

# Practical Approaches to Tibullus the Idealist

Knowles Committee Room, Whitworth Building, University of Manchester, 25-26 June 2015

## Abstracts

### Thursday, 25 June

#### **Helen Dixon (UCD): 'Tibullus and his Medieval and Renaissance Readers'**

Who were Tibullus's medieval and Renaissance readers? And how did they respond to the text? To address these questions we need to consult the manuscript and early printed evidence.

All extant manuscripts of the Tibullan corpus, almost all of them Italian, date from the late 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, and appear to derive from one manuscript: Milan, Bibl. Ambrosiana, R. 26 sup (A). No one has found evidence sufficient to disprove this. It has therefore been assumed that one older manuscript emerged in Italy, or was brought to Italy, in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and that A – and possibly Vatican City, Vat. lat. 3270 (V) – was copied from it. In stark contrast to the patterns of many other classical Latin authors' manuscript traditions (e.g. one or two late antique remnants; a handful of 9<sup>th</sup>-century manuscripts; a fair number of 12<sup>th</sup>- to 13<sup>th</sup>-century manuscripts and then a much larger number in the Renaissance period), the complete text of Tibullus, like that of Catullus and Propertius, experienced a sudden, massive surge in the fifteenth century, but with manuscripts far outnumbering those of his fellow elegists. Some new questions immediately present themselves: where was the text before A emerged? Did no one read it before then? And why did so many people read Tibullus after his rediscovery? The second and third questions have a direct bearing on our initial inquiry.

In fact the centuries from late antiquity to the late 14<sup>th</sup> century are not completely silent about Tibullus. Excerpts from all three books of the Tibullan corpus have survived in two examples of 11<sup>th</sup>-century grammatical *florilegium* and the 12<sup>th</sup>-century *Florilegium Gallicum*, and there are other traces that the poems were read (e.g. in literary 'echoes', the appearance of Tibullus's name in medieval book-lists and library catalogues, and the odd line jotted in the margins of a manuscript). But since the *florilegia* provide the most substantial evidence from this period, in the first part of my paper I will consider what they suggest about how medieval readers responded to Tibullus: their focuses seem to have been directed largely by grammatical, lexical and moral concerns. Then we will turn to the fifteenth-century material. We will consider how responses and approaches to Tibullus evolved from the traditional, medieval ways of reading dictated by a need to *use* the text (e.g. for its grammatical and linguistic qualities and for whatever moral content it might be perceived to have), to more sophisticated rhetorical analysis and to a more modern approach that sought to appreciate the ancient text in its original antique contexts, and to consider it as attention-worthy in its own right. Particular attention will be paid to two manuscripts now kept in the Vatican, to the printed commentary by Bernardinus Cyllenius (Rome: [Georgius Lauer], 18 July 1475) and to Angelo Poliziano's notes on Tibullus in his own personal copy of the text.

#### **John Henderson (King's College, Cambridge)/Tibullus 2.4: Going For Broke**

In terms of the elegiac repertoire of recriminations of *amor*, Tibullus 2.4 declares the second book's epodic plot of surrender, lapping up punishment and dishing out recursive venom. In terms of the comic *amator* narrative, the poem marks one more step down and out to degradation, again, as if with ultimate finality. In terms of post-Actian deconstruction, the poem messes with Horace and Propertius' messing with the Virgilian oeuvre. 'Not all Tibullus is as *bad* as this' (K. Quinn)

**Parshia Lee-Stecum (Melbourne): 'Present Memory and Frustrated Desire (Tibullus 2.1, 2.5 and 2.6)'**

The persistence of memory in Tibullus' two books has helped fuel characterisations of the poet as a 'dreamer'. But the exploration of memory's capacity to satisfy desire and compensate for lost or absence is systematic. Enwrapped with the language of persuasion, threat, prophecy and prayer, Tibullan memories mobilise a traditional domain of poetry to confront the demands of desire. The result is more nightmare than dream – and very Roman.

Friday, 26 June

**Ian Goh (Manchester): "'And Sometimes There'll Be Sorrow": A Tibullan Birthday Hansel'**

This paper treats the poems in the Tibullan corpus which celebrate birthdays – 1.7, 2.2, 3.11 (4.5), 3.12 (4.6), 3.14 (4.8) and 3.15 (4.9), the last few apparently by Sulpicia – together. I read them politically as an instantiation of contemporary interest in the calendar, both in its Republican annalistic incarnation and its Caesarian reformation. There is a pervasive element of gloom surrounding these occasions, and I attribute this in part to the artificiality of the situations envisaged. Important aspects here include the tensions between audience and speaker, eloquence and silence; the absence or fleeting presence of *Natalis*, the birthday spirit or *Genius* whose distinction from *Juno* in 3.12.1 (4.6.1) is unclear, in relation to the friendships and relationships depicted, is critical; the ambiguity of the predicted future in relation to present triumph and ceremony overshadows fleeting joys. I also compare Greek iterations of the *genethliacon*, in the context of two-way influence and the performative broaching of the epigrammatic moment.

**Jane Burkowski (Oxford): 'Funerary Imagery in Tibullus'**

In Latin love elegy, a genre with roots in lament and funerary epigram, depictions of funerary ritual and mourning for the dead are often a platform for self-definition, and for the prominent introduction, exploration, or reiteration of central themes and ideas. Each elegiac funeral scene is shaped by its context and its rhetorical purpose, and is unique in its focus, its tone, and its effects, but those put forward by Tibullus vary particularly broadly in their content and purposes. Perhaps because it provides the closest parallel with Propertian analogues, Tibullus' fantasy of his own death and of *Delia's* passionate mourning at 1.1.59-68 has received the most attention, but can perhaps provide more insight into Tibullian poetics when examined alongside his other, more original, but comparatively neglected funerary fantasies. The more traditional family funeral that Tibullus' sick and stranded speaker ruefully conjures up at 1.3.5-8, for instance, provides a foil for and demands a reassessment of the earlier scene, contributing towards 1.3's complication of the opposition between the life of love and that of war, wealth, and public obligations that had been set up in 1.1. In book 2, meanwhile, the visions of death and mourning that the speaker sets up before *Nemesis* – first of the opposite fates of the greedy *puella*, forsaken by her admirers after her death, and of her *bona nec auara* counterpart, rewarded with loving commemoration (2.4.43-50), and then of the tributes that the speaker himself threatens to make to *Nemesis's* dead sister, in order to win the supernatural aid of her restless spirit (2.6.29-40) – foreground the manipulative subtext of elegiac funerary fantasies, while extending the scope of their subject matter. An examination of how, in all these scenes, Tibullus expands the boundaries of a familiar *topos*, approaches it from different angles, and suits it to a wide variety of contexts and purposes, is a case study for the subtlety, complexity, and even the boldness of his brand of elegy.

### **Dunstan Lowe (Kent): 'Delia, Parce: Disfigurement and Disarray in Elegant Tibullus'**

Tibullus (*elegans* in Quintilian's famous judgement) is distinguished from the other love-elegists by his neat hexameters, genial persona, and visions of a rural escape from competitive Rome. Yet images of *cultus* under attack are a defining feature of all extant Roman love-elegy: time, anger, grief, and desire can all tarnish the good looks on which elegiac desire is founded, animating many of the emotions that it explores. The Tibullan corpus, though smaller than those of Propertius or Ovid, has its fair share of such images, and their prominence at the beginning, middle and end of Book 1 (poems 1, 6 and 10) deserves particular attention. They add up to a Tibullan treatment of spoiled beauty that shares common ground with the other elegists, yet is also essential to the distinctive personae of both Delia and the poet.

### **Erika Zimmermann Damer (Richmond): 'Tibullan Embodiments: Slaves, Soldiers, and Elegiac Vulnerability'**

The human body's role in elegiac poetry has been the subject of many important studies that have charted the shift from romantic and biographical readings of elegy towards the discursive and feminist turn. This paper makes the case for a more materialist reading in our interpretation of Tibullus' poetry as I examine Tibullus' use of two famously elegiac tropes, the *servitium amoris* and the *militia amoris*, and conclude with a brief reading of Delia's embodiment in 1.6.

Discussions of the *servitium amoris* often center on Propertius' deployment of the motif. As Tibullus is prone to doing, he literalizes this trope, and renders it on the body of the poet-speaker himself. Tibullus' representation of the *servitium amoris*, particularly in elegy 2.4, stresses the material experiences of slavery in the Roman world by exaggerating the physicality of the image and the pain that the poet-speaker experiences at the hand of his *domina*. Tibullus' poet-lover is bound by chains and subjected to slave's torture by fire and the lash more often than the Propertian speaker, in spite of the comparative slightness of his collection. When Tibullus deploys this trope against the poet-speaker himself, he renders visible one of the most defining characteristics of the Roman male citizen's body as a sign of class and status, its corporal inviolability, by its negation.

Second, the Tibullan speaker shows his ability to take up a military position within Roman society. Unlike Propertian *recusationes* to participate in or write epic about Roman armies, and although this character swears at the outset that others may choose the life of military service while he chooses an elegiac *modus vivendi*, nevertheless in 1.3 the speaker himself is sick on campaign on the island of Corfu. As Books 1 and 2 close, the speaker laments that he is called again to war, and the narrative pulls the speaker outside of elegy's narrowly confined erotic battles (*bella Veneris*, 1.10.53) into military engagements. Tibullus' ambivalence towards military life and martial poetry is symbolized in the images of the poet as soldier that show the poet-speaker's body trying on the kind of normative Roman masculinity that the elegiac speaker continually rejects. Yet even in the Tibullan speaker recast as a *miles*, there are continuing echoes of the characteristically weak and languid elegiac lover's body.

The Tibullan elegiac speaker is under constant tension as he vacillates between occupying a normative Roman social role and rejecting those same norms. The uneasy equivalency between the poet-lover's body and the poet-soldier's concretizes this vacillation for elegy's readers, as the speaker's body takes up the polarized costumes of masculinity that the poetry establishes as norm and opposition. Tibullus' poetry thus uses bodies conspicuously located at the intersection of many competing forms of subjective identification. The body serves to communicate class, gender, sexuality, and status, and Tibullan poetics are overt about the social position that the speaker, Delia, and the other characters of elegy hold in the Roman social hierarchy.

**Nick Ollivère (Royal Holloway/Oxford): “As Dreams are Made On”: Undercutting the Dream in Tibullus 1’**

In several key poems of his first book of poetry Tibullus presents us with various idyllic, and idealistic, dreams that he will then subsequently undermine, or undercut, with elements from his ‘real’ life. His dream of peaceful, rural poverty in 1.1 is disturbed by military obligations, for example. Thus early critical opinion, still somehow pervasive, of him as a dreamer or idealist is troubled by Tibullus’ own abrupt interruptions of those dreams. Tibullus seems to let himself imagine these scenarios, whether of the Golden Age or a quiet life in the country, and then imagine ways in which they are impossible for him. What’s more, not only does he undercut dreams with real life, but there are also fascinating passages where he undercuts real life with dreams. He is close to death in Phaeacia, even writes his own epitaph, but then imagines himself in Elysium, surrounded by dance and song, and birds and flowers. In this paper I would like to explore the meaning and import of these moments of undercutting further, and the more indirect ways in which Tibullus sets himself up for failure – his careful use of language, repeating the same words in different contexts. Is Tibullus as much of a dreamer, or idealist, as he seems? In a defining image that he presents of himself in 1.5, Tibullus wishes to become nothing (*nihil*). Has he disappeared, slipped from view, and finally escaped into a dream-world of his own making? Or has he woken up?

**Brian Breed (UMass Amherst): ‘Tibullus the Historist’**

In Tibullus 1 the imperfect alignment of dreamy fantasies and historical realities contrasts with examples of seemingly more forthright topicality among the poet’s contemporaries. The book is, nevertheless, embedded in specific contexts, as reflected in different ways of measuring and delineating time. The position in history the book makes for itself is both responsive to concerns particular to Tibullus and consequential for understanding some broader implications of classifying texts according to historical eras and relationships to extra-textual realities.

It turns out that the question of whether Tibullus 1 is an ‘Augustan’ text or something else – ‘triumviral’?, even ‘republican’? – cannot be answered simply by establishing the publication date (subject of its own important debate, with which I do not intend to engage). Nor is it strictly a matter of political affiliations and patronage. To consider Tibullan perspectives on contemporary history and the potential for understanding it in terms of a transition between eras I will look especially at the depiction of Egypt in poem 7, which is and isn’t the Roman province created by the aftermath of Actium. I will also consider the relationship between *quondam* and *nunc* in poems 1 and 10, definitively Tibullan statements, built on intertextual foundations, of a how the present gains definition through differentiation from an alternative past. The past as preparation for the present is an expected theme in an environment of social crisis and the need for legitimacy (see just about every other text of the period), but Tibullus 1 recentres perspectives on where one thing ends and another begins. And elements of a continuous timeline, including recurring events, ritual observances, and intertextual continuities, make it possible to plot one-time occasions, like Messalla’s triumph and a poem to celebrate it, while also establishing that ‘now’ and ‘before’, though distinct, are connected. In the end, we may also be reminded that books are themselves temporal structures with their own histories formed by the generation of chronologies and boundaries.

**Laurel Fulkerson (FSU): 'Religion, Myth, and Humour: Gods in the *Corpus Tibullianum*'**

Starting from the often-stated point that Tibullan elegy is different from 'standard' (i.e. Propertian and Ovidian) elegy, this paper looks at one of those differences – his avoidance of mythology – in light of the habits of the other poets of the *Corpus Tibullianum*. Its larger aim is to suggest that incorporation of these poets gives us a fuller picture of what Latin love elegy actually is.

The *Appendix Tibulliana*, although brief, contains poems by at least four different authors, and has a somewhat different set of concerns from the poems of Propertius and Ovid, on the one hand, but also from Tibullus on the other. One of the most noticeable features of the poetry of Propertius and Ovid is the incorporation of mythological allusions, in the Alexandrian manner, as *comparanda* for what they present as their own 'real-life' situations. In Tibullus, by contrast, there is only a single extended mythological reference, the tale of Apollo and Admetus, told in Tib. 2.3, and even brief mythological references are infrequent. But Tibullus also imagines rustic gods (especially) interacting with humans, and so offers a different model.

The *Appendix* treats few mythological tales explicitly. But this is not to say that the divine apparatus is absent; far from it: the corpus is crawling with gods, who are envisioned as Homerically popping down to earth to visit their favourites and intervene in their lives. For instance, Apollo pays Lygdamus an extended personal visit in 3.4; 3.6 is a lengthy prayer to Liber to heal Lygdamus' amatory ills. In 3.8, Mars is invited to come down and have a look at Sulpicia, and in 3.10 Apollo is invited to come heal her. Diana is a potential rival to her in 3.9. Genius and Juno figures intervene in 3.11 and 12, and in 3.13, Venus brings personally brings Sulpicia what she most desires, Cerinthus. Although divine, these figures are also wholly individual, and are presumed to be deeply concerned with the minutiae of daily life among human beings. While the treatment of the gods in the CT poets is certainly comparable to the humorous way in which Ovid (especially) treats them, there is also something Tibullan about their familiarity.