



Dante's Eclogues

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Dante's Eclogues

ANDO Yukie

Dante is considered to have written two eclogues in Latin. The first was written by him indeed, but some scholars are hesitant about acknowledging Dante's full authorship of the second. Philip H. Wicksteed says: "It will be noted that this second eclogue does not in any express way claim to be the work of Dante."¹ But Wicksteed himself also admits that "it is generally accepted as Dante's authentic work."² Editors and translators before and after him regard it as Dante's own work, therefore I will deal with both eclogues as his, discussing them through English translations.

The first eclogue was written as an answer to an epistle in Latin hexameters to Dante by Giovanni del Virgilio, professor of Latin at the University of Bologna. The second eclogue, also a reply to Del Virgilio's second epistle to Dante, was sent to the Latin scholar after Dante's death. So it is necessary to read Del Virgilio's epistles in order to understand Dante's eclogues. The whole poetical correspondence was fortunately preserved by Boccaccio. And we have various English translations. The first one is *The Divina Commedia and Canzoniere* translated by E. H. Plumptre, Vol. IV (*Canzoniere*), 202-26, in English blank verse as "Eclogues, I~IV." The second is *Dante and Giovanni del Virgilio*

by Philip H. Wicksteed and Edmund G. Gardner, 146-173, which gives us the original Latin and a prose translation, an elaborate work including an introduction and a commentary with detailed and vital information. It is also noteworthy for preserving the poetic remains of Giovanni del Virgilio and for its explanation of Mussato, Dante's contemporary. The third is *Dante's Eclogues* translated into English blank verse by Wilmon Brewer. We can also download the texts from the Web.³ I mainly use Plumptre's translation as the English text for this paper. It seems rather difficult to translate Dante's eclogues into English line for line. While Dante's first eclogue consists of 68 lines in Latin, Plumptre's translation has 94 lines. Dante's second one is made up of 97 lines, which Plumptre translates into 130 lines. Kegel-Brinkgreve translates both eclogues into English verses with the same number of lines in her elaborate book, *The Echoing Woods* (240-45), but she leaves out many details.

Del Virgilio, also known as Master Johannes, was the only professor of poetry in the University of Bologna. He earned the nickname "Del Virgilio" by his devotion to Virgil.⁴ In the year 1319 he wrote his first epistle in Latin verse to Dante in Ravenna, which was his headquarters during the closing years of his life. In the epistle he addresses Dante as "gentle voice" (1) and refers to the *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso* of the *Divine Comedy*:

Who with new rhymes dost soothe the troubled world,
 Still striving, with the branch of life's true tree,
 To cleanse it from the taint that bringeth death,
 By laying bare to view the threefold coasts,
 Assigned to souls, as merits may demand:
 Hell for the lost; for those that seek the stars

Lethe; and realms above the sun for saints; (2-8)

"New rhymes" apparently refers to the Italian vernacular Dante used in his *Divine Comedy*. The *Inferno* was published in 1314 and the *Purgatorio* in 1315, so Del Virgilio would have been familiar with them, and obviously admired them greatly, but he wanted to reproach Dante for turning from Latin to the demotic: "Why wilt thou still such lofty topics treat/For the rude herd . . . ?" (9-10), adding that "the world/Of scholars scorns that language" (21-22).

Moreover he points out that Dante doesn't follow the great Latin poets, Virgil, Horace, Ovid, and Lucan, whom Dante joined in *Inferno* IV, 102, or Statius, whom he met in *Purgatorio*, XXI, 83-99:

And none of those with whom thou rank'st as sixth,
Nor he thou followest on thy heavenward path,
Wrote in the speech that through the market rings. (24-26)

He appeals to Dante's ostensible desire for laurels:

Be not too wasteful, throwing pearls to swine,
Nor clothe the sisterhood of Castaly
In unmeet raiment, but, I pray thee, choose
The speech that will most widely give thee fame
For thy prophetic song, the common lot
Of this and of that nation. (29-34)

He further suggests some contemporary political themes as Dante's suitable subjects: the Italian campaign and the death of Henry VII (Count of Luxemburg, c.1275-1313; Holy Roman

Emperor, 1308-13); the great military victory of Ugucchione della Faggiuola (renowned Ghibelline leader) against the Ghelf forces of Florence and Naples at the battle of Montecatini in 1315; the great victory of Can Grande della Scalla (Ghibelline lord of Verona, one of Dante's patrons) against the Paduans at Vicenza in 1317; the war of Robert of Anjou (King of Naples) against Piedmont and Genoa.⁴ From the late twelfth century, local rivalries in the Italian towns consolidated into factions. Then, in the 1240s, local factions gradually formed two party alliances that took sides in the renewed conflict between the German emperors and the Italian popes. The Ghibellines were the supporters of the efforts of the Holy Roman emperors to establish hegemony over northern Italy in opposition to the Guelfs, the supporters of the political and territorial ambitions of the papal curia and its allies. Dante was involved in this conflict and suffered his misfortunes because of it.

Dante was born in 1265. He participated as a cavalryman in the battle of Campaldino in 1289. The Guelf League (Florence and Lucca) defeated the Ghibellines of Arezzo. Dante recalls this battle in the *Purgatorio*. In 1294 he met Charles Martel, King of Hungary and heir to the kingdom of Naples and the country of Provence. Dante recounts their meeting in *Paradiso* VIII. In 1295 he joined the guild of the apothecaries for the purpose of entering public life. In 1300 Dante was prior for two months (15 June-15 August), one of the six highest magistrates in Florence. In the same year Pope Boniface VIII proclaimed the Jubilee Year. In 1301 Dante was sent to Rome as an envoy to Pope Boniface VIII, as Charles of Valois approached Florence. In 1302 the Black Guelfs seized power in Florence. Dante was banished from the city for two years and forever excluded from public office. Later

in the same year his banishment was made perpetual and he was condemned to be burned alive if taken in the territory of the Florentine Republic. In 1306 Dante began the *Divine Comedy*. In 1310 Henry of Luxembourg, Holy Roman Emperor, descended into Italy and Dante addressed an epistle to him, who died in 1313. In 1314, as mentioned above, the *Inferno* was published. In 1315 Dante moved to Verona as a guest of Cangrande della Scala and worked on the *Purgatorio* and the *Paradiso*. And the former was published in the same year. In 1318 Dante moved to Ravenna, where he was the guest of Guido Novello da Polenta, lord of the city. In 1319 he corresponded with Del Virgilio.

In his epistle Del Virgilio imagines that Dante will follow his suggestion and successfully attain great fame, declaring that he will be heralded in a procession as the poet laureate:

And Maro's servant, bearing Virgil's name,
Will gladly be the first to lead thee forth,
'Mid crowds of loud-applauding worshippers,
Thy temples crowned with wreaths of fragrant bays,
E'en as the herald, mounted on his horse,
Exults, proclaiming loud with echoing voice
His leader's trophies to the joyful crowd. (52-58)

Thus he shows his affectionate devotion to Dante. And he urges Dante to write on war again:

E'en now the alarm of war affrights mine ears:
Why are Tyrrhenian waves by Nereus lashed?
What threats are those of father Apennine?
Why rages Mars on this side or on that?

Take thou thy lyre, and calm that tumult wild. (59-63)

Lastly he asks Dante to visit him in Bologna and write a poem for him, looking forward to Dante's answer with humility:

Yet even now,
If thou, who dwell'st hard by Eridanus,
Give me the hope that thou wilt visit me,
And count me worthy of some kindly lines,
And if it irk thee not to read my verse,
Weak though it be—e'en such as goose o'erbold
Might cackle to the swan of sweetest song—
Or answer, Master mine, or grant my prayer. (66-73)

Dante's answer is an eclogue in Latin hexameters following Virgil's models. In the poem Dante assumes the name "Tityrus" and his partner is called "Meliboeus" like the characters in Virgil's *Eclogue I*; Del Virgilio appears as Mopsus:

And so it chanced we told our tale of goats
Fresh from their pastures, I beneath the oak,
And Meliboeus with me. He indeed—
For much he sought with me to read that song—
"O Tityrus," began, "I pray thee tell
What Mopsus means?" And I, O Mopsus, smiled. (4-9)

This Meliboeus, a goatherd, is said to be the youthful Dino Perini, who was a teacher at the Studio or, as we may say now, the University of Ravenna. There Dante himself, who wrote *De vulgari eloquentia* in 1304, was a professor or a reader of

Vernacular Rhetoric.⁵ So they were colleagues.

Responding to his earnest request, Dante explains the content of the epistle of Del Virgilio, referring to the pastoral situation:

Unknown to thee the pastures where the shade
Of Maenalus o'erhangs, and hides the sun
With sloping summit—pastures decked in tints
Of thousand hues of grasses and of flowers. (16-19)

Maenalus is a mountain in Arcadia, and Mopsus lives there, piping and singing pastoral songs:

Mopsus there,
While o'er the pliant grass his oxen rove,
Contemplates, at his ease, of men and gods
The labours. Then, through pipes that swell with wind,
He to his inner joys gives utterance,
So that his sweet songs draw his herds to him,
And lions calmed rush from the mountain's height
Down to the plain, and waters stay their course
And mountain height and forest nod their heads. (24-32)

Here Dante applauds Mopsus as an ideal cowherd who can sing and pipe so well that he can attract animals and nature responds to him. Then Meliboeus wants to know "his unknown songs" (34). Instead Dante explains about Mopsus' invitation:

O Meliboeus, to Aonian hills
Mopsus has given himself, year following year,
While others toil o'er law and equity,

And in the holy mountain's shade grows pale,
 Washed in the stream that quickens poets' life,
 And full, till breast, throat, palate overflow
 With milk of song; my Mopsus summons me
 To take the leaves that grow on Peneus' shore,
 Where Daphne was transformed. (38-46)

Clearly Dante has compassion for Mopsus, who devotes himself to poetry despite his poverty, though others study law and become rich. Daphne is the daughter of Peneus, a river god; she is loved by Apollo and transformed into a laurel to escape him (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, I, 452-567). Mopsus invites Dante to come to Bologna and become a poet laureate.

Meliboeus asks Dante, "What wilt thou do?" (46) and blames him for spending days without a laurel crown:

"Wilt thou ever keep
 Thy brows undecked with laurels, through the fields
 As shepherd known? (47-49)

Dante answers that fame is not such a valuable thing: "Nay, name and fame of seer,/Oft vanish . . . into air" (50-51). He adds that Bologna doesn't respect Mopsus as a poet: "And scarcely has the Muse our Mopsus brought/To full completeness, spite of sleepless nights" (52-53). Therefore he doubts the response toward his own poetry:

"What echoes will from hills and fields resound,
 If with a laurelled brow I tune my lyre
 To paeon hymns?" (55-57)

He blames the city of a savage and impious place: "I own I fear/The thickets wild, and fields that know not God" (57-58). Thus Dante rejects going to Bologna. He would prefer to go back to Florence to get a laurel crown:

"Were it not better done to deck my locks
With triumph-wreath, and should I e'er return
Where my own Arno flows, to hide them there,
Now grey, once golden, 'neath the laurel crown?" (59-62)

Melibeus agrees with him, but warns him, saying that "the time flies fast" (64). According to Plumptre's translation, Tityrus/Dante answers that the *Purgatorio and Paradiso* of his *Divine Comedy* will prove him a poet laureate:

"When in my song the sea-girt mountain high,
And those who dwell within the starry spheres,
Shall be revealed, as now the realms of Hell,
Then 'twill be well with ivy and with bay
To crown my brows." (68-72)

"The sea-girt mountain high" represents the *Purgatorio* and "those who dwell within the starry spheres" implies the *Paradiso*. And "the realms of Hell," of course, are the *Inferno*. But the original Latin says:

Tunc ego "Cum mundi cirucumflua corpora cantu
astricolaeque meo velut infera regna patebunt
devincire caput hedera lauroque juvabit,
concedat Mopsus." (48-51)

Wicksteed and Gardner translate this: "Then I: 'When the bodies that flow round the world, and they that dwell among the stars, shall be shown forth in my song, even as the lower realms, then shall I joy to bind my brow with ivy and with laurel, if Mopsus will allow'" (155). And they comment: "The 'lower realms' include both Hell and Purgatory, and the 'bodies that flow round the world' are the revolving heavens" (227). I agree, for the *Inferno* and the *Purgatorio* were already published by then. Therefore Dante is saying that his laurels must await the publication of the *Paradiso*.

Dante hopes Mopsus will grant this. But Meliboeus reminds him that the scholar disapproved of his use of Italian in the *Divine Comedy*:

"Mopsus!" he answered, "See'st thou not that he
 Condemns the speech of that thy Comedy,
 As by the lips of women trite and worn,
 Rejected by the nymphs of Castaly?" (73-76)

Then Dante/Tityrus declares he will send ten cantos of the *Paradiso* to Mopsus in order to make him understand the value of the vernacular and of his work as a whole, using the metaphor of an ewe. The original Latin goes: "'Est mecum quam nosis ovis gratissima' dixi" (58). Plumptre translates this: "And then I said, 'I have an ewe, thou know'st her goodliest far/Of all the flock'" (80-81). Wicksteed and Gardner render it: "'I have,' said I, 'one sheep, thou knowest, most loved'" (157). This ewe has so much milk that she can scarcely bear the weight of her udders. Wicksteed and Gardner comment: "This *ovis gratissima* can surely be nothing else than the *Commedia* or, more specifically,

the *Paradiso*, ten cantos of which Dante will send to his correspondent to convert him from his contempt of vernacular poetry" (228). This is one interpretation. I would like to suggest another: this most beloved ewe represents the Italian language and her milk implies his work, that is, the *Commedia* or the *Paradiso*. The vernacular is so rich and productive that he can manage it readily and freely:

"Of her free will, unforced, she never fails
To seek the milk-pail. Her 'tis in my mind
To milk with ready hands, and ten jugs full
Will I to Mopsus send." (86-89)

"Ten jugs full" apparently refers to ten cantos of the *Paradiso*.

Their conversation ends when supper is ready: "our poor abode/Saw homely meal preparing on the hearth" (93-94). Thus the first eclogue is finished. All of this is a Theocritan burlesque clothed in Virgilian form, a witty coded rejection of Del Virgilio's request.

Del Virgilio's reply, at first refers to two rivers in Bologna, the Savena (Sarpina) and Reno. Next he explains his solitary situation, living in "a shelter in a rock-hewn cave" (4):

What should I do? for I alone was there
As dweller in the woods, the rest being gone
Full speed into the city, business-pressed; (7-9)

Then he makes reed pipes like an ordinary shepherd: "With my hook/I carved me pipes of water-reeds" (11-12), for "The whistling wind of Eurus blowing soft,/Brought to my ears the song of

Tityrus" (20-21). He apparently misunderstands Dante's eclogue, which, he says, moves even animals as well as nymphs and shepherds:

Arcadian nymphs rejoice to hear the song,
 Shepherds, and sheep, and shaggy goats, and kine;
 E'en the wild asses run with pricked-up ears,
 And fauns come dancing from Lyceian heights. (27-30)

He himself also takes his reeds and tries to breathe a new song. In his song he calls Dante "divine old man" (41) and "A second Tityrus" (42). The first Tityrus is, of course, Virgil. As he is called "Mopsus" in Dante's eclogue, Del Virgilio asks Dante to "let Mopsus speak as Meliboeus spoke" (44) as an ardent follower of Dante who deplores his miserable situation as an exile rejected by Florence:

Ah me! That thou shouldst dwell in squalid hut,
 With dust o'erlaid, and shouldst in righteous wrath,
 Mourn for the fields of Arno, fields from thee
 Stolen, and from thy flocks. Ah, deed of shame
 For that ungrateful city! (45-49)

Then he earnestly urges Dante to come to him: "Refresh thyself with me. We both will sing" (62). He offers Dante pastoral happiness: first he mentions pastoral surroundings such as a stream flowing through a cavern, blowing shrubs, fragrant marjoram, and drowsy poppies; second he assures Dante that the Arcadian people will serve him readily and gladly:

. . . a couch for thee
 Of wilding thyme shall our Alexis strew
 Whom Corydon bids me call, and willingly
 Will Nysa gird herself to wash thy feet,
 And get thy supper ready. (71-75)

Third he refers to tasty food: seasoned mushrooms, garlic, honey, and sweet apples. Fourth he declares that Dante will be garlanded with ivy wreaths. And lastly he pledges that "no pleasure shall be lacking" (86) and again urges Dante to come to him.

Del Virgilio even offers assurances that the social and political situations in Bologna are safe:

Come then, and fear not, Tityrus, our fields;
 The lofty pines with waving heads give pledge
 Of safety for thee; even so the shrubs,
 And acorn-bearing oaks. No wiles are here,
 No plots, as thou dost deem, of frauds and wrong, (94-98)

He then tropes on this modesty, trying to humiliate Dante for preferring the riches of Ravenna to his poor dwelling in Bologna:

"Art thou mad, Mopsus? Nay, Iolas, he,
 The man of polished culture, will refuse,
 Seeing that thy gifts are but a peasant's store,
 Nor is thy cave as safe as are the tents
 Where Tityrus seeks repose." (105-9)

Here, "Iolas," who is the rich lover of Alexis in Virgil's *Eclogue IV*, refers Guido Novello da Polenta, Podesta of Ravenna, who

early in 1318 invited Dante as his guest. Wicksteed and Gardner comment on him as follows:

Guido was a poet of distinction in the vulgar tongue, and a man well skilled in the liberal arts; his rule was peaceful to a degree unusual in that age and almost unprecedented in a city of Romagna. The university was liberally patronized and enlarged; men of culture were encouraged to settle in the city. (82)

Dante was joined by his sons, Pietro and Jaccop, and his daughter Antonia, who became a nun there, taking the name Suor Beatrice, that is, Sister Beatrice. His wife Gemma did not join her husband.⁶

Del Virgilio even tries to stimulate Dante's jealousy, by referring to a rival: "Reject me then, and I/Will quench my thirst with Muso, Phrygian born" (114-15). "Muso" is Albertino Musatto, a Latin poet of Padua, where he was crowned with laurel for his tragic poem, the *Ecerinis*, in 1315, a work dealing with the tyranny of Ezzelino, who was guilty of massacring the citizens of Padua. It tells the story of the diabolical brothers Ezzelino and Alberico, their hideous tyranny, and their woeful end. The poem stirred the patriotism of the Paduans.⁷

The coronation of Statius had been the last occasion on which laurel crown had decorated any honorable poet. Therefore we can easily imagine that the revival of the practice would fire the imagination of the scholars and poets of the time and that Dante would earnestly long for a similar act of honor and recognition. We also understand that Del Vilgilio was serious about his interest in Musatto. After Dante's death, in fact, Del Vilgilio sent a

lengthy eclogue, "Tu modo Pieriis," to Musatto (Wicksteed and Gardner, 130-39; 176-95).

In his eclogue to Dante Del Vilgilio finally adopts a scornful tone: "thou drinkest still/Of thine own country's waters" (116-17), that is, "you still drink the water of the Arno and write Italian poetry." Lastly he mentions that he has also cows with abundant milk and that he will "send as many jugs to Tityrus/As he has promised" (124-25). He sends ten poems of his own to Dante in return for those which he received, though he tropes again on his humility. The sun sets and the eclogues ends:

Even while I speak
My friends draw near, and on the mountain height
The setting sun sinks down behind the ridge. (127-29)

Dante's response in his second eclogue sets the time at noon when the sun is hot. "And therefore, in their pity for their flocks,
/Alphesiboeus, yea, and Tityrus,/Fled to the woods" (9-11). This new interlocutor, Alphesiboeus, comes from the name of a shepherd in Virgil's *Eclogue IV*, 7. He is identified with "Fiducio de' Milotti of Certaldo (Boccaccio's birthplace), a physician of high repute, staying at Ravenna" (Plumptre, 219).

Tityrus reclines beneath a shadow of a tree and Alphesiboeus speaks to him in the woods. He invokes nature and says:

—at all this I
Have ceased to wonder; for to all that live
Appropriate environment brings joy; (31-33)

But he cannot understand why Mopsus lives in Bologna: "he

[Mopsus] prefers/Where Aetna smokes, the Cyclops' cave and rocks" (36-37). The personal Cyclops here is identified with Romeo dei Pepoli, then ruler of that city, under whose protection Del Vilgilio lived (Cf. Plumptre, 220).

Then Meliboeus arrives "all hot with panting breath" (38). His master raises his head and asks him: "Ah friend o'er-young, what fresh-born care is this,/That makes thee vex thy lungs with pace so quick?" (46-47). He cannot answer, but he touches his lips to the pipe of oaten straw; "as the youth was striving to draw out/Tones from his reed, the reed itself breathes forth" (51-52). This alludes to the story of King Midas, the legendary Phrygian king. Having to judge a musical contest between Apollo and Pan, Midas voted against Apollo, who therefore bestowed ass's ears on him. He managed to hide these from most people with his head-dress, but was obliged to tell his barber. The latter, bursting with the secret, found relief by whispering it into a hole in the ground. Reeds grew over this when he refilled it and whispered the tale whenever the wind blew through them. The story is described in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, XI, 153ff. Making use of the myth, Dante let Meliboeus' pipe itself respond to the second eclogue of Del Vilgilio, who by implication is an ass.

Both Tityrus and Alphesiboeus listen to the song. The latter asks Tityrus: "Would'st thou, honoured old man, dare/To leave Pelorum's dewy plains, and seek/The Cyclops' cavern?" (61-63). "Pelorum" is "Pelorus", the promontory at the northeast extremity of Sicily, to which Dante refers in the *Purgatorio*, XIV, 32 and the *Paradiso*, VIII, 68. In this case Alphesiboeus asks Tityrus/Dante whether he will leave Ravenna to go to Bologna. Tityrus replies: "Why dost thou doubt? Why, dear friend, question me?" (65). In return Alphesiboeus says:

"Hear'st thou not what sound
 Comes from the flute in its melodious might,
 God-given, like the reeds, the breeze-born reeds,
 As rumour spreads far off the change that passed
 O'er the king's temples, in their foul disgrace,
 When he, as Bromios bade him, straightway changed
 Pactolus' sands to hue of glittering gold?" (67-73)

Here Dante refers to Midas again: "the change that passed/O'er the king's temples" and "their foul disgrace" represent his ass's ears. The poet adds another story of Midas, who was very hospitable to Silenus. Bacchus or Dionysus therefore offered Midas anything he wished. He asked that all he touched might become gold. Soon after, he found that this applied even to his food and prayed to have the power lifted. By Bacchus' advice he bathed in Pactolus, which ever since has had golden sands (*Metamorphoses*, XI, 90 ff). "Bromios" is the same as "Bromius", meaning "the noisy one," and surname of Bacchus. Using this allusion, Alphisiboeus asks Tityrus not to be induced: "O, blest old man,/Trust not delusive favour" (75-76) and urges him not to leave Ravenna: "Blest old man,/Abandon not the pastures and the springs,/On which thy name hath stamped a deathless life" (83-85).

In spite of Alphisiboeus' entreaty Tityrus answers: "I fain would leave my flock,/And as thou wishest, come to visit thee,/My Mopsus, but for fear of Polypheme" (99-101). He says that he will go to Bologna without "fear of Polypheme." This, of course, is Polyphemus, chief of Cyclops. Alphisiboeus expresses shock: "Who fears not Polypheme, with human blood/Still wont to stain his lips" (103-4). Plumptre points out that Polyphemus is, as before, Romeo dei Pepoli (224), who was apparently connected with

some cruel acts. Wicksteed and Gardner comment: "In this very year in which Dante is writing, 1319, a band of so-called Ghibelline exiles who had made an excursion into Bolognese territory had been cut to pieces and their leaders hanged" (227). But they take Polyphemus as "the pastoral cipher for King Robert of Naples, whose vicar had sentenced Dante and his sons to death, and who was still potent in Bologna, although he no longer ruled the province of Romagna" (241). Alpheus again implores Tityrus not to yield to the temptation of the laurel crown in terrible Bologna. Tityrus smilingly agrees with him and decides to stay in Ravenna. The evening comes and the shepherds (Tityrus, Alpheus, and Meliboeus) take their homeward way with their flocks.

Dante puts Iolas, that is, Guido Novello da Polenta, in the final scene:

Iolas crafty, listening stood hard by,
 Who heard all this and told all this to us:
 He sings to us, O Mopsus, we to thee. (128-30)

Thus Dante arranges it that Iolas has secretly overheard the whole of this and that he tells it to the Ravennese, who in turn tells it to Mopsus. It is not through Tityrus himself but through the Ravennese as a third party that Mopsus gets his answer, an arrangement quite different from Dante's first eclogue. In this way Mopsus is informed that Dante will stay in Ravenna. The tone of this shifts from Theocritan to Propertian burlesque, with its complex allusiveness to myths and placenames, again clad in Virgilian form, a pointed but still witty rejoinder to the professor.

This second eclogue was only dispatched to Del Virgilio after Dante's death, by his son. The news of his death actually reached Del Virgilio before the eclogue. Accordingly Del Virgilio wrote an epitaph for Dante, which was selected by Boccaccio from many others to stand on Dante's tomb, if Guido Novello da Polenta had ever erected it (Wicksteed and Gardner, 110 & 130).

Dante had moved from Verona to Ravenna in 1318, though he returned briefly to Verona on 20 January 1320, in order to deliver his *Questio de aqua et terra*. He was clearly content in Ravenna. His material needs were generously met by Guido Novello da Polenta, on whose behalf Dante undertook a number of diplomatic missions. In the summer of 1321 a quarrel between Venetian and Ravennese sailors brought on a conflict in which the Venetians were worsted. The result was that the Doge of Venice and the tyrant of Forli entered into an alliance and prepared for a war of extermination against Ravenna. They secured the benevolent neutrality of the Lord of Rimini and the Communes and Podestas of Cesena, Imola, and Faenza. Guido Novello found himself threatened on all sides and on the brink of destruction. At the end of August 1321, he sent Dante to Venice with other ambassadors to lay the whole matter before the Doge and to avert the war by diplomatic means. Dante visited Venice twice on short notice, and the war was averted, but it caused his fatal illness. He died on 13 September 1321 at the age of fifty-six. All the Ravennese citizens, from Guido Novello down, grieved over his death. Dante was crowned with laurel at his funeral in Ravenna. He was buried in the church of San Pier Maggiore (now San Francesco).

Here is the elegy of fourteen lines by Giovanni del Virgilio, intended as an epitaph on Dante's tomb, quoted from Wicksteed and Gardner, 174-75:

Theologus Dantes, nullius dogmatis expers
 quod foveat claro philosophia sinu,
 gloria musarum, vulgo gratissimus auctor,
 hic jacet et fama pulsat utrumque polum:
 qui loca defunctis gladiis regnumque gemellis
 distribuit laicis rhetoricisque modis.
 Pascua Pieriis demum resonabat avenis;
 Atropos heu laetum livida rupit opus.
 Huic ingrata tulit tristem Florentia fructum
 exilium vati patria cruda suo;
 quem pia Guidonis gremio Ravenna Novelli
 gaudet honorati continuisse ducis.
 Mille trecentenis ter septem Numinis annis
 ad sua Septembris idibus astra redit.

(Text after Macrì-Leone.)

Dante, the theologian, skilled in every branch of knowledge
 that philosophy may cherish in her illustrious bosom,
 glory of the muses, author most acceptable to the vulgar,
 here lieth and smiteth either pole with his fame;
 who assigned their places to the defunct and their respective
 sway to the twin swords, in laic and rhetoric fashion.
 Lastly he was singing pastoral songs on the Pierian pipes;
 envious Atropos, alas, broke off the work of joy.
 To him ungrateful Florence bore the bitter fruit of exile,
 fatherland cruel to her [*sic*] bard;
 whom pitying Ravenna rejoices to have received
 in the bosom of Guido Novello her honoured chief.
 In the years of the Deity one thousand three times a hundred
 and three times seven on September's ides to his own stars did

he return.

(Translation by Wicksteed)

Del Virgilio clearly held no grudge. He acknowledges Dante's wide knowledge and respects him as an "author most acceptable to the vulgar." Moreover he lays emphasis on Dante's good command of Italian as well as Latin. He blames Florence and praises Ravenna and Guido Novello on behalf of Dante. We understand his deep affection for Dante.

Through Dante's eclogues we understand his life and his way of thinking more closely. Besides we should notice that they played an important part in European literary history. In spite of his ironic use of the form Dante's stature lent the pastoral a renewed respect. Brewer suitably points out this fact:

Once more the pastoral became a dignified form of poetry. During the rest of the mediaeval period, indeed, it remained only a minor form of literature; but it was attempted successively by many of the leading Italian poets, including both Petrarch and Boccaccio. Dante had restored the ancient pastoral to favor and had opened the way for its development in modern times. (41)

In the Renaissance Tasso, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton all took up the form. The pastoral tradition thus continued in modified ways through the Romantics to modern authors.

Notes

¹ *A Translation of the Latin Works of Dante Alighieri* (London: Dent, 1904. The Temple Classics), 379.

² Ibid.

³ *Dante Alighieri on the Web*. <http://www.greatdante.net/texts.htm>. In the website the "Eclogues" has PDF and LaTeX sourced versions (48 Kb) and three other versions. The link "A selection of English translations of Dante's work can be found here" leads to "Dante's Lyric Poems--New Translation by Joseph Tusiani." There we can find the original Latin eclogues and their English translations.

<http://www.italianstudies.org/poetry/index.htm>.

⁴ Wicksteed and Gardner, 119 & 121.

⁵ Plumptre, IV, 205-6. Wicksteed and Gardner, 215-19.

⁶ Wicksteed and Gardner, 84 & 95.

⁷ Wicksteed and Gardner say: "It seems certain that Gemma was not reunited to her husband" (84). "Unlike her children, Gemma did not join Dante in exile" (*The Dante Encyclopedia*, 432).

⁸ Details about the poem in Wicksteed and Gardner, 38-41.

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