

The Pious *Rusticus*: Reconsidering Rural Lifestyle in Tibullus 1.1

Circumventing traditional Roman mores, the elegiac poet Tibullus rejects in his erotic verse the stereotypical professions treasured by Augustan society, in particular that of the *miles*. Tibullus' elegies have recently been interpreted through the lens of intertextuality to destabilize gender (Damer 2014), of a simultaneously nightmarish and fantastical dreamscape (Miller 2004), of the gendered language used for time (Gardner 2013), and of the interplay of power (Lee-Stecum 1998) among others. However, unlike his literary peers who advocate for the occupation of the soldier of love (*miles amoris*), Tibullus provides another alternative lifestyle to that of the career soldier in the form of the *rusticus* (Gaisser 1983). In 1.1, Tibullus creates a home for himself and his lover that is ideal in its *pietas* and traditional *fides* by escaping into a fantasy of the Roman countryside (Fisher 1970). Beginning his poem with a declaration against the pursuits of the military man followed by an idealization of the country's charm, I argue that Tibullus in this poem circumvents Roman social expectations by arguing for the purity of the rural lifestyle over the luxury of the city, while also endorsing the superiority of the *rusticus* over the *miles*. I first examine Rome's traditional views of the richness and nobility of its agricultural history, which affirms the virtue of the *rus* and can be seen in the legend of Cincinnatus and in the *Georgics* of Vergil, a contemporary of Tibullus; then I trace the transition from the moral countryside to the debased urbanity of Rome, as illustrated by the metamorphosis of Priapus (Uden 2010). While in 1.1 Tibullus places the blushing guardian in his fertile orchards (*Pomosisque ruber custos ponatur in hortis*), in reality the god has become a symbol of *otium* and part of the sterile urban landscape (Nikoloutsos 2007). I compare the life and virtues of the *rusticus* and the *miles* to show that Tibullus' innovative contrast between the *rus* and the *urbs*, as well as that of the *rusticus* and the *miles*, created an unorthodox lifestyle choice justified by turning to earlier Roman morals. While the *rusticus* exhibits his *pietas* through offerings to the

gods regardless of the success of a harvest (*Nam veneror, seu stipes habet desertus in agris*), the *miles* seeks only personal wealth and violence. Finally I argue that in his portrayal of the romanticized *rus* (Thibodeau 2011), Tibullus presents a darker reality where rusticity is the result of hard labor, as in 1.1 where the poet imagines passing his days on shore of a riverbank avoiding the heat of the day (*Sed Canis aestivos ortus vitare sub umbra/Arboris ad rivos praetereuntis aquae*).

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