

DRAMATIC UNITY IN TIBULLUS: A TRIBUTE TO PROPERTIUS*

Tibullus occasionally uses a transitional device employed by Propertius in a number of his own elegies—a technique called «dramatic unity». The poet connects two passages by having the reader imagine between them an unexpressed idea occurring during an unexpressed time-lapse. Like Propertius, Tibullus generally utilizes this device in elegies characterized by humorous or joyful situations (Tib. 12, 14, 18, 11 1, and 11 2).

While Tibullus's early critics labelled certain passages in his elegies as digressive or spurious, one can actually relate these passages to the contexts in which they appear, occasionally by explaining them in relation to a transitional device called «dramatic unity». Ronald White¹, a Propertius scholar, first formally defined and carefully analyzed this technique in connection with his own study of six of Propertius's elegies (18, 128, 11 29, 11 33, 11 34, and 111 20). He defined dramatic unity as a device whereby the reader connects two sections of a poem by visualizing between them an unexpressed idea occurring during an unexpressed time-lapse. He analyzed (for example) Prop. 11 28 as a series of four dramatically connected addresses (1-34 to Jupiter, 35-46 to Jupiter, 47-58 to Persephone and Pluto, and 59-62 to Cynthia)-passages dealing with four successive stages of Cynthia's illness, with various changes in her health understood from one section to another. Looking very possibly to Propertius as the master of this dramatic

*I wish to thank Dr. Ronald E. White, who no longer teaches in the profession, but who introduced me early in my career to the wonders of Roman Elegy and the subtleties of dramatic unity.

¹ R. White, *Some Techniques of Development in Propertius and Their Bearing on Poem Division*, (Diss., Chapel Hill, 1958, pp. 31, 49-50, 59, 65, 75, and 82-83, and the three articles developed from this dissertation «The Structure of Propertius 2.28: Dramatic Unity», *TAPhA* 89, 1958, pp. 254-261, especially 260-261; «Dramatic Unity in Propertius 1.8, 2.29, 2.33», *CPh* 56, 1961, pp. 217-229, especially 220-221, 225, and 228; «The Unity of Propertius 2.34 and 3.20», *The James Sprunt Studies in History and Political Science* 46, 1964, pp. 63-72, especially 66 and 70.

device, Tibullus employs the same organizational technique in at least five of his elegies—those to be discussed in the course of this paper.

Tibullus 12 contains an excellent example of dramatic unity. The poet begins by asking for wine in order to drown his lovesickness (1-6), curses then entreats the door which keeps Delia from him (7-14), urges Delia to unbar the door by promising her Venus's protection, a witch's magic, and his own devotion (15-80), offers to humble himself before Venus's temple (81-88), and concludes by defending his conduct in the face of someone's laughter (89-100). Critics¹ tend to identify the person addressed in the first couplet as a young slave-boy, the kind of individual usually designated to perform the described task—an opinion which they generally substantiate by citing a similar exhortation in Tib. III 6 (Tib. 12, 1 *adde merum, uinoque novos conpesce dolores* and Tib. III 6, 62 *tu puer, i, liquidum fortius adde merum*) and by citing the second couplet of Tib. 12 as the point where the poet begins to address a wider audience (Tib. 12.3 *neu quisquam*). Yet nowhere in this particular poem does Tibullus mention a boy, surely not the sort of person to whom he would even want to reveal the details of his amatory plight—a character whom Lygdamus may have incorporated into the reminiscence without understanding its context in the original elegy. Leo² alone interprets the opening couplet in the framework of the entire elegy, wherein he senses a certain ring-structure, one involving an initial address before a circle of friends (1-6), a movement to, within, and from a daydream (77-88), and a final address before the same group of friends (89-100)—one of whom interrupts the poet's blubbing with his laughing. This attractive interpretation acquires additional strength if one can envision an unexpressed passage of time between the poet's imagined stance before the door and his sudden realization of his actual whereabouts, and if one can supply an unexpressed dramatic idea—the

¹ A. Estayo, *Tibullus cum commentario Achillis Statii Lusitani*, Venice, 1567, p. 27; G. Volpi, *Albius Tibullus, Eques Romanus*, Padua, 1749, p. 21; C. Heyne, *Albi Tibulli carmina libri tres and Observationes in Tibullum*, Leipzig, 1798³, p. 13 in *Albi Tibulli carmina libri tres*; E. Wunderlich, *Albi Tibulli carmina libri tres and Observationes et indices in Tibullum*, Leipzig, 1817, p. 16 in *Albi Tibulli carmina libri tres*; L. Dissen, *Albi Tibulli carmina*, 2 vols., Göttingen, 1835, vol. 2, p. 33; K. Smith, *The Elegies of Albius Tibullus*, New York, 1913, p. 207; K. Vretska, «Tibullus «Paraklausithyron» (I,2)», *WS* 68, 1955, pp. 20-46, especially 23-25; M. Putnam, *Tibullus: A Commentary*, Norman, 1973, p. 62.

² F. Leo, «Über einige Elegien Tibulls», in *Philologische Untersuchungen*, Berlin, 1881, vol. 2, pp. 1-47, especially pp. 34-39.

laughter of a drinking companion who can no longer restrain himself. The tipsy amorist bemoans his fate to an anonymous cup-companion, hears the laughter of his tactless comrade echoing through the wine-laden air, and presents him with a final warning.

In Tibullus 14 the poet provides his audience with another humorous situation as he questions Priapus about the art of sodomy. The elegy opens with Tibullus asking Priapus for instruction in the art (1-6), proceeds with a reference to the god and his appearance (7-8), sets forth Priapus's long reply-advice for wooers and boys (9-72), continues with a reference to Titius—the friend presumably in need of the instruction but forbidden to follow it by his domineering wife (73-74), and closes with Tibullus's glorious claim of success and sudden admission of failure (75-84). Some¹ contend that the final quatrain destroys the unity of the piece—a passage which Bubendey regards as spurious because of its apparent lack of connection with the rest of the composition, and a passage which Michaelis regards as a sign of artistic immaturity because of the sudden insertion of Marathus's name at the end of the elegy. These critics do not attempt to explore the dramatic effect of the poet's delayed admission, one which bears a strong resemblance to the downbeat conclusion of the god's earlier speech (the sudden realization that boys demand gifts in an age of avarice) —a similarity intensified by an echo of the god's exclamation (57 and 81 *heu*). Others² believe that these concluding verses actually contribute to the coherence of the elegy—couplets which (in their opinion) afford a humorous collision between the declaration of self-confidence and the admission of utter failure expressed by the new *praeceptor amoris*. The irony of the situation becomes even more apparent if immediately after the poet's boast and just before the poet's confession, the reader visualizes a foxy young boy lurking in the background and snickering at the very teacher whom he can easily twist around his finger—another instance of an understood dramatic idea happening during an understood passage of time. The perplexed pederast tries to convince himself of his expertise in homosexual relations, detects the ridicule of the youth who knows how to manipulate him, and throws himself at the mercy of the tender lad.

¹ H. Bubendey, *Quaestiones Tibullianae*, Diss., Bonn, 1864, p. 12; E. Michaelis, «Zum authentischen Tibull», *Philologus* 73, 1914-1916, pp. 374-404, especially 396.

² Smith (above, note 1, p. 190) pp. 286-287; F. Solmsen, «Tibullus as an Augustan Poet», *Hermes* 90, 1962, pp. 295-325, especially 321 and 324; W. Wimmel, *Der frühe Tibull*, Munich, 1968, p. 39; F. Muecke, *Tibullus Book I: Critical Essays on Selected Poems*, B. Phil. Thes., Oxford, 1970, pp. 50-51; Putnam (above, note 1, p. 190), p. 98.

In examining the structure of Tibullus 1.8, one finds still another example of this interesting dramatic device. Tibullus presents a series of addresses to the young lovers Marathus and Pholoe: he tells Marathus that he recognizes his amatory dilemma from observing his foppish dress (1-26); he tells Pholoe to accept her suitor by calling attention to his youth and his devotion (27-66); he proceeds to console Marathus when he realizes the hopelessness of the boy's situation (67-68); he proceeds to warn Pholoe that the gods will punish her unless she stops flaunting her arrogance (69-78). Several scholars¹ perceive something spurious in or around Tibullus's second exhortation to Marathus (67-68): Scaliger transposes 11 3,75-78 before 1, 8,67-68, primarily because of parallels which he detects between 11 3,75-78 and 18 (18,61 *quid prosunt artes, miserum si spernit amantem* and 11 3,75 *ah pereant artes, et mollia iura colendi* [sic]; 18,13 *frustra iam uestes, frustra mutantur amictus* and 11 3,76 *horrida uillosa corpora ueste tegant*); Fritzsche excises the same distich, ostensibly in order to link what he considers two sections of one long address (27-66 and 69-78). Yet Scaliger transfers verses (including his own version of 11 3,75) from a passage concerned with the golden past to a passage having no connection with this subject, and Fritzsche actually spoils the structure of the elegy—a scheme based on the careful alternation between the two addressees of the poem. Several others² observe in the couplet under question a subtle reminiscence of Catullus (Tib. 18,68 *et tua iam fletu lumina fessa tument* and Cat. 11117-18 *tua nunc opera meae puellae | flendo turgiduli rubent ocelli*). This reminiscence helps sustain the mildly humorous tone of the elegy, as does the dramatic sequence of events understood as occurring just before the distich—the girl's renewed refusal to relent and the boy's renewed recourse to tears. Making himself Marathus's mouthpiece, Tibullus attempts to mediate a quarrel, finds himself in the middle of another spat, and utters final advice to his two fledglings.

In Tibullus 11 1 the poet transports his audience to the country as he describes the excitement and splendor of a rustic festival. The elegy opens with a vivid picture of the lustration preceding the festival (1-26) and then unfolds with a detailed description of the actual celebration (27-90)—one where the poet urges the assemblage to celebrate with

¹ J. Scaliger, *Catulli, Tibulli, Propertii noua editio and Castigationes in Catullum, Tibullum Propertium*, Paris, 1577, p. 99 in *Catulli, Tibulli, Propertii noua editio* and 132-133, pp. 138-139 in *Castigationes in Catullum, Tibullum, Propertium*; H. Fritzsche, *Quaestiones Tibullianae*, Diss., Halle A. S., 1875, pp. 15-16.

² Smith (above, note 1, p. 100) p. 357 and Putnam (above, same note), p. 134.

wine (27-32), asks Messalla to inspire his praise of the gods (33-36), glorifies the rustic gods and rustic culture (37-80), asks Cupid to attend the celebration (81-82), and encourages the assemblage to celebrate before nightfall (83-90). A few¹ uncover instances of dramatic unity early in the poem (although they use no such term to describe what they observe): Smith remarks that between the conclusion of the prayer (17-24) and the announcement of the omens (25-26), one imagines the actual sacrifice of the lamb—an event which Pöstgens sees as happening while the poet is delivering the prayer to the gods; Pöstgens also points to the way in which the poet moves from the procession (15-16) to the prayer (17-24) without describing the final preparations for the sacrifice. As these scholars imply, by keeping the lamb in the background, the poet has the spectator understand the passage of time from the various actions of the performer rather than from some obvious statements about them. A few others² regard dramatic unity as the organizational device employed throughout the elegy: Godolphin suggests that the narrator assumes the triple role of a priest directing the rustic congregation, a *magister bibendi* toasting Messalla, and a didactic poet glorifying rustic pursuits—a statement quoted by White; Williams comments that the poet's shifting role has a literary history extending to Callimachus (*Hymn.* 2 and 5). As these scholars sense, by moving from the request for silence to the reminder about night, the poet does keep changing his role over an unexpressed but understood passage of time. By incorporating this device into the elegy, the poet compares the several stages of the ceremonial to the successive scenes of a drama.

Tibullus 11 2 affords at least one more instance of dramatic unity. The poet celebrates the birthday of his friend Cornutus in an elegy clearly exhibiting a tripartite structure: he begins by welcoming the Birthday-Spirit to the birthday-celebration (1-8)—a passage punctuated by a formulaic utterance and formulaic repetition—then proceeds to address Cornutus about making a birthday-wish (9-16)—a section involving a colloquially worded exhortation and a long, flowing pronouncement about the wish—and concludes by praying that the Birthday-Spirit will reward Cornutus with the joy of offspring (17-22)

¹ Smith (above, note 1, p. 190), p. 398; P. Pöstgens, *Tibulls Ambarvalgedicht (II,1)*, Diss., Würzburg, 1940, pp. 9 and 13; R. Ball, *The Structure of Tibullus's Elegies* Diss., New York, 1971, pp. 201-202.

² F. Godolphin, «The Unity of Certain Elegies of Propertius», *AJPh* 55, 1934, pp. 62-66, especially 63; White (above, note 1, p. 189), p. 259 in «The Structure of Propertius 2.28: Dramatic Unity»; G. Williams, *Tradition and Originality in Roman Poetry*, Oxford, 1968, pp. 211-212; Ball (above, note 1 of this page), pp. 216-217.

—a passage which balances the introduction of the elegy with the new address to the honored deity. Critics¹ here point to one example of the dramatic technique: Godolphin maintains that just after the poet encourages Cornutus to make a wish and just before he announces the favorable omen, the reader detects an unexpressed dramatic idea occurring during an unexpressed passage of time —the actual observation of the omen— a statement again quoted by White. One does detect this understood action occurring between the two sections mentioned above, and one also perceives a similar situation in the very couplet (9-10) —more precisely, in the very pentameter (10)— in which Tibullus encourages Cornutus to make a wish, where the reader pictures the Birthday-Spirit as having arrived at the altar and waiting to be invoked. Interestingly enough, in announcing the omen, the poet uses a phrase which produces the same effect as an expression in the preceding elegy (II 2,17 *uota cadunt* and II 1,25 *euentura precor*), and in a larger sense, he seems to follow a similar sequence of ideas: the quasi-priest asks a deity or deities to attend the ceremony (II 2,1-8 and II 1,3-4), introduces the element of prayer (II 2,9-16 and II 1,17-24), and forecasts the deity's granting of the wish (II 2,17-22 and II 1,25-26). The poet apparently employs this organizational technique in the course of describing the two religious occasions over which he takes pride and pleasure in presiding —a country festival and a birthday-celebration.

Although Ronald White detected dramatic unity in elegies which Propertius's early critics sought to divide into shorter poems, one really observes this transitional device in elegies of Tibullus which on the whole did not experience the kinds of radical attacks to which the aforementioned poems of Propertius became subjected. Like his contemporary, Tibullus generally employs this technique in elegies characterized by fairly light and rather humorous situations: (12) where an intoxicated amorist suddenly hears the laughter of a cup-companion; (14) where a boastful pederast hears the snickering of his young boyfriend; (18) where a teacher of love attempts to stop the crying of the same young boy; (II 1) where a quasi-priest takes his congregation through the various stages of a country festival; (II 2) where the quasi-priest observes a favorable omen on the occasion of his friend's birthday. Borrowing the dramatic device from the eminent Propertius (whom he may well have heard at poetic recitations), Tibullus exploits this subtle and

¹ Godolphin (above, note 2, p. 193), p. 63; White (above, note 1, p. 189) p. 259 in «The Structure of Propertius II. 28: Dramatic Unity»; Ball (above, note 1, p. 193), pp. 223-224.

interesting technique as he tries to inject humor into the trials and tribulations of the unhappy lover or as he attempts to intensify the joy and warmth of a deeply religious occasion.

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