

Sadistic smiles: pleasure and suffering in the poetry of Tibullus

Seven of the sixteen extant poems attributed to Tibullus represent pleasure experienced either at the suffering of another or in the context of violence (1.1, 2, 6, 8-10; 2.4). Pleasure that depends on the suffering of another brings the reader back to the body, a move which works against an elite ideology of aestheticization in elegy identified by Connolly 2000. Such pleasure also disrupts any sublimation of *amor* which Solmsen 1962 has noted in the Tibullan corpus. This paper will consider the overall effect of Tibullan sadism on the poet's elegiac universe and its narrating lover, especially in the first book.

This form of pleasure is qualitatively different from the masochistic *servitium amoris* which is part of the elegiac code (e.g., Tib. 2.3-5). It is often sadistic in nature and is juxtaposed to the generic contrast between the *nequitium* of the lover's inactive lifestyle with the active political and military life which he refuses. This sadistic pleasure also contradicts the fantasy of an Epicurean happiness apart from the worries of the city and the duties of Roman men (Annas 1993; Yona 2018), a choice Mutschler 2011 associates uniquely with the equestrian class of the late Republic.

We may see this juxtaposition in the very first poem of the collection. The bucolic setting described by Tibullus resembles Epicurean garden. The farm is removed and an oasis for poet and girlfriend while providing just enough with the least amount of labor or suffering. 1.1.1-5 opens with Epicurean rejection of wealth for wealth's sake (because of danger and distraction from pleasure) in a priamel which resembles Hor. C. 1.1 (Yona 2018): *Divitias alius ... Quem labor assiduus...Martia cui...Mi mea paupertas....* Tibullus closes with a statement of the middle way—both Aristotelian and Epicurean: *Despiciam dites despiciamque famem* (78). Nevertheless, soon we encounter the threat of violence as a backdrop for the lover's modest

pleasure. He affirms that a small crop is enough, it is enough (*satis est, satis est*, 43) to lay in bed next to his beloved as a violent storm rages outside (*immites ventos*, 45; *gelidas hibernus aquas cum fuderit Auster*, 47). In the second half of the poem, the lover derives pleasure again in violent context, this time his own making. He declares it time to destroy furniture and to enjoy fighting with his beloved (*rixas inseruisse iuvat*, 73-4).

In addition to the threat of violence heightening the experience of satisfaction or pleasure (cf. 1.10), we also see throughout the small corpus a joy in watching others suffer (1.2, 8, 9; 2.4). In 2.4, the lover wishes that a greedy woman may burn to death in her own house while young men happily (*laeti*, 41) look on and do nothing to save her. Such joy in the threat and fantasy of violence repeatedly unsettles the carefree good life which the lover purports to want with his beloveds.

Bibliography

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