READING CYNTHIA AND SEXUAL DIFFERENCE IN THE POEMS OF PROPERTIUS

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'she is always and never the same'
(advertising slogan for 'Contradiction',
a 'fragrance for women' by Calvin Klein, 1999)

Introduction

In the first poem of his second book, Propertius presents an emphatic declaration of his status as a love poet, slyly incorporating a detailed *recusatio* to Maecenas, who he claims has requested that he compose epic instead.[1] Later in the poem, Propertius' preference for elegy over epic seems to be echoed by the predilections of his lover Cynthia, who, as Propertius insists, finds the entire *Iliad* distasteful. According to Propertius, Cynthia's aversion to the poem emerges from a very specific source: the epic's primary female protagonist, Helen. For, as Propertius recalls it, Cynthia disapproves of the whole epic precisely because she finds fault with its '*leuis*' heroine: *si memini, solet illa leuis culpare puellas,/et totam ex Helena non probat Iliada* ('If I remember, she is accustomed to castigate mutable women and does not approve of the whole *Iliad* because of Helen', 2.1.49f.).[2]

Concealing behind its seeming transparency a number of traps, this assertion about Cynthia's reading of Helen raises a number of questions not only about literary genre (the dominant theme of the poem), but also about the intersection of reading and sexual difference in Propertius. For example, what role does 'mutability' play in formulating female literary characters and, even more, why should that quality make them antithetical to 'good' (readable) literature? How should we interpret Cynthia when we realise that *leuis* (the very aspect she most despises in Helen) remains one of the most prominent characteristics attached to *her* throughout Propertius' corpus? Finally, what type of message does such a passage convey to the modern critic about the viability of reading literary women? If Cynthia does not want to read *leuis* Helen, how (or, even, why) should we read *leuis* Cynthia?[3] In this essay, I would like to explore the potent connection between sexual difference, levity and literary criticism established by Cynthia's 'reading' of epic, one that significantly (and with notable irony) comes to embroil Cynthia herself.

My treatment of the question of sexual difference takes three parts. First, I examine what it would mean generally to employ sexual difference as a term of Propertian literary analysis. In part, I attempt to distinguish the analysis of sexual difference in literary texts from the analysis of femininity, the latter being, as I argue, a more prominent concept in the works of previous Propertian

critics. Then, I propose that sexual difference is given textual form in the poetry of Propertius through his attempt to differentiate himself and Cynthia according to their comparative 'densities' of being. Thus I examine the ways in which Propertius' continuing insistence on his own innate stability contrasts with his censure of Cynthia for her 'lightness', a levity firmly rooted in her position as *femina*. Finally, I explore one of the implications of this treatment of sexual difference, a consequence implied by castigation of Helen: Propertius' equation of Cynthia's sexual difference with a type of textual pathology, an 'unreadability.' For Propertius not only uses levity as an encapsulation of Cynthia's sexual difference, but also subsequently labels that very trait an impediment both to interpretation of Cynthia's role in the poetry and the poetry in its entirety (*totam*). As we shall see, Propertius' poetry thus formulates a dangerous equation of Cynthia with categorical indeterminacy, and hence unreadability, that has exercised great influence on subsequent Propertian scholarship. Not only does his insinuation about Cynthia's adverse relationship to coherent signification dictate the ways Cynthia has been read, but it has also, I argue, encouraged a disturbing recent trend in Propertian criticism: the abandonment of any attempts to read her altogether.

Sexual Difference & Literary Analysis

Two distinct concepts have often been used to account for women's presumed difference(s): femininity and sexual difference, or as expressed in other related binaries, gender and sex, nurture and nature, social construction and biology. The first term, femininity, like its related terms, is used to describe the ways in which women's identities are produced in accordance with (or reaction to) socially prescribed practices and roles. Traditional expectations of femininity, for example, have included passivity, a tendency toward expression through emotions, and a greater capacity for care-taking. In general, the term femininity seeks to mark identity as a social process or performance rather than any essential identity which is biologically or psychically (pre)determined.[4] Sexual difference, on the other hand, does not denote an identity that is constituted through social practice, even though it may have an intimate affiliation to the social realm in the way that it accumulates particular meanings and consequences in historical context. Rather, sexual difference seeks to express the ways in which woman's difference helps formulate the subject herself, including her relation to power, language and the symbolic order.[5] Thus, sexual difference as a model for understanding women's subjectivity can be thought to precede femininity theoretically—to constitute the female subject before she is given the opportunity to express it through social performance.

While the relationship between the terms femininity and sexual difference remains highly contested in feminist and gender studies (e.g., whether the two terms can be so clearly distinguished),[6] the contrasting structures of identity

they seek to address can help us make an important clarification when studying literary representations of women by allowing us to pinpoint more closely the object of our study. In other words, the terms allow us to distinguish analysis of the ways in which literary women signify (or are made to signify) identity at the manifest level of the text (often by conforming to, or violating, expectations of femininity in their speech or actions) from the ways in which their identities are constituted by more latent modes of signification that seek to inscribe sexual difference into the very fabric of the character herself. An examination of sexual difference in literature does not necessarily imply the belief that identities are essential outside of literature, only that the texts themselves rely on a rhetoric of essentialism in depicting characters as categorically men or women, that is, not gendered through their activities alone. Where a study of femininity might lead us to analyse plot and event in literature, a study of sexual difference allows us to ask what narrative modes and linguistic devices serve to signify and encapsulate gendered subjectivity, and similarly what position with respect to power and meaning women and men hold. Such a distinction might be denoted by the difference between asking, for example, *what* women say and *how* women speak in literary texts.[7]

My insistence on analysing sexual difference not only seeks to draw attention to a particular dimension of Cynthia's representation in Propertius' poetry, but also to situate it against previous critical treatments of her role which have privileged the socially situated concepts of femininity and masculinity in analysing gender identities. By focusing on the activities of the characters within Propertius' poetry, such scholarship has tended to elucidate the ways in which traditional social roles are enacted or exchanged by the lovers, pointing out the places in which Cynthia, for example, seems to occupy a dominant 'masculine' role in the poetry, while Propertius, ostensibly eschewing traditional masculine power, occupies the subservient 'feminine' one. A reliance on the socially constructed terms femininity and masculinity is evident in the work of Judith Hallett, who demonstrated elegy's use of a variety of strategies that served to assign to elegiac women 'roles which are the antithesis of those which Roman society officially permitted women to adopt'—a formulation which not only explicitly situated identity within social institutions and attitudes, but also linked gendered literary characters directly to their contemporary social counterparts.[8]

Although it may seem at first glance difficult to treat the identity of literary women as anything *but* social performance (i.e., given that they exist solely as textual products, it may seem impossible to imagine any form of subjectivity pre-existing their performance in that text, especially since that performance is necessarily social in being initiated by a witness, the reader), I would nonetheless like to suggest that exclusive concentration on the ways in which masculinity and femininity are (en)acted in Propertius' poems has led to a disregard for the ways in which sexual difference *per se* operates in the poetry, that is, its relation to the formulation of male and female literary subjects. For despite

Propertius' play with social expectations of gender identity, he nonetheless simultaneously insists on making categorical distinctions between himself and Cynthia, distinctions which are decisively maintained throughout the poetry. While Cynthia may at times act a 'masculine' role, her character is never made equivalent in power and position to that of Propertius' persona.[9] As I seek to demonstrate, Cynthia remains fundamentally different in the way she is constituted by certain rhetorical and grammatical devices.[10] We therefore witness a very different textual politics at operation in Propertius' poetry by focusing not on what Cynthia *does* in the poetry (her acceptance or rejection of 'femininity'), but what she *is*—the means by which her subjectivity becomes signified through reference to, and representation of, an essential sexual difference.[11]

Varium et mutabile semper femina?

If sexual difference is a salient concept for literary analysis, then the question remains—where can we witness sexual difference in textual discourse? Critics have answered that question in a number of ways. Shoshana Felman, for example, linked sexual difference to women's dislocation from normative masculine modes of discourse, equating the 'madness' of one female character in a Balzac short story with her textual formulation as woman.[12] I would like to suggest a related manifestation of sexual difference in Propertius: Cynthia's seemingly inherent instability or lightness of being, a quality that serves to situate her equally outside the normative mode of Propertius' text.[13]

Since Propertius' poetry depicts love as a frustrating process, a constantly precarious state in which the male lover faces potential rejection at every turn, it is perhaps not surprising that Cynthia's so-called 'fickleness' assumes a central narrative role. While her own emotions toward Propertius remain primarily enigmatic and indeed unexplored, the poems repeatedly pose instead the more narcissistic question: will Cynthia accept Propertius as her lover this time (for good)?—a concern established from the very beginning of the poetry. Already in 1.6, Propertius agonises about Cynthia's loyalty. He cancels a trip with his friend Tullus, insisting that Cynthia will not let him go, having already threatened at one point that she is no longer his: *illa meam mihi iam se denegat, illa minatur/quae solet ingrato tristis amica uiro* ('She denies already that she is mine, she threatens the things which a sad girlfriend is accustomed to say to her ungrateful man', 1.6.9f.). Although temporarily providing a happier resolution for the poet, poems 1.8a and 8b pointedly dramatise Cynthia's changeability by crafting her first as preparing to travel to Illyria (1.8a), then changing her mind: *hic erit! hic iurata manet! rumpantur iniqui!/uicimus: assiduas non tulit illa preces* ('She will be here! She's sworn to stay here! Let hostile people be damned! We have won: she could not endure our continual entreaties', 1.8b.27f.). Tempted by the eastern riches of a rival, she has been won over instead by Propertius' poetry (39f.). Similarly, the juxtaposition of 2.7 and 2.8 cast Cyn-

thia's variable stance toward the poet in an emphatically negative light. After enthusing over a change in marriage law that will sanction their relationship in the former (2.7), Propertius bitterly laments Cynthia's subsequent change of heart in the latter: *possum ego in alterius positam spectare lacerto?/nec mea dicetur, quae modo dicta mea est?/omnia uertuntur: certe uertuntur amores:/ uinceris aut uincis, haec in amore rota est* ('Am I able to watch her positioned on the arm of another? Will she not be called mine, who recently was called mine? Everything changes; passions indeed change: you will either be conquered or conquer, this is the cycle in love', 2.8.5-8). Later, the specific dynamics of the affair are revealed in more ambiguous terms: despite all the presents and poetry, steely Cynthia never once said 'I love you' (*munera quanta dedi uel qualia carmina feci!/illa tamen numquam ferrea dixit 'amo'*, 2.8.11f.).

Despite Propertius' dependence on Cynthia's vacillations to give the poetry dramatic (even at times melodramatic) shape, it is clear from critical reactions to Propertius' poetry that her 'fickleness' is usually not recognised as a thematic device but is read as a central feature of her character.[14] Indeed, paradoxically, Cynthia's ostensible mutability, her propensity for change, seems the most consistent quality by which she is identified. Barbara Gold captures well the ambivalence such a quality gives Cynthia overall by remarking: 'From the outset [Propertius] makes Cynthia an element of his poetry that is at the same time essential to its meaning but also absent and elusive.'[15] It is not my aim to contest the assumption that Cynthia is difficult to apprehend; rather, I would like to consider the ways in which Propertius lays the foundation for reading Cynthia's participation in the poetry as intangible by insisting on her fundamentally mutable female subjectivity at its more latent level. In other words, I would like to argue that Propertius uses a rhetoric of essential sexual difference to 'naturalise' his strategy for representing Cynthia, to insinuate powerfully that the 'problem' with reading Cynthia comes not from his various authorial techniques and strategies, but from her very nature itself. In particular, I would like to reveal his use of a particular language about subjectivity that serves to demarcate sexual difference by distinguishing Cynthia's fluidity from the stability of his own masculine position.[16]

To begin, the generic female subject in Propertius is depicted as dangerous precisely because she is porous and corruptible, open to outside influence and seduction. Like many women of elegy, Cynthia constantly totters on the verge of betrayal, in part because she is seemingly motivated by her greed for material goods—goods the impoverished, exasperated poet proclaims himself unable to provide.[17] Poem 1.2 casts Cynthia as susceptible to foreign decoration (*Coa ueste, Orontea murra, peregrinis muneribus*, 'clothes from Cos, myrrh from the Orontes, imported gifts'), even as the poet implores her instead to consider attention from a single lover sufficient ornamentation (*uni si qua placet, culta puella sat est*, 'If a girl pleases one man, she's elegant enough', 1.2.26). In 2.16, Propertius worries that a praetor from Illyria, whom he labels in line 2 as a 'big headache' (*maxima cura*) for himself and a 'huge bounty' (*maxima praeda*) for Cynthia, will 'buy' Cynthia in a way that he cannot. He chastises her for being more concerned with a prospective lover's wallet than his social position (*Cynthia non sequitur fascis nec curat honores,/semper amatorum ponderat una sinus*, 'Cynthia does not chase after the rods of office nor care about civil offices; she alone always weighs her lovers' wallets', 2.16.11f.). Later he pronounces boldly that she is destroying herself for a cheap price: *Iuppiter, indigna merce puella perit* ('Jupiter, my girl is being ruined by shameful merchandise', 2.16.16). Finally, in a later poem, women's inherent and categorical susceptibility to material influence, again marked as foreign, is more directly asserted. Ostensibly answering why a night with greedy women has become so expensive, Propertius rails against the too-open trail of luxuries being brought from the east, declaring that luxury items from the east are capable of attacking even confined women: *haec etiam clausas expugnant arma pudicas* ('These weapons overcome even the virtuously secluded', 3.13.9).

The graphic nature of the verb *expugnant* in the latter passage, moreover, suggests the seriousness of the problem. Women are assaulted by material goods, stormed and subdued. Not by wealth alone, however, are women in Propertius overcome. They emerge as equally vulnerable to geographic setting, to threats, to mythological example, to visual images, and to poetry itself. In 1.11, for example, Cynthia has left the poet to go to Baiae, a place he deems suggestive of imminent corruption, 'shores dangerous even for chaste girls' (*litora quae fuerant castis inimica puellis*, 1.11.29). Acknowledging Cynthia's good reputation (17), he nonetheless fears that she is straying without him there, 'as a girl is accustomed to sink without supervision' (*ut solet amoto labi custode puella*, 1.11.15). In 1.19, Propertius' fear of Cynthia's disregard for his eventual funeral gradually intensifies, ultimately incorporating a categorical profession that even a resigned (*certa*) girl can be swayed (*flectitur*) by continual threats (*assiduis minis*, 24). Similarly, confessing his typical jealousy in 2.6, Propertius attributes its necessity to the persistent depravity of women, a lack of morals not only encouraged by example (including the rape of the Sabines), but also by lascivious paintings which have corrupted their eyes: *quae manus obscenas depinxit prima tabellas/et posuit casta turpia uisa domo,/illa puellarum ingenuos corrupit ocellos* ('The hand that first painted obscene pictures and placed disgusting images in a pure house, that hand corrupted the innocent eyes of girls', 2.6.27-29). Finally, just as Cynthia has been won over by Propertius' poetry in 1.8b (*hanc ego non auro, non Indis flectere conchis,/sed potui blandi carminis obsequio*, 'I was able to bend her not with gold nor Indian pearls, but with the persuasiveness of alluring verse', 1.8b.39f.), in 2.34b he describes the skill of pastoral poetry in using ten apples or a kid to 'break through' (*corrumpere*) women (69f.).

The persistent instability women show in the face of such outside forces acquires explanatory force in Propertius as he increasingly attributes the quality to the generic category of woman (*puellae*) or to the position of *femina* itself. In doing so, he recasts women's vulnerability as a natural propensity for change, a

condition that pre-exists any external threat. Such a rhetorical strategy obscures the cause and effect relationship, asking whether women are changed more because of the intervention of outside forces or because of their own innate changeability. This conceit thus serves to make women's nature complicit in its own corruption. Its use of essentialising vocabulary also evokes Mercury's infamous attempt to make Aeneas frightened of Dido through his similar categorisation of all women: *uarium et mutabile semper/femina* ('Woman is always an inconstant and changeable thing', Virg. *Aen.* 4.569f.).[18] Poem 2.9 provides Propertius' lengthiest harangue against women's mutability, casting it in notably categorical terms:

> sed uobis facile est uerba et componere fraudes:
> hoc unum didicit femina semper opus.
> non sic incerto mutantur flamine Syrtes,
> nec folia hiberno tam tremefacta Noto,
> quam cito feminea non constat foedus in ira,
> siue ea causa grauis siue ea causa leuis.
>
> (2.9.31-36)

> But it is easy for you to compose words and deceptions:
> this is one skill women have always learned.
> Not so quickly do the Syrtes change with a shifting gust
> nor the shivering leaves in winter wind
> as an agreement becomes inconstant in womanly anger,
> either at a serious charge or a trivial one.

Thus, women en masse (*femina*, echoed again in *feminea*) are linked to deceptive speech, to a capacity for change, inconstancy (*mutantur, non constat*) in an agreement greater than the Syrtes in a gust or leaves when faced with winter gales. In the final line, Propertius even craftily utilises the *grauis/leuis* opposition, whose importance in delineating male and female subjectivity we will consider below, to insist on the universality of his charge: women are like this for both serious and trivial reasons.[19] Later, in poem 2.25, Propertius uses a new rhetorical figure to cast women's lightness of being, accusing *femina* literally of not holding density for long: *nulla diu femina pondus habet* (22).

Propertius' insistence on women's generic inconstancy, forcible though it is, remains secondary to a more prominent strategy—his explication of, and insistence upon, Cynthia's specific manifestation of women's levity. Propertius highlights the changeability of Cynthia through a number of textual devices, including his explicit use of the terms *leuis* and *leuitas* to signal her lack of stability.[20] Although Wyke has outlined the later connection Ovid makes between *leuis* and the conception of elegy itself, that is, where 'lightness' connotes the opposite of seriousness,[21] I suggest that Propertius' application of it to Cynthia (*qua* Cynthia) signifies the broader conception of female subjectivity

as 'weightless', meaning, by extension, porous, fluid, unstable, and dangerously penetrable. In 2.16, for example, as we have seen, Propertius seeks to fight off a 'barbarian' rival for Cynthia's love, one who has the requisite presents to corrupt her (his now familiar anxiety); he hastens to assure the reader that the situation was not caused by any misdeed on his part. After all, Cynthia's mutability (*leuitas*) emerges from her very status as a beautiful woman: *non quia peccarim (testor te), sed quia uulgo/formosis leuitas semper amica fuit* ('Not because I committed a wrong, I swear, but because generally mutability has always been a friend to beautiful women', 2.16.25f.).

Poem 1.15 opens with a direct claim about Cynthia's mutable character, drawing pointed attention to her levity, her *leuitas*, in the opening lines: *saepe ego multa tuae leuitatis dura timebam,/hac tamen excepta, Cynthia, perfidia* ('Often I was afraid of the many cruelties of your levity, Cynthia, but with even this treachery excepted', 1.15.1f.). Before he has even levelled any explicit accusation against her (he will later lament the time she has taken to adorn herself before arriving), Propertius thus forcefully assigns to Cynthia a categorical lightness of being that has already been negatively marked through its ironic connection to her inflexibility (*dura*).[22] Even more, Cynthia's manifest levity is labelled an incessant danger to the poet (*saepe timebam*), one which grammatically pre-exists the events of the poem, and which has produced an ostensibly incomprehensible action on her part (*hac tamen excepta*). Later, in 2.5, Propertius scolds Cynthia for her reputation around Rome. Professing that he can find one woman among all the false ones (*multis fallacibus*, 5) who at least will be satisfied to be praised by his poetry, he encourages himself to break from Cynthia now while he is angry. Then he gloats that he will condemn her with one final act of writing and composes a pithy epigraph that not only highlights her levity, but also through its potential duration (*quod non umquam tua deleat aetas*, 'that which your lifetime can never erase', 27) attempts to cast her in those terms in perpetuity: '*Cynthia, forma potens: Cynthia uerba leuis*' ('"Cynthia, mighty figure: Cynthia, ephemeral in word"', 28).[23]

In addition to representing Cynthia's levity as an essential quality (intransitive), Propertius also insists on her ability to be penetrated, or acted upon, by external forces (transitive, with Cynthia occupying the position of direct object), a structure most prominently signalled by the verb *mutare*. In 1.18, asking why Cynthia has become angry at him, Propertius wonders how certain poems have changed her: *quid tantum merui? quae te mihi carmina mutant?* ('Why did I deserve this? What poems changed you with regard to me?', 1.18.9). He then applies the adjective *leuis* (changeable) directly to her, making her nature itself responsible, even as he seeks to deny his own involvement with another woman (11f.). Poem 2.2 expresses hope that old age will never be able to change her appearance (*faciem mutare*, 15), a romantic wish that is later reversed when Propertius gleefully predicts the changes heavy old age (*grauis aetas*) will bring (3.25.11). So, too, in 2.14, Propertius claims that he is ready to drop

dead if Cynthia is changed (*mutabere*, 31) by any fault of his. So susceptible to change is Cynthia that at least one situation in which she escapes change is marked as startling, unnatural. Hence Propertius' shocked (and perjorative) tone in 2.33b, in which, contrary to all expectations, Cynthia remains unaffected by the wine she has been drinking: *me miserum: ut multo nihil est mutata Lyaeo!* ('Wretched me—she isn't changed at all by the wine', 35).

Importantly, Cynthia's presumed mutability does not derive meaning in isolation, but is constantly contrasted to Propertius' own claims of fidelity, constancy and stability; where Cynthia is *leuis*, Propertius presents himself as emphatically *grauis*.[24] In 2.20, for example, professing that even if he were shackled and Cynthia imprisoned in Danaë's tower he would still rescue her, he demands that she never doubt his *grauitas* (*tu modo ne dubita de grauitate mea*, 14).[25] Propertius' stability is similarly reinforced by the assertion that he is impervious to change. Thus, Propertius scolds his friend Bassus in 1.4, for trying to make him change his affections (make him passively *mutatum*) by continually praising other women: *quid mihi tam multas laudando, Basse, puellas/mutatum domina cogis abire mea?* ('Why by praising so many women, Bassus, do you seek to force me, changed, to abandon my mistress?', 1.4.1f.). The sense of Cynthia's violation in 1.15, when she arrives late to visit him, is powerfully contrasted by Propertius' claims in the same poem that he is unable to be changed from loving her: *nulla prius uasto labentur flumina ponto,/annus et inuersas duxerit ante uices,/ quam tua sub nostro mutetur pectore cura* ('Not sooner shall the seas flow back from the vast ocean and the year turn backwards than love for you will be changed in my heart', 1.15.29-31). Finally, in 1.18 Propertius wonders whether Cynthia doubts his sincerity precisely because his body is not changed, that is, gives no sign of changed colour: *an quia parua damus mutato signa colore,/et non ulla meo clamat in ore fides?* ('Is it because I give so few indications by my changed complexion and no trust resonates on my lips?', 1.18.17f.).

The inverse roles men and women occupy with regard to change and changeability (that is, the contrast between men's ability to enact change and women's propensity to be changed)[26] is established from the very outset of Book 1. The poem begins with Propertius being 'captured' (*cepit*) by Cynthia, then 'taught' (*docuit*) by Amor to dislike chaste women and to live recklessly (1.1.1-6).[27] Although momentarily the object of Cynthia's and Amor's interventions, he seeks to assume instead the domineering role of Milanion who not only 'crushed the savagery of the harsh Atalanta' (*saeuitiam durae contudit Iasidos*, 10), but also 'was able to tame the swift girl herself' (*ergo uelocem potuit domuisse puellam*, 15), pointedly the direct object of his domestication. The potential for men to dominate women is linked explicitly to the vocabulary of change later in the poem when Propertius asks that the witches who control the moon 'change the mind of my mistress' (*dominae mentem conuertite nostrae*, 21).

This contrast between men's and women's relationship to change is often heightened grammatically when men are put in the position of being the subject

of *mutare*, directly changing or exchanging women, a juxtaposition that also makes clear their relative power positions. Thus, in 2.17, having called Cynthia's change of mind about admitting him equivalent to murder (1f.), Propertius (nominative) still refuses to change her (direct object), believing she will learn to weep at his steadfastness: *quod quamuis ita sit, dominam mutare cauebo:/tum flebit, cum in me senserit esse fidem* ('Although she is this way, I will take care not to change my mistress, for she will weep when she perceives that there is trustworthiness in me', 2.17.17f.). This construction, men (nominative) changing their girlfriends, recurs in 3.20 when Propertius criticises a man as 'unfeeling, in that he could exchange his girlfriend for financial reward' (*durus, qui lucro potuit mutare puellam*, 3).

The antithetical, albeit it tightly imbricated, relationship between male and female identity is perhaps most directly drawn in two important later passages, both of which rely equally on the vocabulary of 'density' and that of change. In 2.24b, Propertius repeats his characterisation of Cynthia as *leuis*, asking whether she is ashamed to be so beautiful (*formosam*), yet so mutable (*leuem*), even as he is called heavy (*grauis*) to her bed (18-20). Has her love turned its wings (*uertit pennas*) so quickly? he demands (22). Professing his steadfastness in contrast, Propertius declares himself categorically unable to be changed—that not the whole age of the Sibyl, nor the Labours of Hercules, nor even death can change him (*me non...mutabit* 33). Ultimately, he believes that she will recognise his constancy after death, imagining her repeating the claim twice for emphasis: *tu mea compones et dices 'ossa, Properti,/haec tua sunt? eheu tu mihi certus eras,/certus eras eheu, quamuis nec sanguine auito/nobilis et quamuis non ita diues eras'* ('You will bury my remains and will say, "Are these your bones, Propertius? Alas, you were faithful to me, faithful you were, alas. Even though you were neither from noble blood nor so wealthy"', 35-38). He then repeats his insistence on his fundamental inability to be changed, remaining steadfast even when faced with her poor treatment: *nil ego non patiar, numquam me iniuria mutat* ('I would endure everything, insults never change me', 39).

Earlier, in poem 1.12, Propertius laments the consequences of Cynthia's travel, insisting that it affects both lovers. The form of his complaint, *non sum ego qui fueram: mutat uia longa puellas* ('I am not who I was: a long journey changes women', 11), however, marks the critical distinctions that serve to encapsulate his divergent representations of their subjectivity. Although its meaning suggests a change to both parties (implying that their subjects are articulated within a mutually dependent system), the language applied to each nonetheless prescribes notably different grammatical positions: Propertius' transformation is conceived around existential (and intransitive) forms of *esse*, 'to be' (*sum, fueram*), implying his comprehensibility as a subject at both moments, while Cynthia is described solely and generically in the accusative case (*puellas*) as the object of women's susceptibility for change, for being changed by travel. In the same poem, Propertius, lamenting that his complaints

are heavy (*grauis*, 14) to his own ears, praises the hypothetical man who can actively change his passion when spurned (*potuit mutare calores*, 17), emphasising once again the masculine nominative position with respect to change. Finally, he concludes with adamant insistence of his own fidelity to Cynthia, highlighting its magnitude by attributing it to "*fas*": *mi neque amare aliam neque ab hac desistere fas est:/ Cynthia prima fuit, Cynthia finis erit* ('For me it is forbidden to love another or to cease from loving this one: Cynthia was first, Cynthia will be last', 19f.).

Throughout the first two books of the Propertian corpus, then, Cynthia becomes progressively defined through a 'lightness of being', a quality not only suggested by the actions she takes, i.e. the things she is made to do and say in the course of the poetry, but one also tightly linked to her conceptual position as woman (*femina*). Propertius, on the other hand, claims a stability for himself, a solidity, a *grauitas*, that is equally, if less explicitly, gendered. While the difference is emphasised thematically by their tumultuous love affair, a close analysis of the text suggests that the difference is also grammatically and syntactically constructed and maintained. They are described through essentialising vocabulary such as *leuitas* and *grauitas*; so, too, their grammatical positions contrast—while women more frequently occupy the position of direct object, acted upon by external forces that actualise (and exploit) women's potential for change (*mutare, uincere, corrumpere)*, men refuse to be acted upon, often serving as the very agents of the change.

Propertius' and Cynthia's reliance on each other to articulate the meanings and consequences of their gendered positions, moreover, suggests that sexual difference remains a critical term for understanding the mutual ways in which male and female subjectivity are conceptualised and constituted in Propertius' poetry. If, as Micaela Janan has argued, the figure of cross-dressing Hercules in Propertius 4.9 demonstrates a manifest inability securely to fix gender identity within the system of difference,[28] it is significant to note that Propertius attempts in the first two books of his corpus to do just that, that is, to attribute stability and boundedness to his position, while assigning all the fluidity, mutability and ambiguity to *femina* and, by extension, to Cynthia. By adopting Propertius' model of sexual difference for analysis, I do not mean to legitimate his claims (that is, to suggest sexual difference is 'actually' founded on such a distinction), only to emphasise the potency with which this trope operates in his poetry. For as a way of delineating conceptual power in the poem, Cynthia's mutability situates her rigidly outside the normative narrative domain. Although we have seen in one poem that Propertius humorously exploits the identification of Cynthia with *leuitas* and himself with *grauitas* when he asks her whether she is ashamed to be so *leuis* when he is called *grauis* to her bed (2.24b), the difference is meant overall to have serious interpretive consequences.[29] For Propertius' attribution of fluidity to sexual difference leads to his concomitant attempts to keep Cynthia out of conceptual reach of the reader precisely through that quality. That levity presumes to keep Cynthia at a distance

from the reader suggests a darker side of her characterisation that is often overlooked by critics who praise the ways that Cynthia's indeterminacy seems to allow her to defy restrictive categories, such as femininity. Propertius' strategy in making Cynthia seem 'incomprehensible' (not just 'indeterminate') thus invites a critical question that underlies my entire treatment—is woman readable in Propertius?

Is Woman Readable?

If sexual difference does serve in some way to implicate Cynthia in categorical mutability, then it is important to determine what role it plays in our reading of Propertius or, equally, our reading of woman in Propertius. Throughout the corpus, Cynthia's sexual difference clearly places her outside the realm of masculine comprehension, a position witnessed by Propertius' exasperated, and ostensibly failed, attempts to comprehend her and her actions; in 1.15, for example, her behaviour is notably marked as falling outside even the boundaries of his expectations of her cruelty (*hac tamen excepta*).[30] However, I would like to argue that Propertius goes further in demanding that the reader diagnose Cynthia's levity not only as erotic dysfunction, but even more as textual pathology, a continual disruption to the entire textual order and therefore to any act of interpretation—an injunction that ironically receives its most explicit formulation in the mouth of Cynthia herself. So potent is this prognosis of women's antithetical relationship to literary exegesis that we will see its varying influence on subsequent critics who have both reproved Cynthia for this quality and, even more seriously, have avoided reading her altogether.[31]

We have already seen that Cynthia is represented as a reader whose literary criticism of the *Iliad* takes a very distinct, if limited, form in 2.1. While Cynthia's role in the entire scene is dubious (as is any attempt to grant her as a subject complete semiotic autonomy), Propertius nonetheless attempts to implicate her fully in this act of criticism. He begins his statement with the phrase *si memini* ('if I remember correctly') and then adds *solet* ('she is accustomed'), both of which establish her 'essential' existence prior to the text by citing ostensible actions and speech predating the poem. Through his assertion of what Cynthia said, that Helen's levity made the entire *Iliad* distasteful, Propertius even more cunningly forces Cynthia (as female reader) to identify against herself (as *leuis* literary heroine). Taken as a model for reading sexual difference and levity, in discounting the 'readability' of the *Iliad* because of Helen, Cynthia's 'statement' thus serves to help Propertius instruct the reader to find the very quality which is most used to describe Cynthia, one based in her sexual difference, reprehensible and indeed corrosive to the entire project of interpretation.

This insinuation that Cynthia's sexual difference (through levity) undermines textual stability has notably influenced the principles applied to the reconstruction of Propertius' problematic text by at least one editor. In creating his edi-

tion of Book 2, P.J. Enk, 'a repentant separatist', argued for the unity of the difficult 2.1 by maintaining 'that the incongruity between the delightful girl of the opening and the *dura puella* of the closing lines is meant to reflect Cynthia's fickleness in a manner that is programmatic for the whole book.'[32] Poem 2.1, the very poem in which Cynthia censures *leuis* Helen, is thus 'allowed' to remain inconsistent, structurally incomprehensible, precisely because it serves to highlight the programmatic mutability of Cynthia herself. In effect, Cynthia's incoherence serves as the primary mode for explaining (or justification for not explaining) the logical and structural inconsistencies of the poem. As Cynthia, so goes the poem, if not the entire corpus. Or, we might say, *leuis* Cynthia has so infiltrated the project of reading Propertius that 'normal' editing principles no longer apply.

Just as Enk finds in Cynthia's mutability a barrier to any reconstruction of a stable text, so, too, many critics follow Propertius (and Cynthia) in diagnosing this quality pointedly as malignant, a danger to textual interpretation precisely because of its unboundedness, its inability to be recognised or, for the literary critic, to be securely 'read'. The first poem of Propertius' corpus, for example, begins emphatically with Cynthia's name, drawing what appears to be a fundamental distinction between Cynthia as the agent of erotic desire (as the subject of the verb) and the passivity of Propertius' wretched persona (in the accusative) (1.1.1f.). Yet, as we have seen, the narrative abruptly shifts to Amor as subject, who subsequently performs the activities of *deiecit* ('threw down'), *pressit* ('pressed upon'), and finally *docuit* ('taught') against Propertius, himself emphatically still present in both the *mihi* and *me* of lines 3-6. Having ostensibly initiated the activity of the poetry, Cynthia is thus quickly displaced from the poem's centre and, in fact, does not reappear until the next poem.[33] For the remainder of 1.1, Cynthia is present only indirectly through allusion and metaphor, most particularly in harsh Atalanta (*durae Iasidos*, 10), while Propertius goes on to relate his role in love, love's effects on him, his appeals to others for help, and, finally, a warning to those who might be tempted to love.

Despite the fact that Propertius holds centre stage in 1.1, gradually (if not entirely convincingly) relegating Cynthia to its margins, one literary critic nonetheless focused on the indeterminacy of Cynthia's role when interpreting the poem, finding her inability to be securely located a critical aspect of it. Cynthia, we might say, signified more in her absence (her relegation to parts unknown) than Propertius in his emphatic presence. Thus P.J. Connor argued that Cynthia was '...both an inscrutable and a menacing presence', and insisted further that '...this presence affects the whole of the poem.'[34] By his provocative linking of the adjectives 'inscrutable' and 'menacing', Connor thus seems to echo Cynthia's own distaste for Helen, for he firmly implies that Cynthia's inscrutability, her position outside the bounds of readability, makes her a threat. And so pervasive is Cynthia's destabilising influence that Connor declares it haunts the entire poem, just as Helen has previously corrupted the entire *Iliad* for Cynthia.

Importantly, Propertius' strategy not only serves to instruct his readers on how to read woman, but also on why they should give up on reading her altogether, suggesting slyly that Cynthia is perhaps better off not read. For Cynthia's discomfort with reading Helen receives echo in her own ostensible attempts to prevent others from reading Propertius' poetry about her. In 4.7 Cynthia returns from the dead and addresses the poet directly, a gesture that has been characterised by many critics as an assumption of a type of autonomy she lacks in previous books. Barbara Flaschenriem comments, for example, on Cynthia's attempt in that poem to dictate her own epitaph ('HIC TIBVRTINA IACET AVREA CYNTHIA TERRA:/ACCESSIT RIPAE LAVS, ANIENE, TVAE, 'Here lies golden Cynthia in Tiburtine ground: glory has been added to your banks, Anio', 4.7.85f.):

> ...Cynthia's epitaph both acknowledges and dramatizes the inevitable 'estrangement' of a literary text from its authorial source...we might say that Cynthia, the poet's fictional creation, has assumed an existence independent of her creator. She has ceased to belong to Propertius alone, for she is now the possession of a reading public.[35]

Indeed, many of Cynthia's statements in the poem do seem subversive given the discursive images and modes that have previously encompassed her. In contrast to previous accusations of her emotional levity, for example, Cynthia protests adamantly that she has been faithful to the poet (*me seruasse fidem*, 52), potentially upsetting the gap Propertius has carefully erected between male fidelity and female levity. So, too, Cynthia asserts the importance of her own position in the poetry: *longa mea in libris regna fuere tuis* ('My reign in your poetry has been long', 50). Yet any attempts to seize semiotic control and signify 'beyond' the reach of Propertius are undermined by a powerful request that she goes on to make. For Cynthia eventually demands that Propertius destroy all the verses he has written about her, an ironic call for the end of her ability to signify, just as her 'life' has been ended in the poetry: *et quoscumque meo fecisti nomine uersus/ure mihi: laudes desine habere meas* ('And whatever verses you have made with my name, burn them for me: stop garnerning praise from me', 77f.). Flaschenriem writes that the request 'hints...at her desire to assert some control over her own reputation, and to claim an identity that may not correspond to her representation in the poet-lover's books.'[36] Yet such critical endorsement of the request does not acknowledge its fundamental nihilism; Cynthia simply does not exist outside Propertius' poetry. In Propertius' formulation, Cynthia's assumption of subjectivity thus seems to emerge (or to be glimpsed most openly) at the very moment she is seeking textual eradication. Is her female subjectivity thus incompatible with being read?

This discomfort with, at times even aversion toward, reading Cynthia, one expressed in Cynthia's own voice in 4.7, can be traced in many forms of modern Propertian criticism. Recently, for example, many scholars have abandoned

Books 1-3 and emigrated to Book 4 for their discussions of gender and sexual difference in Propertius, a trend that began with Judith Hallett's curious turn to Book 4 to demonstrate Cynthia's importance, as opposed to the first three books in which she holds more obvious textual significance.[37] Wyke in part defends Hallett's interest in Book 4 by arguing that 'the fourth book constitutes a point of departure in the corpus, for women are elaborately represented and frequently even speak. Through the characters and voices of Arethusa, Tarpeia, Acanthis, Cynthia, and Cornelia, the last poetry-book introduces into male-authored elegy a form of female subjectivity.'[38] Yet the implication of such strategies (both explicitly and implicitly stated), that Cynthia can be avoided in Books 1-3 because she does not signify female subjectivity there or, perhaps more accurately, because she signifies it there in ambivalent ways (i.e., in more restrictive, less coherent, less politically important, less autonomous ways), seems troublesome.[39]

Even more, Cynthia's role has been affected by an increasing emphasis on the study of literary textuality rather than subjectivity in Propertius. In such scholarship, Propertius has been 'restored' as a sophisticated poet rather than a lover recording the immediate experience of anguished heartbreak, one whose work often seems self-consciously and provocatively to explore the act and art of writing itself.[40] Although Cynthia's participation in specific poems has been well explicated (i.e., as a literary device) in such scholarship, few attempts have been made to outline the overall, often shifting form of her character *per se*.[41] The most influential reading of Cynthia today, Maria Wyke's description of Cynthia as a *scripta puella*, illustrates the problematic erasure of Cynthia's significance that often accompanies such a 'literary' approach.[42] Providing a refutation of previous 'autobiographical' attempts to read Cynthia as a real Roman woman, Wyke insists instead that Cynthia's form in the poetry is subordinate to the complicated dynamics of literary representation and the narrative demands of her author.[43] Extending her treatment to all the elegists, Wyke argues that the bodies of elegiac women serve specifically (and exclusively) as 'metaphors for the poetic projects and political interests of their authors'.[44]

Despite the accomplishments of Wyke in integrating exegesis of Cynthia into contemporary emphasis on Propertius' literary techniques (notable, in particular, because interest in Cynthia had temporarily seemed to diminish alongside abandonment of the historical method of reading Propertius), her approach nonetheless privileges analysis of the text and its author's literary demands over explication of the woman constituted by it. That is, Wyke's analysis allows us increasingly to learn *how* and perhaps *why* Cynthia comes into being, but not to explore the full range of possibilities of *who* (or *what*) she is in any expansive way. This does not mean that the terms 'woman' and 'text' are mutually exclusive in Wyke's work (indeed she demonstrates convincingly their intimate involvement), only that the term *woman* itself, that is, the consequences of sexual difference as it is constructed by the text, is too often made subordinate

to delineation of the generic processes of its production and, even more, its relation to Propertius' literary ambitions in Wyke's treatment.

Although Wyke considers other aspects of gendered politics in her treatment of Cynthia (including insightful discussion of the social consequences of women's literary representations), the potential danger of her approach, which obscures any attention to the representation of Cynthia's subjectivity as it is formulated by and through sexual difference, is made explicit in the work of Kathleen McNamee. Analysing the one book that Wyke leaves out of her thesis, Book 1, McNamee argues a thesis similar to Wyke's—namely that Cynthia 'is in every detail an allegory for the kind of poetry that Propertius is willing to write.'[45] In expanding the general paradigm of Cynthia as 'written', McNamee explicitly denies Cynthia any importance outside that role. Arguing that Cynthia holds an 'incoherent mix of character traits unlikely to be found in a single person', McNamee subsequently concludes: 'If I am right, then Cynthia's conflicting character traits, even the question of whether her name was Cynthia or not, have diminished importance in and of themselves.'[46] This assertion makes clear the ultimate banishment of terms of Cynthia's sexual difference (incoherence, contradiction, levity) from such critical projects.

While such literary approaches have yielded important insight into the varied, often contradictory, ways in which Propertius' poetry performs as a multivalent text rather than any authentic record of his personal experiences, such work has too often insisted that genre and literary self-definition remain the only significant terms in reading Cynthia, a select focus that obscures and dismisses the meanings Cynthia might signify outside the domain of poetic production. I argue here in particular for a return to exploration of the meanings produced around the term 'woman' or, perhaps more precisely, to exploration of the contours the position 'woman' receives in Propertius' poetry, at least in the ways in which her sexual difference receives articulation through Cynthia. In effect, this project establishes a site capable of mediating Wyke's restrictive binary of the *scripta puella* versus the 'real' woman by considering Cynthia's relationship not to historical women *per se*, but to the term 'woman' itself—woman as a fundamental conceptual category rather than any discrete, historically actualised person. By doing so, I do not seek to dismiss the saliency of the current literary mode of analysis (indeed, I consider this project to have important resonances with it), only to raise a different set of questions about the process of reading, namely whether our reading of Cynthia is as contingent upon the textual dynamics of sexual difference as it is upon narrative strategies of literary self-definition. Thus, I argue, the fundamental 'difficulty' with reading Cynthia is conditioned not only by the inherent ambiguities of textual discourse, but also by Propertius' specific (and strategic) attempts to give textual form to Cynthia's sexual difference.

Conclusion: On Not Reading Like Cynthia

This study arose from numerous frustrations I have encountered in reading recent Propertian scholarship; in particular I have become uncomfortable with current modes of reading Cynthia that make her continually subordinate to other questions, such as Propertius' literary self-identification or his so-called feminism. While it is not my intention to declare only one type of reading of Cynthia relevant to the explication of Propertius, I would like to rethink the long-term implications of the current avoidance of Cynthia *per se*. In particular, I would like to suggest that Cynthia herself provides a dubious sanction of such methodologies. For Cynthia ostensibly does not like *leuis* Helen, indeed does not want to read her, and now, following her example with great irony, we do not seem to like *leuis* Cynthia; nor indeed are we comfortable reading her—what are we afraid of?

More broadly, this work poses questions about the relationship between reading, representation and gender identity. In particular, I wished to conduct an experiment, to ask whether sexual difference *is* textually significant; rather than raising the question through concepts like *écriture féminine*, that is, women's distinctive experiences in self-representation and writing,[47] I wanted to examine the relationship of sexual difference to *reading*, or at least the elusive ways in which reading and being read are referenced around sexual difference in the poems of Propertius.[48] By exposing the complicated relationship between the representation of sexual difference and female (literary) subjectivity, moreover, I attempted to provide a departure from 'femininity' as the primary term of feminist literary analysis of Propertius. For I believe that the concept of sexual difference allows us to examine the meanings of women's participation in literature at the site of their constitution as 'women' rather than at the surface level of their performance of gendered roles. An admittedly difficult project, it would nonetheless allow us to ask not only what women do in literature, but also how their sexual difference functions textually to contribute to their formulation as literary subjects; subjects for whom sexual difference may prescribe a variety of relationships—to power, signification, and even to the reader her- or himself. By my reference to sexual difference and subjectivity, I do not mean to argue that there are essential differences between men and women, merely that a conception of essential difference is often presumed and enacted by literature—and it is a textual formulation to which we must attend. After all, literary texts retain an important role not only in defining social roles for men and women, but also in describing them conceptually—as do the interpretive acts we use to engage them.

While there are a plurality of tropes and figures that Propertius could use to represent sexual difference (including Cynthia's relation to conceptual power or her use of language), I have argued that sexual difference is made manifest in part by contrasting densities of subjectivity, that is by the antithesis between female fluidity and male stability, a conceit that allows Propertius to situate

Cynthia outside the narrative's dominant constructions of rationality and recognition. Indeed, we can witness some of the consequences of such a narrative strategy: for by linking Cynthia's overall characterisation as changeable in love to her position as woman, Propertius attempts to 'naturalise' Cynthia's levity, to suggest that the difficulty of reading Cynthia emerges not from the way in which he depicts her, but from her very nature as *femina*. Or, in terms that reveal even further the close alliance Propertius attempts to forge with his reader, such a conceit allows Propertius to assure his readers that we will be as frustrated in reading Cynthia as he has been in loving her.

The final, albeit latent, part of my project, therefore, has been the reclaiming of Cynthia; I have attempted to reconstruct her not *despite* this quality of fluidity and mutability, but *through* it—to give her shape precisely when Propertius seeks so adamantly to deny both the visibility and indeed the significance of that shape.[49] But Cynthia's very shapelessness and its ostensible foundation in sexual difference raise serious questions about her relationship, about women's relationship overall, to the Propertian literary project. The title of one of Maria Wyke's articles is both instructive and provocative in this regard: 'Reading Female Flesh'.[50] Her accompanying analysis, moreover, is convincing in its disruption of any expectation that 'flesh' in elegy can be read transparently as 'flesh'. Although we can now be persuaded to give up reading 'flesh', however, I do not think we are yet ready to give up reading 'female' and indeed Cynthia *qua* Cynthia. For despite its potential allusion to other meanings, the female flesh that Cynthia inhabits has yet to be fully unmasked and scrutinised as a sign of that which it presumes first and foremost to signify: sexual difference.[51]

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NOTES

1. Whether or not the detail is ironic (that is, whether or not Propertius seeks to incorporate the very genre he denies by providing such extensive description) is debatable. G. Davis, *Polyhymnia: The Rhetoric of Horatian Lyric Discourse* (Berkeley 1991) describes such a strategy in the works of Horace, naming it a 'mode of assimilation', 'a device by which the speaker disingenuously seeks to include material and styles that he ostensibly precludes' (11).

2. Earlier in the poem, Propertius claims that he composes 'long *Iliads*' based on their activities in bed (13f.). In citing Propertius, I follow E.A. Barber's 1960 OCT.

3. In *Satire* 6, Juvenal also represents a female reader passing judgment on an epic heroine, although there the reader is notably aligned with the literary woman, pardoning the dying Dido (*perituraе ignoscit Elissae*, 435).

4. For a useful treatment of terminology, see T. Moi, 'Feminist, Female, Feminine', in C. Belsey and J. Moore (eds.), *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism* (Cambridge MA and Oxford, repr. 1991), 117-32.

5. See, for example, the entry 'sex difference' in M. Humm, *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory*[2] (New York and London 1995), 256f. The complicated connection between subjectivity and sexual difference receives greatest articulation in the work of psychoanalytic critics beginning with Freud and later Lacan. Luce Irigaray's work provides an important critique of psychoanalysis and, in doing so, brings the question of female subjectivity to the fore. It is not my goal to contribute to their theoretical articulations of sexual difference, nor to reproduce their models in

all their complexities; rather, I seek to use the broadest outlines of their work to highlight a mode for analysing literary women that I believe has been lacking in previous scholarly treatment of Cynthia.

6. My seemingly categorical distinction between the two terms should be understood as a strategic gesture for the purposes of this article; their relationship remains a complicated one in the field of feminist philosophy. See, for example, the contrasting viewpoints about women's difference in L. Nicholson (ed.), *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange* (New York and London 1995).

7. This formulation resembles closely the concept of *écriture féminine*, a field of feminist research headed by writers like Hélène Cixous that explores women's distinctive forms of expression. See Humm (n.5 above), 75f., and the essays in E. Abel (ed.), *Writing and Sexual Difference* (Chicago 1982).

8. J. Hallett, 'Women in Roman Elegy: A Reply', *Arethusa* 7 (1974), 211-17, at 212. See also her original formulation of the argument in 'The Role of Woman in Roman Elegy: Counter-Cultural Feminism', *Arethusa* 6 (1973), 103-24. B. Gold, '"But Ariadne Was Never There in the First Place": Finding the Female in Roman Poetry', in N.S. Rabinowitz and A. Richlin (eds.), *Feminist Theory and the Classics* (New York 1993), 75-101, promises a more textual approach by adopting Alice Jardine's notion of 'gynesis'. Her accompanying analysis, however, centres primarily around the socially (rather than textually) situated concepts of femininity and masculinity, that is, those ways in which Cynthia and Propertius' actions in the poetry are related to socially defined roles. Thus she exposes not the methods by which gender and sexual difference are discursively constructed within the poetry (indeed, there is little attention given to the language and structure of the text, despite her ostensible interest in finding its 'spaces'), but the relation of its (already) gendered characters to traditional Roman social roles. In this way, her work resonates strongly with Hallett's earlier treatment. Gold moreover produces a complementary description of the traditional gender roles that she believes are being subverted—where Hallett describes Cynthia as 'masculine', achieving 'braininess, egotism, and libidinousness' ('Reply', 212), Gold outlines Propertius' assumption of 'feminine' qualities like 'devotion, submissiveness, loyalty, subservience, passivity, and procreativity' (91).

9. E. Greene, *The Erotics of Domination: Male Desire and the Mistress in Latin Love Poetry* (Baltimore and London 1998), 37f., focusing on 'the gender specificity of Propertius' portrayals of Cynthia and...the ways desire is constituted' in Book 1, similarly argues against romanticised notions of gender equality in the poems; she insists that 'amatory relations in Propertius' elegies are closely bound up with the "realities" of male domination and power.'

10. In insisting that Cynthia remains fundamentally 'female', if not always 'feminine', I depart from Hallett (n.8 above) and Gold (n.8 above) in not finding Propertius 'feminist'. Although, as Hallett and Gold have argued, the concepts of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' do not serve to distinguish the two lovers absolutely, making Propertius seem politically radical, the presence of sexual difference does define and differentiate them irrevocably. While an insistence on sexual difference alone does not make Propertius anti-feminist, his use of sexual difference to retain the advantages he seems to be denying on the surface of the poetry (as he 'slums' in feminine roles) suggests his text deserves another, more sceptical, reading. Thus, while Propertius may put the privileges of his 'masculine' identity in jeopardy, he never relinquishes other essential privileges, privileges bestowed by his 'male' identity. Despite the fact that she comes at it from a very different perspective, one consonant with her concern for literary representation, M. Wyke, 'Mistress and Metaphor in Augustan Elegy', *Helios* 16 (1989), 25-47, also finds Propertius' poetry anti-feminist, pointing out that the only gains to be found in elegy are those received by the male narrator: 'But it is not the concern of elegiac poetry to upgrade the political position of women, only to *portray* the male narrator as alienated from positions of power and to differentiate him from other, socially responsible male types' (42, my emphasis).

11. Kennedy recognises the essentialism assumed by Propertius' modes of representation, arguing: 'Cynthia is described in terms of "fickle", "wanton", "temperamental", "grasping" and so on (terms which are prompted by the perspective of the Propertian lover's discourse), and these "qualities" are assumed to belong *essentially* to a woman of a particular type and particular social status. An ideological stereotype of female behaviour is being invoked, and the answer is presented as a "fact": Cynthia *is* a courtesan or Cynthia *is* a promiscuous noblewoman.' D.F. Kennedy, *The Arts of Love: Five Studies in the Discourse of Roman Love Elegy* (Cambridge 1993), 95.

12. S. Felman, 'Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy', in Belsey and Moore (n.4 above), 133-53, at 147.

13. Although I would like to focus here on Propertius' representation of female subjectivity as fluid, it is critical to note that he also strategically uses the concept of 'madness' against Cynthia, calling her *demens* at a number of key points in the poetry when she is 'misbehaving'. For example, he begins 1.8 very strongly, calling Cynthia 'mad' and unconcerned about his devotion to her as she plans to depart. She is called '*demens*' in 2.18c for trying to imitate the British by dyeing her hair. Shortly after he responds to another threatened departure by claiming: *non urbem, demens, lumina nostra fugis!* ('It is not the city, mad woman, but my eyes from which you are fleeing!', 2.32.18).

14. Thus, when Georg Luck compares women in Roman comedy to women in elegy, he concludes (G. Luck, *The Latin Love Elegy*[2] [London 1969], 45): 'None of Terence's women is nearly as complex and *self-contradictory*, none has such a compelling presence as Propertius' Cynthia' (my emphasis). J.P. Sullivan similarly refers to Cynthia's fickleness, then later extends her 'attractions' to include unpredictability, lies and infidelities in *Propertius: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge 1976), 35 and 80. In one notable exception, L. Richardson jr (*Propertius Elegies I-IV* [Norman OK 1977], 5) emphasised the narrative choices that determine Cynthia's vacillating form: 'But we are not encouraged, or even permitted, to construct a history of P.'s relations with Cynthia, or any other woman or women, any sequence of events, chronology, or development. When P. wishes to write a poem about the avarice of women, he will make his mistress a *meretrix* and address it to her. If he wants to write about the confused passion of a deserted lover, he will make his mistress desert him without reason or explanation. If he wants to write about a mistress' anger at her lover's infidelity, he will construct an elaborate infidelity, as he does in 4.8.'

15. Gold (n.8 above), 89. In addition to highlighting her sexual fickleness towards him, Propertius employs a number of other textual strategies for keeping Cynthia so elusive to her reader. Many critics have noted, for example, the diverse roles she is made to play, roles that cast her in seemingly contradictory positions—the dice-playing Cynthia who drinks Propertius under the table (2.33b) is, after all, a far cry from the Penelope-like Cynthia of 1.3, who scolds the drunken Propertius upon his late arrival. See the discussion in Richardson (n.14 above), 5. To readers who seek from Cynthia a consistent or coherent character, equally confusing is the fact that she often seems to occupy divergent class or status positions. In her overall repudiation of reading elegy as direct evidence of Augustan social life, Wyke notes (n.10 above, 34): '...no clear clues have been found in the poems to the social status of a living mistress and conclusions have ranged from Roman wife to foreign prostitute.' Indeed, Cynthia's participation in the poetry is so ambiguous that there is often confusion in determining her very presence—a condition highlighted by the fact that she is not always explicitly named. P. Veyne, *Roman Erotic Elegy: Love, Poetry, and the West*, tr. D. Pellauer (Chicago and London 1988), 57, in accordance with his apolitical reading of elegy, sees this situation as a game. He recognises that 'the heroines of the Roman elegists are only recognisable by their name, and, at least in Propertius, the name Cynthia functions almost like a running head on each page,' yet the name 'Cynthia' creates an expectation of consistent identity that is not maintained by the poet (59f.). It is significant that R.O.A.M. Lyne, *The Latin Love Poets* (Oxford 1980), one of the few critics to insist on Cynthia's overall 'coherence', thus intentionally reads Cynthia in poems in which the woman is not named unless 'there is good reason to believe otherwise' (62). Wyke (n.10 above, 33f.) writes succinctly of the differing positions with regard to power each name holds, arguing '...*Propertius* and *Cynthia* do not perform the same semantic operations.'

16. Most of my analysis references the first two books of the corpus. Book 3 does not emphasise Cynthia's mutability, although it remains in the background in e.g. 3.21.

17. M. Myerowitz Levine, 'The Women of Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*: Nature or Culture?' *SCI* 6 (1981-1982), 30-56, describes the literary tradition of describing women as avaricious (43-46). For the historical and literary tradition linking women and greed, see also B.W. Boyd, '*Virtus Effeminata* and Sallust's Sempronia', *TAPA* 117 (1987), 183-201, who traces it back to the Elder Cato (191f.).

18. The irony is, of course, that Aeneas is the one who will suddenly change his position with regard to Dido and, conversely, Dido's own transfer of desire (from her dead husband to Aeneas) is depicted as torturous and one that she bitterly regrets.

19. Propertius uses *ieuis causa* again at 2.24a, there to justify his interest in prostitutes (9f.).

20. J.P. Postgate, *Select Elegies of Propertius* (London 1884; repr. 1958), in his discussion of Propertius' innovative use of language, recognised the importance of this concept to Propertius' work. Arguing that Propertius 'frequently uses a word in the fresh sense on the strength of some analogy', Postgate offers as an example (lxxiv): 'On the analogy of *leuitas* "inconstancy" he has *grauitas* in the sense of constancy III.13 (11).14, and *pondus habere* "to be constant", III.20 (17).22'—the latter a figure we have just witnessed.

21. Ovid calls elegy a '*leuis amica*' in the *Remedia Amoris* (379f.). He extends the image in *Amores* 3.1, when the personified Elegy claims boldly that she is *leuis* ('*sum leuis, et mecum leuis est mea cura Cupido*', '"I am light and with me, Cupid, my care, is also light"', 41) while chastising Tragedy for being *grauis* ('*quid grauibus uerbis, animosa Tragoedia',/dixit 'me premis? an numquam non grauis esse potes*?', '"Why do you weigh me down with such heavy words, stormy Tragedy?" she said. "Can you ever not be serious?"', 35f.). M. Wyke, 'Reading Female Flesh: *Amores* 3.1', in A. Cameron (ed.), *History as Text: The Writing of Ancient History* (London 1989), 111-43, writes of the passage: 'The signification of the *grauis/leuis* opposition is drawn away from the level of female dispositions and towards the level of writing-styles by frequent references in the course of the passage to poetic production...' (122). She goes on to note that 'the reader will recognise the *grauis/leuis* opposition with which the doorways are described as the terminology of a Callimachean polemic already used in *Amores* 1.1.' In her subsequent analysis, however, Wyke applies her findings in Ovid to all of the elegists, overlooking the specific strategies which inform each text. Her blurring of distinctions between the elegists obscures the point that although Propertius repeatedly describes his poetic style, he uses *leuis* specifically only once to depict his Muse (2.12.22), using *mollis* instead to describe his poetry at 2.1.2. Nor does Wyke consider the specific ethics of using the binary *leuis/grauis* dichotomy in each context—female disposition versus poetic production. After all *leuis* clearly has different connotations when used as a term describing poetry (in Ovid) from those implied when describing women (in Propertius).

22. It is significant to note that although Propertius uses *leuis/grauis* to distinguish himself and Cynthia along fairly conventional lines (i.e., *grauitas* is the conventionally positive term so he uses it of his masculine persona), he in fact inverts another dichotomy often linked to Callimachean poetics: *durus/mollis*, consistently describing Cynthia as 'harsh', the side more traditionally aligned to the masculine, while referring to himself as 'soft'. In 1.17, Propertius wonders if it would have been easier (*leuius*) to stay and overcome Cynthia's manners, conceding that although she is tough (*dura*), she is singular (15f.). The meaning of Propertius' assumption of '*mollis*' in this dichotomy, however, is powerfully clarified by 2.22a, in which, like Catullus previously (poem 16), Propertius asserts an exaggeratedly sexually dominant role in rejecting any mistaken reading that connects softness (*mollis*) to a lack of masculinity. For a discussion of these terms, see Kennedy (n.11 above), 31-33; C. Edwards, *The Politics of Immorality in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge 1993), 63-97; and M. Wyke, 'Engendering Roman Love Elegy', *Ramus* 23 (1994), 119f. Notably Wyke's formulation of the impotent male lover of elegy does not take these poems into account, nor does Edwards' statement that 'no Roman author ever calls himself effeminate in surviving Latin literature' (67) capture the complexity of the trope in Propertius.

23. For discussion of these lines, see also J.C. Yardley, 'The Poetic Attack on Cynthia: Propertius 2.5.27-28', *RhM* 126 (1983), 364f.

24. Reading the meaning of Cynthia's mutability against Propertius' self-proclaimed stability allows us to open his participation in the text to equal interrogation. As J. Flax, 'Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory', in L. Nicholson (ed.), *Feminism/Postmodernism* (New York and London 1990), 39-62, at 45, asserts: 'To the extent that feminist discourse defines its problematic as "woman", it, too, ironically privileges the man as unproblematic or exempted from determination by gender relations.' Postgate (n.20 above), who takes a fundamentally historic approach, provides one of the few, albeit problematic, acknowledgements that *both* characters hold responsibility for the 'production' of Cynthia's fickleness, writing: 'We should rather wonder that, *with so much in himself to beget fickleness* and so much in Cynthia to justify it, the passion lasted so long, than that his professions of *fides* were not always exactly interpreted...' (xxxvi, my emphasis). In effect, Postgate claims, Cynthia may be fickle, but who can blame her in the face of her snivelling, narcissistic lover?

25. See Postgate (n.20 above). Two lines later, he extends his use of *grauis*, swearing on his parents' bones that he will be true and asking that if he swears falsely, may they each be heavy, *grauis*, on him (15-18).

26. Propertius laments the costs of love in poem 2.4, concluding that a man (nominative) can 'change his heart' (*praecordia mutat*) through a single word, while a woman 'will not be soft' (*uix...mollis erit*) even at the cost of blood (21f.). Although here Propertius seems to insist on women's incapacity for change, it is notably cast in terms of *dura*, a quality we have seen previously attributed to Cynthia—not as a negation of *leuis* or by use of *mutare*.

27. Propertius repeats this construction in 1.10, with Cynthia acting as the subject of the teaching (1.10.19f.).

28. Janan, 'Refashioning Hercules: Propertius 4.9', *Helios* 25 (1998), 65-77, at 76, concludes that, in 4.9, Propertius 'reveals elegy to have known something all along that epic hopelessly pretends not to know: that gender conditions the human aspiration to "know thyself" as a persistent but instructive impasse'; see also *ibid.*, 69.

29. By arguing for 'serious' consequences of elegy I am in disagreement with Veyne (n.15 above), who insists on the apolitical position of elegy, its status as a 'pleasing falsehood, where everything is a humorous simulacrum with no trace of irony or harshness, including the vexations of love and evil company' (86). This does not mean that I do not acknowledge humour and irony in Propertius, only that I believe certain formulations that elegy assumes, including the conceptual position of woman, must be taken seriously.

30. Despite my exposition of the ways in which Propertius' text marks Cynthia's fluidity as 'negative', I do not mean to suggest the natural status of such a judgment. In other contexts, feminist critics have notably argued for a 'reclaiming' of the fluidity they see as an essential part of female subjectivity. See, for example, L. Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, tr. C. Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca NY 1985); and for a helpful evaluation of Irigaray's formulation, N. Schor, 'This Essentialism Which Is Not One: Coming to Grips with Irigaray', *differences* 1.2 (1989), 48-55.

31. My attempt to trace the effects of Propertius' treatment of Cynthia's sexual difference on subsequent literary criticism owes a great deal to the work of Felman (n.12 above). For Felman's analysis not only reveals the complex ways in which Stéphanie and her madness function in Balzac's text, but also what she calls the 'critical phallacy'; that is, the tendency of many literary critics to mirror Philippe's treatment of Stéphanie and her 'madness', in particular Philippe's attempts to 'cure' Stéphanie and bring her in line with masculine reason. According to Felman, Balzac's critics thus adopt a therapeutic imperative in their interpretations, an impulse to make the story 'explicable', by obliterating any disruption of the text—a process that serves to obliterate the 'disturbing' traces of sexual difference and of Stéphanie herself (152). In short, since Stéphanie seems incomprehensible to the critic (that is, 'unreadable' according to traditional critical methods), her role and its relation to difference are effectively eradicated from the final interpretation in order to insure a cohesive, authoritatively uniform reading.

32. T. Papanghelis, *Propertius: A Hellenistic Poet on Love and Death* (Cambridge 1987), 20. P.J. Enk, *Sex Propertii Elegiarum, Liber Secundus, vol. 2* (Leiden 1962), 9, himself writes: 'Si quis autem miratur poetam Cynthiam, quae sibi tot tantasque voluptates et suavitates adferat (5-16), ultimo versu duram puellam vocare, is meminerit Cynthiae amorem erga poetam instabilem mobilemque esse, id quod totus liber secundus docet' ('If anyone is amazed that the poet calls Cynthia, who brings so much pleasure and delight to him [5-16], a harsh girl in the last verse, they should remember that Cynthia's love for the poet is unstable and shifting, which is what the second book demonstrates').

33. She is presumably the addressee (*uita*, '[my] life') of 1.2.1, but is only named again at 1.3.8.

34. P.J. Connor, '*Saeuitia Amoris:* Propertius 1.1', *CP* 67 (1972), 51-54.

35. B. Flaschenriem, 'Speaking of Women: "Female Voice" in Propertius', *Helios* 25 (1998), 49-64, at 61. 4.7 has attracted a great deal of critical attention: J. Warden, *Fallax Opus: Poet and Reader in the Elegies of Propertius* (Toronto 1980) in its entirety provides a reading of the poem. Similarly (and not surprisingly) it features prominently in Papanghelis' treatment of love and death (n.32 above). See also W.C. Helmbold, 'Propertius IV.7: Prolegomena to an Interpretation', *University of California Publications in Classical Philology* 13 9 (1949), 333-43. Poem 4.7 has been crucial to work on structure and poetic programs in Propertius. Since such analyses often insist that Propertius seeks to get rid of Cynthia by the end of Book 3, her appearance in 4.7 is often interpreted as a re-statement of poetic aims, reading in Cynthia's body the representation of elegiac discourse: cf. M. Wyke, 'The Elegiac Woman at Rome', *PCPS* n.s. 33 (1987), 153-78, at 168-70. D.K. Lange, 'Cynthia and Cornelia: Two Voices from the Grave', in C. Deroux (ed.),

Studies in Latin Literature, vol. 1 (Brussels 1979), 335-42, at 338, writes directly: 'It is my contention that Elegy 7 contains a definite poetic statement and may be, in fact, the formal notice of Propertius' farewell to erotic poetry.'

36. Flaschenriem (n.35 above), 55. See also R.J. Baker, 'A Literary Burnt Offering (Propertius 4.7.77-78)', *CP* 68 (1973), 286-89.

37. Hallett, 'Role' (n.8 above).

38. Wyke (n.22 above), 121. Janan (n.28 above, 65) argues that 'Propertius' fourth book expands the scope of elegy by exploiting potential fluidities in the genre's representation of gender.' Flaschenriem (n.35 above, 63) argues that 4.7 in particular 'experiments with a new way of constructing the female as a speaker and lover, and it hints at the subversive potential of elegiac discourse—its ability to accommodate a range of perspectives—and to sustain a dialogue, so to speak, of contesting voices.'

39. Nor do I agree with a basic premise of much of this scholarship—that Cynthia is most autonomous in Book 4 (especially 4.7). Such an assumption obviously privileges the voice in asserting subjectivity. I am, however, suspicious of the voice Propertius gives Cynthia and argue elsewhere that some of Cynthia's most radical gestures are depicted indirectly in Books 1-3, including her attempts to dye her hair in 2.18c, an act which disclaims her national identity as 'Roman' and sends Propertius into paroxysms. In n.13 above, I identify other incidents in which Cynthia is similarly labelled 'mad', a term that suggests her potential to situate herself outside Propertius' discourse of rationality.

40. Critical approaches to Roman elegy have changed radically over the past decades, as has been well documented. Where scholars traditionally had treated elegy as a type of autobiographical confession signalled by the first person perspective of the narrator, they began increasingly to resist its stylistic claims of emotional immediacy and sincerity and to unmask its elaborate literary constructedness, a critical trend that reached full force in the 1980's. Far from any direct or transparent reflection of Roman social reality, elegy was henceforth exposed as a form of textual discourse that incorporated a variety of modes of representation. See A.W. Allen, '"Sincerity" and the Roman Elegists', *CP* 45 (1950), 145-60, and A.W. Allen, 'Sunt Qui Propertium Malint', in J.P. Sullivan (ed.), *Critical Essays on Roman Literature: Elegy and Lyric* (Cambridge MA 1962), 107-48, for some of the earliest attacks on the biographical tradition of reading elegy. M. Wyke, 'In Pursuit of Love, The Poetic Self and a Process of Reading: Augustan Elegy in the 1980s', *JRS* 79 (1989), 165-73, provides an assessment of the continuing evolution of elegiac studies, asserting in particular the domination of the 'poetic' line of Propertian criticism by the late 1980's. See also R.G.M. Nisbet , 'Pyrrha Among Roses: Real Life and Poetic Imagination in Augustan Rome', *JRS* 77 (1987), 184-90, and Kennedy (n.11 above). Recent studies of Propertius have devoted heightened attention to Propertius' evocation of literary ancestors and models and his use of elaborate rhetorical structures and figures, not to mention his appropriation of a variety of generic forms (most notably in Book 4). See, for example, the following explorations of Propertius' literary qualities: Warden (n.35 above), Papanghelis (n.32 above), Veyne (n.15 above), and D.T. Benediktson, *Propertius: Modernist Poet of Antiquity* (Carbondale and Edwardsville 1989).

41. Treatments of Cynthia's role in individual poems include: R.O.A.M. Lyne, 'Propertius and Cynthia: Elegy 1.3', *PCPS* n.s. 16 (1970), 60-78; A. Allen, 'Cynthia's Bedside Manner', *Phoenix* 27 (1973), 381-85; J.H. Dee, 'Elegy 4.8: A Propertian Comedy', *TAPA* 108 (1978), 41-53; R.J. Gariépy, 'Beauty Unadorned: A Reading of Propertius I.2', *CB* 57 (1980), 12-14; and J.W. Allison, 'The Cast of Characters in Propertius 4.7', *CW* 77 (1984), 355-58. My insistence on treating Cynthia *qua* Cynthia as a subject of Propertius' poetry echoes in part the sentiments of Jasper Griffin, who cautioned against allowing the literary approach to become too dominant, claiming that one is not '...necessarily anxious to accept the implication that all poetry is really about poetry, rather than being about the many and various things which it professes to be about, such as life and love,' in *Latin Poets and Roman Life* (Chapel Hill 1986), 49. That is, I would like to explore ways in which the poems that feature Cynthia can be thought to be 'about' Cynthia—and not always or solely indirect expressions of something *else*.

42. M. Wyke, 'Written Women: Propertius' *Scripta Puella*', *JRS* 77 (1987), 47-61.

43. Wyke (n.10 above, 35) argues that Cynthia functions as 'a woman in a text, whose physique, temperament, name, and status are all subject to the idiom of that text'.

44. Wyke (n.10 above), 43. My use of 'exclusively' to characterise Wyke's conclusions alludes to the restrictive ways in which she articulates her thesis. She claims, for example, that in

that her identity apart from that role holds little significance. She writes (n.42 above, 60): '(p)oems 2.10-13...form a group which re-establishes an allegiance to a politically unorthodox Callimachean poetic practice. Each of the poems then associates the Propertian *puella* so intimately with that practice as to undermine her identity apart from it.' In insisting solely on Cynthia's 'writtenness' at this stage in the poetry, however, Wyke's treatment notably (and summarily) marginalises numerous 'non-poetic' treatments of Cynthia, e.g., Poem 3.8, the description of a brawl between the lovers, one which begins with Cynthia dramatically hurling a table at the poet.

45. K. McNamee, 'Propertius, Poetry, and Love', in M. De Forest (ed.), *Woman's Power, Man's Game: Essays in Classical Antiquity in Honor of Joy K. King* (Wauconda 1993), 215-48, at 215. Greene also attempts to add Book 1 to Wyke's thesis, arguing explicitly against Wyke's claims that Book I portrays 'Cynthia as a flesh and blood woman who does not become intimately associated with the practice of writing until Book 2': Greene (n.9 above), 37.

46. McNamee (n.45 above), 215.

47. See n.7 above.

48. A process of reading designed to bring visibility to such questions was first established in the groundbreaking work of Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington 1978). Claiming in her introduction (xi), 'Literature is political. It is painful to have to insist on this fact, but the necessity of such insistence indicates the dimension of the problem,' Fetterley's solution was to make the critic explicitly political. She called for a type of feminist reading that would work against the text to reveal its too-often concealed strategies, a point of view which '...has its investment in making available to consciousness precisely that which the literature wishes to keep hidden' (xix-xx). See also A. Munich, 'Notorious Signs, Feminist Criticism and Literary Tradition', in G. Greene and C. Kahn (eds.), *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism* (London and New York 1985), 238-59; E.A. Flynn and P.P. Schweickart (eds.), *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contexts* (Baltimore and London 1986); D. Fuss, 'Reading Like a Feminist', *differences* 1.2 (1989), 77-92; V. Kirby, '"Feminisms, Reading, Postmodernisms": Rethinking Complicity', in S. Gunew and A. Yeatman (eds.), *Feminism and the Politics of Difference* (Boulder and San Francisco 1993), 20-34; and J. Butler, 'For a Careful Reading', in Nicholson (n.6 above), 127-43. The process of 'reading like a feminist' in classics has an important history, one that has been addressed in numerous contexts. Papers from a Women's Classical Caucus panel on Ovid, 'Reappropriating the Text: the Case of Ovid', were published in *Helios* 17 (1990). K. Gutzwiller and A.N. Michelini applied a discussion of such methodologies specifically to the act of reading Roman elegy. In 'Women and Other Strangers: Feminist Perspectives in Classical Literature', in J.E. Hartman and E. Messer-Davidow (eds.), *(En)Gendering Knowledge: Feminists In Academe* (Knoxville TN 1991), 66-84, they propose a reading stance for the feminist reader much like Fetterley's earlier one, a position predetermined to combat the specific rhetorical persuasiveness of elegy's style.

49. An anonymous reader of the paper suggested that the goal of this project therefore approximates earlier positive attempts to reconstruct Cynthia. While this statement was very helpful in forcing me to think about the potential consequences of this argument, I believe that my work, which finds changeability Cynthia's sole form of identification, does not support the same assumptions about the subject as earlier positivist scholarship that sought to identify Cynthia conclusively, i.e., that subjects are inherently coherent and consistent.

50. Wyke (n.21 above).

51. I would like to thank one of the article's anonymous reviewers for making suggestions that helped me clarify and sharpen the argument and Professor Anthony Boyle for encouraging me to continue pursuing this reading. I am very grateful to Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge University, for their offer of a Visiting Fellowship, during which time I was able to rethink my approach to gender in Propertius. I am also grateful to the following, with whom I engaged in invaluable discussions at various points in the process: Ann-Marie Knoblauch, Mary McDonald, Helen Wood, Roger Martinez Sanmarti and John Henderson. Finally, I would like to acknowledge my sincere gratitude to two people whose influence on this project is notable: Emily Zakin, whose work in feminist philosophy has been a source of constant inspiration to me, and Lawrence Richardson, jr. It is Professor Richardson who always guides me back to the pleasures (often guilty) and challenges of reading Propertius, and while I owe Professor Richardson innumerable debts, this is the one I hold most dear.

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