

## After Propertius

### (IV.7, *Sunt aliquid Manes: letum non omnia finit*)

Ghosts do exist. Ash & bone-stubble, we left her pyre  
 smoldering, libations  
 where the flames contusioned skyward. We piled the battered  
 red thesaurus, & then

her jewelry, her father's bee books. Toga-shroud & camphorwood,  
Cynthia  
 now was shade, slithering colorless from smoke.  
 & on my bed I'd mourn each night before I slept — brass four-poster  
 where we groaned delirious fucks.

& it was here her phantom swayed above me in my dream. **Wake  
 up**

**Propertius, wake up, you shit**  
**& look upon your Cynthia. Asleep already?** The hair, her  
eyes —  
 exactly as they'd been upon her shroud:

three years ago to this day. Patchouli-smell, lapis ring afloat  
 before me, fire-gnawed and battered.

Wrist-bones clicking, humeria-rattle. **How goes the poetry,  
 loverboy? Did I give good subject matter?**

**Don't think I haven't heard your three-year keening. & now  
 it's given you —**

**I've given you — another little book.**  
**Yes, I've read it; not much else to do in Hades' endless**  
**cellblocks**  
**but unscroll papyri; nobody here shoots up,**

**wine's beside the point, & fucking means nada to a crew with**  
**coins**  
**so heavy on their ectoplasmic tongues.**

Desire is for amateurs, & shame. Imagine it, Propertius, that  
 I  
 of all people am beyond

such things: though you, I see, have hardly changed at all: Mr.  
 Legendary

**Piss & Moan. Give me a break.**

How loose the mourning-toga hung upon her bones, & her turban,  
 shot-through with golden thread,

floated glistening & unscorched, as did her eyes, gunmetal blue —  
 flaring with the gaze that always shone  
 on me & with the same prodigious rage. **It's time, Propertius,**  
**for a little travelogue.**

Outside the Trailways station you'll find Cerebus asleep; he's  
 mangy,  
 a toothless shepherd-boxer mix,  
 jaws always working while he dreams of prey — waterfront  
 rats  
 most likely. & Styx?

Think Boston & the Combat Zone, but before it a shit-oozing  
 smell  
 from the flooded street, where Charon  
 (aka "Dr. Nods," aka "Tugboat") pulls the fillings from your  
 mouth  
 with pliers (though there is no pain),

& with his gold tooth shining, his 'fro sprawling beachball-  
 size, he leads  
 you on the steppingstones  
 he's made of carhoods, dumpster covers. & now you'll hover  
 on  
 The Other Side, floating along

the mentholed air, past "25 Cent Movies," GIRLS! GIRLS!  
GIRLS!

ADONIS THEATRE preening its neon.  
& suddenly you know Hart Crane is here, Chet Baker,  
Clytemnestra,

Emily & Medea. & then

before you, dear Propertius, looms you S.R.O., its  
TRANSIENTS

WELCOME pulsing & its lobby  
sporting zoot-suits, eye-patches, hot-panted legs uncrossing,  
gang

tattoos; arm-pit stink & every eye

fixed maybe on the Zenith with its sound turned down, maybe  
on

the umbrella stand, bristling with canes,  
prosthetic legs. The desk clerk's been expecting you. One  
milky eye,

& his pinky-ringed hand holds out your key.

"With tears in death we ratify life's loves," he says. (At least  
the sense of irony remains  
intact.) The elevator's broken; you can use the stairs. Begin  
your climb, Propertius. Begin.