

## Broken Distichs: Propertius' Internal Epitaphs and Inscriptions

Propertius notoriously creates his elegiac books by borrowing disparate elements from other literary genres, playfully incorporating aetiology, bucolic, comedy, lyric, and epigram with ease throughout the corpus (e.g. Maltby 2006, Keith 2008, James 2012). Recent scholarship has begun to pay attention to how he uses specifically epitaphic epigrams in his poetry, sometimes in complete elegiac couplets (e.g. Ramsby 2007) and sometimes not (e.g. Houghton 2013). And yet, despite a wealth of scholarship on Propertius' generic play and growing interest in his use of inscriptional formulae, we still lack an overarching, cohesive study of how Propertius blends the issues of his generic conventions with the materiality of these epigraphic and inscriptional moments. My paper analyzes Propertius' clever use and manipulation of inscriptional conventions in order to shed new light on Propertius' innovation in the creation of his elegiac genre.

The first part of my paper analyzes how Propertius incorporates entire epitaphs and votive inscriptions within his poetry books. I begin with a brief survey of the generic conventions of these inscriptions and how Propertius playfully manipulates those conventions. Propertius' examples of complete inscriptions using language and setting from funeral epitaphs and votive offerings include an inscribed offering to Venus at 2.14.27-8, Vertumnus' inscription at 4.2.59-64, and Cynthia's description of her own epitaph at 4.7.85-6. Propertius clearly distinguishes these phrases from the primary narrative via introductory statements of speakers and writers, or an explicit grave-site scene. By declaring that his books themselves will be an offering (2.13.25-6), Propertius creates a pattern of poems as offerings that is exemplified through these internal votive offerings. Further, Propertius' death is a constant theme, so his use of direct funeral scenes is not wholly surprising. The fact that these scenes often include direct quotations, however, adds

realism and continuity to the text. Propertius' obsession with his death and *Nachleben* (poetic and otherwise) is a theme as unchanging as his devotion to Cynthia: she is always present, whether joyous or hateful, just as Propertius' grave is the future he always goes towards and thinks about.

I then examine Propertius' use of broken distichs. Many of these internal epitaphs and votive inscriptions are not written as full elegiac couplets, such as Arethusa's proposed votive inscription at 4.3.71 and Propertius' own epitaph at 2.13.35-6. Other examples can be observed at 2.1.79, 2.5.27, 2.24b.35-8, and 2.28.44. Due to the fact that elegy shares its meter with the most dominant meter of inscribed poetry, especially epitaphs and votive offerings, we might expect that Propertius would capitalize on the ease of incorporating complete inscriptions into his poems. However, this is not always the case. These examples of Propertius' internal epigrams are truly internal: they cannot be excised from the larger poem; they cannot exist without his poetic framework. Propertius literally interweaves genre and form within the set meter of his elegy, corrupts and adapts other elegiac forms for his love elegy. Further, these inset inscriptions show a conversion of material as Propertius excises these material inscriptions out of a believable external setting and subsumes them into the physical context of his poetry books. My paper focuses on Propertius' use of these phrases and on how the transference from material object to poetry book enables Propertius to comment on and compete with various genres of the elegiac meter.

Classicists are increasingly interested in the materiality of written culture (Habinek 1998, Kruschwitz 2010, Phillips, 2011, Dinter 2013). Propertius plays with this concept heavily as he converts the material of a votive offering or a gravestone into a poetry book. My paper complements yet builds on these areas of scholarship to make an important new contribution to

the way we understand Propertius' interest in the materiality of poetry and immortality and how this directly affects his development of his genre.

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