

The final couplet in Tibullus' enigmatic elegy 2.3 has received little attention, perhaps as a result of the numerous other problems found in the body of the poem. The latter's lacunae, uncharacteristic content, and apparent lack of overall unity have led to numerous emendations, and in some cases to excision or re-attribution (on textual difficulties see Bright 1978, 192ff). Faced with the multiple *volte-faces* of the poet's persona throughout the poem, scholars' commentaries have focused on bringing to light its internal logic and incorporating the speaker's various reversals within a broader, unifying scheme (see e.g. Shayner 1973, 82ff; Cairns 1979, 144ff; Murgatroyd 1994, 80ff).

In this respect, the elegy's closing couplet has not received the attention it deserves. I suggest that a new reading of these two lines greatly contributes to shed light on the problematic question of the poem's unity from a new angle (ll.79-80): *ducite: ad imperium dominae sulcabitur agros: non ego me uinclis uerberibusque nego* ("Lead me away: I'll plough the fields on my lady's command: | I'll not deny myself the chains and whips"). This final *pirouette* has predominantly been misread. Scholars have interpreted this expression of the speaker's willingness to submit himself to harsh agricultural toil literally, taking it to be a final, submissive resignation (after many a reversal) to the conventional elegiac *servitium amoris* and the status of slave to one's mistress evoked at the beginning of the poem (Bright 1978, 205; Putnam 1973; Murgatroyd 1994, 121). I propose an alternate reading, pointing to the greater significance and complexity of meaning of these last two lines with respect to the poem as a whole (for a timid suggestion of innuendo, see Ball (1983: 176). If one keeps in mind, firstly, that *sulcus* could be used just as well as *ager* (among many agricultural or rustic images) to designate the *cunnus*, and secondly, that both Virgil and Lucretius used *sulcus* of the female pudenda in conjunction with the metaphors of sowing and ploughing (Adams 1980 83-4), the traditional motifs of the *servitium amoris* (*uinclis uerberibusque* – see Adams' "strike and the like," 145) and of "agriculture" (*sulcabitur agros*) take on a whole new meaning in this final, witty *double entendre*.

Such a reading is very much in keeping with the rest of the poem, throughout which one sees Tibullus disingenuously rejecting pastoral and elegiac conventions with a degree of playful, meta-literary self-mockery. The Golden Age description immediately preceding our passage depicts a pre-agricultural age that is devoid of the *topos* of a naturally abundant Nature (found in elegy I.3, for example), and focuses instead on the erotic freedom of the time and its inconcinnous conjunction with acorns (*glans aluit ueteres, et passim semper amarunt*). This is one of several elements which point to the predominantly ironic, facetious nature of the poem. The sexual innuendo in the closing couplet thus both espouses and completes Tibullus' generically innovative and subversive game, bringing it to a culminating point and illuminating the underlying unity of the poem as a whole.

