

Moral Judgement in Historical Perspective: The Experience of the Roman Love Elegy

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Abstract: Roman love elegies tend to represent a single life situation from a love relationship. The representation happens in a first person singular monologue of a male protagonist, for whom modern readers, having internalised the ethos of Romantic love, usually feel sympathy, resulting in a moral judgement against the woman. The represented lifestyle of the man in love implies the rejection of the official value system and the patterns of expected male behaviour, which modern (western) readers may regard as a kind of subversion they are happy to endorse. A historical reading, however, may identify the connection of the love elegy to comic or satirical genres. For the reader of the time, the protagonist was rather probably a ridiculous figure inviting moral judgement exactly because of his rejection of the official values. This paper argues that a moral evaluation so different from ours can be nonetheless be perceived in the reading process. Firstly, a close reading that focuses on the humorous and playful elements may disclose the self-revealing gestures of the *persona* in love, and break the readers' sympathising impulses. Secondly, a reader trained in post-structuralist theory may recognise the lover's power discourse, which may result in sympathising with the socially vulnerable woman rather than the man controlling the discourse. The latter strategy is not actually historicising, since its interest lies not in reconstructing the contemporary moral judgement but criticising it. The paper analyses Propertius 1.6 and Tibullus 1.3 to demonstrate the complex and contradictory representations of values in the Roman love elegy.

Keywords: Roman love elegy; Propertius 1.6; Tibullus 1.3; moral judgement; gender roles

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标题: 道德评价的历史视角：解读罗马爱情哀歌

内容摘要: 古罗马爱情哀歌往往表现的是爱情关系中的某个生活情境，而这

又常常通过男主人公的第一人称单人独白得以实现。对于已被浪漫主义爱情气质浸染过的现代读者来说，他们通常会对男方产生同情，从而对女方进行道德评判。在哀歌里，恋爱中的男人所代表的生活方式表现出对官方价值体系和预期男性行为模式的拒绝，这对现代（西方）读者来说可谓构成了一种颠覆，他们更对此表现出乐于认同的态度。然而，如果从历史的角度进行解读，我们可能会发现爱情哀歌与滑稽或讽刺文体之间的联系。对于古罗马的读者来说，男主人公颇有可能正是因为对官方价值观的拒绝而成为一个招致道德评判的可笑人物。本文认为，这样一种与现代大不相同的道德评价，其实是能够在阅读过程中被感知的。首先，如果对爱情哀歌中的幽默和戏谑元素进行细读，我们可能会发现，它们透露出陷入爱河的男主人公们的自曝属性，从而打破读者的同情冲动。其次，受过后结构主义理论熏陶的读者可能会识别出男方的权力话语，从而同情处于社会弱势地位的女性，而非控制话语的男性。后一种策略实际上并不是历史化，因为它的兴趣不在于重建当代的道德判断，而在于批判它。本文分析了普罗佩提乌斯的哀歌卷 1 中的第 6 首和提布卢斯哀歌卷 1 中的第 3 首，以证明罗马爱情哀歌中复杂而矛盾的价值表述。

关键词：罗马爱情哀歌；普罗佩提乌斯；提布卢斯；道德评判；性别角色

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The Roman love elegy, a poetic genre that flourished briefly in the 1st century BCE, mostly situates a love monologue in a more or less uniformed narrative situation, which also implies the social context of the utterance. In this situation the speaker is male (except for the six elegies by Sulpicia that are included in the *corpus Tibullianum*), and is in love with a woman (except for three elegies by Tibullus in which the speaker is in love with a boy called Marathus). The harmony of the love relationship is disturbed basically by two complications. First, the man requests an exclusive sexual relationship (at least exclusive on the woman's part), which she clearly does not want. Second, the desired woman requests material support from her prospective lover, which the protagonist is not able or willing to supply. If he cannot provide this, he must play the role of a secret rival to the woman's rich, official partner, and is too poor to compete with him in the field of expensive gifts. But usually he does not want to give presents at all, because he claims to provide his beloved with eternal fame, and he finds it humiliating to be asked for material goods as well. A constantly returning motive of the elegies is that poets should be entitled to free sex.

Those readers today who have internalised the ethos of Romantic love tend to identify with the speaker or to feel empathy for him, which may result in judging the woman negatively. A young man's love at first sight, his overwhelming passion towards a woman, is a narrative principle that has an immensely strong tradition in western literature. A supportive attitude towards that kind of passion is generally expected since the period of Romanticism, or even since the troubadours (Lewis 1–44; de Rougemont).¹ Even today, Romantic passion is frequently used to seemingly justify otherwise generally censored behaviour. But if a reader develops a positive attitude towards the miserable man in love, what will they think of the woman? Let me quote the adjectives with which an excellent literary historian (Conte) describes the women as they appear in the poems (keeping in mind that earlier scholarship tended to use such vocabulary for the supposed real models of those women in the poets' lives): "inconstant, capricious, and fond of luxury and mundane pleasures" (326), "greedy and unscrupulous" (327).

The protagonist, the man in love, however, has conflicts outside the relationship as well. His lifestyle may provoke moral judgement, irrespective of the woman. When he chooses love as the only value for the centre of his life, he also refuses to accept the official value system and the socially requested patterns of male behaviour. This aspect of choice tends to be explicit in elegiac oeuvres. It can be partially ascribed to the heritage of Romanticism (the cult of emotions and the revolt against the normality of bourgeois lifestyle (Pikulik) that modern readers are prone to regard the elegist's rejection of official values as a subversion worth identifying with. Literary scholarship in the second half of the 20th century appreciated subversive literary strategies and the undermining of the discourse of power. Such an approach can capitalise on some elegies that do offer a narrative of emotional revolt, representing love as an attempt at creating an alternative lifestyle, based on the rejection of officially approved behaviour.

A historical reading, however, may show a basic similarity between love elegy and comical-satirical genres of the antiquity. The protagonist was very probably a ridiculous figure in the eyes of contemporary readers,² who solicited moral judgement exactly because of his rejection of official values. Some literary histories even associated the supposed moral revolt of the elegists with political resistance against Augustus' regime; the numerous affirmative gestures elegies contain to-

1 The phenomenon of what we would call Romantic love existed in the classical antiquity too, but the general attitude towards it seems to have been far from positive; see (Rudd).

2 For the most influential reading of love elegy as comical see (Veyne, *L'Élégie érotique romaine. L'amour, la poésie et l'Occident*).

wards Augustus or at least some key figures of his regime exclude the possibility of political revolt on the part of the elegists. The discourse of love could be subversive notwithstanding. Augustus used the moralising propaganda of returning to the pure and severe, archaic ethics of the ancestors to establish a state appropriation of the sphere of sexual behaviour, which had previously belonged to the family.¹ Elegies, which advertise the power of love, may seem to take a stand for the libertine ways Augustus was trying to suppress. Such an interpretation can seemingly be supported by Book 2 of Ovid's *Tristia*, which suggests that the poet's exile was the result of a supposedly subversive reading of his love poetry. However, the playful nature of the poem does not allow one to take seriously that the *Ars amatoria* was the main or an important reason for the exile;² and the second book's apologetic argument is perfectly valid, namely that the object of love in the elegies is not a *matrona*, a married woman from the elite, but some kind of demi-monde. Therefore, elegiac love, belonging to a completely different sphere of social life from that which Augustus was trying to regulate, does not challenge the new rules. The Roman love elegy (even if Ovid's *Ars amatoria* not so much so) advertised love until death, which can be seen as in line with the archaising Augustan propaganda. Even more important, however, is what actually happens to the poet-protagonist of the elegies, who makes love the centre of his alternative life. He becomes a miserable, vulnerable and unmanly loser. The alternative that the elegies display is unlikely to seem attractive, and the narrative promises no reward for abandoning social prestige. By ridiculing the protagonist-speaker the implied author eventually confirms the official value system and the ideal of manhood the protagonist denies. Laughter implies a punishment and a moral judgement for the humiliated and cuckolded lover.

Is it possible to endorse a moral judgement that is historically different from ours while reading ancient texts? I have two arguments for such a possibility. On the one hand, a reading that focuses on historical contextualisation may result in endorsing historical morals; my other suggestion will challenge the presuppositions implied in the adverb "our" of the expression "our moral judgements." Both make use of close reading. A sufficiently close reading that focuses on the humorous and playful features reveals the self-disclosing gestures of the lover's persona, and dissolves any impulse to identify with the speaker. I am inclined to suppose that close

1 For such an interpretation of Augustus' so called moral legislation see (Cohen; Habinek 28–29; Reid).

2 For word games and puns in Ovid's exile poetry see (Claassen, 'Exsul Ludens: Ovid's Exilic Word Games'); for ironic intertextual plays see (Williams 3–49); for humour in *Tristia* generally see (Claassen, 'Tristia' 180–81).

reading, i.e. concentration on the textuality of literary works, impedes impulsive moral judgements, and facilitates historical understanding. The more problems, interpretive difficulties and contradictions one discovers in a text, the more probably one has to resort to the interpretive aid primary context can deliver. On the other hand, if a reader trained in post-structuralist theory recognizes the elegist's power discourse, they become distrustful and pay attention to the implied dynamics of power, which may make them side with the socially vulnerable woman instead of the man who controls the discourse. The latter strategy, however, is historical only in a limited sense, since it is not interested in a reconstruction of a contemporary moral judgement, but rather in critiquing it.

After so much emphasis has been put on the importance of close reading it seems necessary to stop speaking about the Roman love elegy in general, about the approximately 200 poems that build up the corpus together. Rather, I now focus on some particular poems to demonstrate the problems and the suggested reading strategies. My first example is *Elegy 6* from the first published collection of elegies, the Book 1 of Propertius. In the short history of the Roman love elegy one cannot see a development in which later books and especially Ovid make fun of what early Propertius and Tibullus had taken very seriously. Even at the beginning of its history, the Roman elegy playfully subverted the discourse and the communicative situation it was creating. This does not, however, mean a parody of the accoutrements of love poetry as inherited from Catullus and Gallus, since playful subversion had featured already in Catullus' poetry too (cf. Fitzgerald; Wray; Holzberg).

The addressee of this poem is Tullus, a good friend, also the addressee of poem 1, and therefore the whole book. The speaker explains that fear is not the reason why he does not accompany Tullus on his travels, but that Cynthia does not allow him to leave. What can we learn from the poem about Tullus' journey, on which he wants to take the poet with him? The first couplet indicates that it is a journey to the East through the Adriatic and the Aegean seas. It is not worth, however, interpreting the second couplet as a geographically precise description of destinations. Although the first couplet says that 'I am not afraid to go with you to the East', the second adds a great hyperbole that 'I would go with you to the end of the world too', be it the end in the north or in the south, or even beyond:

cum quo Rhipaeos possim conscendere montes
ulteriusque domos uadere Memnonias. (3-4.)

[I could scale with you the mountains of the extreme north or travel farther

south than Memnon's halls.]]¹

Lines 13-14 suggest that the journey is a kind of cultural tourism, at least for Propertius, through which he can see Athens, famous for its learning, and the ancient riches of Asia, which may refer to the riches of cultural heritage:

an mihi sit tanti doctas cognoscere Athenas
atque Asiae ueteres cernere diuitias.

[Is it worth so much to me to visit learned Athens and set eyes on the ancient riches of Asia?]

Lines 19-20, however, reveal that Tullus' life plan is to outshine the political career of his uncle, according to the commentaries, L. Volcatius Tullus, consul in 33 BCE. The journey may already be a part of the political career plan. The uncle-nephew relationship is obviously correctly indicated by Propertius from the biographical viewpoint, but it is worth noting that he speaks of a paternal uncle, which in Latin has special connotations. *Patruus* is a severe uncle, an older relative who consequently pushes the youth to adapt to social requirements, while an *avunculus*, a maternal uncle is usually regarded as a kind, indulgent—indeed avuncular—person. The word *patruus* is connected with *pater* ('father'), and as it seems the *patruus* was expected to represent the patriarchal order, while uncles from the motherly side of the family (etymologically 'little grandfathers') did not have such obligations. Tullus follows the ways of his father's brother, who represents the official value system, but wants to go further on that path. That is probably his motivation to go East as an imperial officer, and it is also likely that he wants to take Propertius with him as a member of his entourage. Or he travels as a member of his uncle's team to perform important administrative or military duties. Line 20 explicitly mentions legislation as part of Tullus' activity during his journey:

et uetera oblitis iura refer sociis. (20.)
[and to restore the old laws to forgetful allies.]

Francis Cairns argues convincingly that *anteire* means simultaneously surpassing the uncle's career in the future, and taking part in his present mission, namely that in 30/29 BCE he was *proconsul* of the province Asia. The verb may imply that Tul-

1 I quote G.P. Goold's translation from the Loeb Classical Library edition (Propertius 60–63).

lus was a (*pro*)*praetor*, since the word *praetor* comes from the verb *praeire*, which is synonymous with *anteire*. (Cairns 156–63). Lines 31–34, in which Tullus goes to Ionia and/or Lydia as part of a mission which implies disposition over military forces (*imperium*), support this hypothesis:

...ibis et accepti pars eris imperii. (34.)
[go you will and become a part of popular government.]

The motive of friendship with Tullus is sustained throughout the poem, and it presents the speaker as a person who has strong personal ties to the highest elite that runs the empire, moreover as somebody who also has opportunities to get involved in their political, military and (as the repeated reference to the gold suggests) very profitable business activities. His social environment obviously requires him to play that kind of role. If he resists that social pressure, partly because he lacks the interest and mental strength, partly, which is the main topic of the poem under discussion, because his love does not allow him to leave the city, that must result in moral judgement. The judgement is evident in his own discourse. On the one hand, he admits that Tullus rightly uses judgmental vocabulary to describe his behaviour, such as *nequitia*, which means evil ways, idleness, negligence, wickedness, worthlessness (26). On the other hand, he declares that he does not care about the central values of the Roman elite, such as glory and battle (29). But exactly how does love prevent him from travelling? He does not speak about his own emotions or say that he could not live without his beloved for several months. He rather says that it is Cynthia who does not allow him to leave. This statement activates the motive of amorous slavery (*servitium amoris*): the man in love is the slave of the beloved woman and does what she says. To explain that this attitude makes the speaker ridiculous from the viewpoint of normative masculinity does not need much argumentation.

This poem, however, already uses the slavery motive in a twisted way. Cynthia does not simply forbid him to travel as a real *domina* (the master or owner of a slave) would do, but rather uses passive-aggressive strategies. The girl embraces him, and it is her words, or rather supplications that keep the poet back (5–6). An anaphora in lines 7–10 gives emphasis to the vivid narrative of the woman's actions that are all of verbal nature. Cynthia chats (*argutat*), laments (*queritur*), denies (*denegat*) and threatens (*minatur*). Against those lamentations (*querelae*) the man cannot stay hard (*durare*), not even for an hour.

illa mihi totis argutat noctibus ignes,
 et queritur nullos esse relictos deos;
 illa meam mihi iam se denegat, illa minatur
 quae solet irato tristis amica uiro.

[All night long she shrills her passion at me, complaining that, if I desert her, there are no gods; she tells me she is no longer mine and utters those threats that an upset mistress is wont to cast at an angry¹ lover.]

In line 8 the abandoned woman laments that there are no gods. This suggests that the man had sworn by all the gods never to leave her, and now, when he does, the gods fail to punish him for breaking the oath; consequently they do not exist. It is an evergreen commonplace in ancient literature that men will give precipitate oaths to get a woman, but gods do not care if such oaths are broken. Catullus had already subverted that commonplace in his *Poem 70* (giving a reverse formulation to an epigram by Callimachus²) when he said that it is the oaths of women that one should write on winds and running water, which means on no enduring surface. Propertius may refer to that epigram when in line 17 he makes Cynthia reclaim kisses from the wind.

...osculaue opposito dicat sibi debita uento.
 [telling the wind that it owes her kisses.³]

1 I modified Goold's translation to adapt to the Latin text I use. The codices unanimously and exclusively read *irato* (angry), but many modern editors (including Goold) prefer the humanist conjecture *ingrato* (ungrateful), which makes the meaning much simpler and uninteresting. I will return to this problem later. For the locus see (Cairns 152–54).

2 *Anthologia Palatina* 5.6 = (Pfeiffer Ep. 25). For the Catullan subversion of the Callimachus poem cf. (Holzberg 54–55).

3 My translation, which far from being the only possible one. Francis Cairns, who emphasises the “cryptic and compressed” nature of Propertius's style, mentions three options: ‘and declare it is the adverse wind that she has to thank for my kisses’ (Burman); ‘and should cry to the thwarting wind that I owe her kisses’ (Rothstein); ‘and say that she owes (her) kisses to the wind which blows contrary to me’ (Hertzberg). Cairns prefers the last one (Cairns 155). The double dative—to her(self) and to the wind—makes the meaning ambiguous. The dative of the wind can belong either to *dicat* or *debita*: telling the wind or owing to the wind. It is not evident who does owe. It is tempting to suppose that the expression *oppositus uentus* has a technical meaning of navigation; if the adverse wind temporarily keeps Propertius's ship back, Cynthia might owe it for the kisses she still gets, or she might offer those kisses to it if it keeps him back longer. But the wind can also be unfavourable to her, so that she claims from it the kisses she failed to get.

Winds might owe kisses to Cynthia because they helped the man sail away, but maybe also because they have dispersed his oaths that were supposed to tie him to her. When Catullus replaced the oath breaking men with oath breaking women, he also changed almost every element of the traditional representation and created the image of the vulnerable, helpless, subordinate, the completely unmanly man in love. In this poem by Propertius the traditional roles would be rehabilitated, if the speaker was actually able to depart. It would be the woman who complains about the unfaithful man, and declares that nothing can be harder than him (*durius*, line 18).¹ Eventually, this will not happen, because the man cannot even stay firm for an hour (*durare*, 11).²

Who has the upper hand here? Power relations in love can be complex and mutual even if they are basically asymmetrical. Here a man complains to another man about his own lack of strength to choose the socially required self-actualisation, because a woman could accuse him of cruelty. He seems to say his lack of action is caused by the pity he feels for the woman, but he experiences this condition as vulnerability, which he calls “living under a hard constellation” (*duro sidere*, 36). The vicious circle of the emotional chaos is already embarrassing in lines 9-10, when Cynthia threatens to do what desperate women tend to threaten angry men. Is not usually the angry party that utters threats? Not according to Propertius, who thinks that the angry men are threatened by women. Why is the man angry and what is the threat? The answer to the second question may be implied in the previous line, since in Latin poetry the second line of the elegiac couplet usually offers a variation to the content of the first. In the hexameter Cynthia “tells me that she is not mine anymore.” This can be the threat: the woman breaks up with the man, or rather she will give herself to somebody else. But why should she threaten somebody who is angry? If the anger is justified, in that the woman had done something that both parties regard as wrong in the context of their relationship, the threat is a power game through which the woman claims total freedom for her own behaviour while she denies the man even the right to the emotional punishment of anger.

1 The image of a woman crying lonely on the seashore while the beloved man sails away also refers to Catullus, although not to his elegiac works but Ariadne from the epic *Poem 64*.

2 Jerry Clack thinks that the central motive of the poem is the irony towards the opposition of hard and soft (*durus* and *mollis*), which opposition is going to be so important in the next poem (1.7) of Propertius first collection (Clack 187–90).

Anger, however, can also mean a fit of pique; not an emotion but physical abuse.¹ Such a usage is attested in Ovid and Horace.² If it is so, uttering threats is the only means of a vulnerable woman. Another possibility is that the anger, grammatically attached only to the man, in the imaginary situation belongs to both parties, and ‘telling something to an angry man’ actually means ‘telling a man in a fight’. In fight both the threatening and the threatened are angry. Similarly, we can interpret *irato* as a *hysteron proteron*, a reversal of the temporal order; it is a general experience that people tend to react to threats with anger, which may easily result in a fight.

But that is just the usual scenario, while what is staged in this poem is different. Neither the man is angry, nor the woman, although the latter has every reason to be. Nevertheless, she threatens with a break up or at least withhold love or sex, which in the current situation, when the man is to leave for months, does not sound effective. A bit later the man imagines her in the port before his ship departs. There she blames—the ship. And she scratches a face—probably her own. The woman seems to be very careful about the manifestations of anger. The poem implies the real power relations, while the speaker explicitly laments about the reverse of them: his own powerlessness and the merciless repression of a vague attempt of revolt. A historical reading will find the lamentation ridiculous from the viewpoint of contemporary male values, but a non-historical, non-patriarchal reading will find it no more attractive.

It is the representation of the protagonist’s two different social contexts that solicit two different readings. He uses a different discourse when speaking to a fellow member of the male elite, and to a woman who belongs to another social stratum, and tries to show different faces in those relations. In both directions of the double-edged communication he uses various refined tricks, and he does not appear sincere in any direction, to refer to a notion which used to be appreciated by an older school of literary criticism. While speaking to Tullus he tries to describe amorous life as a full alternative to his lifestyle based on social commitment and patriotic duty, as is requested by the official value system. He claims to be someone who is happy to choose love until the grave (25-26), and emphasises that love is a

1 It is worth mentioning Cairns thoughts that Latin *ira*, usually translated as anger, also means ‘lack of sexual activity’, and *iratus* therefore can mean a man who does not make love to his girlfriend. The argumentation failed to convince me that *ira* has such a meaning a lexicon should contain. I rather think that in special circumstances the word *ira* can metonymically signify the consequences of anger too, such as physical abuse or sex withdrawal (Cairns 152-54).

2 In a footnote Paul Veyne declares that in the world of elegy lovemaking is always represented as sadistic (Veyne, *Roman Erotic Elegy* 88, n. 5).

service (*militia*) that requires as much work and effort (*labores*) as Tullus' political-military career (23 and 30). One is fit either for the one or the other. Tullus does not know of love, therefore state administration is quite suitable for him. However, the speaker proves himself rather unsuccessful in his alternative lifestyle. He spends his entire life in tears (24) and his fate is certainly hard (36). The endorsement of his chosen lifestyle is far from convincing.

When speaking to Cynthia he emphasises his own emotional vulnerability, subordinate position and the restrictions love imposes on him. It would be so nice to travel, see the wonders of the world, and get involved in the important affairs of the empire! But he cannot, because he is unable to resist Cynthia's supplications, confessions of love and lamentations. He becomes soft as soon as he is accused of being hard. Although the topic of the discourse is the man's tears and his life under a "hard constellation," the described situation reveals the real power relations. It is the man who can leave whenever he wants. He is free. He has the options of physical actions (as sailing away or—as it seems—beating up the other), while all the woman can do is talk. It must be the powerless party that begs. And the one who gives in out of pity must have the power.

In both relations, conflicts of interests and values are obviously involved, and their oppositions force readers to take a moral stand. An interpretation that seems to have been valid for centuries had its moral foundation in the ethos of Romantic love to display gestures of sympathy towards the miserable man in love, which implies censoring both his male environment that represents and tries to impose rigid social values and the as much tyrannical, manipulative woman. A historical reading that shows the lover's denial of official values as ridiculous should not make today's readers identify with those values, especially if they take into account the imperialist character of Tullus' journey. The historical reading, however, opens a door to a more sophisticated interpretation of the conflicts and interests inside the love relationship than simply taking the side of the male speaker just because the point of view of the one who can monopolise the discourse may sound genuine.

The poem in which Propertius relates his decision not to journey with an aristocratic patron can be paired with Tibullus' 1.3. The journey Tibullus took seems to be very similar to that of Propertius: he accompanied Messalla Corvinus as a member of his entourage on a mission to the eastern parts of the empire. He managed to depart, but he regrets it, because he fell sick and was left behind on the island of Corcyra (Corfu). The poem is the monologue of the sick poet, addressed partly to his absent travelling fellows, partly to Delia (apart from various deities). Although Tibullus represents both himself and the *puella* differently from Propertius, some

basic similarities suggest that the poems might have solicited the same moral reaction in the contemporary audience.

The man represented in Tibullus' poem is much more comfortable with his socially requested gender role. Not only did he actually depart to participate in an administrative and/or military mission; he also wants to be remembered as an agile, socially and politically active member of the elite society if he dies. In the middle of the poem he inserts the epigram he wishes to be carved in his tombstone, in which there is no hint at his amorous nature or love as the centre of his life and poetry.

HIC IACET IMMITI CONSUMPTUS MORTE TIBULLUS,
MESSALLAM TERRA DVM SEQVIVRQVE MARI.

(55-56)

[Here lies Tibullus, ravished by death's hand, Messalla comrad[ing] o'er sea and land.]¹

What the tomb epigram emphasises is the (would-be) deceased's public role, namely his attachment to a leading public figure, and his commitment that made him to face the dangers of long travels.²

Not only does the speaker appear adaptable to official male roles, but also his beloved shows the traits of a respectable woman. Before his departure she was anxious about his return and consulted all the gods, and after every divination promised a safe homecoming she—albeit weeping—let him go. She appears as a loving and supporting partner. At the end of the poem, the poet imagines her life during his absence and how he could find her if he returned unexpectedly; she appears continuously practicing the traditional housework activity of chaste Roman matrons, namely spinning wool into the late night hours in exclusively female company. When the poem uses the denomination *Phaeacia* for the setting of his sickness, it creates a link to the Odyssey (Lee-Stecum 102) suggesting that during Tibullus' long sea journey, Delia will be his Penelope, the symbol of a faithful wife.

1 I quote F.M. Cornish' translation (Catullus et al.).

2 The tomb epitaphs Propertius (2.13.35-36) and Ovid (Tr. 3.3.73-76) imagine for themselves show a sharp contrast, since those focus on the love life of the deceased; Propertius wants himself to be called *unius seruis amoris* [slave of a single love]. Ovid *tenerorum lusor amorum* [I who played with tender loves]. It is true that the latter also mentions poetry; *lusor* may already imply that, but in the next line the word *poeta* also appears. The emphasis put on poetry is still far away from the public sphere Tibullus' tomb epigram gives exclusive importance, and in addition Ovid only wants his grave inscription to be read by passers by who are in love (76).

The unexpected late night visit of the man that finds the woman at her wool work represents Delia as a reincarnation of Lucretia, another symbol of chastity.¹ As if they were model citizens representing all the gender specific values the Roman society requests, and in addition piety towards all the gods. Could the speaker expect moral approval and sympathy from both his contemporary and today's audience because of the harsh fate that left him sick in a foreign land despite both he and his beloved did everything well?

This representation of the couple shows a harsh contrast both to the other elegies by Tibullus and the entire corpus of Augustan elegies. This contrast has made some interpreters think that the Delia of this poem is far away from reality² (Leach 87) or is a feverish daydream (Jacoby 78). However, the poem itself contains a plethora of the usual motives of elegiac love and plenty of details that contradict the protagonists' conformist representation. First of all, in lines 20-21 the speaker comes to the conclusion that his sickness is the consequence of Amor's wrath, because he must have departed against the deity's will (*inuito Amore*) or forbiddance (*prohibente deo*). Although Delia is said to have consulted all the gods (including Amor?) about his return, he knows that Amor did not want him to leave. How does he know that? The ambiguity of the word (Amor as a deity and *amor* as his personal emotion) is played out here: it was him who did not want to leave because of his love and that is how the god of love forbade him to leave. But this must have been an unconscious motivation of his. Even in the subsequent discourse he explains his tactics of delaying departure again and again with anxiety (*anxius*, 16), i.e. bad feelings about the safety during the journey. The catalogue of the reasons for delay in lines 17-20 contradicts both the previous statement about the divinations Delia had received and the later declaration about the piety of the speaker (51-52). All the reasons are of a religious nature, and the formulations seem to imply that he makes them all up himself. Delia had consulted all the gods, and they all promised safe return, but then he relates dire omens, threatening auguries from observation of birds, and that he hit his foot on the door. He relates them and he speaks about them, but the emphasis on the verbal discourse may suggest that they did not really happen. Or—as Donald H. Mills reconstructed the story—"he consciously and purposely stumbled in order to have another excuse for tarrying" (Mills 227); making a fake omen is hardly better than referring to a fictional one. In the case of using Saturn's day, i.e. the Sabbath of Hebrews, with which a rich Roman had nothing to do, as

1 The best known elaboration of Lucretia's story in Roman literature is Livy 1.57-58. Livy's Books 1-5 were probably written about the same time as Tibullus' Book 1 (Ogilvie 2).

2 Reality for Leach means the day's social reality, not reality as represented in the elegists' work.

a pretext for delay, readers might suppose a cynically instrumental use of religion (Lee-Stecum 109–10).

Aut ego sum causatus aues aut omina dira
 Saturniue sacram me tenuisse diem.
 O quotiens ingressus iter mihi tristia dixi
 offensum in porta signa dedisse pedem!

[Either birds or words of evil omen were my pretexts, or there was the accursed day of Saturn to detain me. How often, when my foot was on the road, said I that, stumbling at the gate, it had warned me of disaster!]

Is it really the act of a pious man to delay his departure with fake omens? Is it legitimate—after that—to declare that gods cannot blame him for any of his actions or words? The attitude displayed towards religion shows various ambivalences. After using Saturn’s day as a fake reason to delay departure, the speaker delivers a laudation to Saturn’s mythical reign. After ridiculing Delia for having been a devotee of Isis without gaining any protection for him (23-26), he asks Isis for help. The votive dedications in Isis’ temple prove that she can help, but Delia’s past dedication has not had any result, therefore Tibullus makes a new and unusual kind of promise: if Isis helps him now, Delia will praise her in the temple. Normally the one who prays promises to pay the debt to the deity, but here it is Delia who is promised to pay somebody else’s debt (cf. Lee-Stecum 112).

Directly after Jupiter’s reign is criticised in sharp contrast to Saturn’s golden age, the speaker addresses Jupiter in a prayer for help (49-52). The speaker is sure about a reward Venus will give him if he dies, because he has “been ever pliable to gentle Love” (*quod facilis tenero sum semper Amori*, 77), although he is right now on a journey he said he started against Amor’s will (21). Tibullian elegy has never been celebrated for consistency or unity; *varietas* was rather regarded as its strength. However, the blatant contradiction in the religious discourse of 1.3 are too numerous to show the male protagonist as a pious Roman who speaks with the required gravity about the gods. The contradictions follow from the duplicity of the official and the alternative/amorous discourse. A stern Roman notion of piety requires the fulfilment of all the obligations towards the gods (and the father), and supposes that gods will give some reward. Tibullus expects divine benevolence from Isis, Jupiter, and Venus for his or Delia’s deeds. But this discourse conflicts with the ideal of elegiac love as the only valuable centre of life. The poet does not

fantasise about catching up with Messalla's team after his recovery, but about returning to Delia; he celebrates the idle life style of the Saturnal golden age; the passage about Delia's devotion to Isis nearly sounds like mockery against a cult that requests sexual abstinence and boasts vain temple propaganda.¹

The first third of the poem shows the poet himself hesitating between two possible spheres of life. Just as he is left behind midway on an island, he is mentally in between the male order represented by Messalla who goes to manly enterprises with his companions to the East, and a female regime left behind. Those he is missing are his mother, his sister, and his mistress, dependent on the possible help of a female deity. But when he imagines a return to this seemingly female determined world, he speaks about the hope to restart his regular sacrifices to the male household gods, the Penates and the Lar (Lee-Stecum 112). Abandoning the mission with Messalla and the official value system might seem imply an unmanly life style, but even in that the poet imagines establishing a patriarchal enclave.

In the case of the golden age description, the laudation of a life contrary to official values is not evident. It is true that Saturn's reign is celebrated because of the lack of sea travels and fights, which are both central for the Roman elite, but golden age is still a cliché and a usual *tour de force* in ancient poetry. The representation of the underworld, however, is clearly an amorous travesty of the traditional ideas about otherworldly justice. Both reward and punishment is given due to people's performance in and attitude towards love, and not to patriarchal values, as in other representations. Elysium, traditionally the place where defunct heroes sojourn, is the designated area for those who died while they were in love (65). Young men and women dance and sing among roses and thyme there eternally, but the formulation of the love they practice allows an interpretation that even in Elysium love is full of conflicts.

...et adsidue proelia miscet amor. (64)
[...Love never lets his warfare cease.]

The *proelia* [battles] could refer to Amor, who shoots arrows on people so that they fall in love with each other (as in Cornish's translation quoted above), but it can

1 As Lee-Stecum puts it: "the reader is unable conclusively to reconstruct the poet's exact attitude to Isis and her cult" (Lee-Stecum 112). For the ambiguities of the claim that Isis' healing power is attested by the temple walls see *ibid.* 111.

also refer to the lovers' continuous fights.¹ Love in an elegy seldom appears as a harmonious relationship of mutual happiness.

Tartarus, the mythical location for otherworldly punishment of evildoers is also transformed through the elegiac code. A four-item mythical catalogue already emphasises that in Tartarus sex offenders are sentenced to eternal punishment. This aspect is explicit in the first and the last evildoers: Ixion is there because he "dared to offer force to Juno" (*Iunonem temptare ausi*, 73), and Danaus' daughters "for slighting the godhead of Venus" (*Veneris numina laesit*, 79), by killing their husbands on their wedding night. The first of the two in the middle, Tityos, is in Tartarus because he tried to rape Leto. Tantalus is the only exception, whose crimes (stealing ambrosia from the gods and trying to make them eat the flesh of his son Pelops) seems to lack sexual connotations (Cilliers), while his punishment, continuous temptation without satisfaction, might be well associated with elegiac love.² After the mythical sinners, the poet expresses his wish that his rivals should end in Tartarus as well. In this personalised and elegised parody of the underworld, Venus awards Elysium for an amorous life, while Tartarus is full of those who do not accept love (Danaids) or interfere with the love of others (Jupiter or the poet himself).³ While the poet imagines a tombstone for himself which advertises full commitment to Roman social values, he imagines a transcendental judgement of

1 Cf. (Lee-Stecum 121): „This power forces the inhabitants of Elysium to fight eternally (*assidue*). In this way the battles of the Elysian lovers resemble the many repetitive torments undergone by the inhabitants of Tartarus.”

2 Cilliers 78 rightly emphasises that the commonplace list of arch-sinners in Tartarus only contains five names, therefore to select only sex offenders would have been impossible. The lack of the sexual in Tantalus' crimes was so confusing for A.A.R. Henderson that he ventured to replace him with Sisyphus (Henderson). I think that making explicit the Venereal character of two of the traditional sinners in Tartarus and adding Tibullus' love rivals are enough to erotise Tartarus.

3 Venus' realm appears as rather patriarchal from the viewpoint of punishments. The Danaids offend Venus when they resist their forced marriages, and men are (or are wished to be) punished for attempts on women who are claimed to belong to other men. Therefore, we may have the impression that violence or rape is not sentenced as a crime against women (protected by Venus) but as an offence against another man's property. (Tantalus committed many crimes. One of them was seducing Ganymede, who was later to become Zeus' lover. For this he was only expelled from Ilus' kingdom, so this is not the one for which he is tortured in Tartarus.)

lives that completely contradicts those values.¹

The fact that the speaker mentions some rivals make one also suspicious about the loving, faithful, Penelope-like character of Delia.

Illic sit quicumque meos uiolauit amores,
optauit lentas et mihi militias. (81-2)

[There let all be who have profaned my love and who have wished me lingering campaigns.]

The poet can only wish that those who have violated his love be punished by Underworld deities, but through the indicative mode of the verb *uiolauit* the utterance presents as a fact that such violations have happened.² Delia is not as faithful as the speaker wants to believe. Those who wish Tibullus' absence was long may have better chances than Penelope's suitors. Lee-Stecum also plays with the idea that if Tibullus used Saturn's day and fake omens as a pretext to delay his departure, Delia could also use the cult of Isis to keep him away from her bed for a while (Lee-Stecum 111). Be that as it may, the speaker only imagines Delia in Lucretia's role, and begs her to stay chaste. And this verb (*precor*) is not the first in the poem which implies the traditional elegiac reversion of power relationships; even if the elegy seemingly displays a man who makes his own decisions to leave the city or to return and a supportive woman who passively weeps, wishes him safe return, and stays at home in female company during his absence, it is the man who begs. And line 9 uses the verb *mittere* for Delia: *me cum mitteret urbe* [ere from the city she let me go]. *Mittere* can mean 'let go' or 'send'. The latter meaning would imply that Delia did not want Tibullus to be around, but even if we prefer the other meaning, it is the woman who makes the decision; she who lets somebody go must also have

1 In my interpretation the amorous transformation of the Tartarus is humorous. Henderson thought that Tibullus imitates Lucretius' description of the Tartarus "to make a stand against Lucretius' teaching on death and romantic love, and at the same time advance the claims of love-elegy to be serious poetry" (Henderson 649). I do not believe in the idea that the love-elegy sought to be serious poetry, and do not share the pre-Bakhtinian exclusive admiration for seriousness. I find it irresistibly funny too, to imagine that Tibullus engages in a philosophical dispute with Lucretius and argues for the reality of post-death punishments and rewards while advertising a non-Epicurean ethos of romantic love.

2 *Violare* basically means 'to do violence' to somebody or something. *Mei amores*, 'my love', especially in plural can signify the loved person metonymically. The combination of *violare* and a woman might imply sexual intercourse, and given the usually violent representation of sexuality in love elegies, can simply mean having sex. This impression is strengthened by Tib. 1.6.51, where it appears in the same metric position: *violare puellam*. The factual nature of the statement about the violations is rightly emphasised by Lee-Stecum 125–26.

the power to keep him back.

The reference to Lucretia may also imply the paradox that the elegist's discourse itself solicits competition in the situation represented. Collatine boasts about the virtue of his wife and invites other men into his house to put her on show, and through this first verbal then visual display he awakens Tarquin's desire for her.¹ The elegist (I mean the elegist as a represented character in the poems) keeps advertising the excellence of his mistress and boasting about his own achievement in making her known widely. The consequences of Collatine's advertisement are fatal for Lucretia, since she is the personification of the virtues Roman society requires of a matron. If the elegiac *puella* makes good use of the publicity provided by the elegist, he necessarily faces fierce competition and can weep about her infidelity. The contradictions inscribed in the discursive situation will clearly be explained in Ovid's *Amores* 3.12, but they function as a source of the comic elsewhere too. When in Tibullus 1.3 the elegist represents himself in a sickbed on a foreign island, he appears ridiculous; he attempted to act in accordance with the ideals of Roman manhood, but failed, and now he fantasises about a chaste Delia, a combination of Penelope and Lucretia.

The conclusion of my analysis of Tibullus 1.3 seems to be partially contrary to the previous one about Propertius 1.6. The Propertian elegist displayed himself as powerless against the tyranny of a woman, yet the discourse could not cover the reverse power relations; in Tibullus the poet tries to make a picture of himself as having the upper hand in the relationship that he adapts to official values, yet he still appears as exposed and vulnerable. However, this vulnerability is still the core concept of the elegy's comic discourse monopolised by the male speaker and it is still difficult to miss—even if in the form of begging the mistress or hoping for otherworldly justice—the imposition of patriarchal gender roles.

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1 What I summarise above is Livy's narrative. Modern readers, however, might have difficulties in not recalling Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece*, in which it is only Collatine's verbal representation of his wife that ignites Tarquin's desire.

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