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Charles Saylor, *Turning Again in Tibullus 1.5*

Tibullus 1.5 has been much studied to date. Perhaps one of the best known studies treats the elegy as an example of Tibullus' style, a smooth surface with an underlying texture of cross referencing and emotional stresses.¹ Scholars have seen in the elegy, or based interpretation of it upon: 1) the παρακλαυσίθυρον in general, or 2) a specially developed form of the κῶμος, or 3) a statement of pessimism vs. guarded optimism with a remarkable, "oracular" close, or 4) a skillfully developed interplay of the idea of capture and slavery.² Magic has been seen as a key component of the poem.³ It has been proposed that the top of 3-4 is the main figure that governs the changing array of scenes from beginning to end because the top with its turning is emblematic of change.⁴ Whatever has been seen as the main idea or image of the elegy, scholars have also given considerable attention to the structure, and identified, although with various refinements, a set of approximately seven units of thought, or scenes, in the composition of the elegy.⁵

The aim of this essay is to look again at the next to last of these topics, the elegy's expression of turning motion descriptive of change, in particular the change or vicissitude of love as a focus for Tibullus. For many commentators have observed that there is much change or turning around of things for the lover, and that this change pervades the poem. One noted that the poem has to do with the extension of the general rule of change in life to love in particular, another remarked on the turning around of many words and situations through the elegy, another pointed out the change of the role of slave between Delia and Tibullus, another the multiple transformation of Tibullus' self-image, and yet another saw change as the whirl in which Tibullus is caught up because he is under Delia's spell and unable to control his destiny.⁶

Given so much change, it might be expected that the poem would have images or expressions of turning, change, or transformation running through the whole of it. Hornsby remarked that the image of the top in 3-4 became emblematic of other matters and thus moved throughout the poem without additional images.⁷ Yet it has not been pointed out how this might be so with images. Study of the elegy in this regard is at the point where, while images of the kind have been noted here and there, there is no complete account of images of turning in the elegy.

Thus my first intention in this essay is to bring together the independent notices. When these are brought together, I think it will be clear that the elegy has an expression of turning in five of its commonly accepted seven units. In addition to this, however, I think that there are expressions of turning that have not yet been noted in the remaining two units of the elegy. When these are taken into account, all seven units show conspicuous expressions of the kind described. Furthermore, I think it can be observed that all the expressions not only repeat and carry forward the elegy's main idea of turning in a general impressionistic way, but do so by expressing the particular turning or change or transformation of the unit in which they stand. Finally, it is to be noted that the last image provides a fitting conclusion to the rest because of its particular character in its unit.

To consider first the images that have been observed, the most commonly noted of these are the images that open and close the elegy, the top at the beginning (3-4) and the wheel at the end (70). Ball in his summary of scholarship on the poem listed a number of scholars who had noted that these two images were parallel in that they contain turning.⁸ On one level of meaning the top introduces the turning motion of fortune in love in general, its vicissitude, that will be illustrated in many changes throughout the elegy. At the same time, the particular turn of the top for Tibullus in 1-8 (the first of the commonly marked units) is negative, his immediate bad fortune, the pain of unrequited love, that is the subject of the unit. The wheel at the end of the poem answers with its motion the turning of the top at the beginning as a final expression of love's vicissitude in general for the whole elegy, but the wheel also conveys the particular turn of fortune for the last unit of the poem, 67-76. For Putnam observed about 73-75 that the restless motion of the lover who passes and repasses Delia's door might be intended as a repetition of the motion of love's wheel, but with a particular significance: the passing and returning imply love's fickleness as well as fortune's changeability,⁹ and this is the particular kind of fortune's motion that is important in the unit. Or, the motion of the lover particularizes for the unit the motion of the wheel. Now this turn of love's fortune is even for Tibullus in the sense that the wheel seen through the passing and repassing of the rival expresses the bad turn of fortune for the rival who possesses Delia now but who will be displaced with the next change of fortune certain to occur.¹⁰

Commentators have not pointed out the significance of this evenness of fortune's turn. For the evenness is something that does not appear in the elegy until this point, and it provides the concluding perspective of change in the poem. The particular motion of the top at the beginning was negative for Tibullus, while (as will be pointed out) the particular turns of fortune through the elegy are varied, both good and bad. The even turn of fortune at the end is a view of fortune taken by an educated or experienced Tibullus, experienced by means of the various turns in particular units throughout the elegy. Or, all the turns between the top and the wheel represent an abbreviated life of varied fortune for Tibullus, the experience of many turns. At the end, the accumulated experience of turns enables Tibullus to look at the motion of fortune as even, indiscriminate: his rivals are winners and losers no less than himself. The elegy culminates in this perspective which is philosophical, not happy but wider and wiser than at the beginning.¹¹ Hence the importance of the particular turn of fortune in the last unit.

Thus there are two expressions of turning in two units, beginning and ending, with a refinement or particularization for the second of these in the movement of the passing and returning lover. There are two more commonly marked units in 1.5 which have been observed independently to contain images of turning, and the images function like those noted above. The units, 9-18 and 47-58, are alike in having to do with magic. The first describes the purification which Tibullus performed in order to cure Delia when she was ill (the cure which resulted for him in some rival's winning of a recovered Delia), ipseque te circum lustravi sulphure puro (11). The second describes the ghosts that fly around the haunted lena, hanc volitent animae circum sua fata querentes / semper (51-52). Wimmel pointed out that these descriptions contained two circular movements, or two magic circles, one to cure Delia, the other to curse her lena, and their interrelationship as such provided a main correspondence in the elegy. Wimmel noted that there was also an interrelationship between the two magic circles and the circle made by the top of 3-4, for as the top was an image of changing fortune for the lover, that fortune was expressed by the two circles of the magic episodes.¹²

Or, the two circular movements extend the movement of the top by expressing the particular fortune of Tibullus in the particular units where the images occur. The first turn, in the lustration, conveys a bad turn of fortune for Tibullus because, while the turn brings about Delia's cure, it leads to another lover's winning of the affection of the recovered Delia. The second turn, in the movement of ghosts around the lena, expresses a good turn of fortune for Tibullus whose curse on the lena is carried out by the ghosts. These two expressions of turning bring the total to four.

A fifth expression of turning occurs in a fifth commonly marked unit of the poem, 37-46, which has a central position in the elegy and dwells on Tibullus' suffering without Delia. The suffering is described in terms of Delia's power to bewitch Tibullus so that he cannot console himself with wine or another lover. The way Tibullus describes this is to say that his grief turned all his wine to tears, using verterat (38) for "turned." Putnam remarked on verterat that turning is a frequent motif in the poem beginning with the turning top of 3-4.¹³ Yet certainly verterat may be taken to express in an allusive way the particular turn in Tibullus' fortune, a bad turn marked by frustration in both drink and love, in this particular unit. In this way, verterat extends with a particular turn the revolving of fortune expressed by the top at the beginning of the elegy.

The two remaining units are those for which no image or expression of turning has been noted. The first of these, 19-36, is Tibullus' happy vision of himself with Delia on the land. The second, 59-66, is his description of the benefits Delia can expect from a faithful lover. In both cases there is no image like a wheel, but in both there is a dramatic change of fortune which matches the motion of change expressed by the turning of the top in 3-4. First, in 19-26 there is a conspicuous turn in Tibullus' fortune as a lover, and it comes about with elevation of Delia to ruler of the house while Tibullus is made nothing, nihil, in 29-30. The turn is dramatic and paradoxical because it elevates Tibullus to happiness as lover even as it reduces him to a nobody as a member of the farm. Then in 59-66 Tibullus argues the value of the man with modest means but constant love for a mistress. Thus the catalogue of benefits in 61-66. But in spite of this, and in spite of the curses on the lena who helps the rich lover, the rich lover prevails, and this is the general rule of love's vicissitude stated

in 60, *donis vincitur omnis amor*. There are winners and losers, a full turn of fortune in love, because of gifts. It is not merely a general rule of love's vicissitude, it is also the description of the turn of love's fortune in which Tibullus finds himself now: *donis vincitur omnis amor* expresses the particular turn of its unit, 59-66. The changes of 30 and 60, that is, are like the expressions of fortune's turn in the other instances. Thus, all seven units of the elegy are marked by images or expressions which extend the movement of the top by describing the particular turn in each respective unit.

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¹ J. P. Elder, "Tibullus: Tersus atque Elegans," in *Critical Essays in Roman Literature: Elegy and Lyric*, ed. by J. P. Sullivan (Cambridge 1962) 95-103. The text used is F. W. Lenz, *Albii Tibulli Aliorumque Carminum Libri Tres*, 2nd ed. (Leiden 1964).

² παρακλαυσίθυρον, F. O. Copley, *Exclusus Amator. A Study in Latin Love Poetry* (Madison 1956) 107-108. See also R. J. Ball, *Tibullus the Elegist: A Critical Survey* (Gottingen 1983) 89. κῶμος, F. Cairns *Tibullus: A Hellenistic Poet at Rome* (Cambridge 1979) 168-171. Pessimism vs. optimism, H. Musarillo, S.J., "Furtivus Amor: The Structure of Tibullus 1.5." *TAPA* 101 (1970) 395, 398. Capture and slavery, D. F. Bright, *Haec Mihi Fingebam: Tibullus in his World* (Leiden 1978) 153-166.

³ Magic, W. Wimmel, "Zur Rolle magischer Themen in Tibulls *Elegia* 1,5," *WJA* 13 (1987) 231-248; A. Stramaglia, "Mezzane, maghe e divinita in Tibullo 1,5,49-56," *AFLB* 30 (1987) 155-175.

⁴ Top as the main figure, R. Hornsby, *Reading Latin Poetry* (Norman 1967) 96. Cf. Musarillo, (above, note 2) 388 note 2.

⁵ The generally accepted units are 1-8, 9-18, 19-36, 37-46, 47-58, 59-68, 69-76. For the units, see Ball 1983 (above, note 2) 81; 87-88, after D. M. Kriel, "Structural Parallels in Tibullus 1.5," *Akroterion* 22 (1977) 1-9, who points out the ring composition of the units; C. C. Rohrer, "Tibullus: A Structural Analysis of the Elegies of the First Book," diss. Yale, 1974, 159-164; Cairns (above, note 2) 213 (cf. R. J. Ball, "Recent Structural Studies in Tibullus," *The Augustan Age* 9 (1989) 4-5); Musarillo (above, note 2) 397. I use throughout my essay these units and the main ideas that have been identified in each.

⁶ Rule of change, M. C. J. Putnam *Tibullus: A Commentary* (Norman 1973) 99; words and situations, Elder (above, note 1) 101; role of slave, Bright (above, note 2) 156-166; self-image, Musarillo (above, note 2) 388, 398; in a whirl under Delia's spell, Kriel (above, note 5) 5.

⁷ Hornsby (above, note 4) 96.

⁸ Ball 1983 (above, note 2) 89 and n.23.

⁹ Putnam (above, note 6) 107.

¹⁰ For this understanding of the situation with rival lovers at the end, see Ball 1983 (above, note 2) 88 and the commentators cited in n.21. For another view, Musarillo (above, note 2) 396-397.

¹¹ I think that Musarillo (above, note 2) 398 comes closest to describing rightly the final perspective, although he does not treat the perspective as a culmination with respect to the preceding turns in the elegy as explained here.

¹² Wimmel (above, note 3) 237, 244.

¹³ Putnam (above, note 6) 99-100, 104, 107.