

# The Materiality of Text – Placement, Perception, and Presence of Inscribed Texts in Classical Antiquity

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# Hard Verses and Soft Books: The Materials of Elegy

*S.J. Heyworth*

Recent decades have seen an apt and increasing attention to the place of epigram in Latin elegy.<sup>1</sup> This paper continues these investigations by concentrating on one related aspect: the extraordinary variety of materials by which the elegists (primarily Propertius in my account) figure the presentation and preservation of words, both theirs and others'. Elegy may be inscribed on hard stone, as the fitting meter for sepulchral epigram; but its nature is soft, as the poets repeatedly admit, and they foresee transmission and immortality as dependent on materials far less permanent, and even insubstantial.

## 1 Sepulchral Memorials in Propertius 1 and 2

From his first lines<sup>2</sup> epigram plays a significant part in Propertius' early books.<sup>3</sup> As death becomes a substantial theme, so does memorialization. Book 1 ends with two ten-line poems:<sup>4</sup> 1.22 is a *sphragis* that serves as a gloss on the previous poem, implicitly identifying as a relative of the poet (*mei ... propinqui*, 7) the dead and unburied speaker of the quasi-sepulchral 1.21. As we expect in the case of an unusual death, this epigram tells the story behind it: Propertius' relative has died after escaping through Caesar's lines during the

1 E.g. Schulz-Vanheyden 1969; Fedeli 1989; Yardley 1996; Ramsby 2007; Videau 2010: 71–130; Keith, ed., 2011; Houghton 2013; Nelis-Clément & Nelis 2013; forthcoming as I write is Bettenworth 2016.

2 1.1.1–4 famously imitate Meleager's *Myiscus* poem, *Anth. Pal.* 12.101; for detailed analysis see e.g. Keith 2011, at 105–6 and n. 32.

3 The texts of Propertius are drawn from my OCT (Heyworth 2007a), and the translations mainly from Heyworth 2007b, where explication of the choices made can also be found. The sources of earlier conjectures can be found in Smyth 1970.

4 On these, and the next few Propertian passages to be discussed, see Ramsby 2007: 50–57. However, Ramsby's book pays surprisingly little attention to the *carmina epigraphica*, except in setting general "Hellenistic influences" in opposition to "the traditional and well-documented Roman practice that honoured the dead with poetic inscriptions" (47), as if Greek sepulchral epigram were not also a strong and influential tradition, e.g. on Propertius 1.21 and 3.7: see e.g. Schulz-Vanheyden 1969.

battle of Perugia. Line 7 gives us the name of the dead soldier,<sup>5</sup> line 6 perhaps the name of his sister (Acca, if Scaliger's conjecture is correct), and 1.22 shows Propertius to be another relative. Thus some regular functions of sepulchral epigram are discharged, and we may observe that one purpose of the poem is to celebrate the man whose death could not be marked by a proper tomb. We might try to imagine the words inscribed on a cenotaph, but the final couplet denies the possibility (1.21.9–10):

et, quaecumque super dispersa inuenerit ossa  
montibus Etruscis, haec sciat esse mea.<sup>6</sup>

The final half-line plays on the common opening *hic situs est*, but here the deictic *haec* points to the bones, which are necessarily absent from any cenotaph. Thus instead of something that might be cut into stone, we have the words of a dead man, speaking not as if from an everlasting grave, but under the temporary circumstances of the siege of Perugia; the words are imagined by a poet and given permanence not by hard-wearing marble but by their inclusion in a poetic book, copied and recopied as generations pass.

The use of the imagined spoken word to celebrate the dead begins in the *Iliad*, with Hector's fantasy about the words of a sailor passing the tomb of the Greek challenger he expects to kill in single combat.<sup>7</sup> It is a repeated motif in the Propertian corpus.<sup>8</sup> It marks the poet's own tomb-to-be already at 1.7.23–4:

nec poterunt iuuenes nostro reticere sepulchro:  
“ardoris nostri magne poeta, iaces?”<sup>9</sup>

5 Even if, as I suspect, *Gallum* is the result of assimilation to the addressee of 1.20, it is likely that the lost word was the correct name.

6 “And, whatever bones she finds scattered up on the Etruscan hills, let her know that these are mine.”

7 *Iliad* 7.87–91, nicely explored as a foundational moment for the tradition of sepulchral epigram by Thomas 1998.

8 See Fedeli 1989: 93–94.

9 “Nor will the young men be able to keep quiet at my tomb: ‘Great composer of our passion, do you lie dead?’” Cf. Tib. 1.3.55 *hic iacet ... Tibullus* (“here lies Tibullus”; see Maltby 2002 *ad loc.*, for further 3rd-person instances, including Ov. *Am.* 3.9.39 *iacet ecce Tibullus*; and Houghton 2013: 353); *CLE* 441.1 (= Courtney 1998 [*MLAP* in following notes] 176.1) *Innocuus Aper ecce iaces* (“Here you lie, innocent Aper”); *CLE* 467.4 (= *MLAP* 177.4) *iaces annis iam uiduata tuis* (“you lie, robbed of the years due to you”). Yardley 1996: 273 notes the similarity to *CLE* 441.1 and other passages (and later the sepulchral usage of *transire* at 2.11.5); he also has a good discussion (268) of the chronological issues in adducing such parallels, responding to

and 2.1.77–78 (addressed to Maecenas):

taliaque illacrimans mutae iace uerba fauillae:

“Huic misero fatum dura puella fuit.”<sup>10</sup>

The absence of such speech is foreseen for Cynthia's tomb (if Propertius ceases to write about her), at 2.11.5–6:

et tua transibit contemnens ossa uiator,  
nec dicet “cinis hic docta puella fuit.”<sup>11</sup>

In each instance the context and phrasing imitates that of sepulchral epigram (as my footnotes illustrate); the placing of the words in the pentameter reinforces the evocation of epigram. Once again we may find implied a strong contrast between the potential engraved form of expression and the apparently fleeting (but in fact long-lasting) words that Propertius gives us. It is true that

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Lissberger 1934, and concluding that “at least some of the terms of phrase and wording that we find recurring in later funerary contexts probably predated the elegists”. This is the assumption that lies behind my discussion too.

10 “And weeping cast such words as these to the mute ash: ‘A hard-hearted girl was the fate of this poor soul.’” Cf. Rodríguez Herrera 1999; and *CLE* 1111.8 (= *MLAP* 123.8) *nunc sum defleti parua fauilla rogi* (“now I am a little ash from the tearful pyre”); 1234.1 *Hic lapis ossa tegit miseri collecta Philonis* (“This stone covers the gathered bones of poor Philo”); 1065.4 *nunc iacet ecce miser* (“here now lies poor ...”); 995.13 (= *MLAP* 180.13) *crudelia fata* (“cruel fates”); 434.10 (= *MLAP* 70.10) *si non infelix contraria fata habuissem* (“if in my misfortune I had not had adverse fates”). *CLE* 512.1 *hic ego qui taceo uersibus meam uitam demonstro* (“Here I who am silent reveal my life in verse”) has a similar paradox: the man who has joined the silent dead speaks through the words written for the tombstone, or to be spoken by the passing Maecenas.

11 “And the traveler will ignore your bones as he passes, and not say, ‘This ash was once a poetic girl.’” Cf. *CLE* 123.1 *frequens uiator saepe qui transis, lege* (“Frequent traveler who often pass, read”); 1452 *dic, rogo, qui transis, ‘sit tibi terra leuis’* (“Passer-by, please say ‘May the earth be light on you’”); 484.2 (= *MLAP* 130.2) *meos uersus dum transeo perlego et ipse* (“while I pass, I read through my own verses”); 434.1–2 (= *MLAP* 70.1–2) *uiator/ siste, rogo, titulumque meum ne spreueris, oro* (“traveler, please stop, I pray, and do not ignore my inscription”); *CLE* 409.5 (= *MLAP* 172.5) *sum deinde cinis de milite factus* (“then I was turned from soldier to ash”); 1532.2 (= *MLAP* 59.2) *mortua hic ego sum et sum cinis* (“here I am dead and ash”); 20.9 *docta, erudita paene Musarum manu* (“an educated girl, taught almost by the hand of the Muses”); 1111.8 (n. 10), and 11–12 (= *MLAP* 123.11–12) *quondam ego ... doctus* (“once I was educated”); 960.3 *si quaeris quae sim, cinis en et tosta fauilla* (“If you ask who I am, look: ash and burned embers”); 219.9–12 (= *MLAP* 131.9–12) *hic cinis/ pueri sepulchrum est Xanthiae, / qui morte acerba raptus est/ iam doctus* (“this ash is the tomb of the boy Xanthias, already educated when snatched by bitter death”).

in the two instances from book 2, the words of the passer-by could be thought of as read from an inscription<sup>12</sup>; but the hypothetical status of each tomb stands against that, as does the emphasis on speech. In two of the three poetry is to the fore (*magne poeta*, 1.7.24; *docta puella*, 2.11.6), and 2.1 is an avowedly programmatic poem. It is also a poem in which the material of text is a persistent theme. Already in the first couplet the book is described as *mollis* (2.1.1–2):

Quaeritis unde mihi totiens scribantur amores,  
unde meus ueniat *mollis* in ora liber.<sup>13</sup>

We might read the epithet as purely a reference to emotional content, and not evoking the form of text at all. But various observations should discourage that limited reading. The first is that *liber* implies a physical object, and *in ora* can mean “into view” (*OLD* s.v. *os*, 10). Then we may note that in verses 41–42 the antithetical *durus* is used to describe what the evocation of the *Aeneid* implies to be epic:

nec mea conueniunt *duro* praecordia uersu  
Caesaris in Phrygios condere nomen auos.<sup>14</sup>

The placing of that epithet in the hexameter, in contrast to *mollis* in the pentameter of the opening couplet, particularly strengthens the formal aspect. But most significant are verses 5–6:

siue illam Cois fulgentem incedere cerno, 5  
totum de<sup>15</sup> Coa ueste uolumen erit.

Here begins the list of ways in which Cynthia's behavior will be encapsulated in the work the poet produces: her wearing of Coan cloth will lead to poetry

12 As happens in Theocritus' epithalamium for Helen, at *Idyll* 18.47–48 γράμματα δ' ἐν φλοιῷ γεγράφεται, ὥς παριὼν τις/ ἀννείμῃ Δωριστί, «σέβευ μ', Ἑλένας φυτὸν εἶμι» (“Letters will be written on the bark so that a passer-by may read in Doric: ‘Revere me: I’m Helen’s plant.’”), which is relevant to the erotic inscriptions I shall move on to. See also Schulz-Vanheyden 1969: 97–100, and Keith 2011: 108, on the epigrammatic aspects of the close of 2.1.

13 “You ask how it happens that so often I write of love affairs, how my book comes in elegiac form on to people’s lips.”

14 “Nor does my heart suit the composition of Caesar’s name back to his Phrygian ancestors in epic verse.”

15 *totum de* 5: *hoc totum e* Ω. The paradosis gives the appropriate sense “entirely of Coan cloth” but lacks the required point that *de* provides: “If I observe her out for a walk gleaming in Coan silks, the whole roll will be (both) about Coan cloth (and made of it).”



about, and thus made of, Coan cloth.<sup>16</sup> What fabric could be softer than silk? The poet's imagination thus brings the content and material of his text into perfect alignment. Hardness recurs towards the end of the poem, not only in the description of Cynthia as *dura*,<sup>17</sup> but also in the couplet that introduces the closing invitation to Maecenas (2.1.71–72):

quandocumque igitur uitam me Fata reposcent,  
et breue in exiguo marmore nomen ero, ...<sup>18</sup>

Here Propertius does envisage his tomb as marble, and inscribed, but the diction diminishes the importance of such a monument: the name will be brief<sup>19</sup>, the marble small – what matters is how he will be defined by his lifelong love for Cynthia and his poetry, and thus he ends the poem (in 2.1.77–78, cited above) by extracting tears and a characteristically elegiac pentameter from the man who has earlier been depicted as seeking epic from him.

## 2 The Permanence of *Nomina*

In the case of 1.7 it is not the surrounding poem that gives weight to the play between poetic and sepulchral memorialization but the allusion to Catullus: *nec poterunt ... reticere* ("they shall not be able to keep silent", 23) recalls the opening line of Catullus 68B (41–50):

*Non possum reticere, deae, qua me Allius in re  
iuuerit aut quantis fouerit officiis,  
ne fugiens saeculis obliuiscens aetas  
illius hoc caeca nocte tegat studium:  
sed dicam uobis, uos porro dicite multis*

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16 The notion has been touched on less directly at 1.2.1–2 *Quid iuuat ... tenues Coa ueste mouere sinus*, in a passage about Cynthia's love of adornment that is easy to read as an allegory of the poet's elegy: see Ross 1975: 58–59.

17 For such paradoxical play as a feature of Propertian style see Heyworth & Morwood 2011: 31–32 (including comments on *mollis* and *durus*).

18 "Therefore, whenever the Fates demand life back from me, and I am a brief name on a small piece of marble, ...".

19 The phrasing "points to the lack of titles and political offices that will appear on his tomb": so Ramsby 2007: 55.

milibus et facite haec charta loquatur anus.  
 ⟨.....⟩  
 notescatque magis mortuus atque magis,  
 nec tenuem texens sublimis aranea telam  
 in deserto Alli nomine opus faciat.<sup>20</sup>

Allius' acts of kindness are to be kept visible through the conversation of the poet to the muses, then of the muses to thousands, and of the papyrus to readers (45–46). *haec charta* figures the papyrus leaf as the one the poet writes on, but also the one that every reader listens to. *anus* expresses the endurance of the material, presenting the papyrus as a gossipy old woman, but also hints at the antiquity that poems can win, while the sequence *dicam, dicite, loquatur* implies the repetitions of gossiping, but also the tradition of copying that secures such permanence. Contrasted with this repeated process is the decay that can attend physical monuments, symbolized in 49–50 by the work of the spider covering up the name of the benefactor. *sublimis* has been doubted<sup>21</sup>, but the sense “aloft” may help us picture the name of a dedicatee inscribed on a building's entablature, where it comes to be neglected as well as hidden by spiders' webs. *nomen*<sup>22</sup> is quickly evocative of an inscribed name in such a context,<sup>23</sup> and it returns in the corresponding lines at the close of the poem (149–52):

hoc tibi, quod potui, confectum carmine munus  
 pro multis, Alli, redditur officiiis,

20 “I cannot keep quiet, goddesses, on the way in which my Allius aided me, or with what kindnesses he supported me, lest time fleeing through forgetful generations cover this concern of his in dark night; but I shall tell you, and you in turn are to tell many thousands and make this paper speak as it grows old. ⟨.....⟩ and may he grow more and more famous when dead; and may the spider weaving its fine web aloft not do its work on the neglected name of Allius.”

21 *subtilis* Nisbet 1978: 107–8 (= 1995: 94–95), accepted by Trappes-Lomax 2007, *ad loc.* Despite *nomine* Nisbet seems to think there is an evocation of *imagines*, and is willing to see the spider as a symbol of decay only on the small scale, despite citing Propertius 2.6.35 *uelauit aranea fanum*.

22 It appears also to be an ironic pointer to the use of an invented name for the benefactor, whom Catullus gives us clues to read as Manlius, the addressee of 68A: n.b. *me Allius* in 41, *Malia* in 54.

23 So Kroll 1959, *ad loc.*: “C. denkt an eine Inschrift, die Allius' namen enthält.” Cf. Propertius' phrasing when he is defining the possibilities for his burial at 3.16.30 *non iuuat in media nomen habere uia* (“I do not want to have my name on the public road”); on *nomen* in “The Public Eye”, see Jenkyns 2013: 11–12, 50–52; on *nomina* in the Augustan era, Nelis-Clément & Nelis 2013: 320–26.

ne uestrum scabra tangat robigine nomen  
haec atque illa dies atque alia atque alia.<sup>24</sup>

Again the physical expression of *nomen* is clear. Here the potential name is not incised in stone (as at Propertius 2.1.72), but conceived of as metal, whether letters fixed on with dowels, or a metal tablet like those in the *tabularium* of the Parcae at Ovid, *Met.* 15.808–14 (Jupiter addressing Venus) *ex aere et solido rerum tabularia ferro ... tuta atque aeterna ... incisa adamantе perenni fata tui generis* (“universal records of bronze and solid iron ..., safe and eternal ... the fates of your race incised in the everlasting adamant”).<sup>25</sup>

Catullus 68B at the end leaves implicit the contrast between the monument that depends on physical form, and that is thus liable to decay, and the poem itself. But Ovid, having stressed the mass, strength and permanence of the Fates’ record office<sup>26</sup> will close his poem sixty lines later with another creation that need not fear physical destruction (*Met.* 15.871–72, 875–79):

Iamque opus exegi, quod nec Iouis ira nec ignis  
nec poterit ferrum nec edax abolere uetustas....  
parte tamen meliore mei super alta perennis  
astra ferar, nomenque erit indelebile nostrum,  
quaue patet domitis Romana potentia terris,  
ore legar populi, perque omnia saecula fama,  
siquid habent ueri uatum praesagia, uiuam.<sup>27</sup>

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24 “This gift, which was what I could manage, made up of a poem, is proffered to you, Allius, in return for many kindnesses, lest this or the next or one or other future day touch your family name with roughening rust.”

25 For discussion of the archaeological evidence, see e.g. Williamson 1987, and Haensch 2009 (see “Bronzetafel” in index).

26 What are we to make of this construction when Ovid sets his own poem up as an alternative image of permanence? Is Jupiter misled about the strength of the building (with implications for the threat to Augustan buildings too)? Or are we to see that as a fiction, in contrast to the reality of the poem’s existence? Or should we perhaps follow the lead of Nelis-Clément & Nelis 2013: 338–39; they note the imitation of the scene between Venus and Jupiter in *Aeneid* 1, and take *fata tui generis* not merely as a pointer to that scene but to the *Aeneid* as a whole, a work that is constructed in a far more monumental fashion than the fluid *Metamorphoses*, and yet shares its prospects of eternity.

27 “Now I have finished a work, which neither the anger of Jupiter nor fire nor iron can blot out, nor gnawing old age.... However, in the better part of myself I shall be carried alive above the lofty stars, and our name will be indestructible, and where Roman power extends on the conquered earth I shall be read by the voice of the people, and in fame through all centuries, if the prophecies of poets have any truth, I shall live.”

His *nomen* will not be liable to deletion (876) because it is found in multiple copies: it is not fixed in one place as an inscription would be, but lives all over the empire (877) on the lips of the people (878), and, perhaps, for all time.

### 3 Breath and Tears

The *Metamorphoses* is not elegiac Ovid, but its closing words reprise a motif from one of the earliest extant couplets in Latin, Ennius' epigram on himself (*FLP* 46 = *Var.* 17–18 Vahlen):

Nemo me lacrimis decoret nec funera fletu  
faxit. cur? uolito uiuu' per ora uirum.<sup>28</sup>

The poet himself is figured as the breath of speech. From the first then Latin elegiacs are associated with tears and borne on air. This is taken further in Catullus' version of a Callimachean epigram (29 Pfeiffer = *Anth. Pal.* 5.6):

ᾠμοσε Καλλίγνωτος Ἰωνίδι μήποτ' ἐκείνης  
ἔξειν μήτε φίλον κρέσσονα μήτε φίλην.  
ᾠμοσεν. ἀλλὰ λέγουσιν ἀληθέα τοὺς ἐν ἔρωτι  
ὄρκους μὴ δύνειν οὐατ' ἐς ἀθανάτων.  
νῦν δ' ὁ μὲν ἀρσενικῶ θέρεται πυρί. τῆς δὲ ταλαίνης  
νύμφης ὡς Μεγαρέων οὐ λόγος οὐδ' ἀριθμός.<sup>29</sup>

Catullus imitates the structure of the first three lines, but then, for his different circumstances, incorporates an extraordinary version of an old *gnome* (70):

Nulli se dicit mulier mea nubere malle  
quam mihi, non si se Iuppiter ipse petat.  
dicit; sed mulier cupido quod dicit amanti,  
in uento et rapida scribere oportet aqua.<sup>30</sup>

28 "No one is to adorn me with tears nor make a funeral with weeping. Why? I fly living through the mouths of men."

29 "Callignotus swore to Ionis that he would never hold a male or female beloved above her. He swore; but men say truly that oaths in love do not enter the ears of the gods. Now he burns with a male passion; and of his poor bride there is, as of the Megarians, 'no count or reckoning'."

30 "My woman says she would prefer to marry no one than me, not if Jupiter himself were to court her. That's what she says; but what a woman says to an eager lover one ought to write on wind and fleeting water."

Callimachus' reference to oaths has apparently triggered reminiscence of a verse attributed to Sophocles (fr. 811 Radt): ὄρκους ἐγὼ γυναικὸς εἰς ὕδωρ γράφω ("I write the oaths of a woman on water").<sup>31</sup> But Catullus has added an even more fleeting and insubstantial surface, by adapting the common image of winds carrying off words, which he himself uses at 30.10 *uentos irrita ferre* ("the winds bear unfulfilled").<sup>32</sup> The expression here may help support the transmitted text at 68.2 *conscriptum hoc lacrimis mittis epistolium* ("you send this letter written with tears"). Schrader's *consersum* ("spattered") has been revived by Trappes-Lomax 2007, and seems possible, but it is hardly a necessary conjecture, given the interest Catullus shows elsewhere in metaphors to describe texts. Here of course the metaphor of tears changes the ink not the surface. We shall return to tears, but for now let me note in passing that Ovid (following Tib. 1.6.19–20, 1.10.32) has fun replacing ink with wine: *Am.* 1.4.20 *uerba notata mero* ("words marked in wine"); 2.5.17–18 *conscriptae uino / mensa* ("or a table written with wine"); *Ars am.* 1.571–72; *Her.* 1.31–36, and especially 17.87–88:

orbe quoque in mensae legi sub nomine nostro  
quod deducta mero littera fecit "amo".<sup>33</sup>

#### 4 Wood and Trees

Wood is a surface used to express love in other ways too in the elegiac tradition. Vergil, *Eclogues* 10.52–4 comes in the midst of Gallus' soliloquy:

certum est in siluis inter spelaea ferarum  
malle pati tenerisque meos incidere amores  
arboribus: crescent illae, crescetis, amores.<sup>34</sup>

31 Ellis 1876, *ad loc.*, cites also *Anth. Pal.* 5.8.5 (Meleager = G.-P. 4352) νῦν δ' ὁ μὲν ὄρκιά φησιν ἐν ὕδατι κεῖνα φέρεσθαι ("Now he says those oaths are being carried on water"; γράφεσθαι Polak), and Plato, *Phaedrus* 276c7 οὐκ ἄρα σπουδῇ αὐτὰ ἐν ὕδατι γράψει μέλανι ("it is not for no reason then that he will write them in water, black water") where the epithet "black", implying ink, seems to correct the nevertheless lasting impression of futility, in a wonderfully ironic passage concerned with the superiority of "living" to written discourse.

32 For further parallels, see e.g. Maltby 2002 on Tibullus 1.4.21–26 and 1.5.35–36. Wind and water are combined also at Prop. 2.28.8, Ov. *Am.* 2.16.46, and already at Theoc. *Id.* 22.167–68. The words to vanish into thin air are specifically elegiac at Ov. *Am.* 2.14.41, *Her.* 1.79.

33 "On the round of the table I have also read beneath my own name, which letters drawn in wine made, 'I love.'"

34 "I've decided rather to endure in the woods amid the lairs of wild beasts and to cut my loves in the tender trees: they shall grow; grow too, loves." Vergil also has a herdsman talk of writing on bark at 5.13–15: *Immo haec, in uiridi nuper quae cortice fagi/ carmina*

The lines are almost certainly a version of a Gallan imitation of the words spoken in the woods by the love-sick Acontius of Callimachus, *Aetia* fr. 73:

ἀλλ' ἐνὶ δῇ φλοιοῖσι κεκομμένα τόσσα φέροιτε  
γράμματα, Κυδίππην ὅσσ' ἐρέουσι καλήν.<sup>35</sup>

These lines are spoken by Acontius, citing his own inscribed words (κεκομμένα ... γράμματα), which are themselves presented as speaking (ἐρέουσι).<sup>36</sup> The play between written and spoken is thus already manifest in this foundational moment for Latin love elegy. In Vergil's imitation some<sup>37</sup> have seen *amores* not just as “expressions of love”, indicating the topic, but as the title of Gallus' work, and thus implying whole books of love poetry. The trees are apt for such writing, in that they are *teneri*: “soft”, and thus easy to cut, “youthful” and thus likely to grow, “tender” and thus suited to erotic subjects. The repetition *crescent ... crescetis* brings out the difference between stone and living wood as a surface for inscription.

In 1.18 Propertius too frequents the woods, and echoes his three predecessors by repeatedly cutting Cynthia's name into the bark of the trees beneath which he sings (1.18.19–22):

uos eritis testes, si quos habet arbor amores,  
fagus et Arcadio pinus amica deo. 20  
a quotiens tenera resonant mea uerba sub umbra,  
scribitur et uestris CYNTHIA corticibus!<sup>38</sup>

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*descripsi et modulans alterna notavi, / experiar* (“or rather I shall try these verses, which I recently wrote down on the green bark of a beech and marked out arranging them in couplets”). On this, and other signs of textuality in the *Eclogues*, see Breed 2006: 15, and e.g. 71 on the tree inscription for Helen at *Idyll* 18.47–48 (cited in n. 12).

35 “And cut in your bark you are to bear as many letters as will say that Cydippe is beautiful.”

36 See Harder 2012, *ad loc.*, for good comments on the “different levels and kinds of ‘text’”. A rather different kind of graffiti is promised by another poet-lover at Catull. 37.9–10: *namque totius uobis/ frontem tabernae sopionibus scribam* (“I shall scribble phalluses all over the front of your tavern”).

37 E.g. Hollis 2007, on *FRP* 139a = Serv. *ad Bucolica* 10.1 *amorum suorum de Cytheride scripsit libros quattuor*.

38 “If there is a tree that knows love, you will be witnesses, beech, and pine, mistress of Pan. How often my words resound below the soft shade, and Cynthia is written in your bark!”.

*Amores* picks up the key word from *Eclogue* 10 (and probably Gallus<sup>39</sup> too). *Fagus* and *pinus* recall the first verses of Vergil's *Eclogues* (*Tityre, tu patulae recubans sub tegmine fagi*, 1.1: "Tityrus, resting under the cover of the spreading beech") and Theocritus' bucolic *Idylls* (Ἄδύ τι τὸ ψιθύρισμα καὶ ἅ πίτυς, αἰπόλε, τήνῃα, 1.1: "Sweet is the whistling, goatherd, and the pine there"; mention of Pan follows in verse 3). They thus mark a move into the pastoral genre to match that from the streets of Rome into the wooded landscape; and this is then reinforced by the reference in 21 to *umbra*, so dominant a word and motif in Vergil's book. But the substance goes back to Callimachus<sup>40</sup>, and so does the use of the second person to address the trees.

More relevant for our purpose is that once again Propertius combines evocation of written text and spoken word, just as Callimachus has done in Acontius' soliloquy. We may combine this observation with awareness of the tactical incoherence of the poem's existence, as manifested already in the opening lines (1.18.1–4):

Haec certe deserta loca et taciturna querenti,  
et uacuum Zephyri possidet aura nemus.  
hic licet occultos proferre impune dolores,  
si modo sola queant saxa tenere fidem.<sup>41</sup>

The lover seeks an empty landscape where he can safely rehearse his complaints without fear of being overheard by those who will broadcast his emotions; the poet on the other hand publishes his emotions. The paradox is brought out by the juxtapositions *taciturna querenti* and *occultos proferre*. But such countryside is notoriously full of echoes:<sup>42</sup> at 4.572–93 Lucretius explains "how in the wilderness rocks (*per loca sola saxa*) return matching forms of words in order" (573–74), and his account of echoes goes on to include phrases such as *loca deserta* ("deserted places", 591) and *taciturna silentia* ("quiet

39 On another aspect of Gallus relevant to this paper, the hint at monumental inscriptions in the Qasr Ibrīm fragment, see Gómez Pallarès 2005.

40 See Cairns 1969: 131–34, who teases out the implications for Callimachus of Aristaenetus' paraphrase at *Ep.* 1.10 = Callim. fr. 75b Harder. The Acontius and Cydippe story features another material used as a surface for elegiac composition, the apple on which the youth inscribed the vow by Artemis to marry him; this will recur indirectly in the final pair of Ovidian letters, *Her.* 20–21 (n.b. 20.9–12, 209–16, 237–40; 21.107–10, 145).

41 "This place at least is deserted and quiet in response to my complaints, and Zephyr's breeze is the master of the empty wood. Here I may bring out my hidden passion with impunity, if only the lonely rocks can keep faith."

42 Cf. e.g. Cic. *Arch.* 19 *saxa atque solitudines uoci respondent*, Hor. *Carm.* 1.17.10–12, Ovid, *Met.* 3.393–94, Plin. *HN* 36.100, 126.





First we have inscriptions on pastoral beech trees, as in Propertius 1.18, but the phrasing of 24 allows an Ovidian ambiguity. At first “My name *Oenone* is read, signed by your sickle”.<sup>46</sup> But I suspect there is an obscene pun here too: effectively “I am read as *Oenone drilled by your* (i.e. *Paris*) *tool*”.<sup>47</sup> The equation of tree and inscription in *Eclogue* 10 is repeated here, but in the present tense: the inscribed words continue to grow even when the man who wrote them is far away. The pun is now on the growth of *Oenone*’s “name” = “fame” (though it is, of course, rather her association with the lover of Helen that will bring her fame). There is an oddity in verse 26, where we might expect *crescite* to be addressed to the *trunci*, seeking fulfilment of their part of the equation; but if so, we get no indication of the change of addressee before the proleptic adjective *recta* marks the subject of the parallel *surgite* as neuter, and thus *nomina*: “rise and grow straight, names, to promote my glory”. However, the adjective itself would apply more easily to trees (even if *Oenone* might hope that the inscription would grow straight and thus legible).<sup>48</sup> It is tempting to see trees and names now combined as one notion, and the neuter used partly because it scans, but also because the nearer noun often determines gender in such cases;<sup>49</sup> in that case the phallic imagery of 24 might be seen as transferring too, as the trees grow to do honor to the nymph.<sup>50</sup>

*Oenone* then goes on to report a further inscription, a whole couplet (29–30), which revisits the interplay between the fixity of text and the fluidity of water. That water does not flow upstream is a firm truth, but one that is denied by *Paris*’ continuing to live after abandoning the nymph. Her watery identity complicates the claim. The previous couplet specifies not only the precise tree, a poplar, on the edge of the river-bank, but also the roughness of the bark used

46 This seems preferable to taking *tua* as part of the inscription, equivalent to *Paridis*, as Burman proposed: that isolates *falce*.

47 See Adams 1987: 24 on *falx*; and 199 on verbs like *maculo*, to which *noto* (“brand”, “stain”, etc.) is obviously akin.

48 The grammar would be more straightforward if we could accept a conjecture of Heinsius’, also suggested to me by Peter Thonemann: *secta* for *recta* (later MSS have impossible alternatives such as *erecta*, *rite*, *lecta*). Cf. Juv. 14.291 *concisum argentum in titulos faciesque minutas*, “silver cut up into titles and tiny faces” (of coinage). The sense would then be “Grow and rise, what has been cut to promote my glory”; but *secare* is used of cutting marble veneers (as at Hor. *Carm.* 2.18.17 *secanda marmora*) rather than inscribing letters: for bibliography and further discussion of the verb, see Horsfall 2006 on *Aen.* 3.464 *secto elephanto*.

49 See e.g. Hofmann & Szantyr 1965: 435.

50 For *surgere* in this sense Adams 1987: 252 cites Ov. *Am.* 2.15.25 *mea membra libidine surgent*, Mart. 12.86.2 *nec surgit mentula*, 12.97.9, Apul. *Met.* 7.23.2 in *Venerem nullo modo surgere*.

as a writing surface. *rugoso* implies age of a poplar, as it would for a human being; and this gives greater poignancy to Oenone's urging the tree to live (*uiue*, 27), as is appropriate for an oath and a memorial. Events have been set in train, however, that will lead to the death of both the writer and the recipient of the letter. But on what is the nymph herself writing, we might wonder? Perhaps bark, or *liber*?

## 5 The Materials of Writing in Propertius 3 and 4

Propertius cites epigrams in fantasizing about his own funeral at 2.13.35–36,<sup>51</sup> in marking a celebratory offering to Venus at 2.14.25–28,<sup>52</sup> and likewise in thanking Jupiter for Cynthia's prospective recovery from illness at 2.28.43–44; but in none of these cases is material or permanence a marked feature. Book 3 offers a little more for our exploration, for example the evocation of Vergil and Catullus in 3.1.5–8 (addressed to Callimachus and Philitas):

dicite, quo pariter carmen tenuastis in antro? 5  
 quoue pede ingressi? quamue bibistis aquam?  
 a ualeat, Phoebum quicumque moratur in armis.  
 exactus tenui pumice uersus eat.<sup>53</sup>

*tenuastis* (5) is a metaphor from spinning,<sup>54</sup> and thus constructs poetry as woven cloth. The verse of 8 is *exactus*, “finished off”, like a completed monument: the allusion to Horace, *Odes* 3.30.1 *Exegi monumentum aere perennius* (“I have finished constructing a monument more lasting than bronze”) is clarified by further echoes in verses 4 and 34, and especially the related poem 3.2.<sup>55</sup> However, *tenui pumice* provides an allusion to a rather different poem, Catullus 1, with its stress on freshness, elegance and charm in verses 1–2 *Cui dono lepidum*

<sup>51</sup> We may compare the inscribed stone that marks Tibullus' grave at Tib. 1.3.55–56, and the list of other examples given *ad loc.* by Maltby 2002, including Verg. *Ecl.* 5.42–44 (discussed by Breed 2006: 62–63). Ramsby 2007: 79 sees Propertius as responding to Tibullus' motif.

<sup>52</sup> Again there was a Tibullian model: 1.9.83–84.

<sup>53</sup> “Tell me, in what glen did you together refine your song? or with what foot did you begin? or what water did you drink? Ah, farewell to any who keeps Phoebus long under arms: let the verse flow, completed by the polishing of a fine pumice-stone.”

<sup>54</sup> As in the *carmen deductum* (“fine-spun song”) of Verg. *Ecl.* 6.5 and at Hor. *Epistles* 2.1.225 *tenui deducta poemata filo* (“poems spun on a fine thread”).

<sup>55</sup> 3.2.19–26 make the immortality of the poems, monuments to Cynthia's beauty, dependent on their immateriality: see Houghton 2013: 359–60.

*nouum libellum/arido modo pumice expolitum?* ("To whom do I give the charming new little book, freshly smoothed off with dry pumice stone?"). Given that pumice was used for smoothing the surface of the scrolls on which poetry was published, as is clear in the Catullian context, the phrasing also re-establishes papyrus as the material of the book.<sup>56</sup>

Towards the end of the book, in poem 3.23, papyrus is replaced by wax writing-tablets.<sup>57</sup> They have been lost, we are told (3.23.1–8):

Ergo tam doctae nobis periire tabellae,  
 scripta quibus pariter tot periire bona!  
 has quondam nostris manibus detriuerat usus,  
 qui non signatas iussit habere fidem.  
 illae iam sine me norant placare puellas  
 atque eadem sine me uerba diserta loqui;  
 non illas fixum caras effecerat aurum:  
 uulgari buxo sordida cera fuit.<sup>58</sup>

The poet plays in verse 1 and later with the idea of an occasional poem, but 3.23 is not in fact tied to specific circumstances. The lost writing tablets are presented as a physical object in verse 3, where Propertius notes the damage the tablets have endured through repeated usage, and in 8, with its talk of dirty wax and cheap boxwood. But elsewhere, e.g. 2 *scripta tot bona*, and 6, they are the symbol for his whole poetic output. The announcement of the loss clearly symbolizes the impending end of the book and the affair with Cynthia, which they have promoted and recorded. The penultimate couplet (21–22) plays on the contrast between the physical value of the tablets – simply wood (*ligna*) – and the gold which Propertius uses to give material expression to his valuation of his writing:

56 There are of course lots of references in elegy to writing on papyrus: *pagina* appears 5 times in Propertius, 6 in Ovid; *charta* once in Tibullus, at 2.5.17 of the Sibylline books, 19 times in Ovid, and once at [Tib.] 3.1.11 (this poem is much concerned with the materiality of texts).

57 For focus on the poetic use of writing tablets, see also Catull. 42, 50.2.

58 "Our writing tablets have gone then, learned as they were, and along with them so much fine writing has gone. The frequent usage of our hands wore these away long ago, and instructed them to maintain credit even when not sealed. They know by now how to placate girls in my absence, and they know too in my absence how to speak polished utterances. Gold fixtures had not made them valuable: the common box-wood contained dirty wax."

quas si quis mihi rettulerit, donabitur auro:  
quis pro diuitiis ligna retenta uelit?<sup>59</sup>

The poem ends, however, in 23–24, visualizing a very different form of writing, a graffito notice on a column, advertising a reward for the return of the tablets. Ovid imitates this poem with a pair, *Amores* 1.11–12, in the first of which he sends off Nape, Corinna's maid, with a message. He speculates on possible positive responses, and promises if they return with the simple instruction *ueni* ("come") to garland the tablets with laurel and dedicate them to Venus – or perhaps he will replace the cheap maple wood with a more expensive replica. In 1.12, the tablets have returned with a negative response, and he curses them now as *inutile lignum* ("useless wood").

In Propertius 4 we move from an epigram set on a statue's base at the end of 2 to a letter blotted by tears at the start of 3, which in turn ends with the promise of a dedicatory inscription;<sup>60</sup> in 7 and 11, the insubstantiality of voices from the dead are set against the physical durability of words on a tomb. When in 4.7 the poet is visited by Cynthia's ghost shortly after her funeral, after affectionate reminiscence and long complaints about his behavior, she gives him instructions, including at 77–78 a firm command to burn the poetry<sup>61</sup> written in her name (which opens his first poem, *Cynthia prima*, 1.1.1): this order envisages the verses as something single and combustible. When she moves on to the memorials she wants, this includes not just a tomb poetically adorned with ivy (79–80), but a column at Tivoli equipped with a short but prominent inscription (83–86):

hic carmen media dignum me scribe columna,  
sed breue, quod currens uector ab urbe legat:  
HIC SITA TIBVRNA IACET AVREA CYNTHIA TERRA  
ACCESSIT RIPAE LAVS, ANIENE, TVAE.<sup>62</sup> 85

She has composed the inscription herself, and it contains both her name and the word *laus* (praise), which recalls and inverts 78 *laudes desine habere meas*

59 "If anyone returns them to me, he will be rewarded with gold: who would want wood retained instead of wealth?"

60 On inscriptions in book 4, see Ramsby 2007: 61–70.

61 This recalls the *puella*'s vow in Catullus 36, and Tibullus' thoughts at 1.9.47–50 of destroying his poems in praise of Marathus with fire or water.

62 "Here on a public column inscribe a poem worthy of me, but a short one, such as a traveler hastening from the city may read: HERE IN THE EARTH OF TIBUR LAID THERE LIES CYNTHIA GOLDEN:/ GLORY IS ADDED NOW, ANIO, TO YOUR BANK."

(“cease to keep your praises of me”). The precarious material of the poetic book is set against epigraphic permanence; but it is the poetic book that survives and records this hypothetical inscription. And all this is spoken by the voice of a fleeting and insubstantial ghost.

Another ghost speaks in 4.11, Cornelia, the ideal matron, *uniuira*, mother of three, and step-daughter of Augustus. Unlike Cynthia’s visiting of Propertius in his bed, Cornelia’s words are connected at the start with her tomb (1: “Cease, Paullus, to burden my tomb with tears”); then she describes herself as in the Underworld (15–18) and addressing the court that sits in judgement on the dead (19–28). On one level the poem is figured as a defense speech (*ipsa loquor pro me*, 27: “I speak for myself”), but the notion of a sepulchral epigram returns explicitly in 35–36:

iungor, Paulle, tuo sic discessura cubili  
ut lapide hoc uni nupta fuisse legar.<sup>63</sup>

In asserting her identity as *uniuira*, she describes her formulation *uni nupta* as a title that can be read on “this stone”, that is in the sepulchral inscription.<sup>64</sup>

## 6 Letters and Blots

Propertius 4.3 on the other hand is figured throughout as a letter, written by a Roman matron, Arethusa, to her husband Lycotas, who is commanding forces in the East. Though there is no specific reference to the material on which she writes, when in verses 3–4 she attributes any blots to her tears it is clear that she is writing with ink:

Haec Arethusa suo mittit mandata Lycotae,  
cum totiens absis, si potes esse meus.  
si qua tamen tibi lecturo pars oblita derit,  
haec erit e lacrimis facta litura meis;  
aut si qua incerto fallet te littera tractu,  
signa meae dextrae iam morientis erunt.<sup>65</sup>

5

63 “I am joined to your bed, Paullus, only to leave it in such a way that I may be read on this stone to have been married to one husband.”

64 See further Lowrie 2009: 349–59.

65 “These instructions Arethusa sends to her Lycotas, if, when you are so often away, you can be mine. For all that, if, as you read, you find any part is blotted out and missing, this will

Interest in the physical composition of her text continues in the next couplet, where she uses the feeble form of her letters to communicate the feeble state of her health. A number of aspects of this passage will be revisited by Ovid, for example the play between *litura* and *littera*, the effect of the circumstances of composition, such as weeping, on the appearance of a text, and the complicated notion of how that can be valid for a letter that is a poem destined for immediate and repeated copying. The opening of *Heroides* 3, Briseis' letter to Achilles, is the most concentrated reworking of these themes and words (*Her.* 3.1–4):<sup>66</sup>

Quam legis, a rapta Briseide littera uenit,  
     uix bene barbarica Graeca notata manu.  
 quascumque adspicies, lacrimae fecere lituras;  
     sed tamen hae<sup>67</sup> lacrimae pondera uocis habent.<sup>68</sup>

Ovid, typically, adds further complications: in verse 4, though the tears were shed out of Achilles' sight and have dried by the time he reads, yet they communicate their emotion through the blots they have created. They thus have weight, but paradoxically the weight of voice: voice, unlike tears, is a phenomenon that does not literally have weight. Verse 2 is also concerned with form: Briseis, unlike Arethusa, is a barbarian using a language with which she is not comfortable – not of course Latin, which Achilles would not understand, but Greek: this explains the uncertainty of her script; but read another way, “Greek badly written in a barbarian hand” may explain why her Greek comes out as Latin: after all she comes from north-western Asia Minor, like Aeneas, the first Latin poet.<sup>69</sup>

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be a blot caused by my tears; or if you cannot make out some feebly written letter, it will be a sign that my hand is failing.”

66 Cf. also *Her.* 11.1–4, 15.97–98, *Tristia* 3.1.15–16 (and 1.1.13–14, discussed below).

67 *hae* EGw: *et* Pç. Not every tear has the expressive power of voice, but these do, because they have blotted Briseis' words. For the homoeoteleuton, cf. *Her.* 5.74 *has lacrimas*.

68 “The letter you read has come from Briseis who has been snatched away, Greek badly written by a barbarian hand. Tears made whatever blots you will see; yet these tears have the weight of voice.”

69 He shows off his skills at *Aeneid* 3.288 *AENEAS HAEC DE DANAIIS VICTORIBVS ARMA* (“AENEAS <DEDICATES> THESE ARMS FROM THE VICTORIOUS GREEKS”), a dedicatory hexameter that encapsulates the theme and the opening words of the epic: cf. Barchiesi 1995: 5–6, Nelis-Clément & Nelis 2013: 327.

## 7 The Materiality of Ovidian Epigrams and Elegies

We have now seen from several instances how Propertius' concern with materiality (like much else in his work<sup>70</sup>) serves as an inspiration and a model for Ovid. In particular Ovid revisits the fragility of writing on papyrus or wax, especially in the *Heroides* and his exile poetry. He too scatters his corpus with sepulchral epigrams, very often commenting on their form or scope, e.g. at the end of *Amores* 2.6, where the introductory couplet 59–60 (like Propertius at 2.13.35–36) picks up on the Callimachean tradition of playing with the concept of brevity in epigrams:<sup>71</sup>

ossa tegit tumulus, tumulus pro corpore paruus<sup>72</sup>,  
 quo lapis exiguus par sibi carmen habet:  
 COLLIGOR EX IPSO DOMINAE PLACVISSE SEPULCRO.  
 ORA FVERE MIHI PLVS AVE DOCTA LOQVI.<sup>73</sup>

Moreover, from the very first Ovid's corpus parades itself as having material form, whether we regard its start as *Amores* 1.1.1–4, where the metrical feet have physical existence that makes them liable to be stolen, or the prefatory epigram that marks what we have as a second edition, reduced from five books to three:

Qui modo Nasonis fueramus quinque libelli,  
 tres sumus; hoc illi praetulit auctor opus.  
 ut iam nulla tibi nos sit legisse uoluptas,  
 at leuior demptis poena duobus erit.<sup>74</sup>

Though *praetulit* means “has preferred” (*OLD* s.v. *praefero* 5), we should not miss the pun on the prime sense “cause to be carried in front”, which comments on the placing of this work, the epigram, at the physical start of the first book. Even though Ovid does not discuss aspects of book production with

<sup>70</sup> See e.g. Heyworth 2009.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Callimachus, *Epigr.* 11 Pf. See also Houghton 2013: 357–58.

<sup>72</sup> *paruus* Heinsius: *magnus* codd. Fedeli 1989: 95–96 adduces a number of inscribed epigrams that similarly bring out issues of length.

<sup>73</sup> “A mound covers his bones (a small mound to match his body), and on it a little stone has a poem that matches its size: ‘FROM MY TOMB ITSELF I CAN BE GATHERED TO HAVE PLEASED MY MISTRESS: MY MOUTH WAS TRAINED TO SAY MORE THAN A BIRD [or HAIL].’”

<sup>74</sup> “We, who were recently the five books of Naso, are now three; the author has preferred this work to that. Though you get no pleasure in reading us, at least now the pain is two books less.”

the regularity of a Catullus<sup>75</sup> or a Martial<sup>76</sup>, such awareness of the details of published form keeps recurring, whether explicit (as in the examples to be explored) or implicit.<sup>77</sup>

The first book of poetry from exile is a collection that celebrates both the precariousness and the indomitability of the poet and his products. *Tristia* 1 is presented as written on the journey from Rome to Tomi, on the Black Sea; letters to his wife and friends mingle with accounts of his current circumstances. And 1.1 sends the book back to Rome, where the poet himself cannot set foot. The familiar pun on *pes* is hinted at in 2 (*quo domino non licet ire tuo*, “the place to which your master is not allowed to go”), and reprised explicitly in the final word of verse 16 (*contingam certe quo licet illa pede*, “I shall touch those places at least with that foot with which I may”). Verses 3–14 describe and explain the material aspect of the book in some detail: as the work of an exile, it should look uncared for, *incultus* (3), nor should it be given a final polish with pumice (in 11–12) unlike Catullus’ *libellus*; it should not have brightly colored adornment (5–8). The poet is happy for the text to be blotted (13–14):

neue liturarum pudeat: qui uiderit illas,  
de lacrimis factas sentiat esse meis.<sup>78</sup>

These blots have a point, like those made by Arethusa’s and Briseis’ tears: readers will think that weeping is what has caused the mess (though this is not necessarily the right explanation).

*Tristia* 1.7 is addressed to a friend who has a picture of Ovid; he is pleased by this, but wishes rather for attention to his poetry, especially the *Metamorphoses*, the recent publication of which he then goes on to authorize. In despair over his exile he had burned the poem, he claims (15–16), forgetting that there were a number of copies (24) and that it would therefore survive his attempt at destruction. The point seems clear, and loaded: though Ovid’s books have material form, they cannot simply be destroyed, for they survive in too many copies; the same must be true of the *Ars amatoria*, along with the mysterious

75 Besides the passages discussed in other parts of this paper I think of poems 1, 14, 22, 44, 95, as well as the fleeting addressing of writing material at 35.2 (*papyre*) and 36.1 (*cacata charta*).

76 E.g. 14.183–96; 1.2–3, 107; 2.1, 8; 4.72, 89; 7.11; 10.2; see also Fowler 1995.

77 See e.g. Barchiesi 1997: 190–91.

78 “Feel no shame about blots: the man who sees them may understand they were made by my tears.” For further discussion of the physical book in *Tristia* 1.1, see e.g. Martelli 2013: 156–60.



*error*, one of the two causes of the relegation:<sup>79</sup> though Augustus may banish the poet, he will not succeed in extirpating every copy of the wicked text. The sense of the material permanence of poetry is partly conveyed by the imagery of 29–30, where composition is figured as the work of a blacksmith at an anvil or smoothing off rough edges with a file (*lima*):

ablatum mediis opus est incudibus illud,  
defuit et coeptis ultima lima meis.<sup>80</sup>

30

At its end the poem returns to reflection on book-form, when it offers the reader three couplets to add to the *frons* of book 1 of the *Metamorphoses* (encouragement surprisingly neglected by editors of the poem).

The final poem of the book, 1.11, is (with 1.2, 1.4) one of three set in a storm at sea. There is a vivid evocation of the poet's fearful situation as he writes, and a contrast to his wonted manner of composition (37–38), in his garden, lying on his familiar couch. Instead "I am tossed on the untameable deep on a mid-winter's day, and the very paper is struck by the dark sea-waters" (39–40):

iactor in indomito brumali luce profundo  
ipsaque caeruleis charta feritur aquis.

40

So now the reader knows the real source of those blots that he is to imagine on his copy of the text. The poet uses his art to create a material effect, and thus to counterfeit his own emotion.

The *Ars amatoria*, the poem for which Ovid was exiled, also has passages on writing, with advice to his pupils on how to keep up a suitably seductive correspondence; and my final passage comes from book 3, addressed to would-be female lovers. Verses 619–24 give advice on how writing can be done in secret ("when the time comes for douching", 620), how tablets and bits of papyrus can be hidden away by the go-between (in the bosom of her dress<sup>81</sup> or beneath her foot); 627–30 suggest the use of invisible inks, fresh milk and linseed oil<sup>82</sup>; and 625–26 makes a fitting close to this assemblage of elegiac materials:

79 *Tristia* 1.1.105–16; 2.1–8, 207–12; 3.1.3–4.

80 "That work was snatched from the very anvil, and the ultimate polish is lacking to what I began."

81 This recalls one of the few moments when Tibullus presents non-epigraphic text as material: 2.6.45–46 *lena ... furtim ... tabellas/ occulto portans itque reditque sinu* ("the *lena* comes and goes secretly carrying tablets hidden in the folds of her dress").

82 Reading *semine lini* in 629, with Diggle 1972: 31–33; *acumine lini* codd.

cauerit haec custos, pro charta conscia tergum                      625  
 praebeat, inque suo corpore uerba ferat.

“If the guardian is aware of this, let a confidante offer her back in the place of papyrus and carry words on her body.”

## 8 Conclusion

In short, elegy presents itself as written with stylus or pen and ink, a chisel or a knife, tears, charcoal or milk; and on bronze, marble, bark, apples, papyrus, silk, wax, water, air, and human skin.<sup>83</sup> The mixture of soft and hard matches the genre’s play on *durus* and *mollis*. Moreover, though epic is regularly identified as hard, elegy itself contains the dactylic hexameter of epic, and so the duality of material equates to a duality of form. And the range of substances also brings out the realities of elegiac writing: the couplet is used for permanent memorials, inscribed in stone, but also as a token of love, breathed into the fleeting air or cut into the flesh of an apple; and of course it is written on wax and papyri to be copied, once and again, and for ever after, and thus secures a monument for the author and those he celebrates.

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83 Latin poetry features other striking tools and surfaces for writing that do not make it into elegy, such as Io’s hoof in the dust at *Metamorphoses* 1.649–50 and the flowers inscribed with the names of kings at *Eclogue* 3.106–7.

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