

## A Short Companion to Tibullus and the Corpus Tibullianum

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## Preface by the Editor

Whereas there are today fairly good companion volumes to Virgil, Horace, Propertius and Ovid for Tibullus, a chronically underresearched author, such a volume is lacking. With this book I hope to fill this gap and I thank the authors Prof. Peter Know, Prof. Robert Maltby and Prof. Kevin Newman for their contributions.

Perhaps I may point out that in German there is a recent introduction to Tibullus for students and the general reader by myself (with text and translation): *Der Dichter Tibull mit Text und Übersetzung seines Werks (Studia Classica et Mediaevalia 18)* (2017). For Sulpicia I may point to my *Sulpiciae Elegidia (Studia Classica et Mediaevalia 13)* (2016).

Müllheim, August 2018

Hans – Christian Günther



# The Interpretation of Tibullus

## Major Themes and Motifs Tibullus and Hellenistic Poetry Tibullus and Roman Poetry

by Kevin Newman

Καὶ ἐπεὶ μάρτυρας ἐπισπᾶται τοὺς μουσικοὺς τοῦ  
λέγειν ἀληθῶς, οὐδὲν συκοφαντεῖ.  
*And when he brings in musicians to give evidence of  
truthful speech, he is not talking humbug.*  
Philodemus, *De Poematis* V, ed. Mangoni, p. 139.

*A Note on Methodology.* The three topics adumbrated in the subtitles of this essay are approached here via an *Introduction*, whose aim is to raise some basic questions which are commonly phrased in an ambiguous or imprecise fashion: it eventually suggests that, if we are to understand Tibullus' attitudes to his poetry (what in Pindar's case Disson and Boeckh called his *Grundgedanken*), comparative literature may be of assistance. Next comes a *commentary on salient points in the elegies of Books I and II*, followed by *remarks on Book III*. Some more general observations follow on *Tibullus' poetry as a whole*.

*Major themes and motifs* of the poetry are then listed and surveyed. The essay concludes with notes on *the poet's relationship to Hellenistic and Roman poetry*, and a brief *summary*.

(The text used is eclectic, but has been critically compared with that of Georg Luck (Teubner 1988). Tibullus has attracted and continues to attract attention. Only a selection of the titles mentioned in the footnotes or more generally relevant to the arguments of this essay could be noted here.)

\* \* \*

*Introduction.* Literary historians are inclined to speak of Tibullus as "musical" without always exploring the consequences of that designation—indeed, perhaps as an excuse for not exploring the poetry itself in sufficient depth, though clearly his contemporary Philodemus' remark quoted above is revolutionary in its implications; as the protégé of Messalla, without always

considering the possible influence on him of his patron's Theocritean poetry; as the author of two books of elegies without enquiring if his friend Horace may help us more truly and fully to define his *œuvre*; as an "Augustan" poet, without asking how that differentiates him from other poets of his age, those *amici* of Maecenas who are "Augustan" in a quite special sense; as the object of Quintilian's highest praises without questioning whether that verdict is wholly reliable. The *Introduction* begins by taking up these five points—music, Messalla, Horace, Augustan Ideology, Quintilian—in order. To them are added notes on certain other features of the poetry which are essential to its interpretation: *Performance Art* and *The Repetitious vs. Dynamic Pentameter*.

The *Introduction* concludes with a brief, but relevant, discussion of *the Poetry of Withdrawal as exemplified in Fray Luis de León*.

*Music*. "All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music": Walter Pater's well-known aphorism,<sup>1</sup> which may easily be paralleled with that of his contemporary Paul Verlaine ("De la musique avant toute chose," *Art Poétique*, 1874), appears to run contrary to Aristotle's suggestion that all great art tends towards drama (μιμήσεις δραματικές [dramatic imitations] already of Homer, *Poetics* 1448b 35; cf. τῶν καλῶν πάντων τούτων τῶν τραγικῶν πρῶτος διδάσκαλός τε καὶ ἡγεμών [sc. Ὀμηρος], Plato, *Rep.* X.595c 1–2: "Homer is the original teacher and leader of all these fine tragedians"). Yet it has a certain plausibility—in certain moments, καιροί, of history. Forty years after Pater and Verlaine would come 1914.

Similarly, in the ancient world, lyrical Pindar's epinicians, to take that example, are often interpreted as the voice of a dying age and class.<sup>2</sup> In Augustan Rome, epic, musical Virgil writes as if the mythical action of Neptune in quelling the angry waters threatening Aeneas were the reality, and the orator, often thought to be Cato minor, calming the violence of a mob, were the surreal comparison (*Aen.* I.148 ff.). The Republic was dead. For all Quintilian's romanticism (XII.1.27) there would no longer be any action of that sort by any new Cato under the Empire. It now makes sense only within a mythology. And so with dead Pompey, subsumed into superannuated Priam (*iacet ingens litore truncus*, *Aen.* II.557<sup>3</sup>)—and so, climactically, with dead Marcellus (VI.866).

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<sup>1</sup> From *The School of Giorgione* (1873).

<sup>2</sup> Yet they are also dramatic, as L. Jllig's analysis of the myth of *Nemean* 1 attests: *Zur Form der pindarischen Erzählung* (Berlin 1932), pp. 20–25. This point will become more relevant later, when the implications of Horace's allusion to Cassius Parmensis in his *epistle* to Tibullus (I.4.3) are reviewed.

<sup>3</sup> "There he lies on the shore, maimed and mighty." The powerful fourth-foot one-word spondee *ingens* should be noted (the supernatural has כבד, "weight," "glory": *ingenti*

These momentous historical happenings can now be accommodated and apprehended as truth, ἀλήθεια, only at another level. That other level is music (*bene sonare*, Donatus, *Vita Verg.* 29).

So it was that, in later centuries, symphonic, Protestant Brahms (d. 1897) became the elegist of the Catholic, imperial Habsburgs (death of Franz Josef 1916); lyrical Rilke (d. 1926) the memorialiser of the soon to be threatened ideals of German culture.<sup>4</sup> It is as if at some points and in some periods the vatic experience and foreboding of the historical process become too great and ominous to be bounded by rational discourse, and must seek outlet in another dimension. It was precisely in the 20's of the last century that, as the figure of Josef Stalin ("Stahl-in," the "man of steel" = *ferus et vere ferreus*, Tib. I.10.2) loomed ever more menacingly on the horizon, the Russian Formalist critics invented for their analyses the term "transrationality," заумь, "that which is beyond mind." It was Boris Pasternak who noted how transrational in grim reality were the initials and acronyms eventually used to distinguish the organs of Soviet State repression ("OGPU," "GULAG" and so on). "That which is beyond mind" turned out in due course to be simple *reportage*. The Gadarene swine of prophetic Dostoevsky's Бесы (*The Devils*, 1871–72) had intruded into history (George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, 1945).

Russia is the dark mirror of our European civilisation's past and future. An Irishman will supply the proof. John Field (b. Dublin 1782; d. Moscow 1837) for much of his life taught music in St. Petersburg, and is credited with being the first to have added to the literature of the piano the *Nocturne*, "night piece," *Nachtstück*, a name he gave to brief compositions which, instead of having, as prescribed by Plato (*Phaedrus* 264c 2–5) and admired by the Classical tradition (Aristotle, *Poetics* 1450b 26–27), a beginning, a middle and an end, played with

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*mole Latinus*, *Aen.* XII.161). Similarly, in the proem to the *Aeneid*, the first such spondee occurs in v. 7, *altae moenia Romae*: on the archaic *altae* here see my "*Altae Romae*," *ICS* 26 (2001), 131–32. And so in Propertius' *date vestro sarta poetae*, III.1.19, with which Horace's *vester, Camenae, vester* (*Carm.* III.4.21) and Dante's *O sante Muse, poi che vostro sono* (*Purg.* 1.8) may be compared. Contrast M. Platnauer, *Latin Elegiac Verse* (Cambridge 1951), p. 21, who tries to explain the spondee in this position merely as a technicality triggered by the preceding imperative. In Tibullus I.1 *frugum* (9) and *dives* (49) in this position encapsulate the essential antitheses of the elegy. He has of course other examples of this ploy: *tristi*, II.3.33; *praedam*, *ibid.* 35.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. "Nur wer die Leier schon hob / auch unter Schatten" usw., *Sonnette an Orpheus* (1923), 1.9. Orpheus was the principal *vates*: *caedibus et victu saevo deterruit Orpheus*, Hor., *A.P.* 392; Tac., *Dial.* 12.4. Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus* (1947), another musical reaction to the advent of extremism in Germany, is discussed in my *The Classical Epic Tradition* (Madison, Wisconsin 1986, repr. 2003), pp. 479–511.

and half-developed certain suggestive melodies, but left their ultimate resolution and harmonisation to the imagination of their listeners. When Chopin (1810–49) later took the *Nocturne* up, that night had already fallen on his native Poland (crushing of November Revolution at Ostroleka, 1831).

Tibullus was the John Field of Roman elegy. And interestingly, Field's contemporary, K. N. Batiushkov (1787–1855), musician as well as poet, was known as “the Russian Tibullus.” Another contemporary, Baron A. A. Del'vig (1798–1831), a school-friend of Pushkin, shares a similar title. How did these early 19<sup>th</sup> century poets then receive Tibullus? Why Tibullus, and why in that particular period of Russian history? It was after all the glorious moment when Tsar Alexander I had defeated the armies of Napoleon. Did those feelings of 1812, later evoked in Tchaikovsky's famous overture, match the feelings in Rome when Octavian triumphed at Actium?

But where would Russia and its Tsars be as the 19<sup>th</sup> century progressed? Where would the Julio–Claudians be as the 1<sup>st</sup> century progressed? What was the appropriate vatic / poetic reaction to all that? Are these questions ever asked by philologists? By students of *literae humaniores*, whose torpor has less excuse?

As an artist of intricate musicality and polyvalent thought, Tibullus developed a subtle alternative to the “Urban” poetry of the circle around Maecenas, including that of Horace: an alternative which touched, as has been noted elsewhere, on the role of the *vates*.<sup>5</sup> “Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard / Are sweeter”: so John Keats already wrote in Field's own lifetime, and precisely in a poem (“Ode on a Grecian Urn,” vv. 11–12, published 1819) celebrating a pastoral scene, one of Tibullus' favourite, though quite unreal, *milieux*.<sup>6</sup> Music, sense, in the work of such masters begin where the instrument falls silent.

But what does this imply? More than dreamy quietude! Music and measure go together. In his edition of the *Harvard Dictionary of Music*<sup>7</sup> W. Apel

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<sup>5</sup> See my “*Saturno Rege*: Themes of the Golden Age in Tibullus and Other Augustan Poets” in *Candide Iudex. Beiträge zur augusteischen Dichtung*, ed. Anna Elissa Radke, Stuttgart (1998), pp. 225–46.

<sup>6</sup> Music and the bucolic have a persistent affinity. In Mann's *Doktor Faustus* the hero and avant-garde composer Adrian Leverkühn is first introduced to music as a child on his father's farm when the milkmaid Hanne gives him lessons in *Kanongesang* (“round song,” “roundelay”: Frankfurt ed., 1956, p. 43).

<sup>7</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge, Mass. 1969).

defined, as “music’s most characteristic procedure,” repetition.<sup>8</sup> Evidently a random series of notes, however well struck, would not be music. Talk about Tibullus as musical, therefore, demands something now coming back into favour with certain critics, and that is attention to pattern, strophic structure,<sup>9</sup> really a sort of polyphony (see below, p. 17). We take that for granted in reading Horace’s *carmina*. Is it anything more than saying that in the study, for example, even of Greek and Latin prose authors one must be attentive to what Isocrates calls μουσικῶς εἰπεῖν (“musical utterance,” *In Soph.* §17)?<sup>10</sup> Such paragraphic recurrences satisfy (or challenge) the ear, charm even when only half-perceived. At a time when the aural / oral nature of ancient literature, evidenced by what Julius Montanus in Donatus’ *Vita Verg.* (§29) calls Virgil’s *vox et os et hypocrisis*, is very much to the fore, some explorations of Tibullus at this level are needed for the interpretation of his aims.

Strophic analysis is not negated when different and equally plausible systems may be proposed. How differently great virtuosi may interpret (“read”) the same piece of music—and with equal validity! It was Thomas Mann who defined

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. C. Rambaux, *Tibulle ou la répétition* (Brussels 1997), esp. pp. 104–06. Fritz-Heiner Mutschler, *Die poetische Kunst Tibulls* (Frankfurt 1985: Index I, s.v. *Struktur*, p. 320) and P. Murgatroyd, *Tibullus, Elegies II* (Oxford 1994), “Structural Appendix” (pp. 283–91), are also basic.

<sup>9</sup> For the Greek model, cf. C. Faraone, *The Stanzaic Architecture of Early Greek Elegy* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2008); in Latin, already the edition of Tibullus by L. Dissen (Göttingen 1835), and other 19<sup>th</sup> c. treatments: e. g. by C. Prien, *Die Symmetrie und Responion der röm. Elegie* (Lübeck 1867); B. Maurenbrecher, “Die Composition der Elegien Tibulls,” *Philol.-hist. Beiträge für C. Wachsmuth* (Leipzig 1897), 56–88; in recent times, C. Meillier, “La composition numérique de Tibulle I et II,” *Eos* 73 (1985), 269–76; Godo Lieberg, *Strukturalanalytische Analyse von Tibull I. 5* (Arezzo 1988). Much older material of this kind is found in the Dittenberger—Vahlen Collection of the Classics Library, University of Illinois, to whose former Librarian, Dr. B. Swann, I would like here to express my thanks. It is easy to grow impatient with this type of analysis (see, for example, R. Ball, *Tibullus the elegist* [Göttingen 1983], p. 13 with his note 9; P. Lee-Stecum, *Powerplay in Tibullus* [Cambridge 1998], pp. 5–6, 165), whether in Theocritus or Tibullus, but if either poet is “musical,” must we not concede that every piece of music has a score? And investigate that score? See below, p. 28, on “Performance Art.”

<sup>10</sup> The passage in Isocrates shows similarities with terms used by Pindar, e.g. *πρεπόντως*, “fittingly,” *Ol.* 3.9: see Newmans, *Pindar’s Art* (Hildesheim 1984), p. 52, n. 8. More generally, cf. K. J. Dover, *The Evolution of Greek Prose Style* (Oxford 1997), c. 8, “Rhythm,” pp. 160–82. C. Gracchus famously stationed a flute player close at hand but out of sight to assist his delivery: Cicero, *de Or.* III. §225; cf. E. Norden, *Die Antike Kunstprosa* (repr. Stuttgart 1958), I, pp. 56–57.

music as *die Zweideutigkeit als System*, “systematic ambiguity” (*Doktor Faustus*, 1947, p. 66).

This will already indicate how tenuous and tentative must be any effort to set out even Tibullus’ “major” themes and motifs. Frameworks may be discovered in the *œuvre*, but the poet does not obtrude them. The same consideration will also prevent us from being too decisive, as will be argued later, in answering the question of what constitutes the Tibullan corpus.

*Messalla and Horace. Two influential friends.* Tibullus did not live in the metamorphous world of his poetry, but in a parallel universe, that of Rome, now fast becoming a goddess (cf. “Roma” *vocative*, II.5.57), where *amici* were *necessarii*. One of these *necessarii* for him in such a society was obviously his patron, M. Valerius Messalla Corvinus,<sup>11</sup> the author of an *Indignatio* (Pliny *N.H.* XXXV.8) defending the purity of his blood line (*limpieza de sangre*, as the Spaniards would call it in the age of Fray Luis).

Like many noble Romans, Corvinus, a *vir consularis et triumphalis*, a *patronus causarum*, was also *homo litteratus*: in prose a stylist admired by Cicero (*Epp. ad Brutum*, ed. Bailey, XXIII, p. 130) and Quintilian (X.1.113), though criticised by Aper in Tacitus (*Dial.* §20) for his constant harping in his exordia on the uncertain state of his health. How curious that this is also a Tibullan theme (see below).<sup>12</sup>

In verse he was the author of Greek pastorals (*Catalept.* 9.13–20). That was something quite extraordinary. No doubt educated men of his class spoke colloquial Greek fluently, and Quintus Cicero and Augustus even tried their hand at composing Attic tragedy. But Messalla’s pastorals, conforming to the Alexandrian taste of his age, were in the artificial tradition established by Theocritus (*Trinacriae doctus ... iuvenis*, *Catalept.* 9.20) whose Greek no one spoke or had ever spoken: evocative, beautiful, other. How could Tibullus not have known his patron’s poems—and not have absorbed at least some of their lessons?

There is clear evidence that he did. *Ego composito securus acervo* (Tib. I.1.77 = “Free from care thanks to my garnered heap”) ~ ἐπι σωρῶ / αὔτις ἐγὼ πάζαμι μέγα πτόον (Theocr. VII.155–56 = “May I again plant my great

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<sup>11</sup> A fierce-looking eagle, possibly surviving from a memorial housing his funeral ashes, is preserved in the Prado (inv. E-225), and was once thought to commemorate the apotheosis of the emperor Claudius. The confusion hints at the dignity of the Roman grandee (*virtute*, Hor., *A.P.* 370; *virtus*, *Pan. Messallae* 1). Horace addresses *Carm.* III.21 to him, flatteringly inviting a modern-day Socrates (9) to a symposium. But, according to Alcibiades, Socrates was also musical (ἀλῆματα, Plato, *Symp.* 216c 4–5).

<sup>12</sup> And compare stricken Seneca in Tacitus, *Ann.* XIV.56 end: *rarus per Urbem, quasi valetudine infensa*....

winnowing-fan upon the heap”).<sup>13</sup> Both poems end with an allusion to a rustic “heap.” In Theocritus, this is often interpreted as a “programmatically,” literary declaration, echoed by Antipater of Sidon in his neologism at *A.P.* VII.713.5 (σωρηδόν), an epigram certainly taken up programmatically by Lucretius at IV.180–83 and again at IV.909–11.<sup>14</sup> Is Tibullus’ *compositus acervus* then his collection of quasi-Theocritean poems?

In assessing Theocritus’ *Idylls* more broadly, it is useful to recall two *aperçus* of Wilamowitz. In the first,<sup>15</sup> he explains the term εἰδύλλιον with reference to εἶδος, the Alexandrian editors’ word acknowledging the unique type of metre and melody employed in any given lyrical poem. The diminutive used of Theocritus’ εἰδύλλια would indicate that they were sensed as individual examples of quasi-lyrical poetry, and indeed the title given in antiquity to the first *Idyll* of all is ΘΕΟΚΡΙΤΟΥ ΘΥΡΣΙΣ Η ΩΙΔΗ. To recite its opening lines (I.1.1–3)—

Ἄδύ τι τὸ ψιθύρισμα καὶ ἄ πίτυς, αἰπόλε, τήνα,  
 ἄ ποτὶ ταῖς παραῖσι, μελίσδετα, ἄδὸ δὲ καὶ τύ  
 συρίσδες ...

Sweet the whispering melody, shepherd, of yonder pine by the spring, and sweet too your own piping....

—is to hear the whispering of the pine, ψιθύρισμα . . . μελίσδετα, as it blends into the sound of the shepherd’s pipe, συρίσδες. There is π alliteration of the kind liked by melic Pindar (*Ol.* 1.76; *Pv.* 4.138, 150): πίτυς, αἰπόλε, . . . παραῖσι: the “melodious” tree and the waters of the spring act as a sounding board which surrounds and generates the emerging, melodious shepherd. One apprehension conjures, unfolds another, just as in Debussy’s *La cathédrale engloutie* (1910) the initial evocation of the moving waters slowly pulls the listener into hearing the faint and then louder chiming of the bells of the once sacred, now inundated, edifice, only for that to vanish at the end.<sup>16</sup> Or again, one might think of another of Debussy’s *Préludes*, *Clair de Lune* (1905). How can notes on a piano possibly suggest the play of light on a darkened landscape? Yet, in a wonderful example of what S. Eisenstein calls the “leap into another dimension” (перескок в другое измерение), they do!

<sup>13</sup> *Acervo* here in Tibullus picks up *frugum* ... *acervos* from v. 9: cf. Horace’s *frumenti* ... *acervum* (*Serm.* II.3.11). It has nothing to do with the “pile(s) of wealth” alluded to elsewhere by Horace (*Carm.* II.2.24; *Serm.* II.5.52).

<sup>14</sup> See F. Lasserre, *Rh. Mus.* 102 (1959), “Aux origines de l’Anthologie” etc., esp. 326–330.

<sup>15</sup> *Hellenistische Dichtung in der Zeit des Kallimachos* (repr. Berlin 1962), I, p. 117.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. N. Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh* etc. (1907).

We may call this the “technique of emergent meaning.” It is practised, for example, by another Hellenistic poet, Apollonius. Compare *Argon.* IV.1479–80 (emendavit H. Fränkel, OCT 1961). Here, the listener hovers:

Τὼς ἰδέειν, ὥς τις τε νέης ἐνὶ ἡματι μήνην  
ἢ ἴδεν ἢ ἐδόκησεν ἐπαχλύουσαν ἰδέσθαι...

<Lynceus seemed> to catch sight <of the hero,> as a man on the day of the new month either sees or half-sees the moon overspread by mist. ἰδέειν... ἴδεν... ἐδόκησεν... ἰδέσθαι. The meaning emerges in suggestion (τὼς ... ὥς). This has a parallel already in some of Pindar’s delicately enclitic restraints (καὶ πού τι καί, *Ol.* 1.28; cf. Apollonius’ own ἡέ που ἐν γαυλῶ κέχυται, *Arg.* III.758, sunlight on water).

The allusion in Apollonius is to Heracles, romantically misted by a different destiny. But what does Virgil make of this? His *aut videt aut vidisse putat* (*Aen.* VI.453–54) is used as Aeneas glimpses Dido among the shades. But, to the careful reader, this “emergent meaning,” over and above the immediate reference, acts as a reminder of the “Hercules theme” which pervades his whole epic.<sup>17</sup>

And in Theocritus, in the continuance (7–8):

ἄδιον, ᾧ ποιμήν, τὸ τεδὸν μέλος ἢ τὸ καταχέξ  
τῆν’ ἀπὸ τᾶς πέτρας καταλείβεται ὑψόθεν ὕδωρ.

Sweeter your song, shepherd, than the echoing water that tumbles there down from the rock.

Melody and falling water blend. Τὸ καταχέξ is particularly noteworthy here, and may be compared with *loquaces* of the Fons Bandusiae in Horace (*Carm.* III.13.15). This is the Campanian *paesaggio* of Poussin and Dughet. There were no pine-trees, no tumbling springs of this kind in Egypt, unless willed by some artificer. Yet, for all his apparent artificiality, Theocritus is quite a modern poet. Wilamowitz had already compared Alexandria with New York (I, p. 159), and indeed contemporary America specialises in this sort of irreality. So in the desert of Las Vegas one may find oneself *παρὰ προσδοκίαν* in Adriatic Venice.

A fruitful contrast may now be drawn between the powerful opening of Propertius’ first elegy:

Cynthia prima suis miserum me cepit ocellis,  
contactum nullis ante Cupidinibus.

Cynthia was the first who made me prisoner, poor wretch, with those eyes of hers, though before that no Desires had ever pierced my armour.

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<sup>17</sup> Aeneas first appears to Dido from a mist: I.586–87. She becomes what he was. In general, see my “Hercules in the *Aeneid*. The Dementia of Power,” in *Hommages à Carl Deroux* I-Poésie, ed. Pol Defosse, Coll. Latomus, vol. 266 (Brussels 2002), pp. 398–411.

And the opening of that of Tibullus:

Divitias alius fulvo sibi congerat auro,  
Et teneat culti iugera multa soli,  
Quem labor assiduus vicino terreat hoste,  
Martia cui somnos classica pulsa fugent.  
Me mea paupertas vitae traducat inerti,  
Dum meus assiduo luceat igne focus....

Another may heap together riches of tawny gold, possess broad acres of tillage. His constant toil, with the enemy ever on the prowl, may fill him with panic, while the sound of the battle-trumpets robs him of any chance of sleep. My poverty must guide me through a life of quiet repose, while the fire shines always from my hearth.

In Propertius (whose couplet is analysed below, p. 32), Cynthia is mentioned first. She does not so much “emerge” as blend into the Cupidines. Tibullus’ rich interplay of alliteration and assonance, in which we also note such elements as *fulvo*, *culti*, *assiduus*, *assiduo*, is focused simply by listening to the verbs; *congerat*, *teneat*, *terreat*. From all that, but only after a four-line wait, out steps the poet: *me mea paupertas ... traducat*.<sup>18</sup>

From Theocritus, Tibullus might also have learned polyphony, the technique of presenting his poetry in and through different voices. This was quite unmistakably adopted by Virgil for his *Eclogues*, with Meliboeus, Tityrus and so on; but in his semi-pastoral Tibullus went further. Polyphony might be explored even when there is no overt change to a new speaker, but rather a change in a single speaker’s voice and attitude and imaginative range. Such “dancing dialectic” (χορὸς διαλεκτικός, Demetrius, *De Eloc.* §167) might preserve its balance with the help of arithmetically similar or related recurrences. In Theocritus’ *Idyll XV*, for example, Gorgo and Praxinoa hold the stage for 99 lines. Then comes the Adonis-song of 45 lines, then five lines of conclusion. This means that the poem divides into two sections of which the first is just about twice as long as the other (99 / 50). After listening to the ecstatic song, Gorgo emerges, both full of admiration for what she has heard and, in a sunny mood, able to illustrate for Praxinoa (who does not speak again) her role as wife, that of “keeping the brute fed.”

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<sup>18</sup> For the syntactical pattern cf. Horace, *Carm.* I.7.1 and 10: *laudabunt alii ... me*; I.1.3 and 29, *Sunt quos ... me. Mi* (Luck) would be quite acceptable in itself (cf. Prop. IV.1.61–62, *Ennius ... cingat ... / mi folia ex hedera porrige, Bacche, tua*) but what parallel is offered for *mi mea*? *Traducat* is a military term borrowed by the would-be civilian (see Murgatroyd’s note). *Labor* (3) is a farmer’s term (*labor omnia vicit / improbus*, Virg., *Geo.* I.145–46) applied to the soldier.

And this leads into a quite different facet of the Theocritean manner. In an immortal phrase Wilamowitz also defined the *Idylls* as “mimes in epic form” (*Hell. Dicht.* I, p. 191, his second *aperçu*). This is unmistakable in the second *Idyll*, for which a parallel from Sophron is often cited, but no less visible in the just mentioned *Adoniasusai* (XV), where Gorgo and Praxinoa, two gossipy middle-class housewives, are a comic turn from the Sicilian stage. Eventually, as was seen, their banter yields to the extraordinary beauty of the song performed in honour of the dying god (100 ff.), illustrating that quasi-lyrical kinship of εἰδύλλιον with εἶδος to which Wilamowitz also alluded—and again showing how these two quite different styles, mime and music (and religion!), could coexist.

Did they coexist in Tibullus? He did not write Greek pastoral, but he strikes the pastoral note often enough. Did he not have in mind his patron’s revival of that genre? If so, where is that influence now detectible? Can the appreciation of his poetry begin without reference to that of Theocritus? After all, Tibullus too, like Adonis, is a dying lover. He too is musical, religious. Did he also write mimes? These are questions to which we must return.

Messalla for his part is the recipient of Horace’s *Carm.* III.21, where he is hailed as a latter-day Socrates (9–10), now invited to a symposium. After the debacle at Philippi he had joined Octavian and been co-consul with him in the critical year of Actium. He was chosen as *praefectus Urbi* by the emperor in 26, though he laid down the office after a week *quasi nescius exercendi* (*Tac., Ann.* VI.11 [“alleging he did not understand its rules”]; cf. *incivilem potestatem esse contestans*, Jerome ad annum 1991, “asserting that its authority was more than a citizen should wield”), and is often thought to have retained quiescent Republican sympathies. We must not for all that think of his poetry as a poetry of “escape” (too cheap a term) but rather as a poetry of the transrational, attempting to respond to a transrational situation. The same is true of Tibullus. Virgil’s *Ecloques*, struggling with the vatic role (7.28; 9.34), are more partisan.

The second of Tibullus’ influential friends came from quite the other end of the social spectrum, not a *vir nobilis* in any sense, but the son of an ex-slave, the immensely gifted Q. Horatius Flaccus. He too had fought and lost at Philippi. He too, like Cicero (*De Officiis* I.§134) and Messalla (*Carm.* III.21.9–10), was interested in *Socratici sermones* (cf. *A.P.* 310). He had after all been a fellow-student in Athens not only of Messalla but of Cicero’s son. Like Messalla, he began by exploring the power of the pastoral to respond to the new Rome (*Ia.* 2).

At this point we must take a moment to lament the difficulties which historians of Roman literature inflict on themselves (and their students!) by their constant use of imprecise terminology: the titles “satires” and “epodes,” for

example, are foisted on a poet who wrote (as he himself says) *sermones* and *iambi*. And, if we call Tibullus and Horace “Augustan” poets, that is accurate only as a matter of historical date. Horace, like Virgil and Propertius, was more. He may have begun as the *amicus* of Messalla in Tibullus’ sense (cf. *Serm.* I.10.85), but he ultimately sought the patronage of the highly placed and wealthy C. Cilnius Maecenas. That brought him into contact with the emperor himself, as both the poetry and items in the fragmentary *Vita Horatii* by Suetonius attest. He was therefore a “Maecenatian” poet, “Augustan” in a much fuller and more committed sense than Tibullus ever was. If Tibullus, whose only strictly “Augustan” elegy is II.5 (cf. *vati*, 114), chose not to leave Messalla’s circle, such withdrawal (what H.-C. Guenther names “Verzicht”) is another motif we must trace in his poetry. The Maecenatians of course write withdrawals (*cupidum, pater optime, vires / deficiunt*, Hor., *Serm.* II.1.12–13 [“I am eager enough, my dear sir, but lack poetic powers”] = *nec meus audeo / rem temptare pudor quam vires ferre recusent* [“my modesty shrinks from tackling a theme which is beyond my powers”], *Epp.* II.1.258–59; *nondum etiam Ascraeos norunt mea carmina fontes*, Prop. II.10.25 [“not yet have my songs known the springs of Ascra”]). How is Tibullus’ withdrawal different?

But of course the paths of “Augustans,” in whatever meaning of the adjective, crossed. Horace addressed two poems to Tibullus: a *carmen* (I.33) and an *epistle* (I.4). It is the latter which must occupy us first.

From exasperated remarks in his *Letter to Florus* (*Epp.* II.2.91–101) it is often deduced that Horace enjoyed an uneasy relationship with a fellow-member of Maecenas’ circle who had the support of highly placed admirers and, we gather, of highly placed fans: the elegist Propertius. A scion of the ancient nobility of Rome’s erstwhile rival, Veii,<sup>19</sup> and quite aware of that fact, Propertius was, it seems, mannered, self-conscious, proud of his *ingenium*, more than a new Callimachus (though that would have been achievement enough!)—a new Mimnermus! Horace, who had his own views about Mimnermus (*Epp.* I.6.65), was offended and annoyed by this ὑποκριτής / *poseur*; worse still, he was jealous of his pop-star success.<sup>20</sup>

In reaction, and rather surprisingly in one who habitually depreciates elegy (*A.P.* 77), Horace appears to have cultivated the friendship of Tibullus, and even sought his literary opinion, at least on his *sermones*. *Nostrorum sermonum*

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<sup>19</sup> *Veientum ... auxilio regis Propertii* (Servius ad *Aen.* VII.697, from Cato Maior): *heu, Veii veteres*, Prop. IV.10.27. See my *Augustan Propertius* (Hildesheim 1997), p. 54, n. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Scholars note quotations from Propertius’ poetry among the graffiti at Pompeii (Schanz–Hosius, *Geschichte der Römischen Literatur* II, repr. 1958, p. 203, *infra*). There are none from Horace. Cf. *premat extra limen iniquus*, *Epp.* I.19.36.

*candide iudex* (“frank critic of my conversation-pieces,” *Epp.* I.4.1) in fact suggests that some *sermones* at least were first recited in Messalla’s circle, where Tibullus could most easily have listened and offered constructive criticism. Did he perhaps share a liking for Cerinthus (Tib. III.9.11 *al.*; Hor., *Serm.* I.2.81)—and, more significantly, some awareness of the concept of the *vates* (Tib. II.5.114; Hor., *Carm.* I.1.35 *al.*)?

In his *Epistle*, Horace thinks of Tibullus as “strolling in silence among the healthful woods, preoccupied with reflections on morals and personal behaviour” (I.4.4–5). Certainly, it was Horace who enjoyed solitary walks, on one of which, while singing of Lalage, evidently alone, he came face to face with a wolf (*Carm.* I.22.9). We read in fact no such elegies from Tibullus’ pen. Yet, if it was true of him, was it an (unexpected) subversive gesture (below, p. 00)? Whatever the reality may have been, even so, Tibullus was not merely a poet of the study and the country estate.<sup>21</sup> *Non sine me est tibi partus honos* he writes to Messalla (“I made my contribution to your success,” I.7.9). He was with his patron then on his campaign in Aquitania, though later prevented by illness from going all the way on a new expedition to the East (I.3). Horace, though a former legionary officer himself, ignores here all this soldiers’ talk. We do learn that Tibullus apparently enjoyed the wealth required to support the rank of knight (contrast Hor., *Epp.* I.1.58). Beyond all this, Horace congratulates him in *Epistle* 4 on his handsome physique, his circle of friends, his good reputation, his health. He is like Horace however in his unsettled emotions, and equally needs to learn to take each day as it comes.

The *Epistle* presents two difficulties, one minor, one major. Tibullus himself alludes to his health as uncertain. It is, as was noted, one of his, as well as his patron’s, themes (cf. I.1.59; 3.4–8, 53–56; III.2.9–30, Lygdamus), matching Horace’s own concern with his advancing age: and not long after Horace’s poem was published (20 B.C.) Tibullus did in fact succumb.<sup>22</sup> Horace’s *valetudo* (10) turns out then to be one of those rather vague, conventional compliments used to friends without any reliable foundation in fact. What else here is of this sort? How deep was Horace’s friendship with Tibullus? But, if it was superficial, why honour him with an *Epistle*?

Was there an ulterior motive? That question leads into the major problem here, the allusion to Cassius of Parma. What is Tibullus writing at the moment,

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<sup>21</sup> *Villae* (II.3.1): in Latin, as in Italian (“Villa Borghese”), not just “country houses” but also their surrounding parks.

<sup>22</sup> The (uncertain!) knowledge of the *Aeneid* which Tibullus may show in II.5 proves nothing about the precise date of his death. Virgil gave pre-publication *recitationes* (Donatus, *Vita Verg.* §32) and no doubt Tibullus attended them.

Horace asks. Is he preoccupied with trying to outdo a literary rival: *scribere quod Cassi Parmensis opuscula vincat* (“writing something to outdo the trivial pieces<sup>23</sup> of Cassius of Parma,” v. 3)? But this was no ordinary fellow-poet. Cassius of Parma, one of Julius’ assassins, was a virulent critic also of Octavian (Suet., *Aug.* §4; cf. Pliny, *N.H.* XXXI.2). Were his epistolary rants meant as some kind of formal political satire?<sup>24</sup> He is now a forgotten figure of Roman literature: forgotten because he had the misfortune to be on the losing side, and missed the opportunity to compromise. According to Porphyrio, it was Cassius who was the real author of the *Thyestes* which later won so much acclaim for Varius, and of many other tragedies. After the defeat at Actium, Varius allegedly killed him in Athens, and then purloined the text he had found Cassius still revising. Much of this is no doubt quite inaccurate—Cassius’ murderer, for example, is said to have been, not Varius Rufus, but one Q. Attius Varus—but it at least suggests the degree of animosity between victors and vanquished.

In changed circumstances at Rome, Cassius was best ignored. Why then does Horace, writing to Tibullus, introduce in so brief a poem such an indiscreet allusion to him? And what literary rivalry is he hinting at? It is true that Acro, for what his evidence is worth, speaks of Cassius as one who dabbled in various genres, including elegy, and elegies could have been in Horace’s mind here. But why mention those of Cassius, when there were countless other less controversial scribblers who might have provided a name?

Cassius in fact was principally known as a *dramatist*. Is there room then for a different suggestion? The Tibullan corpus as it has come down to us is disparate. It contains pieces written by a pseudonymous Lygdamus, by a Sulpicia. This confusion tends rather to confirm the common notion that, when eventually some editor (Domitius Marsus?) was cleaning out the desk of Messallan elegy, he decided to cram certain minor bits and pieces together with Tibullus’ poems simply as makeweights. But how is that later notion of insubstantial hodge-podge reconcilable with Quintilian’s verdict (to be examined below) that Tibullus was Propertius’ superior? On the strength of 16

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<sup>23</sup> *Opuscula* here does not necessarily refer to “minor” works. It may simply be used disparagingly, even contemptuously, of all that Cassius wrote.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Suetonius (*Aug.* §4): *Cassius quidem Parmensis quadam epistula non tantum ut pistoris sed etiam ut nummulari nepotem sic taxat Augustum: “Materna tibi farina, siquidem ex crudissimo Ariciae pistrino hanc finxit manibus collybo decoloratis Nerulonensis mensarius”* (“In one of his letters Cassius of Parma actually taunts Augustus as the grandson not merely of a baker but also of a money changer. ‘There is flour on your mother’s side,’ he writes, ‘for a money lender from Nerulum with hands still dirty from short-changing his customers kneaded her after getting her from some wretched bakery at Aricia.’”).

languorous poems in two books? And why would an editor of Tibullus be interested in “Messallan” elegy? Did Tibullus keep no copies of his genuine *œuvre* in his own home?

It is a commonplace that Roman elegy of this period, surveyed as a whole, is akin, not merely to the iambic, but also to New Comedy, to the mime (compare the infatuated lover’s monologue at Propertius III.6, addressed precisely to Lygdamus: Lygdamus also in IV.7 and IV.8). The complex psychology of a poem such as Tibullus I.9, where the poet upbraids some boy for his infidelity, while admitting that he himself had furthered some of that boy’s affairs, seems to indicate an interest in character, drama, βίος (ὦ Μένανδρος, ὦ βίε ..., “O Menander, O Life,” Aristophanes of Byzantium, *Test.* 32, Körte). Was Tibullus then a bold experimenter who decided that the mask assumed by the elegiac poet—already an elastic fit—might be made even more elastic? That such a poet might (challenging Propertius?) cast himself as a Lygdamus, or (challenging Horace?) as a girl in love?<sup>25</sup> At this point, the art of the elegist begins to shade into that of the dramatist / satirist, such as Cassius is said to have been. No one supposes that the playwright “is” any of the multiple characters on his stage. The fourth *Epistle* may then have been an anti-Propertian gambit. Horace needed to find—and found in Tibullus—a different, more experimental, more intriguing talent.

To draw this conclusion we need the elegiac poems of Book III to be genuine, heard by Horace during their author’s lifetime, even if published with Books I and II only after their author’s death. It would turn out, in Tibullus’ case, that Aristotle and Pater were both right: that if the poet’s art aspired towards the condition of music, it also could join with that a μίμησις δραματική, precisely as in Theocritus’ *Idyll* XV.<sup>26</sup> But in Tibullus Horace would also have heard other notes: those of a poet less serious about Apollo *citharoedus* and his *vates* (III.4); of a sexuality concerned with viewing women, not simply as pleasure-givers or bearers of children, but as persons in their own right, with imagination and wills of their own (Sulpicia!);<sup>27</sup> of a latent critic of the regime,

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<sup>25</sup> This would not have been so revolutionary as appears. Alcaeus had already put *ionici a minore* in the mouth of a lovelorn woman (10 L.–P. ~ Horace, *Carm.* III.12). In choosing to imitate this particular poem by his model, Horace made his own dramatic leanings again evident. In Ennius’ epic, what about Ilia’s Dream (xxix, Sk.)? In Virgil’s, what about Dido / Medea? What later inspired Ovid’s *Medea* and *Heroides*?

<sup>26</sup> And, in any case, for μουσική in drama, cf. Aristotle, *Poetics* 1462a 16–17.

<sup>27</sup> From which, in Book IV, nos. 7 and 8, Propertius may have learned. Contrast *diva, producas subolem, patrumque / prosperes decreta super iugandis / feminis prolisque novae feraci / lege marita* (Hor., *Carm. Saec.* 17–20), with its lip-smacking alliteration and ugly *litterae caninae*. And this, *si dis placet*, in sapphics!