



Propertius, Tibullus and Ovid: A Selection of Love Poetry

Intertexts and Literary Models

A feature of the learned poetry which the elegists strove to compose is allusion to literary precursors as models, sources of inspiration or to point out a contrast. We call these other texts to which they allude “intertexts”. Here are some key intertexts that can enrich your reading and appreciation of the elegies in the selection.

Use the links to access online versions of each text.

You can also download a printable version of this information to hand out to students.

Callimachus was an important model for style, subject-matter and verse-form for the elegists. The prologue to his collection of poems *Aitia* ([Aitia 1.1](#)) seems to have been particularly influential among Latin poets of the first century BC. Its language and imagery for describing the learned, refined poetry that the elegists strove for is reflected in their own poems, and it served as a model for the *recusatio*, a polite refusal to write epic on the exploits of a great patron. *Aitia* 1.1 is also echoed in Latin literature that predates the elegists, for example in Virgil’s *Eclogue* 6 (see especially lines 3-5, [in Latin](#) and [in English](#)), which served as a further intertext for the elegists. In *Amores* 1.1, Ovid adapts the motif of Apollo’s admonition of the poet regarding his task in new ways – compare these poems with his.

The programmatic statements in Virgil’s *Aeneid* also offer interesting points of comparison with the opening of Ovid *Amores* 1.1, which echoes them. Compare with the latter *Aeneid* 1.1 ([in Latin](#) and [in English](#)) and 7.41 ([in Latin](#) and [in English](#)).

Horace *Epode* 2 ([in Latin and English](#)) shares with Tibullus (e.g. 1.1) many of the motifs of the idealised country-life, though the tone of Horace’s poem is ironic and its ending distances it from genuinely setting the country up as an ideal, like in Tibullus. You may compare the two for the tropes and language used for describing the countryside.

Virgil’s *Eclogues* likewise share with Tibullus the ideal of the countryside, and you can see an example of this by comparing Tibullus 1.1.27-28 with Virgil’s description of the *locus amoenus*, a ‘pleasant place’, at *Eclogue* 7.10-13 ([in Latin](#) and [in English](#)).

Catullus 64 ([in Latin and in English](#)) exemplifies the neoteric Latin poetry that came before the elegists and influenced them. In addition to the general sense of style and subject matter, you may compare his use of myth especially with that of Propertius (and specifically, the story of Ariadne as told by Catullus and alluded to by Propertius in 1.3). Likewise, Catullus refers to the beginning of seafaring and the decline from the Golden Age in this poem, a theme that resurfaces in Tibullus 1.3.

Ovid *Amores* 2.5 makes much use of the advice the lover-poet gives to his mistress in *Amores* 1.4 ([in Latin and in English](#)). Compare the two and explore the humour and ironies that result for 2.5.



B L O O M S B U R Y

The description of his mistress's blush in Ovid Amores 2.5.35-40 alludes to the blush of Lavinia described in Virgil Aeneid 12.64-69 ([in Latin](#) and [in English](#)) and to the simile describing the wounded Menelaus in [Iliad 4.141-145](#). Compare these intertexts with Ovid's similes for his mistress's blush to further appreciate his technique – and where he innovates on these intertexts.