



## Propertius: Modernist Poet of Antiquity

*Associate Professor D. Thomas Benediktson A.B. M.A. Ph.D.*

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An examination of Propertius in light of nonclassical, modernist literary techniques, especially internal monologue or stream of consciousness and imagism.

Classical writers typically try to order or shape disparate experiences while modernists seek to present the complexity and disarray of human experience. Failing to realize that Propertius is in the modernist camp has led previous textual critics to divide and reorganize his poems. A. E. Housman, for example, unsuccessfully tried to reorder the lines in one Propertian poem into a logical and chronological sequence.

On the contrary, Propertius, like the modernists, attempts to communicate experience itself through the association of ideas or through the reflection upon a visual picture or series of pictures (imaging, or what Pound described as the "superposition" of image and narrative). Benediktson finds philosophical justification for imaging in the Epicurean theory of images and in the Epicurean theorist and poet Philodemus, as well as in the doctrine of *ut pictura poesis*. The result is a picture of Propertius that accounts for the mathematical precision of Book I, the structural chaos of Book II, and the more balanced poetry of Books III and IV.

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