Heva Olfman
McMaster University

Love and Death in Latin Elegy

The elegists of Rome famously wrote love poems in which each pined for a specific mistress or lover. In some of these poems, love and death were prominent themes. Propertius (c.50BCE – 15BCE), Tibullus (c.55BCE – 19BCE), and Ovid (c.43BCE – 17CE) each wrote poems featuring the topics of love and death, and their relationship as a highlighted theme. This essay will provide a survey of Propertius 4.7, Tibullus 1.3, and Ovid *Amores* 3.9; specifically, exploring the relationship between the themes of love and death. These poems were chosen because each exhibits love and death as themes in distinctive ways. In Propertius 4.7 the resurrection of Propertius' mistress Cynthia is featured and as a ghost she berates Propertius one evening as she is displeased with the circumstances of her death. Tibullus 1.3 presents for readers Tibullus' imagination of how he might die, in which he fears that he will die alone on a deserted island without the care of his love. Ovid's *Amores* 3.9 is dedicated to Tibullus after he actually died; in this elegy Ovid imagines Tibullus in the afterlife and assures his friend that he did not die in the way that he feared he might, deserted and alone.

Each poem that this essay examines is an elegy. Although the majority of each of these poets' poems contained the subject of love and affection, Propertius is particularly known for frequently intertwining the concepts of love and death.[1] Within his treatment of the two topics, normally the theme of death is subordinate to the wooing of the woman in the poem.[2]

[1] Theodore Papanghelis, *Propertius A Hellenistic Poet on Love and Death* (Cambridge Cambridgeshire: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 2.
[2] Papanghelis, 2.

Furthermore, scholars generally consider Ovid to be an overt and explicit poet;[3] a unique quality of Tibullus, however, is that he addresses a different mistress in each of his books.[4] Thus, while each poem that this essay addresses is an elegy, each poet had a different style that they have attached to that elegy. Consequently, this essay will argue that in these distinct poems, each poet perpetuates the premise that love can overcome death.

This paper will examine these poems in both a thematic and literary context. I will begin with a brief overview of elegiac poetry and the poetic style of these three poets; then, an examination of each poem's tone, word usage and thematic distinctions. The poems will be discussed in the order mentioned above, beginning with Propertius. On account of the fact that Ovid's poem could be considered a response to Tibullus' earlier work, Tibullus' and Ovid's poems will be considered, first separately, and then as a pair. The concepts of love, death and those affected by the death in the poem will be analyzed in addition to how these concepts interact with each other in the poems. A few supplemental topics considered will be these three poets' different approaches to the same topic in the same genre; this concept is analyzed by exploring how each poet expresses the ideal that love can overcome death. Lastly, there will be an evaluation of the potential commemoratory aspect that these poems may have had.

Latin love elegy is a type of poetry that revolves around the employment of the elegiac couplet. Catullus, who was a poet of the late republic, is considered a pioneer of this genre. The definition of an elegy is rooted in the use of elegiac couplets, and typically Roman love elegy features a lover poet who is hopelessly in love with a woman. Additionally, the woman is depicted as sometimes reciprocating the amorous feelings, but she is also greedy for presents and

[3] Stephen Hinds, "Generalizing about Ovid" in *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies: Ovid*, ed. Peter Knox (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) 16.
[4] Robert Maltby, *Tibullus: Elegies Text, Introduction and Commentary* (Cambridge: Francis Cairns Ltd., 2002) 42.

lovers, thus, the poet does not have the means to satisfy his mistress' every desire.[5] This results in the elegiac lover's affairs often being turbulent relationships, with the poems depicting the relationship as blissful, sad, angry, and uncertain. It is thought that Catullus' poetry, in which the Lesbia cycle of poems follow that same pattern of a chaotic relationship, is "the undisputed ancestor of Roman love elegy".[6] While Catullus actually employs the use of many meters throughout his corpus, all three poets discussed in this paper, Propertius, Tibullus and Ovid, viewed their own work as following in a tradition of poetry founded by Catullus.[7] Each of the poets focused on in this paper are well known for producing many works that use the elegiac meter and are considered the elegists of Rome. Furthermore, it is important to note that in following the stylings of Catullus, whose work was influenced by Hellenistic poetry,[8] the poems of Ovid, Propertius and Tibullus also contain references and allusions to Hellenistic poetry. Ovid, Propertius and Tibullus produced their elegiac works in the early Augustan period (c. 43BCE – 17CE)[9] and ultimately, elegy had become synonymous with erotic first-person poems that focused on the affections poets had for a specific mistress.[10]

Propertius 4.7 is a unique poem when considered in the context of his other works. As mentioned above, Propertius 4.7 features Cynthia as an angry ghost, and as though she is alive she scolds Propertius. Scholars believe that Propertius had a peculiar linkage between love and

[5] Laurel Fulkerson, "Chapter 6: The *Heroides*: Female Elegy?" in *A Companion to Ovid*, Ed. Peter Knox (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), 82.
[6] Paul Allen Miller, "Catullus and Roman Love Elegy" in *A Companion to Catullus*, Ed. Marilyn Skinner (Wiley-Black, 2007), 3. See Miller (2007) for argument regarding Catullus' influence on later Latin love elegy.
[7] Miller, "Chapter 21 Catullus and Roman Love Elegy" (2007), 3.
[8] Damian Nelis, "Hellenistic poetry at Rome" in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 2012) Hellenistic poetry at Rome - Oxford Reference (oclc.org). See also Conte (1987) *Latin Literature: A History*, pages 136-155 for Catullus' neoteric style and the inclusions of Hellenistic poetry in Latin poetry.
[9] Gian Conte, *Latin Literature: A History* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1987), 249.
[10] Edward Kenney and Stephen Hinds, "Elegiac Poetry, Latin" in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 2012) Elegiac poetry, Latin - Oxford Reference (oclc.org).

death among the elegiac poets.[11] The detailed return of Cynthia as a ghost in Propertius 4.7 has characteristics of an *aition*, *epicedeion* and an expanded epigram.[12] Specifically, it is the prominence of death in this poem that distinguishes it among his other poems. Moreover, book 4 itself is distinctive in the landscape of Propertius' corpus because of its preoccupation with death, and the way in which it sets itself apart from the other books at its commencement.[13] In the beginning of the book, it discusses the foundation of Rome[14]; however this theme does not continue with each poem appearing to contain a different topic. Although book 4 appears to have a random array of subjects, the apparent discontinuity actually has significance with respect to the order of the poems.[15] Sullivan suggests that if viewed as a division of 12 poems, Propertius' Book 4 has a continuous theme of *fides*.[16] Another theory posited points to Propertius' 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 4.7 and 4.11 which all feature female deaths, the arrival of a ghost in 4.7 completes this cycle despite there being one more poem, 4.11.[17] Subsequently, 4.7 becomes the penultimate poem in the series pertaining to female death. If the cycle is in fact simply concerning Cynthia, then this 'cycle completion' is short lived as Cynthia reappears in the next poem alive.[18] Furthermore, Papanghelis notes that scholars have struggled in defining this poem because of its

[11] Papanghelis, 2.
[12] An *aition* is a narrative written for the purpose of explaining the origin of something, an *epicedeion* is a poem that honours the dead, and an extended epigram is a work that informs others of someone's death. See Gregory Hutchinson, *Propertius Elegies Book IV* (Cambridge, UK, New York: Cambridge University Press) 170.
[13] Sharon James, "Ipsa Dixerat" in *Women's Words in Roman Love Elegy*, Phoenix Vol 64, No. 3 (Classical Association of Canada, 2010) 316.
[14] Propertius 4.1.1-5.
[15] Hutchinson, 16.
[16] J.P. Sullivan "Propertius Book IV: Themes and Structures" in *Illinois Classical Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (University of Illinois Press, 1984), 33.
[17] Hutchinson, 16.
[18] Hutchinson, 170.

different styles and tonal levels.[19] Therefore, this poem and the book of poems it is in is distinctive in the genre of elegy and divergent from Propertius' other works.

In 4.7, Propertius intertwines the concepts of love and death and embodies them in the ghost of Cynthia. Book 4 is characteristically different than Propertius' other works and is therefore, hard to qualify in the context of his other works. 4.7 exhibits the same type of presentation of Cynthia aside from the fact that Cynthia is a ghost. As such, Cynthia's lively ghost could metaphorically depict this couple's love affair as one that transcends death. The elegies of the Augustan poets have long been considered poetic fiction.[20] It follows then, that the rules and limitations of realistic life would not apply to elegy and as such death could be transcended by love. The case of their love overcoming death is evidenced in two ways; the first being that Cynthia's ghost has the same form of passion and commitment to Propertius in death as she does in life, and the second is shown by her return in the following poem. Romans believed that time and the way in which people experience time is continuous; consequently, Roman history was considered to be an uninterrupted stream of time from Aeneas to the (present) Augustan age.[21] This being the case, it would be jarring for audiences to have a dead woman reappear just one poem later. Perhaps, however, if there were a force which remained consistent it would not have been such a disturbing surprise. The concept that their love is unbroken even in death may allow for leniency with respect to continuity, in addition to having a

[19] Papanghelis, 145.
[20] Maria Wyke "Mistress and Metaphor in Augustan Elegy" in *The Roman Mistress: Ancient and Modern Representations*. (Oxford University Press, 2007), 15.
[21] Hutchinson, 1.

potentially deeper meaning.[22] Within Cynthia's rant in 4.7 she reminisces about her and Propertius' fervent love affair.[23] In doing so, she says,[24]

saepe Venus trivio commissa, et pectore mixto

fecerunt tepidas proelia nostra vias

often Venus having joined (us) at the crossroads, and with our hearts mixed

our charge made the roadways beneath warm[25]

This line is later complemented by line 94 [26] in which she says,

...mox sola tenebo:

mecum eris, et mixtis ossibus ossa teram

soon I alone will hold you

you will be with me, and I will wear away (your) bones mingled with (my) bones.[27]

When considering the lines in connection with each other, both lines elicit funerary and erotic overtones.[28] The correlation between these two lines demonstrates Propertius' purposeful execution of word usage. Line 94 uses the word *mixtus* which refers the reader back to line 19 which also has the word *mixtus* in it. By linking these two scenes, one near the very beginning of the poem and one being one of the last few lines, Propertius gives the poem a completed yet continuous feeling. Consequently, through both the return of Cynthia in 4.8 and the constant tone that is given to the force of their romance, it is apparent that Propertius is expressing their love as transcendent to death.

[22] To expand on this, the commemorative aspects of these poems will be discussed in the latter portion of the paper.
[23] Propertius 4.7.13-22
[24] All translations are my own.
[25] Propertius 4.7.19-20.
[26] Papanghelis, 158.
[27] Propertius. 4.7.93-94.
[28] Papanghelis, 158.

Propertius' first-person narrative gives Cynthia a living presence in this poem. The first-person narration simultaneously allows him to express his own point of view and Cynthia's when the poem shifts to her speech.[29] Each of the elegists depicts their mistresses with a certain characteristic that the poet finds erotic, and each specific characteristic is the mistresses' form of passion. Propertius' favoured elegiac style exploits Cynthia's *ira*, "anger", and this poem is no different in this way.[30] Although she is a ghost, Cynthia's famous passionate anger is still present. Cynthia's scene begins similarly to the embittered laments of other famous women of Latin poetry[31] with a series of dramatic questions.[32] Nevertheless, her speech is much more of an angry rant than a woeful expression of her circumstance.[33] In lines 23-24 Cynthia states that no one cried for her while she was dying, and that if Propertius had called to her she may have lived another day. She continues the speech detailing a list of her household and how each member should be rewarded or punished.[34] Finally, in line 78 she says, *laudes desine habere meas*, "cease to have praise (by means of) me". With this line she is including Propertius in the list of people with whom she is dissatisfied. Cynthia's irate behaviour is on display throughout the entire corpus of his works.[35] Her anger has always been used to signify that she truly loves him.[36] Thus, even in death Cynthia's fury haunts Propertius. If it were not mentioned at the beginning of the poem that she is a ghost, the audience may think she is alive as her main characteristic, anger, remains constant even in death.

[29] Propertius 4.7.13.
[30] James, "Ipsa Dixerat", 341.
[31] Ariadne in Catullus 64.177-183, and Dido in Aeneid 4.368-371.
[32] Propertius 4.7.13-18
[33] Propertius 4.7.13-93.
[34] Propertius 4.7.35-76
[35] James, 339.
[36] James, 337.

Tibullus' poem 1.3 offers a different reflection of death in an elegy as compared to Propertius 4.7. Tibullus' Book 1 follows his fictional exploits with Messalla in addition to his love affair with Delia. Tibullus' poems generally present fictional scenarios that Tibullus imagines. In poem 3 he falls ill and is abandoned on Phaeacia, where he is left to die. Tibullus laments his death in this elegy through a series of events from his memory, dreams, and prayers all smoothly linked together.[37] This poem's theme and tone is established in the first few lines of the poem.

Ibitis Aegaeas sine me, Messalla, per undas,

O utinam memores ipse cohorsque mei.

You (pl.) will go to through Aegean waves without me, Messalla,

oh I wish that you and your crew remember me.

Tibullus has created a sorrowful tone within the first two lines. Additionally, he also creates epic overtones with the use of the name of the mythological island of Phaeacia. In Tibullus' time, the island he mentions was known as Corcyra; hence, referring to the island with the name of the mythological place Odysseus was stranded on furthers the serious and epic tone.[38] The difference, however, is that Odysseus is given aid from the people in the land, while Tibullus is left there to die in this poem. The following lines express the theme of this poem, which is Tibullus' fear that he will die in a foreign land.[39] This was a fear held by many people in antiquity and because of the commonality of this anxiety the concerns he is airing would be

[37] Maltby 183.
[38] Maltby, 186.
[39] Tibullus.1.3.4-5

understood by the audience.[40] Therefore, although this is an elegy, a different perspective of death and love is explored in this poem that maintains Tibullus' poetic style.

Tibullus separates the topics of love and death in this poem; not only are the themes themselves separated, but he physically separates the two themes by characterising Delia as love and himself as death.[41] Tibullus' elegies are known for their drama and the speaker, Tibullus, often balances his erotic suffering with elaborate fantasies.[42] Delia is introduced in line 9 where he says, *Delia non usquam*, emphasizing that she is not at all near him and not able to be near him. In the following line, however, he uses the word *dicitur*, which Maltby translates in his commentary as "as legend tells".[43] The significance of this word is to distance Delia from him further.[44] Tibullus is referring to something that happened when he was leaving for this journey, and he uses this phrasing to indicate a temporal distance in addition to a physical distance away from his love. This is an important theme within this poem, as distance is the motivation of Tibullus' fear to die in Phaeacia. The space between the two is mentioned again in lines 25-26 when Tibullus recalls that as his mistress, Delia was not able to sleep in the same bed or house as him, so the importance of the memory is her sleeping away from him.[45] Furthermore, in line 3 Tibullus says he is being held in an *ignotus* land, which could be understood as another reference and emphasis on distance. The distance in the poem is also a metaphor for the separation death causes.[46] In addition, Tibullus seems to use a door as a metaphor for a physical separation

[40] Maureen Carroll, "Memory and Commemoration" in *Spirits of the Dead: Roman Funerary Commemoration in Western Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) 45.
[41] Tibullus' characterization of himself as death will be explored in the following paragraph.
[42] James, 341.
[43] Maltby, 189.
[44] Maltby, 189.
[45] Maltby, 192.
[46] Samuel Huskey, "In Memory of Tibullus: Ovid's Remembrance of Tibullus 1.3 in Amores 3.9 and Tristia 3.3" in *Arethusa*. Vol. 38. No. 3. (The John Hopkins University Press, 2005) 372.

between himself and Delia. Two of the three times Tibullus mentions a door in this poem are in reference to her.[47] In the first instance, he speaks of Delia sitting outside her husband's door and metaphorically not outside Tibullus' door. In the second instance, he is reminiscing of the Golden Age when he says that people did not lock their doors, indicating a barrier free environment, which could be interpreted as an environment in which lovers were able to love freely. Therefore, through Tibullus' manipulation of the theme of distance, he demonstrates his literal physical distance away from Delia as a metaphor for the actual separation death causes.

The topic of death is prominent in 1.3 to the extent that Tibullus writes it as though he is already dead. In doing so, he is an exemplar of death and how the death of one person affects those close to them. On line 5 he begins the depiction of life as though he has already died. He says,

> *... non hic mihi mater*
>
> *quae legat in maestos ossa perusta sinus,*
>
> *non soror, Assyrios cineri quae dedat odores*
>
> *et fleat effusis ante sepulcra comis,*
>
> *Delia non usquam;*
>
> …my mother is not here, who would mournfully gather (my) burnt bones into her bosom,
>
> no sister, who pouring out Assyrian perfumes dedicates them to my ashes
>
> and may weep before my tomb with flowing hair,
>
> and no Delia anywhere.[48]

[47] Tibullus.1.3.30 and 1.3.43
[48] Tibullus. 1.3.5-9

These are the rituals that would have taken place if Tibullus died,[49] but because these events did not actually come to fruition they are written in a more imaginative mood. Later in the poem he discusses what his tombstone should say.[50] Next, he imagines what his life in the underworld would be like as the lover he is. The imaginative state of his fantasy seems to become less and less of a potential fear but more of an anticipated end and acceptance of this end. Line 83 shows Tibullus' acceptance and a turn to a more hopeful tone. When he says,

At tu casta precor maneas, sanctique pudoris

Adsideat custos sedula semper anus.

and you, I beg that you may remain pure, and let the old

woman (who is) the diligent guardian of sacred and modest (things) sit with you always.[51]

Tibullus indicates his willingness to let go of his fear and fully embrace death as it comes to him. It is important to note that he only accepts death on the condition that the afterlife go according to what he would like. Despite his preferences, however, these lines also demonstrate his recognition that death is inevitable. Finally, his understanding of these circumstances is fully depicted in the last two lines in which he invites the morning star to rise.[52] This line somewhat mirrors the Homeric line concerning Odysseus' return to Ithaca. So, Tibullus' final lines also recall the readers to the first few lines with another reference to Odysseus.[53] Therefore, with his final acceptance of death and reminder of the beginning of the poem, Tibullus welcomes his unavoidable fate and as such he embodies the concept of death in this poem.

[49] Maltby, 183.
[50] Tibullus. 1.3.55-56.
[51] Tibullus.1.3.83-84
[52] Tibullus. 1.3.93-94.
[53] Maltby, 213.

Considering the different aspects and interpretations of love and death in this poem, it appears as though in his imagined scenario love will conquer death. Although for the majority of the poem Tibullus is concerned with all the things he will miss,[54] how this would not have happened in the 'golden age',[55] and how he will spend time in the afterlife,[56] by the end of the poem he accepts this fate with the hope that he will be reunited with Delia. It is evident from the last two lines with its hopeful and optimistic tone, as discussed above, that Tibullus is certain that he will reunite with Delia. Lastly, he prays to the gods that Delia take all the necessary steps to live piously so that they can be reunited and allow their love to overcome death.

Ovid's *Amores* 3.9 offers another perspective on the subject of death, different from Propertius' 4.7 and Tibullus 1.3. Naturally, this poem will have more similarities with Tibullus 1.3 than Propertius 4.7, as it is a eulogy for Tibullus upon his actual death. Ovid's elegy has many similarities both literarily and thematically with its counterpart, Tibullus 1.3. [57] In addition to this, Ovid alludes to a poem of Callimachus, in which he mourns the death of a friend.[58] Furthermore, Ovid discusses the inevitability of death and within this concept that death is a shared human experience among all, in spite of the thought that poets have a divine existence.[59] Through his imitation of Tibullus' poem, Ovid's poem becomes an echo of 1.3, expressing for Tibullus a reshaped version of his death in which he details the true circumstances of Tibullus' death. Moreover, Ovid clarifies that Tibullus did not die in a foreign land but at home with all of

[54] Tibullus. 1.3.4-20
[55] Tibullus. 1.3.35-52
[56] Tibullus. 1.3.57-66
[57] This will be discussed in more depth later in the paper.
[58] Frederick Williams, "The Hands of Death: Ovid Amores 3.9.20" in *The America Journal of Philology*, Vol. 124. No.2. (John Hopkins University Press, 2003) 225.
[59] Williams, "The Hands of Death" 228.

his friends and family around him.[60] Therefore, Ovid's *Amores* 3.9 offers another style of elegy distinct from Propertius 4.7 and Tibullus 1.3, but still concerning the subject of death.

Amores 3.9 exhibits both a somber tone and one of great grandeur. In a similar fashion as Tibullus' elegy, Ovid begins his elegy with a sorrowful tone, and hints of an epic tone. Ovid immediately compares Tibullus with the mythical figures Memnon and Achilles, stating that if their mothers mourned for them, surely, *Elegy* ought to cry for Tibullus.[61] Ovid continues these statements of greatness, by saying,

nec minus est confusa Venus moriente Tibullo

quam iuveni rupit cum ferus inguen aper.

Venus was no less troubled from Tibullus dying

than when the wild boar seized the groin of her young man.[62]

Evidently, Ovid has chosen Venus on account of her associations with love and Tibullus' career of writing love poetry. More than this, his statement that she was no less *confusa*, "troubled", over Tibullus' death is a striking sentence to audiences. Such an extreme comment perhaps demonstrates Ovid's grief over the loss of Tibullus. The list of mythical characters who lost loved ones and the level of mourning is magnified throughout the entire poem. The concept of *confusa* frames the poem and shapes the tone. On line 35 Ovid questions the purpose of living a good and pious life, feeling that it is pointless as ultimately everyone will die.[63] Lastly, the epic tone even continues to the end of the poem, when Ovid imagines Tibullus joining other great

[60] Joseph Reed, "Ovid's Elegy on Tibullus and Its Models" in *Classical Philology*, Vol. 92, No. 3. (University of Chicago Press, 1997) 261.
[61] Ovid. *Amor*. 3.9.1.
[62] Ovid *Amor*. 3.9.15-16.
[63] Ovid *Amor*. 3.9.35-48.

poets who have died and who have also shaped the style of poetry that they all write.[64] Consequently this elegy presents a meaningful eulogy, both expressing melancholy feelings and the greatness of the deceased.

Ovid's purpose in echoing Tibullus is a concept many scholars have considered, and it is necessary for a well rounded understanding of the themes of love and death to consider Ovid's and Tibullus' poems as a pair.[65] Some view it as an homage to Tibullus and a true eulogy, while others view it as an imitation of Hellenistic poetry.[66] Ovid's purpose could potentially alter the commemorative meaning of this poem, in which he pays homage to the late Tibullus by using the literal words of Tibullus.[67] For example, in Tibullus 1.3 he questions Delia's earnest devotion to Isis, stating that it has not helped their cause, that is, him returning home safely.[68] In this section Tibullus has three concessive *quid*s; in a similar fashion, when Ovid questions Tibullus' early death,[69] he mirrors the three concessive *quid*s.[70] Ovid reflects similar themes again in lines 63-64; in Tibullus' poem he is hoping that he will come across dancing, singing, and merriment in his afterlife, while Ovid affirms this to be the case with Tibullus' fellow poets welcoming him to the afterlife. Ovid's similarities cause the audience to recollect Tibullus' poem, and in doing so, readers who were familiar with Tibullus' works would have recognized the obvious references. An additional purpose in writing this poem in this way is the commemorative potential for Ovid himself. It was a custom for people who dedicated epitaphs to have their own name inscribed on the epitaph. For this reason, dedicators were also immortalized with the words written for the

[64] Ovid *Amor*. 3.9.59-68.
[65] This is discussed in both Reed's and William's article which I cite throughout the following paragraphs.
[66] The latter topic will be explored in the following paragraph.
[67] Reed, "Ovid's Elegy on Tibullus and Its Models" 261.
[68] Tibullus. 1.3.23.
[69] Ovid. *Amor*. 3.9.33-34.
[70] Williams, 227.

deceased.[71] Similarly, Ovid could have been genuinely sorry about the passing of Tibullus, but also wanted to further his own legacy in writing this poem. Thus, with the mutually beneficial aspects to writing this poem for both Ovid and Tibullus, it is reasonable to think that this poem is simply a commemorative eulogy.

As mentioned above, the purpose of the link between Ovid's poem and Tibullus' poem is difficult to discern. Nevertheless, a few scholars have asserted that Ovid is not simply paying tribute to Tibullus, but he echoes and imitates Hellenistic poetry and its characteristics.[72] Reed asserts that Ovid borrowed heavily from Bion's epitaph to Adonis, Bion was a Bucolic Greek poet whose work is dated to the late second century BCE, and Reed even suggests that each point in Ovid's *Amores* 3.9 that was not an imitation of Tibullus' 1.3 was an imitation of Bion's epitaph.[73] Supporting this contention is the fact that Ovid blatantly compares Tibullus to Adonis on lines 15-16; Adonis who is the subject of Bion's epitaph. He suggests that Ovid does so to emphasize the young and charming features of Tibullus, since he died so young.[74] Again, this poem has been likened to a poem by Callimachus, which mourned a friend of his.[75] Additionally, there is an epitaph dedicated to Bion by an anonymous author that borrows heavily from Bion's epitaph to Adonis.[76] Reed thinks that Ovid used these two epitaphs and their similarities to construct the relationship between his poem and Tibullus' poem. For example, the concept of the love's weeping for Tibullus is also an image described in Bion's epitaph for Adonis in lines 80-82.[77] In spite of this, it is necessary to consider the fact that Ovid was a neoteric poet, who

[71] Carroll, "Memory and Commemoration" 33.
[72] Reed, 261 and Williams 226.
[73] Reed, 263.
[74] Reed, 264.
[75] Williams, 225.
[76] Reed, 261.
[77] Reed, 262.

took his models of poetry from Hellenistic poetry.[78] Therefore, it would be odd not to find similarities between his works and some Hellenistic works. This is not the only poem in which Ovid references Tibullus' work, there are many similarities between Tibullus 1.3 and Ovid's *Tristia* 3.3, and some argue that this poem is much more similar to Tibullus' 1.3 than Ovid's *Amores* 3.9.[79]

The similarities between Ovid's *Tristia* 3.3 and Tibullus' 1.3 indicates Ovid's reverence for Tibullus' works. Ovid revisits Tibullus' poem in his *epicedion*[80] for himself when he is exiled, and finds comfort in his fellow poet's poem.[81] Following more closely than even his eulogy followed Tibullus' poem, Ovid begins this poem detailing that he has fallen so ill that he must dictate this poem.[82] Ovid uses verbal cues to demonstrate how his predicament is similar to Tibullus'. It is apparent from this second similar poem that Ovid enjoyed the elegy, and in his exile he identifies with the character that Tibullus presented. In addition to this, the adjective *ignotus* is present in all three poems; it is not only used, but it is used in the exact position and line number; in *Tristia*, it is in lines 3-4 and in Tibullus 1.3 it appears in lines 3-4.[83] The adjective is also used in *Amores* 3.9,[84] but it is not in the same line as in the other two poems. In both Ovid's *Tristia* and Tibullus' 1.3, it seems as though the word is being used to emphasize the great distance that separates the poets from the cities they are from, again indicating a potential metaphor for the definite separation death causes; in *Amores* 3.9, though, the adjective is used to

[78] Nelis, "Hellenistic poetry at Rome" (Oxford University Press, 2012) Hellenistic poetry at Rome - Oxford Reference (oclc.org).
[79] This is the argument of Huskey's article.
[80] See note 11 and see also Hutchinson, 170 for definition of an *epicedion*.
[81] Huskey, 368.
[82] Huskey, 369.
[83] Huskey, 371.
[84] In lines 47-48.

emphasize that Tibullus did not die far from home.[85] Furthermore, a significant difference between the two poems is that in Ovid's *Tristia* 3.3 he does not imagine a positive afterlife for himself as he did for Tibullus and Tibullus imagined for himself.[86] This difference demonstrates that Ovid identified with Tibullus' plight, and he is actually applying this situation to himself and crafting the appropriate differences. This is relevant because, although he recognized the variances, one would not imitate or connect with something they did not feel strongly about. The resurgence of Tibullus' poem in another one of Ovid's poem's demonstrates the level of respect and reverence Ovid had for Tibullus and his works. Therefore, it is apparent that Ovid used Tibullus' 1.3 as a model for his *Tristia* 3.3 on account of his association with their respective circumstances.

Lastly, through the personification of elegy Ovid depicts his version of how love may overcome death. Just as in Propertius 4.7 and Tibullus 1.3, in Ovid *Amores* 3.9 the three themes of love, death and those affected by death are present. In this poem Ovid represents those affected by death, Tibullus represents death, and elegy is the depiction of love. It is evident from the fact that Ovid wrote the poem he is one of those affected or those left behind. This topic is especially specified in the point at which Ovid describes the fictionalized funeral Tibullus had with his mother, sister, Delia, and Nemesis.[87] Furthermore, it is apparent that Tibullus is the representation of death as he is the one who had died, and the personification of *Elegy* represents the love aspect of this poem. It is interesting that it is not either of the women that Ovid mentions, but very clearly elegy itself. Elegy is referenced in the very first few lines of Ovid's

[85] Huskey, 372.
[86] Huskey, 377.
[87] Ovid *Amor*. 3.9.50-55.

poem;[88] similarly, both Propertius and Tibullus name their "loves" within the first 10 lines of their respective poems. Moreover, Ovid does not mention Elegy by name again, but he discusses the immortal aspect of poetry. For example on line 29 he says,

defugiunt avidos carmina sola rogos:

poetry (song) alone escapes the greedy graves:

Later in the poem he then says on lines 39-40,

carminibus confide bonis- iacet, ecce, Tibullus

put your good faith in poetry (songs)- behold Tibullus lies here.

In these lines Ovid proclaims that poetry is immortal, and he goes beyond that stating that people should believe in the immortal qualities poetry possesses rather than the gods.[89] Additionally, at the beginning of the poem it is not just Elegy that cries but so does Venus and Cupid.[90] Consequently, all forms and representations of love were affected by Tibullus' death; however, because poetry is immortal, the love Tibullus shared through Elegy lives on beyond his passing through his work.

Throughout this essay the belief that love in different forms and variations has the potential to overcome the force of death has been expressed in Propertius 4.7, Tibullus 1.3 and Ovid's *Amores* 3.9. Such a romantic viewpoint, however, is odd when considering the written record and customs of Roman society.[91] It is important to note that a crucial aspect of Roman society is irrecoverable; while many of the ancient accounts can indicate that Roman's viewed certain things in a specific way, what remains in the writings is an idealized Roman society not

[88] Ovid. *Amor*. 3.9.3
[89] Ovid. *Amor*. 3.9.35-39.
[90] Ovid. *Amor*. 3.9.3-16.
[91] Papanghelis, 1.

the actualized Roman society. That being said, during the Augustan period in Rome, the written accounts imply that marriage for love or romance was frowned upon and marriage for convenience and practicalities was standard practice.[92] Furthermore, without the aid of modern medicine, better living conditions, and many other advancements society has developed since antiquity, death's imminence and higher frequency was an accepted condition of life.[93] The Romans had standardized funerary and burial practices;[94] they determined forms of appropriate grieving and even established suitable amounts of time for mourning. For example, in the first chapter of Seneca's famous *De Consolatione Ad Marciam*, he berates Marcia for grieving her son for over three years. Although this work post-dates the poems discussed in this paper, it was not written significantly later than the poems, and societal changes take much longer to occur. Moreover, despite death causing some sort of emotional response, the tombstones Romans had made for the deceased were intended to depict the valuation of that person's social persona while alive.[95] Thus, it is evident from the written record that whatever emotional connections, if there were any, present in these rituals and practises have not been recorded, which gives the impression of a civilization structured around specifically calculated actions with distinct goals according to societal duties rather than emotional ones. Therefore, it is a curiosity as to why this fantastic point of view should be a frequent plot point in these poems.

In spite of the arguably calculated and free from passion lifestyle the written record seems to indicate, the concept of love prevailing over death was a common theme in Latin poetry outside of the poems presented in this paper. In addition to the myths inherited from Greece,

[92] Papanghelis, 1.
[93] Brent Shaw, "The Cultural Meaning of Death: Age and Gender in the Roman Family" in *The Family in Italy from Antiquity to the Present*, ed. David Kertzer and Richard Saller, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991) 67.
[94] Shaw, "The Cultural Meaning of Death" 67.
[95] Shaw, 67.

which boast of love with the power to be everlasting and transcendent, Roman tombstones often attested to love and devotion, which seems contrary to the idea of only specifying a person's social valuation.[96] Lyne posits that this type of love indicates a belief or even a need to believe that absolute love can in a way survive death. For example, the tombstones in which it is imagined that couples will reunite in the afterlife demonstrates the belief that love survives death. [97] Some examples of myths in which love conquers or has the potential to conquer death include Orpheus and Eurydice, Alcestis and Admetus, and Protesilaus and Laodamia. [98] The story of Protesilaus and Laodamia was not fully developed beyond its minor mention in the *Iliad* until Euripides wrote his tragedy entitled *Protesilaus*.[99] In Euripides' tragedy, although it is just a brief reprieve from grief, Hermes brings Protesilaus to his wife Laodamia because of her powerful devotion, and thus for a time in the story love overcomes death.[100] Catullus revisits this story in poem 68; he chooses this story to demonstrate the power and potential of love.[101] Finally, however, since Laodamia commits suicide to be with her husband, love did not overcome death. Lyne says that for this time this is a distinct and stark romanticism.[102] This being the case, Propertius 1.19, which contains the same story, demonstrates that he does believe in the power of love to overcome death, while at the same time believing that death is a very destructive power. Therefore, among elegy and elegists in Rome, this romanticized concept was accepted and well received.

---

[96] R.O.A.M. Lyne, "Love and Death: Laodamia and Protesilaus in Catullus, Propertius, and Others" in *The Classical Quarterly,* Vol. 48, No.1 (Cambridge University Press, 1998) 200.
[97] Lyne, "Love and Death" 200.
[98] It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine all of these myths in depth, for a full discussion see Lyne, 201.
[99] Lyne, 202.
[100] Lyne, 202.
[101] Lyne, 208.
[102] Lyne, 209.

An additional purpose of these poems beyond the preservation and commemoration of these poets could have been their ability to comfort public readers or audiences with an ideal of immortality. Ovid established in his poem that poetry is immortal and considering his works are still studied currently, it is evident that so far this has been the case. A memorial or way of commemorating the dead was an important practice to the Romans as they wanted their memory to live on.[103] Moreover, in legal terms the Romans had established funerary monuments as items designed specifically to preserve memory.[104] A worthy legacy for poets was considered to be one who left behind a large body work that was greatly admired. As such, poems could extend the lives of not only the poets but also the lives of those characters and people in the poems.[105] In a time period with such a calculated view and execution of a person's course of life, perhaps it was more comfortable for people to express their emotions from reading or hearing these poems.[106] It is important to note that to have a significant monument following someone's death required a certain level of wealth.[107] However, for those who could afford commemorative monuments, their name and legacy would, in their view, be immortalized. Propertius' 4.7 then had the potential to extend Cynthia's memory and women like Cynthia, Tibullus 1.3 could be viewed as honouring those who did die abandoned on an island, and Ovid's *Amores* 3.9 demonstrates and commemorates friendship and the kinship of the poets and those who enjoyed poetry in Rome. Therefore, through the relatable aspects of these poems, they had the potential of allowing audiences to find comfort in a pseudo-immortality provided by the poetic works.

[103] Carroll, 30.
[104] Carroll, 30.
[105] Carroll, 31.
[106] As is depicted from the written record, and the *mos maiorum*.
[107] Carroll, 37.

Each of the three poems studied in this paper had a capacity to comfort different aspects of life. For example, just as discussed earlier, in the very first line of Propertius 4.7 he states that death does not end all things.[108] This could give peace to someone struggling with a loss, simply the belief could aid in grief. Furthermore, in Tibullus 1.3, despite the dire situation, the end of the poem has a hopeful outlook.[109] The discussion of a topic feared by many indicates the commonality and pervasive emotional quality these poems had. Lastly, Ovid's *Amores* 3.9 expresses the memory and commemorative aspects these poems could exhibit. For example, if someone believes the eulogy aspect of the poem, it then follows that this poem was written in order to immortalize Tibullus and Ovid himself.[110] Therefore, the social aspects of these poems indicate that they had the potential to comfort readers in addition to creating long lasting legacies of the poets, and characters within the poems.

In conclusion, love and death cause some of the strongest emotions people experience. This was a common and shared human experience that many poets explored in their various works. This essay examined the relationship between the concepts of love and death in Propetius' 4.7, Tibullus 1.3 and Ovid's *Amores* 3.9. From this study it is evident that each poet through means of their own style depicted the ideal that love had the ability to even overcome death. In Propertius 4.7 the ghost of his mistress Cynthia appears, and she is every bit as angry and lively as before her death. In Tibullus' 1.3 he imagines a scenario in which he is ill and because he is ill, he has been stranded on an island left to die. By the end of the poem Tibullus makes peace with his circumstance, but in the process he shifts from a somber tone to a hopeful one at the prospect of being reunited with his mistress. Upon Tibullus' actual death, Ovid wrote

[108] Propertius 4.7.1
[109] Tibullus 1.3.90-94.
[110] Carroll, 31.

an elegy in commemoration for the earlier poet's passing. Mirroring many aspects of Tibullus' work, Ovid rectified every concept in Tibullus' poem that made his death sub par. Also, Ovid's poem served two functions of commemorating and immortalizing Tibullus, while simultaneously immortalizing his own works. Each poet expressed their unique style in their poems which had the potential to function as a comfort in many different facets, in spite of the similar theme and genre. Through the ideal that love has the ability to overcome the unavoidable and inevitable force of death, these poems presented an emotional and romantic view toward the afterlife.

Bibliography

Carroll, M. "Memory and Commemoration" *Spirits of the Dead: Roman Funerary Commemoration in Western Europe*, Oxford University Press. Pp. 30-58, 2006.

Conte, G. *Latin Literature: A History*. Baltimore. John Hopkins University Press. 1994.

Fulkerson, L. "The « Heroides »: female elegy?" In Knox, P. E. (Ed.), *A companion to Ovid*. Oxford: Blackwell. p.78-89. 2009.

Hinds, S. "Generalizing about Ovid" *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies: Ovid*. Ed. Peter Knox. Oxford University Press. Pp. 15-50, 2006.

Huskey, S. "In Memory of Tibullus: Ovid's Remembrance of Tibullus 1.3 in Amores 3.9 and Tristia 3.3" *Arethusa*. Vol. 38. No. 3. John Hopkins University Press. Pp. 367-386, 2005.

Hutchinson, G. *Propertius Elegies Book IV*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.

James, S. "Ipsa Dixerat" *Women's Words in Roman Love Elegy*, Vol 64, No. 3. Classical Association of Canada. Pp. 314-344, 2010.

Kenney, E. and Hinds, S. "Elegiac Poetry, Latin" in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 2012) Elegiac poetry, Latin - Oxford Reference (oclc.org).

Lyne R.O.A.M. "Love and Death: Laodamia and Protesilaus in Catullus, Propertius, and Others" *The Classical Quarterly*, Vol. 48, No.1. Cambridge University Press. Pp. 200- 212, 1998.

Maltby, R. *Tibullus: Elegies Text, Introduction and Commentary*. Francis Cairns Ltd, 2002.

Miller, P. "Catullus and Roman Love Elegy" in Skinner, M. (ed.) *A Companion to Catullus.* Wiley-Blackwell. 2007.

Myke, M. "Mistress and Metaphor in Augustan Elegy" in *The Roman Mistress: Ancient and Modern Representations*. Oxford University Press. p.11-45. 2007.

Nelis, D. "Hellenistic poetry at Rome" in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 2012) Hellenistic poetry at Rome - Oxford Reference (oclc.org).

Ovid. *Heroides: Amores*. G.P. Goold (ed.). (Harvard University Press 1977).

Papanghelis Theodore. *Propertius A Hellenistic Poet on Love and Death*. Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Propertius: Elegies Book IV. Gregory Hutchinson (ed.). (Cambridge 2010).

Reed, J. “Ovid’s Elegy on Tibullus and Its Models” *Classical Philology*, Vol. 92, No. 3. The University of Chicago Press. Pp. 260-269, 1997.

Shaw, Brent. “The Cultural Meaning of Death: Age and Gender in the Roman Family” in *The family in Italy from antiquity to the present*. Ed. Kertzer, D., and Saller, R. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991.

Sullivan, J. “Propertius Book IV: Themes and Structures” in *Illinois Classical Studies*, Vol 9. No.1. University of Illinois Press. p.30-34. 1984.

Tibullus. *Elegies*. Robert Maltby (ed.). Text, Introduction and Commentary. (Cambridge 2002).

Williams F. “The Hands of Death: Ovid Amores 3.9.20” *The American Journal of Philology*, Vol. 124. No. 2. John Hopkins University Press. Pp. 225-234, 2003.