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## Recent Work on Tibullus\*

ERIKA ZIMMERMANN DAMER

ABSTRACT: This introduction provides an overview of Tibullus' life, his poetry, and his style, and offers a bibliographical survey of emerging critical trends in interpreting this relatively neglected Roman elegist.

Roman poets and literary critics widely praised Tibullus' poetry: Horace teases the elegist (*Carm.* 1.33, *Ep.* 1.4); Ovid praises his poetry (*Am.* 1.15.28, *Ars* 3.334, *Rem.* 763, *Tr.* 4.10.51–53) and eulogizes him after his death (*Am.* 3.9); and both Velleius Paterculus (2.36.3) and Quintilian (*Inst.* 10.1.93) elevate him to the top of the elegiac canon. Yet despite the ancients' high esteem for him, Tibullus has done less well among moderns. Both in the classroom and in Anglo-American scholarship, he has garnered far less praise and attention than either Propertius or Ovid. This tide may now be turning: we have two new translations<sup>1</sup> and a new reader,<sup>2</sup> all of which promise to bring Tibullus' poems to a wider student audience. The two translations feature the work of two of Tibullus' great commentators: the posthumous translation of Rodney Dennis completed and expanded by Michael Putnam attempts to reproduce Tibullus' "immediate, unpretentious, but deceptively simple

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\*Many thanks are due to our audience members and to my fellow panelists at the APA's 2009 panel on "Rethinking Tibullus": Alison Keith, John Henkel and David Wray; to Sharon James and Jim O'Hara for their generous and acute feedback throughout different stages of this project; and to Megan Drinkwater and Konstantinos Nikoloutsos for sharing advance copies of their work. The Faculty Research Council at the University of Richmond provided generous support for this project. I wish also to thank *CW*'s anonymous referees for their helpful feedback and its editors (both previous and current) Matthew Santirocco, Judith Hallett, Robin Mitchell-Boyask, and Lee Percy for being efficient, thorough, and fair. Any errors that remain in this collection are mine alone.

<sup>1</sup> A. M. Juster, tr., *Tibullus Elegies*. With an introduction and notes by R. Maltby (Oxford 2012); R. Dennis and M. Putnam, trs., *The Complete Poems of Tibullus. An En Face Bilingual Edition*. With an introduction by J. H. Gaisser (Berkeley 2012).

<sup>2</sup> P. A. Miller. *A Tibullus Reader. Seven Selected Elegies* (Mundelein, Ill. 2013).

style,”<sup>3</sup> while A. M. Juster, in a new Oxford World’s Classics edition introduced and annotated by Robert Maltby, seeks to capture internal and end-rhyme as well as to imitate Tibullus’ alliteration and assonance.<sup>4</sup> Since these new publications promise to improve Tibullus’ fortunes in the classroom, the time is ripe to refocus scholarly attention on this under-appreciated Augustan elegist. We have therefore brought together in one place several innovative critical approaches to Tibullus’ poetry in hopes of fostering many more fruitful conversations.

The essays that follow formed the core of an APA panel on “Re-thinking Tibullus” and represent several of the new avenues that have emerged in the study of Tibullus’ poetry in the decade since the publication of Maltby’s scholarly commentary in 2002. John Henkel’s essay on foot puns offers a philological study of Tibullus’ references to feet, which builds upon the groundwork of Keith and Fineberg to attempt a metapoetic reading of poem 1.1.<sup>5</sup> Alison Keith’s essay examines Tibullus’ aestheticization of imperialism, engaging in dialogue along the way with Keith’s own work on Propertius and with Lowell Bowditch’s recent series of articles on post-colonialism and imperialism in Roman love elegy.<sup>6</sup> Finally, Erika Zimmermann Damer’s essay on Tibullan allusion and gender reversals brings continued attention to the Marathus poems (1.4, 1.8, 1.9), where elegy offers its most intense experiment in representing male-male love.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Dennis (above, n.1) x.

<sup>4</sup> Juster (above, n.1) xxviii.

<sup>5</sup> A. Keith, “Slender Verse: Roman Elegy and Ancient Rhetorical Theory,” *Mnemosyne* 52 (1999) 41–62; B. Fineberg, “From a Sure Foot to Faltering Meters: the Dark Ladies of Tibullan Elegy,” in M. DeForest, ed., *Woman’s Power, Man’s Game: Essays on Classical Antiquity in Honor of Joy K. King* (Wauconda, Ill. 1993) 249–56; B. Fineberg, “Repetition and the Poetics of Desire in Tibullus 1.2 and 1.4,” *CW* 92 (2000) 419–28.

<sup>6</sup> A. Keith, *Propertius, Poet of Love and Leisure* (London 2008); L. Bowditch, “Propertius and the Gendered Rhetoric of Luxury and Empire: A Reading of 2.16,” *CLS* 43 (2006) 306–25; L. Bowditch, “Palatine Apollo and the Imperial Gaze: Propertius 2.31 and 2.32,” *AJP* 130 (2009) 401–38; L. Bowditch, “Tibullus and Egypt: A Postcolonial Reading of Elegy 1.7,” *Arethusa* 44 (2011) 88–121; L. Bowditch, “Roman Love Elegy and the Eros of Empire,” in B. Gold, ed., *A Companion to Roman Love Elegy* (Oxford 2012) 119–33.

<sup>7</sup> See also B. Verstraete, “The Originality of Tibullus’ Marathus Elegies,” *J Homosex* 49 (2005) 299–313; K. Nikoloutsos, “Beyond Sex: The Poetics and Politics of Pederasty in Tibullus 1.4,” *Phoenix* 61 (2007) 55–82; K. Nikoloutsos, “The Boy as Metaphor: The Hermeneutics of Homoerotic Desire in Tibullus 1.9,” *Helios* 38 (2011) 27–57; M. Drinkwater, “His Turn to Cry: Tibullus’ Marathus Cycle (1.4, 1.8 and 1.9) and Roman Elegy,” *CJ* 107 (2012) 423–50.

The poet Albius Tibullus was born between 60 and 55 B.C.E. in the region of Pedum, east of Rome (Hor. *Ep.* 1.4.2), and he died in 19 B.C.E., the same year as Vergil. In both background and biography, Tibullus shares much with other Augustan poets: like the elegists Gallus, Propertius, and Ovid, he was born into the equestrian class, and like Propertius and Vergil, he saw his family suffer under the land confiscations during the proscriptions of the second triumvirate (Tib. 1.1.41–42). Unlike Propertius, Horace, and Vergil, Tibullus belonged to the poetic circle not of Maecenas but of M. Valerius Messalla Corvinus, whose patronage later extended to Ovid and Sulpicia as well. Tibullus also served under Messalla as a soldier and traveled with him on campaign in Aquitania (1.7.9–12). Messalla supported Augustus against Antony in the civil war but retired from politics after his Aquitanian triumph, celebrated in 27 B.C.E. and recorded in Tibullus 1.7.

Tibullus published sixteen poems in two books of poetry. The date of the first book has recently been challenged by Peter Knox,<sup>8</sup> but general consensus places its publication after Propertius' *Monobiblos* in c. 26 B.C.E. In this book, Tibullus speaks of his relationships with his mistress Delia (1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.5, 1.6) and the boy Marathus (1.4, 1.8, 1.9); he celebrates Messalla's birthday (1.7); and he closes the collection with his rejection of a military career and praise of an idealized country life and erotic love (1.10). The second book, published posthumously in or around 19 B.C.E., contains three poems celebrating rites or ceremonies (2.1, 2.2, 2.5), but its main focus is on a new beloved, the appropriately named Nemesis (2.3, 2.4, 2.6), whom Tibullus presents as a consistently harsh and greedy mistress. Where in book 1 Tibullus had imagined an idealized country life with Delia as his faithful lover, in book 2 the speaker's elegiac servitude, *servitium amoris*, begins to look more and more like actual enslavement and the countryside becomes a space of laborious toil and exertion instead of an agricultural idyll. As he becomes a truly downcast lover, the poet-speaker recants his earlier desires,<sup>9</sup> until in the final poem of book 2 he rejects both the countryside and military service in favor of the city and a permanent connection to his unavailable mistress—who nevertheless rejects him, despite his willingness to give her luxurious gifts (2.4, 2.6).

Tibullus' subject matter shares much with the elegies of his contemporary Propertius and with Ovid's *Amores*. Yet, while the elegies

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<sup>8</sup> P. Knox, "Milestones in the Career of Tibullus," *CQ* 55 (2005) 204–16.

<sup>9</sup> D. Bright, *Haec mihi fingebam: Tibullus in His World* (Leiden 1978) 184–227.

of Propertius and Ovid enjoyed a warm reception in the latter half of the twentieth century, Tibullus' elegies have often been overlooked on account of their style. Where Ovid's poetry follows a linear narrative or a clear rhetorical structure and Propertius' elegies create a vivid sense of the speaker's emotions, Tibullus' poems move through metonymic associations from couplet to couplet.<sup>10</sup> Thanks to the clarity of Tibullus' Latin, which offers "easy syntax, straightforward word order, and reasonable images,"<sup>11</sup> Tibullus' verses appear deceptively simple and have not attracted the degree of attention that the troubled Propertian textual transmission has brought to Propertius.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, although the syntax and word order are straightforward, the dreamy quality of the transitions between Tibullus' verses obscures the movement from one scene to the next and from one theme to another.<sup>13</sup> For David Wray, Tibullus' smoothly polished poems belie the difficulty of reading his disjunctive, "hyper-subjunctive" dreaminess.<sup>14</sup> Paul Allen Miller's influential post-modern and psychoanalytic readings build from this very dreamlike quality of Tibullus' poetry, presenting his elegies as dream texts, susceptible to being read through a Freudian or Lacanian lens.<sup>15</sup> These dream texts, in turn, through their unresolved tensions between opposing subject positions within and between the poems, are able to express the profound disruptions to Roman elite male identity characteristic of elegiac poetry written during the transition from the Republic to the Principate.

## I. Contemporary Critical Trends

Miller has recently argued that the lack of critical attention to Tibullus "fundamentally distorts" the nature of Roman love elegy as we scholars

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<sup>10</sup> P. Veyne, *Roman Erotic Elegy: Love, Poetry, and the West*. D. Pellauer, tr., (Chicago 1988) 36; P. A. Miller, "Tibullus," in B. Gold, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Latin Love Elegy* (Oxford 2012) 54.

<sup>11</sup> J. P. Elder, "Tibullus: *Tersus Atque Elegans*," in J. P. Sullivan, ed., *Critical Essays on Roman Literature: Elegy and Lyric* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962) 79.

<sup>12</sup> Gaisser (above, n.1) 1; Miller (above, n.10) 53–54.

<sup>13</sup> M. Putnam, ed., *Tibullus: A Commentary* (Norman, Okla., 1973) 11–13.

<sup>14</sup> D. Wray ("What Poets Do: Tibullus on 'Easy' Hands," *CP* 98 [2003] 217) reminds us how W. Wimmel (*Tibull und Delia: Erster Teil, Tibulls Elegie 1,1. Hermes Einzelschriften, Heft 37* [Wiesbaden 1976] 32) coined the term *überkonjunktiv* to describe Tibullus' indicative verbs.

<sup>15</sup> P. A. Miller, "The Tibullan Dream Text," *TAPA* 129 (1999) 181–224; P. A. Miller, *Subjecting Verses: Latin Love Elegy and the Emergence of the Real* (Princeton 2004).

understand it and as we teach it to our students.<sup>16</sup> Yet scholarly interest has been turning to Tibullus since Murgatroyd's and Maltby's magnificent scholarly commentaries have joined Putnam's.<sup>17</sup> What follows is a necessarily selective and brief introduction to several of the major critical trends that have appeared in studies of Tibullus in the past decade.

The turn towards interrogations of Roman masculinity has brought attention to Tibullus' Marathus poems (1.4, 1.8, 1.9), and to his programmatic 1.1. In a series of two articles, Nikoloutsos has argued that Marathus should be read, like the *puellae* of elegy, as a *scriptus puer*, whose appearance and behavior more closely model the aesthetics, generic features, and economic and social structures that characterize Roman love elegy, than as an accurate representation of male-male love relationships in Rome.<sup>18</sup> Drinkwater's examination of Marathus' speech in 1.8 demonstrates how the homoerotic relationship of the Marathus cycle encapsulates in microcosm the gamut of elegiac roles and situations: the *levis puella*, the *exclusus amator*, and the greedy rival among them.<sup>19</sup> These readers have scrutinized the elegiac *amator* and his male beloved and their particular expressions of masculinity and have begun to reincorporate Tibullus into the flourishing scholarly conversation about sexuality and gender in Roman love elegy.<sup>20</sup>

Psychoanalytic and postmodernist readings of Roman love elegy have further destabilized the constructions of gender and subjectivity

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<sup>16</sup> Miller (above, n.10) 54.

<sup>17</sup> P. Murgatroyd, ed., *Tibullus 1: A Commentary on the First Book of the Elegies of Albius Tibullus* (Pietermaritzburg 1980); P. Murgatroyd, *Tibullus. Elegies II* (Oxford 1994); R. Maltby, *Tibullus: Elegies. Text, Introduction, and Commentary. ARCA 41* (Cambridge 2002).

<sup>18</sup> Nikoloutsos 2007 (above, n.7), esp. 79, and Nikoloutsos 2011 (above n.7), esp. 49.

<sup>19</sup> Drinkwater (above, n.7).

<sup>20</sup> A few exemplars must suffice: J. Hallett, "The Role of Women in Roman Elegy: Counter-Cultural Feminism," *Arethusa* 6 (1973) 103–24; M. Wyke, "Written Women: Propertius' *scripta puella*," *JRS* 77 (1987) 47–61; A. Sharrock, "Womanaufacture," *JRS* 81 (1991) 36–49; B. Gold, "'But Ariadne Was Never There in the First Place': Finding the Female in Roman Poetry," in N. S. Rabinowitz and A. Richlin, eds. *Feminist Theory and the Classics* (New York 1993) 75–101; E. Greene, *The Erotics of Domination: Male Desire and the Mistress in Latin Love Poetry* (Baltimore 1998); M. Janan, *The Politics of Desire: Propertius IV* (Berkeley 2001); M. Wyke, *The Roman Mistress* (Oxford 2002); S. James, *Learned Girls and Male Persuasion: Gender and Reading in Latin Love Elegy* (Berkeley 2003); Miller 2004 (above, n.15); Keith (above, n.6); E. Greene, "Gender and Elegy," in B. Gold, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Latin Love Elegy* (Oxford 2012) 357–372.

in Tibullus' poetry by embracing the instability of the Tibullan poet-lover's subjectivity. Critics such as Fineberg, Miller, and Lee-Stecum have shown that, as readers, we should perhaps not expect to find a coherent identity running through the Tibullan texts, either for the poet-speaker or for his various beloveds.<sup>21</sup> Like the *scriptae puellae* of Propertius and Ovid, Tibullan characters—including especially the poet-speaker himself—emerge as radically unstable and subject to disruptions and discontinuities of poetic, political, sexual, and gender norms.

In contrast to these approaches, Wray's cogent analysis of Tibullus 1.1 argues for the ultimate interpretability of Tibullus' elegiac persona.<sup>22</sup> Wray works outward from several apparently paradoxical uses of *facilis*, "easy," to an etymologically and semantically grounded approach to Tibullus 1.1 as "poetological allegory."<sup>23</sup> His poetological reading sees an *ars poetica* in the *ars vivendi* of this poem, and we see the semantic slippage between the poet-speaker's elegiac lifestyle (*vita iners*) and the stylistic vocabulary that scholars continue to observe in Propertius and Ovid, who more overtly conflate the qualities of the speaker and/or his love object with the aesthetic conventions of Alexandrian Roman love elegy. Wray's work thus offers a welcome challenge to an emerging view of Tibullan elegy that articulates the fundamental instability of the Tibullan poet-lover's subjectivity and, in so doing, risks reifying earlier nineteenth- and twentieth-century readings of Tibullus that saw him as a dreamy poet not worthy of serious critical scrutiny.<sup>24</sup> While this dreamlike and unstable quality holds greater appeal for postmodern readers, Wray's Tibullus instead emerges as a potent and deliberate wordsmith.<sup>25</sup>

Several other recent approaches deserve mention as well. Bowditch has offered a postcolonial reading of Tibullus 1.7's appropriative

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<sup>21</sup> B. Fineberg, "Configurations of Desire in the Elegies of Tibullus" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago 1991); Fineberg 1993 (above, n.5); Fineberg 2000 (above, n.5); Miller 2004 (above n.15); P. Lee-Stecum, *Powerplay in Tibullus: Reading Elegies Book One* (Cambridge 1998); P. Lee-Stecum, "Poet/Reader, Authority Deferred: Re-reading Tibullan Elegy," *Arethusa* 33 (2000) 177–215. F. Cairns' seminal work (*Tibullus: A Hellenistic Poet at Rome* [Cambridge 1979]) helped readers see Tibullus' strategies to destabilize readerly expectations.

<sup>22</sup> Wray (above, n.14).

<sup>23</sup> Wray (above, n.14) 232.

<sup>24</sup> Miller (above, n.10) 53–55 offers a concise historiography of earlier readings.

<sup>25</sup> E. Oliensis (*Freud's Rome. Psychoanalysis and Latin Poetry* [Cambridge 2009] 8–10) continues the conversation between Miller and Wray on how to read Tibullus' *facili manu* of 1.1.8.

discourses of the Egyptian world wherein Roman political and representational control of Egypt and the representation of Osiris and Messalla within the poem intersect with elegiac power relations between patron and lover-poet and between lover and beloved.<sup>26</sup> Ramsby's illuminating chapter demonstrates that Tibullus introduces full inscriptions into his first book of poetry to distinguish the poet from his persona. While the persona inhabits the world of the elegiac lover in which he rejects Roman social values, Tibullus' inclusion of his own epitaph memorializing his work as a soldier on Messalla's campaign in 1.3 points to his desire to be remembered as a full participant in Roman society. Tibullus' poetry thus balances Alexandrian poetic style with the elegiac tradition's roots in Roman commemoration.<sup>27</sup> Outside of Anglo-American criticism, there have also been numerous valuable European studies of Tibullus interested in the structure and design of Tibullus' poetry book.<sup>28</sup>

## II. Our Contributions

In his essay, "Metrical Feet on the Road of Poetry: Foot Puns and Literary Polemic in Tibullus," John Henkel demonstrates that Tibullus, well before Ovid's more overt joking about the unequal line lengths of the elegiac couplet in *Amores* 1.1 and 3.1, innovates in how he deploys the trope of the unevenness of the elegiac couplet. Through images of limping, binding, and chains (especially in 1.1), Tibullus expresses metaphorically the literary and poetic issues that he encounters as an elegiac poet and engages in intergeneric polemic with choliambic and epic poetry through this metaliterary play.

Alison Keith's essay, "Imperial Geographies in Tibullan Elegy," argues that Tibullan elegy domesticates newly conquered Greco-Egyptian culture and geographies through the translation of Greek and Egyptian language into his poems on the Roman imperial project (1.3, 1.7, 2.2, 2.3). Despite his overt statements to the contrary, Tibullus' poetry

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<sup>26</sup> Bowditch 2011 (above, n.6).

<sup>27</sup> T. Ramsby, *Textual Permanence: Roman Elegists and the Epigraphic Tradition* (Ann Arbor 2007) 73–87.

<sup>28</sup> See W. Wimmel, *Der frühe Tibull* (Munich 1968) and Wimmel (above, n.14); H. Mutschler, *Die poetische Kunst Tibulls: Struktur und Bedeutung der Bücher 1 und 2 des Corpus Tibullianum* (Frankfurt 1985); C. Neumeister, *Tibull: Einführung in sein Werk* (Heidelberg 1986); C. Rambaux, *Tibulle, ou La répétition* (Brussels 1997); L. D'Azay, *Tibulle à Corfou* (Paris 2003).

participates in the project of securing Roman hegemony in the Mediterranean by reimagining Roman expansion as a literary excursion through Greek mythology and by incorporating the non-Latin vocabulary of imported foreign luxury goods affiliated with elegiac love.

Erika Zimmermann Damer's essay, "Gender Reversals and Intertextuality in Tibullus," focuses on Tibullus' manipulations of readerly expectations through intertextualities with Philotas, Callimachus, Catullus, and Propertius in 1.8 and 2.6. Tibullus uses intertexts of prior elegiac works to create unexpected gender reversals and to demonstrate his skill in manipulating the flexibility of grammatical gender in Latin in order to establish his own, subtly marked version of elegiac Callimacheanism. This intertextual reading thus underscores Tibullus' contributions to the gender play and instability of gendered identities characteristic of Roman elegy.

Together, these three essays more richly locate Tibullus in his Augustan context as a poet actively engaged in generic self-definition through metrical play, one involved with the politics of imperial expansion and the importation of luxury goods and luxury language into the Roman center, and one concerned with establishing his own, subtly marked Alexandrian aesthetic through unexpected gender reversals and intertextuality that obfuscate the male-female gendered binary. It is our hope that this collection, alongside the appearance of these new translations of, and commentaries on, Tibullus' poetry, will promote a new image of Tibullus, whose seductively smooth generic rhetoric has so long defined him as a rustic, dreamy poet uninterested in (or unaware of) the broader thematic concerns of his fellow elegiac and Augustan poets.

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