

Tibullus 1.1.48: What Does Fire Do?

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Quam iuuat inmites ventos audire cubantem 45

Et dominam tenero continuisse sinu

Aut, gelidas hibernus aquas cum fuderit Auster,

Securum somnos igne iuuante sequi.

48 *igne] imbre* Flor.

The overall meaning of this Tibullan passage is clear: the author states that he likes to take shelter in his modest home during periods of bad weather –which fits well with the theme of the entire elegy. Yet, line 48 contains a critical issue that has become the subject of a lengthy debate¹. The manuscript tradition reads *igne*, except for the *Florilegium Gallicum* (MS Par. Lat. 13582), which has *imbre*. Without reporting the discussion in detail, I agree with scholars who consider *imbre* to be a corruption which has entered the text due to its proximity to *gelidas [...] aquas* in line 47. The arguments which have been put forward against *imbre* and in favour of *igne* were summarized by Kayachev in a recent article².

Kayachev also draws attention to another problematic reading in the discussed verse – the participle *iuuante*, which he deemed to be corrupt. The construction *iuuat [...] somnos igne iuuante sequi* is indeed «inelegantly tautological», if not simply odd. Kayachev is therefore correct in stating that the text should be emended, although the remedy he proposes – the conjecture *fouente* (meaning «to make or keep warm») in place of *iuuante* – is less convincing than the diagnosis. To begin with, the notion of «heating» seems implicit in *ignis* (when someone is near a fire, it is clear that they feel its heat), so *fouente* is unnecessary. Next, *fouere* is not attested with «ignis as subject», as

¹ This discussion has been going on since Scaliger. For a recent bibliography, see Portuese (2017: 130–131).

² Kayachev (2024: 261–262), following Murgatroyd (1980: 300), Maltby (2002: 139) and Portuese (2017: 131). The opposing point of view is represented by Westendorp Boerma (1951).

the author of the emendation himself admits³. It can also be added that *foueo* in the sense of *calefacio* very rarely occurs without a complement⁴. In addition, from a paleographical point of view, the corruption of *iuuante* in *fouente* is rather unlikely.

What might be concealed behind *iuuante*, then? It seems that the poet himself gives us a hint. In another passage of the same elegy (1.1.6) Tibullus writes: *dum meus adsiduo luceat igne focus*, «so my hearth but shine with an unfailing fire»⁵. Therefore, the image we should expect here is this: outside there is wind and rain, and the poet falls asleep at home in the glow of the fire burning in the fireplace. I suggest that the text should read:

securum somnos igne micante sequi.

Although it is not certain that *ignis* can *fouere*, it certainly can *micare*⁶, cf. e.g.: Verg. *Aen.* 12.102: *oculis micat acribus ignis*; Ov. *Fast.* 1.655–656: *sidere ab hoc ignis uenienti ab nocte Leonis, / qui micat in medio pectore*; Sil. 9.942: *Gorgoneo late micat ignis ab ore*; Avien. *Arat.* 80: *micat omnibus ignis*; Sen. *Cl.* 1.7.2: *ignes hinc atque illinc micant*. One might raise the objection that none of the parallels cited pertains specifically to the fireplace; yet it is clear that what is present in the fireplace is *ignis*. And the presence of *luceat igne focus* in line 6 clarifies the context; thus, the reader has no doubt that *igne micante* is referring to the flickering fireplace.

It might be added that the form *micante* is attested to in the same place in the pentameter in Tibullus (1.10.12: *arma nec audissem corde micante tubam*), and in Ovid (*Ars* 3.722: *pulsantur trepidi corde micante sinus*; *Fast.* 6.338: *et fert suspensos corde micante gradus*). Finally, the corruption of *micante* into *iuuante* can easily be explained on the basis of paleography, as both of these forms can be written similarly⁷. This similarity, along with the presence of *iuuat* in line 45, may be responsible for this corruption.

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³ Kayachev (2024: 263).

⁴ Cf. *TLL* VI 1, col. 1218, s.v. *foueo*, I.

⁵ Tr. Cornish, Postgate, Mackail (1913:192).

⁶ *TLL* VIII, col. 930, s.v. *mico*, II 1: *de flammis, igne, lumine sim.*

⁷ In minuscule, various letters or combinations of letters made of downstrokes are commonly confused (cf. Reynolds and Wilson [1974: 201]); this is the case with the beginnings of *iuuante* and *micante*.

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