

Propertius 4.9, which describes Hercules' destruction of a shrine to the Bona Dea and foundation of the Ara Maxima, presents a mythic episode from Rome's ancient past, rather than an event from contemporary Rome, as is typical for elegy. Its subject is a mighty, semi-divine warrior, in stark contrast to the usual elegiac protagonist, who complains that he is helpless in the face of his powerful *domina*. I will argue that the depiction of Hercules' body, as well as other bodies depicted in 4.9, coheres with the standard depiction of elegiac bodies, male and female. (The typical poet-lover of Roman elegy is strong but not muscular, and he avoids using brute strength against the *puella*, who is slender and physically soft, if emotionally hard.) Depiction of the body (especially Hercules') in 4.9 highlights the complexities that characterize the poem and provides an underlying coherence to the poem's narrative. Furthermore, Propertius uses description of bodies in the poem to connect its content to broader elegiac themes.

It has long been recognized that Hercules functions in the poem as an elegiac character (cf. Anderson, Janan). The poem has been read as a kind of *paraclausithyron* (Anderson), as a Vergilian intertext (Warden), and as an allegory for Propertius' Callimachean poetics (DeBrohun). There are several analyses of the blurring of gender identity in 4.9 (Cyrino, Lindheim, Janan, Welch), but almost every scholar has focused on clothing and costumes, to the near-exclusion of the poem's bodies. I will explore three previously unnoticed features about bodies in the poem that tie the character of Hercules to both the poet-lover and the elegiac *puella*, yet also let him act outside the usual constraints of elegiac relationships.

[1] Whole bodies (*corpora*) as such are absent from 4.9, but body parts abound (e.g., *ora palato*, 4.9.21, *barbam* 31, *palma* 36, *comas* 52, *umeris* 61, *labris* 64, *manibus* 73). Hercules is the most corporeal figure in the poem: he beseeches the shrine's priestess for bodily aid (he suffers from thirst and hunger), and in doing so he represents his body as frightening. The priestess ignores his body-based argument in her response, and the narrator focalizes the description of the shrine's destruction through Hercules' own body. This emphasis on Hercules' body places him in power over the poem's progression.

[2] The *puellae* inhabiting the shrine of the Bona Dea are assimilated to the shrine itself, as their adornment is placed on their domicile (*uelabant limina uitae*, 4.9.27). Hercules' destruction of the shrine can thus be seen as tantamount to rape, forever ruining the *puellae*'s bodies. Furthermore, the Apollonian intertext (4.1432–1448) shows that Propertius, unlike his predecessor, silences the *puellae* and has Hercules completely destroy both them and the source of water with which they are associated.

[3] Hercules can be seen as both poet-lover (cf. Anderson, Janan) and as a rampaging *puella* (e.g., *apta puella fui*, 4.9.50, in an allusion to Hercules' service under Omphale) like Cynthia as depicted in poem 4.8. Yet he does what the poet-lover cannot: he forces his way into the domicile from which he has been excluded. Brute male force (along with the consequent implication of rape) here effectively destroys the illusory power structures of elegy, for once the shrine is breached, the *puellae* are destroyed and the possibility for elegiac interaction between them and Hercules is now precluded. The poet-lover of Roman elegy consistently disavows violence against the *puella*'s body, despite his urges to express his anger at her through physical force (e.g., Prop. 2.5.21–26, Tib. 1.6.73–76; cf. Fredrick, James 2003a and 2003b). The violent destruction of the shrine and its *puellae*—Hercules' breaking into the *puella*'s domain and breaking out of the elegiac impasse—brings Propertian love elegy to an end (as 4.10 and 4.11, the final poems of Book 4, do not deal with love). Propertius' final depiction of elegiac relations ends in physical violence, with a focus on bodies as agents and victims of that violence.