this kind of friendly services in the future! The base of the poem may be a dull, traditional concept of elegy; it is the linguistic subtleties, the thematic flexibility, the psychological verisimilitude and acuteness which give it sparkle.

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PROPERTIUS 4. 11: GREEK HEROINES AND DEATH

Although Propertius’ Cornelia elegy (4. 11) has been almost universally admired¹ and Scaliger’s judgment, regina elegiarum, is frequently repeated, most of the praise lavished on this poem is occasioned by extraliterary considerations. Most applause is directed at its morality, at the edifying things it seems to be saying about death and about some peculiarly Roman virtues. Propertius, it is so often stated or implied, after a long and unfortunate infatuation with Cynthia and with Alexandrianism, has at last managed to find inspiration in the life and death of a good woman, a Roman matron, and to depict her thoroughly Roman character with fitting dignity.² Some regard the poem as a statement of Roman excellence worthy to stand beside supposedly similar passages in Virgil and Horace.³ Others discern an attitude toward death that is deeply religious,⁴ almost Christian.⁵ I believe that such ways of looking at the poem seriously distort its meaning.

What close analysis has been done has concentrated on mapping out the rhetorical structure of the poem and tracing its themes to the epitaph, eulogy, or consolatio,⁶ or on answering the question of where we are to imagine Cornelia to be during the action of the poem.⁷

As a contribution to a reappraisal of the elegy, in less narrowly patriotic and inspirational terms, I should like in this paper to explore two important aspects of its literary technique, the use of Greek mythological heroines and the imagery of death, in order to show how the former qualifies and complements the specifically Roman character of the poem and how the latter suggests an attitude toward death darker and more pessimistic than is usually recognized.

Greek mythological heroines play as central a role in this poem as they do anywhere in Propertius, although the only heroines to whom Cornelia is compared by name are not Greek but Roman. Part of the reason for their apparent absence is that it would be somewhat inappropriate for a Roman noblewoman, speaking in her own person, to cite Greek heroines as explicit parallels for her conduct. But the Greek heroines are here and the Roman women are not substitutes for them but complements.

Although commentators usually point out the reminiscences of Georgics 4 and of the Alcestis, they have not explained their allusive function in the economy of the poem. In his most obvious borrowing from Georgics 4, Propertius imagines the denizens of the underworld falling silent in order to listen to Cornelia just as they had listened to Orpheus (V. G. 4. 481 ff. and P. 4. 11. 21 ff.). The rest of the allusions to the myth naturally associate Cornelia with Eurydice, but the momentary

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1. One of the few who dissent from the general view is A. La Penna, Properzio (Florence, 1951), p. 87.
identification of her with Orpheus is quite appropriate in the case of a woman who is playing two male roles: that of patronus in a trial and that of the kinsman who pronounced the laudatio funebris at a woman’s funeral.8

The myth of Orpheus and Eurydice is first introduced in the opening lines of the poem: before the closed door of a bustum a man stands, weeping, unreconciled to the separation from the woman whose remains the bustum encloses. In a grim travesty of a real house, both the bustum itself and the underworld are conceived of as a house to which a man is denied access. As Copley saw, the dramatic situation and the language cast Paulus in the role of the exclusus amator.9 The importation of this convention from erotic elegy might seem out of place in the context of marriage, but Propertius preserves propriety by employing allusion rather than direct statement. The importation is further justified by the implied parallel with a mythological exclusus amator. The house before which Paulus stands is no ordinary house but the house of death, and his antagonist is no jealous stir or diligent ianitor but death itself. As such he is clearly intended to recall Orpheus in his attempt to deliver Eurydice from the underworld.10

Indeed Virgil uses the image of the house of death in his version of the story: ostia Ditis (G. 4. 467) and “domus atque intima Leti / Tartara” (481 f.). Virgil revives the word portitor and applies it to Charon, and Propertius follows him in this (V. loc. cit. 502, P. 7).11 After a brief catalogue of the dead, the last of whom are those who, like Cornelia, died untimely deaths, Virgil says: “quos circum limus niger et deformis harundo / Cocyi tardaque palus inamabilis unda / alligat et nouies Styx interfusa coercet ” (478–80; cf. Aen. 6. 438–39). This is picked up by Propertius in lines 15–16 by paludes unda, and lenta and implicat correspond to Virgil’s tarda and alligat. Virgil names the Eumenides, Cerberus, and Ixion as among Orpheus’ audience (482 ff.); to these Propertius adds Sisyphus and Tantalus. Cornelia uses rapta of her untimely death (62) and rapta (66); Virgil three times uses rapta of Eurydice (456, 504, 519). Further echoes, of little moment when taken separately, contribute to the cumulative effect: cumba (V. 506, P. 69), immitis (V. 492, P. 13), dat iura (V. 562, just after the Orpheus-Aristaeus story; P. 18). Finally, it is possible that in lines 5–7 we have a faint echo of Virgil’s “nesciacue humanis precibus mansuescere corda” (470).

In her mandata to her husband, reminiscences of Euripides’ Alcestis supplant those of Virgil’s Eurydice.12 Both Alcestis and Cornelia enjoin their husbands to take upon themselves the role of mother to their children (E. Alc. 377, P. 75–76), and both will visit their

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8. As a woman, Cornelia has no public career to be celebrated. Propertius compensates for this limitation by having her speak in terms that call to mind the law court, elective office, and warfare, to suggest that her domestic virtues are somehow equivalent to the accomplishments a man might achieve in public life. (Grimal, op. cit., p. 443, regards her chastity and other virtues as her acta, corresponding to the meritorious achievements of a male Roman.) She is an orator, arguing a case in court: ipsa loquor pro me (27); causa perorata est (99); perorare in this technical sense is not found elsewhere in poetry (cf. Tränkle, op. cit., p. 135). She actually makes the infernal tribunal over into something very much like a Roman court. (For the use of language drawn from Roman legal practice in lines 19–22, cf. Butler and Barber, ad loc., on arma, assidueant, and Eumenidum; W. A. Camps, Propertius: Elegies, Book IV (Cambridge, 1965), ad loc., on pila, assidueant, iuxta, and sella; and F. H. Sandbach, CQ, LVI (1962), 274–75, on vindicet. Note also iudex and foro.) She momentarily imagines her anticipated assignment to a place in the underworld as an almost formal naturalization process in which a Roman citizen would be granted political rights or status in her new community: “det Pater hic umbrae mollia iura meae” (18). (For iura dare in the sense “to assign privileges or status in a state,” cf. Hertzberg ad loc. and Sandbach, op. cit., p. 274.) In 61 emerui and honores, individually and together, suggest the career of the magistrate; so do merendo . . . honoratis in 101–2; both emerui and merendo further suggest military service. There are also military connotations in two of the words she rather exaggeratedly uses of her three children: turba (76) and caterva (98). Her funeral procession is a kind of triumph (72–72), corresponding to the real triumphs of her male ancestors.


10. Cf. Rothstein ad vs. 5.

11. Tränkle, op. cit., p. 56.

12. The two myths are already associated in Euripides, for he has Admetus say that, if he had the tongue of Orpheus, he would go to the underworld to bring Alcestis back (Al. 357 ff.).
husbands in dreams (E. Alc. 354–56, P. 81–82). Both husbands will speak to images of their wives (E. Alc. 348 ff., P. 83–84). Finally, although the resemblance here is less close, there may be an echo of Alcestis’ wish that Admetus not marry again and of her apprehension about how a new wife would get along with her children (E. Alc. 303 ff., P. 85 ff.).

With great discretion and delicacy, Propertius thus presents this Roman woman as two Greek heroines, one the type of the beloved wife, the other the type of the loving wife and mother, and both wives who died untimely deaths. Since the husbands of both heroines are types of mourning carried to excess, he is also able to read Paulus a gentle lesson in moderation in grief—a grief which Cornelia speaks of in opening lines in a tone very close to annoyance—in the didactic or hortatory use of exempla so common in his work. It seems hardly necessary to say that he does not intend a one-to-one correspondence between Cornelia, Paulus, and their mythological counterparts and that some of the details are not relevant, for example, the eventual rescue of Alcestis by Hercules and the unpleasant qualities many modern readers find in Admetus’ character.

By making Cornelia into a Eurydice and an Alcestis, as he had once made Cynthia into an Ariadne and an Andromeda, Propertius has idealized a Roman matron and universalized her experience; through Greek mythology he has transcended the narrow, traditional grounds on which a woman could normally be eulogized in Rome. At the same time, the allusive subtlety with which the mythological heroines are brought into the poem keeps the Greek material from seeming a tasteless intrusion into an intensely Roman context; rather, the Roman ideal is placed in a broader perspective which enlarges it without denying its validity. Before leaving the topic of Greek heroines, it might be noted that in calling down upon herself the punishment of the Danaids if she fails to tell the truth (27–28), Cornelia thus implicitly associates herself with Hypermestra, the one Danaïd who remained a loyal wife.

To examine the treatment of death in the poem we must return to the opening lines. From the very beginning a vision of the finality of death is placed before our eyes so grim and so powerful that nothing to come later in the poem can completely dispel it. Without any preliminaries, immediately after the donnish tone of scholarly inquiry with which 4. 10 ends, we suddenly hear a voice from the dead. We heard a voice from the dead in an earlier poem, 4. 7; but there was at least a short introduction there, and we were thus somewhat prepared for the ghostly voice. Some of the mournful sound effects and echoes may be Virgilian. But we have the gloom of Virgil without his counterbalancing vision of hope and rebirth. Undercutting any traces of the majestic Virgilian sadness is the more macabre and pessimistic atmosphere characteristic of Propertius on the subject of death. Then, in the bitterest lines in the poem, Cornelia descends to the depths of despair with her bleak recognition of the futility of human achievement, especially as a Roman understood human achievement, in the face of death: “quid mihi coniugium Paulli, quid currus auorum / profuit aut famae pignora tanta meae? / non minus immittis habuit Cornelia Parcas: / et sum, quod digitis quinque legatur, onus” (11–14). Since it is in precisely these terms that her defense will shortly be conducted, this emphatic denial of their relevance, sub specie aeternitatis, strongly qualifies that defense before it has even begun. Throughout the eulogy we are forced to remember that although the demonstration of her virtue may refute the charge that her untimely death is

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13. Tränkle (op. cit., p. 56 n. 2) considers the dark vowels of 1–10 to have been written under the influence of Aen. 6; one might add the end of G. 4, a passage which, as we have seen, strongly influenced Propertius. Other sound effects are Virgilian in manner, especially the mournful repetition of the r-sound in the first ten lines; some may be fortuitous, but this can hardly be true of 3–4 and 6–8. Note also the repetition in “stant adamanste uiae te licet orantem” (4 f.), audiat aulae (5), and portitor . . . portia (7 f.). For the repetition of r and ent in a context of mourning, cf. G. 4. 460 f. (and T. E. Page’s note), 466, 510. The repeated r may not be onomatopoetic, although it is worth remembering that when Ennius and Virgil imitate the sound of the ruba, r figures no less prominently than t (Ennius, Frag. 425 V.; Virg. Aen. 9. 503–4).
punishment for evil-doing, that very virtue has not in the end kept her from being reduced by death to nothing more than *quod digitis quinque legatur.*

Throughout the poem Cornelia seems obsessed with thoughts of her funeral. The central event of the poem and the aspect of her death given most prominence is not the cause of death, the deathbed scene, the notion of death as a release, as the climax of life, or any of the other ways in which death can be thought of; it is rather her funeral and its immediate aftermath. Allusion to its somber ceremonies colors so much of the language, even in passages where she is ostensibly talking about something else, that a deep shadow is cast over the more edifying and consolatory passages. It is as if the funeral had been the outstanding event in her whole existence, her entire life having led up to it and all her thoughts now being drawn back to it. Indeed, the funeral must certainly have been the most important public event in her life: the Princeps himself attended and wept openly for her (58). A Cornélius or an Aemilius could be publicly celebrated in the streets of Rome as *triumphator,* consul, censor; the daughter of a Cornélius or the wife of an Aemilius could attain such honor only in her funeral: “haec est feminei merces extrema triumphi, / laudat ubi emeritum libera fama rogum” (71–72).

She speaks of her death throughout almost exclusively in terms of her funeral; it preys on her mind. Her thoughts recur, not to the physical occurrence of death, but to the funeral and the ceremonies connected with it: *urgere* (1), *funera* (3), *rogos* (8), *tubae* (9), *lecto,* *fax* (10), *currus* *aurum* (11), as appropriate to a funeral as to a triumph), the *laudatio funebris* (27 ff.), *facem* (46), the public mourning (57 ff.), the funeral procession and pyre (71–72), *exsequias* (98). In addition to the prominence of torch and pyre in the list, Propertius has Cornelia refer to herself repeatedly in the state in which cremation has left her. The importance of fire in the rites of death in this world is thrown into sharp relief by the contrast with the darkness of the underworld.

As fire thus becomes the primary symbol of the funeral, so water becomes the most prominent symbol of the underworld to which the funeral leads. Although water figures in the tears of the mourners in this world, both during the funeral and later, the principal associations of water in the poem are with the underworld. In the metaphors for the finality of death and for the isolation of the dead at the beginning of the poem, the image of the house and closed door is coupled with that of the infernal stream which stands as a barrier between Cornelia and Paullus: the shore (or banks) of the underworld will absorb Paullus’ pleas without hearing them (6). In a macabre pun Propertius joins the two images in *portitor...porta* (7–8), where the careful specification of Charon’s activity (*aera recepit*) would remind the reader of the etymological connection of *portitor* with a body of water (*portus*) rather than the act of carrying (*portare*). When Cornelia apostrophizes the underworld, it is described as a watery prison: “uos, uada lenta, paludes, / et quae cumque meos implicet unda pedes” (15–16). She mentions only water from among the punishments of Tantalus (24) and refers to another form of water punishment when she calls down upon herself the fate of the Danáidés (27–28). In 69–70 still another water metaphor is applied to death, namely, the casting off from the shore of Charon’s boat. The climax of the water imagery of the underworld is the last

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14. The effect of this passage is only slightly softened by the fact that such outbursts are a common theme in funerary inscriptions and poetry.

15. The only allusion to the actual moment of death treats it as the occasion for the first of the series of ritual acts which will culminate in the funeral itself, the closing of the deceased’s eyes (64).

16. *Urgere* implies that the funeral has just taken place, for the literal meaning of the word reflects and echoes the same attitude toward burial as the familiar formula, *sit tibi terra leuis*; *urgere* is used explicitly of burial in Lucr. 3.893 and implicitly in Hor. *Carm.* 1. 24. 5 and 4. 9. 27.

17. *Cineres* (74, 92), *ossa* (20, 58, 102), *inusta* (74); cf. line 14.

word in the poem: "sim digna merendo, / cuius honoratis ossa uelhantur aquis" (101–2).19

The imagery of death thus centers on fire, water, and, as we saw earlier, the house. Everything is significantly brought together in the two Roman exempla (51–54), where Cornelia is compared to two Roman women whose chastity was proved miraculously. Claudia’s miracle involved water and the Great Mother; Aemilia’s miracle involved fire and the Goddess of the Hearth. Here, in one context, we find the fire of the funeral and the water of the underworld associated with those two central attributes of the home, motherhood and the hearth. This is the key to the understanding of the pattern of images we have been discussing. The triad fire–water–house is a clear allusion to an important element in the Roman wedding ceremony, the presentation of fire and water to the bride after she has entered her husband’s home.20 Wedding and funeral thus form a grim equation.21 This conclusion is strengthened when we see how Cornelia constantly refers to one ceremony in terms that suggest the other. The torch of the funeral pyre (10) is picked up by those of the marriage procession (33). She uses lectus both of the new marriage Paullus may make (85) and of her own funeral bier (10). The tears of mourning remind one that tears are also a traditional motif of weddings. She twice uses of her early death words that recall the notion of marriage by capture, enthroned in the myth of the Sabine women and alluded to in literary references to real weddings:22 rapina (62) and rapta (66).23 Her reference to the role of her children in escorting her remains to the grave recalls the boys who escorted the bride in that other and happier torchlight procession, the domum deductio. The distinctive dress and coiffure of the Roman bride are mentioned in 33–34. Once introduced, the motif of clothing symbolizes purity in 54 and fertility in 61, but these positive symbols are ultimately replaced by references to clothing as symbolic of mourning in 97. The technical term for the bride’s peculiar hair style was tutulus,24 a word which Propertius may allude to in the repeated titulus (32, 38); in any event, the latter can also mean “funerary inscription.” Marriage and death are associated in a different way when death is spoken of as if it were a kind of divorce: iungor . . . sic discessura (35).25 One pointed phrase of Cornelia’s epitomizes, with particular relevance for the fire imagery, the complex of meanings I have been unraveling: “uiximus insignes inter utramque facem” (46). So Cornelia sums up her whole adult life as an interval between two torches, the wedding torch, whose fire is an augury of life and birth, and the funeral torch, whose fire represents final consummation and denial of life. The pairing of these torches makes her wedding a mere prelude to her funeral. The fire and the water she received when she came to Paullus’ home now find their somber counterparts in the flames of the funeral pyre and the water of the underworld.

In the wedding ceremony fire and water were symbols of life and of the acceptance by the wife of her new role in her husband’s home.26 Now the meaning of fire and water has been reversed, and the house serves as the final, unifying motif: it is the house of death (bustum and underworld); it is the house before which the exclusus amator stands; it is the house in the sense of “family” (32, 44, simulatur urigo ex gremio matris . . . cum ad uirum traditur.”

23. For the use of ropere in epitaphs, see R. Lattimore, Themes in Greek and Roman Epitaphs (Urbana, 1962), pp. 153 (and n. 99), 182, 184.

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21. Propertius makes a similar association of wedding and funeral by means of fire and water in 4. 3. 13 ff.
22. E.g., Cat. 61. 3, and cf. vs. 56; Fest. 364. 26 ff. L.: “rapi...
62, 78); it is the house as the goal of the domum deductio; and it is the house as the locale of the tender scenes of domestic affection, which Cornelia evokes toward the end of her speech. At her marriage she had entered Paullus’ house as its new mistress; now, as a prisoner, she has entered the house of death from which he vainly tries to summon her.

The manipulation of these symbols produces a sense of waste and of the futility of human endeavor in the face of death that strongly qualifies the more positive assertions of the worth of family, fidelity, and fertility that seem to monopolize the attention of most readers of this poem. Propertius has done much more than celebrate the virtues of a Roman woman in death. He has fused Roman matron with Greek heroine and handled the symbolism of death in a way that challenges Virgil (on a smaller scale, but the difference is only one of degree, not one of kind) in moral complexity, breadth of vision, and ultimate ambivalence.

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Virgil's Araxes

Our texts of Ecl. 1. 61–66 usually offer:

T. ante pererratis amborum finibus exsil
   aut Ararim Parthus bibet aut Germania Tigrim
   quam nostro illius labatur pectore uultus.

M. at nos hinc alii sitientes ibimus Afras,
   pars Scythiam et rapidum cretace ueniemus
   Oaxen
   et penitus toto diuisos orbe Britannos.

That Virgil’s knowledge of geography was extensive and peculiar, and that for the ancients, as for us, the river that symbolizes Germany is the Rhine, are propositions that scarcely require proof. It is therefore with dismay that we deduce from line 62 above that the poet supposed that the Saône was a German river. Such ignorance is intolerable in an educated Roman writing some dozen years after the publication of Caesar’s Bellum Gallicum, from which (1. 12) all might inform themselves, if such information was not already common knowledge, that the Saône “per fines Haeduorum et Sequanorum in Rhodanum influit.” Nor is it rendered more tolerable by the consideration that less than three years previously, on 9 October 43, Lugdunum had been founded as caput Galliarum at the confluence of Saône and Rhône.1 In 40, when Virgil wrote the first eclogue under the impact of the confiscations,2 it was no less impossible for Germans than for Parthians to drink the waters of the Arar. Stylistically, the artful antithesis of the adynaton3 is spoiled and obscured by the introduction of a word that does not immediately and indisputably carry the connotation of “Germany.”

The comfortable answer to this difficulty is that the Arar, wherever Virgil supposed it to flow, was correctly known by him to be a river in the west of Europe, and that this is good enough to serve the poet’s purpose in making his antithesis. One has scarcely formulated this unflattering defense when an objection presents itself. When a Roman thinks of the far west, his thoughts not unnaturally turn to Spain, and nothing prevented Virgil, had he so desired, from writing “aut Baetim Parthus bibet aut Hispania Tigrim.” It seems, then, that his intention was to hint at the far northwest, an area as distant as could be from the Parthians on the southeastern fringe of the Roman world. If this is so, the Arar was a singularly unhappy choice, since it was neither very western, nor very northern, nor very remote. Furthermore, the emphatic introduction, ante pererratis amborum finibus, conjures up a clear picture of an exchange of territories by peoples up to the further limit of each other’s land: both fines and pererratis convey

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1. The foundation date of Lugdunum is that established by Wuilleumier and Audin: A. Audin, Lyon (Paris, 1965), p. 50.