Although the origins of the paraclausithyron were rooted in Greek poetry, it was under the jurisdiction of the Roman poet’s pen that the style grew to address some of the more serious moral and social dilemmas of elegiac love. In general, Romans considered doors objects of especial significance, and manifestations of this are readily available throughout literary and archaeological records. To a Roman, a house’s door was its guardian, and hence it was regarded as a physical symbol of family tradition and stability.\(^1\) It is only fitting that many elegists considered the act supplication before the door of one’s beloved a particularly meaningful gesture. For the genre of elegy, with its calculated role reversals and exaggerated emotional appeals, there is no image that conveys elegiac lover’s plight more clearly. Of course, each author takes his own personal angle on the subject, and of particular importance to the study of the paraclausithyron is Propertius I.16. In this poem, Propertius develops the fairly simple “closed door” formula in this poem in some quite original ways. However, in the end he is mindful to retain much of the unadulterated style and convention of the more traditional Hellenistic paraclausithyron while surrounding it (quite literally, as will be shown) with the moral and psychological dilemmas central to the Roman elegiac love affair.

The most readily apparent subject where one might notice Propertius’ adding his own personal touches to the theme is in the general perspective of the poem. Instead of a lover directly addressing the door, the animated door (unbeknownst to its subjects, of course) examines and describes the lover’s lament through its own eyes. The significance of this shift in perspective deserves the utmost consideration, as it is through

\(^1\) Copley, Francis (1956)
the door that we understand the lover and hence the implications of the elegiac affair at hand. When these two characters are more thoroughly investigated, then the more subliminal complexities of the poem can be brought to light.

To begin, it is most useful to divide the poem into two basic parts, each corresponding directly to the main characters mentioned above. These, of course, are the lover’s lament (lines 17-44) and the soliloquy of the door (lines 1-16, 45-8). Of the two the former stands as the more “traditional” in that it adheres almost dogmatically to the essential base elements of the original Greek paraclausithyra—a lover excluded and a lament. The specific identity of this lover is left vague, as neither door nor lover says anything that allows such disclosure. The usage of “carmina” and “novo…versu” can at least suggest that he is an elegiac poet of some sort, but inevitably some doubt must remain. Naturally, this conclusion also applies to his social status. One might easily say that the excluded’s carmina stand in sharp contrast to the petulantia linguae of the streets. Allan Kershaw offers an alternative reading for line 38. By replacing “…tota loco…” with “….turba foro…” he emphasizes his belief that Propertius meant to emphasize the sophistication of the lover’s songs versus the common parlance of the street. From there he concludes that fact that the lover’s restriction to the streets is all the more unjust, since he has taken such pains to avoid vulgar speech. Whether or not his reconstruction or interpretation is entirely correct, Kershaw’s point deserves consideration. Indeed, one could most certainly expect such courtship activity from any young man (real or imaginary). Thus, the highly generalized way in which this particular

\[\text{\footnotesize\ref{2} l. 16; \ref{3} l. 37}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize\ref{4} Kershaw (1991) p258}\]
lover’s actions are portrayed may lead one to the conclusion that he represents a kind of “Every-lover,” a purely generalized manifestation of a standard poetic form.

The dramatic setting of the poem follows the same convention. The most specific detail that the lover’s lament gives about this setting is that it is trivio. This at the very least implies that it is more exposed and more frequented than a standard two-road junction. The humiliation that would be expected to follow from playing the beggar in such a situation would then be understood. Still, beyond this paltry bit of detail there is little more about the physical setting that is revealed other than the fact that it is windy and cold (or at least the lover would have his mistress believe it). These, of course, are part of the standard repertoire of any composer of paraclausithyra. In this case, however, it seems that Propertius made a conscious decision to avoid embellishing these essential features with unnecessary detail.

The vagueness apparent in this section has two particularly important implications. First of all, it highlights a primary concern with structure and form. After all, the content is simple to the extent that some might even call it boring. After all, the lover’s situation is beyond stereotypical. Moreover, it lacks the vivid imagery and mythological references that occur so frequently in other poems. One could perhaps say that this part of the poem is as empty as the street on which it was being performed. However, that is not to say that it was done without good reason. One could say that in this lament Propertius was consciously regressing back to a more traditional Hellenistic paraclausithyron in opposition to the trajectory of the style in his day. For the Greeks, the paraclausithyron was simply a lover’s lament, and it lacked the intrigues and social problems (e.g. adultery) that entered in the Roman age. As Francis Copley describes it,

\[5\] l. 40
during the Roman period, “…the paraclusithyron had become top-heavy. To the simple situation of the shut-out lover bemoaning his sorrow and disappointment had been added a host of other complications.”

These complexities and the ‘top-heaviness’ that results from are readily apparent in other Roman paraclusithyra. For example, Tibullus multiplies the barriers that exist between lover and beloved, adding a custodia, notions of furtivus amor, speeches addressed to both the door and the girl, as well as the presence of bystanders. Tibullus seems to have been more concerned with the social and legal problems associated with adultery and secret love, and in many cases he reverses the ‘morality’ of society and the ‘immorality’ of elegy in ways that are completely paradoxical. Because he adds all of these various elements, Tibullus transforms a simple paraclusithyron into a diatribe on the vagaries, intricacies, and toils of Roman elegiac love. It is this kind of development that Propertius seems to have been working against in the lover’s lament of I.16. In short, the section is sharply and bluntly defined by the essential subject matter of the paraclusithyron, nothing more.

It is important to note again that I.16 is the only paraclusithyron known to have been authored by Propertius, although other poems of Book One make varied references to the plight of the exclusus. The words limen, clausus, and exclusus are all intimately related to the theme and are fairly common. It is in I.16, though, that Propertius outlines what he felt was the form that this type of experience was to take. Moreover, the de-

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6 Copley, op.cit. 120
7 Tibullus 1.2, 1.5
8 Copley, op. cit.
9 1.4.22, 1.5.13, 1.8a.22, 1.13.34, 1.14.19, 1.18.12
10 “clausis…foribus” 1.3.36 (the relationship between this particular poem and I.16 is itself significant and will be discussed below), “Dicite, quo portu clausa puella mea est.” 1.8a.24,
11 1.5.13
glossing of the lover’s lament essentially de-glosses the relationship at hand. Stripped of the ornamentation that comes from secret love and adultery, the ever-complex elegiac love affair is reduced to a more ephemeral sexual matter. This type of short-term sexual relationship is, of course, central elegy as a genre. Still, that is not to say that the complications that characterize Roman elegy are not present. In fact, they are, only not in the lover’s lament. The rest of the picture must of course be filled in through an analysis of the other half of the poem—the door’s soliloquy. It is in this part of the episode that Propertius adds his own distinctly Roman twist to the otherwise traditionally-rooted lament.

Granted, Propertius was not the first to animate his door, giving it a voice and personality. Catullus also does something similar in Carmen 67. It is important to note the fact that both doors in their respective poems are delivering a kind of apologia, as this provides important ground for comparison between the two. In both cases, each door claims that it was once respectable, but then came upon darker days\textsuperscript{12} due to the scandalous behaviour of its mistress.\textsuperscript{13} Each also emphasizes its own impotence against slander and defamation.\textsuperscript{14} Finally, each attempts to defend itself against charges of laxity in its duties. At this point, however, there arises a major difference between the two. On the one hand, Catullus’ door gives a very specific apologia with testimony that includes explicit naming of both individuals involved\textsuperscript{15} and crimes committed.\textsuperscript{16} One can immediately see a marked difference in purpose between the two works. Catullus was writing a diffamatio whose primary purpose was to divulge slanderous gossip through the

\textsuperscript{12} Propertius 1.16.1-10; Catullus 67.1-8
\textsuperscript{13} Propertius 1.16.9-12; Catullus 67.19
\textsuperscript{14} Propertius 1.16.10, 47-8; Catullus 67.9-14
\textsuperscript{15} Catullus 67.3, 34, 37, 49-50
\textsuperscript{16} Catullus 67.19-24, 37-8
mouth of the door. Propertius’ door, on the other hand, is a different matter. It lacks such specifically directed defamatory force. Thus, the nature and purpose of its apologia must be treated differently.\textsuperscript{17}

Where Catullus’ priority was to defame his own personal enemies without giving all too much consideration to the specific character development of the door, Propertius paid greater attention to the identity and personality of the door itself. In fact, the door’s identity and personality are much more thoroughly developed than those of the wailing amator. Its lament opens retrospectively, stating in the first two lines how it was “magnis olim patefacta triumphis / janua Tarpeiae nota pudicitiae.” Admittedly, the reference to Tarpeia is problematic, and a great deal of attention has been given to trying to pin down exactly which Tarpeia Propertius was referring to. Commentators have, “…dredged up from Roman legend, literature and topography no fewer than six more suitable Tarpeias, including (most desperate shift of all) ‘some blameless Tarpeia well-known to Propertius and his reader but not known to us.”\textsuperscript{18} The conclusion that I feel is most accurate and most pertinent to the discussion at hand is that of L.A. MacKay, who believes that this particular Tarpeia is the same as that of Propertius 4.4—the Vestal who throws open the gates of Rome for her lover Tatius and his hordes of Sabines. As MacKay points out, the fact that she is associated with the opening of a door gives her a case for consideration that seems to rule out any other Tarpeias.\textsuperscript{19} Her “pudicitia,” then, is pure irony, but the paradox is in Propertius’ manner.\textsuperscript{20} To return to the door, the fact that it appeals to such “Tarpeian” virtue thus implies that the “good old days” were those times when it could be

\textsuperscript{17} Copley, op. cit. 118
\textsuperscript{18} Jones, Howard (1992) p304
\textsuperscript{19} MacKay (1956) p14
\textsuperscript{20} Little (1972) p138
opened indiscriminately. The traditional understanding of a door as the guardian of the household, and hence of family integrity, is thus stood on its head. Subsequently, a whole new world of possibility is opened in terms of how the reader is meant to understand the role of the door and of the puella. Here, the darker side of this poem begins to show from under its poetic shroud, and beneath it certain economic considerations begin to appear.

To segue into discussion of the economics of elegy and how they relate to this poem in particular, it is most useful to consider the implications of the triumphal procession mentioned in the next couplet. One must bear in mind the triple triumph of Augustus and the massive amounts of wealth that were physically flowing through the streets at the time. This triumph, commemorated by Virgil on the shield of Aeneas, openly presented the Roman citizenry with riches beyond their wildest dreams. There can be no doubt that the “gilded chariots” which traversed main Roman thoroughfares on that day made a lasting impression on any and all viewers. The age in which the elegiac poets lived was directly and overtly affected by this influx of wealth. “Having one’s door open” could perhaps be regarded as an ancient “laissez le bon temps roule.” Times were good, money was flowing, and a certain kind of woman who practiced a certain kind of trade could make a killing off of the hundreds of newly-enriched legionaries that would have been pouring into the city.

Still, one must be careful not to believe outright that the woman in question was the meretrix that some scholars suggest. Elegiac relationships are much more complicated than that. The poets themselves are careful to avoid such suggestive, vulgar language. They must convince the elegiac puella that sex is a natural, nonprofit

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21 *Aeneid viii.* 714-23
activity.\textsuperscript{22} Thus, the status of the elegiac \textit{puella} lies somewhere between the \textit{virgo} and the \textit{meretrix}. She must be characterized as sexually accessible on the one hand, but not easily purchaseable on the other. As L.A. MacKay points out, the socio-economic status of women in ancient Rome would not have allowed free-born unmarried women many options for employment. Many would have to turn their charms into income as best they could.\textsuperscript{23} For these women, a military triumph like Augustus’, with the inevitable economic boost it would bring, would mean opportunity. Hence, it would have been prudent to have opened doors during such times. The passing of the “\textit{inaurati…currus}” that “celebrated” the threshold may add a sense of gaiety to the whole affair, but this is more of a veneer for the likely unpleasant life that one might lead as a professional Roman escort. The stigma of the trade could not be bought off with any amount of money, and it seems likely that any woman would have been more than happy to move on from such a trade. It seems probable that this is the situation of the \textit{domina} in this poem, and so the closed door presents itself as more than the denial of a single nocturnal liaison. Rather, it indicates a more permanent lifestyle change. The apparent intensity and frequency of the complaints of the \textit{exclusus} would indicate that this lifestyle change was somewhat recent, at least recent enough for the excluded lover to retain his hopes of admission. Neither lover(s) nor door seems to have had much time to get used to the fact that the \textit{domina} has changed her lifestyle. Thus, “…non desunt turpes pendere corollae / semper et exclusi signa iacere faces.” Moreover, the potential for a plurality of suitors also ought to be considered. As was mentioned above, the lack of clear specification as to the lover’s identity casts him as a kind of “Every-lover,” and thus essentially beyond

\textsuperscript{22} James (2001) p247  
\textsuperscript{23} MacKay (1956) p16
any numerical bounds. As will be shown, leaving open the potential for multiple suitors helps to reinforce the door’s plight and lament.

For both door and exclusus, the lamented situation is reciprocal and the dissatisfaction of one results in that of the other. Of course, there is a theoretical possibility that a relationship of mutual satisfaction could be reached. For the door, opening up would end the lover’s lament and (at least in it’s own mind) ‘restore’ it to a state of fulfillment that it once knew in bygone days. For the lover, an open door would grant him the sexual satisfaction that he desires. Of course, this will never happen, as the domina (and she is certainly a domina in this case) renders both impotent. This impotence in turn sets door and exclusus at odds, despite the fact that their ultimate desires coincide. Naturally, only the exclusus is able to take an actively antagonistic role, and his weapons of choice come from his arsenal of poetic carmina.

The actual effect of these carmina against the door is less than certain, however. Certainly, the lover’s actual lament lacks any strong defamatory force. In addition, the way the door expresses its opinion toward them is itself nebulous and inconclusive. On the one hand, in line ten they are obscenis. In line sixteen, they are arguta, another typically vague term that does not have a clear-cut positive or negative connotation. Characterizing them as obscenis\(^{24}\) appears to imply that their content would be that of a diffamatio, but the lover’s actual lament is hardly obscenus, as stated above. Is the reader to believe that this particular lament is not obscenus, but others are? Or is it possible that the door is calling them obscenus in an effort to transmit the seriousness of the situation without revealing anything too slanderous? Is it an exaggeration, or even an outright lie? It is difficult to tell from this description alone. As far as the songs’ being arguta, this

\(^{24}\) This is the only occurrence of the word obscenus in Book One.
double-edged word seems to imply that the door’s feelings toward these carmina are actually divided. On the one hand, these street laments can be regarded as somewhat melodious, but the repetition implied by referens drives the door to ennui. This repetition, and hence the lover’s continued presence, stand as both symptom and symbol of the door’s primary lament—that it can not be opened.

In the sense that this door wishes to be opened (either in favor of or unbothered by the subsequent entry of the exclusus), the door can be viewed as a kind of anti-custos or even anti-lena. In all other examples such characters actively work against the efforts of the elegiac poet by manipulating and controlling puella’s behaviour. In this case, discussion of the lena is particulary pertinent because of the economic considerations that tend to characterize her presence. Typically, she advises the puella to look to the economic reality of her future, and elegists are always at pains to disavow such a mercenary position.\(^{25}\) One means by which elegists often do this, especially pertinent to the poem at hand, is to decrying the venality of their age.\(^{26}\) This seems to be the meaning of the admittedly tendentious “…turpior et saecli vivere luxuria.” If this is so, then it seems that the door has taken up the type of rhetoric that should coming from the exclusus. At least, it would not be expected from a supposed guardian of a household or the hard-lining, economically motivated lena. Such insinuation ultimately leads one to wonder whose interests are actually meant to coincide with the door.

Howard Jones offers an original perspective on the door’s perspective, saying that, “…what we have is not, in fact, a recital of a remembered song but a paraclausithyron which the door makes up as it goes along, piecing it together from all

\(^{25}\) Myers (1996) p5, 12
\(^{26}\) ibid. 5. Propertius does this in particular with poem III.3. cf. Tib. 1.4.57-72
the well-worn themes." What, then, is one to say about the role of this mysterious door? Indeed it acts as author and mouthpiece of the lover’s lament, and in doing so takes up the task of the elegiac poet. One could say even further that the door is little more than a disguise, a theatrical mask for the elegiac poet himself. If so, any apparent sympathy or alliance with the poet is a moot point— it is the poet. Of course it expresses a measure of covert sympathy for his presence. Of course it borrows elegiac rhetoric not traditionally associated with its role. Of course it would refer to times of openness as times of gaiety. One could call it an elegiac “inside job.” The actual lament of the exclusus is not the kernel of the proposition being made. Certainly, it shows Propertius’ understanding of the basic traditional features of the paraclausithyron, but this is incidental given what has been revealed. Its primary poetic significance comes from its inclusion within the door’s monologue. It has been mentioned above that the non-specificity of the lament allows for an interpretation of the exclusus as a kind of “Every-lover.” If the same type of scrutiny is applied to the door, its identity becomes similarly ubiquitous. It itself is nonspecific and formulaic, thus it could be inferred that the door of I.16 could be any door before which any poet has subjected himself. This poem provides the blueprint through which any elegiac lover can take advantage of the ingenious approach that Propertius had come up with. There remains only one important question to be answered—how well does it work?

In the context of this poem alone, one simply can’t tell. However, when one considers the ‘set’ in which this poem occurs, the answer is a rather disappointing “no.” Propertius I.16-18 are each connected by the theme of solitude, a motif which, in the

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27 Jones, op. cit. 307
28 cf. In Catullus 67, where the ‘gossip’ the door relates is clearly directed at a particular household.
works of Propertius, is wholly confined to Book One.\textsuperscript{29} It is only proper that Propertius begin this sequence of solitude at the closed door, because it is understood to be a, “…visible, concrete embodiment of his distressing situation and in consequence of this the first recipient of his prayers, accusations, and laments.”\textsuperscript{30} The failure of both poet and door, and especially poet in guise of door, makes the exclusion of I.16 all the more potent. The lover has exhausted his poetic resources, and even his most sly and cunning approach has proven ineffective. From the lament before the door, a traditional motif for exclusion, Propertius makes the logical transition to the poems of seclusion that follow. There is a marked progression in agent from poems 15 and 16 to poems 17 and 18. In the former, the poet is being disregarded and shut out completely by his \textit{domina}. All power to change the situation lies with her, and the disappointment of both door and \textit{exclusus} underlines this fact. By seeking refuge in \textit{deserta loca} in the latter stage of this cycle, the poet attempts to regain some kind of active status in this relationship. Of course, he fails miserably, and his addresses to Cynthia \textit{in absentia} illustrate that he cannot but act under her influence. Poem 16 is the crucial turning point in this struggle for authority. It is here that the lover must realize and accept the fact that, despite the ingenuity of his approach, he can’t change the situation in which he has been placed.

Propertius I.3 provides still more ground for comparison with I.16. Brooks Otis, who originally came up with an entire schema for how the poems of Book One are interrelated, notes how each poem stands as a kind of reversal of the other.\textsuperscript{31} In the case of I.3, the motif of the lover’s coming home drunk, sexually advancing upon his mistress, and then being discovered and upbraided is also borrowed from earlier Hellenistic

\textsuperscript{29} Solmsen (1962) p73
\textsuperscript{30} ibid. p81
\textsuperscript{31} Otis (1965) p18
tradition.\textsuperscript{32} I.3 also lacks a direct addressee; instead it contains within the poet’s monologue a direct quotations from Cynthia herself. This quotation, when juxtaposed with the monologue of the door, provides the most substantial ground for comparison. In a sense, each of them serves as a frame through which the remaining events of each poem ought to be viewed. Moreover, each also overlies a much more complicated psychological game in which both\textit{amator} and\textit{domina} vie for control over each other. One should note the role that censure and shame play in both of these poems, as these provide much of their emotional leverage. In simpler terms, both parties play the ever so common “blame game.” Cynthia attempts to lay guilt on the lover in I.3 and the lover/door attempts to lay it on the\textit{domina}(admittedly less directly, but the angle is still the same) in I.16. The personification of the door adds a new level to this interpretation, though, and thus one must incorporate what has been said about the door thus far.

As mentioned above, the door can be interpreted as a sort of poetic theatre-mask through which the excluded lover gains a new angle on his approach to the\textit{domina}. This mask allows him to play on the traditional values of household integrity, of which the door is the most obvious symbol. Naturally, this is a total deception, and the paradoxes of the door’s lament (e.g. “Tarpeian” chastity) give the reader brief hints as to what is really going on. Interestingly enough, similar hints of deception can be gleaned from Cynthia’s attack. Her diatribe is also a carefully constructed bit of censure, drawing its potency from careful plays on the character traits of the elegiac lover. She throws the arguments of the typical\textit{exclusus} right back at him,\textsuperscript{33} noting how he passed the night in

\textsuperscript{32} ibid. p19, 42 n.18
\textsuperscript{33} Harmon (1974) p161
the arms of another.\textsuperscript{34} Her weaving\textsuperscript{35} evokes images of a loyal wife, and this characterization is given a heroic colouring by the “\textit{purpureo...stamine}” that she uses.\textsuperscript{36} Such images certainly can be seen to coincide with the idealized fantasy of Cynthia that the poet relates in the first half of the poem. Of course, as Brooks Otis points out, this image is “…preposterously exaggerated…her pose is far too virtuous to be real.”\textsuperscript{37} Cynthia’s reference to the “\textit{carmina...lyrae}” provides a crucial hint as to the twisted game that she plays. Skill with the lyre was not the mark of a stable, chaste life. In fact it is specifically associated with the professional courtesans’ trade.\textsuperscript{38} The subtle hint that this detail adds to Cynthia’s character is essential to understanding how she tries to manipulate her lover. One could perhaps suggest that in her “loneliness” and “desperation” she began playing her lyre in anxious belief that she may soon have to use it to attract another. At the very least, this is what she would have her tardy lover believe.

The way that Cynthia’s \textit{querela} is structured thus plays on the elegiac lover’s worst fears. These have little or nothing to do with his actual relationship with or feelings toward his beloved. Instead, he is concerned with losing what every elegiac lover ultimately seeks—sex. Control of this one object is the quintessential hinge upon which elegy’s vacillation of authority ultimately hangs. By wishing lonely nights upon her late lover,\textsuperscript{39} Cynthia brings the ball back into her court. By playing on his fears and fantasies, Cynthia constructs a poignant, well-crafted tirade that hits him right where it hurts most.

\textsuperscript{34} Propertius I.3.35-6
\textsuperscript{35} ibid. I.3.41
\textsuperscript{36} Harmon (1974). p162
\textsuperscript{37} ibid p20
\textsuperscript{38} Sallust, \textit{Cat.} 25, In his characterization of Sempronia, a supposed consort of Catiline, Sallust makes note of her knowledge of music and poetry and associates them with her profligate lifestyle.
\textsuperscript{39} Propertius I.3.39
To bring I.16 back into the picture, the door uses similarly ironic language in its attempt to have itself opened. Where Cynthia appeals to a deceptively idealized image of wifely loyalty, the door on the other hand appeals to its house’s former glory and the paradoxically Tarpeian chastity that once characterized its threshold. Of course, given the characterization of the *domina* that has been suggested, this past “ideal” was anything but. Just as Cynthia’s portrayal of herself as a deserted but faithful housewife is a complete fabrication, so is the door’s appeal to its past glory. It is this irony that provides the essential link between I.3 and I.16.

So, what began as a venture into the seemingly simple, traditional conventions of a lover’s lament has come to reveal a far more devious and complex psychological control-game. By dividing the poem into its two parts, Propertius introduced to the paraclausithyron such clever subliminal elements as had seldom (if ever) appeared in such an antiquated form. This single poem can truly be regarded as a perfect synthesis of the traditional and new, of the overt and covert, and of the sinister and benign elements of elegy. After such an in-depth analysis, the careful reader should be able to note the significance that the interplay of such elements carries. At all points, elegy represents a clash of wills, and for this clash to be adequately represented the subtle complexities of elegiac courtship need be reproduced in their full complexity. Through this one poem, Propertius recreates this situation in both the interplay of language and conventions and the drama of the actual story that the poem tells. It is, in hindsight, the perfect cross-section of the elegiac affair, and any avid reader of Latin poetry who has not had the opportunity to read and study it is indeed at a loss.

Melvin Triay


Dee, James H. “Propertius 1.16.2” The American Journal of Philology, Vol. 100, No. 2 (Summer, 1979) 245-6


