POET/READER, AUTHORITY DEFERRED: RE-READING TIBULLAN ELEGY

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The Tibullus of twentieth-century criticism is the shy, retiring type. Somewhere between a linguistic somnambulist and a rustic philosopher, he[1] is dreamy, sensitive, melancholy, thoughtful, and, above all, non-threatening.[2] Compared to the work of "exuberant" Propertius or "subversive" Ovid (or even the shade of "rough and ready" Gallus), the elegies of cosy old Tibullus present a gently rolling landscape. Perhaps there is the odd dark cloud, but it

1 By "he" is meant the poet's work: the two books of elegies which are certainly by the historical "Tibullus."

2 "Tibullus was generous and well-balanced . . . Tibullus is tender as well as passionate. Naturally refined and fastidious . . . ," Smith 1913.42, 49; "Tibullus may lead us through a long cycle of loosely connected themes (as in 1.1), where successive scenes and images blend into each other and seem to have no logical relation, yet dictate to us what we are to feel and carry us gently from one mood to the next," Luck 1959.74; "During his whole life, Tibullus retained the freshness, the melancholy, the wonder and curiosity of youth," Luck 1959.77; "He seems to live in a dream world of his own," Luck 1982.412. Back in 1962, Elder complained about "the picture of Tibullus as weak and wishy-washy, a dabbler in winsome sweetness," Elder 1962.70. But, "in the final analysis," Elder simply replaced one (criticised) image of a "sensitive" Tibullus with another (valourised) one. The final sentence of Elder's seminal essay is a classic formulation of the "dreamy" Tibullus: "In the final analysis, we realise that we have been listening to someone who could not "keep pace" with his companions—thank heaven for such men—and who knew this fact and felt torment therefrom. In fine, we have been listening to an Augustan who heard the distant call of Thoreau's 'different drummer,'" Elder 1962.103. Lee, too, a decade later, set out to modify the "gentle" image of Tibullus: "We tend to regard Tibullus as the poet of sentiment and wishful thinking, whose art is tinged with a gentle and nostalgic melancholy . . . and we are right to think so. But he also has another side, as I hope to indicate in what follows, though the reader should be warned that we are stepping onto controversial ground," Lee

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is not a hard rain that falls.[3] There are no dangers for the reader lurking in the Tibullan text.

The present piece offers a very different Tibullus. It offers an unreliable, infuriating, even treacherous Tibullus. It attempts to shadow the ambiguous and destabilising manoeuvres of a trickster-text where the reader shares full jeopardy. Like many of the more recent approaches to Roman elegy, this study is concerned not with the relation of the text to the biography of the author, nor with the genre in the abstract, but with the dynamics of reading the texts in question.[4] More specifically, it is concerned with how an ancient Roman, a reader of the first circulated "editions" of the elegies, could have constructed meaning from the texts.[5] As with all interpretation of text (whether this is made explicit by the critic in question or not), the emphasis must be on what the text *could* mean, not what it specifically *did* mean for any one reader at any one time. This is not to argue for an undifferentiated relativism—for an infinity of viable readings, one for

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1974.106. Lee's "controversial ground" seems to be summed up by the statement "this is the gallant style of poetry, elegant and sentimental, but intended to be taken with a pinch of realistic salt," Lee.1974.110. This "pinch of realistic salt" has in recent decades sometimes taken the form of viewing the first person poet/lover of the Tibullan texts as a persona who may or may not reflect the views of the author Tibullus and whose words are to be read with a degree of irony (see, for example, Mutschler 1985 and Bright 1978). But while Tibullus the author may be seen as a strong, controlling force behind the impression of dreaminess ("he directs the evolutions of his changing emotions with a very firm hand," Solmsen 1962.324–25), the general impression of a gentle, dreamy persona/text, albeit with moments of cultivated passion and suffering, remains. Perhaps the ultimate exponent of the "Tibullan reverie" is R. J. Ball, a scholar who has very little time for "the persona theory" and writes of "Tibullus's graceful elegies" with tenderness and warmth: "Tibullus's elegies move calmly and gently, like the tide of a summer sea, forward and backward in a rhythmic cadence . . . [u]nfolding smoothly" (1983.18). For Ball, Tibullus is "[t]his gentle, frightened, capricious, easygoing, rebellious young writer," he is "[t]his tender and soft-hearted man," and, of course, he is "melancholy" (1983.18; see also Ball 1989.19). Even in the last decades of the twentieth century, this warm and fuzzy Tibullus could pop up in the strangest places and in the oddest ways. In the Preface to his 1980 commentary on Book 1, for example, Paul Murgatroyd gives special thanks to Tibullus himself "for standing on my papers and sitting on my knee," Murgatroyd 1980.ix.

3 For example, Tibullan "passion," when it is noted, is almost always qualified: see note 2 above.

4 For various conceptions of this dynamic see, for example, Wyke 1989, Kennedy 1993, Conte 1994, Sharrock 1994.

5 I accept the following dates for the publication of the two Tibullan collections: Book 1 27/26 B.C.E., Book 2 19/18 B.C.E. See Murgatroyd 1980.3–6 and 11–12 for arguments regarding the Tibullan dates.

every reader. As Paul Ricoeur has put it (1981.213): "if it is true that there is always more than one way of construing a text, it is not true that all interpretations are equal . . . The text is a limited field of possible constructions." While there may be a plurality of possible readings, they are within the "limited field" represented by the particular text. It could be seen as the critical task to chart the boundaries of that field, to develop an appreciation of its breadth, to map out its topography, and to demonstrate what it might be like (and might *have* been like) to cross it. The present study sets out to do this in the case of Tibullan elegy[6] and, specifically, to suggest that the Tibullan text can be a slippery, disorienting field to cross.

While such slipperiness, in general terms, may not be unique to Tibullan elegy, this paper argues that there are factors of text and context which work in its case to particular effects. Instability and uncertainty are foregrounded thematically by the poet/lover's thwarted desire for stability within the *amor*-relationship. This is specifically linked to the reading process by the poet's parallel ideal of interpretive (and poetic) power expressed most forcefully in Book 2 through the figures of Apollo and the Sibyl (2.5). This draws into focus the Tibullan text's persistent inter-relation of the positions of poet/lover and reader as seekers of (an often denied or deferred) certainty.

The socio-cultural context in which the Tibullan collections were written and first circulated (during the 20s and teens B.C.E.) also lends a particular force to the instability of the Tibullan text. The period of transition from Republic to Principate has long been seen as a time of great cultural as well as political instability and change (even "revolution").[7] This period involved not simply "the collapse of the cultural structures by which authority had been defined in Roman society" (Wallace-Hadrill 1997.22), but a consequent realignment of authority in many areas of Roman culture around the figure of Augustus.[8] In such a context, the difficulties of establishing authority or certainty within and over the Tibullan text can be read as an

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6 While this study does concern Tibullan elegy generally (and may well touch on areas common to elegy in general), it will focus predominantly on Book 2 and will rely partly on the arguments of Lee-Stecum 1998 for its view of the first book.

7 For a recent formulation of an Augustan "cultural revolution," see the essays in Habinek and Schiesaro 1997, especially the editors' Introduction and the essay by Andrew Wallace-Hadrill.

8 "What makes the Augustan restoration revolutionary is that it involves a fundamental relocation and redefinition of authority in Roman society," Wallace-Hadrill 1997.7.

engagement with the Augustan redefinition of authority. Indeed, in several respects, the text intervenes in the same discursive fields in which the Augustan reorganisation of authority was or would become most active (specifically religion, prophecy, language).[9] In such a context, the Tibullan text's resistance to authority and certainty becomes all the more prominent and takes on broader socio-cultural implications.

ONE ON ONE: THE INTERPENETRATION OF THE TIBULLAN ELEGIES

Texts affect texts. More precisely: the meaning which a reader constructs from a text is open to influence from other texts.[10] While intertextuality by one name or another has long been an object of critical attention, the interpenetration of individual poems within a single collection or across an author's oeuvre has received somewhat less attention.[11] This is surprising in the case of late Republican/Augustan Roman literature. The nature of the poetry book during this period would not only seem to encourage the close inter-relation of its contents during reading, but would tend to channel reading through the particular linear sequence of poems.[12] The individual poems not only influence each other's meaning, the nature of that influence is largely determined (at least on first reading) by the sequence in which the poems come before the reader's attention. The creation of expectation, the suggestion of situation or character, may be achieved, affirmed, modified, or destabilised more or less radically by each poem in turn as surely as they may be achieved, affirmed, modified, or destabilised in the course of a single poem. The effects of such interpenetration on the

9 The Augustan "reforms" of religion are among the most studied areas of the Augustan revolution/restoration. For Augustus' intervention in the area of prophecy, see Suetonius *Augustus* 31.1, which specifically refers to Augustus' editing of the Sibylline books and placement of them in the Palatine temple of Apollo (next door to his own residence); on which see also Liebeschuetz 1979.83. These books and their association with Apollo are the subject of Tibullus 2.5, on which see below p. 200. For the reorganisation of linguistic authority during this period, see Wallace-Hadrill 1997.18–20.

10 Hinds 1998 provides the fullest recent exploration of this in relation to Roman literature.

11 Studies of the inter-relations of poems in collections have usually concentrated on broad "structural" relationships. The effect of interpenetration on the reader's construction of meaning has not been entirely neglected, however, (see Miller 1994.55, for example) and will appear self-evident to some.

12 See Van Sickle 1980, Lee-Stecum 1998.1–6.

reading process can be extensive. I have argued elsewhere (1998) for the interpenetration of the poems within an elegiac collection (in the case of Tibullus' first book) and have attempted to chart some of the effects which this might have on a linear reading of the collection. But such a dynamic also operates across the sequence of an author's work, especially when this work is linked not only by the reader's awareness of a common author but also by a common genre.[13] These factors encourage those readers aware of the earlier work to inter-relate the poems and to apply expectations raised by one text to the other.

At the opening of Tibullus Book 2 stands Tibullus Book 1. More particularly, the opening poem of Book 2 follows the opening poem of Book 1 in a sequence of elegies which open Tibullan books. The opening (and possibly programmatic) 2.1 can be immediately inter-related to the opening (and possibly programmatic) 1.1. This is only one element of influence upon the reading process, but its consequences for that process are dynamic and characteristic of the model of reading Tibullan elegy I am developing here.

The opening lines of 2.1 encourage comparison with the opening poem of Book 1 by re-evoking the context of the earlier elegy: *fruges . . . et agros*, "fruits and fields" (2.1.1). Not only do they both share a focus on the rural world, but specific elements of the opening couplet of 2.1 recall 1.1. The ritual purification (*lustramus,* 2.1.1), while not dramatised in 1.1 as it is in 2.1,[14] is still a prominent element of the poet's vision of rural life in the earlier poem: *hic ego pastoremque meum lustrare quotannis | et placidam soleo spargere lacte Palem*, "here I never fail to purify my shepherd | and sprinkle kindly Pales every year with milk" (1.1.35–36).[15] The recollection continues in the lines which follow, from the reference to the wheaten crown of Ceres (2.1.4, compare 1.1.15–16) to the emphasis on rest from work (2.1.5–6, compare 1.1.43–44).

But what might the consequences be for a reader recalling 1.1 here? In that poem, the social and ethical choices which seem to lead the

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13 This process, however, is not restricted to a commonality of genre. See recently, for example, Oliensis 1998.14 on "the changing value of Horace's face" across the multi-generic Horatian oeuvre.

14 As the opening words make clear, the ritual is actually in progress: *Quisquis adest, faveat*, "Whoever is present, be silent," 2.1.1.

15 The Latin text used throughout this article is that of Lee 1990. Translations are in general taken from Guy Lee's elegant English version of the text, although significantly modified in some places. Any resulting inelegance is thus purely the fault of the present author.

poet to his elaborate vision of the rural world (the valourisation of *paupertas* relative to the pursuit of wealth through war: 1.1.1–6) are ultimately revealed to be determined by *amor*. It is *amor* and not free ethical choice which leads the poet/lover to avoid *militia*, to embrace *paupertas*, and to construct his rural fantasy in the terms which he does.[16] A reader aware of the dynamic of 1.1 might suspect a similar dynamic here. The rural focus may be operating as justification for, rationalisation of, facade over, or distraction from the obsession with *amor* which the earlier elegies of Tibullus, and in particular the dynamic of 1.1, might encourage the reader to expect. The poet/priest of 2.1.1 waits to be unmasked (or to unmask himself) as the poet/lover of 1.1. The pious, rural vision waits to be revealed as an *amor*-determined ideal as in 1.1. Poem 3 of Book 2 will indeed see *amor* emerge as the poet's central concern and precisely suggest that the concern with *rus* in 2.1 was determined by that *amor*. But an initial linear reading of 2.1 sees a radical fluctuation of the relationship between *rus* and *amor*, especially when read against 1.1 and Tibullus' first collection generally. This fluctuation has the startling effect of rendering 2.3, which otherwise might be an entirely expected (and generically stable) representation of *amor*'s dominance over the elegiac poet/lover, a surprise or at least a new twist in the collection's trajectory. 2.3, with its otherwise "textbook" presentation of the *servitium amoris* motif, thus becomes yet another shift in an unstable interpretive field.

Early in 2.1, the reader may re-evaluate any suspicions (or expectations) that *amor* is the controlling force behind the poet/lover's words following lines 11–14:

> vos quoque abesse procul iubeo, discedat ab aris
> cui tulit hesterna gaudia nocte Venus.
> casta placent superis: pura cum veste venite
> et manibus puris sumite fontis aquam.
>
> I charge all you whom Venus granted joy last night
> to stand apart and not approach the altar.
> The gods love purity. Come wearing clean clothes
> and take in clean hands water from the spring.

16 Lee-Stecum 1998.50–52, 65–66.

The specific exclusion of those to whom Venus granted *gaudia* the previous night suggests a subordination of the sexual *gaudia* which is the (usually thwarted) aim of an elegiac poet/lover such as the persona of 1.1 (or of Book 1 generally; see, for example, 1.5.39–40).[17] The specific exclusion of Venus might suggest a radical *break* from (rather than a continuance of) the underlying dominance of Amor/Venus which was seen in Book 1 and dramatised particularly over the course of that book's opening poem. The reading of 2.1 in the light of 1.1 might now (at lines 11–14) trigger a revision of reader expectations. These lines could be seen as asserting a rejection of the underlying dynamic of 1.1.

This, in turn, opens a possible re-reading of the purification which is an emphatic imperative of the opening lines and the lines which follow 11–14: *purgamus . . . purgamus . . .* | *vos mala . . . pellite*, "we purify . . . we purify . . . | drive away evils" (2.1.17–18). The emphasis on renewal in the agricultural context might now also suggest a renewal of the rural focus of Tibullan elegy *purged* of the *amor* which was seen to be a determining element of its configuration in 1.1.[18] The opening couplet of 2.1 might also now be re-read as suggesting a break with the situation of 1.1. The emphasis on continuity from past to present, and specifically from the time of the *avus* (*ritus . . . a prisco traditus . . . avo*, "a rite handed down from our ancient ancestor," 2.1.2), directly contrasts with the break in such continuity which is stressed in 1.1 (*non ego divitias patrum fructusque requiro* | *quos tulit antiquo condita messis avo*, "I do not miss the fortune or the profit | that garnered harvest brought my ancestor in former times," 1.1.41–42; see also 1.1.19–22). In *this* case (2.1), the connection between past and present (the *mores maiorum*) would seem to be more secure and unproblematic. While such a difference between the two poems *may* have been immediately apparent to a reader, it would become more obvious (or be seen to represent

17 These lines also recall the sort of ritual chastity which the poet/lover of Book 1 had specifically rejected (or at least suffered from): see 1.3.23–26.

18 The depiction in elegy and elsewhere of *amor*/*eros* and its effects as a disease or illness (on which see Veyne 1988.160–63, commenting partly on Lucretius 4.1058ff.; Foucault 1986.112–23; Rousselle 1988.5–77; and the specific characterisation of desire as a *morbus*, "sickness," at Tibullus 2.5.110) might strengthen the implication that *amor* is being purged here, since purgation/purification, including sexual abstinence, was commonly used as a cure for or prevention of illness (for a discussion of this see Foucault 1986.121–22); see also Rousselle 1988.19–20 on the use of a purifying diet to reduce desire. (I owe this observation to one of the anonymous referees.)

this more particular sense of a *break* with the underlying dynamic of 1.1) following the reading of 2.1.11ff.

But the reading of a break here with the determining forces of 1.1 is not a foregone conclusion. It is neither entirely necessary nor secure. There are ways left open for a reader to rejuvenate and privilege the model of Tibullan elegy suggested by 1.1 (and Book 1). The desire for chastity and purity expressed at lines 13–14 not only recalls "amatory language" generally in the phrase *casta placent*, "chastity is pleasing" (see Murgatroyd 1994.27), but specifically recalls the Tibullan lover's desire for Delia to remain *casta* at 1.3.83 and 1.6.67. These lines could be re-appropriated for a reading which, with 1.1 fixed in mind, suspects *amor* behind the scenes pulling the strings.

But there are other "signs" which follow in 2.1 that suggest the situation here is different from that of 1.1. The opening poem of the first book presented the poet's prayers as not yet answered and perhaps even suggested that the decline of his estate evidenced the failure of his prayers to be fulfilled in the past. But 2.1 seems to confidently represent the poet's prayers as answered (or at least sure of *being* answered): *eventura precor*, "my prayers will be fulfilled," 2.1.25. Even in this case, the question of lines 25–26 (*viden ut felicibus extis | significet placidos nuntia fibra deos?*, "Do you see the entrails promise well and the liver's lobe announces the gods' favour?") may leave open the possibility of a negative response. (After all, there are suggestions in 1.1 that the poet there was also confident of his prayers being fulfilled, despite signs to the contrary being apparent to the reader: see, for example, 1.1.9–12.) Nevertheless, 2.1.25–26 do seem to suggest that the entrails of the sacrifice herald a positive outcome to the poet's (and his community's) prayers and offerings.

The reference to Messalla in terms which might themselves recall the apparently non-amatory elegy 1.7 (*gentis Aquitanae celeber Messalla triumphis*, "Messalla, famed for triumphs over Aquitanian tribes," 2.1.33–34) is blended with explicit description of the subject matter of the poet's song (*carmen*, 35) as *agricolis gratia caelitibus*, "thanks to the gods of farming" (2.1.36). The phrase *rura cano rurisque deos*, "country I sing and country gods" (2.1.37), in particular, has a strong programmatic flavour. This suggests not only a different focus for this poem as compared with the ultimately amatory dynamic of 1.1, but also (given the programmatic function of the opening poem) a different focus for Book 2 as compared with Book 1. Here *rura* and *ruri dei* are not to be *amor*-constructed fantasies but the subject matter in themselves. The long passage at lines 37–66 about rural

pastimes and the deities who contribute to rural life serves to reinforce this apparent difference from 1.1.

While the reading of such difference here may be encouraged by the text, it is still not a necessary interpretation. The agency of *amor* in the construction of the poet's rural ideal in 1.1 may not have been suspected during first reading of *that* poem either. A reader of 2.1, on analogy with the delayed revelation of 1.1, may still suspect *amor* in the background even after 2.1.37. In fact, such a "knowing" reader might feel an initial rush of "recognition" (of being proved "right") when, at line 67, Cupid himself is introduced on the scene (2.1.67–80):

> Ipse quoque inter agros interque armenta Cupido
> natus et indomitas dicitur inter equas.
> illic indocto primum se exercuit arcu:
> ei mihi, quam doctas nunc habet ille manus!
> nec pecudes uelut ante petit: fixisse puellas
> gestit et audaces perdomuisse viros.
> hic iuveni detraxit opes, hic dicere iussit
> limen ad iratae verba pudenda senem;
> hoc duce custodes furtim transgressa iacentes
> ad iuvenem tenebris sola puella venit,
> et pedibus praetemptat iter, suspensa timore,
> explorat caecas cui manus ante vias.
> a miseri quos hic graviter deus urget, at ille
> felix cui placidus leniter afflat Amor.
>
> Cupid himself, it is said, was born among the fields,
> among the cattle and the wild mares.
> There he practised first his unskilled archery.
> Alas, how skilful are his hands today!
> His aim has shifted from the beasts, and now he takes
> delight
> in wounding girls and taming insolent males.
> He robs the young of riches and commands the
> middle-aged
> to use unseemly language at an angry woman's door.
> Guided by him, the girl steps over sleeping sentries,
> creeping to a lover in the lonely dark,
> feeling the way with her feet, pausing on timid tiptoe,

> with hand outstretched exploring blind directions.
> Wretched they, alas, on whom this god bears hard,
> but happy he who feels Amor's breath serene.

It is said that the sphere of Cupid was originally the rural sphere (2.1.67–68). The separation between rural and amatory spheres, which some readers might have been encouraged to make, is thus elided, apparently confirming expectations which 1.1 may have raised. Alternatively, Amor/Cupid could be seen to supersede the rural world. The *nunc* of line 70 might seem to relegate the rural world to the past while moving to focus on an amatory (elegiac) here and now which is familiar to the reader of the first Tibullan book (or, indeed, of Propertius' and Ovid's early elegies): the world described in lines 71–78. The couplet 71–72 could even be read as representing a shift which the poem (and perhaps the Book) is apparently now making from a focus on the rural to a focus on a familiar elegiac amatory world (which perhaps subsumes the rural). So Cupid shifts his aim from beasts of the rural world to *puellae et audaces viri*. The exclamation *ei mihi* (line 70) suggests the poet's own painful experience of *amor*. It suggests that, as in 1.1 (and Book 1), the poet is a poet/lover. Following the dynamic of the earlier collection and its opening poem, final revelation of the domination by *amor* and the elegiac *amor*-relationship of the poet/lover's ethical choice as well as his sexual desires would appear to be imminent (or indeed in the process of occurring). In the context of such expectations, lines 79–80 suggest a transition to a more particularised depiction of the poet/lover himself as the one whom—back in line now with the earlier Tibullan and (perhaps) generic[19] situation—*graviter Amor urget*.

The final lines of the poem (81–90), however, do not provide any re-assuring confirmation for the "knowing" reader, although neither do they wholly dispel suspicions. They might seem to rejuvenate a reading which sees here a strong difference from the *amor*-determined situation of 1.1 or which, uninformed by a reading of the first Tibullan book, accepts the privileging of *rura* as the "pure" focus of the poet of 2.1. Cupid, like

19 Comparison with the first three Propertian books, as well as the first edition of Ovid's *Amores*, which was also circulating by this time, not to mention the elegies of Gallus, would probably have suggested *amor* as the dominant, even defining, theme of the "genre" of Roman elegy to a reader in 19/18 B.C.E., although perhaps the assumption that *Amor* is a generic inevitability should not be taken for granted.

Bacchus and Ceres at lines 3–4, is invoked as a rural deity. He is specifically asked to lay aside his traditional weapons, which were described as inflicting great damage on lovers at lines 70–72. This could be read (as lines 67–72 could now be re-read) as an attempt to re-appropriate the power of Cupid/Amor within a benign rural context. That power is re-directed or even subsumed within the world of *pecora* ("flocks") and the *turba iocosa* ("the merry crowd"). Amor, the power behind the poet's conception of *rura* in 1.1, is thus to be diffused and defused within the resurgent, dominant *rura* of 2.1. The focus has, it seems, shifted. So, too, has the active/passive dynamic of Amor/*rura* in 1.1. Here Amor is ruralised rather than the rural world being constructed according to *amor*-determined principles.

There are suggestions within the language of this closing passage that an amatory dynamic similar to that of Book 1 may still be operating here. The injunction *ludite* ("play") following the direct invocation of Cupid might recall the amatory meaning of "play" in Book 1 (see 1.3.64).[20] The desired presence of Cupid alone may suggest the potential for the enslaving power of *amor* which has been seen in Tibullus Book 1 (and other recent Roman elegies) to be prone to break out at any time.

But the impression of the re-appropriation of Amor/Cupid within a rural and ritual context towards the end of 2.1 is reinforced by the short elegy which follows. The vacillation of expectation and implication continues to be played out across the collection. In 2.2, Amor is once again appropriated for a benign, social, ritual context where his presence is actively invoked (2.2.17–18). Different possibilities for Amor from those associated with the earlier Tibullan poet/lover (or "typical" of the elegiac lover generally) are emphasised and exploited. Amor here facilitates marriage (and perhaps, by association with Natalis in the closing couplet, fertility and offspring) (2.2.17–22):

> Vota cadunt: utinam strepitantibus advolet alis
> flavaque coniugio vincula portet Amor,
> vincula quae maneant semper, dum tarda senectus
> inducat rugas inficiatque comas.

20 *Ludere* is, of course, a term used of erotic play more widely than Tibullus Book 1: see Adams 1982.162–63.

> hic veniat Natalis avis[21] prolemque ministret,
> ludat et ante tuos turba novella pedes.
>
> Prayers befall: may Amor fly here on noisy wings
> bearing the golden chains of marriage,
> chains to endure for always, till belatedly
> old age applies the wrinkles and bedaubs the hair.
> May Natalis come here and bring grandparents offspring
> and a troop of little ones play before your feet.

The language used of the relationship which Amor brings could suggest the asymmetrical *amor*-relationship(s) of Book 1: *vincula . . . vincula* (2.2.18–19) recalls the enchained poet/lover of 1.1.55 (*me retinent vinctum formosae vincla puellae*, "the chains of a beautiful girl hold me bound"). But here the language of the elegiac lover's enslavement is clearly reframed within the context of marriage and, as the closing lines demonstrate, the family line. The purification of Tibullan elegy which the content and language of 2.1 may have suggested seems to involve not an exclusion of *amor* but its reformulation and the reformulation of the language previously associated with it. From the enslaving power of Book 1, *amor* is now represented as a (hopefully) benign force, integrated socially through ritual into the rural world (2.1) and the family (2.2). The language which once marked its power to enslave the poet/lover in an anomalous and asymmetrical relationship now figures its power to bind together a normative, traditional social relationship (2.2) and to facilitate the well-being of the rural world (2.1). But if some interpretive stability now seems achieved, it is at this moment that the most radical modification of the reader's understanding of what has just passed is introduced.

Rura, the first word of 2.3, immediately recalls the apparently programmatic *rura cano* of 2.1.37. This is the focus, or so it seemed, of the poet's concern. This is the new context which has possibly reintegrated *amor*, reforming the terms of its presentation and operation in Book 1 (2.3.1–4):

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21 I here follow Murgatroyd 1994.78–79 in reading *hic veniat Natalis avis* as, "may Natalis come here to grandparents" (i.e., to Cornutus and his wife when they are grandparents), with *prolem* referring to their grandchildren.

> Rura meam, Cornute, tenent villaeque puellam:
> ferreus est, eheu, quisquis in urbe manet.
> ipsa Venus latos iam nunc migravit in agros,
> verbaque aratoris rustica discit Amor.
>
> The country and country houses hold my girl, Cornutus;
> only a man of iron could stay in town.
> Venus herself has moved now to lonely fields
> and Amor is learning rustic dialect.

This appears to be the vigourous return of the Book 1 brand of *amor*, complete with *puella* (whom the reader at this point may well expect to be Delia). These lines directly recall the language of the Book 1 poet/lover by calling the man who would resist the *puella* and the *amor*-relationship in favour of another way of life *ferreus,* "iron-hearted" (compare 1.2.67). These lines re-align once more the reader's conception of *amor*'s relationship to *rura*, and thus the poet's relationship to them both. In the shifting constellation of *amor*/*rura*/poet/reader, it now seems that the rural world is the context of the familiar *amor*-relationship of poet/lover and *puella*, rather than the context and catalyst for a reappropriated, benign, and integrated *amor*. The underlying, *amor*-dominant dynamic of 1.1 seems again (or still) the case.

In fact, the reader may now suspect that a very similar dynamic to that revealed at work in 1.1 has just been played out over the opening three elegies of Book 2. Initially, *rura* and the associated piety and simplicity seem to be privileged as the primary focus and preferred lifestyle of the poet-persona in their own right. Suspicions may be raised, but they are still capable of being accommodated within the apparent situation (except perhaps for the most suspicious of readers). Eventually, however, it is confirmed that an enslaving *amor* determines and supersedes the discourse of *rura*. An awareness of 1.1 (and Book 1) fore-arms the reader against "falling for the same trick." But, over the course of the opening poem, the reader's understanding and expectations of the relationship between *amor* and *rus* have been open to fluctuation. Suggestions of an active reformulation (and even defusing) of the dynamic of 1.1 within 2.1 and 2.2 have served to openly confront and destabilise the reader's "foreknowledge." For the reader who "keeps faith" with 1.1 and the expectation of *amor*'s pre-eminence, 2.3 brings the satisfaction of being right all along.

Reading the opening lines of 2.3 against the opening poem of the

collection, it may now seem that the description of Amor at 2.3.4 (*verbaque aratoris rustica discit Amor*) might equally be applied to the poet/lover. These *verba rustica* (literally "country words") can now be reinterpreted as either a strategy of the lover to impress or persuade the *puella* or as part of an *amor*-determined trial performed under duress, an element of the rural-based *servitium amoris* exemplified by the labours and humiliations of Apollo (the divine poet/lover) in the lines which follow (11–36). Lines 5–10 might even offer themselves as an explanation of the rural concerns and setting of the poet in 2.1, as might the final lines of 2.3 (81–84). In both cases, rural life is a thing to be endured in order to see the *domina* (*aspicerem,* 5; *videndi,* 81). 2.1 could be re-read from the vantage point of 2.3 as an adoption by the poet/lover of a rural persona for strategic purposes within the context of the sort of *amor*-relationship familiar from Book 1. The rural life which the poet claims he will adopt[22] will be *ad imperium dominae* (line 83), and when the chains return in the final line (*vinclis,* 84) they are not the socially binding chains of marriage but the unreconstructed chains of amatory enslavement directly reminiscent of the first Tibullan collection.

It is always possible to prevent the sort of interpenetration of elegies within and across collections which I have described here by adopting a reading strategy of radical separation. Such a strategy would view each elegy in isolation, refuse to allow the reading of one to affect the others (or vice versa), and thus avoid the fluctuating expectations and implications which I have attempted to chart. This "isolating" strategy is hard to maintain in any reading of a physically unified collection of poems,[23] but it is particularly so given the various "prompts" which link the poems and texts (e.g., the appearance of Amor, *rura* and their associations, the *vinc*[*u*]*la,* etc.). The elegies of Tibullus interact with one another, and such interpenetration can generate a series of competing and fluctuating possibilities.[24] The textual ground is constantly shifting. The reader's certainty concerning the content and underlying dynamics of the fictional world is prey to

22 Or which he will perhaps continue to adopt; emphasis on future behaviour does not preclude the poet/lover having already done so.

23 This is particularly true of a collection this small where the scope for "forgetting" previous poems may be less.

24 I am here concerned with the reading of a *collection* of poems, of course. Recitation (either pre- or post-publication) of individual elegies or different combinations from the circulated collection would create different possibilities.

destabilisation. Any certainty remains provisional. The reader's control of meaning remains insecure.

From this perspective, Tibullan elegy could be seen as a multi-levelled con-trick. The poet-persona's strategies of persuasion or manipulation (the masks over the mask) or the pursuit of his desire by any means necessary within the relationships described in the text (poet and *rura*, poet and Amor/Cupid, poet and beloved) directly affect the relationship of the reader to the text.[25] The reader must rely on the words of the poet/lover for the details of the poet/lover's situation and motivation, but these words are not a "straightforward" narrative of such things. Tibullan elegy is not a description of the poet/lover's character, attitude, and relationships. Instead, it is a dramatisation of the strategies and dynamics at work in those relationships and employed by the poet/lover. Part of the reader's enjoyment of the elegies may involve the observation of those strategies and dynamics at work (or failing to work, as often seems the case in the poet/lover's attempts to persuade and manipulate or generally manoeuvre himself into the position he desires). But while this might seem to provide the reader with a detached and superior position in relation to the poet/lover, the reading process itself becomes intermeshed with the strategies of the poet/lover. For, as these strategies might be covert and deceptive (or simply not clearly signposted), the reader shares the risk of being deceived. From 2.3, 2.1 can be re-read as a strategy of the poet/lover which is determined by *amor*: his adoption of *rura* in order to position himself closer to (or even to impress) the *domina*. The most apparent "first" reading of 2.1 is thus revealed as deceptive. Even where the reader may be suspicious (and a reading of 1.1 may have encouraged suspicion in the case of 2.1), those suspicions are challenged, allowing the re- (or mis-)direction of even the "knowing" reader. Implications encourage readings which are later undercut. Possibilities and counter possibilities open and are left open. Even re-assembling and fixing a reading from the vantage point of 2.3 may seem vulnerably arbitrary. Firstly, there are still elegies to be read in the collection, all with the potential to re-arrange or continually destabilise any reading, as the previous poems of the collection (and the Tibullan corpus) have demonstrated. But, in addition,

25 Alternatively, they might be thought of as affecting the relationship of the reader to the poet/author, Tibullus, if such is conceived of as an external figure in control of the course of the text, manipulating the reader's responses.

within the opening three elegies themselves, there remain possible avenues for alternative readings and elements of uncertain meaning which have a latent potential to upset any too-secure reading. The effect of the address to Cornutus on the poet/lover's words in 2.2 and, especially, 2.3 remains open to interpretation. Is 2.3 a "confidence" shared with a friend and thus, perhaps, a more reliable guide to the poet/lover's "true" feelings and motivations than 2.1, which may have been designed (within the fiction of the *amor*-relationship) for the attention of the *domina* or which perhaps expresses a situation into which *amor* has driven the poet/lover against his will? Or might the address to Cornutus itself hide a strategy of some sort, an explanation or justification to Cornutus of why the poet has adopted the rural themes of 2.1? Might 2.3 present a false or distorted face (a "false" mask covering the supposedly "true" mask/persona of the poet/lover)? An appreciation of the potentially strategic nature of the poet/lover's words opens new uncertainties and destabilising elements, while others it renders only provisionally closed.

The name of the *domina* revealed at line 55 has often been taken to reflect a *nemesis* upon the poet/lover.[26] But her appearance at this stage and its potential to re-arrange a reading up to this point might equally be figured as a *nemesis* upon any reader who was too secure in their reading of the opening poems of the collection. Indeed, the fact that it is not Delia, the female beloved of Book 1, may itself be a modification of reader expectation. There is also an incidental possibility for re-reading raised by the name "Nemesis." The goddess Nemesis could be thought of in antiquity as the daughter of Night.[27] If this association of Nemesis and Night came to a reader's mind it might suggest an earlier hint of the coming of Nemesis in the closing of 2.1 (significantly following the invocation of Cupid/Amor): *iam Nox iungit equos, currumque sequuntur | matris lasciuo sidera fulua choro*, "already Night yokes her horses and the yellow | stars in wanton dance attend their mother's car" (2.1.87–88). The clues were there all the time.

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26 See Murgatroyd 1994.xviii.

27 As Bright 1978.190 observes; see Hesiod *Theogony* 223–24 where Nemesis' birth is suggestively followed by that of her sibling, Apate (Trickery/Deceit), itself (as I argue) a quality of the Tibullan text.

THE READER IN THE TEXT: BOOK 2 AND THE POETICS OF PRESENCE

There is a great emphasis on words within the text of Tibullus' second book: their effectiveness, their power, and their function. *Verba*, *carmina*, *vota* and the verbs which denote their delivery recur frequently throughout the six elegies. Both 2.1 and 2.2 express a concern for the importance of words and the need for correct words (or for the withholding of words where appropriate). Words are to be employed to recall the name of Messalla at 2.1.31–32. Words, specifically song, are a central element of the relationship with the country and its deities not only for the poet himself (2.1.37) but for the farmers and countrywomen of 2.1.51–54 and 63–66. Song and words (spoken both openly, *palam*, and secretly, *clam*) are a central element and emblem of community ritual in the rural context presented by 2.1. They are a way of evoking divine presence (2.1.83–86):

> vos celebrem cantate deum pecorique vocate:
> voce palam pecori, clam sibi quisque vocet—
> aut etiam sibi quisque palam, nam turba iocosa
> obstrepit et Phrygio tibia curua sono.
>
> Sing all of you the glorious god and call him to the flock:
> call him aloud to the flock, in silence to yourselves—
> or even aloud to yourselves, for the din of the merry crowd
> and the skirl of the Phrygian pipe will drown the words.

2.2 begins with an injunction to all present to speak only *bona verba*, "propitious words" (2.1.1). A desire for the success of *vota*, which will be picked up again in the final line of the collection, is expressed at 2.2.17. The place, function, power, and importance of words might seem secure and paramount in the opening two elegies. But 2.3.4 underlines the threat of manipulation, untrustworthiness, and inappropriateness always present in language: *verbaque aratoris rustica discit Amor*. This directly recalls 2.1.52, where the *verba rustica* of the *agricola satiatus aratro* were supposedly appropriate and possessed of a "straightforward" and secure meaning which was echoed by the "fixed" rhythm of the song (*certo pede*): *agricola assiduo*

primum satiatus aratro | *cantauit certo rustica verba pede*, "a farmer wearied with continual ploughing first sang country words in fixed metre" (2.1.51–52).[28] 2.3.4 may also remind the reader that, even within 2.1, the power of Amor to effectively manipulate *verba*, to produce words which are inappropriate (the *verba pudenda*, "unseemly language," of the old man), had been made explicit (2.1.73–74). More fundamentally, of course, 2.3.4 encourages the reader to reassess the poet/lover's *verba* (particularly in 2.1) as possibly other than they appeared at first. The poet/lover, like Amor, may be adopting and manipulating *verba* for reasons and in ways which may not be immediately (or ever) apparent to the reader.[29] *Verba* can be misleading, empty, or deliberately deceptive. Although the reader, at times, may be able to observe the poet/lover's verbal strategies in operation and gain pleasure from this knowledge, there is always jeopardy involved in such knowledge for any reading process: the threat that the reader him/herself may be ensnared by the deceptive, malleable potential of elegiac *verba* (or that, perhaps, the reader cannot help but be so ensnared).

In the Tibullan text, this threat has an immediacy and a particular impact on the reader's position which transcends the general slipperiness of language that can be observed to a greater or lesser extent in almost any text. In Tibullan elegy, the threat of interpretive instability is exacerbated and focused by both the poet/lover's own explicit reliance upon the stability and effectiveness of words in the *amor*-relationship and by the specific intertwining of the positions of poet and reader which is consequent upon this. These effects are further emphasised and particularised in 2.5 (as discussed below). There Apollo, god of prophecy, and the Sibyl are represented as ideals of both locutionary and interpretive power (the ideal poet and reader), reflecting their traditional roles as figures of verbal authority and masters of meaning.

The poet himself, in Book 2, asserts the value of and his reliance upon words. *Vota loquor*, "I talk of wishes," at 2.3.63 could be read as a description of all the elegies in Book 2 (and maybe also Book 1).[30] 2.4 describes the primary purpose of the poet/lover's *carmina*: *ad dominam faciles aditus per carmina quaero:* | *ite procul, Musae, si nihil ista valent*,

28 The words *certo pede* physically enclose the words *verba rustica* on the page.

29 Although, given hints such as 2.3.4, such manipulation may always be suspected.

30 *Votum* occurs five times in the 430-line Book 2, one occurrence more than in the 812-line Book 1 (although the adjective *votiva* also occurs at 1.3.29).

"by poetry I look for easy access to my mistress. | Leave me alone, Muses, if such things have no power" (2.4.19–20). 2.4 is full of a number of different addresses (or implied/possible addresses) which could be read as different techniques of persuasion or manipulation. These include the submissive lover's play for sympathy (2.4.1–6), curses against those who thwart his desires (2.4.27ff., 2.4.39–44), praise and the promise of affection (albeit after death) for the compliant woman (2.4.45–50). Unable to employ the one strategy which seems most effective within the elegiac *amor*-relationship, the offering of *dona* or *praeda* (2.4.21ff.; see also 2.3.39ff. and, in Book 1, 1.5.59ff. and 1.9.7ff.), the poet/lover concludes the poem by turning desperately to magic as a potential strategy for securing Nemesis' favour as his own words and the various verbal strategies he has employed seem to fail. Alternatively, the description of this final ploy may itself be seen as a verbal strategy to convince the beloved (who might be considered an implied reader of all the poet/lover's elegies) of the extremity of the poet/lover's devotion and thus, hopefully, impress and win her over. There is, however, no indication that this or any other strategies are likely to succeed.

The importance invested in words and the poet/lover's reliance upon them in the context of the *amor*-relationship are also reflected in the ritual context of 2.1 and 2.2, as has already been suggested. 2.1 begins with the poet/priest attempting to control speech (*quisquis adest, faveat*, "whoever is present, be silent," 2.1.1), while 2.2 begins with the call for *bona verba,* "propitious words" (2.2.1). In both cases, the desire for prayers to be granted, for the words to affect a future outcome, is explicit (2.1.25, 2.2.17).

But the poet/lover's dependence upon words leaves him open to complete failure and impotence. The words of his poetry seem powerless: *nec prosunt elegi nec carminis auctor Apollo*, "elegies and Apollo, the source of poetry, are no help" (2.4.13). The stratagems of curse and invective (towards those whose behaviour thwarts his desires) and praise or the promise of benefits to come (towards those whose behaviour is compliant with his desires) at 2.4.26–50 fail to function in the way the poet/lover desires: *vera quidem moneo, sed prosunt quid mihi vera?*, "I warn of true things, but what help is the truth to me?" (2.4.51). There may even already be a suggestion of the lack of power in the poet/lover's words in the opening couplet of 2.4: *sic mihi servitium video dominamque paratam: | iam mihi, libertas illa paterna, vale*, "So I see servitude and a mistress prepared for me: | farewell now the freedom which is my birthright" (2.4.1–2). The poet/lover's freedom of speech, which should be his birthright as a free-born Roman male (*libertas paterna*), has been lost. His words no longer command

respect nor are able to have an effect.[31] In the final elegy of the collection, another poem which could be read as presenting a series of hopeful strategies of persuasion and/or manipulation,[32] the unreliability of words as a guide to the "truth" or as a power to affect the situation within the *amor*-relationship is explicitly stated (2.6.11–14):

> Magna loquor, sed magnifice mihi magna locuto
> excutiunt clausae fortia verba fores.
> iuravi quotiens rediturum ad limina numquam!
> cum bene iuravi, pes[33] tamen ipse redit.
>
> I speak brave words, but when I've grandly spoken these
> brave words
> closed doors send all the tough words flying.
> I've sworn so often never to return to that doorstep!
> but after all the swearing my feet still take me there.

To his cost, the poet/lover's words twist out of his own control under the influence, so he argues, of *amor*: *tu miserum torques, tu me mihi dira precari* | *cogis et insana mente nefanda loqui*, "you torture me in my wretchedness, you make me curse myself | and with an unbalanced mind utter blasphemy" (2.6.17–18). It is ironic that the poem and the collection end with the poet falling back on another verbal strategy, the curse.[34] The final couplet states that the power of the curse is dependent on the *vota* of the poet/lover being acted upon by the gods: *tunc tibi, lena, precor diras: satis*

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31 Compare Propertius 1.1.28.

32 These strategies may be incompetent as well as hopeful: see the poet/lover's attempted use of Nemesis' dead sister to intercede with and even (possibly) curse the *domina*; he pulls back from this strategy when he fears that it may backfire by making Nemesis ill-disposed: *Desino, ne dominae luctus renoventur acerbi:* | *non ego sum tanti, ploret ut illa semel*, "I stop, lest the bitter sorrows of my mistress be renewed: that she should weep once only is more than I am worth" (2.6.41–42). This itself, of course, could be read as a deliberate display of the poet/lover's concern for Nemesis: his desire to save her tears.

33 The double signification of *pes* (both the poet's physical foot and the metrical foot of his verse [e.g., 2.5.112]), suggests *amor*'s control over both his body and his words (his poetry).

34 In fact, these lines could be seen as a double strategy since they not only attack the *lena,* but, in doing so, shift the blame for the poet/lover's suffering from Nemesis, and thus attempt to avoid her hostility by excusing her of responsibility for the pains which the poet/lover has been loudly lamenting in 2.3, 2.4, and 2.6.

anxia vivas, | *moverit e votis pars quotacumque deos*, "bawd, I curse you then; pain enough will be your life, | if the gods grant the least of all my prayers" (2.6.53–54). This, again, at the last, links the *amor*-relationship and the rituals described in 2.1 and 2.2 (and, as will be discussed below, in 2.5) through the poet's reliance upon words (*verba*/*vota*/*carmina*) and their power. But the anxiety about the reliability of such words, expressed especially in 2.3 and 2.4, casts doubt upon the effectiveness of those final words and this final strategy.

The poet/lover's insecurity over the effectiveness of words within the relationships and situations described by the text is reflected in the reader's own insecurity over the meaning of the poet/lover's words. As the poet/lover's words are disempowered by the controlling force of *amor* and the *domina* or by the power of wealth, the poet/lover's strategic manipulation of those words (explicit or suspected) destabilises the reader's control over the meaning of the text, limiting certainty, rendering any bid for secure meaning vulnerable. These two dynamics are fundamentally interwoven because the words which cause the poet/lover such anxiety—his strategies to give him *ad dominam faciles aditus*—are the things which problematize the reader's understanding of (and thus control over) the text. The dynamic of the *amor*-relationship in Tibullan elegy is twined with the dynamic of reading Tibullan elegy.

The inter-relation of the positions of reader and poet/lover is further emphasised by the desire for presence which the poet/lover maintains throughout Book 2. The collection begins with an address to those who are present (*quisquis adest,* 2.1.1; compare *quisquis ades,* 2.2.2). Throughout the first two elegies of the collection, the traditional language of prayer is exploited and the summoning of a deity or deities features prominently in this: *Bacche, veni* (2.1.3), *Sancte, veni dapibus festis* (2.1.81), *Genius adsit* (2.2.5), *advolet . . . Amor* (2.2.17–18), *hic veniat Natalis* (2.2.21). The patron, too, is summoned to ensure inspiration for the poet's words in language which directly recalls the invocation of divinities (and here, in particular, the invocation of a Muse):[35] *huc ades aspiraque mihi*, "come here and inspire me" (2.1.35).

From desire for the presence of deities (and the surrogate deity, Messalla), the poet moves in 2.3 to a desire for the presence of the beloved, Nemesis. Nemesis is specifically absent from the poet/lover's urban location

35 Bright 1978.62–63.

(2.3.65). (It is ironic that it is Ceres and, later at line 67, Bacchus, the very deities whose presence was desired in 2.1.3–4, who are now responsible for Nemesis' *absence*.)[36] The poet/lover desires the presence of the *domina*, figured by his wish *to see* her (2.3.5, 2.3.81–84).[37] But now, instead of the deity coming to him (as was the hope in 2.1 and 2.2), he must go to the deity. 2.4 suggests that the primary function of the poet/lover's *carmina* is to convey him into the presence of the *domina* (*ad dominam faciles aditus per carmina quaero,* 2.4.19), while emphasising that it has failed in this function. The appearance of the *exclusus amator* theme at 2.4.39 suggests the definitive role which exclusion from the beloved's presence plays in the self-presentation of the elegiac poet/lover. In the final elegy of the collection, the poet/lover's emphatic *spes* places the presence of the beloved in a (forever) deferred *cras* (2.6.19–28). *Spes,* in the poet/lover's case, is the desire for presence, but that presence is perpetually deferred by the intransigence of the beloved (or, as the reader may think, by the generic requirements of the elegiac *amor*-relationship): *Spes facilem Nemesim spondet mihi, sed negat illa:* | *ei mihi, ne vincas, dura puella, deam*, "Hope promises me Nemesis, but Nemesis says no: | ah, harsh girl, you shouldn't overrule a goddess" (2.6.27–28).

The closing passage of 2.6 depicts the poet/lover deprived again of the longed-for presence of the beloved, although this time, so he suggests, it is the machinations of the *lena* which are responsible (2.6.45–52):

> lena vetat miserum Phryne, furtimque tabellas
> occulto portans itque reditque sinu.
> saepe ego cum dominae dulces a limine duro
> agnosco voces, haec negat esse domi.
> saepe ubi nox mihi promissa est, languere puellam
> nuntiat aut aliquas extimuisse minas.
> tunc morior curis, tunc mens mihi perdita fingit
> quisve meam teneat quot teneatve modis.

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36 This may even suggest that the poet's desire for their presence in 2.1 has now backfired on him.

37 The final lines of poem 4 again employ *seeing* to suggest presence, but here the beloved is the subject. It is her looking upon the poet/lover *placido vultu* which will supposedly grant him the unmediated presence which he desires: *si modo me placido videat Nemesis mea vultu*, "if only my Nemesis might look upon me with mild countenance" (2.4.59).

> Phryne the bawd debars me in my wretchedness as she
> secretly
> comes and goes bearing messages hidden in her bosom.
> When, on the hard threshold, I often recognise
> the sweet voice of my mistress, the bawd says she's out.
> Often when a night was promised, she brings me word
> that my girl's unwell or victim of intimidation.
> I then die of anxiety and my distraught mind imagines
> who's embracing her and in how many ways.

The poet/lover is left not with the desired presence but with *tabellae* ("writing-tablets") brought *furtim occulto sinu* (lines 45–46). Upon these secretive *tabellae*, upon the words of the *lena*, and upon the half-heard words (*voces*) which he interprets as those of the beloved, the poet/lover's mind works to imagine the "truth": *tunc mens mihi perdita fingit* (line 51). There is, of course, no guarantee that what his mind "makes up" really is the case. His reading of the situation is presumably based on his fears/suspicions and past experience/knowledge of Nemesis' behaviour. The lover here operates as both reader, interpreting words (the written words of the *tabellae*, the spoken words of the beloved—if it is her—and the *lena*), and as a poet, creating a fiction (*tunc mens mihi perdita fingit*). Indeed, the preceding poems of the collection could be considered part of such a fiction: a creation of the *mens perdita* of the poet. Here the roles of poet and reader merge into each other. The poet/lover's position could be read as that of a reader and/or a poet.

The poet/lover's desire for presence, like his related desire for (and reliance upon) the security of words, is a reflection of the reader's desire and search for certainty from the text. Both may remain unfulfilled (such fulfilment, such presence, may be forever deferred), but their searches for fulfilment affect each other directly. The manipulative strategies of the poet/lover destabilise the reader's grasp on meaning: suspending interpretation/expectation/suspicion always just short of confirmation or generating a vacillation of interpretations and possibilities across the shifting ground of Tibullan elegy. Yet the difficulties of interpretation also demonstrate the role of the reader's assumptions, expectations, and suspicions in constructing a reading of the poet/lover's position within the *amor*-relationship or of his attitude and relationship to *rura* in 2.1 or to Cornutus in 2.2 and 2.3. This parallels the way the poet/lover's *mens perdita* determines his reading of Nemesis' situation (a reading whose weaknesses he seems aware of). It is

the reader who must determine the poet/lover's degree of access to the presence he desires and actively pursues. By the end of the collection, the reader may fix him in the position of the ever-excluded elegiac poet/lover, with the desired presence forever deferred, or leave open the possibility that the strategies deployed in the collection may succeed. In all cases, however, it is the possibly dubious, possibly manipulative words of the poet/lover which provide the reader's only access to interpretation, and the interpenetration of the elegies within the collection and across the Tibullan corpus renders such interpretation a problematic process. Yet the need for interpretation cannot be escaped (without abandoning reading altogether), just as the poet/lover cannot escape the destabilising power of Amor.

READING 2.5

Elegy 2.5 is full of both poet-figures and reader-figures. It can be read as an exploration of the reading process, of the process of the elegiac *amor*-relationship, and of the writing of (Tibullan) elegy. The poem begins with a concern to ensure presence which is familiar from the earlier poems in the collection: *veni . . . veni . . . veni* (lines 2, 6, and 7). The concern is also with the control and direction of words (specifically poetry): *nunc te vocales impellere pollice chordas, | nunc precor ad laudes flectere verba mea*, "pluck now, I pray you, with your thumb the singing strings | and tune my words to hymns of praise" (2.5.3–4). The poet uses words (*precor*) to ensure the presence of Phoebus so that the god might then control and direct the poet's words (*verba mea*). Phoebus is presented from the first as a master of words. Even the sounds of his lyre "speak" as if with a voice (*vocales chordae,* 2.5.3). Phoebus is the archetypal poet, coming *cum cithara carminibusque*, "with cithara and songs" at line 2.[38] But he is also represented as a master of meaning, a master reader. He can see future events clearly without error, and he empowers his augur to read the song of birds faultlessly: *tu procul eventura vides, tibi deditus augur | scit bene quid fati provida cantet avis*, "you see the future from afar, your votary the augur | understands the song of the prophetic bird" (2.5.11–12). Not only does the reference to the interpretation of song (*cantet*) suggest the reading and interpretation of poetry (specifically the Tibullan poet/lover's *carmina*), but the utterances of the poet/lover have already assumed the form of prophecy

38 At 2.4.13, he was *carminis auctor Apollo*, "Apollo, the source of poetry."

at several points in the preceding elegies, reinforcing the association (2.1.25–26; *auguror,* 2.2.11, 2.4.51). Phoebus also inspired the Sibyl with song (specifically with poetry/verse: *senis pedibus*, line 16)[39] and is called upon to teach correct interpretation to Messallinus, the new *quindecimvir* (2.5.15–18):

> te duce Romanos numquam frustrata Sibylla,
> abdita quae senis fata canit pedibus.
> Phoebe, sacras Messallinum sine tangere chartas
> vatis, et ipse, precor, quid canat illa doce.
>
> Inspired by you, the Sibyl singing destiny obscure
> in hexameter verses has never failed the Romans.
> Phoebus, allow Messallinus to touch her sacred scrolls
> and teach him, I pray, the meaning of her song.

The source of both poetry/song and its interpretation, Phoebus empowers or potentially empowers both the poet (the Sibyl) and the reader (Messallinus).[40] Phoebus enables, so the poet of 2.5 hopes, a secure song and secure reading of that song.

Messallinus is not the only reader-figure in the poem. Just as the Sibyl is presented as one of a line of poet/prophets (named at lines 67–68), so Messallinus is presented as a "descendant" of Aeneas, an earlier "reader" of the Italian Sibyl's pronouncements (lines 19ff.). In fact, the text which Aeneas must read/interpret is presented within the text of 2.5 at lines 39–64. The nature of these lines as "text within text" is foregrounded by the introduction of the poet's depiction of Aeneas and the words of the Sibyl with *dicitur*, "it is said" (line 20). The Sibyl's words are not only in need of interpretation themselves, they are set within a text which is dependant on other texts or words (that which has been "said" about Aeneas) for *its* interpretation and presentation of these events. Readings are set within readings within readings.

The emphasis on reading or interpretation and its complexities inevitably foregrounds and reflects upon the reader of Book 2 and his/her

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39 Similarly, the Sibyl is described in words appropriate to a poet at line 65: *cecinit vates*, "the prophet/poet sang" (compare the self-description of the poet at line 114).

40 Messallinus may also be thought of as an implied reader of 2.5 itself.

own reading process. The poet/lover's words need interpretation as surely as do the Sibyl's words. The text of the Sibyl's prophecy which Aeneas must read demonstrates the role of knowledge or its lack in the process of interpretation. For the reader of Book 2, the meaning of the Sibyl's words may seem clear. The reader's knowledge of Roman "history" might allow them to see the Sibyl's prophecy as unproblematic and certain. Indeed, that is how the whole "tale" of Aeneas from line 19 on might be read. The outcome and meaning of the story are clear: the foundation of Rome. The details of the Sibyl's song can similarly be interpreted securely through the reader's knowledge of Roman mythic history. But the position of Aeneas, the first reader, is different. He begins without knowledge or trust: *nec fore credebat Romam*, "he did not believe that Rome would be" (line 21). At this point, Aeneas trying to read the future is akin to the reader of Book 2 negotiating an untrustworthy text which generates multiple possibilities and uncertainties. Yet, as far as Aeneas' own text (his future) is concerned, the reader of Book 2 is in a position superior to that of the hero. The reader *can* know that Rome will be. Aeneas' interpretation of the Sibyl's song at lines 39–64 is not made clear, but again the reader (from the perspective of Aeneas' future) is in a more secure interpretive position. But the focus on the reading process here and the role of the "poet" in that process draw issues to the surface which complicate the reader's security. As the introduction to them at line 19 and following suggests, the Sibyl's words are not simply a text. They are a text within the Tibullan poet's text (and possibly a text within a text within a text as *dicitur* at line 20 suggests). The Sibyl and Aeneas act as poet and reader within the text, but the Tibullan poet and his reader are the ones who determine the presentation and interpretation of the textual poet and reader and their relationship. Thus the Sibyl's text and Aeneas' relationship to it must be interpreted within and through the relationship of the reader of 2.5 to the Tibullan poet and his text. The suspicions and possibilities raised by the previous poems of the collection can all too easily invade a reading of 2.5 to destabilise the security which a "knowing" reader might otherwise feel when interpreting the Sibyl's song and the role of Aeneas.

The Sibyl's words are the Tibullan poet's words. The unreliability of words in this collection (and in Book 1) may in itself be enough to open fissures in the security of any interpretation of this prophecy. But there are several other elements which may serve to trigger such fissures. The Sibyl's own assertion at line 63, *vera cano*, "I sing of true things," recalls the poet/lover's assertion in the immediately preceding elegy: *vera quidem moneo*

(2.4.51). In the case of the poet/lover, the assertion was made in the context of a strategy (essentially a "prophecy" of combined threat and promise) which attempted to exploit the forms and impact of "prophecy" to encourage the beloved's compliance. In that case, the strategy was explicitly unsuccessful (2.4.51). But the echo in 2.5 allows the possibility that here, too, the poet/lover has ulterior motives.[41] Other elements of the presentation of Aeneas and the Sibyl's words reinforce a reader's suspicions. Aeneas is *volitantis frater Amoris*, "brother of flying Amor" (line 39). The association with Amor is direct (it is genetic) and stated in the first line of the Sibyl's song immediately after Aeneas' name. In the context of the collection so far, bearing in mind that the Sibyl's words are those of the *amor*-controlled poet/lover, this reference might trigger an association of Aeneas' prophesied victory and the consequent rise of Rome (detailed at lines 55 and following) with the domination of the poet/lover by *amor*. *Victoria* at line 45 is, like Amor at line 39, "flying" (*volitat Victoria*; Amor is also flying at 2.2.17: *advolet alis*). The rise of Rome, the *magna urbs*, disrupts the rural world at lines 55–56, echoing the disruption which Amor (and the re-reading of 2.1 as an *amor*-determined strategy) caused to the opening poem of the collection. (The palindromic relationship of Amor/Roma might even come into play at this point to further reinforce the link.) Amatory relationships of a sort also exist both within the poet's description of the site of Rome at the time of Aeneas' arrival and within his version of the Sibyl's prophecy of Rome's future. The two cases are linked by verbal parallel: *illac . . . gregis diti* ***placitura*** *magistro*, "the woman . . . who will please the rich master of the flock" (line 35) is echoed by *Marti* ***placitura*** *sacerdos | Ilia*, "Ilia the priestess who will please Mars" (lines 51–52). Amor is always there, both before Rome's foundation and at the very centre of its foundation story. But, in both cases, the male dominance (and, in Mars' case, *violent* dominance) within the relationships described is a reversal of the situation within the elegiac *amor*-relationship (specifically that depicted in 2.3 and 2.4). The poet's words here reflect an ideal of the elegiac lover (the *concubitus furtim*, "secret intercourse," of line 53 reflecting the desired outcome of all the poet/lover's strategies).

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41 While the debate over whether Tibullus or the initial readers of Book 2 had access to Book 6 of the *Aeneid* either through text or recitation seems intractable (on which see Ball 1983.213–16), the suggestion of something obscure within or behind the Sibyl's role here might be heightened by comparison with Virgil's description of the Sibyl *obscuris vera involvens*, "enfolding truth with obscurity" (*Aeneid* 6.100).

The presence of Amor in the poem may have been suggested by its very first word (*Phoebe*), since this is the second time in the collection that Phoebus has played a role, and the second time that he has been addressed. The first time, at 2.3.11–36, Apollo was an archetype of the (rustic) lover rather than appearing as the master poet or the master reader. This recent association may have encouraged the reader of the opening lines of 2.5 to expect something similar here. The presence of and allusions to Amor in the story of Aeneas and the Sibyl might activate a re-reading of the amatory associations of Apollo and, in turn, strengthen the possibilities of an "amatory" sub-text to 2.5. The reader's "knowledge" of the poet/lover in past poems thus complicates the reading of Aeneas and the Sibyl here. More than simply suggesting the role of the reader's knowledge, assumptions, expectations, or suspicions in the interpretive process, however, the suggestive presence of *amor* in 2.5 and the recollection of its impact on the poet/lover's words in previous poems jeopardise the security of any reading of the poem. This prayer to Phoebus and its components, like the prayers of 2.1, run the risk of being re-figured as an *amor*-determined strategy (or ideal) of the Tibullan poet/lover. This is a risk of which the presence of *amor* within the text, the parallels and recollections of the poet/lover's words and strategies in earlier poems, and the emphasis on the process of reading in 2.5 encourage the reader to be constantly aware.

The imperative for interpretation is further emphasised in the description of the signs foretold by other prophets/Sibyls which follows the Sibyl's song to Aeneas (2.5.67–78):

> Quicquid Amalthea, quicquid Marpesia dixit
> Herophile, Phoeto Graia quod admonuit,
> quasque Aniena sacras Tiburs per flumina sortes
> portarat sicco pertuleratque sinu—
> haec fore dixerunt belli mala signa cometen,
> multus ut in terras deplueretque lapis.
> atque tubas atque arma ferunt strepitantia caelo
> audita, et lucos praecinuisse fugam.
> ipsum etiam Solem, defectum lumine, vidit
> iungere pallentes nubilus annus equos,
> et simulacra deum lacrimas fudisse tepentes,
> fataque vocales praemonuisse boves.
>
> That which Amalthea and Marpessian Herophile spoke,
> the admonitions of Grecian Phoeto,

> the sacred lots which Tibur's Sibyl carried as she swam
> down the Anio and brought them to dry land—
> all these foretold a comet, the ill-boding sign of war,
> and a rain of stones falling to the earth,
> and they say that trumpets and the clang of arms were
> heard
> in the sky, and that the sacred groves forechanted rout.
> That cloudy year saw Sol himself
> harnessing pale horses in eclipse,
> and images of gods shed warm tears,
> and cattle speaking, prophesying doom.

Two levels of interpretation/reading are implied here. Firstly, there are the predictions of the Sibyls, with the emphasis on their words: *quicquid . . . dixit . . . quod admonuit . . . haec fore dixerunt* (lines 67–68 and 71), and the anonymous reporters suggested by *ferunt* (line 73). These words *describe* the signs and require an initial level of interpretation. Secondly, there are the signs of which the words spoke: the prodigies themselves. These involve sound, in some cases implying words once again (*tubas atque arma . . . strepitantia . . .* | *audita*; *praecinuisse . . .* | *fataque vocales praemonuisse boves*). They also involve sight (*videt*). There is also a third level of interpretation, that to be applied by the reader of the Tibullan text to this passage. These *mala signa* can be seen as representative samples of the sorts of "dreadful prodigies" which would spur the *quindecimviri* into action,[42] implying yet another level of reading: the consultation of the Sibylline books. But the juxtaposition of this passage foretelling dire events with the Sibyl's song to Aeneas foretelling the rise of Rome suggests that the consequences of that rise are not wholly beneficial.[43] If the reader carries through to this passage the association of Rome's rise with the power of Amor, the dire prodigies of lines 67–78, with their tears, pallor, and premonitions of war, suggest a parallel between the consequences of the poet/lover's enslavement by *amor*[44] and those of Rome's power. *Amor* multiplies meaning, complicating reading.

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42 Murgatroyd 1994.163.

43 Specifically, the list of prodigies given here suggests the prodigies which marked Julius Caesar's death and foretold the turmoil and civil war which followed: see Murgatroyd 1994.211, Putnam 1973.191.

44 And *amor* has its *signa*, too: see 1.8.11ff.

At lines 79–80, the poet looks towards his and his readers' own future and asks Apollo to prevent such *prodigia* occurring again: *haec fuerunt olim, sed tu iam mitis, Apollo,* | *prodigia indomitis merge sub aequoribus*, "these occurred in the past, but now in mercy, Apollo, | drown prodigies beneath the untamed sea" (2.5.79–80).[45] Here the poet attempts to relegate the horrible events foretold by the prodigies to the past.[46] But this also attempts to put an end to the need for interpretation (incidentally, putting the *quindecimviri* and Messallinus, the central "reader-figure" of the poem, out of a job!). The poet looks for a security ensured by Apollo (master poet/master reader), which reflects the poet/lover's desire for security within the *amor*-relationship. Security lies in or involves the end of the reading process.

The call for an end to the need for interpretation is ironic given the next twenty lines (83–112) which re-enact the process of reading the opening poems of the collection (2.1–2.4). Lines 83–100 recall the rural milieu of 2.1, an environment whose well-being is apparently guaranteed by omens (2.5.81–82) as in the opening poem (2.1.25–26). Ceres and Bacchus are once more the attendant deities. Song and dance feature prominently. There is a festival setting as in 2.1. While 2.1 might not be specifically celebrating the Parilia,[47] as is explicitly the case here, there is an emphasis on purification and fertility in both cases.[48] The prominence of family at lines 91–94 and the interaction of grandfathers and grandchildren similarly recall 2.2.17–20. But, at lines 101ff., *amor* and the language of the elegiac *amor*-relationship irrupt once more. The *maledicta* ("curses") hurled by the *iuvenis* at the *puella* recall the threats and curses deployed by the Tibullan poet/lover in 2.3 and 2.4, while the *vota* of line 102 recall the poet/lover's reliance on such

45 The association of the sea (*indomita aequora*) with the unknown/never known here might suggest an interpretation of the occurrence of water and the crossing of water at several points in the poem (the crossing of the Velabrum by boat before its draining after the foundation of Rome at lines 33–34; the carrying of the *sacrae sortes per flumina* at lines 69–70; and perhaps, by implication, Aeneas' carrying of his people and gods over the sea to Italy and the Roman future). All these might be seen as expressions of the ideal interpretive move from the unknown to certainty, associated in each case with the rise of Roman power.

46 Although there is some variation among surviving manuscripts, the alternatives to reading *fuerunt* in line 79 (*fuerint* or *fuerant*) do not invalidate this point.

47 2.1 is usually interpreted as celebrating the Ambarvalia: see Murgatroyd 1994.17–19.

48 The Parilia, like the Ambarvalia, involved rituals of purification. Both are usually interpreted as being directed towards ensuring and protecting the fertility of the crops.

vows in all the poems of the collection so far. Even the young man's change of mind (or tactic) at lines 102–04 suggests the shifting tactics of the poet/lover in the previous two elegies and will be directly recalled in the closing poem when the poet seemingly (and perhaps disingenuously) pulls back from exploiting the threat that Nemesis' dead sister will come back to haunt her for fear that he will exacerbate his beloved's grief (2.6.41–42). The *mens mala* ("bad mind") of the *iuvenis* is also recalled by and related to the *mens perdita* of the poet/lover at 2.6.51. As with its initial introduction into 2.1 (and 2.2), however, the operation of Amor seems at first to be integrated into a rural world. There is even the possibility (as was suggested in the opening two elegies) that Amor will be re-appropriated and transformed from the savage force (*acer Amor,* 2.6.15) common to elegy (2.5.105–08):

> Pace tua pereant arcus pereantque sagittae,
> Phoebe, modo in terris erret inermis Amor.
> ars bona, sed postquam sumpsit sibi tela Cupido,
> eheu quam multis ars dedit ista malum!
>
> By your grace, may bows and arrows perish,
> Phoebus, if only Amor may wander the earth unarmed.
> Art is good, but after Cupid took up archery,
> alas, to how many has art brought misfortune!

Apollo, the master poet/reader, the bringer of certainty, is looked to as the one to remove the danger from *amor*, just as he was looked to to remove the dangers represented by *prodigia* and thus the need for their interpretation. The insecurity in both cases (reading process/interpretation and *amor*-relationship) is similar. The poet hopes that the cure will be similar too: the removal by Phoebus of the dangers involved in or consequent upon each.

As in poems 2.3 and 2.4, the intrusion of a non-specific *amor* (with hopes or implications that it will be re-formed and re-integrated) is followed by the emphatic re-emergence of the poet as *lover* and the specific *amor*-relationship in which he is involved (2.5.109–12):

> et mihi praecipue, iaceo cum saucius annum
> et faveo morbo, cum iuvat ipse dolor.
> usque cano Nemesim, sine qua versus mihi nullus
> verba potest iustos aut reperire pedes.

> and on me especially, for I have lain a year now stricken,
> and I encourage the sickness, finding pleasure in the pain.
> Continuously I sing of Nemesis, without whom not one
> line of mine
> can rediscover right phrase or rhythm.

Wounded by *amor*, the poet/lover is actively nurturing his passion figured here as a (perhaps deranging) sickness. Moreover, at lines 111–12, *amor* is explicitly described as determining the poet/lover's verse. There is (or would be) *no* poetry without the beloved: *sine qua versus mihi nullus | verba potest iustos aut reperire pedes*. As suggested above, the "knowing" reader may already have suspicions about *amor*'s role in determining the poet's words. But, if the reader does not have or has suppressed such suspicions, these lines (like poem 2.3) have the potential to radically re-arrange his/her reading up to this point. The power of these lines to retrospectively permeate the lines which have gone before can be resisted only by the most determinedly restrictive reading.[49] If Nemesis determines the poet/lover's words (*verba*) and poetry, the possibility is raised that the poem as a whole has as its *primary* aim the securing of a positive response to the couplet which follows: *At tu, nam divum servat tutela poetas, | praemoneo, vati parce puella sacro*, "but you, since divine guardianship protects poets, | I warn you, girl, take pity on the sacred bard" (2.5.113–14). The support of Phoebus, the authority of prophecy, the association of his own poetry and his position as a poet with the songs and status of the Sibyl are all now marshalled to the end of securing the *puella*'s compliance with his desires (requested with the familiar Tibullan refrain, *parce*). 2.5 can now be re-read as, in large part, an elaborate strategy to engineer Nemesis' favour.[50] The poet links the security of the poetic process (the production of *iusti pedes* and *verba*) with security within the *amor*-relationship (Nemesis' compliance with his desires). Both are determined by the presence of Nemesis. As seen already in the collection, and demonstrated by the need for a verb such as *parce*, such a basis for

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49 See, for example, the argument of Murgatroyd 1994.231: "The idea here can hardly be, as some would have it, that T. writes exclusively of Nemesis, she is his sole inspiration and he cannot compose a single verse not inspired by her, when in the very same poem T. has produced over a hundred lines without reference to her and inspired by different subjects."

50 Even then *parce* seems a weak culmination to this strategy, leaving the final power with Nemesis and the poet/lover at her mercy. Given the presentation of Nemesis in other poems, the strategy seems unlikely to be successful.

security is very tenuous indeed. These lines once more bring the intertwining of *amor*-relationship and reading process to the fore. For just as the poet/lover expresses his desire for stability in his relationship with the *puella*, so this expression itself (the intrusion of the *amor*-relationship at this point) has the power to destabilise the reader's understanding of the text.

The return in the final lines of the poem to Messallinus, the reader-figure, would seem to set him in a position of power and security as *triumphator* (2.5.115–22):

> ut Messallinum celebrem cum praemia belli
> ante suos currus oppida victa feret,
> ipse gerens laurus, lauro devinctus agresti
> miles "io" magna voce "Triumphe" canet.
> tunc Messalla meus pia det spectacula turbae
> et plaudat curru praetereunte pater.
> annue: sic tibi sint intonsi, Phoebe, capilli,
> sic tua perpetuo sit tibi casta soror.
>
> so that I may celebrate Messallinus when he drives
> the spoils of conquered towns before his chariot,
> himself crowned with laurel, and the soldier garlanded
> with rustic laurel will sing in a loud voice "Io
> Triumphe!"
> Then let my Messalla give the crowd a pious spectacle
> as the father cheers his son's passing chariot.
> Grant this: and so may your hair remain unshorn,
> Phoebus,
> so may your sister be chaste to the end of time.

The triumph here recalls the depiction of Phoebus in the opening lines as himself a *triumphator* (2.5.5) and as celebrating the triumph of Jupiter (2.5.9–10).[51] The triumph would seem to provide a secure context and meaning both for the triumphal song of the poet and *miles* of line 118 (*"io, Triumphe"*) and for the reader-figure, Messallinus, who is represented as a

51 It also recalls the triumph of Messalla celebrated in 1.7 and thus suggests a continuation of familial glory and power. This parallel is underlined by the presence of Messallinus' father and the poet's patron, *meus Messalla*, at line 119.

conqueror at line 116. The twin roles of Phoebus as *triumphator* and celebrator of triumph at lines 5–10 interlock with his twin roles as master reader and master poet. These twin roles are now reflected in the roles of Messallinus/*triumphator*/reader and "Tibullus"/celebrator of triumph/poet. These final lines thus represent the certainty and power which the poet desires for himself and for Messallinus and the certainty (the control over meaning) which the reader of his text may also desire. Or, rather, they represent the hope for such certainty, since these lines exploit the link between poetry and prophecy which has featured strongly throughout the elegy. They posit a *future* triumph of Messallinus. The triumph of poet and reader remains deferred.

But there is a potentially far more destabilising factor than deferral at work in these lines. The poet's prospective celebration of the triumph of Messallinus is presented as dependant on Nemesis' "sparing" of the poet/lover (2.5.113–16):

> At tu, nam divum servat tutela poetas,
> praemoneo, vati parce puella sacro,
> ut Messallinum celebrem cum praemia belli
> ante suos currus oppida victa feret.
>
> But you, since divine guardianship protects poets,
> I warn you, girl, take pity on the sacred bard,
> so that I may celebrate Messallinus when he drives
> the spoils of conquered towns before his chariot.

The poet/lover's ability to celebrate and partake in the triumph is entirely dependant on the beloved. She is addressed like a god here. In fact, *at tu* at line 113 might seem at first to be an address to Phoebus (who has been the primary addressee in the poem up to this point) until *puella* appears as the second last word of the pentameter; and, in reverse, *annue* at line 121 seems at first to be addressed to Nemesis following on from *parce* in line 114 before the remainder of that line reveals that it is an address to Phoebus. The demarcation here between how much of lines 115–20 is dependant on Nemesis and how much is to be granted by Phoebus' power is obscure. The poet seems to be pitting the two against each other: Phoebus the (male) bringer of certainty against Nemesis the (female) destabilising force; this would recall the poet's attempted opposition of Phoebus and Amor at lines

105–08.[52] But any degree of dependence on the compliance of the intransigent elegiac *domina* jeopardises the poet's desired place in the anticipated triumph.

CONCLUSION

The insecurities and fluctuations involved in reading Tibullan elegy make the reader a double of the poet/lover: his insecurities over the effectiveness of his words, his powerlessness within the *amor*-relationship. The search for certain meaning within the Tibullan collections matches the poet/lover's desire and search for stability within the *amor*-relationship: his desire for the presence of the beloved, his maintenance of a hope through which that presence is anticipated but forever deferred. The two (reading process and *amor*-relationship, reader and poet/lover) are in fact interlocked. The poet/lover's search for stability and presence, the strategies adopted (or possibly adopted) for this purpose, have the potential to destabilise any reading of the elegies. The positions of poet/lover and reader fluctuate in resonance with each other. It is sometimes said that, in elegy, "to love is to write" or indeed "to write is to love." It might also be said that, in Tibullan elegy, "to read is to love."[53] At the least, the two are represented as very similar and inter-related processes.

This inter-relation, in turn, projects the strongly gendered power dynamics of the elegiac *amor*-relationship onto the relationship of reader to text. The reader is aligned with the male poet/lover in his thwarted search for authority and stability, while the intractable text is aligned with the female beloved as the object in relation to which stability is desired and over which authority is sought. But the gender dynamic here is an anomalous one.[54] The

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52 This opposition is strengthened by the linking of Phoebus to his sister who, in the final words of the elegy, is characterised as *casta* ("chaste"), perhaps in contrast to Nemesis.

53 Compare Maria Wyke's (1987) investigation of the Propertian beloved as *scripta puella* ("written woman") which suggests this connection between being loved and being written/read; see also Alison Sharrock's argument (1994.291) that in Ovid's *Ars Amatoria II*: "the acts of reading and loving are collapsed into an identification." Although the conclusions in this respect may be broadly similar for the Propertian corpus (as argued by Wyke), for Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* (as argued by Sharrock), and for the Tibullan corpus (as argued in the present article), the ways in which the poet-beloved-reader nexus is constructed and operates are very different in each case.

54 For a discussion of the anomalous nature of the Tibullan poet/lover and the implications of such anomaly in Book 1 see Lee-Stecum 1998.292–99.

elegiac poet/lover, as has often been observed, in many ways abdicates the Roman cultural norm of male authority and control (a norm which the Tibullan poet/lover gestures towards with the phrase *libertas paterna* at 2.4.2) and "takes the woman's part."[55] This might suggest a characteristically elegiac destabilisation of gender categories onto which the sort of destabilisation which I have described at work in the Tibullan text closely maps. Yet the "persistent discursive mastery of the male narrator over his female object of desire" (Wyke 1995.118) always allows this "gender play" to be stabilised by re-figuring the poet as the ultimate controlling (male) authority of/over the text. This, too, might be compared to the position of the reader, who shares the anxieties and possible powerlessness of the poet/lover, but only to the extent that the reader's position can always be re-figured as a controlling one (foreclosing/determining meaning).

I commented at the outset that the Tibullan text resists certainty in precisely the areas in which, at the time of its production, authority was being renegotiated and re-established around the figure of Augustus (a figure who is himself famously absent from the Tibullan text).[56] This gives particular piquancy to the instability of Tibullan elegy, but not necessarily as an element of dissent or resistance to the Augustan reorganisation of authority itself. It is perhaps the final uncertainty of the text that the instability which pervades it (invading the fields of growing Augustan authority such as ritual and prophecy) could equally bespeak the *need* for the absent presence, the deferred certainty—and even the absent presence of Augustus himself—to re-establish the authority and certainty which is the unsecured ideal of poet and reader.[57] (The close association of Augustus and Palatine Apollo, the master poet and reader, becomes active here.) The unresolved issue of the forever deferred presence, the authority which is sought but not secured,

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55 See Wyke 1995.111 for a discussion of the "gender play" of Roman elegy and the various critical models of the "feminisation" of the poet/lover: "Augustan elegy can be said to 'take the woman's part' in its central construction of a female object for erotic discourse (the *puella*) and in its attribution of traditionally feminine characteristics to its male narrator (the *ego*)."

56 See, for example, Solmsen 1962.297, Davies 1973.30, Little 1982.314, and Lee-Stecum 1998.301 for discussion of this absent presence in Tibullus' poetry.

57 Compare Duncan Kennedy (1992.45) on Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* and "the discursive context which both enables the *Ars Amatoria* as witty and sophisticated text *and* constitutes it at the same time as what-must-be-repressed. This is the logic that helps to generate the 'necessity' of an 'Augustus,' and thus plays an integral part in creating and sustaining the position of Augustus."

thus engages in a very particular way with Roman social, cultural, and political dynamics of the 20s and early teens B.C.E.

The reader of Tibullan elegy is prey to the possible manipulations, ambiguities, and deceptions of an untrustworthy text. Yet any fictional world is open to being represented as "untrustworthy" in the sense of "unreal." Since there are no external points of reference by which to assess its "untrustworthiness" or otherwise, the charge of untrustworthiness could be seen as invalid. But these paradoxical difficulties of establishing the "realities" of a fiction are precisely what the Tibullan text draws attention to and plays with. The reader has no "solid ground" to cling to. The impact of the destabilisation of reading is in fact heightened by the interweaving of apparently "real" reference points from the world of Roman social, religious, and military affairs (Messalla, Messallinus, the *quindecimviri,* etc.) into the elegiac world just as it is by (in the first book at least) the use of the name "Tibullus" to designate the poet/lover.[58] These elements encourage the reader to attempt to reconstruct a reality from the text. But, within the elegiac landscape, these apparently solid reference points become effects of the text prone to reformation and manipulation under the pressure of *amor*, elegy's paradigmatic destabilising force. In such a shifting landscape, the reader moves (or is engineered, if a controlling author-figure is assumed) into a process of constant re-reading. Wolfgang Iser has famously described reading as a process of "filling in the gaps" (1978.166–67). In Tibullan elegy, the presence of such gaps is emphatic, yet the reader can seldom be sure exactly where they are. The reader must sustain multiple readings and re-readings or exclude readings on the basis of assumptions which are always vulnerable (always prey to falling into one of Iser's "gaps"). Yet it is only by risking such vulnerability that the illusion of mastery over the meaning of the text can be attained. This is the process which the Tibullan text enacts and foregrounds within individual poems, across each collection, and across the corpus of the poet's work.[59]

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58 By suggesting that the first person persona of the elegies "is" the flesh and blood author of the poems, Tibullus, this co-incidentally uses the unity of the author to suggest a single, unified persona for the poet/lover throughout the poems of the collection even when the name is not used.

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