



Virgil's Eclogues

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Virgil's *Eclogues*

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In this paper I will discuss Virgil's *Eclogues*, using the fine English translations in Paul Alpers' study, *The Singer of the Eclogues*.¹ Virgil is generally considered to have been the first Roman poet to imitate Theocritus' pastorals. Alpers says: "The *Eclogues* were probably written between 42 and 38 B. C., when Virgil was about thirty years old" (2). Virgil was born October 15, 70 B. C., in Andes, a district near Mantua. His father, though described as of humble origin, as a potter or courier who married his master's daughter, was probably a landowner rich enough to give his son an excellent education and to prepare him for a senatorial career. Virgil was presumably brought up in Mantua and at his father's suburban villa and farm, but for his higher education he went to Cremona. From Cremona Virgil proceeded to Milan, and soon after to Rome, where he studied rhetoric under prominent teachers.

As though under the old Chinese curse, Virgil lived in "interesting," meaning turbulent, times. In 60 B. C. the First Triumvirate was formed by Pompey, Caesar and Crassus. Two years later Caesar began to conduct a series of great campaigns in Gaul which continued for seven years. In 49 B. C. the civil wars began and Caesar defeated Pompey. In 46 B. C. Caesar was appointed dictator for ten years, but in 44 B. C. he was assassinated and Mark Antony took command in Rome. Next year Octavian was elected consul at only twenty. He then formed the Second

Triumvirate with Antony and Lepidus, and they defeated Caesar's assassins at Philippi.

When land in Italy was distributed to war veterans in 41 B. C., Virgil's father had his property expropriated, and he took refuge with his son near Naples. *Eclogue I* is said to celebrate the subsequent restoration of the estate to Virgil by Octavian owing to the intercession of his friends. In 31 B. C. Antony and Cleopatra were defeated at Actium by Octavian and killed themselves. In 27 B. C. Octavian became the first Emperor and assumed the title of Augustus. In 19 B. C. Virgil died of a fever during his homeward journey with Augustus, who had met him at Athens and induced him to return to Italy. The *Aeneid* was published posthumously by order of Augustus.

The title of *Eclogues* and the names of the characters are all Greek. The ten poems are modeled to various degrees on the *Idylls* of Theocritus. *Eclogue I* consists of a conversation between Melibee [Meliboeus] and Tityrus. Melibee is a free citizen who has lost his ancestral estate, while Tityrus is an old slave who has been granted his liberty and his *peculium* (property). This poem has no Greek model, as the situation is new and distinctly Roman. It begins with the words of Melibee, who envies Tityrus' peaceful happiness as a traditional shepherd: "You, Tityrus, under the spreading, sheltering beech, / Tune woodland musings on a delicate reed" (1-2); "you, lazing in the shade, / Make woods resound with lovely Amaryllis" (4-5). Melibee contrasts his own unhappy situation: "We flee our country's borders, our sweet fields, / Abandon home" (3-4). Tityrus responds: "O Melibee, a god grants us this peace" (6). Melibee asks who this god is. Tityrus explains the unimaginably great city of Rome: "she, among cities, holds her head aloft / As cypresses among the creeping shrubs" (24-25), and goes on to say that he gained freedom there thanks to his present lover, Amaryllis, not his former one, Galatea, under whom he had "no care of property nor hope of freedom" (32). In those

days a slave could purchase his freedom with his property, when it amounted to a certain sum.² After long and painful labor ("Though many a victim went forth from my folds / And rich cheese for the thankless town was pressed, / Never did hands come home heavy with coins," 33-35), in his old age ("After my beard hung whitened for the shears," 28), he finally got freedom thanks to an entirely human "god" in Rome:

I saw that noble youth
 For whom our altars smoke twelve times a year.
 He gave his suppliant this oracle:
 "Graze cattle as before, lads, breed your bulls." (42-45)

"That noble youth" refers to Octavian. Moses Hadas writes in his *Imperial Rome*: "The 41-year reign of Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus, first and greatest of Rome's many emperors, was long remembered as a golden age. Romans called him Augustus, meaning 'the revered', and provincials hailed him as a god".³ In a similar way, Theocritus calls Ptolemy II Zeus in *Idyll VII*, reflecting the way bucolic verse, from the outset, was also a form of court poetry.

Hearing Tityrus' words, Melibee congratulates him, saying "Lucky old man!" twice and describing his promised pastoral happiness: "Here for you always, bees from the neighboring hedge, / Feeding on willow blossoms, will allure / To slumber soft with their sweet murmurings" (53-55). Tityrus comments on this assured happiness by again mentioning Octavian: "Sooner in exile, roaming frontiers unknown, / Will Gauls and Persians drink each other's streams, / Than shall *his* features slip out of our hearts" (61-63). Virgil thus implies the political and social anxiety of the day. Melibee responds by again lamenting his unhappy lot: "Ah, but we others leave for thirsty land— / Africa, Scythia, or Oxus'

chalky waves, / Or Britain, wholly cut off from the world" (64-66). This amounts to a criticism of the very political system Tityrus extols: "Think of these fields in a soldier's hands! / These crops for foreigners! See how discord leaves / Countrymen wretched: for *them* we've tilled and sown!" (70-73). By having Melibee say "we" and "our countrymen", Virgil suggests how many farmers were deprived of their fields. Melibee seems to accept his situation resignedly, at one point: "Go now, my goats; once happy flock, move on" (74). But then his patriotic indignation rises again and he loses himself in grief: "I'll sing no songs, nor shepherd you when you / Browse on the flowering shrubs and bitter willows" (77-78). Tityrus tries to console him, at least for a brief time: "Still, you could take your rest with me tonight, / Couched on green leaves: there will be apples ripe, / Soft roasted chestnuts, plenty of pressed cheese" (79-81). The poem thus begins with a description of the pastoral happiness of Tityrus and ends with a description of pastoral happiness, though temporary, for both of them. It forms a circle and readers may be relieved, but it also engages social and psychological complexities little dreamed of by Theocritus. It treats the confiscation of farms by Octavian. Tityrus may represent Virgil or may not. We can surely say that Melibee's situation is described with compassion. Far from being an entertainment based on their buffoonery, the poem would have encouraged both a Tityrus and a Melibee in those days. It thus moves toward the kind of world Keats would treat in his pastorals.

Eclogue II is mostly the monologue of a shepherd, Corydon, who loves Alexis, the darling of his master, Iollas, with no hope. The poem reminds us of Theocritus' *Idyll III*, "The Serenade" and *Idyll XI*, "The Cyclops". In *Idyll III* a goatherd vainly addresses his mistress, Amaryllis, in front of her cave. Here, however, Corydon does not go to Alexis, but visits "the thick-set beeches, with their shady tops" (3) and rambles on about his love "to hills and woods" (5). This seems to embody

what Theocritus says in *Idyll XI*: the only remedy for love is minstrelsy or song.

Yet Corydon sings alone, lamenting: "Cruel Alexis, don't you like my songs? / Don't you pity me? Will you make me die at last?" (6-7). It is high summer, when "even cattle seek out shade and coolness" (8) and reapers are "weary in the consuming heat" (11). But Corydon traces Alexis' steps "under the burning sun" (13) with the shrill sound of cicadas in the trees, criticizing himself for accepting unrequited love: "Better put up with Phyllis [Amaryllis]' moody rages / Or haughty whims—better Menalcas, / Tanned though he was" (14-16). Then he descends to sour grapes: "Don't, lovely boy, stake too much on complexion: / White privets fade, dark blueberries are picked" (17-18).

Changing his tone again, he boasts of his property: "A thousand lambs of mine roam Sicily's hills; / Summer or winter, I'm never out of milk" (21-22) like the Cyclops Polyphemus in *Idyll XI*. But these lambs are perhaps his master's. He is mostly proud of his singing, comparing himself to Amphion, the son of Antiope and Zeus, who was reared by a shepherd and was given a lyre by Hermes. Corydon also has confidence in his looks: "Nor am I ugly: once by the shore I saw / Myself in the wind-calmed sea. I would not fear to / Compete for you with Daphnis: mirrors don't lie" (25-27). This reminds us that Polyphemus looks into the calmed sea in perfect contentment in *Idyll VI*, though without similar justification for his conceit.

Corydon would induce Alexis to come and live with him in some humility: "If only paltry woods and fields could please you! / We would dwell in lowly cottage" (28-29). But his real appeal is that he could teach the boy how to pipe: "In the woods with me you'd learn to pipe like Pan—" (31). He would encourage the boy to practice the pipe: "And don't begrudge chafing your lips on reeds: / Amyntas would do anything to learn" (34-35). Corydon is proud of "a well-joined pipe of hemlock stalks

/ Of different lengths" (36-37), which Damaetas gave him, saying when he died, "Now you're its second master" (38). Its first master was, of course, Pan, as described in *Idyll I*. Corydon also mentions a pair of young wild kids he found "deep in a valley" (41) he has as gifts for Alexis, then says sarcastically: "Thestylis often begs to take them from me— / And so she shall, since all my gifts disgust you" (43-44). Thestylis is a slave girl who serves food to reapers (10). This is very like the goatherd's address to Amaryllis in *Idyll III*: "Truly I keep for thee a white nanny-goat with two kids which Mermnon's swarthy serving-girl begs of me. And I will give it her since thou art so haughty with me" (Gow, 16).⁴

At the end of the poem Corydon acknowledges his reality; he tells himself, *cognito ipsum*: "Corydon, you country boy! Alexis scorns / Your gifts—nor could they match Iollas" (56-57). "You country boy!" sounds like self-deprecation. But he persuades himself to enjoy a woodland life: "Trojan Paris / And gods too dwelt in woods. Let . . . / . . . woods be our delight" (60-62); "our pleasures draw us on" (65). He calls himself "madman" (60) and asks: "Ah Corydon, what madness seizes you?" (69), for he has neglected his work because of his love-sickness, like Bucaeus in *Idyll XI*: "Your elm tree's leafy, and its vine half-pruned" (70). His final consolation is familiar: "You'll find another lad, if this one's cold" (73), like Polyphemus, who tries to give up Galatea in *Idyll XI*: "another and a fairer Galatea wilt thou find, maybe" (Gow, 46). Thus Corydon shepherds his love with song, and fares easier than if he spent gold, though in this case it does not ring with the hollowness of Polyphemus' self-deception. Virgil's sad songs, like Keats's, really are their own consolation.

Eclogue III is an amoebaeian pastoral, in which two shepherds, Menalcas and Damoetas, contend in alternate song. This reminds us of the fourth and fifth *Idylls* of Theocritus. It begins with a question by Menalcas: "Say, whose flock's that, Damoetas? Melibee's?" (1). This

clearly echoes Battus in *Idyll IV*: "Tell me, Corydon, whose cows are these? Philondas's?" (Gow, 18). The first part of Damoetas' answer is also just the same as Corydon's: "No, Aegon's" (2; Gow, 18). But then Virgil gives Menalcas a sharper tongue than Battus: "this hireling [Damoetas] drains the ewes twice every hour, / Steals the lambs' milk and dries up the whole flock" (5-6). From here on Damoetas and Menalcas begins to speak ill of each other like Comatas and Lacon in *Idyll V*, though without the low comic indecencies. Menalcas accuses Damoetas of having tried to "catch / Damon's best goat" (17-18), but Damoetas insists that his "melodious pipe had won" (22) the goat and that Damon wouldn't surrender it. Hearing this, Menalcas makes light of Damoetas:

You beat him singing? Whenever did panpipes
Belong to you?—street-corner bard, whose skill's to
Murder on scrannel straw a wretched song. (25-27)

Damoetas rises to the bait and offers a singing contest: "Then how about trying what we two can do / Singing by turns?" (28-29) and stakes a heifer, who has "udder full / Enough for double milkings plus two calves" (29-30). Menalcas doesn't stake any of his herd, because his father and "mean step-mother at home / Count the flock twice a day and check the kids" (33-34). Instead he stakes ivy cups, which remind us of the ivy cup of the goatherd in *Idyll I*:

. . . two beechwood cups;
The carving's Alcimede's inspired work
A creeping vine, tooled with a master's ease,
Cloaks in pale ivy clusters richly spread. (36-39)

In the middle of the cups are engraved two astronomers, Conon and

Eudoxus (Cf. Fairclough, 19). Damoetas is also proud of his cups, made by Alcimede, which have handles “entwined with soft acanthus” (45) and the figure of Orpheus in the middle. Against this allusively rich backdrop, they begin their singing contest, with Palaemon as a judge. Damoetas begins by praising Jove; Menalcas appeals with Apollo. Then they sing of their darlings. Damoetas says: “My Galatea’s sexy: throws an apple” (64), which reminds us of how Polyphemus’ mistress pelts him with apples in *Idyll VI*. Menalcas sings of his sweet boy, Amyntas, whom he sent “ten golden apples” (70). Damoetas asks Iollas to “send Phyllis” (76) for it is his birthday, but Menalcas plays Iollas’ part and says: “Phyllis I love: she wept to see me go, / Said, Iollas, ‘Adieu, adieu, fair lad’” (78-79), a line which Keats picked up and made a clever parody.⁵

Virgil has Damoetas refer to his benefactor, Pollio: “Pollio loves my simple country muse” (84). Gaius Asinius Pollio (76 B. C. - A. D. 4) supported Caesar, as praetor in 45 B. C., commanding in Spain in 44 B. C., and then joined Antony. In 41 B. C. he saved Virgil’s property from confiscation in Cisalpine Gaul. Consul in 40 B. C., he celebrated a triumph over the Parthini of Illyria in 39 B. C.. From the booty he built the first public library in Rome. Then, with full honours, he retired from politics to devote himself to literature, organizing public recitations. He enjoyed the friendship of Horace and Virgil. His own work included poetry, tragedy, and oratory in Attic style, but he was above all a historian. We can thus say that Damoetas represents Virgil. Damoetas sings in behalf of Pollio and his worshipper, in an apparently reflexive gesture: “Who loves you, Pollio, may he enjoy like fame; / For him let honey flow, wild thorns bear spice” (88-89). Yet Virgil does not slight Menalcas, who also refers to Pollio’s new poems. Together they sing of rural life and end their songs with riddles. Palaemon judges the contest a draw: “It’s not for me to settle such a contest. / You each deserve a heifer” (108-09). Thus Virgil insists on the predominance of his poetry itself, by saying

that Pollio loves his pastoral, like Theocritus, who writes in *Idyll VII* his "fame report maybe, has carried even to the throne of Zeus" (Gow, 32-33).

Eclogue IV is a monologue by the poet himself, consisting of four verse paragraphs. The first one is his address to Sicilian Muses, conscious of Theocritus: "Sicilian muse, let's sing a nobler song" (1). But then he swerves from the pastoral model, leaving shepherd life and singing of or for noble men: "Low shrubs and orchards do not always please; / Let us sing woods to dignify a consul" (2-3), though as Alpers argues, this is not as far from Theocritus as some critics maintain.⁵

In the second paragraph he mentions the coming of a new golden age prophesied by the Cumaean Sibyl: "The last great age the Sibyl's song foretold / Rolls round: the centuries are born anew!" (4-5). The age begins with a new-born baby: "Now as the babe is born, with whom iron men / Shall cease, and golden men spread through the world" (8-9). In this poem the baby is the main theme. Virgil addresses Diana, who is in charge of childbirth and children: "Bless him [the babe], chaste goddess" (10). The poet says "the babe," not "a babe," so contemporaries might have known who he was, but we don't. Many different opinions about his identity have been suggested, but Alpers is most probably right when he argues that the baby is emblematic, that "the promise of a new age is imagined as *like* the birth and maturing of a noble child" (178). Still, reasons for specific ascriptions are worth following.

First the poet addresses Pollio, as in *Eclogue III*:

This age's glory and the mighty months
Begin their courses, Pollio, with you
As consul, and all traces of our crimes
Annulled release earth from continual fear. (11-14)

Thus, according to Fairclough, "most scholars incline to the view that it

was the infant son of C. [sic] Asinius Pollio, in whose consulship, 40 B. C. , the poem was written (l. 11)" (28-29). But Virgil doesn't mention the name of the father:

He [the babe] shall assume a god's life and see gods
Mingling with heroes and be seen by them,
Ruling the world calmed by his father's hand. (15-17)

The baby is compared to a god, and we remember that Octavian is called a god in *Eclogue I*. Virgil writes that the world was "calmed by his father's hand," and we know that the world was calmed by Octavian, who married Scribonia, sister of L. Scribonius Libo, in 40 B. C. in order to conciliate Sextus Pompeius, Libo's son-in-law. When the poem was written, Scribonia was pregnant.

Then in the third stanza he addresses the unborn child: "But first, child, earth's uncultivated gifts / Will spring up for you—wandering ivy, herbs, / Smiling acanthus and Egyptian beans" (18-20). We remember the description of the Golden Age in Hesiod's *Works and Days*: "they [a golden race of mortal men] had all good things; for the fruitful earth unforced bare them fruit abundantly and without stint."⁶ This general view certainly lends credence to Alpers' position.

In the last stanza Virgil has Fate declare: "O ages such as these, make haste!" (46). He calls the child "Dear scion of the gods, Jove's generation" (49) and celebrates: "How all rejoices at the coming age!" (52). He also prays that he will live long to praise the child: "O that a remnant of long life be mine, / Giving me breath to celebrate your deeds" (53-54). And he boasts that he could vanquish Orpheus and even Pan with his song. At the end he addresses the baby again:

Come now, sweet boy, with smiling greet your mother

(She carried you ten long and tedious months)
Come now, sweet boy: who smiles not on a parent
Graces no god's carouse nor goddess' bed. (60-63)

This is a nice feminist touch, though critics have not tended to focus on it. Alpers says: "Everyone takes up the question of why the pregnancy is said to be ten months" (173). European and American people say nine months, but it is not a question here, since we Japanese say "ten months and ten days," according to the lunar calendar. Rather, the question is whether intentionally asking the baby to greet his mother first may suggest that she was a very noble or famous lady. Could his mother be Octavia, sister of Augustus, who married by 54 B. C. Gaius Claudius Marcellus? This is unlikely, since in 40 B. C. Marcellus died and, to seal the Pact of Brundisium, she was immediately married to Antony (*The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 745).

There is even a Christian interpretation of the poem, which was launched, in a naïve form, by Constantine "the Great" at Nicaea in 325, when he called the first general council of the Church there to deal with the Arian controversy.⁷ Lactantius and St. Augustine adopted a carefully qualified attitude to it.⁸ For centuries Christian writers have regarded the eclogue as a prophecy of the coming of the Messiah. In *The Divine Comedy* Dante makes Virgil his guide through Hell and Purgatory, and the Roman poet is called "*il cantor de' bucolici carmi*"⁹ ("the singer of the pastoral song," Purgatory, XXII, 57). As Robin Sowerby points out, "Virgil became in the eyes of future time the great representative of the best in classical culture, the good pagan and prophet of Christ,"¹⁰ due to this eclogue and its ambiguity. And surely that ambiguity is the key point, an invitation to all, but also a *passe-partout*.

Eclogue V is a friendly singing contest between two shepherds, Menalcas and the younger Mopsus. Mopsus relates the death of

Daphnis and Menalcas his deification. The contest, without a judge, ends in peace, with an exchange of gifts, recalling Thyrsis' elegy for Daphnis in *Idyll I* with its archetypal pastoral mood. Menalcas praises Mopsus' piping and his own singing, and says: "Why not sit here, where elms and hazels mingle?" (3). Mopsus suggests a cave: "Look!—on the cave— / Grape clusters scattered by the woodland vine" (6-7). Menalcas praises Mopsus again: "In these hills only Amyntas rivals you" (8). Mopsus replies, referring to the arrogance of his rival: "What? that man thinks that he can outsing Phoebus" (9). Menalcas induces Mopsus to sing first and the younger shepherd tries "some well-set verses" (13) he "carved on the green bark of a beech" (14), conscious of his rival: "let Amyntas challenge me" (15). Menalcas praises and encourages him, using beautiful similes: "As bending willow to the silvery olive, / As lowly reed to crimson beds of roses, / So must, I think, Amyntas yield to you" (16-18).

Then Mopsus begins an elegy: "Snuffed out by cruel death, Daphnis was mourned / By nymphs" (20-21). His focus is resolutely bucolic: "No one, in those days, drove his well-fed cattle, / Daphnis, to cooling streams" (24-25); adding that "the very lions groaned at" (27) his death. He describes how Daphnis presided over Bacchic festivals: "Daphnis instructed us to harness tigers / On chariots, to lead on Bacchus' revels / And intertwine tough spears and delicate leaves" (29-31). Daphnis was, in short, like the prince of shepherds: "As vines adorn the trees and grapes the vine, . . . So you adorned us all" (32-34). On his death "Apollo, god of shepherds, left the fields" (35), which lay in waste: "Furrows where we have buried barley corns / Grow barren oat straws, darnel, idle weeds" (36-37). In the end Mopsus calls shepherds to "strew foliage on the ground and shade the springs" (40) and "build him a mound and add this epitaph: 'I woodland Daphnis, blazoned among stars, / Guarded a lovely flock, still lovelier I'" (42-44).

Menalcas praises Mopsus as an “inspired poet” (45) and declares that he is equal to Daphnis: “Piping and singing both, you are his equal, / Fortunate lad, his one and true successor” (48-49). Menalcas, in his turn, sings of Daphnis in heaven: “I’ll sing and raise your Daphnis to the stars” (51); “Radiant at heaven’s unfamiliar gate, / Daphnis marvels at clouds and stars below” (56-57). Everybody rejoices at his heavenly bliss. On the earth “wolves lay no ambush for the flocks, no nets / Wait to betray the deer: Daphnis loves peace” (60-61). This leads to his deification: “now rocky cliffs and trees / Sing out, ‘A god! he is a god’” (63-64). Two altars are set for Daphnis and two for Apollo. Menalcas promises: “Each year two foaming cups of freshest milk / I’ll set for you, and two bowls rich with oil” (67-68); “At the hearth in winter, at harvest in the shade, / I’ll pour choice Chian wine, a very nectar” (70-71). In the end Menalcas declares that Daphnis’ fame will live forever:

While boars love mountain ridges, fish the streams,
 Bees feed on thyme and grasshoppers on dew,
 Your honor, name, and praises will endure.
 Farmers will make their vows to you, as to
 Bacchus and Ceres, and you will honor vows. (76-80)

Mopsus, so much impressed with this, says: “What can I give in return for such a song?” (81). Menalcas first gives the young shepherd a “delicate reed-pipe” (85), which taught him “Corydon loved fair Alexis’ [*Eclogue II*] / And also ‘Whose flock is this? Melibee’s’ [*Eclogue III*]” (86-87). Mopsus gives a sheepphook to the elder shepherd.

Daphnis here seems to be the same pastoral hero as the one in *Idyll I*, but the name may symbolize or suggest some real person, because the last words reveal that Menalcas is Virgil himself, just as Simichidas is Theocritus in *Idyll VII*. Fairclough says: “his [Daphnis] deification,

which is original with Virgil, probably has an allegorical reference to Julius Caesar" (35), who was also fully deified after his death. At any rate Menalcas' descriptions of the ceremonies and rites for Daphnis correspond to imperial trappings, and we must see that in Virgil's hands the pastoral has changed from an entertainment to a tool for addressing the greatest affairs of state, and the greatest aesthetic issues as well.

Eclogue VI is Silenus' song. In the beginning Virgil declares that he is the singer of pastoral songs: "My playful muse first chose Sicilian verse" (1). When he tried to write an epic poem, Apollo forbade it:

When I tried a song of kings and battles, Phoebus
Plucked my ear and warned, "A shepherd, Tityrus,
Should feed fat sheep, recite a fine-spun song." (3-5)

Thus he excuses himself to Varus for his rudeness in not singing of his distinguished war services, and assures him that some other poets will praise him, saying, "Nothing / Charms Phoebus more than a page inscribed to Varus" (11-12). Publius Quinctilius Varus is said to have owed his career to the favour of Augustus.

In the second stanza Silenus, the snub-nosed and drunken tutor of Bacchus, is tied up, during his sleep by two boys, Mnasyllus and Chromis, and a beautiful nymph, Aegle, with his own wreaths, in a cave. Silenus asks them to untie him so that he can sing for them. Indeed his exquisite powers make this a compelling inducement, as though one were needed, when this was their playful purpose from the outset:

You might have seen wild beasts and satyrs play
In time to his song, and stout oaks wave their tops.
Parnassus' rocks rejoice no more in Phoebus
Nor Orpheus rouse on Rhodope such wonder. (27-30)

From the third stanza to the end Virgil gives us Silenus' song. He sings of the creation of the world, in terms of Greek myth: "Pyrrha's stones and Saturn's reign, / The birds of Caucasus, Prometheus' theft" (41-42). He also sings of Hylas, who was pulled into the water by the spring nymphs of Chios and was left there by the Argonauts. He pities Pasiphae's extraordinary love toward "a snow-white bullock" (46) and even assumes her role, which certainly heightens the immediacy, though this may be subtly undercut if we fully imagine old Silenus imitating the young girl's voice:

"Close off, you nymphs,
 Dictaeon nymphs, close off the forest glades.
 Possibly chance will bring before my eyes
 His wandering hoofprints; possibly green grass
 Ensnares him, or in following the herd
 He's drawn to Cretan stalls by other cows." (55-60)

Atalanta and Phaethon are also mentioned. But here Virgil has Silenus speak more highly of his friend, Gallus:

Who roamed its streams, to the Aonian mount;
 How Phoebus' choir arose to greet the man;
 How Linus, sacred for his shepherd's song,
 His hair adorned with flowers and bitter parsley,
 Said: "Now take up this pipe, the Muses' gift,
 Once given to old Hesiod, he who could
 Draw down stout mountain ashes with his song.
 Let it tell of the Grynean wood's beginnings,
 So that no grove makes Phoebus glory more." (65-73)

Considered the successor of Hesiod, Gallus is often coupled or contrasted with Homer as the other main representative of early epic. Gallus (Gaius Cornelius Gallus) was a poet, general, and friend of Augustus and Virgil. He was instrumental in the settlement of veterans in Cisalpine Gaul (41B. C.) and is said to have saved Virgil's farm for him. So the poem here swerves, apparently out of a sense of personal indebtedness. Silenus then continues to sing the stories of Scylla and Ulysses' ships, of Tereus and Philomel, and others until Vesper appears.

Besides such mythological and personal material, Virgil presents the atomist theories of the Greek philosophers Democritus and Epicurus, and their Roman follower Lucretius: "He [Silenus] sang how driven through the mighty void / Embryo atoms of earth, sea, air, and fire / First joined" (31-33). According to the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, "Donatus in his 'Life' of Virgil states that Virgil assumed the *toga virilis* [male clothes] on 15 Oct. 55 [B. C.], and adds that 'it happened that on that very day Lucretius the poet died'" (623). From this we can understand that in Roman times a boy would become a man when he was fifteen years old and that Virgil was surely influenced by the writing of Lucretius. Thus even the philosophical takes a turn toward the personal in this eclogue, a note not found in Theocritus' *Idylls*.

Eclogue VII is a singing match between a shepherd, Thyrsis, and a goatherd, Corin [Corydon], both young Arcadians. Daphnis serves as judge. Melibee [Meliboeus] is asked to join them and remember their verses. The poem begins with his explanation of the situation. It is spring, and he leaves his work as a herdman for a while: "My serious business gave way to their playing" (17). Corin begins by asking the Muses to give him a good song: "Beloved nymphs of Helicon, grant me / A song such as my Codrus made—his verses / Rank next to Phoebus" (21-23). Thyrsis, by contrast, sings arrogantly and coarsely: "Arcadians,

deck with bays the budding poet, / Shepherds, let Codrus burst his guts with envy" (25-26).

Corin addresses Diana, offering a boar's head and a stag's horns, and saying that he will build her marble statue "scarlet-booted" (32). Thyrsis addresses Priapus, the deity of gardens and vineyards, a god usually represented in figures of stone or wood, offering a bowl of milk and cakes, saying, "protecting our poor garden" (34) and "if / New offspring fill the flock, you shall be gold" (35-36).

Corin sings of his love, Galatea, who is "sweet as Hyblaean thyme" (37) and asks her to come to him. Hybla is a mountain in Sicily famous for its flowers, bees and honey; Keats referred to it in "To – [Had I a man's fair form']." Thyrsis, on the other hand, tells his unnamed girl not to despise him and vents his anger on his young bulls: "Go home well fed, if you've any shame, you bullocks" (44).

Corin sings of the coming of summer, while Thyrsis sings of winter. Corin says that Alexis' absence from the green hills leads to a drying up of streams. Thyrsis says that "every grove turns green" (59) when Phyllis comes. Corin also praises Phyllis: "Phyllis loves hazels and while Phyllis loves them, / Myrtle nor Phoebus' laurels shall match hazels" (63-64). Thyrsis says that the ash is loveliest in the woods and the pine in gardens, and asks Lycidas to come back to him: "Fair Lycidas, if you return to me, / Wood ash will yield to you and garden pines" (67-68). That is all that Melibee recalls, and he easily decides Corin is the winner: "Thyrsis strove in vain" (69), and "From then on, It's been Corin, Corin with us" (70).

The poem more closely resembles its Greek model, but we can find a significant difference: in Theocritus' *Idylls* Arcadia is the place where Pan exists and the poet calls the god to come to Sicily, where his shepherds live, to console them (*Idyll I*). But Virgil's shepherds themselves live in Arcadia, which is described as a place where the River Mincius, near Mantua, flows (13), another personal note, however subtle.

Eclogue VIII is a monologue, though it recounts the songs of Alphesibee and Damon. It is dedicated to Pollio,¹¹ who Virgil praises in the prologue as a poet: "Your tragic songs, sole heirs of Sophocles" (10). This gracefully serves to maintain a personal note and to establish a dark tone. Virgil then introduces the song of Damon, who mourns that his betrothed, Nysa, has left him for Mopus. So mournful is he that he seems unable to get beyond his opening refrain, "Begin these verses, shepherd's pipe, with me," which is repeated nine times. This is clearly modeled on Theocritus, who has Thyrsis pray eight times in *Idyll I*: "Begin, dear Muses, begin the pastoral song." Damon believes that a range of mountains in Arcadia listens to his laments: "Maenalus listens to the shepherds' love / And Pan's" (23-24). And then he blames cruel Eros, referring to Medea:

Taught by cruel Love, a mother stained her hands
 With her offsprings' blood; mother, you too were cruel.
 Which was more savage, the mother or that boy?
 The boy was savage; mother, you too were cruel. (47-50)

In his distraction, he sees the whole world as topsy-turvy, "Now let wolves flee from sheep and rough oaks bear / Apples of gold, narcissus bloom on alders," (52-53) and he concludes by threatening suicide: "From windy cliff top headlong into waves / I'll plunge" (59-60).

Alphesibee replies, playing a woman waiting for her lover, Daphnis. She tries to fetch him from town with her magic, repeating her invocation nine times: "Fetch him, my charms, fetch Daphnis home from town," as Simaetha had repeated ten times in *Idyll II*: "My magic wheel, draw to my house the man I love" (Gow, 9-11). With the help of Amaryllis, she makes an image of Daphnis:

I bind three triple threads of treble hue
 About thee, and escort this image thrice
 Around the shrine: odd numbers please the god.

 Knot these three colors, Amaryllis, trebly;
 Knot them and say, "Love's fetters do I knot."

 This clay will harden and this wax will melt
 In the selfsame fire—so may he in our love. (73-81)

These voodoo procedures produce a good omen: "Look there! The ash itself, while I delay, / Flickers and flames on the altar. A sign at last!" (105-06). The poem ends with Daphnis on his way back: "Leave off, my charms, Daphnis is coming from town" (109).

The unifying element in these contrasting tales of fierce passion is the element of black magic. By invoking Medea, Damon alludes to her dependence on Hecate for sorcery over Jason, and her relation, as niece of Circe, to another enchantress. Alpheesibee's rites may also be connected to Hecate, who was called Trivia (three ways), since they dwell on the number three. At any rate, Virgil adds considerable tragic depth to the comparative comedy of *Idyll II*, a significant refocusing of the pastoral aesthetic.

Eclogue IX is a dialogue between Lycidas, a youth, and Moeris, an old plowman whose land was confiscated for a war veteran. Their main theme is pastoral song. Lycidas calls Moeris, who is going to town to sell kids. Moeris answers: "An outsider would lay claim to our little farm / And say, 'This is mine, old plowmen. Now clear out!'" (3-4). Lycidas mentions that Menalcas preserved his land from confiscation with his songs. But Moeris says that the song is not mightier than the sword: "all our songs, / Lycidas, no more prevail with weapons of war / Than the

oracle's doves, they say, when eagles come" (11-13). Lycidas gets angry on behalf of Menalcas at this and tries to sing Menalcas' song, a prelude to serenading Amaryllis:

Tityrus, pasture my goats till I return—
I sha'n't be gone long—and water them when fed,
And don't bump into that goat, for he butts. (23-25)

Encouraged by Lycidas, Moeris then takes up Menalcas' "unfinished song to Varus" (26):

Varus, your name, should Mantua survive,
Mantua all too near to sad Cremona,
Melodious swans will raise up to the stars. (27-29)

Virgil also sang of Varus, of course, in *Eclogue VI*: "The whole grove, Varus, will sing of you. Nothing / Charms Phoebus more than a page inscribed to Varus" (11-12). Hearing his song now, Lycidas encourages Moeris again: "Sing, if you've something" (32) and reveals that he himself is also a poet: "the Muses made / Me too a poet; I too have songs, and hear / The shepherds call me bard" (32-34). Recovered from dejection, Moeris sings a "well-known song" (35), collecting his memories:

Come, Galatea; what sport is there at sea?
Here earth pours forth spring flowers, many hues
Brighten the streams, and silver poplars arch
The cave where vines compliant weave their shade.
Come—leave the waves to rage and lash the shore. (39-43)

This derives from *Idyll XI*, "The Cyclops":

Nay, come to me, and thou shalt fare well enough. Leave the green sea to pulse upon the shore; thou wilt pass the night more pleasantly in the cave with me. There are bays and slender cypresses; there is dark ivy, and the sweet-fruited vine, and water cold, which wooded Etna puts forth for me from her white snowfields, a draught divine. Who would rather choose the sea and its waves than these? (Gow, 45)

Lycidas then recalls the tune Moeris sang "one cloudless night" (44), under the starlit sky, and sings that song himself:

Daphnis, why study ancient constellations?
Behold, the star of Caesar has burst forth,
To make the fields rejoice in crops, and grapes
Ripen and color on the sunny hills.
Graft pear trees, Daphnis; your sons will pluck the fruits. (46-50)

Fairclough notes of "the star of Caesar": "This is Horace's *Iulium sidus* (*Carm.* I. XII. 47), the comet which appeared just after the death of Julius Caesar, and was commonly supposed to be Caesar's deified soul" (69). In *Eclogue V* Virgil depicts Caesar's deification under the name of Daphnis, the pastoral hero. Hearing the song now, Moeris deplores his old age: "Now all those songs forgotten! And my voice / Itself is gone" (53-54), and he stops singing on the pretext of deferring to Menalcas: "Menalcas will repeat them [the songs] when you like" (55). Yet Lycidas still wants to hear Moeris sing: "Don't put off, with these pretexts, what I long for" (56). At this point they have come half-way to town, and Lycidas, looking at the harvest, asks Moeris to sing: "Here farmers lop / Thick-growing leaves; here, Moeris, let us sing" (60-61). Lycidas even says, to encourage

Moeris: "Sing as we walk—it makes the trip less painful; / To keep us singing, I shall take your load" (64-65). But Moeris refuses: "No more, my boy" (66) and tries to face severe reality: "let's do what must be done" (66). Yet clearly he still has some hope: "We shall sing all the better when *he* comes" (67), referring to Menalcas again as the poem ends.

It is easy to see Menalcas as figure for Virgil himself. But more important is to see how this whole eclogue foregrounds its own intertextuality with its constant sense of allusive indebtedness. Here again, Virgil brings a heightened literary aesthetic to the pastoral.

In *Eclogue X* Virgil asks for the help of Arethusa, a nymph metamorphosed into a spring near Syracuse, Sicily, to save her from the pursuing river god, Alpheus: "Grant this, my final effort, Arethusa" (1). It is "a song for Gallus" (2), whose sweet girl has gone to the Alps with another man, leaving him alone and almost dying. He prays that Lycoris, Gallus' love, may read his poem. This reminds us of *Idyll I*, Thyrsis' song for Daphnis. On behalf of Gallus Virgil sings: "let us recite his troubled love" (6). He sings to the woods in the belief that they can hear and answer: "Not to the deaf we sing: woods answer all" (8). This pathetic fallacy reminds me of a *waka*, an old Japanese song by Michizane Sugawara, a poet and politician who was sentenced to exile in Kyushu from Kyoto, the capital, and sang to a plum tree in his garden before departing:

O, my plum-blossoms,
 Make your fragrance smell around,
 When the east wind blows.
 Never forget sweet spring-time,
 Even though your master isn't here.

Two years later, he died in dejection in Dazaifu, Kyushu. After his death,

Sugawara was deified as a god of learning and shrines in his honor were built in many places in Japan—twelve thousand in all, where plum trees were planted and still blossom every spring, even eleven-hundred years after his death.

In the second stanza Virgil blames the Naiads, who were not beside Gallus when he “languished in ignoble love” (10). He continues with the motif of the pathetic fallacy, insisting, “Even the low shrubs and the laurels mourned” (13) and “Maenalus mourned and the cold Lycaean cliffs” (15). He calls Gallus an “inspired poet” (17), though clearly not a pastoral one, since he asks him not to be displeased with the sheep who stand around. Then come Menalcas, Apollo, Silvanus, and Pan, all to worry about him. Gallus calls them “Arcadians” (32) and deplores: “Had only I been one of you—the one / To tend your flocks or cultivate your vines!” (35-36). In reality he is a warrior: “Mars’ raging love keeps me in arms, / Thrust among weapons and encircling foes” (44-45). He burns with love for Lycoris:

. . . far from home
 You see the snowy Alps and icy Rhine,
 Alone, without me. Oh, may biting frosts
 Not harm you, nor ice wound your tender feet. (46-49)

He tries to divert himself with pastoral songs: “I’ll go, and all my witty compositions / Pipe as a shepherd to Sicilian measures” (50-51), but in vain. He is not healed and becomes angry: “Now once again wood nymphs and songs themselves / Cannot please us: once more, you woods, begone!” (62-63). He is conquered by Love: “Love conquers all: let us too yield to Love” (69).

With this message Virgil ends his poem: “Your poet, goddesses, has sung enough, / While he sat and wove a basket of light rushes” (70-71).

This recalls the figure of the boy who is wrought on the ivy cup of the goatherd in *Idyll I*: “the boy is plaiting a pretty cricket-cage of bonded rush and asphodel, and has more joy in his plaiting than care for wallet or for vines” (Gow, 5). Yet he cannot restrain himself from another declamation:

Muses, make this something that counts for Gallus,
Gallus, for whom my love grows hour by hour
As green trees shoot up when the spring is new. (72-74)

Then, as the sun sets, he acknowledges that it is really time to stop: “Arise: the shade weighs heavily on singers, / The shade of junipers, and shade harms crops / Go home well fed, my goats: go: Vesper comes” (75-77). Thus he says farewell to the day and to pastoral songs.

Certainly Virgil brought a sense of seriousness to the pastoral, a concern with social and political situations of his day. Yet he recognized that bucolic poetry was not the place to “compose sad wars” (VI, 7), and that he needed to “tune rustic musing on a delicate reed” (VI, 8). To deal with the heavier issues that weighed on his mind, he had to leave the bucolic behind, to move on to the epic, to the *Aeneid*. Yet he clearly moved the pastoral toward the aesthetic embraced by Wordsworth in the *Lyrical Ballads*, where “the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure” and “it [the book] contains a natural delineation of human passions, human characters, and human incidents.”¹²

Notes

- ¹ Paul Alpers, *The Singer of the Eclogues—A Study of Virgilian Pastoral* with a new translation of the *Eclogues*. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1979. I also refer to *Virgil* with an English translation by H. Rushton Fairclough. 2 vols. Vol. I: *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid I-IV*. Revised Edition (London: William Henemann, 1965), 1-77. The Loeb Classical Library.
- ² W. O. Blake (compiled), *The History of Slavery and the Slave Trade* (Columbus, Ohio: 1859), 56.
- ³ Moses Hadas and the editors of Time-Life Books, *Imperial Rome* (Nederland: Time-Life International, 1966), 69.
- ⁴ A. S. F. Gow, ed. and trans. *The Greek Bucolic Poets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953). All the quotations of Theocritus' *Idylls* are from this edition. The figures after Gow in parentheses show the page number.
- ⁵ See Alpers, 158-64.
- ⁶ *Hesiod, The Homeric Hymns and Homerica* with an English Translation by Hugh G. Evelyn-White (London: Harvard University Press, 1974. Loeb Classical Library), 11.
- ⁷ We can find his reference to *Eclogue IV* in "The Oration of the Emperor Constantine which he addressed 'to the Assembly of the Saints,'" *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*.
- ⁸ *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 1125.
- ⁹ *The Purgatory of Dante Alighieri* edited by Hermann Oelsner (London: J. M. Dent, 1901), 274.
- ¹⁰ Robin Sowerby, *The Classical Legacy in Renaissance Poetry* (London: Longman, 1994), 240.
- ¹¹ Fairclough, 55.
- ¹² E. De Selincourt, ed. *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*. Second ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), II, 383.

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