

Late in the Day: Elegiac Overtones in Vergil's Corycian Farmer

Vergil's Corycian *senex* (G 4.116-148) has engendered admiration, discussion, imitation and dissent almost since its publication. One of the most recent and provocative analyses of this passage examines the way that time is experienced in passage, and argues that the *senex* acutely feels the press of time (as an old man concerned about his own demise) and that the garden itself is reified in the process of Vergil's narration, as an object of memory (Thibodeau 2001). While temporal concerns, especially as the intimate property of narrative, can be viewed as particular to agricultural and didactic literature, where the accomplishment of certain work at a fixed time is of great moment, I argue that the temporal concerns here are more akin to those of elegy, especially in Vergil's concern with "lateness" and multiple uses of the adjective *serus*. Indeed, the elegiac atmosphere is especially notable and although the topics are different, there are significant resonances with Tibullus 1.4, specifically:

- (1) the framing of these episodes with Priapus, and thus an emphasis on fecundity and its swift passing
- (2) multiple uses of the adjective *serus* or synonyms (e.g. *tardus*)
- (3) the speaker's eyewitness account on the unfolding of time (*vidi* Tib. 1.4.33, *vidisse* Verg. G. 127)

Yet, while both texts suggest the reward of patience, either in agriculture or in love, such patience leads only to solitude. Tibullus attends to Priapus's advice, but his own efforts have come to nothing, and he foresees the day when as an old man he is merely a source of advice for younger ones (79-80). The Corycian farmer, conversely, lives in a world of abundance, but his mania for cheating time has left him the sole occupant of his miniature paradise.

Bibliography

Thibodeau, P. 2001. *Playing the Farmer*. Berkeley.