

## Hiding Behind Their *Puella*: Insecure Narrators in Catullus 67 and Propertius 1.16

My presentation will explore how the speaking doors in Catullus 67 and Propertius 1.16 disparage their *puellae*. Through close readings of each door's diction and conflicting desires, I argue that the disparagement of the *puellae* reveals the doors' own insecurities: Catullus' door strives to be the center of attention, even if that attention is defamatory, and Propertius' door faces an identity crisis as it laments its presence in the paraclausithyron. My analysis will largely build upon Frank O. Copley's *Exclusus Amator* and Sharon L. James' *Learned Girls and Male Persuasion*, which discuss the evolution of the paraclausithyron and the *docta puella*'s role in Roman elegy respectively.

Catullus' door is displeased with the *puella*'s behavior because it is continually blamed for not serving its owners well. Yet, the door continues to spread gossip about the *puella*, gossip that perpetuates the *puella*'s and the door's ill reputations. In fact, the door enjoys painting itself as a victim to the interlocutor. In its first address to the interlocutor, the door openly declares "it's not my fault" (*non...culpa mea est*) (Catullus 67.9-10). Afterwards, the door provides the first indirect characterization of its mistress whilst still deflecting any blame: "no one is able to say that any transgression [was committed] by me" (*nec peccatum a me quisquam pote dicere quicquam*) (Catullus 67.11). Here, *peccatum* specifically refers to a moral offence, adultery. The door does not attempt to conceal or feign ignorance about the *puella*'s behavior. Notably, the interlocutor does not remark upon the *puella*'s misdeeds because he is there to discover how immoral the *puella* is, that is how many affairs has she had. The first time the door speaks, it intentionally disparages its mistress in order to entice the interlocutor. To keep the interlocutor's attention, the door gossips about the *puella*'s previous affairs for the remainder of the poem.

Propertius' door longs for its noble past and resents the *puella*'s and the *exclusus amator*'s deplorable behavior. After recalling its own resplendent past (*olim*), the door ruminates on its current (*nunc*) state: "wounded by the nocturnal brawls of drinkers" (*nocturnis potorum saucia rixis*), adorned with "loathsome garlands" (*turpes...corollae*) and "given over to obscene songs" (*obscaenis tradita carminibus*) that persist until the lover "croaks with the morning birds" (*matutinis obstrepit alitibus*) at the end of the poem (Propertius 1.16.1, 5, 7, 10, 46). The door specifically disparages the traditional elements of the *paraclausithyron* and the fact that the *puella* has forced it to endure the shameful behavior of the *exclusus amator*. Yet, the door ignores the irony in the fact that its complaints mirror those of the *exclusus amator*, who would rather not behave so miserably, and it ignores the fact that its obstinance against the *exclusus amator* mimics that of the *puella*, who has shut him out. By bewailing its fate in a similar manner as the *exclusus amator*, the door enacts its own form of elegiac male persuasion against the *puella*. At the same time, the door's refusal to let any part of the *exclusus amator*'s song reach the *puella* represents the *puella*'s refusal to be swayed by the *exclusus amator* and the door's complaints.

To conclude, both poems play with the traditional conventions and expectations of a *paraclausithyron* to draw attention to themes of unreliable narration and agency. The doors bewail the behavior of their *puellae*, and, in doing so, they reveal their own agendas and insecurities. Catullus' door hyperbolizes the salaciousness of its *puella* to entertain the interlocutor. Propertius' door epitomizes the complaining nature of the *paraclausithyron* by complaining about its *puella* and the *exclusus amator* without realizing how it behaves like them.

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