

Propertius 4.7, Aeschylus, and the Ghosts of the Past

In Propertius 4.7, the shade of Cynthia demonstrates her fidelity to Propertius through reference to four exemplars of female erotic behavior, two positive (Andromeda and Hypermnestra), and two negative (Clytemnestra and Pasiphae). While the majority of scholarly attention to this passage (ll. 55-62) has focused on the unusual choice of Andromeda and Hypermnestra, whose stories seem not entirely suitable to the point being made, the choice of Clytemnestra and Pasiphae has generally passed without comment, as both are relatively straightforward mythic examples of female infidelity. I argue, however, that the poem aligns Cynthia more closely with the latter pair than the former, for not only do both Clytemnestra and Pasiphae have established associations with just the sort of nocturnal apparition that Cynthia here makes, but one of those, the dream-appearance of Clytemnestra in the *Eumenides*, has clear verbal and structural parallels with Cynthia's in 4.7.

Although it is well-established that the dream of Patroclus in *Iliad* XXIII was an important model for Propertius's dream, the two episodes do not align in their message or in the details of their structure. Patroclus is concerned above all with funeral ritual, and is at pains to emphasize the finality of the event, which is the means of his appearance to Achilles; once the funeral has been properly performed, no such visitations will be possible. Yet although Cynthia's focus on her own botched funeral is superficially similar, the narrator directly inverts Patroclus's somber finality by asserting from the beginning (line 1) that "*letum non omnia finit.*" Cynthia's sepulchral concerns are merely another source of reproach for the faithless Propertius, who Cynthia insists has failed to live up to the obligations of the *pactum* forged between them. This parallels the complaint of Clytemnestra in the *Eumenides*, who in a dream upbraids the Furies for their failure to pursue Orestes, despite the sacrifices she had often made to them during her

mortal life. In this reading, Cynthia's decorous circumlocution that the two had "*saepe Venus trivium commissa*" may be read as a wry reference to Clytemnestra's insistence that she sacrificed to the Furies at an hour "shared by no other gods"—even at such hours as those, elegy finds a way. This structural correspondence is amplified by selected allusions, particularly when Cynthia ceases from her reproach with the punning "*non tamen insector*" (line 49), "I do not blame you" but also, in the light of Clytemnestra's closing lines, "I do not pursue you"—"ὄναρ διώκεις θῆρα... ἀνίστω, μή σε νικάτω πόνος... δευτέροις διώγμασιν!" (*Eum.* 131, 139).

I suggest further that Propertius' use of Pasiphae is equally intentional. Both Cicero in the *De Divinatione* and Pausanias testify to the existence of a cult of Pasiphae in Sparta, and it seems plausible Propertius could have known about this tradition from either Cicero or a lost source. Both report that the Spartan ephors made a habit of visiting the temple for dream incubation, in which "*vera quietis oracla ducebant*" (*De Div.* 1.96). Although these dreams are nowhere described, comparison to the more adequately-described apparitions at the temple of Asclepius suggests that Pasiphae herself may have been thought to be personally involved in the dreams. Through reference to another passage in Pausanias (3.26.1) I suggest that Pasiphae's role in the rituals likely owed to the tradition which identified her as the Moon, as daughter of Helios—no small thing, given the emphasis which Propertius places on Cynthia's affiliation with the Moon (O'Neil 1958), including in her name.

Given the poem's apparent use of the Clytemnestra passage of the *Eumenides* and the prominence of Cynthia's four exemplars within her argument for fidelity, I argue that this can be no accident. Rather, Propertius here undermines Cynthia's claims by aligning her with her own negative examples, inviting comparison between the three.

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