Latin Elegy and Narratology

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Chapter 9

Cornelia’s Exemplum

Form and Ideology in Propertius 4.11

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The original focus of narratology as developed by Gérard Genette and Mieke Bal was formalistic. Since then, interest has shifted to the ideological burden of storytelling, and in the 1990s formalism was reviled. The turn toward the social was a salutary move, given its varied degrees of neglect by formalism, the New Criticism, narratology, and early deconstruction, but at the beginning of the twenty-first century, form has again become interesting. The question facing critics of literature today is whether formal and ideological analysis can be reconciled. This essay is an experiment in such an endeavor. I will attempt a reading of Propertius 4.11, the Cornelia elegy, within the framework of an ancient rhetorical figure that has attracted considerable recent attention: the exemplum.1 This figure brings together a strong, formal narrative element with considerable ideological power. Cornelia has long been identified as an exemplum.2 What I hope to demonstrate is how this critical tool can help overcome the divide between formalism and ideology in the study of narrative. As often with critical frameworks, the interest of their practical applications lies in the gaps—the places where the individual instance challenges the model.

Quintilian’s definition of the exemplum separates out the figure’s component parts: the narration (commemoratio), the content (res gesta), and the reason for its use—in a rhetorical context, persuasion.3

1. To name only a few signal instances: Bloomer (1992); Agamben (1998), 21–22; Chaplin (2000); Roller (2004); Kraus (2005), 181–200; Lowrie (2007).
2. See below, notes 21 and 30.
3. Lausberg (1960), 1: 227–28. A somewhat different scheme can be found in Roller (2004),
what we properly call an exemplum, that is, the recalling to mind of something done, or as if done, that is useful for persuading what you intend (IO 5.11.6).

Although the literary use of the exemplum may not be persuasive, a fundamental critical task will be to determine what pragmatic end the figure serves. Before approaching this analytic goal, however, I will first cover the more traditional ground of narratology. Quintilian anticipates the Russian formalist division between fabula and sujet, the story and its telling. While it is tempting to align a story’s form with its telling and its ideological import with the res gesta, a story’s telling will necessarily both be shaped by and itself inform the social function it carries. The separation of these categories is heuristic. Although it is possible to abstract a story from its telling, the result will be another telling and no story will ever exist on its own outside some form of telling.

A further heuristic separation has been happening in classical scholarship: the exemplum is an important category for both representation and ethics. As a singular instance, it represents the category from which it has been removed in order to represent it. The word derives from eximo (“to remove”), and Ernout-Meillet defines it as “properly the object distinguished from others and set aside to serve as a model.” Its phenomenology, however, surpasses the aims of mere representation. Livy understands the exemplum as an instance to be imitated or avoided, and Augustus’ presentation of his own actions as exemplary and therefore to be imitated will be discussed below. The exemplum’s moral weight comes out precisely at the moment it stops being conceived of as an entirely singular phenomenon: it provides a

4–6, who isolates an exemplum’s component parts as: action, audience, commemoration, and imitation (positive and negative). The pragmatic effect Quintilian envisages is spread between Roller’s audience and imitation, but sometimes an exemplum’s persuasive force is merely to prove that something is the case, in which case it functions more like our “example” or “instance,” and is not meant to be imitated. Roller considers only the stronger cases.

6. Livy, Preface 10: Hoc illud est praecipue in cognitione rerum salubre ac frugiferum, omnis te exempli documenta in illustri posita monumento intueri; inde tibi tuaeque rei publicae quod imitere capias, inde foedum inceptu foedum exitu quod vites. (“This is especially healthy and fruitful in the understanding of things, for you to consider the evidence of every example placed on a shining monument; from there you may take what you may imitate for yourself and the republic, from there what you should avoid—foul in its beginning, foul in its outcome.”)
model and therefore is to some degree repeatable. As with the distinction between form and content, narrating and story, the division into representation and ethics is an abstraction helping us understand the manifold functions encompassed by this figure.

To analyze Cornelia as an exemplum, it will be necessary to break down the figure into its component parts, but to fully appreciate the poem in which she is represented, all of the elements will, in a second move, need to be conjoined. Following Quintilian, I will first treat the how (commemoration), then the what (res gesta), and then attempt to understand the poem’s pragmatic aim.

1. Form

Narratology takes as its premise the unities of time, place, and voice.\(^7\) Its real interest lies in departures from the norm, but these cannot be defined without the presuppositions of linear time, the inability to be in two places at once, and the persistence of identity within the speaking voice. Only these presuppositions lend value to anachronism, dislocation, and the ripples in identity found in focalization. Narratology is not antithetical to the reading of nonnarrated literature because these same presuppositions are necessary to make sense of any enacted speech situation. The first task in reading lyric and elegy, for instance, is to figure out what occasion—by which I mean both social context and literal position in time and space—would allow the utterance to take place. This endeavor has given rise to the classification of the subgenres and rhetorical genres common to both lyric and elegy (e.g., sympotic poem, werbende Dichtung, propemptikon, recusatio).\(^8\)

Death challenges these unities. Time and place are problematic for the dead—are they here at the tomb, or somewhere in Hades? What does “now” mean for those for whom there is no “here”? Persistence of identity might be easier to maintain while dead, except that the closure of death makes any

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\(^7\) The unities of time and place go back to Aristotle’s *Poetics*, though these are not legislated as they were understood to be in the Renaissance, but, as Lucas (1968), 94–95, observes, were “merely a consequence of unity of action.” See also his comments on the relation of time and place in different genres (222–23). Unity of action is treated below. Genette (1972) devotes chapters 2 and 3 to issues of time, 4 and 5 to variations in voice. Narrative order often has to do with place, see, e.g., “cette succession n’a aucun rapport avec l’ordre temporel des événements qui la composent, ou seulement un rapport de coïncidence partielle. Elle dépend essentiellement de l’emplacement des sites” (120). Bal (1984), 21–58 analyzes and refines Genette.

\(^8\) Classic works on this subject are: Heinze (1972); Cairns (1972); Fowler (1982), 67–68; Davis (1991); Edmunds (2001), 83–94.
persistence moot. The best way to keep the dead in their place is to relegate them to the past, but ghosts have an uncanny way of crossing spatial, temporal, and logical boundaries. A related challenge to the unities is writing, which allows for the displacement of the utterance from the time and place of speaking, even beyond the life of the speaker. The severance of the utterance from the speaking voice subjects the speaker's identity to doubt. How do we know an imposter has not intervened?

Propertius' Cornelia elegy (4.11) challenges the unities on numerous levels, both in Cornelia's speech, and as a poem. For one thing, no situation would allow the utterance to take place. I do not mean the mere banality that ghosts do not exist and cannot, therefore, speak. In literature, there are plenty of narratologically sensible ghosts who speak logically in well-defined nonexistent places—I think of Anchises in Aeneid 6. Creusa's ghost (Aen. 2) provides a model for a departed wife's visit to her grieving husband in the place where he happens to be. Cornelia, however, straddles two incompatible speech situations in (at least) two incompatible places. About a century ago, Butler made this comment on what we would now call the poem's speech genre: “This elegy takes the form of a funeral laudatio of a noble Roman lady, Cornelia, spoken by herself. It is possible that it may have formed the inscription of her tomb.” These terse two sentences require a lot of unpacking, since, while true, they contain many incompatibles.

Cornelia speaks her praises in a speech of defense to the judges of the underworld. The pragmatic stakes of Cornelia's court speech are clear, since her treatment in the underworld depends on the judgment passed on her life. She herself raises the possibility of her failure to convince, in which case she would accept the punishment of the husband-slaying Danaids, in direct contradiction to her life of marital faithfulness and fertility (4.11.27–8). This is a reductio ad absurdum presupposing her success, and the end of the speech assumes as much: causa perorata est. flentes me surgite, testes, / dum pretium vitae grata rependit humus / moribus et caelum patuit (“My case has

10. The scholarship has not sufficiently differentiated between these modes. Hubbard (1974), 146, sees "the address to the bereaved husband that we find on ancient tombstones" as an introduction to "Cornelia's speech in defense." Wyke (1987), 170–71 moves seamlessly from the one to the other. For the complex relation of speech to writing in archaic Greek funerary epigram, see Svenbro (1993). Steiner (2001), 154 draws a link between the speaking monument and defense and suggests that a statue's epitaph "acts in the manner of the spokesman or prostates whom those barred from speaking in the fifth-century polis would later employ: stating the claims, merits, and achievements of the silenced party, it makes the case on his or her behalf."
11. For the expectation that she would be punished as for adultery should she fail, see Janan (2001), 157.
been made. Rise, witnesses, who weep over me, while the grateful earth repays the price of my life. Even the sky is open to good morals,” 4.11.99–101).\textsuperscript{12}

The poem opens, however, with an address to Cornelia's husband, asking him not to mourn. Propertius could have organized the poem so as to frame the speech of defense within the larger address to her husband; instead, the two speeches are intertwined in such a way that they cannot be extricated one from the other. The first address to Paullus comes in line 1; at line 27 she announces she will speak as her own lawyer (\textit{ipsa loquor pro me}, “I myself speak for myself”); a further address to Paullus comes at line 73 and she continues speaking to family members until line 98, when she announces the close of her speech (\textit{causa perorata est}, “[my] case has been argued,” 99).

We could suppose that the words directed to husband and children within the underworld speech are apostrophes; that is, Cornelia addresses people represented as absent.\textsuperscript{13} Then there would be a difference between the initial address to Paullus, imagined as present in line 1, and the later apostrophes, but this avoids the question. Ghosts blur the difference between presence and absence so that we cannot draw a sharp line between present address and absent apostrophe. Furthermore, the transition between speaking to Paullus and to the judges happens over a number of lines and the section addressed to Paullus does not make sense even as a one-sided frame (with the address to Paullus at the beginning, then the speech to the judges with the apostrophes to family members, then the conclusion of the speech without a return to the opening to Paullus).

Before turning to the question of the time and space of Cornelia's speech, a further problem with the speech genre needs to be addressed. Roman funeral laudations are not conventionally in the voice of the deceased, but are usually given by their sons.\textsuperscript{14} Propertius certainly enlivens the genre by not uttering the praise in his own voice, or even imagining a family member speaking at his mother's funeral, whether a son or, as in the voice of the \textit{Laudatio Turiae}, her husband.\textsuperscript{15} A canonical technique for avoiding the social difficulty of self-praise is to put the praise in the mouth of another. Quintilian cites Cicero for this: he often puts praise of himself in dialogues

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\item\textsuperscript{12} Camps (1965) \textit{ad loc.}, sees this as her anticipation of a favorable verdict.
\item\textsuperscript{13} On the difference between apostrophe and address, see Culler (1981), 135–54 and Lowrie (1997), 20–26.
\item\textsuperscript{14} Flower (1996), 130–31. For the conventions of the \textit{laudatio funebris} in this poem, see, e.g., Butler (1905), 392; Hubbard (1974), 146.
\item\textsuperscript{15} Flower (1996), 131–32 notes that the \textit{laudatio Turiae} probably belongs “to a more private context than the public speeches on the \textit{rostra}.”
\end{thebibliography}
in the voice of Atticus, or Brutus, or Quintus, or some other interlocutor. Propertius does the opposite. He lends his own words to the *laudanda* as if she were speaking them herself. This fiction creates a narratological conundrum. In a third-person omniscient narrative, focalization occurs when some coloring lets readers know that the point of view of one of the characters is being expressed. Here it goes the other way around. The fictive speaker focalizes the author’s point of view.

A further inconsistency in Cornelia’s speech genre is the deployment of the conventions of grave epigram, which sit strangely with the speech of defense. The poem opens with her telling Paullus to stop pressing her grave with tears. An option is to imagine him at the tomb, with her hovering as a ghost uttering the words or conveying her words through an inscription. But neither he nor she has to be at the tomb. He could be dreaming or daydreaming her words. One of the characteristics of tomb inscriptions is that they localize the speech and the buried corpse in a particular place. Here, however, Cornelia wanders off to the underworld and deictics explicitly locate her rather in Hades: *immatura licet, tamen huc non noxia ueni: / det Pater hic umbrae mollia iura meae* (“Though before my time, I did not come to this place guilty: here let the Father give soft laws to my shade,” 4.11.17–18). But if we use this information to conclude that she is really in the underworld and that the conventions of the inscription are dislocated from the grave, another deictic later pulls us back to the tomb: *in lapide hoc unius nupta fuisse legar* (“I will be read on this stone to have been married to one man,” 4.11.36). Well, maybe her ghost is in the underworld, and Paullus is off moping at home, and the poem's readers are the ones to be imagined at the tomb, poring over the inscription. We readers are certainly reading the poem, and the tomb inscription has an uneasy relation with the poem itself; there is a suggestion of identity, although the poem cannot be imagined as being transcribed verbatim on stone. Still, the poem conveys what Cornelia attributes to the inscription, namely, her status as *univira*, and to that extent, the deictic moves at least partially over to our frame of reference. If there is a disparity between the deictic Cornelia uses to place herself in the underworld and the one that locates her at her own tomb, the

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16. Quintilian, *IO* 11.1.21: *in epistulis aliquando familiariter apud amicos, nonnumquam in dialogis, aliena tamen persona, serum de eloquentia sua dixit* (“He spoke the truth about his eloquence sometimes in his letters, familiarly among friends, occasionally in the dialogues, but in another voice”). This passage is discussed in Lowrie (2007), 98.

17. This holds whether or not they speak in their own voices. Svenbro (1993), 30 notes that for Greece, “Egocentric inscriptions are staged by an author who is systematically considered absent.”

18. For the appropriation of tomb inscription conventions in Roman poetry, see Woodman (1974), 116–17.
latter is even more equivocal in making a partial link between the inscription and the poem, a particular place and one that is both metaphorical and movable.\textsuperscript{19}

The equivocation between whether we are hearing Cornelia speak or reading her inscription matches her implication of speech with writing within her speech of defense. Although these first appear to support one another, here too a logical discrepancy makes the speech act inconsistent. Cornelia proudly describes the two sides of her family: the \textit{fama} of her paternal side, victorious in Africa, lines up with speaking (\textit{loquuntur}, “they speak,” 4.11.29–30), while both sides of her lineage can boast of inscriptions (\textit{et domus est titulis utraque fulta suis}, “and each house rests on its own inscriptions,” 4.11.31–32). Oral testimony and honorary inscriptions at least tell the same story of her ancestors’ greatness, and when she calls on the ashes of her ancestors to witness her obedience to the censor’s law (41–42), their testimony would appear to emerge from the inscriptions: \textit{testor maiorum cineres tibi, Roma, colendos, / sub quorum titulis, Africa, tumsa iaces} (“I call to witness the ashes of my ancestors, which should be worshipped by you, Rome, and under whose inscriptions you lie beaten, Africa,” 4.11.37–38). Logically, however, the inscriptions cannot attest to Cornelia’s virtue and obedience to the censor’s law, but only to the glory of her family.\textsuperscript{20}

The disparity between Cornelia’s various speech modalities covers many categories. She seems to be in two places at once, but furthermore, the relationship of the speech to the inscription sets up not only antithetical occasions, but antithetical temporal spheres. The speech to the judges is, properly speaking, an occasion. She utters it only once, and she will be judged as a consequence. The speech is intended to achieve a specific result. The inscription, however, exists, or is imagined to exist, for all time. Readers can return to it to check her list of virtues and accomplishments, just as reading the poem itself can reactivate her utterance again and again, outside the context of the speech. The result of the reading is not judgment, at least

\textsuperscript{19} I treat a comparable instance of a slide between deictics referring to the text in both the author’s time and in our own, and also provide a larger account of deixis in Lowrie (2006a), 115–32. A difference between \textit{haec carta} at Catullus 68.46 and \textit{in hoc lapide} at Propertius 4.11.36 is that paper applies both to the poem’s original and subsequent material of transmission, while stone does not pertain to either. For the problem of deixis in performance texts, see Felson (1999), and her introduction in Felson (2004), 253–66.

\textsuperscript{20} Flower (1996), 159 links the funeral oration with grave inscriptions in a single event: the oration was followed by a procession to the family plot, where the inscriptions on ancestors’ tombs could be read. The \textit{imaginiae} (“funeral masks”) of the ancestors also had their own inscriptions (180–84). These masks normally were kept in a house’s atrium (chapter 7), but also accompanied the dead to the tomb.
not in the technical sense of a judge passing sentence, though anyone may in fact make a moral adjudication of Cornelia on reading the inscription. Rather, the inscription serves to commemorate the dead, and this memorializing role is linked to the genre of the laudatio, a speech of praise given on a single occasion, the funeral, and later inscribed. Commemoration obviously also has ties to the poem’s own pragmatic ends. While the laudatio and the inscription work toward the same aim (praise) in contrast to the speech in defense, whose aim is to win a favorable judgment, they still offer different temporal frameworks: the single event and the timelessness of repetition.

What about identity? Aristotle in the Poetics remarks that the unity of a plot does not reside in its being about one individual, but about a single action (chapter 8). The action the poem represents, Cornelia’s speaking, as discussed above, is hardly single. Aristotle also remarks that the poet should as far as possible keep the scene before his eyes (chapter 17), and this is exactly what does not happen. If there is any unity to this poem, it consists in its being about a single individual’s life.

However, it is not clear there is even a character here. Cornelia is defined by her historical accomplishments—as a man is on an inscription. Her life consists of a list of Roman female virtues and social desiderata. She comes from a long aristocratic line; she is related to the imperial family; her close male relatives have recently held prestigious offices; she has won the ius trium liberorum (“law of three children”), unlike some, by actually having three children. Furthermore, she has an ideal selfless character: she releases her husband from mourning, and wishes him and the children well with the putative new stepmother. Compared to Cynthia, Cornelia is historically specific, but as a character, even that cipher Cynthia, with her passion and jealousy, appears emotionally fuller than Cornelia, who seems to be nothing more than a symbolic representation.

The exemplum is a figure with a complex relation to narrativity. On the formal level, exempla are often narrated and set into some larger discursive

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21. Wyke (1987), 173 regards the woman here as “everywhere organized in relation to the male”; metaphorically, she appropriates the roles of orator, magistrate, and triumphant general.
22. The bibliography on Cynthia as a cipher is long; analysis and bibliography can be found in Miller (2004), 60–68. For critiques of his Lacanian frame, see Buchan’s review (2005), 198–202, and my review article (2005b), 108–16.
23. Janan (2001) refers to Cornelia’s “exemplary virtue” (147) and “exemplary maternity” (160).
frame where they may have a persuasive function. As nodes of ideology, they offer story patterns that are not inert: they are to be imitated or avoided. Poem 4.11 gives no frame to guide interpretation. Rather, readers tend to adopt the whole book as a frame, and here the contrast with Cynthia and other demimondaines has produced various interpretations of how Cornelia’s story functions within elegy’s generic code. She is an “anti-elegiac woman” to be scorned; she’s a paragon of Roman virtues to be admired; she is a locus of covert elegiac resistance to such Roman virtues. These interpretations depend on reconstructing the poet’s attitude toward Cornelia, whether pro or con, and they founder on the fact that the poem does not offer that kind of evidence. Even where the poet in his own voice, or a character in his or her voice, offers some guide to interpretation, *exempla* have a tendency to escape their users’ intentions. Here, however, the lack of a discursive frame makes the comparison of the narrative to the teller’s ostensible reason for telling it impossible.

The question of authorial control opens up the concomitant issue of judgment. The best ancient description of how *exempla* escape their authors’ original intentions is Velleius Paterculus, 2.3.4:

> non enim ibi consistunt exempla, unde coeperunt, sed quamlibet in tenuem recepta tramitem latissime evagandi sibi viam faciunt, et ubi semel recto deerratum est, in praeceps pervenitur, nec quisquam sibi putat turpe, quod alii fuit fructuosum.

*Exempla* do not stop where they have begun, but in however small a path they have been received, make for themselves a way of wandering off very far, and once one has wandered from the right way, it goes headlong, and no one thinks foul for himself what was fruitful for another.

Velleius’ moral language shows that interpretation and judgment are intimately related. As a historian, he was aware that stories are not neutral, but models for behavior, and this is where ideology rears its head.

24. Roller (2004), 2 and 10 comments on how even just the mention of an exemplary name implies a narrative the reader is meant to supply. The relation of the narrative to the frame is a pervasive theme of Lowrie (1997). *Odes* 1.15 is anomalous as an extended narrative in Horace because it lacks a frame (1997),123–35. More usual and paradigmatic is *Odes* 1.7, discussed in Lowrie (1997), 101–23.


26. Janan (2001), 147 summarizes these interpretations and their history.

27. This passage provides the interpretive frame of Lowrie (2007).
2. Ideology

So far, I have given some formalistic remarks on Cornelia and her speech situation according to narratological premises. Where narratology as a method of formal analysis becomes less useful is at the moment where critical analysis passes from the situation represented within the poem or story, to the literary event itself, from the exemplum as a formal structure to the exemplum as ideology. What is to be gained from representing Cornelia’s utterances in such a disunified fashion?

Micaela Janan offers a powerful reading of the poem as ideology. Cornelia’s obsession with her imminent judgment in the underworld sets in motion a representation of the twofold nature of the Law. Janan capitalizes this word to differentiate earthly formal legal codes from a broader category that includes “all social constraints.” In Janan’s analysis, Cornelia embodies the two reciprocal aspects of the Law, so that she is an honorable paradigm on the one hand, and shows up the Law as “meaningless horror” on the other.28 The Law, like other systems of signification, is an arbitrary realm where distinctions are produced by difference. Janan sees Cornelia’s selfless sacrifice as a critique of the Law: she gives up her life and asks for nothing in return, such as a vow of chastity from Paullus.29 Cornelia, however, did not choose death willingly or, like Alcestis, make a bargain. She merely and contingently died. I would also argue that the Law may have its horrors, but even these produce meaning. In the end, Janan joins those who put the poem down on the side of elegiac critique, although she does not reconstruct authorial intention. The question remains whether analysis necessarily requires judgment. Can an exemplum ever escape its own moral weight to become pure form?

To read poetry as ideology need have little if anything to do with its form. Such narratives are social constructs regardless of their aesthetic value, and they do not require an extensive act of narration to produce stories.30 The form of the act of narrating plays second fiddle to the content. Aesthetic quality plays as ideological value, without conveying particular meanings. Janan is herself sensitive to the poem’s formal features—as in her reading of the poem’s repetition of *urna*—and her emphasis on the Law comes as a result of the remarkable repetition of *lex* and other words having to do with the law (*iura*, *iudex*, *tabellae*, *testor*, *testis*). These words, however, structure

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28. Janan (2001), 147 (other quotations above are from the same page). This is the law in the Lacanian sense. For an assessment of Janan’s theoretical frame, see Lowrie (2002), 63–65.
30. See n. 24 above for Roller’s remarks about minimal narration in exempla.
the poem in addition to conveying the ideology’s content and revealing the structure of the law.

I would like to attempt an experiment in bringing the form of the speech genre back into relation with the poem’s ideological burden. This attempt turns on a flimsy pun, but one that, I think, cuts to the heart of the way the Romans formulated their understanding of the media of representation, and hence form, during the Augustan age. In addition to numerous references to leges, Cornelia also speaks of herself twice with the passive of legere, once meaning “gather” and once meaning “read.” Magdelain argues that the etymological link between reading and the law, legere and lex, has to do not with the fact that laws were fixed by being written on tablets, but with the way laws were ratified: by being read aloud in the Senate before the vote. Reading, according to this interpretation, at least at its inception falls on the side of the performative, rather than aligning with a static text, though it would be impossible to limit the relation of reading to the law to this originary moment. I would like to argue that the duality of Cornelia’s utterance as a speech and as an inscription corresponds neatly to the double status of the law as fixed, to be read on tablets, and as something that comes into being through performance. The law enacted in the vote Cornelia imagines will be taken about her is a speech act to be written on tablets (tabellas, 4.11.49). It is exactly this combination of the fixed and the newly created in the context of processes of representation—aesthetic, social, and political—that is particularly Augustan.

The two passages where Cornelia uses legere of herself align reading with death, but also set a contrast between the differing materialities of physical and textual existence. Cornelia’s body has been reduced to a handful of dust:

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\text{et sum, quod digitis quinque legatur, onus (4.11.14)}
\]

and I am a burden which could be gathered in five fingers.

But she can project a future existence for herself through reception by a reader.

\[
\text{in lapide hoc uni nupta fuisse legar (4.11.36)}
\]

31. Horace and Ovid are similarly interested in the law’s medium and its performativity. Magdelain’s interpretation is discussed in Lowrie (2006b), 333 and (2005a), 412–18 especially n. 50, and it forms a cornerstone of interpretation of the final chapter of my book Writing, Performance, and Authority in the Age of Augustus (2009).
It will be read on this stone that I was married to one man.

The writing up of the life, in a laudatio, on an inscription, in a poem, comes about on the condition of death. It fixes Cornelia’s life in a complete narrative that the reader views after the fact and that can be presented as a whole to the judges in the underworld for judgment. Reading compensates for the body’s dissolution.

By contrast, the law (lex) in Cornelia’s usage appears as a code that informs living behavior. When Cornelia faces the judges in the underworld, she speaks of iura and wishes the ones Father Dis will give her be soft (mollia, 4.11.18). She claims never to have herself “softened” (mollise, 4.11.41) the law of censorship, as, say, an elegist might, since elegy presents itself as a “soft” genre. It is the lawgiver’s prerogative to make the laws soft or harsh; her job is to obey. The difference between these two passages is that lex implies a set of social constraints and expectations—Janan’s definition—in the second passage rather than a set of specific codified prohibitions. Cornelia refers to the censor’s role in overseeing morality. These are expectations to be lived out dynamically. Her other mention of the law supports this understanding. At line 47, the laws are located in nature and in her patrician class; they are not formal statutes.

This dynamic and fluid understanding of the law as custom, however, meets up with an actual governmental law in the ius trium liberorum, and the crux of Cornelia’s status as an exemplum has much to do with the Augustan marriage legislation. It is this legislation that paradigmatically brings together law as fixed statute and law as lived social expectations; these particular laws are pathbreaking in legal history precisely in intervening in biopolitics. Augustus must have been thrilled that at least one female member of his close family, his ex-stepdaughter, in fact, met the legal standards he established. Finally someone fit the requisite story pattern and neatly died before any of life’s unanticipated twists could alter the narrative. Cornelia is a perfect candidate for being written up and for being read as instantiating in her life the very laws that intervened in life.

3. Representation

The attraction of Cornelia for Augustus is evident. She exemplifies the ideology his marriage legislation attempts to reinforce. But what is the attraction

32. Stahl (1985), 262 calls Cornelia a “flesh-and-blood paradigm of the legislated Augustan womanhood.”
for Propertius? I don’t think this poem either forwards or opposes Augustan ideology, but rather makes an intervention that exposes how this kind of story works, particularly as a form of representation. I see it less as critique than an analysis that turns on the way the exemplum functions as a narrative device. The exemplum mediates between singularity and repeatability. Cornelia is the singular instance, but her usefulness as an exemplum stems from the imitability of her actions. She emphasizes that she was “a part to be imitated of a great house” (erat magae pars imitanda domus, 4.11.44). Her third-person use of her own name accords with the objectivization that happens when she turns herself into an exemplum.33 She herself has already lived up to the model set by others, since she can stand in the company of the great past examples of female virtue, Claudia and Aemilia (51–55). She enjoins her daughter to imitate her in having only one man (filia, . . . / fac teneas unum nos imitata uirum, “daughter, make sure to have one man in imitation of me,” 4.11.67–68). She lies at the turning point between past, her lineage, and future, her daughter.

Propertius sets Cornelia up as a singular, but repeatable instance; he locates her at the fulcrum of past and future; she is a speaker who performs a singular speech on an individual occasion, but whose utterance has another modality in writing; she lives in accordance with the law understood both as written statute and as social expectations; the story of her life is told on the occasion of her death. This intermingling of life and death, of singularity and iterability, of writing with performative utterance and social performance, cuts to the heart of the way the Augustan age figures representation. A tight encapsulation of this understanding of representation occurs in fact in Augustus’ own Res gestae, where his self-presentation bears many points of resemblance to Propertius’ Cornelia. He says:

legibus novis me auctore latis multa exempla maiorum exolescentia iam ex nostro saeculo reduxi et ipse multarum rerum exempla imitanda posteris tradidi.

With new laws passed under my authorship, I brought back many examples of our ancestors already fading away from our age, and I myself handed down examples of many things to be imitated by posterity. (RG 8.5)

The laws in question are generally agreed to be the moral legislation, of

33. She speaks of herself by name at lines 13 and 43. The first person habui would retain the same scansion as habuit in 13, as would eram for erat in 44, since syllables which are long by position would become long by nature. I discuss in greater detail the split between speaker and person spoken of in Lowrie (2007).
which the marriage laws were the centerpiece. Augustus sits at the fulcrum between the exempla of the past and the exempla handed down to the future for imitation. His singularity is emphasized again and again in the Res gestae, yet he offers a model for imitation. His performance as emperor finds a record in the inscription of the Res gestae, itself a text to be iterated through copying and dissemination to at least the Eastern province of Galatia. Suetonius’ record of Augustus’ last words tells us that he conceived of his life as a theatrical role in the mime. Cornelia’s performance venue is rather the law court, though her conclusion of her speech with causa perorata est (“the case has been spoken,” 4.11.99) and the release of her audience resembles in structure the formal conclusions of Roman comedy. Both Cornelia and Augustus fill roles that are largely already scripted, though Augustus certainly surpassed Cornelia in his ability to control his own script. A thorough analysis of the relation of writing and performativity in Augustus’ own self-representation would be a different, though related story. Let this gesture toward the parallels between Cornelia and Augustus suffice to show that Propertius is creating a version of what Augustus at any rate would have conceived of as the master narrative of his age.

So much for the poem’s pragmatic purpose on ideological grounds. One could argue that some of the formal features emphasized above—the repetition and association of words having to do with the law, the exemplary form itself whatever its intricacies—serve the greater purpose of making a representation that sums up the complexity of its age. The narrative illogicalities emphasized at the beginning of this paper, however, set any straightforward ideological representation at a distance. The dissonances do not so much undermine the represented ideology, as emphasize the poem as a medium. Propertius’ task of persuasion is not a persuasion to—that task falls rather to Cornelia—but a persuasion that, namely, the analysis he makes that the ideology is such. In addition to the what of artistic representation, Propertius also considers the how. Quintilian’s formulation makes narrative a component of an exemplum, but there is also a discourse conveying the exemplum itself. Cornelia functions once more as a figure, this time of the challenge facing poetry, to communicate beyond death.

At the poem’s beginning, death appears as a brick wall: its immutable,

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34. Brunt and Moore (eds.) (1967), ad loc.
36. Suetonius, Augustus, 99: et admissos amicos percontatus ecquid iis uideretur minum uitae com-mode transegisse (“and he inquired of the friends he had let in whether he seemed at all to have played through the mime of life satisfactorily”).
37. E.g., Plautus, Captivi 1029, 1036: Spectatores, ad pudicos mores facta haec fabula est . . . / qui pudicitiae esse volit tur praemium, plauum date (“Spectators, this play was made for modest manners . . . / those who wish to give a prize for modesty, applaud”).
infernal laws (infernas . . . leges, 4.11.3) withstand any pleas (preces . . . exorato . . . orantem, 4.11.2–5). Against death, no discourse is effective, nor are institutions or public performances or other sorts of speech acts, such as marriage, the triumphal chariots of one’s ancestors (currus auorum, 4.11.11), and pledges. Communication of the living with the dead, however, seems to be possible, and is a recurrent concern in Propertius. He lends Cornelia a voice in death through his poem; in addition to speaking to Paullus, the judges, and later readers, she addresses or apostrophizes myriad objects and persons throughout the poem. Despite the complexities of his representation of her speech genre, the voice is static, since it cannot respond. It is in fact written. Although Propertius cannot reach out of the confines of his representation to make what he represents happen, he suggests that there can be a countervailing assumption on the part of the audience of a work of art’s responsiveness. Cornelia asks Paullus to speak to her statue as if it would respond: atque ubi secreto nostra ad simulacra loqueris, ut responsurae singula uerba iace (“and when you speak in secret to my statue, throw out each utterance as if to one about to respond,” 4.11.83–84). I take this as an allegory of reading. Even more than Cornelia, Propertius lends himself a voice after death. The inert statue is a work of art that preserves Cornelia’s memory and stands for her completed narrative and her completed life. She takes it for granted that Paullus will speak to it. The statue simply exists and cannot give a response, but he is to leave pauses in his speech to it as if it could. Janan reads this passage as empty and horrific: Cornelia occupies the gaps in conversation. The passage could be rather half full. Although art or poetry cannot be expected to speak on its own, posterity can continue to address it as if it could.

38. I take these as triumphal with Rothstein (1924) and Camps (1965).
39. As in Cynthia’s return from the dead in 4.7.
40. Address: Paullus (1, 35, 73, 81), mater Scribonia (55), her sons Lepidus and Paullus and daughter (63, 67, 87), the testes (“witnesses,” 99). Apostrophe: notes et . . . paludes (“nights and swamps,” 15; Sisyphus, 23; Tantalus’ water, 24; the exemplary Claudia, 51–52; personified lands (Rome, 37; Africa, 38). Several of these apostrophes countervail the assumption that the figure is directed to people or objects who cannot respond (see note 13, above). Cornelia enjoins silence on some of the standard inhabitants of the underworld in a convention offering them respite from their travails (taceant, “let them be silent,” 23; tacita, “silent,” 26); the assumption is that they could in fact speak.
41. Rothstein (1924) reads iace (“be silent”) for iace (“throw out”), with no essential change in the meaning. Steiner (2001), 151 calls attention to the consolatory aspect of the negation of loss made by archaic Greek statues and inscriptions that represent the dead in motion and speaking. She sees the images put up in honor of dead wives as attempts to restore what was lost and to preserve the social relations that defined the dead woman in life (13). This instance goes beyond its predecessors in the “typical dialogue motif” between lovers and the absent portrait of the beloved, for which, see Bettini (1999), 118.
42. Janan (2001), 162. Bettini (1999), 119 suggests rather that Paullus is meant to engage in sermocinatio and bestow speech on someone without a voice.