

*VATES* - VIRGIL AS POET-PROPHET  
Reclaiming Epic Tradition from Lucretius & Catullus  
in the Messianic Eclogue (Fourth *Bucolic*)

Foreword

The State of the Question

In retrospect I see that two stories were competing as I prepared this publication. Each had a legitimate claim to figure in the title. One concerned a young poet laying the grounds for his life work. It called for the portmanteau titlature adopted here in the manner of certain older books, featuring the poetic role that Virgil created for himself and specifying that he did so in response to Latin masters of the tradition derived from Hesiod and Homer. This version conveys my considered view of the matter after years of study.

The other story concerned a young scholar laying groundwork and seeking to define a distinct viewpoint within a tradition of scholarly studies. That story dictated the title of the dissertation as it first appeared: “A Reading of Virgil’s Messianic Eclogue.” The emphasis on “reading” reflected something I was and remain sure of, which I had learned by experience: that poems respond to careful and repeated readings. I had seen it work with Horace, Catullus, Robert Frost, I further concluded that Virgil, by engaging with these two Latin poets, was laying claim to

two strands of epic tradition .. the didactic stemming from Hesiod (who directly provided motifs for the eclogue at key points) and the heroic from Homer, who also supplied key motifs. Poetic ambition likewise accounted for Virgil's departure from Theocritus and his projected victory in Arcadia over Pan, the mythical founder of bucolic poetry.

(1) The signs of ambition were confirmed by close study of vocabulary. Above all, the epithet of the child, *incrementum*, 'scion, growth', singled out by Servius and again by Eduard Norden, came to seem crucial as exemplifying in form and conveying in theme the program of the whole. Technical and prosaic, it acquired wider implications in its new context, anticipating the ideology that would find expression in the cognomen *Augustus*.

(2) The task remained of forming a complete text, supplied with a translation and with a commentary on rhetorical and thematic development. Rereading I found the argument unfolding in rhetorical forms for which Quintilian would use the term *incrementum*, already a central concept in the poem. I came to think of the poem in two main sections, each with a distinct scenario. In a preamble, Virgil called for poetic growth to describe birth as underway, with its implications for growth in the world. In the remainder, Virgil spoke as if the birth were accomplished, ostensibly addressing a newborn infant and promising gifts if only the child would make a proper start.

The latter scenario invited comparison with three mythic paradigms. One was the moment described by Varro when an infant makes its first meaningful utterance and the *Parcae* assign its fate. The others came from the literary tradition that Virgil sought to reclaim, Homeric epic. Promising honorific gifts to move a hero to take action on behalf of the community recalled the 'Embassy' of Achaian heroes to Achilles (*Iliad* 9); the plea to take responsibility and grow to grasp a heroic patrimony recalled the 'Embassy' of Athena to Telemachus (*Odyssey* 1).

In conceptual support, my notes cited Northrup Frye, Paul Valéry, and Cedric Whitman. I realize now that another influence was implicit in my title and working assumptions: the emphasis on reading, on the eclogue as poetry, and on the figure it would make as a whole. My

unexamined critical ideology, as someone might now call it, seems rooted in my regard for Reuben A. Brower. In the Harvard catalogue as I planned a program for my freshman year, his new course in close reading caught my attention; and his teaching stirred us with the promise of felicitous sharing between philological and literary criticism.

Shortly after the dissertation was done, a publisher's referee (Steele Commager someone said) reported it could be published if revised. I decided not to turn back. I felt that the main difficulties could not be resolved without wider contexts of interpretation. I needed to look outward, to relations with the other eclogues, and inward, to the self-reflexive nature of Virgil's poetry. For the latter, it now seems clear, I needed to develop what has become familiar as a theory of metapoetics. The result was a series of exploratory papers with titles that reflect my steps:<sup>1</sup> "Unity of the Eclogues: Arcadian Forest, Theocritean Trees," "Dialectical Methodology," "Poetica Teocritea." A decisive breakthrough came in a shoptalk for the American Academy in Rome, finally identifying the program that scholarly and scholiastic tradition had failed to find at the start of the eclogue book, clarifying the missing link with Theocritus and the literary horizon of Virgil's project: "Epic and Bucolic: (Theocritus, *Id.* VII / Virgil, *Ecl.* I)." Once it was clear that Virgil in the first eclogue took a stance with respect to both Theocritus and the Hesiodic strain in epic, thereby defining a poetics for his book, it became possible to show how recent accidents of scholarly history led to the mistaken notion that Virgil delayed defining his poetics till the book's second half only to ground them in Callimachus not Theocritus: "Virgil's Sixth Eclogue & the Poetics of Middle Style."

Scholarly history yielded other partial and symmetrically opposed judgments (e. g., by Brooks Otis and Otto Skutsch) as well as signs of symmetrical contrasts among the eclogues. My attempt at synthesis was *The Design of Virgil's Bucolics* (1978). Reading dialectically, I described a thematic order, also relating it to a perceived numerological design. One energetic rejoinder lumped the latter with other studies of number in Augustan poetry, all ruled out, though

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<sup>1</sup> Full citations appear in the bibliography at the end.

allowing my approach to thematic order: “Van Sickle, *Design*, has produced the most persuasive portrait of the *Eclogues*, arguing cogently for what he calls an ‘ideological order’.”<sup>2</sup>

Filling out this “ideological” and literary frame came studies such as “Conception of the Bucolic Genre” and “The Bookroll & Some Conventions of the Poetic Book.” The idea of linkage between bucolic and epic grew further in “Dawn & Dusk as Motifs of Opening & Closure in Heroic & Bucolic *Epos*.” I found it possible to give fuller accounts of each eclogue and its role in an eclogue book that was coming to be understood ever more cogently as an articulated sequence. I also gave fuller attention to the role of the *Bucolics* in creating the Virgil myth in the West (Fulbright lectures for the Virgil Bimillennium at the University of Rome *La Sapienza*, published as *Poesia e potere. Il mito Virgilio* 1986). In publishing the lectures, I labelled chapters and sections to show continuities in theme and situation. Some of these markers appear in notes to the *Afterword* below to suggest how my reading of the “ideological order” continues to evolve.

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In returning to eclogue four, I sought to review interim developments, at least regarding the links with Lucretius and Catullus that figure so largely in my study. Prominent on the horizon when I first wrote was Karl Büchner’s article in the *Realencyclopädie*, so I opened with the new *Virgiliana*. The articles on individual eclogues were written by the editor, Francesco Della Corte, who evoked Virgil’s use of the Catullan *Parcae* in eclogue four:<sup>3</sup> “Sulla culla di un bimbo, le Parche, come già in Catullo (64,306...) annunziano con elevato tono profetico il ritorno di questa *gens*.” But “come già” made it clear that contrast, even in the broad terms sketched by E. K.

<sup>2</sup> William S. Anderson, “Poetic Arrangement from Vergil to Ovid,” in *Poems in Their Places. The Intertextuality and Order of Poetic Collections*, Neil Fraistat, ed. (Chapel Hill 1986) 65, n. 20. Further evidence for relations between thematic and numerical order appears in my two articles in Italian, one devoted to the eclogue book, the other to symmetries within individual eclogues: “Le Bucoliche. La Struttura” and “Strutture interne di singole egloghe nel libro bucolico di Virgilio.”

<sup>3</sup> ‘By a baby’s crib, the Parcae, as already in Catullus, announce in lofty prophetic tone the return of this race’: F. Della Corte, “Bucoliche. La Quarta,” *Enciclopedia Virgiliana* (Roma 1984) 557.

Rand, let alone particularized revision, was not to be discussed.<sup>4</sup> Nor was difference an issue for Giovanni Pascucci, who cited Virgil's dependence on Catullus as the basis for a strong reading.<sup>5</sup> Less strongly, in a note of 1990 Stephen Tracy remarked that Virgil in the fourth eclogue "takes Catullus 64 as his primary model."<sup>6</sup> Most radically, Wendell Clausen, also in 1990, mentions no interest in Latin poets.<sup>7</sup>

Yet substantial borrowing and significant difference from Catullus are taken for granted by Owen Lee in 1989, though without a cohesive reading of the eclogue and without Lucretius.<sup>8</sup> Lee follows numerous studies from the 80's and 70's that touched with varying emphases on Catullus, e. g.:

Virgil "uses near-quotation from Catullus 64 to suggest that it was the Fates who delivered the prophecy,"<sup>9</sup>

"One feels more directly the weight and renewed presence of poetic allusions. The

<sup>4</sup> Likewise, "Hinter diesen versen steht" is all the conception one finds in W. Kraus, "Vergils vierte Ekloge: ein kritisches Hypomnema," *ANRW* II.31.1 (Berlin 1980) 626.

<sup>5</sup> Giovanni Pascucci, "Lettura della quarta bucolica," in *Le Bucoliche*, Marcello Gigante, ed. (Napoli 1981) 171-197: "Il confronto con il modello giova a far giustizia di aberranti interpretazioni, indirizzando verso l'unica possibile... costruito isolato in latino, che trova giustificazione solo nel procedimento allusivo praticato da Virgilio" (p. 189).

<sup>6</sup> S. V. Tracy, "Commentary on Alpers," *Arethusa* 23 (1990) 55, in an essay interesting for the line of investigation it opens into the poetics of 'song' as a motif systematically interrelating the eclogues: discussed by J. Van Sickle, "Response to a *Georgics* Reader Bemused by the *Bucolics*," *Vergilius* 36 (1990) 62-63.

<sup>7</sup> Clausen does cite some allusions to Greek: *B.* 4.4-6 to Hes. *Erga* 106-73; *B.* 4.6 to Arat. *Phain.* 96-136; *B.* 4.60-62 to Call. *H. Delos* 212-13; *B.* 4.60-62 to Theoc. *Id.* 24.7-8; *B.* 4.63 to Theoc. *Id.* 17.13-14, 16-23, 28-33: "Virgil's Messianic Eclogue," *Poetry and Prophecy. The Beginnings of a Literary Tradition*, J. Kugel, ed. (Ithaca 1990) 65-74.

<sup>8</sup> M. O. Lee, *Death and Rebirth in Virgil's Arcadia* (Albany 1989) 77-88.

<sup>9</sup> Gordon Williams, *Figures of Thought in Roman Poetry* (New Haven 1980) 236-38: based on taking "dixerunt" (4.46) as "aorist", one of several curiously arbitrary inventions imposed against the scenario Virgil clearly sketches, as also in "A Version of Pastoral: Virgil, *Eclogue* 4," in *Quality and Pleasure in Latin Poetry*, T. Woodman and David West, edd. (Cambridge 1974) 31-46.

utterance of the Fates is drawn from Catullus' most ambitious poem..."<sup>10</sup>

"The valour of a second Achilles will form the prelude to the fulfillment of Catullus' nostalgic wish."<sup>11</sup>

"Virgil's ideal age... not to be identified..., an improvement on Catullus' lost 'heroic age'."<sup>12</sup>

"So far we have examined the similarity between Eclogue 4 and Catullus 64.... We must now consider the deliberate contrast Vergil has created..."<sup>13</sup>

"Virgil's conversion of Catullus' age of heroes into a real Golden Age... meant to be appreciated by one poet above all, his friend Pollio.... Virgil had offered a poem which was largely Catullan in theme, vocabulary, and versification... to one who had known and admired the dead poet."<sup>14</sup>

"Vergil has explored his subject within a clear traditional frame, modeling the rhetorical structure of his prophecy upon that of the *Homeric Hymns*."<sup>15</sup>

"Die 'Korrektur' Catulls nicht nur in der vergilischen Zukunftshoffnung besteht, sondern auch in einem veränderten Bild des Heroischen."<sup>16</sup>

"Curiously, these lines [B. 4.46-47] also refer directly to *Carmen* 64 by Catullus... mankind and the immortals have completely lost the happy accord they once possessed...

<sup>10</sup> Paul Alpers, *The Singer of the Eclogues* (Berkeley 1979) 155-249 (scattered remarks). Preoccupied with a traditional conception of genre, Alpers has never evolved from thinking sporadically of eclogues to considering the ensemble of the *Bucolics*, hence his inclusion among the "pastoralists" styled "academic" in the *Afterword*.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Coleman, *Eclogues* (Cambridge 1977) 144.

<sup>12</sup> Tony Boyle, *The Eclogues of Virgil* (Melbourne 1976) 111-115.

<sup>13</sup> Ian Du Quesnay, "Virgil's Fourth Eclogue," *ARCA* 2 (1976) 71.

<sup>14</sup> William Berg, *Early Virgil* (London 1974) 166.

<sup>15</sup> Eleanor Leach, *Virgil's Eclogues. Landscapes of Experience* (Ithaca 1974) 228.

<sup>16</sup> 'The correction of Catullus consists not only in Virgil's hope for the future, rather also in an altered picture of the heroic': Ernst Schmidt, *Poetische Reflexion Vergil's Bukolik* (München 1972) 165, n. 174.

Virgil claims the opposite... age of peace founded upon heroism.”<sup>17</sup>

Lucretius received shorter shrift. One of the studies cited did, however, add to good effect:

“The beginning of the final pastoral vision [B. 4.38-39] draws directly on Virgil’s most august predecessors... Not only is this directly modeled on the conclusion of Hesiod’s account of the golden race (*Works and Days*, 236-237); Virgil’s clinching phrase comes from Lucretius, where it appears as the conclusion of a list of impossible happenings: *ferre omnes omnia possent* [DRN 1.166].”<sup>18</sup>

This implied reversal of Lucretius received a stronger reading, as “una ripresa polemica,” from L. Ramorino Martini.<sup>19</sup> Eclogue four, she remarks, shares more in language and style with Lucretius than does eclogue six. The fact has escaped commentators, she suggests, because of the almost total divergence in ideologies between Lucretius and eclogue four.

By and large these readers took for granted, without particular attention,<sup>20</sup> the integrity of the poem. Others did not. Ciro Monteleone has argued that certain lines should be rearranged to reflect their order in citations by Lactantius.<sup>21</sup> Likewise Wendell Clausen has doubted integrity, referring dismissively to the motif of victory over Pan (4.58-59) as added late and “emphatic... rather too emphatic.”

Montaleone assumes the authority of a distant citation while neglecting the thematic system at hand, which Virgil made.<sup>22</sup> Clausen makes two assumptions. He believes that one can

<sup>17</sup> Michael C. J. Putnam, *Virgil's Pastoral Art* (Princeton 1970) 157-58.

<sup>18</sup> ‘All would be able to produce everything’: Alpers (n. 10 above) 18-82.

<sup>19</sup> “Influssi lucreziani nelle Bucoliche di Virgilio,” *Civiltà Classica e Cristiana* 7 (1986) 316, n. 30.

<sup>20</sup> But concern for the whole appears in Coleman, Du Quesnay, Berg and Williams, for all their differing perspectives.

<sup>21</sup> Ciro Monteleone, *L'egloga quarta da Virgilio a Costantino. Critica del testo e ideologia* (Manduria 1975). In a useful clarification of internal logic, Egil Kraggerud argues that 4.4-5 form a pair, and that *ultima aetas* must mean, ‘Now has come the end of the whole old order’: “Further problems in Vergil,” *SO LXV* (1990) 63-65.

determine the relative chronology of individual passages in the eclogues. This seems bold, given the strong likelihood that Virgil rewrote and coordinated. Elsewhere I have made the case that lateness cannot be demonstrated for any part of the book, that final revisions left a seamless web.<sup>23</sup> Clausen also must feel that he is in a better position than Virgil to judge the fitness of such a reference to Pan in such a place. Like Monteleone he disregards what Virgil contrived.

The challenge to Pan fits above all the context of the eclogue itself. As we shall see in Chapter five, the argument unfolds in the form of an incremental rhetoric of praise, for which the challenge to Pan makes the climax.<sup>24</sup> Reasons why such a motif should be given such importance emerge from the context of the eclogue book, where Virgil accepts the myth of Pan as inventor of bucolic tradition.<sup>25</sup> In the book Arcadian motifs occur in an incremental way,<sup>26</sup> so that the motif in eclogue four builds on the motif of Pan the inventor in eclogue two and anticipates the Arcadian motifs in eclogues seven, eight, and, most fully, eclogue ten, which alone among the eclogues represents itself as located in Arcadia in the presence of Pan,<sup>27</sup> with broad implications

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<sup>22</sup> Thematic differentiation and progression in the whole central speech are studied in Chapters three and five. For a critique of rearrangement in this section, see Williams (above n. 9) 143, n. 34.

<sup>23</sup> Virgil reflects the times following the assassination of Julius Caesar; yet who infallibly knows which passages were penned in which order within which segment of time: *Bucolics* not a diary, argued in “The Indivisibility of the Eighth Eclogue and the Achronicity of the *Bucolics*,” *Virgil: 2000 Years = Arethusa* 14 (198) 33-34.

<sup>24</sup> “*Klimax*, Steigerung”, H. Holthorf, *P. Vergilius Maro Die grösseren Gedichte I* (Freiburg/ München 1959) 171, 266.

<sup>25</sup> *B.* 2.32-33, “*primum*”; 8.24, “*primus*”; cf. 5.59, 10.26.

<sup>26</sup> Schmidt, loc. cit. n. 16.

<sup>27</sup> Schmidt, loc. cit. n. 16. Only the last eclogue locates song in Pan’s Arcadian homeland (notional place), place), also invoking the nymph Arethusa at a time imagined as prior to her mythic flight to Sicily, *B.* 10.4, “*subterlabere*”, future: sc. Arethusa’s departure for Syracuse is imagined as occurring after the notional present of the poem.

for Roman literature and Western culture.<sup>28</sup> In bucolic poetry, challenges to Pan implied ambition.<sup>29</sup> Similar patterning, even suggesting the style of charms, occurred in Theocritus.<sup>30</sup>

Reading comes back to this language at this place in this poem. Why hint at old music here? Does the scenario call for a sign of essential or original style? For enchantment? Both?

The challenge to Pan qualifies as a hard place in theme and style, like those that Aristotle said should be defended on grounds of poetic effect or inner beauty or audience expectations foreign to one's own.<sup>31</sup> Anything less, I think, hardly does justice. It does abort reading.

Nuances in the texture of language were dear to Ben Brower. I remember him once in Rome remarking of the eclogues, "We must not forget the music of the verse." In class, too, he had spoken lines from an old poet-friend to let us hear how changes in verbal music underscored the sense of a close:

Two roads diverged in a wood and I,  
I took the one less traveled by  
And that has made all the difference.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> 'An astonishing step in the development of Roman poetry', "In der Entwicklung der römischen Dichtung ist hier ein erstaunlicher Schritt getan.", writes Schmidt (op. cit., n. 16) 171, in a careful analysis of Virgil's Virgil's literary ambitions and the Arcadian motifs in the eclogue book. Cf. Norden and Servius on *B.* 4.49, discussed in Chapter four.

<sup>29</sup> Theocritus, *Id.* 1.1-17, awesome presence in the locus of music, but 123-126, summoned from Arcadia to Sicily at a notional time when Arethusa already has left Arcadia for Sicily; *Epitaph. Bion.* 55-56; cf. *B.* 2.31, "mecum in siluis imitabere Pana canendo," "With me in woods you will imitate Pan by singing'.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Chapter 5 and instances of mannered repetitions from Theocritus brought to bear by Williams (n. 9) 42-43; *B.* 4.55-57 to *Id.* 16.3-4; *B.* 4.58-59 to *Id.* 1.120-21, 11.22-23. Williams also relates *B.* 4.2 to *Id.* 1.13; *B.* 4.18 to *Id.* 17.64; *B.* 4.63 to *Id.* 17.20-33; *B.* 4.4 and 4.9 to Hes. *Erga* 109; *B.* 4.6 to Arat. *Phain.* 96-136 and Hes. *Erga* 111.

<sup>31</sup> *Poetics* xxv.26, 1461b.

<sup>32</sup> A tribute to Brower forms Alpers' close (n. 10, p. 248): "this great teacher, who taught me and many others much of what we know about the way poetry is handed on and about what sharing it means."

For publication, I have translated Greek and Latin, transliterating the former. Citing brief recurrent tags I have used the English alone. While keeping to my original order of chapters, I have rearranged particular discussions to follow the order in the text of the passages discussed. This has made it easier, and I hope will help the reader, to keep track of that coherence touted above.

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