

“Subzero Politics:” Reading *frigidus* as a Political Metaphor in Propertius 3.22 and beyond

Although much has changed in reading Ovid’s exile literature since scholarship has shifted the focus from biographically-inflected criticism to investigating the narrative techniques as well as the literary metaphorology that shape the texts (e.g., Hinds 2023, Williams 1994, Keith 2023), the signification of the coldness that Ovid ascribes to the environs of his place of exile (e.g., Scythico ... frigore, *Ex Pont.* 1.3.37) remains elusive. With the intent of broadening the interpretive horizon of Ovid’s use of *frigor* / *frigidus* in this segment of his *oeuvre*, this paper takes the reader back to Propertius 3.22, published in the second half of the 20s BC, and sketches out the political signification attributed to *frigida* ... *Cyzicus* (3.22.1) in this elegy.

At the heart of this paper’s argument will be the point that in Propertius’ *Laudes Romae*, *frigidus* is used as a political metaphor, denoting a setting that is not conducive to Rome’s commonwealth of the Republican format. The tool for identifying *frigidus* as a political metaphor will be Iser’s theory of an aesthetic response, an approach associated with the Constance School, that conceptualizes the reading experience as a performance of meaning, initiated by the structure of the literary text (Iser 1978).

The argumentation will rest on the findings gleaned from the study of (1) the cues in the poem’s text that bind *frigida* ... *Cyzicus* (3.22.1) into the emphatic as much as ironic praise of the City as the seat of the traditional values and career-prospects of the Republican nobility in the second half of the 20s BC; (2) the background-foreground relationship between the politicized geography of Vergil’s *Laudes Italiae* (*Georgics* 2.136-76) and Propertius’ *Laudes Romae*, which reinforces the use of *frigidus* as a political metaphor in Elegy 3.22.1 and at the same time distinguishes its signification from the figurative meaning inscribed, as Lowrie and Vinken (2022) have shown, onto the Vergilian landscape; and (3) the foreground-background relationship between Elegies 3.22 and 1.6 (which is evoked by the name of the poem’s addressee, Tullus) regarding the

political significance attributed to the East: Elegy 3.22's focus on Rome indicates that the political map has been redrawn – at least for supporters of Augustus' vision of the republic.

While an interpretation of the coldness that Ovid ascribes to the environs of his exile would be beyond the scope of this paper, a few suggestions will be offered in conclusion as to how to integrate the symbolic meaning of Propertian *frigor* in the multi-layered readings of the equally multi-layered texts of the *Tristia* and the *Epistulae ex Ponto*.

Works Cited

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