

Response to a *Georgics* Reader Bemused by the *Bucolics*

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On reflection, I see that this panel set readers from the middle to comment on the beginning and the end: although experienced in the *Georgics*, they were supposed to deal with the *Aeneid* and *Bucolics*, after which some veteran would respond. To me as the responding bucolic veteran, it looked a little like the first eclogue, where the first speaker was displaced from a prosperous georgic life as citizen farmer and reduced to pastoral pickings, unruly goats and uncertain prospects. His advent provoked a response from the second speaker, a bucolic veteran, who had been absorbed in propagating his own echoes until the newcomer called him to account and a whole new dialogue got going. Now if something similar happens here, if the advent of a georgic reader interrupts bucolic business-as-usual and makes us explain ourselves, that may be just what the canny impresario of this panel had in mind.¹

In our case, Christine Perkell arrived from the *Georgics* not all at once but in several conversations and drafts. The exchange was welcome and will surely not exhaust itself in our present texts. It has provoked the present bucolic veteran to react, reflect, rediscover and reach beyond lines previously drawn. What follows shows some of the steps.

My general reaction, as I told her at once, was that the welter of bucolic opinions, among them mine, seemed initially to overwhelm her paper. But towards the end she broke through to a strong viewpoint of her own that promised to put our bucolic wrangling in perspective. In her closing remarks on the first eclogue, she came to speak with real authority about “the poet of the *whole* poem.” She argued that “Virgil’s own vision subsumes and transcends the visions of both Meliboeus and Tityrus” and that irony “allows the poet, the zero-voice, to be more inclusive than his speakers, larger than the sum of their parts.” Here was a radical critique of the common talk about bucolic persons as if they were autonomous people met somehow anywhere but in the text;² she also seized on its natural implications with

¹ . I wish to thank Ward Briggs for organizing a panel that has stimulated so many conversations and hints for further study. His interests in Virgil and in the history of scholarship combined to open new approaches to old themes.

² . In a previous venture into bucolic territory, Perkell defended the dramatic character of the first eclogue against attempts to flatten it out; at the end she adumbrated the breakthrough she makes here, “Virgil is grander in vision than

a further project: to take eclogue one as programmatic and from it extend the concept of unifying mind to include the rest of the eclogues.

Together these two projects sounded like a breakthrough to a promising direction for new reading. If only they had been Perkell's own starting point here! They might have led, I could not help thinking, to a less discouraging view of scholarly history: instead of mere failed consensus, lacking significant developments or progress, one might find a pattern of development through paradigm shifts like those described in the scientific community by Thomas Kuhn.³ A developmental pattern might comprise a shift from older paradigms of the eclogues as separate poems with sporadic biographical allegories to newer paradigms of the eclogues as parts of an integrated sequence with issues of ethics or poetics emerging from the whole. An even more particular analysis might distinguish among diverse models of sequence,⁴ seeking to discern the models most compatible with the concept of an overarching mind, inclusive and disabused.

One step on Perkell's way to her final breakthrough was a critique of single-minded and reductive positivism in scholarship.⁵ But her counter-proposal of a reading "more open, inclusive and inconclusive, ironic and dissolved" may strike scholars as a surrender not a program, unless it can be bolstered by more systematic analysis of the conflicting premises and expectations of diverse interpretive schools.⁶ Help for such an analysis might come from the work of M. M. Bakhtin. He distinguishes between monologic and dialogic discourse in a way that

either Meliboeus or Tityrus": Christine Perkell, "On *Eclogue* 1.79-83," *TAPA* 120 (1990) 180-81. On the dramatic coherence of this eclogue see also John Van Sickle, "How Do We Read Ancient Texts? Codes & Critics in Virgil, *Eclogue* One," *Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici* 13 (1984) 111-115.

³ . *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago 1970²).

⁴ . See, for example, the diverse models identified by John Van Sickle, *The Design of Virgil's Bucolics* (Roma 1978) 27-37 and codified in "Bucoliche. 11. La struttura," *Enciclopedia Virgiliana* I (Roma 1984) 549-552, with its supplement, "Strutture interne di singole egloghe nel libro bucolico di Virgilio," *Maia* 34 (1983) 205-212.

⁵ . Perkell adopts the critique of such scholarship by Van Sickle, "Codes & Critics in *Eclogue* One," *MD* 13 (1984) 110-127, directed against Ian DuQuesnay, "Vergil's First *Eclogue*," *Papers of the Liverpool Latin Seminar* 3 (=ARCA 7, Liverpool 1981) 19-182. My paper documents a collision between opposed scholarly paradigms--incommensurate ways of thinking about poetry and meaning.

⁶ . For an attempt in this direction, see the article cited in note 5.

seems to parallel the distinction drawn by Perkell between single-minded and more open reading. Arguably, too, Virgil's contrastive voices, interweaving of place and time, elusive narratives, all invite analysis along lines suggested by Bakhtin.⁷

Moving up the critical hierarchy from drama and theme to allusion, Perkell seemed to border, I felt, on something like defeatism. She sees allusion as the privileged topic for interpreters in our day, yet feels that it somehow resists critical reason. Again a remedy was to hand in her own breakthrough; for if, as she suggests, the first eclogue defines the poet's project, then surely this is the place to begin to explore his use of allusion. Nor need she worry about choosing between similarity and difference in allusive art, since allusion always comprises both as complementary and inseparable constituents.⁸

Exploring allusion in the opening eclogue, she would encounter Philip Damon's classic insight that the first term of Virgil's pastoral poetics, *siluestris musa*, 'woodland muse', echoed Lucretius, who imagined the invention of pastoral myth to explain echoes in wooded hills.⁹ Virgil thus problematizes pastoral from the start. Exploration would also rediscover the arguments of Hanslik and Fedeli leading to my own that the first eclogue contains a story of poetic authorization and that Virgil formed it by taking and changing similar stories from Theocritus's seventh Idyll and Hesiod's *Theogony*.¹⁰

⁷ . See M. M. Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin 1981) 84-258. Perkell's own account of the first eclogue, cited in note 2 above, approaches a dialogic sense. For use of Bakhtin's analysis of narrative segments (city to country) and chronotopes to interpret the *Bucolics*, see John Van Sickle, *Poesia e potere: il mito Virgilio* (Roma 1986), 40, 42, 48.

⁸ . This dynamic and irreducible duality may be compared to the roles of analogy and anomaly in language, theorized as holism and heteroglossy by Bakhtin. See the remarks by Michael Holquist quoting Bakhtin in *Dialogic Imagination*, pp. xviii-xix.

⁹ . Philip Damon, "Modes of Analogy in Ancient and Medieval Verse," *University of California Publications in Classical Philology* 15 (1961) 281-86, with discussion by Van Sickle *Design* (Roma 1978) 122-124.

¹⁰ . R. Hanslik, "Nachlese zu Vergil's Eclogen 1 und 9," *Weiner Studien* 68 (1968) 5-19; P. Fedeli, "Sulla prima bucolica di Virgilio," *Giornale italiano di filologia* 3 (1972) 273-300; J. Van Sickle, *Design* (Roma 1978) 119-122, arguing that all three poets derived their authority from divinities, but that where the Greeks derived authority from gods of poetry, Virgil says that Tityrus got orders from a god at Rome: a strong difference, supporting the inference that Virgil, by inserting new

Once on the trail of allusions to Theocritus, exploration might backtrack to the inexhaustible question of how opening dialogic structures differ from the first idyll to the first eclogue.¹¹ Above all, Perkell's breakthrough, conceiving both Tityrus and Meliboeus as instruments of Virgil's mind, would require her to incorporate here a passage treated elsewhere in her drafts: the praise of idyllic pastoral by Meliboeus, which recasts the closing praise of country in the seventh idyll. What does it mean for Virgil to transfer the praise of idyllic pastoral from the personage of an urban 'singer' whose movement culminates in the idyllic place (so Theocritus) to a personage conceived by Virgil, too, as a 'singer', but a 'singer' momentarily touching pastoral at the start of a vaster movement. Taking both Meliboeus and Tityrus as functions of the overarching poetic mind, if together, that is, they express Virgil's project in dialogic form, she would get something like the following in poetics: Tityrus must represent, say, the old bucolic genre discovering a new Roman cause; and so Meliboeus must represent a larger poetic range with this pastoral break between its past and future--Meliboeus, imagined as a 'singer' dislocated, reduced, yet moving out and on?¹²

Having learned to read pastoral dramatics with an eye to overarching mind, readers will be ready for Perkell's project of interpreting the other eclogues in the same wise.¹³ A first step might be to trace the developing images of place and time,¹⁴ or of poetics, from new god but loss of old 'song' (*Buc.* I) into an energetic

Roman authority into the old myths, meant to announce a Roman program for his work. Ignoring this dynamic transformation of Theocritus, and neglecting Lucretius, too, makes for a preternaturally flat view of Virgil as merely reducing to generic convention what Theocritus initiated, which is what we get from Paul Alpers, "Theocritean Bucolic and Virgilian Pastoral," *Arethusa* 23.1 (1990) 19-47.

¹¹ . See Van Sickle, *Poesia e potere* (Roma 1984) 45-57: "L'impostazione (EG 1.1-10)."

¹² . On the far-reaching poetic implications of Meliboeus, see Van Sickle, *Design* (Roma 1978) 253, s.v., but especially now *Poesia e potere* (Roma 1986), for eclogue one, "Melibeo: i motivi dell'andare lontano" 64-66, and for eclogue seven, "Melibeo: i motivi del ritorno 'da vicino'" 141-143.

¹³ . This will require, as another reader as recently said, a disciplined reading that interprets "the characters not as persons so much as thematic ideas accumulating significance with each reappearance.": M. Owen Lee, *Death and Rebirth in Virgil's Arcadia* (Albany 1989) 126.

¹⁴ . See, for example, the developing imagery of *fagus*, 'beech' documented by Van Sickle, *Design* (Roma 1978) 248, s.v. 'beech'.

recapture of ‘song’ in successive developments: Corydon and his pipe inherited from an old master (*Buc.* II), the sustaining powers of Jove and Apollo (*Buc.* III), the ambition to ‘tell of deeds’, i. e. write a new Roman epic, challenging Apollo and other masters (*Buc.* IV), the master songs for a dead master (*Buc.* V), and finally the unifying gesture that expressly relates a personage, ‘Menalcas’, to preceding pieces, imposing readership of internal allusion within the book.

Tracing poetics of ‘song’ through five eclogues and dealing with internal allusion should prepare one to handle the further poetics of ‘song’ that open eclogue six: after growth in ‘song’ to challenge even Apollo comes ‘song’ restricted by Apollo. The scene of poetic restriction recalls the original scene of authorization in eclogue one, with both recipients of divine injunction called Tityrus.¹⁵ Alluding back to the beginning of his book, Virgil makes a revised program for its second half. The next, corroborating, step will come in the seventh eclogue, with Meliboeus returning after Tityrus in the sixth.

The structure marked within the book by internal allusion helps also to control the welter of external allusions, for example to Hesiod, Apollonius, Callimachus, Lucretius, and Catullus, all of them used in the fourth eclogue then reused with a different slant in the sixth.¹⁶ Structure and allusion intertwine, too, in the close of eclogue six, which is linked by internal cross reference to the closes of the first and tenth eclogues--beginning, middle and end of the book.¹⁷ Meanwhile, also at the close of eclogue six, external allusion hints at Arcadia; Arcadian motifs then develop through the second halfbook and culminate in the final eclogue, where Virgil imagines returning the bucolic genre to its original place and time (chronotope of foundation myth).¹⁸

¹⁵ . With a history of the formation of a new disciplinary matrix, and its premature ossification, requiring critique: “Virgil’s 6th eclogue and the poetics of middle style,” *Liverpool Classical Monthly* 2 (1977) 107-08.

¹⁶ . See Van Sickle, *Design* (Roma 1978) 131-38, 146-58; *Poesia e potere* (Roma 1984) 91-105, “Il compimento e il progetto dei ritorni (EG III): 1. Il canto recupera il registro alto,... 3. La riconquista della rete intertestuale”; 119-135, “Il rimpasto (EG VI): 1. Titiro: il ‘rialzo’ poetico e i motivi del ‘ribasso’; 2. Il potere del canto si risveglia; 3. La chiusa mediante chiasmo; 4. Lo sfondo poetico: le fonti.”

¹⁷ . John Van Sickle, “Dawn and dusk as motifs of opening or closure in heroic and bucolic epos (Homer, Apollonius, Theocritus, Virgil),” *Atti del Convegno mondiale scientifico di studi su Virgilio* I (Milano 1984) 136-38.

¹⁸ . Eurotas mentioned by Callimachus, fr. 699 Pf., as rising on Arcadian Maenalus, mingling with Alpheus, a river avoided by Arethusa, who appears in Arcadia in *Buc.* X: adduced by Van Sickle, *Design* (Roma 1978) 158; Apollo’s singing

In sum, the breakthrough to a unifying conception and the call to a newly concerted reading challenge business-as-usual in the eclogue industry. The scandal of ‘difficult unity’, which one of our panelists inscribed on the agenda for further study of the *Georgics*,¹⁹ also waits on the agenda for the *Bucolics*. But do minds move? Is there a will? Or do old paradigms die only as their adherents do? Has the newly arrived reader tried in vain to tell us to reread?

Epilogue: Between Paradigms²⁰

The above remark about paradigms dying only with their adherents had been tossed in for closural emphasis. It acquired unwanted immediacy with news of the death in early December of Otto Skutsch. Thirty years of deepening affection and scholarly exchange, most recently about the elogia of the Scipios,²¹ had put in perspective an earlier standoff on the *Bucolics*. Valuing his clarifications of numerological symmetry, I would urge refinements and interpretations, only to meet a stone wall. Having made an important shift, he was closed to any other: “un autorevole difesa delle scoperte materiali, con un rifiuto alquanto paradossale della loro significanza” was how I finally summed it up and put it behind.²² In retrospect our differences look like a classic clash of disciplinary matrices, of older and newer

by Eurotas suggests his loss of Daphne, whose origin is Arcadian: so Peter Knox, “In Pursuit of Daphne,” *TAPA* 120 (1990) 187-193, underlining the parallel with eclogue ten of the motif of unhappy love. Knox prefers, however, a reading of “omnia quae” that fails to reckon with the retrospective and summative, closural force of lines 82-86, for which see note 17.

¹⁹ . Unity in the *Georgics* becomes less difficult when sought in a dialectically ascending hierarchy: see the sketch of unity in terms of theme and poetic program in Van Sickle, *Design* (Roma 1978) 224-230.

²⁰ . The panel generated a sense of excitement that could not enjoy its natural consequence in discussion, since the room had been assigned to another session. Some of us continued to talk at lunch and dinner. These remarks are meant to carry the talk another step.

²¹ . For which see John Van Sickle, “The First Hellenistic Epigrams at Rome,” *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies Supplement* 51 (1988) 143, note 1.

²² . Van Sickle, *EVI* (Roma 1984) 548a.

paradigms,²³ with incommensurability and incommunicability as symptoms. Such a clash might lend itself to analysis by Kuhn's criteria of measurable progress and be pigeonholed by some historian of scholarship.²⁴ The same historian would find other examples of paradigm clash in the entry on "Bucoliche" of the *Enciclopedia Virgiliana*, where different sections represent radically different assumptions and expectations, which the general editor admitted, even invited, with rare openness to viewpoints not his own.

Between the evidence of immobility but also openness, a historian must wonder how new paradigms come into being and where. That is why Perkell's paper struck me, with its closing breakthrough and project for future research. A start on the unitary reading envisioned by Perkell actually occurs in another recent paper, which I wish to discuss in closing, along with the old paradigm to which it responds.

Our closing case comes from a panel about pastoral as genre, where the old paradigm appears in papers by William Batstone and Paul Alpers.²⁵ Both treat the characters of the first eclogue as personalities, although what they say would gain perspective and point from Perkell's breakthrough to read bucolic persons as functions of an ironic, unifying mind. True to the old disciplinary matrix, Alpers imposes a reductive conception of genre: Virgil conventionalizing Theocritus. To maintain this theory, Alpers ignores the complicating and dynamic allusions cited above (Lucretian, Theocritean and Hesiodic myths appropriated and overturned). The old matrix also keeps Alpers from breaking through to read the interplay of persons as Virgil's thematization of two strains in his own art.²⁶ Nor do Alpers and Batstone show any bent towards Perkell's further project of reading from the first

²³ . Kuhn, *Structure* (Chicago 1970²) 182, 198-204.

²⁴ . Kuhn, *Structure*, 205-06.

²⁵ . William Batstone, "How Virgil's Pastoral Makes a Difference," in *Pastoral Versions*," ed. William Batstone, *Arethusa* 23.1 (1990) 5-19; Paul Alpers, "Theocritean Bucolic and Virgilian Pastoral," *ibid.* 19-47, cited also in note 10 above.

²⁶ . See the apt account by David Halperin, "Commentary on Ross," *Arethusa* 23.1 (1990) 78, "It is characteristic of Virgil's artistic method to thematize the conventions of whatever genre he is working in until he has forced these conventions to yield a figure for the subject he has chosen to treat." But when Halperin continues, "Virgil's true subject... is the dynamic of the poetic imagination: the pastoral setting becomes, in Virgil's hands, a figure for the secluded inwardness, perilous detachment, and creative liberty of the poet's mind," he provokes a dialogic memory of Jean Bayet, who spoke of the initial shattering from which flowed the art: meditation on 'flight' as the recurrent motor of the Virgilian mind. For remarks on the meaning of poetics, see also Van Sickle, *Design* (Roma 1978) 87-97.

eclogue to the second and so on into the structure of a book. The very concept of the poetry book is singularly lacking from their deliberations, which rest enclosed in eclogue one, with only desultory glances towards the rest.

Such confirmed closure makes the responding breakthrough seem even more striking. Virgil's originality, asserts Stephen V. Tracy,²⁷ lay not in the self-representation and crystallization stressed by Alpers but in the fact that Virgil created a "poetry book which took as its principal theme the viability of poetry." Tracy goes on to look at the important role of 'singing' through the book from first to last. His substantial convergence with Perkell's second project suggests that here we may be seeing some actual steps toward a new disciplinary matrix. Clearly it could gain interpretive grasp by assimilating Halperin's concept of figural thematization of poetics.²⁸ And clearly the progress is not linear: a step here, two there, three back; trial and error; far-reaching theory and particular testing in the text; openness and above all exchange; panels proving their worth.

Within the new frame of reference, new kinds of questions can be asked, opening a new conversation in which the poet's language counts. Accepting the general theory that "the viability of poetry" is at stake, what about the dialogical poetics of the first eclogue? What does Virgil mean to specify with two personages, two stories, two revisions of Theocritus? Tityrus speaks of divine permission to 'play what he wished on rustic reed' while Meliboeus would 'sing no songs': can 'play' and 'sing' simply be equated or does each inevitably carry its own specificity into symbolizing poetics? In a specific step beyond an older position, Tracy finds programmatic value in "tenui" (1.2), where Clausen denied sense.²⁹ A further step might note how this "tenui" with "meditaris" and "auena" captures and entwines the Lucretian phrase *siluestris musa*: what implication for poetics here or in the fact that "tenui" occurs but once again in all the eclogues and in a contrasting allusion to Lucretius? What, too, of the fact that "tenui" displaces from the emphatic first position what had been the leading adjective in Idyll one: "*hadu*," applied by Meliboeus to his lost lands, "*dulcia arua*" (1.3)?

Continuing in the frame of Tracy's general theory, the loss of 'songs' in the first eclogue might almost be said to necessitate that 'songs' return and develop in eclogues two and three. New questions, then, will regard the supplementary myths of poetics (pipe inherited, Pan, Jove / Apollo).

Once the general theory absorbs this growth in 'song' poetics, the fourth eclogue should seem even less problematic. Internal allusion will further clarify its

²⁷ . "Commentary on Alpers," *Arethusa* 23.1 (1990) 49-57.

²⁸ . Quoted in note 26 above.

²⁹ . Wendell V. Clausen, "Callimachus and Latin Poetry," *GRBS* 5 (1964) 194; on the import for poetics of this and the other use of "tenui" in the eclogues, see Van Sickle, *Design* (Roma 1978) 87-90.

role in the book, and external allusion place it properly in tradition: for instance, its use of Catullus 64 must be an emphatic reversal, and does it not presume a public and political Callimachus more than the theoretician of slight style?.

The theory that ‘song’ must be at issue in the book has plenty to go on in the fifth eclogue. Here Virgil frames complementary master songs in an elaborate drama of presentation; and this drama cries out to be interpreted as a key to poetics in the way we have come to recognize as a feature of the new disciplinary matrix.

Decoding presentational drama for programmatic implication is what Tracy goes on to do in a very suggestive sketch that reaches from eclogue six to the end of the book.³⁰ He begins by underlining the paradoxical presentation of Silenus’s singing--coerced, fragmentary, mediated through another, Tityrus--, then goes on to trace other signs of ‘song’ difficult or distant, beginning with the elaborately circumstantial return of Meliboeus in eclogue seven. Clearly he has entered on a new, productive and inexhaustible way of reading. Not only does much remain to reinterpret in the last six eclogues, but a similar focus on presentational drama would elucidate much about the poetics of ‘song’ in the first halfbook as well.

Tracy’s sketch along lines envisioned by Perkell, too, should hearten anyone who feared that interpretation might be exhausted, circling in its tracks, shut in an older paradigm. Their demarche from drama to poetics and the structure of Virgil’s book raises new questions and initiates new pleasures in reading. All told, there should be plenty to do this two hundred third decade of puzzling over the *Bucolics*. In the process, internal allusion, which our panel underlined, will play an important part, stitching together “difficult unity” and not in the *Bucolics* alone but in the whole Virgilian oeuvre. By way of envoi, then, till further talk, a reminder may be called for that any general theory of poetics in Virgil will have to chart the varying time-place coordinates (chronotopes) of Arcadia throughout his works with the representative Arcadian figures. Likewise a Virgilian poetics will chart the poet’s preoccupation with paradigm shift (both painful in loss of old and fruitful in new order) expressed from first to last in motifs of exile--flight and loss (“fugimus... fugerit... profugus... fugit”).

³⁰ . Tracy, op. cit. 55-57.