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Delia as Nemesis: The Tibullan Mistress Evolved

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The Tibullan poetic mistresses are commonly considered independent of one another. Unlike Propertius and Ovid, the collection addresses two mistresses, Delia of Book I and Nemesis of Book II, whose pseudonym is identified with the goddess of the same name. Although it seems that the poet-lover has adopted a new beloved in the second work, he never formally introduces her nor does he dismiss Delia. Further, there is a distinctive shift in poetic disposition that accompanies the Nemesis cycle, the genesis of which begins to take shape in Book I. This paper examines these developments and explores the idea of continuity between the works and the development of the poetic perspective. I will argue that it is not the new mistress that effects the speaker's transformation but rather, the poet's characterization of the mistress is a product of this conversion. The poet-lover's fruitless attempts in love encourage an aberrant deification of the beloved in an effort to satisfy his infatuation. This paper discusses the intertextual transformations that take place between Books I and II as a reflection the poet-lover's fixated amorous condition and considers the identity of Nemesis as the evolved Delia of Book I.

Among the Latin elegists, Tibullus is unique in his celebration of two poetic mistresses. Cornelius Gallus, who dedicated his four books to a woman named Lycoris, effectively established a paradigm for focusing on a single mistress that was largely maintained by the later elegists. Propertius commits *Monobiblos* and Book 2-4 to Cynthia, Ovid's *Amores* centers on his affair with Corinna, and Sculpicia's small collection is dedicated to Cerinthus. Unlike his contemporaries, the Tibullan books revolve around the poet's relationship with *two* women. While this deviates from the traditional archetype, it is generally thought that the mistresses were independent of each other, evidence that the poet-lover had ended his relationship with the first woman and chosen a new beloved.¹ Book One is devoted to Delia, although it also features three pederastic poems.² The second book exclusively recounts Tibullus's affair

¹ The terms "poet" and "poet-lover" will be used throughout to refer to the poetic speaker or persona and not to Tibullus the poet.

² *Tib.* 1.4, 1.8, 1.9. Full consideration the pederastic affair between the poet and the boy Marathus extends beyond the scope of this paper and will not be discussed.

with a woman named Nemesis, whose pseudonym is identified with the goddess of the same name. Although the mistress's name change suggests that Nemesis is a new figure, Tibullus never formally introduces this new woman, nor does he dismiss Delia. His refusal to define the moments when his relationships begin and end is yet another paradigmatic deviation unique to Tibullus. Further, there is a distinctive shift in poetic disposition that accompanies the Nemesis cycle, the genesis of which begins to take shape in Book One. This suggests that rather than contrasting isolated affairs, the poet has constructed a series of maturing, interconnected moments between the books. This paper examines these developments and explores the idea of continuity between the works and the development of the poetic perspective. In this endeavor, I will first consider the poet's treatment of the mistresses on their own merit, paying close attention to how they are introduced and dismissed within each book. Of course, within this conversation it is necessary to examine the possible implications of the curious pseudonym of the second mistress, Nemesis.³ In this way, I believe we can detect a progressive reshaping of the poet's disposition and understand these changes as chronological. I would argue that it is not a *new* mistress that effects the speaker's transformation but rather, characterization of the mistress is a product of the *poet's* conversion. I will discuss the intertextual transformations that take place between Books One and Two as a reflection of the poet-lover's fixated amorous condition and consider the identity of Nemesis as the evolved Delia of Book One.

The first poem of the Delia series introduces the poetic themes that will remain consistent throughout both books. We begin to understand the poet's fascination with religion and become acquainted with his ambitions and displeasures with his world. His ideal life is that of the countryside, as it is an escape from the troubles of the world (25-6). He finds comfort in the *Lares*, the familial gods of

³ For a study of the metrical value of the pseudonym and the role it plays in our understanding of the text, see Emma Stafford, "Tibullus' Nemesis: Divine Retribution and the Poet," in *What's in a Name? The Significance of Proper Names in Classical Latin Literature*, ed. Joan Booth and Robert Maltby (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2006), 33-48.

homestead whom he honors (19-24).⁴ He rejects wealth and fame gained in the pursuit of military glory (1-3; 51-2), struggles with ideas of duty and freedom (5-6) as well as love and death (59-69), and fantasizes about a modest pastoral life that will provide an escape from these concerns (67-8). At first, he does not name Delia but fantasizes about embracing his *domina* on a cool night in the countryside (45-48).⁵ Then, he announces that the life of a soldier and the gifts of war are not for him, but instead that he will be prisoner to his *puella* and will soldier for her alone: *Non ego laudari curo, mea Delia,* “Glory has no charms for me, my Delia” (1.1.58).⁶ He envisions his beloved weeping at his funeral pyre and attempts to prove his merits as a lover, urging her to love him before old age sets in. Immediately, the mistress is thrust into the poet’s fantasy. The intimate domain of the lover is entangled within the external conflicts of the poet. The amorous focus is part of these concerns, yet in his fantasy, the mistress is an element of his “solution,” or escape, from troubles. This is not a vision of the future nor of the past—it is a persuasive appeal and a fantasized desire. The relationship is part of the poem’s thematic conflicts. The woman will not join the poet in the countryside but will be the figure standing in the way of his dream: *me retinent uinctum formosae uincla puella,* “I am held a prisoner, fettered by a lovely girl” (1.1.55). Expressions of imprisonment and servitude in an attempt to alter this reality will remain constant throughout his struggles as a lover.⁷

The following elegy is a wildly emotional appeal outside Delia’s locked door, a variation on a common elegiac poem called the *Paraklausithyron*, or “Song at the Closed Door.”⁸ Up to this point in the

⁴ For the *Lares*, see David Orr, “Roman Domestic Religion: A Study of the Roman Household Deities and Their Shrines at Pompeii and Herculaneum” (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, 1972).

⁵ Delia’s late introduction within this first poem indicates that there are additional important thematic issues central to this work that accompany the amorous tone. The poet’s “outside world” often intersects with his experiences in love. This trend is expressed here.

⁶ For the translation referenced throughout this paper, see Guy Lee, trans., *Tibullus: Elegies* (Cambridge: St John’s College, 1975).

⁷ Within this very first poem’s mention of the poet as “*servuus Delia*,” it becomes clear that servitude in particular is central to his role. Rarely treated negatively, his is a willing servitude. See Robert Maltby, *Tibullus: Elegies. Text, Introduction and Commentary* (Cambridge: Francis Cairns Publications, 2002).

⁸ For further explanation of the *Paraklausithyron*, see Lee, 109, and Frank Copley, *Exclusus Amator: A Study in Latin Love Poetry*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1956.

poem there has been no real interaction between the poet and his girl, yet immediately we experience his feelings of abandonment and desperation. In this poem we get a glimpse of the role of religion and treatment of the divine in the elegies of Tibullus. Religion is deeply knitted into the erotic world of Tibullus. His appeals to amorous deities and the magic of witches are central to his strategies to gain the affection of his beloved.⁹ Additionally, among the Latin elegists, Tibullus is often distinguished as the “poet of feeling.”¹⁰ His unrestrained emotionality arouses a sense of vulnerability and subtle wildness that bids for our sympathy. The *Paraklausithyron* highlights these distinctively Tibullian qualities. At the threshold of his beloved’s home, the poet pleads with the door as if the door itself were a divine being; he begs it to open for him, reminding it of the kindness he has shown it in the past: *te meminisse decet quae plurima uoce peregi supplice, cum posti florida serta darem*, (“It is right that you should remember all of my prayers and promises when I hung those garlands of flowers on your post” (1.2.13-14). Lee notes the implied religious tone throughout, specifically in respect to the “Door,” which is addressed as if it were a god through the use of language that is characteristic of hymns.¹¹ The poet calls to Delia and asks her to sneak out to him, claiming that Venus provides special protection for lovers: *quisquis amore tenetur eat tutusque sacerque qualibet*, “The love-possessed are sacred, safe to wander where they will” (1.2.29). He continues on to explain that he has asked a witch to compose a special spell for her, so she can easily sneak past her husband. This same witch has promised a spell to free him from his love, although he does not wish for this relief, nor does he think it possible (1.2.61-62). He would prefer to appeal to the gods: *non ego totus abesset amor sed mutuus esset orabam, nec te posse carere uelim*, “I

⁹ For a full exploration of religion and Tibullus, see Eli Edward Burriss, “The Religious Life of Tibullus as Reflected in His Elegies,” *The Classical Weekly* 22, no. 16 (1929): 121-26, and B. Robert Palmer, “Is There a Religion of Love in Tibullus?” *The Classical Journal* 73, no. 1 (Oct. - Nov. 1977): 1-10. For the worship of domestic gods such as the *Lares* in Tibullus, see Orr.

¹⁰ Lee expands on the distinctive emotive quality of Tibullian elegy. I would agree with this assessment. His poems seem almost erratic in form and content, seemingly driven by a wildly emotional force that is constantly reacting to his external experiences. See Lee, 10.

¹¹ The Door addressed as a god, 1.2.7: *Iana difficilis domini*...And later, *fixo dente* and the following anaphora of *illa*, characteristic of hymns: 1.2.19. See Lee, note 18, 110.

prayed that love be mutual, not absent altogether. How could I ever wish to live without you?" (1.2.65-66).

Here we gain a deeper understanding of the poet's relationship with Delia. He implies that she has sneaked out at night to see him before and that he is hoping that she will do so again. Perhaps she is absent on this night because she is afraid, so he offers her the protection of Venus and turns to witchcraft as a last resort.¹² His feeling of super-human strength as a lover under the shield of Venus attests to his loss of reality.¹³ In spite of all of these troubles, the poet-lover refuses to seek relief from his love-sickness. Rather, he wishes still that his love would be returned, with the grace of the gods to whom he prays. In growing frustration he cries out to Venus:

*Num Veneris magnae uiolauī numina uerbo
et mea nunc poenas impia lingua luit?
num feror incestus sedes adiisse deorum
sertaque de sanctis deripuisse focis?
non ego, si merui, dubitem procumbere templis
et dare sacratis oscula liminibus;
non ego tellurem genibus perrepere supplex
et miserum sancto tendere poste caput.* (1.2.81-89)

Has word of mine profaned the majesty of Venus
And is my tongue now paying the price of blasphemy?
Can I be accused of defiling the gods' temples
Or of stealing garlands from their holy hearths?
If guilty I'd not hesitate to fall down on my face in the
Porch and kiss the consecrated threshold,
To crawl in penance on my knees and beat my wretched head
Against the holy door.

The function of the *serta* (garlands), *supplex* (suppliant/worshipper) and *postes* (door-posts) is an echo from the earlier passage at Delia's doorstep (1.2.13-14), but is here used in connection to the sacred

¹² The appearance of witches and witchcraft appear throughout both books, although it is only in the *Nemesis* series that he is willing to submit to their power. For the role of witchcraft in the Roman world, see Robert Turcan, *The Cults of the Roman Empire*, trans. Antonia Nevill (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), and B. Kimberly Stratton, *Naming the Witch: Magic Ideology and Stereotype in the Ancient World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), particularly Stratton's understanding of the role of the witch in Tibullian elegy.

¹³ *non mihi pigra nocent hibernae figora noctis, non mihi cum multa decidit imber aqua*, "In the freezing winter's night no frost can bite me; no rain can damp me though it falls in floods" (1.2.31-32).

shrine of Venus. Robert Palmer suggests that the plea at the door is representative of ritual worship, portraying Delia's doorstep a shrine itself and thus equating Delia with Venus.¹⁴ I agree with the interpretation of the door as sacred. The parallel between the two thresholds and the "holy door" is equally evocative. However, this does not specifically justify the conclusion that there is a direct relationship between the *domina* and Venus. Rather, it suggests that the beloved can embody the divine *in place of* Venus. The *domina* inevitably assumes the role of a goddess the moment the poet assumes the role of worshipper. The plea at the door resembles the ritual devotion at 83-88 in connection to Venus because the *domina* is, in effect, worshiped as a goddess herself.¹⁵ Despite this treatment of the mistress, the poem concludes with Venus:

At mihi parce, Venus, semper tibi dedita seruit mens mea. (1.2.100)
But Venus, my devoted heart is ever at *your* service. Have mercy.

Although Delia is able to adopt the role of the goddess as the poet plays patron, there has been no transference of divine nature. She does not replace Venus nor act as a member of her divine household. The two exist independently, their bond only in their sanctity.

A pastoral Delia is a recurrent fantasy throughout Book One. Unfortunately, the poet's dream will never be realized because Delia lives in the city and has been enticed by a wealthy lover. Nevertheless, it is this situation that inspires the fantasy in Poem Five. He envisions Delia as the mistress of his farm, hostess to Messalla, and ruler of this domain: *illa regat cunctos, illi sint omnia curae, ac iuuet in tota me nihil esse domo*, "She can rule us all, take charge of everything, and I'll enjoy non-entity at home" (1.5.27-30). It is here that she seems to embody the divine, for she adopts the role of observer

¹⁴ See B. Robert Palmer, "Is There a Religion of Love in Tibullus?" *The Classical Journal* 73, no. 1 (Oct. - Nov. 1977): 1-10. This thought is shared by M. C. J. Putnam, though no textual support is offered. See M. C. J. Putnam, *Tibullus: A Commentary* (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973).

¹⁵ The figures only resemble each other in their divine qualities but not as components of the same godly identity. In fact, as we will soon discover, the *domina* is often set in conflict with the gods.

and hostess to the holy.¹⁶ But alas, he is refused access to his mistress and realizes that all of this is impossible, the transition between these contrasting realities abrupt and emotional. In response he asks: *num donis uincitur omnis amor?* “Must every love surrender to a bribe?” (2.5.60). Yet, he does not have the resources needed for this end and so he offers himself, as poor man, in servitude to her.¹⁷ Willing to submit even to the harshest humiliation, he gladly offers his service, suggesting that he will willingly escort her to see other men if that is what she desires. We see here that even outside the world of his fantasy, the irrational state continues; his pleas go unanswered, and Delia is unfaithful and unmoved. The poem ends in bitterness.

The last of the Delia series highlights the poet’s various desperate appeals to his beloved. The poem begins in anger, cursing his devious Delia who has betrayed him with the very lies he taught her to use against her husband when she would sneak out to be with him, (1.6.5-15). Delia has been unfaithful to her husband and to the poet.¹⁸ He threatens her suitors and blames her husband for his carelessness (1.6.15-8), going so far as to nearly impose violence on her (55).¹⁹ However, this thought is quickly retracted in consideration of her mother, (1.6.56-68). Although this poem is the last of the Delia elegies and expresses a sense of erratic desperation and tension, there is no formal dismissal or rejection of the mistress.²⁰ Rather, the poet closes the verse with optimism: *nos, Delia, amoris exemplum cana simus*

¹⁶ Messalla, Tibullus’s patron, is yet another figure who is often portrayed as divine. Delia’s service to him is a divine privilege. For more on this subject, see F. David Bright, *Haec Mihi Fingebam: Tibullus in His World* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 38-98.

¹⁷ This, of course, is a pose. As a Roman knight and landholder, the poet would not have been considered “poor.” See Lee, 14-15.

¹⁸ It is important to remember that she has already been unfaithful to her husband with the poet, although it is unclear if this man is indeed her husband, (cf. *Tib* 1.6.67). Her “infidelity” only applies when she is unfaithful to the poet.

¹⁹ Instead, he threatens her infidelity with the wrath of Venus: *hanc Venus ex alto flentem sublimis Olymps spectat et infidis qum sit acerba monet*, “Aloof on high Olympus, Venus sees her tears and warns us how merciless she is to infidelity” (1.6.83-84).

²⁰ If we are to consider the conventions maintained within the elegiac tradition (which I will soon discuss) we would expect some expressed closure to this relationship. As the amorous theme is central to the books, the end of this affair greatly influences the content and direction of the work. However, there is no evidence to this effect or that the relationship has actually ended except that this is the last poem that features Delia.

uterque coma, "Delia, you and I must be Love's paradigm when we are both white-haired" (1.6.85-86).

There is no conclusion to the affair; the last note is hopeful.

Before beginning our consideration of Book Two, it is important to discuss the unique pseudonym of the new *domina*, Nemesis. There are no other parallels in extant Latin elegy that directly attribute the name of a divine figure to a mistress. The pseudonym is a very important key to our understanding of the text and has inspired a great deal of scholarship, especially in the attempts to decode these names in search of a real historical woman.²¹ However, for our purpose the importance of the pseudonym is in its *intention*. Tibullus conceptualized the mistress within the text and purposefully chose a name to represent her within his work. In this way, the poet controls our perception of the *domina*. The intended implications of the assigned name are central to our understanding of the poet's mistress.

There is a small amount of epigraphic evidence that shows that there was a minor precedent for the use of the real name Nemesis, specifically five examples from the imperial period.²² These, however, do not offer a large enough sample for us to assume that the name was popular. It is improbable to think that Tibullus, a learned poet, was not familiar with the goddess by the same name and the implications her name suggests. For this reason, we must consider the character of the goddess.

²¹ See Stafford as well as Bright, 99-123. There are multiple difficulties one faces in an attempt to discover the historical identity of a mistress—namely, our uncertainty as to whether or not a real mistress exists. In this paper I consider the role of the woman within the text to be the full range of her existence. I do not discount the possibility that Delia may have well been the pseudonym for a real historical woman; however, consideration of this extends beyond this paper. A. R. Baca has supported the idea of Nemesis as an invention of the poet's disenchantment of the also-fictitious Delia; see Baca, *Delia and Nemesis in the Corpus Tibullianum* (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 1965). Bright has taken issue with this interpretation, considering it impossible to become "disenchanted" with a literary invention. However, I would note that poetry is often an expression of real experience, even if reinterpreted fantastically. It only takes one disheartening experience with any kind of acquaintance to understand this feature of human nature. The poet's understanding of the relationship need be the only pretense for his creation; the beloved has the ability to embody the accumulation of human qualities as understood by the poet.

²² See Stafford, 34-36 for a discussion on the metrical value of the pseudonym. Ancient evidence (Apuleius, *Apol.* 10) tells us Delia's "real name", but see Bright on the difficulties of trusting the ancient source. Additionally, Nemesis rather than Delia is mentioned in Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* (3.535-8). Yet the use of the poetic name in poetry itself cannot account as proof of a woman's existence; rather, we might assume that it is employed with the intentions of inspiring the idea of the mistress as presented by Tibullus.

Nemesis is the Greek word for “righteous indignation” and is often associated with Dike, the goddess of moral justice. Originally a Greek goddess, she is described as the daughter of Nyx, the personification of night, by Hesiod.²³ The understanding of Nemesis was two-fold in antiquity: she both embodied the personification of retribution and later evolved as a concrete divine figure, with a distinctive cult in Attica.²⁴ Many scholars have looked to the characteristics of the goddess as a way to explain this pseudonym, citing her reputation for retribution as a defining element of the mistress herself.²⁵ Some have attributed this change as reflective of the failed relationship in the previous book. A.R. Baca suggests that by changing the pseudonym, the poet attempts to channel the wrath of the goddess as Delia’s punishment. Bright dismisses this analysis and argues that Nemesis is not a woman at all, but merely an abstract, contrasting reflection of his former lover.²⁶ All of these interpretations stem from the view that there is some connective allusion to the former mistress. In Baca’s interpretation, Nemesis adopts the role of punisher, yet the poet never wishes to harm Delia. In fact, all suggestion of violence is retracted in the last poem. In Bright’s analysis, the character of Nemesis is presented as standing in opposition to Delia. Yet Delia and Nemesis share many of the same characteristics; one is not “good” and the other “dark,” as is often suggested. Both are greedy (1.5.60; 2.3.53-4); both reject the poet’s advances, causing him a great deal of anguish (1.2; 1.4); both are beautiful (1.5.43-6; 2.3.1-4); both are described as caring or good (1.1.63-4; 2.6.44); and both are city women. It is the poet’s attitude

²³ Hes, *Theo.* 221ff. Also see the Orphic Hymn to Nemesis, which describes her righteous indignation.

²⁴ See Stafford, 38-41. Even within her cult, the divine figure continued to be representative and attached to her moral qualities. For Nemesis as connected to theaters, amphitheaters and stadia in the Roman Imperial period, see Michael B. Hornum, *Nemesis, the Roman State and the Games* (Leiden: Brill, 1993). There were also connections between her and Diana in the Roman era as well as connections to the wheel. The erotic poet Catullus characterizes her as a punisher for those who violate lovers and poets (*Cat.* 50.18-21). The Myth of Narcissus and Echo (Gr. Narkissos and Nikaia) likewise highlights her role in matters of love; in this tale, Nemesis punishes Narcissus for his pride and unwillingness to offer love to another. The goddess makes him fall in love with himself while remaining incapable of accepting his own affection. See Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Charles Martin (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2005). For Nemesis associated with arrogance and fortune, see also the *Tristia*, 5.8.7-12, in Ovid, *The Poems of Exile: Tristia and the Black Sea Letters*, trans. Peter Green (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

²⁵ See Stafford.

²⁶ See Bright and Baca.

that marks the “darkness” of Book Two, not that of the woman. Further, the poet never refers back to Delia in the Nemesis series, nor does he reference any particular retributive characteristics of his beloved, unless we consider his own torment as an unrequited lover—but this torment is also attributed to Delia, who rejects his advances. Interestingly, in the Tibullan texts, Venus is the goddess who often adopts the role of harsh avenger in the world of love: *iniusta lege relictæ Venus*, “Venus takes revenge when unlawfully abandoned” (1.5.58). Perhaps in this way we can see that we cannot accept a straightforward interpretation of Nemesis as representing all the characteristics equated with the goddess. Rather, she is an abstraction of this figure. The character of the divine is blurred and reinterpreted.²⁷ The “unrelenting mistress” is not specific to either mistress; it is a theme that endures throughout both books. The domain of the lover is entangled in conflict and servitude, pitted against a fantasy to resolve this by virtue of the pastoral existence. Yet neither Nemesis nor Delia fulfills this wish, and one cannot be seen in opposition to the other. Rather, Nemesis embodies the rapacious, unfaithful characteristics of Delia expressed in the end of Book One, thus contributing to the disenchanting tenor of Book Two.

The introduction of Nemesis occurs much later in the second book. The first poem of the second book resembles the first of the Delia series. The setting is similarly pastoral, taking place during *Ambarvalia*, a spring festival of the fields. Again we are presented with important thematic issues, all of which mirror those previously mentioned. There is no mention of a new mistress.²⁸ Although he reports that he is suffering at the hands of Cupid, characterized in the lines following:

*hic iuueni detraxit opes, hic dicere iussit
limen ad iratae uerba pudenda senem;
hoc duce custodias furtim transgressa iacentes
ad iuuenem tenebris sola puella uenit (2.1.67-70)*

²⁷ It is common for Tibullus to play with the traditional role of the gods. In addition to deifying other figures such as Messalla within his elegy, his versions of myth are often unique. See *Tib.* 2.1 for the role of Cupid in the ritual feast during *Ambarvalia*, the spring festival of the fields.

²⁸ This mimics the late introduction of Delia in the first poem, although in this case, Nemesis appears much later into the book.

He robs the young of riches and commands the middle-aged
 To use unseemly language at an angry woman's door.
 Guided by him the girls steps over sleeping sentries,
 Creeping to lover in the lonely dark.

Maltby considers this passage to be a “stock theme” in elegy.²⁹ While this may be true, it is important to note that this also describes the exact situation that the poet experiences with Delia. The similarities are highlighted by the preceding passage, indicating that he is at present, a victim of Cupid's violence. Is it not the poet who is middle-aged often cursing at an angry woman's door? Was it not Delia who often sneaked out to visit him at night? The similarities must be acknowledged. Perhaps this accounts for the unmentioned mistress as we are assumed to understand the source of the poet's pain from the onset. It is not until halfway through the third poem of Book Two that Nemesis is mentioned by name: *ut mea luxuria Nemesis fluat utque per urbem incedat donis conspicienda meis*, “My Nemesis shall float in luxury and strut the Roman streets parading gifts of mine” (2.3.55-56). Although Tibullus has seemingly found himself another “greedy” girl, he has resigned himself to her nature and to the idea of offering her the riches of love.³⁰ He pleasantly submits and is pleased to entertain the idea of providing his beloved with gifts (2.3.53-62). This is interesting if we are to consider the same struggle he faces in Book One, but instead of offering the goods his love desires, as a poor man he offers his service to her. If we are to compare our first picture of Nemesis to that of Delia, we will see a much different form of introduction. Nemesis is absent during the first poem, whereas Delia is featured from the onset within the poet's idealized world. The same treatment is not given to Nemesis, and furthermore, the setting is much harsher and the hopeful tone muted. The poet's unexplained transition between mistresses must be considered in light of this new perspective.

²⁹ Maltby, 207.

³⁰ Nemesis is twice referred to as Venus in this poem, in 2.3.3 as a compliment to her beauty and again at 2.3.54 as a vision of Venus who is persuaded by fine gifts. This is an interesting comparison. If she had been intended to embody the goddess Nemesis, it is curious that she would here resemble Venus.

As previously mentioned, the manner of Nemesis's introduction and Delia's dismissal is unusual. Propertius's mistress, Cynthia, endures throughout his work and is clearly introduced in the opening line of Book One: *Cynthia prima suis miserum me cepit ocellis, contactum nullis ante cupidinibus*, "Cynthia was the first. She caught me with her eyes, a fool who had never before been touched by desires" (1.1.1). She is dismissed in 3.24 and 3.25 and reported dead in 4.7: *inter complexus excidit umbra meos*, "Her shade then slipped away from my embrace," (4.7.95).³¹ Following the same trend, Corinna of Ovid's *Amores* dominates the whole of the introductory poem, seeming to appear to him as an epiphany.³² Likewise, she is dismissed in 3.14, followed by the elegy that features Ovid's abandonment of love.³³

Why is Tibullus so ambiguous in his account of the relationships that dominate his books? In his anger he does not spite Delia, and in his excitement he does not give us any details about his new lover. It is as if we are to have some understanding of her in his life from the onset. He offers us no description of Nemesis except that she is a muse (2.5.110-112), that she is "good" (2.6.44) and beautiful (2.4.35), and that she has *oculi loquaces* (2.6.43). We know more concrete details about Delia but not many: she is beautiful with long, blond hair (1.5.44) and, like Thetis, has blue eyes (1.5.46). Such a physical description of the mistress is substantially lacking from a work that is often considered "erotic," especially if we compare this deficit to the 1.5 of Ovid's *Amores*, which details every part of his mistress's body.³⁴ There is also a serious lack of events or memories between the poet and Nemesis; the only memory he describes is that of her sister's death in 2.6. In the Delia series, we know that Delia was upset that he was leaving for war (1.3), that he had spent time by her side when she was ill (1.5), that he had taught her tricks to sneak past her husband, and that he had a relationship with her mother (1.6).

³¹ She is also mentioned in 4.8, as part of a memory or reflective poem. No new mistress is ever introduced.

³² See *Amores* 1.5, in which her body and the nature of an erotic encounter are described in great detail.

³³ Ellen Greene, *The Erotics of Domination: Male Desire and the Mistress in Latin Love Poetry* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998)..

³⁴ Philip Hardie, *Ovid's Poetics of Illusion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 30-60.

There are no additional stories of courtship added to the Nemesis series. The Propertian elegies detail multiple arguments, fond memories and erotic encounters, as does Ovid's poetry. Tibullus offers us neither such an account nor an erotic description of Nemesis.

There is a distinctive change that accompanies the second book and which is highlighted in 2.4, the poem following Nemesis's introduction. The first look at this Tibullan mistress is hopeful; although we know that she desires gifts from a wealthy man, the poet is willing to accept this fate—a change that has already been noted in contrast to the first book. Poem Four details a wildly expressive rant of an infatuated lover. The poet exclaims outright that he is a slave to his mistress; he surrenders his freedom and accepts the harshest slavery to the bonds of love (2.4.1-6). He dismisses Elegies and Phoebus, the Muses and his patron, since they bring him no help in this matter (2.4. 12-14). Nemesis wants wealth, but Tibullus's poetry provides no solution, and so he must find ways to provide for her. In his desperation, he turns to the most outrageous solutions:

*At mihi per caedem et facinus sunt dona paranda,
ne iaceam clausam flebilis ante domum.
aut rapiam suspensa sacris insignia fanis:
sed Venus ante alios est uiolanda mihi.
Illa malum facinus suadet dominamque rapacem
dat mihi: sacrilegas sentiat illa manus. (2.4. 21-26)*

I must take to crime and bloodshed to provide her with the gifts
That save me from those weeping vigils at her door;
Or steal the sacred offerings hung up on temple walls:
And Venus shall be first to be profaned.
She tempts me to do evil and devotes me to a grasping
mistress; she deserve to suffer sacrilege.

He continues in his treatment of Venus: *fecit ut infamis nunc deus esset Amor*, "Love is now a God of evil reputation," (2.4.39). The poet submits to the condition demanded of him, willing even to sell off his country home and *Lares* for the money it would bring him: *illius est nobis lege colendus Amor*, "Love's worship means obedience to her laws" (2.4.51).

This moment illustrates a total value conversion. Each of the things that the poet held dear to him throughout both books is profaned. He surrenders to greed and denies his identity. He wishes to save himself from the sorrowful plea at his beloved's door, but as far as we know, this has not happened in Book Two. Could he be referencing Delia? He shuns his patron Messalla, along with the gods of poetry and family estate that serve as the foundation for his fantasy. As a poet who is noted for having such a committed sense of religion throughout his elegies, here he rejects nearly all the gods previously held dear to him.³⁵ In 1.2, the poet claims that he will crawl on his knees for forgiveness if there was any thought that he had "profaned the majesty of Venus," but here he revels in such an idea, claiming that she is an evil goddess. He now worships his beloved, who he has fully submitted to at the close of the poem. In order to provide Nemesis with gifts, he will steal from the temple of Venus, taking the sacred offerings and dedication gifted to the goddess. Here there is a literal transference of the divine from Venus to Nemesis. The poet is in total servitude to the woman and, as a worshipper, will provide her with the gifts intended for the most sacred of temples. Nemesis is first compared to Venus in 2.3 and later fulfills the transformation in 2.4.³⁶ She has not only taken Venus's place, but she has also forced him to reject all other divine figures in favor of her. The religious poet lies down in veneration of his mistress and his mistress alone. Rather than merely rejecting the gods on account of his unanswered pleas to them and remaining distraught by the character of his *domina*, he becomes worshipper of his deified mistress.³⁷ She is transformed in the eyes of the poet and made to represent what he deems most vital: a figure to obey and to worship. His willing offer as a servile lover expressed in the first poem of Book One has been fully realized. This poem illustrates the pinnacle of his continuous delusion.

³⁵ Most noticeable is his treatment of Venus.

³⁶ Note the comparison between Delia and Venus in 1.2 previously discussed.

³⁷ For an alternative view, see Saara Lilja, *The Roman Elegists' Attitude to Women*, *Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae*, Series B, Tom. 135, 1 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1965), 288. Lilja notes that the word "dea" is never used to describe either mistress, nor is either equated to a specific deity. Cf. Palmer as well as G. Lieberg, *Erasmus 17* (1965): 750-751, which deem this interpretation insufficient as it disregards the value of poetic subtleties, which takes precedence as a poetic device over surface topics.

Devotional servitude provides him with his bond to the mistress: Here he can play out the role of worshipper in the hope of gaining the favor of his goddess, Nemesis.³⁸

This conversion does not last for long. Although the poet condemns Venus in Poem Four, he still calls out to her at the end of Book Two, thus showing the poet's instability and continued struggle to mend the disparity between his emotional desires and the reality of the situation. He is unwilling to come to terms with the truth, because he is fiercely holding onto what he wants. This denial continues through to the very last poem. In 2.6 the poet is tortured by the idea that his Nemesis is again with someone else. He calls for *Amor* to lay down his weapons (2.6.15-16) and considers suicide (2.6.18), yet it is hope that urges him onward. In this last poem he seems to come in and out of the wild, dream-like state we see in 2.4. He acknowledges his blasphemous tongue but forges onward.³⁹ He is encouraged by *Spes* (Hope), who promises him Nemesis: *Spes facilem Nemesim spondet mihi, sed negat illa: ei mihi, ne uincas, dura puella, deam*, "Hope guarantees me Nemesis, but Nemesis says No. Ah, cruel girl, you ought to let a goddess win" (2.6.28-9). Here, added at the end of Book Two, Tibullus cleverly acknowledges the interplay between the persona of the goddess and his mistress. The woman is a woman yet again, but his estimation of her continues to be unreasonable. He remains unwilling to desert her. This is reminiscent of 1.6 when he curses Delia's husband; here, too, he finds someone else to blame for his mistress's ways, cursing her *lena: tunc tibi, lena, precor diras: satis anxia uiuas, mouerit e uotis pars quotacumque deos*, "I curse you then, and pain enough would be your life were the gods to grant the least of all my prayers" (2.6.53-4). Of course, the gods are unresponsive. This is his last remark of the series. Again, there is no conclusion at the end of the Nemesis series. The last poem featuring Delia is hopeful, but here Nemesis only provokes curses and frustration.

³⁸ See Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love – Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problem of Domination* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), which details the role of voluntary submission to the idealized beloved and the role of devotion servitude as the affirmation of the self. In this theory the lover's servitude becomes a confirmation of the self, a kind of recognition and acknowledgement.

³⁹ *tu miserum torques, tu me mihi dira precari cogis et insane mente nefanda loqui*, "You torture my unhappiness. You make me cure myself and with a mind unbalanced utter blasphemy" (2.6.17-8).

We might understand this last note as an illustration of the poet's progressive delusion. Despite the expressive sorrow that is maintained throughout both books, he will remain hopeful. However, in the last book, his expressions of hope are dulled and heavy-hearted as if he were a wearied traveler. He does not understand his beloved as a straightforward woman. Rather, the mistress represents something to him: she is a goal and an abstraction. It has been this way from the first mention of Delia, who was equated with his dream of the country. From the first poem we understand that the poet's mistress is rooted in fantasy. She is an expression of his emotional dream, and his emotions likewise dictate her character. He cannot abandon her, regardless of how she treats him, because this would also mean he would have to abandon his dreams and be forced to come back to the reality he so desires to abandon.⁴⁰ It is only with her that this fantasy is realized.

Delia represents a life of hope and freedom from a world of military glory, war, and greed. Nemesis is a reflection of the struggle to maintain this dream. Delia has rejected him in poem 1.6, and Nemesis emerges as his conception of what kind of woman Delia has become. She is not a "retributive goddess" in the way of one who exacts revenge, but instead embodies the kind of torture experienced by the poet throughout his ordeal. If Nemesis was a new woman, there is no suggestion that she is a different kind of woman. There is no mention of new experiences that they have shared. There are no pleasant memories from their past. She is introduced as if the poet and audience already know her. Nemesis is the evolved *domina*, and specifically, she is what Delia has become: an expression of the poet's pain and a misunderstanding of why he cannot have what he so desires. She represents the disintegration of reality and collapse of the original relationship; Nemesis is the name assigned to Delia as a reflection of how the poet copes with this. The poet's growing desperation for her as fulfillment of his vision encourages the creation her new identity, indicative of his rejection of reality. He is unable to accept Delia as she is.

⁴⁰ It is not that she is a fictitious character, but rather that his desires have sculpted his vision of his beloved. It is through this intensely emotional lens that he shapes our perception of her.

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