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Time and Place in Tibullus 1.10

1. Summary (from Putnam 1973):

“The inventor of the sword was himself wild and iron, bestial and with a metal heart. He fathered slaughter and war and shortened the road to death. No, we are at fault, turning against ourselves what was meant as protection against animals. Now Tibullus is drawn to war. His humble household gods will save him. Yet, why provoke death; the underworld is unlovely. Better to grow old recalling the past, as country dweller with wife and children. May peace rule the fields. After country festivals the farmer battles lovingly with his wife. The violent lover deserves a military life. May nourishing peace come and make the country fruitful.”

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| 2. Tibullus 1.10 (Postgate 1924) |  |  |
| Quis fuit, horrendos primus qui protulit enses?  quam ferus et uere ferreus ille fuit!  tum caedes hominum generi, tum proelia nata  tum breuior dirae mortis aperta uia est.  an nihil ille miser meruit, nos ad mala nostra  uertimus, in saeuas quod dedit ille feras?  diuitis hoc uitium est auri, nec bella fuerunt,  faginus astabat cum scyphus ante dapes.  non arces, non uallus erat, somnumque petebat  securus uarias dux gregis inter oues.  tunc mihi uita foret uulgi nec tristia nossem  arma nec audissem corde micante tubam.  nunc ad bella trahor, et iam quis forsitan hostis  haesura in nostro tela gerit latere.  sed patrii seruate Lares: aluistis et idem,  cursarem uestros cum tener ante pedes.  neu pudeat prisco uos esse e stipite factos:  sic ueteris sedes incoluistis aui.  tunc melius tenuere fidem, cum paupere cultu  stabat in exigua ligneus aede deus.  hic placatus erat, seu quis libauerat uuam  seu dederat sanctae spicea serta comae:  atque aliquis uoti compos liba ipse ferebat  postque comes purum filia parua fauum.  at nobis aerata, Lares, depellite tela,  \* \* \* \* \* \*  hostiaque e plena rustica porcus hara.  hanc pura cum ueste sequar myrtoque canistra  uincta geram, myrto uinctus et ipse caput.  sic placeam uobis: alius sit fortis in armis,  sternat et aduersos Marte fauente duces,  ut mihi potanti possit sua dicere facta  miles et in mensa pingere castra mero.  quis furor est atram bellis accersere Mortem?  imminet et tacito clam uenit illa pede.  non seges est infra, non uinea culta, sed audax  Cerberus et Stygiae nauita turpis aquae:  illic percussisque genis ustoque capillo  errat ad obscuros pallida turba lacus.  quam potius laudandus hic est quem prole parata  occupat in parua pigra senecta casa!  ipse suas sectatur oues, at filius agnos,  et calidam fesso comparat uxor aquam.  sic ego sim, liceatque caput candescere canis  temporis et prisci facta referre senem. | 5  10  15  20  25  26  30  35  40 | Who was he, the man who first invented horrible swords? How wild and truly made of iron he was!  Then slaughter arose for the race of men, then battles, then a shorter road to grim death was opened.  Or was that wretch not to blame, have we turned to our own ill that which he gave for use against wild beasts?  This is the fault of rich gold, nor were there wars, when beechen was the cup that stood by the feast.  There were no citadels, no palisade, and the flock’s leader sought sleep carefree among mottled sheep.  Then life would have been sweet for me, nor would I have known sad arms nor heard trumpet with beating heart.  Now I am dragged to wars, and perhaps already some enemy bears the darts that will stick in my side.  But ancestral Lares, preserve me! You also nourished me when as a boy I would run before your feet.  And let it not shame you to have been made of an old stump: thus you inhabited my old grandfather’s home.  Then they held their faith better, when it was a wooden god that stood in a tiny shrine with poor adornment.  This god was pleased whether someone had offered a grape or had place a garland of grain on his holy hair.  And a man having won his prayer would himself bring cakes, and his little daughter pure honeycomb behind.  But drive brazen weapons from me, Lares…  and, as victim, a country pig from a full sty.  This I will follow, in purified clothing, and I will carry a basket bound in myrtle, my head too wrapped in myrtle.  Thus may I please you: let another man be bold in arms and lay low the enemy generals with Mars on his side,  so that the soldier can tell me of his deeds while I’m drinking, and draw the camp in wine on the table.  What madness is it to summon black death in wars?  Death looms, and it comes concealed on silent foot.  There is no cropland below, no cultivated vines, but bold Cerberus and the foul sailor of the Stygian water.  In that place a pale crowd, with cheeks torn and burnt hair, wanders towards dark pools.  How much more to be praised is the man whom old age takes in a small hovel, after he has got children!  He himself follows his sheep, and his son the lambs, and his wife prepares hot water for the tired man.  Thus may I be, and grant that my head grow white and as an old man I recall the deeds of an earlier time. |
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| interea pax arua colat. pax candida primum  duxit araturos sub iuga curua boues:  pax aluit uites et sucos condidit uuae,  funderet ut nato testa paterna merum:  pace bidens uomerque nitent, at tristia duri  militis in tenebris occupat arma situs.—  rusticus e lucoque uehit, male sobrius ipse,  uxorem plaustro progeniemque domum.— | 45  50 | Meanwhile may peace cultivate the fields. It was shining peace that first led oxen under curved yokes to plow; peace that nourished vines and stored the grape’s juices so that the father’s vessel might pour wine for the son. With peace the mattock and ploughshare shine, but rust takes hold of the hard soldier’s sad arms in the darkness. A country fellow rides out of a sacred grove, hardly too sober, carrying his wife and children home in a wagon. |
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| sed ueneris tunc bella calent, scissosque capillos  femina, perfractas conqueriturque fores;  flet teneras subtusa genas, sed uictor et ipse  flet sibi dementes tam ualuisse manus.  at lasciuus Amor rixae mala uerba ministrat,  inter et iratum lentus utrumque sedet.  a lapis est ferrumque, suam quicumque puellam  uerberat: e caelo deripit ille deos. | 55  60 | But then the wars of Venus grow hot, and a woman complains of her torn hair and her broken doors;  she weeps with her tender cheeks bruised, but the victor himself weeps too, that his insane hands had such strength. Yet playful Amor supplies abusive words to the lover’s bout, and he sits stubbornly between the angry pair. Ah, he is stone and iron, whoever beats his own girl; a man like that seizes the gods down from the sky. |
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| sit satis e membris tenuem rescindere uestem,  sit satis ornatus dissoluisse comae,  sit lacrimas mouisse satis: quater ille beatus  quo tenera irato flere puella potest.  sed manibus qui saeuus erit, scutumque sudemque  is gerat et miti sit procul a Venere.  at nobis, Pax alma, ueni spicamque teneto,  profluat et pomis candidus ante sinus. | 65 | Be it enough to tear the fine garment from her limbs, be it enough to disarrange the adornments of her hair,  be it enough to have roused tears; four times blessed is he whose tender girl can weep when he is angered. But he who will be brutish with his hands, let him bear shield and stake and be far off from gentle Venus. But for us, nourishing Peace, come and receive a spike of grain, and may your shining bosom flow forth with fruits. |

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