

**THE ELEGIES OF TIBULLUS:
BEING THE CONSOLATIONS
OF A ROMAN LOVER,
DONE IN ENGLISH VERSE**

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The Elegies of Tibullus: Being the Consolations of a Roman Lover, Done in English Verse by
Theodore C. Williams

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THE EPIGRAM OF DOMITIUS MARSUS

Tibullus, thee with Virgil, in your prime,
Death, heedless, to Elysian realms leads down:
That none might longer of lost loves complain,
Nor warring kings with epic numbers crown.

TO THE GOSSIPS

Rumor avers: "Thy love deceives again."
Oh, that my ears were deaf, and I at peace!
Such charges leave me wounded and in pain.
Why scourge a bleeding wretch? Fierce Rumor,
cease!

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BEING

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TO WILLIAM COE COLLAR
HEAD MASTER OF THE
ROXBURY LATIN SCHOOL

Our old master ever young to his old boys:

*Did Mentor with his mantle thee invest,
Or Chiron lend thee his persuasive lyre,
Or Socrates, of pedagogues the best,
Teach thee the harp-strings of a youth's desire?*

P R E F A C E

ALBIUS TIBULLUS was a Roman gentleman, whose father fought on Pompey's side. The precise dates of his birth and death are in doubt, and what we know of his life is all in his own poems; except that Horace condoles with him about Glyceria, and Apuleius says Delia's real name was Plautia.

Horace paid him this immortal compliment: (*Epist. 4 bk. 1*).

*"Albi nostrorum sermonum candide iudex,
"Non tu corpus eras sine pectore; Di tibi formam,
"Di tibi divitias dederant, artemque fruendi."*

After his death, Ovid wrote him a fine elegy (p. 115); and Domitius Marsus a neat epigram. The former promised him an immortality equal to Homer's; the latter sent him to Elysium at Virgil's side. These excessive eulogies are the more remarkable in that Tibullus stood, proudly or indolently, aloof from the court. He never flatters Augustus nor mentions his name. He scoffs at riches, glory and war, wanting nothing but to triumph as a lover. Ovid dares to group him with the laurelled shades of Catullus and Gallus, of whom the former had lampooned the divine Julius and the latter had been exiled by Augustus.

But in spite of this contemporary *succès d'estime*, Tibullus is clearly a minor poet. He expresses only one aspect of his time. His few themes are oft-repeated and in monotonous rhythms. He sings of nothing greater than his own lost loves. Yet of

PREFACE

Delia, Nemesis and Neaera, we learn only that all were fair, faithless and venal. For a man whose ideal of love was life-long fidelity, he was tragically unsuccessful.

If this were all, his verse would have perished with that of Macer and Gallus. But it is not all. These love-poems of a private gentleman of the Augustan time, show a delicacy of sentiment almost modern. Of the ribald curses which Catullus hurls after his departing Lesbia, there is nothing. He throws the blame on others: and if, just to frighten, he describes the wretched old age of the girls who never were faithful, it is with a playful tone and hoping such bad luck will never befall any sweet-heart of his. This delicacy and tenderness, with the playful accent, are, perhaps, Tibullus' distinctive charm.

His popularity in 18th century France was very great. The current English version, Grainger's (1755), with its cheap verse and common-place galantries, is a stupid echo of the French feeling for Tibullus as an erotic poet. Much better is the witty prose version by the elder Mirabeau, done during the Terror, in the prison at Vincennes, and published after his release, with a ravishing portrait of "Sophie," surrounded by Cupids and billing doves. One of the old Parisian editors dared to say:

"Tous ceux qui aiment, ou qui ont jamais aimé, savent par coeur ce délicieux Tibulle."

But it was unjust to classify Tibullus merely as an erotic poet. The gallants of the *ancien régime* were quite capable of writing their own valentines. Tibul-