Reuse Me. Recycle Me. Reduce Me? : How Propertius Manages his own Reception

Anxieties of influence can look forward in time as well as backward. This paper briefly surveys a few ways in which Augustan poets could expect others to reuse their words. It then explores how the speaker of Propertius' elegies acknowledges that other people will reuse, change, or destroy his words and so conceives of his texts as open to these processes.

Augustans used each other's poetry in various ways. Famous poets quoted, alluded to, repurposed, and reworked each other's and earlier poets' words, as much scholarship has discussed (*e.g.*, Conte 1986; Hinds 1998; Darbo-Peschanski 2004; and Keith 2008: 45-85, esp.). Meanwhile, grammarians such as Quintilian and Rutilius, and later Caesius Bassus, realized Horace's fear that his poetry would become a banal tool for teaching young boys (Hor. *Epist.* 20.17-8), using verses from famous poets as *exempla* and sometimes changing them in the process. Likewise, graffiti and other inscriptions quote, allude to, and mash-up famous poets' words (Lissberger 1934; Wachter 1998) or efface their authorship.

The speaker of Propertius' elegies acknowledges that other people may appropriate or destroy his words and makes this acknowledgement part of his poetics. At the end of the programmatic Poem 2.1, for example, the speaker invites Maecenas to give a eulogy for him when he dies: "and, weeping, toss words such as these to the mute ashes: 'A harsh girl was this wretch's fate' " (*taliaque illacrimans mutae iace verba favillae: / 'Huic misero fatum dura puella fuit,'* Prop. 2.1.77-8). With the word "such" (*talia* – as opposed to "these" [*haec*]; *haec atque* or *et haec* could stand in metrically for *taliaque*) in verse 77, the speaker respectfully avoids dictating words to his patron but rather suggests a model which Maecenas might change or replace. In addition, the model the speaker gives is a pentameter, which would be anomalous as a stand-alone. Since the tone of the pentameter suggests an epigram, it might prompt

Maecenas to provide his own hexameter to complete the distich. Thus the speaker invites Maecenas to alter or replace his words, which in this instance are the final verse of his poetic manifesto for Book 2. Poem 2.13 also invites its audience to supplement or rewrite an incomplete epitaph that the speaker proposes for himself. In Poem 3.23, the speaker envisions an accountant erasing his poems. Then the speaker instructs a slave to post a flyer that the slave will need to reformulate, because the speaker dictates it in indirect discourse. In Poem 4.7, Cynthia's ghost echoes the speaker's own words from Book 1 to criticize and threaten him. In these and other poems, the speaker manages potential repurposing and erasure by taking them into account in his vision of his texts.

Propertius was not the only Roman author to try to manage his own reception. In Horace's *Satires*, for example, the speaker carefully limits the group of people whose opinions and suggestions about his poetry he will even hear. Such attempts to manage their works' reception are, in themselves, examples of an audience's influence over an author's words and point to authors' anxieties about this influence.

Bibliography

Conte, G. B. 1986. *The Rhetoric of Imitation: Genre and Poetic Memory in Virgil and Other Latin Poets*. Tr. Charles Segal. Ithaca, NY.

Darbo-Peschanski, C. 2004. "Les citations grecques et romaines." *La citation dans l'antiquité*. Ed. Catherine Darbo-Peschanski. Grenoble. 9-21.

Hinds, S. 1998. *Allusion and Intertext: Dynamics of appropriation in Roman poetry*. Cambridge, UK.

Keith, A. 2008. *Propertius: Poet of Love and Leisure*. London.

Lissberger, E. 1934. *Das Fortleben der roemischen Elegiker in den Carmina Latina Epigraphica*. Tuebingen.

Wachter, R. 1998. " 'Oral Poetry' in ungewohntem Kontext: Hinweise auf Muendliche Dichtungstechnik in den pompejanischen Wandinschriften." *Zeitschrift fuer Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 121: 73-89.