

At the Door: The Tibullan *Exclusus Amator* and the Boundaries of Masculinity

Roman elegy cavorts with the idea of space, whether that be the threshold of the doorway (Tib., 1.2, 1.5; Ov. *Am.* 1.6; Prop. 1.16) or commentary on travel between rural and urban spaces (Tib. 1.3, Sulp. 3.2, 3.3). Recent scholarship about elegy and spatial theory has focused particularly on the genre's commentary on and engagement with the territory of the rapidly expanding empire, such as in the volumes *Latin Elegy and the Space of Empire* (ed. Lindheim 2021) and *The Production of Space in Latin Literature* (ed. Fitzgerald 2018). As a genre which playfully engages with and inverts social and gender norms, elegy has also seen fruitful engagement with feminist theory (e.g., James 2001, Keith 2022, Zimmermann 2019), in works which have explored elegy via Marxist-feminist, temporal-feminist, and embodied-feminist lenses. Given the productivity of spatial and feminist approaches when applied to the genre separately, in this paper I propose an analysis of Tibullus' elegiac space motivated by a feminist engagement with spatial theory.

Applying Lefebvre's conception of space as socially produced (1991) and Löw's model of space as a set of relations composed of "living beings and social goods at places" (232), and "actively linked by two people," (134), I argue that the boundary of the door (*ianua*) primarily represents the delineation between masculine and feminine space, and, additionally, that the Tibullan *amator*'s desire to enter the room and be united with his lover evinces his desire to occupy feminine space and time (cf. Gardner 2013, applying Kristeva 1981). The *amator*'s inability to cross the threshold, I suggest, represents societal impositions of traditional masculinity upon him, which he attempts to combat via his fantasies about an extra-urban life with his *puella*.

Via this spatial framework, I offer close readings of two poems of Tibullus in which the *amator* beseeches and/or berates the door (or guard) that separates him from his *puella* (Tib. 1.2 and 1.5). The door, as the physical object which separates the two lovers, is symbolic of societal standards that keep the two apart, as well as of the separation of masculine/feminine space. In Poem 1.2, Tibullus asserts that Venus herself “favors... the girl (who) unlocks the doors, although the bar is fixed” (1.2.17-18: *illa favet ... seu reserat fixo dente puella fores*). In this instance, only the *puella* has the explicit ability to unbar the door and let her lover in; that the *amator* attributes to the *puella* the power to bring the two together inverts the expected masculine/feminine social order, in affirmation of the broader counter-cultural masculinities that suffuse the genre.

Next, I focus on Tibullus’ habit of imagining unreal and idyllic spaces in which the *amator* and the *puella* will live. In both 1.2 and 1.5, he composes an elaborate fantasy of himself and his *puella* living in the countryside (1.2.71-4; 1.5.21-34), an idealized location removed from the societal bounds of urban space. This fantasy appears to occupy an unreal space in cyclical time that resists normative social codes that require progress affiliated with military service and the accumulation of wealth. However, the *puella*’s status in this fantasy is reflective of her “real” status, either as a free (1.5) or enslaved woman (1.2). Thus, the real is superimposed upon the unreal, illuminating the continuity between social spaces (Lefebvre 86-7, 95).

Finally, I conclude with some remarks about the articulation of unseen and unreal spaces by the Tibullan *amator*. Although he expresses a desire to be away from the real, the *amator* nevertheless reinscribes social codes upon his *puella* based on her status in each poem. Both the other side of the door and the imagined rural space are marked as feminine, liminal space, but are ultimately superseded by the *amator*’s lived social reality. Through the *amator*’s interaction with

these unseen spaces, he reveals that his apparent counter-cultural masculinity exists alongside normative forms of masculinity.

Works Cited

Gardner, Hunter H. *Gendering Time in Augustan Love Elegy*. Oxford University Press, 2013.

James, Sharon L. "The Economics of Roman Elegy: Voluntary Poverty, the Recusatio, and the Greedy Girl." *AJP* 122 (2001): 223–253.

Keith, Alison. "Women's Travel in Latin Elegy." In *Travel, Geography, and Empire in Latin Poetry*, ed. by Micah Young Myers & Erika Zimmermann Damer. Routledge, 2022.

Kristeva, Julia. "Women's Time." *Signs* 7 (1981): 13-35.

Löw, Martina. *The Sociology of Space: Materiality, Social Structures, and Action*. Translated by Donald Goodwin. Macmillan, 2016.

Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Blackwell, 1991.

Lindheim, Sara H. *Latin Elegy and the Space of Empire*. Oxford University Press, 2021.

Fitzgerald, William & Efrossini Spentzou, eds. *The Production of Space in Latin Literature*. Oxford University Press, 2018.

Zimmerman, Erika Damer. *In the Flesh: Embodied Identities in Roman Elegy*. University of Wisconsin Press, 2019.