On some Tibullian Problems

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ON SOME TIBULLIAN PROBLEMS.

I. THE FEAST OF LUSTRATION IN II. i.

Dissatisfied with current views upon the exordium of Tibullus II. i. (vv. 1–24), I proposed in Selections from Tibullus (1903) to make the occasion of the poem the Sementiae Feriae instead of the Ambarualia. This proposal, criticised, amongst others, by Mr. Warde Fowler in an interesting article in the Classical Review (xxii. 1908, pp. 36 sqq.), I have now abandoned (ib. p. 40 6). But the difficulties which led me to break away from previous exegesis still remain, and to them I address myself in the present article.

I shall assume that these difficulties do not arise from lax or 'poetical' treatment of facts, and that here, as elsewhere, Tibullus writes upon rustic matters with adequate knowledge and care.

Let us collect the indications which he gives of the season of the festival which he is here describing. Firstly, a lamb is mentioned as the offering (15). This, as Mr. Fowler says (ib. p. 37), is not decisive, but it is consistent with any date between the middle of January and, say, the end of June. Ploughing, again, is in progress. This may be the prosissio which in uliginosi campi took place in the latter half of April (Columella, ii. 4. 3), but in colles pinguis soli (ib. § 9) in March, or even as early as February in mild weather or dry districts. Or it may be the iteratio, which is to be accomplished after the middle of April and before the summer solstice (§§ 4, 9). The tertiatio, which, like the prosissio and iteratio of exiles agri (§ 11), took place in the beginning of September (§ 4) or about the autumnal equinox (§ 9), it cannot be, since Tibullus refers to the harvest as yet to come (l. 19).

To Columella's statements those of Varro, R.R. i. 28, may be subjoined. He mentions ploughing in the period between the first blowing of Fauonius (Feb. 7) and the vernal equinox, in that from the vernal equinox to the rising of the Pleiads (May 8), and again in that which ended with the summer solstice, the first two periods being the most important.1 So far, then, we are pointed to a date between the earlier part of February and the latter part of June.

But now we come to the passage which seemed to me clearly to indicate the winter and therefore to be incompatible with any date that could be

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1 Horace, Odes, I. iv., is especially interesting in this connexion. He refers to Fauonius in l. 1, 'grata uice ueris et Fauoni.' A lamb is mentioned in 12, and in 3 the cattle are no longer in sheds or the ploughman by the fire ('neque iam stabulis gaudet pecus aut arator igni').
assigned to an Ambarualian festival or *agrorum lustratio* (l. i ‘fruges lustramus et agros’). It follows on the prayer in lines 17–20.

\[ \text{di patrii, purgamus agros, purgamus agrestes:} \\
\text{uos mala de nostris pellite limitibus.} \]

\[ \text{neu seges eludat messem fallacibus herbis} \\
\text{neu timeat celeres tardior agna lupos.} \]

\[ \text{tunc nitidus plenis confusus rusticus agris} \\
\text{ingeret ardenti grandia ligna foco;} \\
\text{turbaque uernarum, saturi bona signa coloni,} \\
\text{ludet et ex uirgis extruet ante casas.} \]

\[ \text{euentura precor: uiden’ ut felicibus extis} \]
\[ \text{significet placidos nuntia fibra deos?} \]

I had supposed the time contemplated in *tunc* to be immediate, and the connexion of thought to be ‘Grant the farmer’s prayer, and he may thereupon to-day, with full confidence in the future, indulge his genius in his cheerful home,’ but I now believe (as I wrote to Mr. Fowler, l.c. p. 38 a) that its reference is prospective and to a period posterior to anything in the context.

Mr. Fowler accepts this interpretation of *tunc*, but holds an entirely different theory as to the purport of the passage. For his defence of it, which rests upon some undeniable though, I believe, accidental ambiguities, I must refer to his own article; but its presentation may be condensed as follows. ‘The poem and the *lustratio* it describes belong to the spring.’ ‘The omens are favourable, the *lustratio* is successful, and the husbandman may look forward to the time when the crops are no longer in danger (*confusus plenis agris*, which he understands as feeling every confidence in the fields full of the now ripe or ripening corn), and when he will be able to take his part in the general rejoicings with a light heart.’ These ‘general rejoicings’ he finds in 22–24. 22 *ardenti foco* he understands of ‘a midsummer bonfire or of an altar-fire at a summer festival,’ inclining apparently to the former (p. 39 a). And in the next couplet he sees ‘a survival of an ancient bit of custom or ritual in which the *uernae* took part, making booths or tabernacles out of *uirgae*. To this he finds parallels in Ovid’s account of the feast of Anna Perenna on the Ides of March (*Fasti*, 3. 523), in Tibullus’s (ii. 5. 95 sqq.) of an unspecified festival and in Festus’s mention of the Neptunalia, July 23, when booths or huts were erected, made of the foliage of trees: ‘Vmbrae uocantur Neptunalibus casae frondeae pro tabernaculis’ (p. 377). Now the sense, upon which Mr. Fowler bases his theory of a ‘ritual’ allusion, *can* be extracted from the Latin of 24, and others have in fact so extracted it, and it may therefore here be submitted to an examination in detail which the enforced brevity of my notes in the *Selections* prevented it there from receiving.

The parallels cited by Mr. Fowler for the custom appear to fail him in an important respect. Why is it not the *coloni* but the *uernae* that make booths of branches here? In Ovid and in Tibullus (ii. 5. 95) this ‘bit of ritual’ is performed by *freemen*. 
In **21 plenis—agris** might certainly mean 'full of the standing corn.' Cf. Tac. *H. 2. 12* 'pleni agri; apertae domus.' But it may just as well mean 'full of the sown seed.' Cf. Ovid, *Fasti, 4. 633* sq. 'nunc grauidum pecus est; grauidae quoque semine terrae. | telluri plenae uictima plena datur.' *confisus*, Mr. Fowler thinks, 'suits better with crops that have come to maturity and thus passed through the greater part of the perils that beset them than with seed that has yet to encounter so many natural dangers.' But his objection cannot be upheld in the face of Tibullus, *i. 9. 45,* 'tum miser interii, *stulte confisus* amari;' where the adverb shows *confidere* is just as suitable of unwarranted as of justifiable confidence. Furthermore, the husbandman's trust in the good faith of the land he has sown is an idea that naturally occurs to our poet; *ii. 6. 21* sq. 'spes alit agricolas: spes sulcis *credit* aratis | semina, quae magno faenore reddat ager,' *3. 61* 'at tibi, dura seges, Nemesim quae abducis ab urbe, | *persoluet* nulla *semina terra* *fide*.'

Need we adduce proof that the simple and obvious sense of the next line is that the countryman heaps logs upon his blazing hearth to keep out the bitter cold? If so, Hor. *Carm. i. 9. 5* 'dissolue frigus, *ligna* super *foco | large reponens*' and Ovid, *Fasti, 4. 509* sq. 'illa domum glande's excussaque mora rubetis | portat et *arsuris* grandia *ligna foci* will serve our turn.

In **23 uernarum** in itself may signify either 'home-born slaves in general' (so Mr. Fowler) or 'home-born slave children,' which is its meaning in Plautus, *Miles, 698* 'quid? *nutrici* non missuru's quicquam quae *uernas* alit?,' Horace, *S. ii. 6. 65* sqq. 'o noctes cenaque deum quibus ipse meique | ante Larem proprium uescor *uernasque* procosac | pasco libatis dapibus'; *cf. Epod. 2. 65.* But, following a principle, the importance of which for the interpretation of Tibullus I have urged on more than one occasion (*Journal of Philology, xxvi. pp. 87 sq., xxviii. pp. 153—156; Selections from Tibullus, p. 208*), we shall be guided by the parallelisms of *i. 5. 25* sq. 'consuescit amantis | garrulus in dominae *uerna* sinu' and *ii. 2. 22* 'ludat et ante tuos turba nouella pedes' to regard the second interpretation as more probable. The youthful *uernae* (the signs of prosperity, *bona signa*) are of course the offspring of the well-fed *colonus* and his *ancillae.*

Juvenal 14. 166 sqq. seems a parallel worth quoting, 'saturabat glaeabela talis | patrem ipsum turbamque casae qua feta iacebat | uxor et infantes ludebant quattuor, unus | *uernula* tres domini.'

As for the last sentence, building houses (*aedificare casas*) was a children's game, as is attested by Hor. *S. ii 3. 247* (and 275). And in Tibullus the adverb

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1 I have printed the MS. reading *amari,* as the present point is not thereby affected, but *Amori,* dat. like *agris* here, is extremely probable.

2 For this, it would seem, the more exact diminutive came later into vogue; Sen. *Dial. ii. 6* 'cogita *filorum* nos modestia delectari, *uernularum* licentia.' A transition in use seems indicated in Pliny, *N.H. 22. 44,* where *uerna—uernula* are used of the same person in the same context.

3 It is important to observe that here, the only other place where Tibullus uses *uerna,* it must refer to a child.

4 Mr. Fowler apparently takes *ludat* as generally indulging in 'jollification,' but in Tibullus, when applied to adults, it would more naturally have the erotic sense of *i. 3. 64* and *l. 87* of the present poem.
ante may refer indifferently to space or to time; see e.g. i. 10. 68 and 78 of our poem.

A reader then who is not in search of survivals of ancient ceremonials may, I think, rest content to interpret this passage as a natural description of a winter scene in an Italian country home. The working year is over, the seed is sown; and the prosperous farmer, blessed with a good harvest and full of trust that the earth will continue to yield him her increase, piles up the cheerful household fire, round which play the little uernae, the proofs of his prosperity. And its connexion with what precedes will be by no means obscure. 'Let us celebrate this feast of purification for our crops and herds with all the due traditional rites, and let us in purity and sincerity pray to the country gods to bless us; so that our harvest may not disappoint our just expectations nor the wolf ravage our flocks. Then, when the crops are gathered and the autumn sowing done, we may take our ease at home, looking forward to another prosperous year.'

The exact date of the lustration described by Tibullus, which we may call a private Ambarualia, no antiquarian research has been able to determine; doubtless for the reason that it was not fixed but varied with the year, the district, and the convenience of the farmer. The latitude indicated above (p. 127) is countenanced by the language of Virgil, who, while assigning the festival to early spring, Georg. i. 339 sqq. 'sacra refer Cereri laetis operatus in herbis, | extremae sub casum hiemis iam uere sereno; | tum pingues agni et tum mollissima uina, | tum somni dulces densaeque in montibus umbrae,' and 345 'terque nouas felix eat hostia fruges,' contemplates nevertheless the possibility of its being celebrated much later, inasmuch as he warns the husbandman that it must be over before the corn is cut, 347 sqq. 'neque ante | falce maturis quisquam supponat aristis | quam Cereri torta redimitus temporae quercu | det motus incompositos et carmina dicat.' Within this period of the year would fall the small number of datable rustic festivals in various parts of Italy which are mentioned by Wissowa, Real-Encyclop. i. p. 1796.

II. ON LYGDAMVS.

In my Selections from Tibullus I contended for the following propositions:
1. Lygdamus was the poetaster's real name, while Neaera, that of his lady-love, was in all likelihood an assumed one. Though the latter cannot be directly
established, there is no reason for assuming a deviation from Roman literary
etiquette in such matters. Catullus, Lesbia; Gallus, Lycoris; Tibullus,
Delia; Propertius, Cynthia; Naso, Corinna, etc., to which we may add
Sulpicia, Cerinthus (Selections, p. xxxviii, note (3)). Why any one should dispute
this I do not know, except on the ground, surely an insufficient one, that he does
not know who Lygdamus was.

2. He was probably a freedman. For his name was that of a slave, and the
argument for a Roman descent drawn from iii. 1. 2 'nostris—auis' is wholly
inconclusive, as 'a new Roman citizen entered as a matter of course into all the
rights of the native' (op. cit. p. xlvi). I am glad now to have the support of
Prof. Cartault, Tibulle (1909), p. 74, who refers to Horace, Carm. iv. 15. 25 sqq.
The wealth attributed to him on the score of the magniloquent phrases of iii. 3 is
just as imaginary. 'Wishes,' I said, 'cost nothing,' and Prof. Cartault points out
that even if he had wealth, a theory discountenanced by 3. 23 and 5. 31, so had
plenty of other freedmen in his times. Further, I drew attention to the peculiar
term which he applies to his relation to Neaera: coniunx 1. 26 (and note) and
elsewhere, coniugium 4. 79. The researches of two scholars published since my
note was written confirm my inference, showing, as they do, that coniunx is
extremely frequent on the inscriptions of freedmen; C.I.L. i. 1053, 1220, 1240,
1242, 1479, 1064, 1413, 1011; vi. 15389, 16306, 21326, 24711, 18616,
20222, 17082.¹

Prof. Cartault (op. cit. p. 88) conjectures that Lygdamus was a freedman of
Tibullus. This of course is possible. But if we are to guess, I prefer the guess
that he was the Lygdamus of Cynthia and Propertius, Selections, p. xlv n. 2 (where
his imitations of Propertius are referred to). There is no chronological difficulty
that I can see. Lygdamus is mentioned in Prop. iv. 7. 35, a poem written after
the death of Cynthia. But no poem in that book appears to be later than
B.C. 16, and on my theory Lygdamus may have published the Third Book any
time between B.C. 15 and B.C. 3.

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¹ J. Kohn, Alllateinische Forschungen, p. 86 (on coniunx), and E. H. Sturtevant, Classical Philology,
i. pp. 213 sqq.