

### *Ianua Vota*: Inscribed Epigram in Propertius's 1.16

In this paper I argue that Propertius uses the genre of inscribed epigram in *Prop.* 1.16 as a means to convey a perspective that is critical of elegiac values while simultaneously subverting it. 1.16 is best known as Propertius's inversion of the paraclausithyron motif, in which the door speaks instead of the lover (Copley 1956). In this poem, a door makes a complaint that is two-fold: its mistress partakes in scandalous behavior and, as a result, *amatores exclusi* publicize her shame. Although this is the door's primary concern, most of 1.16 is the door's recitation of a poet-lover's complaint.

Scholars hesitate to take the door's criticism of the mistress and the poet-lover seriously. MacKay (1956) argues that the door secretly sympathizes with the poet-lover, as do Hodge/Buttimore (1977). Nappa (2007) likewise hesitates to take the door's criticism seriously, arguing that certain ironic statements by the door "destabilize" this framework. I agree with Nappa that the door's criticism is subverted by irony and that the poem is self-conscious of its genre; yet, I argue that this subversive irony actually depends on elegy's absorption of inscribed epigram.

My argument may be divided into three sections for the sake of clarity. First, I establish Propertius's adaptation of inscribed epigram in 1.16, which has yet to be noted in scholarship; then, I show the significance of inscribed epigram to establish an ideological critique of the mistress, poet-lover, and elegy; finally, I show that the poem's elegiac framework subverts this critique.

Propertius has several other poems in which an object speaks: 1.21, 4.2, and 4.11. In each of these poems, Propertius plays with inscribed epigram (see also Thomas 2011). 1.21 and 4.11 engage with sepulchral epigram; likewise, 4.2 is conventional in that a statue/deity speaks via the

inscription on its base. Each of these poems uses the object-speaker to play on the similarities between epigram and elegy: the meter and the conventionally monologic-subjective mode. Propertius plays similarly with inscribed dedicatory epigram in 1.16, though this experimentation has been obscured in part by a questionable emendation of *uota* to *nota* in the second line of the poem, by which Propertius identifies the door as an object dedicated to *Pudicitia* (Fedeli 1984; Butler and Barber 1933).

The primary function of this generic play is to construct a double nature for the door as a participant in both amatory affairs and religious practices; that is to say, Propertius plays on the religious nature of doors as well as the central position of doors in Roman paraclausithyra. On one hand, the door emphasizes its status as an object of veneration and its involvement in ceremonial practice. On the other hand, the door emphasizes its reluctance to participate in its mistress's affairs. This double nature is further exploited in the inset poem when the poet-lover appears as a *supplex* to the door -- for not religious reasons but amatory ones.

Once the door's ideology and its potential as inscribed epigram have been established, Propertius draws attention to several ironies through the door's diction: primarily the poem's own elegiac status and its audience (*miseri amantes*). These ironies emphasize several similarities between the door and the poet-lover of the inset poem, which culminate in the final lines when one recognizes that the door's complaint (like the poet-lover's) falls on deaf ears. The consequences of this subversion is the trivializing of moral criticism regarding elegy, which is dependent upon Propertius's absorption of inscribed epigram within an elegiac framework. This paper is part of a larger project that examines how elegy's origins and metapoetic nature facilitates its 'absorption' of other genres. In consideration of Thomas Beebee's literary theory of

genre and generic ideology (1994), elegy's absorption of other genres within its ideological framework can be seen as a conscious act of generic formulation on the part of an author.

### Bibliography

Beebee, Thomas. *The Ideology of Genre: A Comparative Study of Generic Instability*. University Park: Penn State UP, 1994.

Butler, H. E. and E. A. Barber, eds. *The Elegies of Propertius*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933.

Copley, Frank. *Exclusus Amator: A Study in Latin Love Poetry*. Madison: Madison UP, 1956.

Fedeli, Paolo, ed. *Sexti Properti Elegiarum Libri IV*. Stuttgart: Teubner, 1984.

Hodge, R. I. V. and R. A. Buttimore. *The Monobiblos of Propertius*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1977.

MacKay, L. A. "The Well-Disposed and Ill-Used Door (Propertius 1.16)." *Phoenix* 10.1 (1956), 13-19.

Nappa, Christopher. "Elegy on the Threshold: Generic Self-Consciousness in Propertius 1.16." *The Classical World* 101.1 (2007), 57-73.

Thomas, Richard. "Propertius and Propertian Elegy's Epigram Riffs." *Latin Elegy and Hellenistic Epigram: A Tale of Two Genres At Rome*. Edited by Alison Keith. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011.