 is still the Vertumnus poem, most also print some distinction between the two halves of 4.1 between lines 70-71, either as 4.1a and 4.1b, or by the subheading “Horos” at the same point.³² Debate largely centers around how connected or divided the speeches of the two speakers are, but the question is unlikely to be definitively answered due to the unreliable manuscript tradition. Despite the ambiguity, the second half of 4.1 (lines 71-150) is constructed as a response to Propertius’ introduction of his aetiological program in the preceding lines. Horos’ language frequently recalls that of Propertius in the first half, and with the presence of the rather strong linguistic change at line 71,³³ it seems reasonable to think Propertius may have intended there to be ambiguity about whether what follows is separate from or connected to what came before. It is

²⁷ Janan (2001) 135.

²⁸ Rüpke (2007) 183. The *templum* will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2, which will focus on the role of religious boundaries.

²⁹ Heyworth (2007) 424-426.

³⁰ Miller (2004) 186.

³¹ Hutchinson (2006) 59-62; Camps (1965).

³² Heyworth (2007) and Camps (1965) separate with IV i A and B; Hutchinson (2006) provides no separation; Barber (1957) separates with “HOROS”.

³³ 4.1.71: *Quo ruis imprudens, vage, dicere fata, Properti?*

poetically fitting, if the poem that centers around the divide between the past and present, Roma and Umbria, Propertius' new subject matter and his old, does not itself have a clear boundary.

Poem 4.4

Poem 4.4 is rich with the language of boundaries and walls. The traditional myth of Tarpeia is predicated upon the transgression of boundaries, as she betrays Rome by opening the gates to Titus Tatius and the Sabines.³⁴ Propertius, although he changes the motivation for Tarpeia's betrayal from greed to love, maintains the importance of transgressed boundaries and even expands their relevance to the myth, in order to reflect upon the importance of boundaries to the maintenance of Rome's identity.³⁵ Poem 4.4 forces the reader to process the questions inherent in the creation of boundaries: who decides who is included/excluded and who can create/dissolve boundaries? Tarpeia, the person so associated with transgression that traitors were thrown off a cliff called the Tarpeian Rock, is here presented sympathetically, contrary to traditional Roman thought. The inclusion of her monologue (4.4.31-66) presents her thoughts on her betrayal, making her moral culpability less automatic.³⁶ In this poem we are shown Tarpeia, not betraying Rome's walls without a second thought on account of her own self-centered greed, but motivated by love. She attempts to dissolve old boundaries that divide in order to construct them anew, so that no one has to transgress any boundary, not her as a traitor, nor Tatius as an invader. Tarpeia's efforts to remove the boundary between the Romans and the Sabines, however, are ultimately in vain, as 4.4 shows that the power to make and break boundaries is

³⁴ Livy 1.11.6-9.

³⁵ Konstan (1986) 198- 201 discusses the importance of walls (and other boundaries) in Livy Book 1, highly relevant in theme and subject matter to Propertius 4.4.

³⁶ Welch (2005) 76-77.

reserved for the men alone: Titus constructs a barricade around the fountain (7-8) and Romulus has recently built the walls of Rome (73-78).

Despite the apparent assertion of 4.4 that women have no power to manipulate boundaries, readers would be well aware of Tarpeia's traditional mythological counterpart, the Sabine women, who both create and destroy boundaries.³⁷ As related by Livy, the women insert themselves between their warring Roman husbands and Sabine fathers, ultimately resulting in the union of the two peoples into Rome.³⁸ Additionally, this is Rome's first expansion. The Sabine women are able to do what Tarpeia wishes to do in 4.4, but they are lauded while she is derided.³⁹ Welch comments: "When they behaved appropriately as wives, daughters, and mothers, Roman women acted as social mediators between men and even facilitated Roman expansion."⁴⁰ Tarpeia, however, attempts to go beyond her status as a woman and make the treaty herself, standing in for Romulus. Her active role contrasts strongly with that of the Sabine women, who convince the men to make the treaty among themselves through their own feminine piety, rather than subverting the male role and attempting to craft the treaty themselves. Although mentioned only once in line 57 (*si minus, at raptae ne sint impune Sabinae*), the Sabine women are an implied contrast with Tarpeia throughout the poem.

How, When, and Why Boundaries Change

Propertius begins 4.4 with the explicit statement of its subjects, seemingly a return to his aetiological program, although he never really addresses these subjects again: *Tarpeium nemus et*

³⁷ Welch (2005) 58-62.

³⁸ Livy 1.13.1-7.

³⁹ Janan (2001) 75: "The resolution she proposes to Rome's conflict with the Sabines foreshadows the principles of their eventual reconciliation."

⁴⁰ Welch (2005) 61.

Tarpeiae turpe sepulchrum / fabor et antiqui limina capta Iovis (I will sing of the Tarpeian grove and the shameful tomb of Tarpeia and the captured thresholds of ancient Jove 1-2). In addition to the Tarpeian grove and the tomb of Tarpeia, he states that his third subject will be the captured thresholds of Jove, which is an unexpected third subject in a poem which initially seems exclusively about Tarpeia. Additionally, the placement of *fabor* at the beginning of line 2 divides the first two subjects, the *nemus* and the *sepulchrum*, from the *limina*, which furthers the unexpectedness of the *limina* as subjects of his poem. That the *limina* are also specified as captured is significant because *capta* indicates a change of state. At one time the *limina* were uncaptured, but underwent a transition and now belong to others. This description of the *limina* indicates that it has changed in character, and this further enforces that 4.4 is a poem about how, when, and why boundaries change.

Since the Tarpeian rock was located on the Capitoline, there are two options for which temple is referenced here: Jupiter Optimus Maximus and Jupiter Feretrius. Both were present upon the Capitoline by the classical period, and both were important symbols for the state. The temple to Jupiter Optimus Maximus was the most important in the city, and the temple of Jupiter Feretrius was where victorious generals who defeated the enemy commander in hand-to-hand combat could dedicate the *spolia opima*. Although we might assume that Propertius has constructed the setting of his poem with some anachronism, there are convincing arguments to be made for why *antiqui Iovi* (and all other references to Jupiter in the poem) refer to Jupiter Feretrius. The designation as ancient probably does not just indicate antiquity, for both Jupiter temples were old by Propertius' time, but describes the ages of the temples in relation to each other, for Jupiter Feretrius was dedicated in 752/1 BCE and Jupiter Optimus Maximus in 509 BCE, making Jupiter Feretrius the older of the two. Also important is that, according to Livy, the

Feretrius temple was dedicated shortly before Tarpeia's betrayal, and the founding of the temple is inserted in the narration of the war with Titus Tatius and the Sabines.⁴¹ The myths are contemporaneous and connected, providing thematic support for the identification of the temple. Additionally, the storyline of 4.4 is told chronologically, and Tarpeia only has knowledge appropriate to her situation, so it would fit logically into the timeline of the poem. Tarpeia/the Tarpeian rock and Jupiter are mentioned several times throughout the poem. Each time Jupiter appears in the poem, it is in opposition to the behavior of Tarpeia.⁴² The temple of Jupiter Feretrius seems to function to contrast the appropriate and honorable way to defeat enemies, through weapons and violence, with Tarpeia's plan to defeat the Sabines through marriage and harmony.

Military Boundaries

The next mentions of boundaries in 4.4 are examples of the creation of specifically military boundaries, the wall of maple and the earthen barrier: *hunc Tatius fontem vallo praecingit acerno, / fidaque suggesta castra coronat humo* (Tatius surrounded this font with a maple rampart, and ringed the camps with heaped up earth 4.4.7-8). Like the threshold of Jupiter was captured and so switched sides, Tatius has claimed the fountain and a part of the Forum for himself. Rather than *moenia*, the wall here is a *vallum*, a rampart or fortification.⁴³ *Vallum* is used primarily in military narratives by Livy, Caesar, Tacitus, Pliny, and even Virgil, who uses it in Book 9 of the *Aeneid* during the attack by the Italians on the Trojan camp.⁴⁴ This final usage is especially relevant, as it concerns Italian natives attacking the Trojans; although they were at war

⁴¹ Livy 1.10.5-7; Hutchinson (2006) 119.

⁴² 4.4.29-30, 85-86.

⁴³ OLD s.v. *vallum*.

⁴⁴ Liv. 4.28.5, Plin. *Nat.* 12.22, Caes. *Gal.* 3.25.1, Verg. *A.* 9.524, Tac. *Ann.* 4.2.

at the time, the two would later be unified. So too would Tatius' Sabines and Romulus' Romans unify after their war; Tatius' *vallum*, a boundary by which he laid claim to Roman land, Tatius thus encloses the font—*fons* being a traditional word to describe the softer Callimachean-style poetry— with a word common to epic and war narratives. This mirrors the overall structure of 4.4, which encloses Tarpeia's love narrative within the war with the Sabines. There are two competing claims on the land, the Romans on the Capitoline and the Sabines, in the Forum, and Welch has noted that Tarpeia herself occupies the liminal space between the two, not quite fitting in with either people and only being able to speak when she is excluded.⁴⁵

Rome and Her Walls

Shortly after, Propertius returns to the language of city walls used in 4.1. Following his description of the enemy camp, he describes the contrast between the Forum of the past and present: *muris erant montes: ubi nunc est Curia saepta, / bellicus ex illo fonte bibebat equus* (the mountains were a wall: where now the Curia is enclosed, a warhorse was drinking from that font 13-14). Despite the extreme change from warhorse to the civilized Curia, the city of Rome as defined by its walls remains the same. The intrinsic connection between Rome's existence and its walls (as discussed in 4.1) is here still present. Although the walls themselves are in their initial stages, as stated later on in the poem: *urbi festus erat (dixere Parilia patres), / hic primus coepit moenibus esse dies* (There was a celebration in the city (the fathers called it the Parilia), this day began to be the first for the walls 4.4.73-74), the famous hills of Rome also function as walls. Noteworthy is Propertius' use of *muros* rather than *moenia*; the hills are not meant to necessarily function as defensive walls, but rather as the walls which define the limits of the city.

⁴⁵ Welch (2005) 74-76. She also notes how Tarpeia's "emotional marginality" and the dangers of a Vestal in love are represented by the liminal and treacherous landscape which she must navigate.

Rome is equated with its physical location, so even before Rome has expanded to cover all seven hills, the seven hills are still Rome. Furthermore, Propertius again mentions the Parilia, calling to mind all former associations with the festival – walls, origins, Remus. That day, on which he almost obsessively focuses, was the beginning of Rome, but also the beginning of Non-Rome.⁴⁶ Until Romulus defines the limits of his city, the Romans are nothing more than a collection of local shepherds.⁴⁷ Once the walls are begun, they have something to defend and non-Romans from whom to defend it. In poem 4.4 that something is the Capitoline, something which is theirs and therefore not another's. David Konstan observes that "if the wall suggests both protection and the division between inside and outside, the gap represents both vulnerability and the possible fusion of what the wall differentiates and divides."⁴⁸ Their identity as "Romans" is challenged by the attack of the Sabines, who seek to take back their women, preventing Rome from expanding and destroying them before they have really begun. This conflict, however, also provides the opportunity to expand the boundaries of their society through the addition of the Sabines. The delineation between Roman and Sabine is thus destroyed in favor of one society as the walls themselves are rising and the territory of Rome itself expands to include that of the Sabines.

Propertius revisits the inseparability of the concept of Rome from its physical location and structures in line 35. The first mention of physical boundaries is in Tarpeia's speech, and it comes at the very beginning in a powerful contrast between Tarpeia's two conflicting loyalties, her love for Tatius and her duty as a Vestal Virgin. She expresses this conflict through an ascending tricolon of addressees, from *montes* (35) to *Vesta* (36). She also seems to move

⁴⁶ See Janan (2001) for more discussion of *Romanitas* and the conceptual boundaries of Roman and Non-Roman in Book 4.

⁴⁷ Livy 1.4.8.

⁴⁸ Konstan (1986) 200.

inward, from the mountains to the city to the temple of Vesta (her home within the city), as though reiterating her sense of being hemmed in:

Ignes castrorum et Tatiae praetoria turmae
et formosa oculis arma Sabina meis,
o utinam ad vestros sedam captiva Penatis,
dum captiva mei conspicer ora Tati!
Romani montes, et montibus addita Roma,
et valeat probro Vesta pudenda meo

Fires of the camps and guard of the Tatian troops and Sabine arms attractive to my eyes, O if only I could sit as a captive at your hearth, while as a captive I could look upon the face of my Tatius! Roman mountains, and Rome added to the mountains, and Vesta who must be ashamed by my disgrace, fare well. (4.4.31-36)

Tarpeia's treason is made especially poignant by her expressed wish to sit at Tatius' hearth, literally "at your Penates" (*ad vestros Penatis*), indicating a change in loyalties to Tatius through a physical movement to Tatius' home and household gods. As a priestess of Vesta, one of Tarpeia's duties was to watch over and sacrifice to the Penates of the city, those brought from Troy by Aeneas. Her mention of the enemy's Penates shortly before her address to Vesta makes it clear why Vesta is ashamed (*pudenda*).

The Vestal Virgins themselves fill a liminal role, as intermediaries between Vesta and the Romans. As the Romans envisioned a gap between the affairs of gods and men, the Vestals acted as an intermediary, tending to the goddess on behalf of the State. The Vestals are unusual among Roman priesthoods in that their appointment was full-time and lifelong. Other priesthoods, while still important for maintaining the *pax deorum*, were not linked to specific people. Functioning equally as political offices and religious positions, other religious roles were temporary, elected positions (even for women, such as the *flaminica dialis*). The Vestals, by contrast, were permanently changed by their role and could not be reincorporated into society, in recognition of their powerful liminality between divine and human. In recognition of their role as intermediary,

which was viewed as absolutely essential, they were given the freedom to be in public without a male guardian. Tarpeia's ability to leave the Roman camp to watch Tatius is enabled by her role as a priestess. Additionally, when Vestals broke their vow of chastity, as punishment they were buried alive outside the Colline gate. This custom is recalled through Tarpeia's method of death: burial under a pile of shields. This was perhaps the custom because, as part of their special status, there was a law against physically accosting a Vestal. To the Roman mind, they, although the agents of the burial, were not the agents of the death. The goddess could save the Vestal if she wished, putting the responsibility for punishing the priestess in the hands of the goddess whom they served. There are recorded stories of Vestal Virgins who are wrongfully accused of breaking their vows of chastity, only to be saved from punishment through the miraculous intervention of Vesta. This system helps make sense of Vesta's potentially puzzling inclusion in lines 69-70, which editors have often emended to read *Venus: nam Vesta, Iliacae felix tutela favillae, / culpam alit et plures condit in ossa faces* (for Vesta, the auspicious guardian of the Trojan embers, nourished the fault and established many torches in her bones 4.4.69-70). Confusion has arisen due to Vesta's seemingly active nature in the downfall of her own priestess, however Tarpeia has already admitted shaming Vesta through her own fault thirty lines earlier, as discussed above in line 36. Thus Vesta's action in intensifying Tarpeia's illicit love could be seen as the goddess punishing her priestess, as is to be expected. She betrays not only Rome, but the guardian of Rome, Vesta.

Tarpeia's religious betrayal is thus combined with her betrayal of the Roman landscape, the *Romani montes*. The use of the adjective *Romani* characterizes the mountains as inherently Roman, not temporarily or incidentally Roman. Throughout 4.4, Propertius impresses upon the reader that the mountains are not neutral, that their allegiance lies with the Romans. This is also

communicated here via the chiasmic structure of line 35, clearly equating “Rome” and “mountains.” Rome itself was added (*addita*) to the mountains from the very beginning, suggesting that, not only are the mountains inherently Roman, but Rome is characterized by its mountains from the very beginning.

The Danger of Changing Boundaries

As Tarpeia constructs her plan to lead Tatius up the Capitoline, she reflects upon the danger of the route: *lubrica tota via est et perfida: quippe tacentis / fallaci celat limite semper aquas* (The whole way is slippery and treacherous: indeed often it hides silent waters on its deceptive path 4.4.49-50). As she leads Tatius and his troops up the hill on this path, Tarpeia is breaking the literal boundary between the two groups, the slope of the Capitoline and, later on, the walls that surround the Roman camp. While the path itself may be slippery and treacherous, this couplet also has a strong metapoetic reading. The process of breaking or changing boundaries itself is hard to navigate and difficult to accomplish. The slipping of the path is emphasized by the elision between *via* and *est*, and the enjambment between lines 49 and 50 further adds to the imagery of tricky or misplaced boundaries. Additionally, like the path, which is *perfida*, Tarpeia’s action is literally *per-fidus*, that which deliberately breaks faith or is deceitful.⁴⁹ *Fides* comes up again later in the poem in connection with broken boundaries: *prodiderat portaeque fidem patriamque iacentem, / nubendique petit, quem velit, ipsa diem* (She betrayed the faith of the gate and her sleeping fatherland, she herself sought the day of marriage, whichever he would wish 4.4.87-88). *Fides* is a word with an elegiac association, appropriated

⁴⁹ OLD *s.v.* *perfidus*.

from its originally contract-based usage to describe the relationship between the elegiac *amator* and his *domina*.

The final boundary image I shall discuss comes toward the end of Tarpeia's speech. In lines 59-60 she casts herself as an active agent, believing she can change the boundaries that control her life. Ironically, what she wishes to accomplish is actually brought about by the Sabine women, mentioned in lines 57-58:

si minus, at raptae ne sint impune Sabinae,
Me rape et alterna lege repende vices!
commissas acies ego possum solvere: nuptae
vos medium palla foedus inite mea.

If not, lest the Sabine women be seized with impunity, seize me and repay the crimes with a reciprocal law! I am able to dissolve the joined battle lines: begin a treaty between you by my bride's *palla*. 4.4.57-60

It has been observed that Tarpeia envisions herself as the passive object of the treaty in lines 57-58 and as the active negotiator in 59-60.⁵⁰ Janan views Tarpeia's contradictory self-presentation as victim and perpetrator as complicating her guilt and complicity in the crime, blurring the distinction between the various roles she plays in the poem.⁵¹ As an active agent, Tarpeia wishes to break very real boundaries, the two battle lines of Roman and Sabine soldiers, which are as effective as actual walls in keeping the two peoples separated. The image evoked by her language is extremely vivid, with two straight lines of opposing soldiers, who break formation and dissolve into one indistinguishable group.⁵²

Outside of her monologue, however, Tarpeia's efforts as a manipulator of boundaries are bracketed by the effective manipulation of the two central male characters, Tatius and Romulus.

⁵⁰ Janan (2001) 82.

⁵¹ Janan (2001) 83-84.

⁵² Janan (2001) 75 also notes that in line 62 Tarpeia states that she will soften (*molliet*) the Sabines' arms, another example of Tarpeia's desire to change the state of the world around her.

Despite her best efforts, she is unable to escape from the bounds imposed on her: woman, Roman, and Vestal. In poem 4.4, Propertius seems to conclude that the order of society is predicated upon who controls the boundaries: their creation, destruction, and use. Although the middle of the poem, composed of Tarpeia's speech, causes the reader to question her moral culpability, the end of the poem reaffirms the traditional Roman narrative of 'Tarpeia as guilty traitor':

dixit, et ingestis comitum super obruit armis.
haec, virgo, officiis dos erat apta tuis.
a duce Tarpeia mons est cognomen adeptus:
o vigil, iniustae praemia sortis habes.

He spoke, and covered her over with the heaped arms of his comrades. This, virgin, was a fitting dowry for your favors. From this Tarpeian leader the mount obtained its name: O sleepless one, you have the reward of an unjust lot. 4.4.91-94.

As a result of her efforts to manipulate boundaries, she receives death and the notoriety of her name on the Tarpeian rock. This sends a clear message that only those with power, such as Tatius, Romulus, and all the Sabine women (as properly married *matronae*), are able to determine the bounds for a society.

4.4 Conclusion

Poem 4.4 raises the question: what does it mean for the identity of Rome when it extends beyond the hills? If the physical city of Rome is so closely tied to its landscape, how does this connection affect the empire, which by Propertius' day has spread to Gaul, Egypt, and Asia Minor?⁵³ Throughout Book Four Propertius' reflection on those who are included and excluded from Rome takes many different forms, but in 4.4 he focuses on the very beginning of Rome,

⁵³ Propertius explicitly reflects upon the borders of Rome in 4.3, whether they are truly the reaches of Roman power or whether the walls of the city are.

and what at that time defined the city. This poem asserts that from the outset, Rome is focused on defining its own boundaries—the hills, the new walls—and expanding them—the integration of the Sabines. Yet in 4.4 Propertius also reflects on how this focus on expansion is not always good. While the conflict with the Sabines is brought to a “happy ending,” the poet chooses to focus on the (literally) marginalized Tarpeia, who acts as a stand-in for all who are the casualties of Rome’s expansion. The next poem I will discuss, 4.7, also addresses a woman who boldly transgresses boundaries and engages with the issue of punishment for infidelity, albeit it does so with a radically different tone and approach.

Poem 4.7

Poem 4.7 involves the transgression of the (seemingly) most permanent boundary, that of death. While not “physical” in the sense of walls, gates, and rivers as has been observed in other poems from Book Four, I have nevertheless chosen to discuss the boundary of death in combination with those. Despite lacking a tangible reality, the Roman understanding of death and the underworld was conceptualized in terms of a physical locality, with the transition from life to death visualized as the crossing of boundaries. These *limina*, the Styx and the gates of Cerberus, are mirrored by the funerary practices undertaken by the living. The mourners follow the body of the deceased to its final resting place outside the walls of Rome, passing over the *pomerium*, the physical/religious boundary of the city of Rome. It is also closely connected to death, for the dead had to be buried outside its bounds. These boundaries are placed at the forefront of Cynthia’s admittedly odd presentation of the underworld. Cynthia’s physical presence as a ghost, despite her lack of tangibility, affirms the reality of the underworld and its

boundaries. On a basic level, the poem's setting, with a ghost surprising a sleeping man by breaking through the barrier of both death and sleep, itself establishes the theme of boundary breaching from the outset.

Poem 4.7 presents a markedly different perspective on the manipulation of boundaries from all others in Book Four (except perhaps 4.11). In its surprising return to the ostentatiously elegiac theme of Cynthia, it also offers a return to the reversed power dynamic of elegiac poetry wherein the woman is the *domina* and the man is the *servus*. Cynthia dominates the poem, with 82 of its 96 lines relating her direct speech, while Propertius does not speak once. In keeping with the elegiac reversal of power, 4.7 highlights Cynthia as the *domina* not only of Propertius, but also of boundaries. This is a marked difference from all six preceding poems, wherein male Roman control over physical and cultural bounds was emphasized.

Throughout her speech, Cynthia takes care to emphasize the liminal nature of their relationship, how it flouted traditional boundaries. She uses this to demand Propertius' loyalty even following her death, and she goes on to prove her own power over boundaries and therefore Propertius, through her description of the underworld and her own supernatural return from the dead. The first instance of the ineffectiveness of boundaries is an elegiac description of their affair: *iamne tibi exciderant uigilacis furta Suburae / et mea nocturnis trita fenestra dolis?* (Have now the affairs of wakeful Subura and my window, worn down by nocturnal tricks, escaped you? 4.7.15-16). The reader also learns that Propertius and Cynthia would conduct their night-time affair at the crossroads, a place of fluidity and changing directions, and a boundary: *saepe Venus triuio commissa est, pectore mixto / fecerunt tepidas pallia nostra uias* (Often Venus was mixed in the crossroads, our cloaks made the roads warm 4.7.19-20). The crossroads are additionally

the realm of the infernal goddess Hecate/ Trivia, lending an association with the underworld to their relationship even before Cynthia's death.

There are several important boundaries in 4.7, the first being the gates of the city mentioned by Cynthia. She berates Propertius for a lack of care in performing her funeral rites: *si piguit portas ultra procedere, at illuc / iussisses lectum lentius ire meum* (If it troubles you to go beyond the gates, nevertheless you could have ordered my bier to go there more slowly 4.7.29-30). Although Propertius has made the choice not to follow her funeral procession and therefore seems to be in control, Cynthia's angry reprimand effectively places him in the wrong and reasserts her dominance. The repetition of the letter *p* in *piguit portas... procedere* emphasizes the force and emotion of her accusation. Despite being dead, she perceived his absence and makes it clear that not passing through the gates was not an option.

The next significant boundary in 4.7 is the Lethe, given a lengthy description by Cynthia. Rivers of the underworld play a significant role in the topography of death. A river, the Styx, is the most significant physical boundary that the dead are required to cross. In traditional mythology, the Styx is a closely guarded boundary, which can only be crossed with the fulfillment of proper burial rituals. The inability to cross the Styx is also the inability to be fully a member of the dead. Although no longer among the living, the deceased is described as if in a state of limbo, always striving to complete the journey into the underworld. The soul locked out from the underworld results in the epic trope wherein a hero speaks with one of his dead companions, who request a proper burial so that they can finally cross the Styx. Cynthia's appearance to Propertius in 4.7 calls on this tradition, present as early as Elpenor in the *Odyssey* and later Palinurus in the *Aeneid*.⁵⁴ She too laments the situation of her burial, although her

⁵⁴ *Od.* 11.51-83; *Aen.* 6.337-383.

complaints are about the meager effort put into the funeral rather than its lack. In attitude she is more akin to Hector appearing to Aeneas as a ghost in Book 2 of the *Aeneid* in that she comes to Propertius with an urgent message, as Hector did to Aeneas.⁵⁵ Both Propertius and Aeneas note that the ghosts appear as they did at death, rather than as pristine or in their prime. Nevertheless, there is another major difference between Cynthia with Elpenor and Palinus. Cynthia returns of her own volition to deliver her complaints, while Odysseus and Aeneas both must travel to the underworld to encounter their comrades. Both Odysseus and Aeneas make a physical journey which requires each to cross boundaries by their own exceptional virtue and heroism, quite literally they are the exception that proves the average person cannot journey to the land of the dead. There are rules and control over the underworld, and only noteworthy male heroes are normally permitted to cross it in a difficult journey.⁵⁶ The dead certainly never leave the underworld to deliver a message of their own volition. On the contrary, Cynthia emphasizes the ease with which she left the underworld.

The Lethe is especially significant because it is the river of forgetfulness. It is ironic that Cynthia and the other women, Andromeda and Hypermestra, spend their time remembering their pasts while traveling on the Lethe: *Andromedeque et Hypermestre sine fraude maritae / narrant historiae tempora nota suae* (Andromeda and Hypermestra, wives without deceit, tell the known times of their own history 4.7.63-64). This incongruity thus reinforces that boundaries have no effect on Cynthia, who can cross over the Lethe and still potently remember Propertius' wrongs against her.⁵⁷ The river divides not just two sections of land or two peoples, but the living from the dead and the fields of the damned from those of the blessed: *nam gemina est sedes turpem*

⁵⁵ *Aen.* 2.268-297.

⁵⁶ Heroes who accomplish a *katabasis*: Hercules, Theseus, Orpheus, Odysseus, Aeneas.

⁵⁷ *sic mortis lacrimis uitae sancimus amores: / celo ego perfidiae crimina multa tuae.* 4.7.69-60.

sortita per amnem, / turbaque diuersa remigat omnis aqua (for there are twin abodes appointed along the polluted river, and the whole crowd rows on diverse waters 4.7.55-56). Cynthia's description focuses on the river itself and its two groups of passengers while providing no direct description of the destinations of the two groups, the Fields of Elysium or Tartarus. Throughout the poem she copiously describes the various boundaries by which one can enter or leave the underworld, but never fully seems to cross the boundary into Elysium herself. Thus she places the emphasis upon the boundary, rather than what it divides. Her grouping with the virtuous women of the mythic past is especially surprising for the reader because it contradicts all previous characterizations of Cynthia from Books 1-3 as a serial adulterer. Cynthia, in control of where she lies in the stark divide between virtuous and evil, places herself with the honorable.

The most pervasive and permanent boundary in the poem is that of Death. Yet in Cynthia's presentation of death, the boundary is fluid. The poem opens with the rejection of death's boundary: *Sunt aliquid Manes: letum non omnia finit* (There is such a thing as ghosts, death does not end all 4.7.1). The reality of ghosts and the assertion of their physical existence is reinforced at the end of the poem by Cynthia's assertion that dreams have a *pondus* (4.7.88). Thus the poem is framed by the two claims, both asserting the physicality of death and the truth of Cynthia's dream-like appearance to Propertius. A traditional representation of a boundary comes in line 87, wherein there is reference to gates: *nec tu sperne piis uenientia somnia portis* (do not spurn dreams coming from the pious gates 4.7.87). Once again there is an emphasis on gates as an important boundary, in this case controlling the "pious dreams" (*pia somnia* 88). Cynthia, who has identified herself with this group of "pious dreams", passes through this boundary to meet Propertius and deliver her message. Yet the underworld boundary is reversed, for it controls what leaves, rather than what enters.

The most succinct illustration of crossing the *limen* of death is presented at the end of the poem:

nocte uagae ferimur, nox clausas liberat umbras,
errat et abiecta Cerberus ipse sera.
luce iubent leges Lethaea ad stagna reuerti:
nos uehimur, uectum nauta recenset onus. 4.7.89-92

We are borne as wanderers in the night, night frees confined shades, Cerberus himself wanders with the door-bolt cast aside. At the light the laws order that we return to the Lethean pools: We are borne, the boatsman counts the carried burden.

The language of this passage repeatedly emphasizes the ineffectiveness of the boundaries and guards of death. The dead are called wanderers (*vagae*), emphasizing their mobile nature as they cross over (presumably) many boundaries in their travels: countries, cities, and homes.

Moreover, the shades are freed (*liberat*) from being enclosed, highlighting their lack of restraint.

Finally, the underworld is so ineffective at keeping people inside that even the guard himself is absent. He, like the ghosts themselves, wanders. They have no purpose or justification for leaving, and the boundary itself seems so flexible as to be essentially nonexistent. Only at the end of the poem then, does the reader learn that Cynthia's return is not a singular, unexpected, and unsanctioned event, but part of a grander pattern of disarray. The only structure and control imposed on this system appears to exist through the regular exchange of night and light, which are both used in the same case and in the same metrical position at the start of the hexameter (*nocte* 89, *luce* 91). These rules imposed on the wandering shades are not mentioned elsewhere in 4.7, and Cynthia's brief explanation is perhaps aimed at eliding their effect so that she can focus on her own claims of power, making her threats against Propertius more efficacious.

Cynthia has found a way to remove any limits between them, for eternity: *nunc te possideant aliae: mox sola tenebo: / mecum eris, et mixtis ossibus ossa teram* (Now other women might possess you; Soon, I alone will hold you. You will be with me, and I will wear down your

bones mingled with my bones 4.7.93-94). His punishment is an inverse of his crime. He refused to cross boundaries for her, but soon he too will die, crossing the Lethe to be with her in death. He kept too many boundaries between them at the time of her death, so for eternity he will be with her forever in the grave. There will be no boundaries between them anymore, as even their bones are mixed. This becomes more convincing when one looks closely at the language itself. *mecum eris* elides when scanned, eliminating the boundary between the words as the boundary between their bodies will be eliminated. Cynthia claims her eventual victory over Propertius through her control of boundaries, proving her power through her return from death. The verb *tero* is used one other time in 4.7, as the participle *trita* describing Cynthia's window in Subura.⁵⁸ John Warden makes a connection between the description of Subura and lines 93-94 based on *petore mixto* in line 19 and *mixtis ossibus* from 94. He argues that the image of the interpenetration of two bodies in 19 is a precursor for the even more physical union expressed through *mixtis ossibus ossa*.⁵⁹ Thus Propertius connects a more traditional crossing of a *limen*, climbing through a window, with the loss of a physical boundary between their remains. As the worn-down windowsill resulted from frequent crossings, so too will Propertius' bones be worn down as a result of an eternity together.

In this poem, Propertius seems to suggest that there exists only the illusion of control over boundaries. The underworld and a traditional understanding of death are presented as semi-meaningless, failing to contain the dead and allowing them to return to the world of the living. But nevertheless, although Cynthia claims control over this boundary and over Propertius' fate, she is subject to the laws of night and day, and ultimately is still dead. Although the boundary is ineffective in many ways, the dead cannot return entirely. This, perhaps, is commentary on the

⁵⁸ *iamne tibi exciderant uigilacis furta Suburae / et mea nocturnis trita fenestra dolis?* 4.7.15-16

⁵⁹ Warden (1980) 25, 60.

futile nature of attempting to control boundaries. Although Cynthia threatens Propertius with her control, and her position as an elegiac *domina* lends credence to her claim, ultimately the reader does not know whether Cynthia is able to carry out her threats.

Poem 4.9

One of Book Four's few ostensibly aetiological poems, 4.9 has drawn the attention of many scholars who also see, among other themes, a subversion of Augustus' new religious program and the creative repackaging of elegiac tropes into a story more at home in epic.⁶⁰ On the basic level of plot, however, poem 4.9 is about Hercules' dissolution of two thresholds, the doors of Cacus and the Bona Dea, and his establishment of a third, the Ara Maxima. The first of these destroyed thresholds is the cave of Cacus, the three-headed cattle thief familiar to the audience of the *Aeneid*.⁶¹ The long battle narrative from the *Aeneid* is cut down to ten lines, leaving only the bare details of the theft, fight, and death of Cacus. Propertius does not have to worry about a characterization of Cacus as feral and uncivilized, because by referencing the *Aeneid* passage, he allows the image of Cacus presented by Virgil to predominate in the reader's mind. What he chooses to include is thus for emphasis: *furis et implacidas diruit ira fores / Maenalia iacuit pulsus tria tempora ramo / Cacus...* (And anger demolished the savage doors of the thief, Cacus lay dead struck in his three temples by the Maenalian club 4.9.14-15). What remains is Hercules' brute strength, used to overpower Cacus and his doors. He tears asunder (*diruit*) the doors, a striking word often used to describe the destruction of manmade structures

⁶⁰ Anderson (1964), Newman (1997), Spencer (2001), Miller (2004), Welch (2005), Panoussi (2016).

⁶¹ *Aen.* 8.193-275.

such as cities, temples, and walls.⁶² The doors are described as savage (*implacidas*), perhaps an epithet transferred from Cacus or perhaps a reflection of Hercules' rage, which colors the whole landscape as hostile. Nonetheless it is a startling adjective to describe doors, used to justify their violent destruction which presages Cacus' own in the following line. Thus the destruction of the doors and the destruction of Cacus are linked, and the reader feels a sense of righteousness as the hero Hercules triumphs over the savage thief. This brief episode sets the tone for the poem, showing the hero-identified-as-Roman dissolving an enemy boundary, and thereafter the enemy as well. However, this is a time before Rome's existence. The mountains are unconquered (*invictos... montis* 4.9.3), and so not yet Roman. In contrast, Cacus is described as an inhabitant (*incola* 4.9.9) who has more of a claim to the land than Hercules.⁶³ Propertius reminds the reader that even the site of Rome once belonged to others, and there is a lurking sense that Hercules is more a brute than a savior. This language recalls the use of *montes* in 4.4, reminding the reader that it is the fate of Rome to possess those mountains, emphasizing the importance of the physical city of Rome and its specific location.⁶⁴ Even though the Romans do not exist at this point, the mountains are defined by their relation to the city.

Cacus' shattered doors are juxtaposed with the destruction of the doors of the Bona Dea shrine at the conclusion of the poem, a ring composition which sends the reader back to the beginning to reflect again upon the destruction of Cacus. After being denied entrance by the head priestess, Hercules simply takes what he wants: *sic anus: ille umeris postis concussit opacos, / nec tulit iratam ianua clausa sitim* (Thus spoke the old woman: He struck the shady doors with

⁶² OLD *s.v. diruo* Ia.

⁶³ Spencer (2001) 266 observes that Hercules' very name shows that he is a foreigner who "imposes a future Roman landscape onto the aboriginal narrative present."

⁶⁴ *Romani montes, et montibus addita Roma* 4.4.35

his shoulders, and the closed door did not bear the wrathful thirst 4.9.61-62).⁶⁵ Once again, a vivid verb, *concutio*, is used to describe the assault on the doors, which are characterized as the victims. The long description of the peaceful shrine creates a positive view for the reader, leading him/her to feel sympathy for the building when it is later assaulted.⁶⁶ Emphasis is drawn to the plight of the doors by their position as the subject of the pentameter, and the use of the adjective *iratam* recalls the use of *ira* in line 14, the only other form of the word to occur in poem 4.9. In describing the destruction of Cacus' doors, by contrast, *ira* is the subject and the focus of the sentiment, while the Bona Dea's doors are almost incidentally in the path of the anger. Also similar to the description of Cacus' doors, the adjective used to describe the doors of the shrine, *clausa*, reflects upon the owners of the door. *Clausa* recalls the original description of the inhabitants of the shrine, the *inclusas puellas* (enclosed girls 4.9.23).⁶⁷ As he had with Cacus, Propertius once again links the owners with the doors themselves, communicating the violence done to the humans and not only the objects. *Clausa* is also used to describe the shrine in its initial description: *feminae loca clausa deae fontisque piandos / impune et nullis sacra resecta viris* (the closed places of the feminine goddess and the holy springs, and the sacred places bared to no men without punishment 4.9.25-26). The shrine's exclusion of men is tied to its identity from the outset, emphasized by *clausa* and *feminae*, and through the placement of *loca clausa* within the connected *feminae deae*, visualizing the enclosed nature of the shrine on the page. It is this characterizing feature of the shrine that Hercules violates, rejecting the idea that women could exclude him, a man, at all.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Welch (2004) 129 interprets Hercules' violent entry into the sanctuary as a means to assert "that he is a master of all places, from the heavens to the underworld," casting his entry into the shrine as yet another example of aggressive Roman imperialism.

⁶⁶ 4.9.23-30.

⁶⁷ *Clausa* and *inclusas* are etymologically related, both from *claudio*. OLD s.v. *claudio* Ia; *includo* [*in* + *claudio*] IIa, IVa.

⁶⁸ For further analysis of the role of gender in 4.9, see Janan (2001), Spencer (2001), Welch (2004), Panoussi (2016).

Poem 4.9 is infused with the language of boundaries, inclusion, and exclusion.⁶⁹

Hercules, in his plea to the priestess of the Bona Dea utilizes the language of inclusion and opened boundaries: he falls down (*ruit* 4.9.31), he throws words before the doors (*iacit verba ante fores* 4.9.32), he wishes that the shrine would lie open (*pandite... fana* 4.9.34), comments that the earth itself has opened itself for him (*mihi terra patet* 4.9.42), and claims that Juno would not close off her waters (*non clausisset* 4.9.44). The priestess in her reply to Hercules, by contrast, uses language of limits and of exclusion: she speaks of the preserved threshold (*tuta limina* 4.9.54) and of a secret passage (*secreti limitis* 4.9.60). Hercules, in his foundation of the Ara Maxima, echoes the description of the shrine (*impune et nullis sacra resecta viris* 4.9.26): *haec nullis umquam pateat veneranda puellis* (this shrine shall never lie open to any girls 4.9.69). He also recalls his earlier plea through the use of *pateat*, but this time negates it, acting exactly as the priestess did who angered him.

Although the two scenes of door-destruction are linked grammatically and structurally, the reader is led to respond quite differently to each act. The doors of Cacus are those of an inhuman monster, initially characterized as a treacherous host (*infido hospite Caco* 4.9.7) who “polluted Jupiter by the theft” (*...furto polluit ille Iovem* 4.9.8), although this is never elaborated upon. As the strange and foreign three-headed monster familiar from Virgil, the reader feels a righteous sense of revenge as the godless thief is murdered by the Roman hero Hercules. The anger of Hercules (*ira* 4.9.14) is justified by who Cacus is, and possibly through a sense of nationalism inherited from the *Aeneid*. Following this feel-good story of a Roman hero’s triumph over a barbarian, the story of that hero’s use of the same anger to desecrate the shrine of an important Roman goddess can only cause the reader to reflect back on the beginning of the poem

⁶⁹ Spencer (2001) 270. She also draws attention to “a cluster of enclosing, excluding, and visually obscuring words” in the narrative of the Bona Dea shrine.

and question the assumptions inherent in the feelings of pride and vindication at Cacus' death. The change in victims from a barbarian to women priestesses may have an effect on the reader's interpretation of the action, but it does not have an effect on Hercules' actions. Propertius may be commenting on the abilities of power and strength, both literal and not, to destroy and create without any repercussions. Hercules follows each destruction of a boundary with the establishment of a new boundary: Cacus' doors with the Forum Boarium and the Bona Dea's doors with the Ara Maxima. Once again Propertius reflects upon the power dynamics inherent in the creation of boundaries, revealing the lack of agency given to barbarians/foreigners and women.

There are several attested aetiologies for the founder of the Ara Maxima: Hercules, Hercules' companions, and Evander. Virgil (and then later, Ovid) connects the founding of the Ara Maxima to Hercules following his defeat of Cacus, and Livy relates that Hercules and Evander co-found the altar. As the innovation of connecting these two cults, noteworthy for being exclusionary in their rites, lies with Propertius, it is worthwhile to consider why he deviates in this manner. He chooses to emphasize the religious and physical boundaries of the Bona Dea shrine itself, how its physical enclosure enables and is necessitated by its religious exclusivity. This, in turn, vindictively inspires Hercules to found the Ara Maxima with the same rules. However, this absolutist view of the exclusionary nature of both shrines is not held up by the historical record. As regards the exclusion of males from the Bona Dea shrine, this primarily seems to occur at the December festival, held at the home reigning magistrate with imperium. It was hosted by the magistrate's wife and restricted to upper class matronae.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, there

⁷⁰ This rite was made famous (and perhaps largely discontinued) following the scandal involving Publius Clodius Pulcher's cross-dressing intrusion into the ceremony. For further analysis of the role of this scandal on 4.9, see Spencer (2001).

is evidence of male worship of the Bona Dea, indicating that the divide presented by Propertius is intentionally excessive.

The Ara Maxima, that is the aetiological *telos* of poem 4.9, is allotted only six lines.⁷¹ The focus is on the foundation of the altar in a moment of rage, laying the emphasis on the exclusion but characterizing it as rash, as the water he drained from the shrine has barely dried: *ponit uix siccis tristia iura labris* (With his lips scarcely dried he decreed harsh laws 4.9.64). Propertius thus questions the integrity and justice of the law, which was made for eternity and punishes all women for the perceived fault of a few: *haec nullis umquam pateat ueneranda puellis, / Herculis aeternum nec sit inulta sitis* (This shrine which ought to be revered shall lie open to no girls, lest the thirst of Hercules be unavenged forever 4.9.69-70). The exclusionary nature of the shrine is shown to be excessive and petty, created by someone unfit but yet still binding. Additionally, the absolutist presentation of the Ara Maxima is misrepresentative of the cult as a whole.⁷² There is evidence of numerous shrines and temples to Hercules throughout Rome, with the Ara Maxima as the only outlier. The historical record supports the exclusion of women from the Ara Maxima, but this altar is also odd in that it is the only Herculean cult site where the rites are performed *in graeco ritu*. The Ara Maxima, then is presented as the exception, not the standard. Celia Schultz argues persuasively for the widespread worship of Hercules by women in Rome and elsewhere, supported by a number of dedicatory inscriptions by women.⁷³

At the conclusion of 4.9, then, the reader is presented with an arbitrary and excessive exclusion, which is also artificial. Although women may have been forbidden to worship at the

⁷¹ Spencer (2001) also finds meaning in the comparatively brief space allotted to the foundation of the Ara Maxima, lines 4.9.65-70.

⁷² Schultz (2000) 293.

⁷³ See Schultz (2000).

Ara Maxima, there were plenty of others (including the nearby temple to Hercules Victor) which one of Propertius' readers could sacrifice at. Finally, the poem unexpectedly concludes with a reference to the Sabine god, Sancus, who has been combined with Hercules in cult practice: *Sancte pater salve, cui iam fauet aspera Iuno: / Sancte, uelis libro dexter inesse meo* (Hail holy father, to whom now bitter Juno is favorable: / Holy one, may you, favorable, wish to belong in my book 4.9.71-72).⁷⁴ The casual mention of Hercules' elision with a native Italic god is a contrast with the rest of 4.9, which is cast as a contest between Hercules and the natives (both Cacus and the priestesses). The lack of distinction between Sancus and Hercules at the end of the poem mocks the earlier emphasis on the exclusion of men and women, further emphasizing the uselessness of the injunction against women. It exists purely due to the anger of its founder, Hercules, a powerful 'Roman' man, and not due to any practical or religious reason.

Poem 4.10

Poem 4.10 makes even more explicit the critique of Roman imperialism found in the previous poem.⁷⁵ Another etiology, this poem claims to tell about the origins of the temple to Jupiter Feretrius and the ritual of dedicating the *spolia opima*. While it does provide two possible etymologies at the conclusion of the poem, from *ferire* (to strike) and *ferre* (to bear), Propertius uses the poem to focus on the process of acquiring the *spolia opima*—the defeat of an enemy leader by a Roman general. He opens the poem with his etiological program: *nunc Iovis incipiam causas aperire Feretri / armaque de ducibus trina recepta tribus* (Now I shall begin to disclose the beginnings of Jupiter Feretrius, and the arms received thrice from three leaders 4.10.1-2). As

⁷⁴ Barber's text has rearranged these lines, 71-72, to conclude the poem.

⁷⁵ Ingleheart (2007) also reads 4.10 as a subversion of Augustus' sole claims to military glory.

previously stated, the apparent purpose of the poem is to uncover the reasons for the temple's existence, as is communicated primarily through the verb *aperire*. *Aperio* frequently also means "to open (a door, gate, etc.)" or "to make a breach in (walls, etc.), break into, open."⁷⁶ Thus Propertius begins his poem which will in actuality be frequently about the breaking of enemy walls with the verb often used to mean "to open doors," hinting at how the poem will focus on something other than the foundation of the temple itself. Additionally, immediately before *aperire* in line one is the noun *causas*, which here means something like "causes for the temple's existence", however it also strongly resembles *clausas*, recalling the use of *clausa* in 4.9.62 (*nec tulit iratam ianua **clausa** sitim*), where it is used to describe Cacus' closed doors which are broken down by Hercules. Propertius' intent could then be read as "to open closed doors," which in fact will be the focus of his first two retellings.

The first to establish the tradition of dedicating the spoils to Jupiter was Romulus himself. He defeated Acron, who is thus introduced: *tempore quo portas Caeninum Acrona petentem / uictor in euersum cuspide fundis equum* (At which time Caeninan Acron seeking the gates, you as a victor cast down with a spear upon his overturned horse 4.10.7-8). Acron's crime is that he sought the gates of Rome, attempting to defeat the Romans through a destruction of their defenses (rather like Hercules in 4.9). In the following couplet, Propertius again names Acron: *Acron Herculeus Caenina ductor ab arce / Roma, tuis quondam finibus horror erat* (the leader, Acron the son of Hercules from the Caeninan citadel, was once a threat to your borders, Rome 4.10.9-10). He provides the interesting detail that Acron was a threat to Rome's boundaries (*finibus*), setting the action in the past with the imperfect *erat* and *quondam*, because the story is told for those who know of Acron due to his defeat. The threat only exists in the past,

⁷⁶ OLD s.v. *aperio* Ia, Ib.

and emphasis is placed upon the gates of Rome and the *finibus* being the same, because we are talking about the Rome of the distant past.

Additionally, Acron is called “Acron son of Hercules” (*Acron Herculeus* 4.10.9), a loaded genealogy in a poem which follows 4.9. While Hercules is (at least ostensibly) the hero of poem 4.9, here his descendant is an enemy of Rome. This attributes to the Hercules of 4.9 negative characteristics, proving that he is not a perfect Roman, and serves to characterize Acron in a way that is uncomfortably friendly and positive, casting his following murder as especially gruesome. However, Myrto Garani argues that Hercules’ effeminacy from 4.9 demeans Acron through the comparison, rather than ennobling him.⁷⁷ He additionally notes the similarities drawn between Augustus and Romulus, and Marc Antony and Hercules. Thus the battle is cast as Augustus v. Antony, with Augustus as the champion, although Garani goes on to argue that the image is not positive patriotism, but is complicated through Romulus’ harsh description and characterizations in previous poems.⁷⁸ Like the walls, Rome’s gates can function metonymically for the city itself. However, as is relevant in 4.10, gates are the weak points of walls. They are transient, both additive and exclusionary, whichever there is a need. This makes them dangerous, as any point of change is. Acron, then, seeks out the weak points of Rome.

The following instance of dedicating the *spolia opima* is by Crassus, who defeats Tolumnus, the leader of Veii. Before narrating the death of Tolumnus, Propertius describes the Veii of his own day, spoiling the ending of his own narrative: *nunc intra muros pastoris bucina lenti / cantat, et in uestris ossibus arua metunt* (Now, among the walls the horns of slow shepherds sing, and they harvest fields among your bones 4.10.29-30). As a result of their victory, the Romans gain the right to destroy Veii’s walls, making them so ineffective that even

⁷⁷ Garani (2007) 107-108.

⁷⁸ Garani (2007) 106-108.

sheep can cross over the boundary. Propertius is quick to remind the readers of the cost of such power through the image of the fields sown with bones, the remains of the Veians who failed to maintain the integrity of boundaries in life and in death. Immediately afterward and without any transition, Propertius rips the relative time of the poem back to the battle between Tolumnus and Crassus. Following the description of the destroyed and ineffective walls, Tolumnus stands above the intact gates of Veii as they are besieged by the Romans: *forte super portae dux Veiens astitit arcem / colloquiumque sua fretus ab urbe dedit* (By chance the leader of Veii stood above the citadel of the gates and from the city gave a discourse, relying upon his own abilities 4.10.31-32). The conjunction of these two couplets in reverse chronological order evokes pity in the reader, casting the people of Veii as doomed and the cause of Tolumnus as lost. In this vignette, the Romans have transitioned from the attacked to the attackers, showing the progress of the state as it begins to extend rather than defend its boundaries.⁷⁹ Welch notes the contrast in culpability between Acron and Tolumnus, of whom the latter is guilty of nothing other than defending his own walls.⁸⁰ This in turn emphasizes the offensive nature of Rome's foreign policy. In line 31, *dux* follows immediately after *portae*, possibly showing how Tolumnus' status as a leader is linked at that moment to the integrity of Veii's gates: if they fall, Veii is defeated and he is no longer a leader.

The final dedication of the *spolia opima* is by Claudius, who defeats the Germanic leader Vidomarius. The territory of Rome has now expanded so that the Romans no longer fight other Latins, but peoples beyond the Italian peninsula. This is emphasized through the first introduction of Claudius in the poem: *Claudius at Rheno traiectos arcuit hostis* (but Claudius

⁷⁹ Welch (2004) 151 argues that Propertius' presentation of the battle for Veii continues the theme of domestic vs. abroad in 4.10.

⁸⁰ Welch (2004) 152.

held back the enemy who went across the Rhine 4.10.39). The Romans now must concern themselves with the borders of an empire, part of which is the distant Rhine river. This is juxtaposed with the threat of Acron, who also challenged Rome's boundaries in the time of Romulus. The boundaries that Acron attacked, however, were the walls of Rome herself, as opposed to Vidomarius' transgression of the Rhine, which is far removed from the residents of the city of Rome. Propertius also provides us with the details of Vidomarius' heritage: *Vidomari. genus hic Rheno iactabat ab ipso* (... Of Vidomarius. This man was boasting that his clan was from the Rhine itself 4.10.41). We learn that his family is from the Rhine, and that the area he is accused of transgressing is in fact his homeland. The boundary between the two peoples is one created entirely by the Romans, and seemingly without the consent of Vidomarius' people. While Vidomarius' crossing of the Rhine may be interpreted as an act of aggression by the Romans, was that in fact what he was doing? Or was he simply unwilling to accept the Roman's definition of his boundaries, and was subsequently killed because of it? In either case, Propertius shows that transgressing the boundaries established by the powerful will result in violence and death, and that is the true legacy of Rome's imperialism as summed up in the temple of Jupiter Feretrius.

Conclusion

This thesis has mainly focused on Propertius' use of the imagery of walls in Book Four, by far the most prevalent type of boundary. Yet, as seen in poems 4.7, 4.9, and 4.10, areas of liminality such as gates and rivers also play a part in Propertius' imagery. The emphasis on these shows the Romans' self-conscious concern with their own boundaries, literally as in the case of

4.10, but oftentimes in far less tangible ways. Those in power are often concerned with what “*Romanitas*” is, which is frequently defined by what it is not. Thus the ability to control societal boundaries is as important as controlling physical boundaries, and in Book 4, Propertius connects the two, allowing him to expose the intangible restrictions of society through the familiar imagery of walls and gates.

Propertius’ fourth book of poetry is unique, not quite fitting the mold of any other work. It bends expectations of epic, elegy, aetiology, history, and mythology to defy categorization. His work, which challenges the assumptions made by Romans about their identity, accomplishes this goal through its very form. It reacts against any attempt to artificialize the narrative of history, changing traditional stories of figures such as Tarpeia in 4.4 and Hercules in 4.9, and casting others in a negative light, such as Romulus, Crassus, and Claudius in 4.10. Through these poems the poet reminds the reader that history can be changed, and that a discerning mind is needed to react to changes in the narrative. While not directly mentioning Augustus in ten out of his eleven poems (the clear exception being 4.6, Propertius’ poem about the Battle at Actium) Propertius consistently engages with the impact of Augustus’ revisionist history, revivals of ancient cults, and propaganda on Roman identity. The Roman state in the 1st c. BCE includes a vast area of the Mediterranean and Europe, and by focusing on antiquarian myths and cults from hundreds of years earlier, Augustus elides the presence and effect of any peoples who became Roman afterwards. The clear consolidation of power in the hands of the imperial family and their allies is reflected by the repeated reoccurrence of traditional male Roman figures, notably Romulus, who is directly mentioned in poems 4.1, 4.4, and 4.10. The role of Romulus is filled by Hercules in 4.9 and recalled by Cynthia in 4.7.

In 4.1, Propertius lays out the framework through which the reader should understand the book as a whole. He heavily emphasizes the idea that Rome is equated with her walls, only to conclude 4.1a by focusing on an entirely different set of walls, those of Assisi, which were destroyed by the Romans. He also casts the walls as a living part of Rome, which, like its founder, was nourished by a she-wolf. Although the attention in this poem is primarily focused on physical walls, towards the end of 4.1a, Propertius makes it clear that the walls should be read metaphorically as well, comparing his poetry to walls through the use of the verb *surgit* (4.1.67). In this poem, he draws attention to the theme of conflicting nationalities, referring to himself as the Roman Callimachus and claiming two origins for himself: *Umbria Romani patria Callimachi!* (4.1.64). Thus, he draws to the forefront the inconsistencies and exclusions perpetrated by contemporaneous Roman culture, which is attempting to redefine itself following the decades of civil war.

4.4 examines more closely the functioning of power structures. As opposed to 4.1, which focuses on both the past and present, 4.4 is situated firmly in the past. Tarpeia, herself a figure who fulfills a liminal role as a Vestal virgin, falls in love with Tatius, the Sabine commander. She attempts to bridge a martial gap through a marital bond, which only results in her betrayal of Rome and rejection by both the Roman goddess Vesta and Tatius himself. She illustrates the metaphorical and physical importance of boundaries through her desire to consolidate the Romans and the Sabines by means of betraying the fledgling walls of Rome.

4.9 explores the often violent and illogical means by which boundaries are created. Propertius again reflects on the foundation of the Roman state and religious cult through aggression and exclusion. He exposes the way that the traditional Roman foundation narrative

ignores the multicultural and inclusive nature of the society, which grows and expands throughout its history to encompass new gods, traditions, and peoples.

4.10 is perhaps the most straightforward of the poems here examined. At the end of the collection of poems, Propertius draws attention to the creation/division of boundaries through military expansion, something which has always been a part of Roman culture. Rather than glorify the incorporation into the Roman state, he focuses on the death and dissolution of native boundaries which necessarily precedes it.

4.7 is in some senses the outlier of the selection presented in this thesis, but it also encompasses some of the overarching themes of the work. Rather than depicting a historical or ‘real-world’ situation, it presents a fantasy world, wherein the dead can return. Enhancing the unrealistic nature of the scene, Cynthia, a woman with a Greek name, is the one presented with control of boundaries, and these are the extreme boundaries of life and death. Located in the middle of the book, this poem offers the readers a chance to reflect upon why this poem is so shocking. It presents an alternate reality, wherein the systems of inclusive and exclusive boundaries Propertius has presented – and critiqued—throughout this book of poetry are reversed.

Propertius’ use of the imagery of physical boundaries touches specifically upon how Rome’s expansionist nature affects the concept of *Romanitas*, or what it means to be a Roman. He focuses on the militaristic nature of Roman society, examining the effects of forced Romanization from the perspective of the outsider. Consistently, the poetry in Book Four asserts that one either is (Romulus, Tarpeia, Hercules) or is not (Tatius, Cacus, Tolumnus, Acron, Vidomarius) a Roman. Yet, Propertius simultaneously subverts this division with subtle characterizations that throw this categorization into doubt. Romulus is himself not from Rome

and is a fratricide, Tarpeia is a traitor, and Hercules is a Greek who attacks the shrine of a Roman goddess. A simplistic definition of *Romanitas*, founded in the physical landscape of the city of Rome and its traditional walls, ancient history/myth, and Roman marital values, elides the vast majority of those who could consider themselves Romans. On a further level, he explores how the simplistic binary became the method for understanding *Romanitas* through his critique of power structures within the Roman state. Through the repeated imagery of boundaries destroyed, created, and manipulated, Propertius emphasizes how the powerful are those with the ability to manipulate boundaries. Although his examples of this power remain primarily in the realm of physical boundaries, the metaphor clearly extends to societal and religious divisions as well. At its most controversial level, Propertius repeatedly emphasizes his own identity as both Roman and Not Roman, claiming two homelands for himself. Thus, he asserts, with himself as the example, the relevance and applicability of his poetry's discussion about Roman identity.

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