

Tibullus
Elegies Book 1 1.1-28

Translated from Latin by Shaina M. Anderson

Divitias alius fulvo sibi congerat auro
Et teneat culti iugera multa soli,
Quem labor adsiduus vicino terreat hoste,
Marta cui somnos classica pulsa fugent:
Me mea paupertas vita traducat inerti,
Dum meus adsiduo luceat igne focus.
Ipse seram teneras maturo tempore vites
Rusticus et facili grandia poma manu;
Nec spes destituat, sed frugum semper acervos
Praebeat et pleno pinguia musta lacu.
Nam veneror, seu stipes habet desertus in agris
Seu vetus in trivio florida sarta lapis,
Et quodcumque mihi pomum novus educat annus,
Libatum agricolae ponitur ante deo.
Flava Ceres, tibi sit nostro de rure corona
Spicea, quae templi pendeat ante fores,
Pomosisque ruber custos ponatur in hortis,
Terreat ut saeva falce Priapus aves.
Vos quoque, felix quondam, nunc pauperis agri
Custodes, fertis munera vestra, Lares.
Tunc vitula innumeros lustrabat caesa iuencos,
Nunc agna exigui est hostia parva soli.
Agnam cadet vobis, quam circum rustica pubes
Clamet "io messes et bona vina date."
Iam modo iam possim contentus vivere parvo
Nec semper longae deditus esse viae,
Sed Canis aestivos ortus vitare sub umbra
Arboris ad rivos praetereuntis aquae.

Let another man heap up riches with gleaming gold,
 Let him possess many acres of cultivated soil,
 Let relentless toil frighten away one with an enemy lying near,
 Let blaring war-trumpets invade one's slumber.
 Let my humble means lead me through a quiet existence,
 As long as my hearth glows with a persistent fire.
 Let me, as a farmer, sow delicate grape-vines in proper season,
 Let me plant magnificent saplings with effortless caress:
 Let Hope not falter, but let the harvests of fruit continuously
 Abound and fresh wine overflow from a brimming vat.
 For I am reverent, in fields where reside a neglected tree-trunk
 Or ancient stone, at a cross-roads abloom with offerings,
 And whatsoever specimen of tree the new year matures for me,
 It is placed as an offering before the divinity of cultivation.
 Golden-locked Ceres, let hang a crown of wheaten spikes made
 From my countryside, on the front doors of the temple.
 And let ruddy-faced Priapus be stationed in the fruit-gardens,
 So that as a guard he intimidates the birds with his savage scythe,
 You too, as guardians of once-prosperous land, now receive
 Our gift of a small crop, Household Lares.
 Then, the sacrificial calf was purifying countless young bulls,
 Now, the ewe is a slender sacrifice from my little portion of land:
 The ewe will take the fall for us, around whom let the
 Rustic youths invoke: "Oh, bequeath great harvests and great wine!"
 Now, if only I am content to subsist by modest means,
 Not perpetually given over to a long life...
 But let me avoid the summer heat of the rising Dog-star,
 Under the shadow of a tree, near streams of trickling water!

The soldier and poet Albius Tibullus was born east of Rome in Pedum or Gabii between 60-55 BCE. According to an epigram attributed to Domitius Marsus, Tibullus died sometime after Vergil's death in 19 BCE. The first book of his corpus was written around 27 BCE and was associated closely with his patron, the general and orator, Valerius Mesalla Corvinus, and a group of fellow poets including Gallus, Catullus, Propertius, and Ovid. They emulated the 6-5th century BCE Greek lyric poets, and wrote in the

meter of elegiac couplets used by Callimachus, a 3rd century BCE Hellenic scholar from Cyrene. The first line in an elegiac couplet is in the meter of epic poetry, the dactyl hexameter, followed by the second in pentameter verse comprised of two 2.5-dactyl-units separated by a diæresis, which permits a strong break in sense. Elegiac meter represents a deliberate and emphatic turn from the hexameter verse of epic poetry and its weighty themes of war and history, and heavy didacticism to elegiac themes of Roman poetry. The elegiac genre features highly personal and reflexive expressions of invective, lamentation, and unrequited romantic love, often in pastoral and rustic settings, and features “learned” or “Alexandrian” allusions.

Tibullus’s corpus is well-known known for the influence of Vergil’s *Eclogues* and *Georgics*, which feature idyllic pastoral settings. In particular, poem 1.10 is shrouded in mournful anticipation of leaving the beloved countryside for his first military campaign. Tibullus expresses vehement distaste for military service and the acquisition of material goods or “war-plunder” as a means to personal wealth and societal prestige. Thus, his poetry is heavily entrenched in the belief that wealth leads to the degradation of morality and romantic love, which is already evident in the beginning lines of book one.

A few lines posed particular challenges in my translation of 1.1. In line 8, I translate the reference to the cultivation of crops, “*facili... manu*,” which is literally “with an easy hand” as “with a careful caress.” The poet is conveying the cultivation or nourishment of the crops, and so the *manu* or “hand” represents the gentle *touch* of the hand that cares physically for the plants. In Line 22, I chose an idiomatic translation, “the ewe will take the fall/die for us” rather than the literal “the ewe will be sacrificed/atone for us (for our wrongdoing).” The idiom is less passive in nature which conveys a dual active/passive nature of the verbal action. According to Roman religious rites, an animal must demonstrate a willing and calm demeanor (albeit, anthropomorphic) to be considered fit for sacrifice. In this regard, the English idiom captures the active *and* passive sense of the Latin verb.

For Tibullus’ repetition of words or *anaphora*, I adhered to the sense of the verbal imagery: I translate the *terreat* on line 3 as “frighten” due to the sense of potential violence from an intruder or robber, while the second instance of the same verb in line 18 pertains to the passive intimidation of the scarecrow in the *rusticus*’ garden. In Roman times, the physical manifestation of

the mythological character Priapus was often featured in gardens as a little painted red statue functioning as a scarecrow. The act of swinging a *saeva falce* or “savage scythe” toward an intruder in the garden has undertones of violence and rape, but the action is passive because the statue does not move. A metrical sense break occurs at the precise textual moment the violent harvest instrument is described: when reading aloud in meter, the reader pauses naturally as the imagery synchronizes a metrical “hiccup” that mimics the unexpected nature of surprise.

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