

Original Preface

Proving the childish theorems he poses
Imbry Miles

This study began when David Kuhn, a Junior Fellow, asked me what *irrita* meant in the fourth eclogue. “The most important word,” he said. It was one of many links I had noted earlier between the eclogue and Catullus’ ‘Wedding of Peleus and Thetis’, which now started to acquire meaning.¹

My study differs from most others by starting from a poet’s intuition about a word and not from generic questions about the child. I turn from history, narrowly conceived, to historiography but also style, language, poetic form, Augustan culture, literary tradition and poetics. The new approaches overshadow the old question of identity. Some such shift was foreshadowed by Karl Büchner in his Pauly article, *Vergilius*, but all too hastily, raising as many difficulties as might have been resolved. Büchner points out the *aporia* of previous scholars, but his own final solution to the problem of identity is verbal, not substantial.

Beginning with a word ought to let one see the poem less as an impasse than a way. One should be able to attend to the considerable difficulties, approaching them as in other poetry. Still, eclogue four, by its density and liberty, surpasses other poems. Often it still eludes the reader. We remain trammelled in mental habits, fixed viewpoints and well defended positions .. our *uestigia fraudis... quae iubeant*. Then too, our world gives little occasion for hope .. *sceleris uestigia nostri*. Materialism, within and around, confuses and constrains us. We cannot quite recapture the reasons of the smile; yet “how gracious the world would be if we could make them common habit among mankind..

My research started while I was a tutor in Quincy House and continued in Rome with a United States Government student grant, under the Fulbright-Hays act. The Department of Classical Studies, University of Pennsylvania, underwrote the initial typing through its chairman Professor Lloyd W. Daly, who read much of the first draft, offering many particular correctives, and encouraging the procedure and intent of the whole.

At Rome, Professor Scevola Mariotti read earlier drafts of the work. His fine correction was no less stimulating than his

¹ I had seen that the poems were linked by manneristic word arrangement: see the sequence of articles on epigram and elegy in the bibliography at the close.

generous encouragement to sin boldly. Professor Frank Brown gave pleasure and benefit in discussion of a draft of Chapter One. Giulia Battaglia and her family added a sense of home.

Originally, Professor Wendell V. Clausen stirred and directed the interest in style that prepared for a confrontation between Catullus and Virgil. Whatever is more finely drawn in the actual work owes much to his criticism and to his example, *iam pridem quasi insitum*, as a reader of the Latin poets.

Three years are not too many for a poem of sixty-three lines that ends with a start, in hope of a smile; but perhaps they will be enough. From the beginning, reading the eclogues was to prepare for reading *The Works of Imbry Miles*:² poet 'A' in order to read poet 'B'. Now, after three full years, that remains really still to do.

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Philadelphia
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² Which I subsequently saw through the press, sv. W. Antony in the bibliography.