

## THE THEME OF TIME AS A POETIC DEVICE IN THE ELEGIES OF TIBULLUS

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The early Greek poets had no strict concept of time, nor should we expect them to. Homer, however, beautifully portrays the poignancy of passing youth and the young warrior's strength that diminishes with age, and he loves to dwell on old men's reminiscences of their past deeds of glory.<sup>1</sup> In a famous simile, he compares the generations of men to the leaves that fall from the trees;<sup>2</sup> and Mimnermus uses a similar image in a song on the brevity of youth.<sup>3</sup> For Pindar, time is "the father of all things";<sup>4</sup> but it cannot undo the evil deeds of men; rather it reveals them, and then "forgetfulness may come with happiness."<sup>5</sup> Pindar's concept of world-time culminates in an endless cycle of existence, wherein "in equal days and nights . . . the good enjoy a life without pain, not harassing the soil by the might of their hands."<sup>6</sup> Here time has a calming, consoling aspect, that soothes the anxiety of men.

<sup>1</sup> *Iliad* 1.259–73; 4.318–21; 11.670–761, and elsewhere (of the past glory of Nestor).

<sup>2</sup> *Iliad* 6.146–49.

<sup>3</sup> Mimnermus 2.1–4 (ed. Diehl).

<sup>4</sup> *Olymp.* 2.17.

<sup>5</sup> *Olymp.* 2.17–18.

<sup>6</sup> *Olymp.* 2.61 ff. It is instructive to set the statements of the poets within the framework of the philosophic discussion on time, although but rarely did the poets (with the exception of Lucretius) take advantage of it. Parmenides, for example, taught the eternal presence of all things (*VS* 10 28, B8.5–6): "[Being] has no past or future, but exists altogether in the present, one, entire, and consistent." For Plato, however, especially in the *Timaeus* 37D–38A, time is linked with the movement of the universe —the stars, to be exact—and is thus the basis of our true predication of "was," "is," and "will be," and thus in a relative sense of "is," and "is not." For the lengthy, analytic treatment of Aristotle, see especially *Physica* 4.10–13, 217B–223 (ed. W. D. Ross, Oxford 1960), where he establishes the famous definition that time is "the measure of motion ordered sequentially." The Stoic view of time was largely modeled on the

In Sophocles, time is portrayed as a kind of divine power that works with *Moira* in bringing all things to completion, or else—as though identified with Helios, the sun—as a divine eye that sees all, good and evil, and reveals the awful secrets of mankind. As the aged Oedipus says to Theseus in the *Coloneus* (607–10):

Dear son of Aegeus, the gods alone age not  
Nor die. All else corrupts beneath  
Almighty Time. The strength of earth and body  
All decay.

But contrast the shocked cry of the Chorus in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* (1213–15):

All-seeing Time has found you out  
Against your will, long since condemning  
This marriageless marriage,  
Both begetting and begotten.

But the poignancy of time, as a poetic device, seems to become common in Roman poetry. In Horace, for example, time is portrayed as a distance irrevocably traveled, and which can no longer be recovered.<sup>7</sup> Strangely enough, it is in the *Ars poetica* (60–63), that Horace adopts the Homeric metaphor of the falling leaves:

ut silvae foliis pronos mutantur in annos,  
prima cadunt: ita verborum vetus interit actas,  
et iuvenum ritu florent modo nata vigentque.  
debemur morti nos nostraque. . . .

Aristotelian. Time for Zeno is “a dimension of motion, that is, the measure and criterion of swiftness and slowness. All things that have been, that are, and are accomplished occur in accordance with this”: see A. C. Pearson, *The Fragments of Zeno and Cleanthes* (London 1891) Zeno, frag. 76, p. 130. And on this and the similar definition of Chrysippus, see J. von Arnim, *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta* (Leipzig 1905–24) 1.93, p. 26, and 2.509, p. 164. For Epicurus, time has no existence apart from the events (*eventa*, *συμπτώματα*) and the attendant feelings and experiences which make them up: see his *Epistle to Herodotus* 72–73 Arrighetti. See also the passage on time in Lucretius 1.459–63, with the commentary of C. Bailey, *T. Lucreti Cari De rerum natura libri sex* (Oxford 1947) 2.675–76. For a general discussion of the subject, see A. Aliotta, “Tempo,” *Encyclopedie filosofica* (Rome 1957) 4.1124–31, with the bibliography there cited; cf. also A. Levi, “Il concetto del tempo nella filosofia dell’età romana,” *Rivista critica di storia della filosofia* 7 (1952) 173–200.

<sup>7</sup> *Serm.* 1.6.94–95; in the context Horace is saying that he would not have chosen a different father even if he could relive his life again.

All things are doomed to pass: but like new generations of men, so too new words arise and flourish; language is kept up to date by fresh coinages and usage.

But it is especially in his lyric poetry that Horace expresses the emotional aspect of time, in the inexorable march of the years and the approach of old age and death. In the lovely spring ode (*Carm. 1.4*), and the song of the succession of the seasons (*Carm. 4.7*), Horace stresses the brevity of man's springtime and the inevitable coming of pale Death. Again the poignancy of youth and old age emerges in *Vides ut alta* (*Carm. 1.9*): *quid sit futurum cras fuge quaerere*; young people should enjoy their brief springtime, *donec virenti canities abest / morosa*. But the emotional aspect of time is perhaps best expressed in Horace's memorable ode to Postumus (*Carm. 2.14*):<sup>8</sup>

Eheu fugaces, Postume, Postume,  
labuntur anni. . . .

Time brings greater opportunity for reflection and philosophy; but nothing—neither piety nor love—can forestall its passage, separating us from the carefree loves and companions of our youth. Once old, we can no longer wish to seem young and dance with the groups of boys and girls.<sup>9</sup>

In approaching the theme of time as a poetic device in Tibullus,<sup>10</sup> we at once realize that there is a kind of blurring of the distinction between past, present, and future. Time for Tibullus seems always a subjective experience that enhances the sensuous overtones of his verse. For the true lover, indeed, has no sense of time in the eternal now of his love. Yet there is in Tibullus' poetry the use of a subtle time-shift which would seem to go far beyond the simple motif that we found in Horace.

<sup>8</sup> On the ode, see P. Callahan and H. Musurillo, "The Wine of Life," *CJ* 62 (1967) 367–69, with the bibliography.

<sup>9</sup> See *Carm. 4.13.1–12*.

<sup>10</sup> There has been no extensive discussion of time in Tibullus save for a few brief remarks by H. Eisenberger, "Der innere Zusammenhang der Motive in Tibulls Gedicht I.3," *Hermes* 88 (1960), 188–97. For the vast bibliography, see in general, F. W. Lenz, *Albii Tibulli aliorumque carminum libri tres*<sup>2</sup> (Leyden 1964), with the entries on 37–41, 170–2; and add also E. N. O'Neil, *A Critical Concordance of the Tibullan Corpus* (Amer. Philol. Assoc. Monograph 21, 1963). In my analysis of the first two books of the Tibullan corpus I have for the most part followed the edition of Lenz, with occasional use of the Budé edition of M. Ponchon (ed. 5, Paris 1961), and the Oxford edition of J. P. Postgate (Oxford 1915; repr. 1959).

Like Horace, Tibullus stresses the urgency of the present, in which there is so little time to love before the darkness will descend (1.1.69-72):

interea dum fata sinunt, iungamus amores.  
iam veniet tenebris Mors adoperta caput;  
iam subrepet iners aetas nec amare decebit,  
dicere nec cano blanditias capite.

This theme is expressed in more explicit detail in Priapus' advice to young lovers in Tibullus 1.4.27-30.<sup>11</sup> While Priapus bids the poet to be patient in the arts of love, he ironically urges him at the same time to act quickly, or time will pass him by:

at si tardus eris errabis: transiet aetas.  
quam cito non segnis stat remeatque dies,  
quam cito purpureos deperdit terra colores,  
quam cito formosas populus alta comas!

*Quam cito . . . cito . . . cito*, in urgent tricolon, presses the message home, and it recalls the Epicurean doctrine of the fragility and brevity of all beauty,<sup>12</sup> which we must enjoy before the imminent dissolution and decay.

For Tibullus, the immediate link between the present and the darkening shadows of the future is the prospect of sickness or old age: the *iners aetas* (1.1.71), or *infirma, pigra senecta* (1.4.31, 10.40). Soon enough, the poet tells Pholoe, will come the day when passion dies (1.8.47-48):

at tu, dum primi floret tibi temporis aetas  
utere: non tardo labitur illa pede.

Old men will weep for the days that have gone by (1.4.33-34), try to change their faces and dye their hair (1.8.41-44), and lay sad garlands on the tombs of their departed loves (1.4.47). Tibullus paints a brilliantly acid picture of old age. The old man, his limbs now disfigured by rheumatism, is avoided by the young girl of good breeding (1.9.73-74); most pathetic of all is the old man who once ridiculed the

<sup>11</sup> For the text, see Lenz, 61, whom I follow in reading *transiet* at 27 and in the general punctuation of the passage.

<sup>12</sup> See Lucretius 2.1164-73, with the commentary of Bailey (above, note 6) 2.982-83; cf. Epicurus, *Ep. to Herod.* 72-73 Arrighetti.

loves of the young and now puts his own neck under the yoke of Venus (1.2.89-94). Old age is the time for telling stories of the exploits of times gone by (1.10.44; cf. Lygdamus, 3.5.26). And in elegy 1.6.77-82 Tibullus paints a striking portrait of the elderly woman, now bent with the years, who sits alone tending her yarn, while the young boys and girls laugh at her because she never married. Yet, despite this dismal picture of old age, Tibullus envisages a happy life for himself and Delia and prays that Venus will keep them faithful lovers till their hair is white (1.6.85-86):

haec aliis maledicta cadant: nos, Delia, amoris  
exemplum cana simus uterque coma.

Now as we analyze Tibullus' elegies more closely, we will note the recurrence of a peculiar device whereby the love of the present is linked with thoughts of death<sup>13</sup> or old age in the future, and again with a nostalgic longing for a Golden Age long past. This present-future-past pattern is at the center of the charming elegy 1.3, which vividly portrays Tibullus' feelings when he was left behind by Messalla Corvinus' army at Corcyra, on their way to the Middle East. With a morbid sense of imminent doom, the poet tells Delia that her prayers to the goddess Isis were of no avail (23-24); and, after a wish that he one day may return home to his beloved *Lares*, the poet's mind drifts to the distant past of the Golden Age, when men lived and loved in leisure on a generous earth, without pain, war, or the fear of violent death (35-50). The motifs, of course, are conventional; but it is Tibullus' subtle use of them within his poetic time-structure that is noteworthy. Next, his mind darts forward to the future, and he conjures up a vision of his own death and his passage to the Underworld (51-82). Here we note a division into two parts: the *campi Elysii* (57-66) for those who have been loyal to Venus and to love; and the *scelerata sedes*, the abode of the accursed (67-82), for those who have been unfaithful in life or in love (Ixion, Tityus, Tantalus, and the daughters of Danaus).<sup>14</sup> There too the poet consigns (81-82)

quicumque meos violavit amores,  
optavit lentes et mihi militias.

<sup>13</sup> See H. Eisenberger (above, note 10) especially 194.

<sup>14</sup> On Hades, see H. Musurillo, *Symbol and Myth in Ancient Poetry* (New York 1961 111-13).

The beautifully conceived close (83–94), *at tu casta precor maneas . . .*, evokes a vision of tender hope: the poet will one day come home, and his beloved Delia will come running out to meet him, with long hair down, her feet unshod, as he arrives unexpectedly from his journey.

What is unique and striking about this poem is Tibullus' control of the time-pattern: it is a kind of inner monologue, wherein the poet's present anxiety and illness evoke the Golden Age of the past<sup>15</sup> and, without perceptible transition, the hope of Delia's love and the Elysian happiness of the future. Wars are accursed because they have deprived him of his love and brought on his present illness; blessed were the days of old when there were no wars, nothing to separate faithful lovers; and, finally, the grim vision of death is tempered by the playful fantasy of the Afterlife as truly a Hades of Venus, where faithful love will separate the evil from the good. Although the separate themes are indeed conventional, they are here bound together in a perfect unity; and what prevents the piece from becoming a tedious moral sermon on the plight of man is the immediacy and warmth of Delia's love, her prayers and her anxious waiting for his return. As the present love is the poet's one source of hope and perseverance, so too it is the central poetic link that binds the past to the future.

A somewhat similar pattern may be detected in Tibullus 1.10, a prayerful reverie addressed to the *Lares* and to *Pax alma*. There is a twofold division: the first part (1–38) enlarges on mankind's involvement in war and slaughter since the close of the Golden Age; the second part (39–68) is in the form of a hymn to *Pax alma* in praise of the farmer's simple joys and loves, his family, and his sincere cult of the *di rustici*. The central theme of the poem is based, once again, upon the poetic time-pattern. The dream of the Golden Age was destroyed with the invention of the sword. In a bitter aside the poet berates the folly of men who, by war, only hasten black Death, which will come in any case without invitation (33–34). Men should devote themselves to the farm, their families, and their flocks (in imitation, the poet seems to imply, of the lost Golden Age), and live and love while Fate allows.

<sup>15</sup> On the Golden Age, see Hesiod, *Works and Days* 109 ff.; Poseidonius, as quoted by Seneca, *Epist. Morales* 90.36–46. See in general Kirby Flower Smith, "Ages of the World," Hastings' *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* 1 (1900) 192–200; H. J. Rose, *A Handbook of Greek Mythology*<sup>5</sup> (London 1953) 43–45.

For the *bella Martis* men should substitute the *bella Veneris* (53), those harmless mock-battles that begin only to end in love's embrace. It is a message, however trite and ancient, that even modern man has failed to assimilate.

At this point it is important to note how the *di rustici* not only serve Tibullus' theme but also, occasionally, his time-structure. One of the keys to the meaning of 1.10, for example, is the concept of *Pax* (cf. 45, 47, 67), that goddess of the Italic soil<sup>16</sup> who would restore the equilibrium of a lost age and promise fertility for the future: *Pax aluit vites*. She is the divine spirit which, in the poet's mind, binds the golden past with the future age of bliss as yet unrealized and ideal: *at nobis, Pax alma, veni!* Parallel with the role of *Pax* in 1.10.45-50 is that of *Spes*, another Italic goddess of the harvest,<sup>17</sup> in 2.6.19-26. But *Spes* has a further function: it is Hope that soothes the pain of the present and promises that the morrow will be better:

iam mala finissem leto, sed credula vitam  
 Spes foveat et fore cras semper ait melius.  
 Spes alit agricolas, Spes sulcis credit aratis  
     semina quae magno faenore reddit ager;  
 haec laqueo volucres, haec capta harundine pisces  
     cum tenues hamos abdidit ante cibus;  
 Spes etiam valida solatur compede vinctum:  
     crura sonant ferro sed canit inter opus.

<sup>16</sup> It is admittedly difficult to determine when *Pax* in Tibullus should be capitalized (as a goddess); yet it would seem that the special blessings requested by the poet in 1.10, concluding with the invocation, *Pax alma, veni* (1.10.67), should be enough to assure us that the goddess is intended in 1.10.45 and 47, as in 67, and the text should be modified accordingly: see Lenz, 89; O'Neil, *Concordance*, 231. On the goddess *Pax*, see Ludwig Preller, *Römische Mythologie* (Berlin 1858) 2.250; Georg Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Römer*<sup>2</sup> (Munich 1912) 334-35; Carl Koch, "Pax," *RE* 18 (1949) 2430-36, with the literature cited (though he stresses the political-military nature of the deity). For *Pax* in Ovid, see Franz Bömer, P. Ovidius Naso: *Die Fasten* (Heidelberg 1958) 2.77, commenting on Ovid, *Fasti* 1.710-22.

<sup>17</sup> Editors have been more liberal in considering *Spes* as a *numen* and capitalizing the word accordingly: see O'Neil, *Concordance* 297 (five instances), and to this number should perhaps be restored 1.1.9,

nec Spes destituat, sed frugum semper acervos  
     praebeat;

for, while *spem destituere* is indeed an accepted idiom, in the context of the poet's prayer the *acervos praebeat* suggests that he is thinking of a harvest *numen*. On *Spes*, see Wissowa (above, note 16) 329-31, and Kurt Latte in *RE* 3 A (1929) 1634-36.

It should be noted how subtly the gods of the old Italic countryside not only support the mood and tone of Tibullus' poetry, but also the shifting time-pattern. Like the *antiqui Lares* (1.1.20, 2.1.60), so beloved, the gods are for the poet a link with the hallowed past of Italy; they are symbols of permanence and stability in the restless movement of time; they promise blessings for the future, and add luster and dignity to the festal gathering where men pay them homage in the simple surroundings of the countryside. Most frequently mentioned is Bacchus-Liber (1.7.39-42, 2.1.55, and elsewhere), so dear to the Italian farmer in his work on the fields and the vines; like *Spes* (cf. 2.6.19-26 with 1.7.39-42), Liber soothes and heals the present anxieties of man, and helps him bear his sorrowful burdens. Ceres and Minerva too have ties with the life of the countryside: of Ceres little need be said, as she *sua de caelo prospicit arva* (2.5.58); her role in the farmer's life is taken for granted (cf. 1.1.15; 2.5.58, 84; and elsewhere). Minerva is of more concern for the women as they toil within the house in making clothes for the family (2.1.61-66). Pales is a *numen* of the fields, whose cult, the Palilia, the poet is at pains not to neglect (1.1.36; 2.5.18, 87); there is Pan (2.5.27); and especially Priapus (1.1.18; 1.4.9 ff.), in whose mouth Tibullus places a direct statement of much of his own beliefs; and finally *Spes* and *Pax alma*, who for Tibullus embody the hopes and consolation promised by all religious worship.

Apollo is not normally associated, by the poet, with the life of the country, except (in passing) in the hymn for Messallinus (2.5.79-83): but there too he is asked to calm Love's sharp attack (2.5.105-22). Rather, in Tibullus he represents the high dignity and eternity of the gods; a particular token of this is seen in the god's glorious hair, ever bright, ever uncut. Thus he prays to Phoebus at the close of the hymn for Messallinus (2.5.121-22):

adnue: sic tibi sint intonsi, Phoebe, capilli,  
sic tua perpetuo sit tibi casta soror;

Apollo's hair, like his sister's chastity, is everlasting. So too, at the opening of the same piece, when he bids the god come (2.5.7-8):

sed nitidus pulcherque veni; nunc inde vestem  
sepositam, longas nunc bene pecte comas.

Again, in the *ars amatoria* which the poet puts into the mouth of Priapus, where he bids lovers enjoy the passing years (1.4.27 ff.), he blames the gods for their unfairness to men: *crudeles divi!* human beauty cannot be stayed, for (1.4.37-38):

solis aeterna est Baccho Phoeboque iuventas:  
nam decet intonsus crinis utrumque deum.

But it is fair to say that this eternal youth is, for the poet, associated with all the gods, and within the time-pattern of his poetry marks a poignant contrast with the brevity of man's life on earth. Thus even in love the gods have the advantage of men (2.3.29-30):

felices olim Veneri cum fertur aperte  
servire aeternos non puduisse deos;

here the context is slightly different, but the association between *Venus* and *aeternos* is not to be disregarded. In any case, the function of the unchanging, everlasting gods within the poetic time-structure of Tibullus becomes clear.

Against this background it will become easier to analyze some of the elegies in which the time-pattern may not be so evident. In 1.1, for example, the themes of love, war, and death are more complexly interwoven into the quiet, pastoral texture. We may divide the poem into three parts, corresponding to the three great concerns of the poet's life: Delia and his life on the farm, the wars, and death. In the first section (1-52), the poet prays to the *di rustici* that he may live undisturbed till death amid the familiar scenes he so loves, with his flocks, vines, and trees, his gods, and, above all, his love. The *Lares* of his ancestors will protect an estate that has now become poor. But not for him (part 2: 53-56) are the military campaigns of his patron Messalla. Finally, in part 3 (57-78), against the dark vision of death, he prays that he may live with Delia until old age comes upon him. Here, in the quiet retreat of the countryside, will he wage his campaigns (75). This delicate close supplies us with the emotional key (69): *interea, dum fata sinunt*. The advice that he put in the mouth of Priapus for young lovers he will here apply to himself. Just as the repetition of the word *cito* was significant in the Priapus-piece (1.4.28, 29, 30), so too here the time-words are to be stressed: *interea . . . dum* (1.1.69); *iam . . . iam* (70-71) for "soon . . . soon"; and finally (73-74),

nunc levis est tractanda venus, dum frangere postes  
non pudet et rixas inseruisse iuvat.

For the present, then, is *interea dum fata sinunt*. It is *interea*, the “mean-while” (69), so precariously balanced between the past and the grim vision of the future, that is the key to the poem. Here the poet weaves the magic spell of his love pastoral against the background of the Italic gods of the countryside, Spes, Pales, Priapus, and Ceres. And it is as though he would try to restore insofar as he can the Golden Age of old, following peace and love with Delia at his side, instead of wealth and booty, the illusions of latter-day men, thus braving whatever terrors the future might hold in store. Here the structure of time-past is not foremost, as it is in other poems, but it is implicit (cf. 39-40), and integral for an understanding of the poem as a whole.

In elegy 1.5, Tibullus pictures himself brooding over his wine-cups after a quarrel with Delia, while he dreams of what might have been. Another lover, it seems, has stolen Delia from him with the help of a *callida lena*, a *rapax saga* (48,59). In his disconsolate mood the poet recalls the dreams he had of Delia and their life in the golden future (*haec mihi fingebam* 35; cf. 20). The entire passage, 1.5.19-36, which is set in the future, is framed within the repeated *fingebam* (21-22):

rura colam frugumque aderit mea Delia custos  
area dum messes sole calente teret.

Delia would have been the complete mistress of the farm-estate, tending flocks, fruit-trees, vines. And, finally, as though to climax all, Messalla his patron would grace their household (33-34):

hunc sedula curet,  
huic paret atque epulas ipsa ministra gerat.

In this delightful, domestic picture, Tibullus would be but a cipher in the house (30),

at iuvet in tota me nihil esse domo;

but, alas, it is only a dream, to be wafted by the winds over Armenia (36).

Tibullus uses his past-present-future pattern together with the Golden Age motif in two other poems: the triumphal song to Messalla (1.7), and the elegy for the country festival (2.1). Elegy 1.7 is really a

*carmen natalicum* in honor of Messalla's *genius natalis*, written shortly after his triumphal entry into Rome after quelling the revolt in Aquitania.<sup>18</sup> But the central portion of the poem is devoted to the praise of the Egyptian god Osiris as the source of civilization, love, poetry, wine, and, indeed, of all happiness (27–48). The elegy may be divided into five parts. The poet opens with a reference to Messalla's victory in Aquitania (1–12); next he dwells on his patron's successes in the Middle East, in Cilicia, Syria, Tyre, and Egypt (13–22). Next, after a somewhat artificial apostrophe to Father Nile (23–26), Tibullus proceeds to the longest section of the poem, the encomium of Osiris-Bacchus (27–48), concluding with a formal invocation to Osiris and to Messalla's *genius* to come to the birthday festival (49–64). The prominence of the Osiris passage is not quite clear; it is perhaps an imaginative fantasy designed to suit the taste of the poet's patron, and is linked with Messalla's victories in the Middle East. In any case, Osiris in his role of Liber is depicted as the god of culture, wine, and joy—the proper god to preside at Messalla's birthday celebration. But with the relation of Osiris' role in the primitive life of man, teaching him agriculture and the care of the vine, we have another echo of one of the poet's favorite themes, mankind at the close of the Golden Age, when Osiris brought only *chorus et cantus et levis aptus amor* (44). Once again we have the blending of the three stages in the time-scheme: the golden past, the immediate present (the celebration of Messalla's victories and his feast), and the prosperous future under the guidance of Osiris and the *genius natalis* (55–64).

A similar technique is observable in the lovely hymn for a rustic feast (2.1), in all likelihood the ancient Paganalia,<sup>19</sup> although some scholars would prefer the Ambarvalia. Our ignorance of the precise details of many of the ancient feasts (or their local variations) makes it

<sup>18</sup> On Tibullus 1.7, see among others M. Ponchont (above, note 10) 50–53. Important for the background are the *Acta triumphalia capitolina* for a. u. c. 727, *CIL* 1<sup>2</sup> (1893) p. 50; for an historical discussion, see Rudolf Hanslik, "M. Valerius Messalla Corvinus (261)," *RE* 8 A (1955) 131–57, especially 148–49 and 152–53.

<sup>19</sup> Much more is known about the Ambarvalia, and perhaps for this reason most editors would incline to favor this feast. But the prominence of the *Lares*, the season of the year (*rusticus . . . / ingeret ardenti grandia ligna foco*, 21–22), and the suggestion that the work in the fields has been interrupted (5–6), all point to the feast of the *Paganalia*. On this see G. Rohde, *RE* 18 (1942) 2293–95, and Bömer (above, note 16), 2.73–74, on Ovid, *Fasti* 1.658, with the references.

impossible to be certain. Here again the poet seems to set the piece in three parts: the description of the festal celebration (1–36); a pastoral hymn to the *di rustici* (37–80)—*rura cano rurisque deos*, in a formal apostrophe—and a final invocation to *Amor*, as *Nox* and *Somnus* approach with the gathering night (81–90).

In this elegy—the vivid picture of a solemn feast—the invitation to Messalla (31–36) to come and grace their celebration forms the transition to the central portion of the poem, the moving hymn to the gods of the countryside, here Liber, Minerva, and the *Lares*. Here Liber and the other rustic gods perform the same function as Osiris in the triumphal song to Messalla (1.7). Once more we are back in the days of the Golden Age; man is portrayed in a state of ignorance and privation. But from the gods of the countryside come all the good things that have made modern man what he is: building, agriculture, irrigation, viticulture, and the raising of bees. Love, too, was born amid the fields; and as Bacchus encouraged song and the dance (with reference, perhaps, to the rise of drama: 55–56), the wool-trade and weaving arose under the aegis of Minerva (61–66).

At the close of the glowing portrait of primitive country life, the poet inserts a kind of hymn to Love, *Cupido* (67–82), which recalls the choral odes of Sophocles and Euripides.<sup>20</sup> But once again the past becomes present, as the poet begs the god to come to the country festival: *sancte, veni dapibus festis* (81). On this note, bidding all to pray to Love, the poet concludes, as the rustic folk join in the gaiety of song, love-making, and the dance. For the approach of Night, Sleep, and Dreams signals the beginning of the love-sport for the country youth (87–90):

ludite: iam Nox iungit equos, currumque sequuntur  
 matris lascivo sidera fulva choro,  
 postque venit tacitus furvis circumdatus alis  
 Somnus et incerto Somnia nigra pede.

And with this charming, twilight vision the poem comes to an end.

Tibullus' poetry breathes an atmosphere of reverence and respect for the older traditions connected with the farmer's life, and his use of

<sup>20</sup> Sophocles, *Antigone* 781–99; Euripides, *Hippolytus* 525–44. See W. S. Barrett, *Euripides: Hippolytos* (Oxford 1964) 258–62.

earlier conventional motifs<sup>21</sup> serve this purpose. His conservatism, as we might so term it, precisely suits his technique of blending the past with the present. Like Osiris-Bacchus in the birthday-song to Messalla Corvinus (elegy 1.7), here in the song for the Paganalia, Liber, Minerva, the *Lares*, Cupido, and all the *di ruris* not only lend their sacred presence to the harvest-festival, but also serve to relate it to the glorious past and give the feast a present dignity as a relic of one stage of mankind's rise in culture and in the development of the arts. The poem, indeed, borders on the didactic; but the final appeal to Love to come to the feast, and the beautiful quiet close raise the piece to a lyric quality as the tipsy Dreams wander through the darkened countryside.

Before concluding, it will be interesting to see how the poet adapts his technique to still another kind of poem, the solemn occasional ode. Elegy 2.5, *Phoebe fave*, is a hymn on the occasion of the appointment of Messalla's son, M. Valerius Messallinus, to the prominent commission of the *XV viri sacris faciundis*.<sup>22</sup> In form it is an invocation to Phoebus Apollo (see lines 1, 17, 65, 79, 106, 121) to bless the young priest and his family; but the technique resembles that of the Pindaric epinicion. The material details are gracefully in the poem; there is a long digression of a mythic sort; and finally the poem returns to its hero. So too, Tibullus begins with a prayer to Phoebus, with an oblique reference to the young Messallinus and his function (1-18), and then proceeds to the longest part of the poem: the role of the Cumaeian Sibyl in Rome's past history and Aeneas' founding of the city, with references to other minor Sibyls (19-78). The poet next begs Apollo to bless the land, and goes on to describe a harvest festival at the time of the ripening of the grapes (79-104). Like Pindar, too, the poet cannot, in the midst of the solemn hymn, refrain from a brief personal passage on his love for the lady Nemesis, with a prayer to Apollo to dispel Cupid's arrows (105-12). The deliberate intrusion

<sup>21</sup> For the typical references, see W. Kroll and F. Skutsch, *W. S. Teuffels Geschichte der römischen Literatur* 1 (Berlin 1913) 4-6.

<sup>22</sup> On this elegy, see W. Y. Sellar, *The Roman Poets of the Augustan Age: Horace and the Elegiac Poets* (Oxford 1891; reprinted 1937) 243-44; cf. also Ponchon (above, note 10) 105-7. On the career of the young Messallinus and the problem of the inscriptive evidence for his priesthood (e.g. *CIL* 6.32323, 152) see Dorothea von Lunzer, "Messalla Messallinus (264)," *RE* 8 A (1955) 159-62. On the Sibyls mentioned in the poem, see B. Cardauns, "Zu den Sibyllen der Tibull 2.5," *Hermes* 89 (1961) 357-66.

serves to soften somewhat the austere character of the poem and recall the more informal manner of the love elegy. The conclusion (113-22) begs Nemesis to spare the poet that he may sing of the triumphs of young Messallinus, while Messalla applauds from the watching throngs. The piece ends quietly with a renewed invocation to Apollo, but in a lighter vein (121-22):

adnue: sic tibi sint intonsi, Phoebe, capilli;  
sic tua perpetuo sit tibi casta soror.

The poem is not a love pastoral, and, indeed, it is an elegy only in form; its special form and narrative style would have been better suited to the hexameter or to the strophic metres of Horace. But as Tibullus tells the story of the Sibyl and ancient Latium, it is not merely an abstract narrative, but one intimately related to the present feast and to the future life of the young Messallinus. Thus the poet prays very touchingly (2.5.17-18),

Phoebe, sacras Messallinum sine tangere chartas  
vatis, et ipse precor quid canat illa doce.

So too, the projection in the prehistoric past, with the story of Aeneas, is counterbalanced by the description of the country festival in honor of the god, with the abundant wine and food and the tipsy love-quarrels (95-104). The unity of the piece is given by Apollo, whose blessing on Messallinus, on the land, and upon the poet himself, is the object of Tibullus' earnest prayer.

In conclusion, it is well to recall that, though the thematic material of Tibullus (Books 1-2) is substantially conventional, it is nonetheless instructive to analyze the way in which the poet cleverly inserts it into what I have called his time-pattern. The following is a listing of the various motifs structured (artificially, it is true) in a way which will highlight the different time-levels which underlie his verse:<sup>23</sup> the past

<sup>23</sup> Of the poems omitted from our discussion, 1.6, 1.8, 1.9, and 2.4 have no observable time-pattern. In "Sulpicia's Garland," usually attributed to Tibullus (3.8-12 or 4.2-6), there would be little scope for the complexity of the time-shifts; the same applies to the disputed 3.18-19 (4.12-13). It is to be noted that 2.3, to Cornutus, reveals faint traces of the technique we have been discussing: a mythic digression on Apollo and Latona (11-32, with the typical reference to the golden locks of Phoebus, 23-26), and a tirade against war, booty, and wealth (35-38), as the result of the perverted desires of the *ferrea saecula* (35).

(*temporis prisci facta*: 1.10.44), the present (*interea, dum fata sinunt*: 1.1.69), and the future.

A. The Past

1. Remote<sup>24</sup>

The Golden Age of mankind, brought to an end by war, wealth, and booty: 1.3.35-50; 1.10.1-14; 2.3.35-48

2. Proximate

The origins of the harvest festival, the development of civilization under the *di rustici* (2.1.37-66) and Osiris-Bacchus (1.7.29-48)

The age of the Sibyls, and the founding of Rome (2.5.19-64)

B. The Present

Delia's love: 1.1.69-70, 73-74; 1.2.73-74; 1.5.7-10, and *passim*

Tibullus' illness: 1.3.1-50

Quarrel with Delia: 1.5.1 ff.; separation from Nemesis: 2.3.61-62

Joy of the rustic festivals: 2.1.17-26, 83-90; 2.5.95-104

Celebrations for Messalla: 1.7.1-22; 1.5.31-34; for Messallinus: 2.5.89-104

C. The Future

1. Proximate

The poet's hope that he will recover from illness and return to Delia: 1.3.83-94

Delia to have been the mistress of his household: 1.5.21-34

*Pax* (1.10.45-49), and *Spes* (2.6.20-27) to bless the land

Phoebus to bless the young Messallinus: 2.5.17-18, 115-20

2. Remote

Old age: 1.1.71-72; 1.6.77-86; 1.10.39-40; 1.2.91-92; 1.9.73-74; 1.10.43-44; 2.4.47-48

Tibullus' vision of his death: 1.3.51-56; 1.1.59-68

The Hades of lovers: 1.3.57-82

Our study of the theme of time in Tibullus not only enhances our judgment of his poetic achievement; it also gives us an insight into his attitude towards life, love, war, and the cult of the Italic gods. From the technical point of view it may be said that, in Tibullus' elegies, the

<sup>24</sup> Little distinction is actually made in Tibullus between the two levels which we call remote and proximate, save that the age of the Sibyls, the coming of Aeneas, and the establishment of the first rustic harvest festivals seem more intimately bound up with the contemporary Roman scene. This is in part due to what Ernst Curtius has called the vagueness of the Romans' sense of *prisca tempora*: see E. R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (tr. W. R. Trask, New York 1948) 252.

excitement, the love, or the loneliness of the present causes the poet to shift subtly and restlessly back to the consoling memories of the past (especially the Golden Age), or again to thrust forward to the hopes, promises, or threats of the future. The two outer poles of the pattern (the remote past and the remote future) are the glories of the Golden Age of the past and the Elysian Fields that await the faithful lover after death. Ever in the background are the gods that Tibullus loves, especially those of the countryside, whose presence men feel on special festal occasions. Everlasting, they live beyond the time structure, and yet (like Bacchus, *Pax alma*, and *Spes*) they bring men comfort and help them bridge the terrifying passage from the present to the dark future. If men once gained this insight, they would cease their aimless search for wealth, and their wars and quarrels: the *proelia Martis* would give way to the *rixae Veneris*. Such is the character of Tibullus as revealed in his poetry; and everywhere there is manifest a delicate tension in his craving for a happiness that men once had and, he hopes, will one day come to be. Yet throughout, the central focus is always on the poet's love and the emotional immediacy of the present, before the approach of old age, death, and the end of love. Few poets have been so successful in portraying the sorrow and the beauty of the "mean-while"—*interea, dum fata sinunt, iungamus amores* (1.1.69)—that too brief space we have on earth to taste the new wine with our fellows and to celebrate the golden harvest before the shadows of night fall, *et incerto Somnia nigra pede*.