

Happy Together: Homo-Social Alliances and Positive Affect in Propertius' Monobiblos

This paper argues that Propertius' monobiblos constructs and centers the pursuit of a new type of happiness in the wake of profound social changes. The approach is inspired by Ahmed's critique of happiness and seeks to contribute to a growing conversation around positive emotions in the ancient world (e.g. Caston and Kaster, Connolly, Fulkerson, La Barbera, Mutschler).

The paper begins with the book's frame, which positions Propertius' poet-narrator and his internal audience in a sudden, externally engineered change in interpersonal relationships, represented by the figures of Cynthia and Amor (1.1). This change results in the dissolution of communities, represented by the figures of families mourning loved ones lost in the Perusine war (1.21, 22). Next, the analysis moves to the poet-narrator's strategies for building a strong homo-social community around a shared definition of happiness in this new social context. He does this by assuming the role of *praeceptor laetitiae*, by and orienting the internal audience of male addressees (in thirteen of twenty-two poems) toward the promise of happiness he is teaching (Racette-Campbell). As *praeceptor laetitiae*, the poet-narrator explicitly defines mutual, loyal, and long-lasting love as happiness in the very first poem (*sitis et in tuto semper amore pares*, "may you be always equal partners in a secure love, 1.1.32), a definition he privileges and reaffirms throughout the collection. He encourages his peers in their pursuit of this happiness, and takes pleasure, bordering on the erotic (Oliensis), when they find success (*O iucunda quies, primo cum testis amori/ affueram*, "O pleasurable peace, when I first was present as witness to your love, 1.10.1-2). The poet-praeceptor adduces mythological examples as models, and personally models the correct behavior necessary for community cohesion around this promise and its successful attainment. The poet-narrator takes pains to avoid disrupting any homosocial

bond by shifting retribution for rivalry onto another. For example, he warns Bassus not to interfere with his affair lest Bassus be punished by Cynthia and her alliance of women (1.4.17-28). He draws attention to his refusal to take pleasure from competitive retribution. While Ponticus once laughed at the poet-praeceptor's erotic misery (*irrisor*, 1.9.1), now that Ponticus suffers from love, the poet responds, not with derision, but with helpful advice. Finally, the poet-praeceptor locates opportunities for strengthening homosocial bonds in the shared unhappiness of failed pursuits of this shared promise (*pariter miseri socio cogemur amore/ alter in alterius mutua flere sinu*, “unhappy, equally we will be compelled by our shared experience of love to take turns weeping in each other’s embrace,” 1.5.29-30).

This paper will conclude by considering this first extant collection of Latin elegy in the historical moment to which Propertius’ frame takes pains to draw attention. This collection was published around 29/28 B.C.E., only a few years after the battle of Actium that established the rule of one man in the wake of a failed homosocial alliance whose disintegration could be traced back to the Perusine war of 41 B.C.E. Propertius’ universe in the monobiblos is small. It consists almost entirely of the poet-narrator, Cynthia, his male friends, their beloveds, and mythological exempla. Its sparse population of characters mirrors the loss of friends and family in the recent decade. The male homosocial community, however, oriented around a promise of happiness in the form of a life-long, mutually loving erotic partnership, offers an optimistic, albeit androcentric, antidote to the autocratic regime of Augustus.

Works Cited

- Ahmed, S. 2010. *The Promise of Happiness*. Durham.
- Caston, R. and R. Kaster, eds. 2016. *Hope, Joy, and Affection in the Classical World*. New York.

- Connolly, J. 2000. "Asymptotes of Pleasure: Thoughts on the Nature of Roman Erotic Elegy." *Arethusa* 33: 71-98.
- Fulkerson, L. 2018. *Credula Spes: Tibullan Hope and the Future of Elegy*. In S. Frangoulidis, S. Harrison, and T. Papanghelis, eds. *Intratextuality and Latin Literature*, 55-66. Boston.
- La Barbera, S. 2021. "Hopeful poetry: Tibullus' « Spes » and her literary lineage." *Aev. Ant.* n. s. 21: 35-56.
- Mutschler, F.-H. 2011. "Happiness, Life Models, and Social Order in Republican and Augustan Rome." *SO* 85: 134-60.
- Oliensis, E. 1997. "The Erotics of Amicitia: Readings in Tibullus, Propertius, And Horace." In J. Hallett, and M. Skinner, eds. *Roman Sexualities*, 151-171. Princeton.
- Racette-Campbell, M. 2024. "The Language of Teaching and Learning in Propertius." In T. H. M. Gellar-Goad, and C. B. Polt, eds. *Didactic Literature in the Roman World*, 119-134. New York.