University of Alberta

The Tradition of Virgilian Pastoral in the Poetry of Louis MacNeice, Robert Frost & Seamus Heaney

by

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Abstract

There are many studies of pastoral poetry, but few that consider twentieth or twenty-first century pastorals and their relation to the pastoral tradition. This, in part, stems from the difficulty in reducing the diverse forms of pastoral to a single theory. Rather than attempt to accommodate pastoral in its entirety, this study investigates one aspect of the pastoral, the Virgilian pastoral. It begins with an analysis of Virgil's *Bucolica* and then follows the development of the Virgilian pastoral from the classical period onwards. Finally, this study performs close readings on Virgilian pastorals by three modern poets: Louis MacNeice, Robert Frost and Seamus Heaney. The result is a demonstration of how the classical currents of the Virgilian pastoral continue to exert a presence in modern poetry, as well as an understanding of how new poetic practices have adapted the Virgilian pastoral.

Table of Contents

I Introduction: Some Versions of Virgil 1

II Some Aspects of Virgil's Bucolica 18
- Virgil and his origins 19
- Tityrus and the rusticum carmen 23
- Virgil and the political eclogue 28
- The messianic eclogue 31
- Otia and amor 38

III Virgil's Pastoral Tradition 42
- Reclining under a shaded beech tree 44
- Arcady and the golden age 47
- The prophetic turn 58

IV Louis MacNeice and the 1930s Pastoral 68
- An eclogue for Christmas 69
- Eclogue between the motherless 73
- Eclogue by a five-barred gate 78
- Eclogue from Iceland 83
- Some conclusions 87

V Robert Frost and the American Pastoral 89

VI Seamus Heaney and the Irish Pastoral 109
- Bann Valley Eclogue 111
- Glanmore Eclogue 122
- Virgil: Eclogue IX, a translation 129
- Conclusion 131

VII Conclusion 133

Works Cited 141

I Introduction: Some Versions of Virgil

The complaint: "Audivi pastorum carmina mille" ("I have heard a thousand shepherd songs" Petrarca 1970 *Ecl.*I.60)[1], is an old one. And yet pastoral poetry is still a living tradition, with poets actively writing in it and critics reactively writing about it. This study is an attempt to work out the reasons why a form of poetry, so often derided for being sentimental, conventional or reactionary, still manages to sustain such high levels of interest in the minds of poets and scholars. Yet this study is neither an attempt to account for pastoral in all its varied manifestations nor an attempt to expound a new theory of pastoral; it is rather an attempt to explore a single but important aspect of the pastoral, the Virgilian. The Virgilian pastoral is here understood as poetry grounded in Virgil's ten *Bucolica*. Rather than trying to devise a systematic explanation for this grounding, this study explores the active process of reading and interpreting Virgilian pastorals. Rather than relying upon one interpretative framework, it begins with an analysis of various receptions, interpretations, commentaries and translation strategies that have been applied to the *Bucolica* themselves. Special attention is paid to translations and commentaries, which provide an array of different possible interpretations of Virgil's *Bucolica*. Little attention is given to devising a 'correct' interpretation of the *Bucolica* as firstly, there already exists a plethora of such studies, and secondly, none of these studies has ever managed to account for all the nuances, possibilities and ambiguities of the texts. No amount of reading scholarship will dispel all the uncertainties concerning Virgil's fourth eclogue for example. This is not to denigrate Virgil scholarship, which certainly has enlightened this study, but rather, for the

[1] *All translations are mine unless otherwise specified.*

purposes set out, to focus rather on various interpretations and readings applied to the *Bucolica*. A reading of Virgil's poetry is deferred in favour of reading Virgil's readers. What follows from this is an understanding of some of the underlying methodologies and assumptions behind the interpretive frameworks that readers of Virgil have used. The following chapters turn from the *Bucolica* to later poets working in the Virgilian tradition. Again, no attempt is made to deliver a concrete methodology for recognizing and interpreting Virgilian pastorals; instead active engagements with Virgil's poems are highlighted though close readings. Poets from Calpurnius Siculus to several contemporary poets are considered as working within the same tradition of Virgilian pastoral, but not necessarily otherwise following the same poetic practices. The next three chapters are close readings of Virgilian pastoral eclogues by Louis MacNeice, Robert Frost and Seamus Heaney. These reading are designed partially to show some aspects of modern poetry that I believe are often overlooked, but also to affirm that it is possible for major poets to create exceptional poems within the context of classical poetic traditions. It is hoped that they will affirm that tradition in art does not inhibit freedom of expression, but rather provides a viable medium for that expression. Furthermore, these readings should show that in spite of theorizing to the contrary, classical poetics still exerts a meaningful presence in contemporary art; that we are: "Post-this, post-that, post-the-other, yet in the end / Not past a thing" (Heaney 2001 "On His Work in the English Tongue" 1-2).

When Virgil wrote his *Bucolica*, he was not following a path set out for him by Theocritus; he was creating his own innovative poetry with Theocritus's works forming

part of his materials.[2] Similarly Theocritus created his *Idylls* out of existing poetic materials. Neither he nor Virgil created *ex nihilo*. And it is only because the identity of the pre-historical progenitor of pastoral poetry remains unknown that the pastoral tradition begins with Virgil and Theocritus. Therefore, it is only after Virgil and Theocritus that the critical categories and genre definitions concerning the pastoral come into being. Through commentaries and critical writing on these two poets the conventions of pastoral are first described and then prescribed. Further along a natural discontentment with boundaries and regulations sets in, which makes the pastoral appear overly conventional and leads to assessments such as Samuel Johnson's famous criticism of Milton's "Lycidas":

> One of the poems on which much praise has been bestowed is Lycidas; of which the diction is harsh, the rhymes uncertain, and the numbers unpleasing. [...] It is not to be considered as the effusion of real passion; for passion runs not after remote allusions and obscure opinions. [...] In this poem there is no nature, for there is no truth; there is no art, for there is nothing new. Its form is that of a pastoral, easy, vulgar, and therefore disgusting: whatever images it can supply are long ago exhausted; and its inherent improbability always forces dissatisfaction on the mind. (Johnson "Life of Milton" 96)

To refute Johnson (the critic's critic) one must offer up a defence of Milton's originality, almost against the genre he works within. Barbara Johnson (the critic's critic's critic) sees this. Commenting on Samuel Johnson's reading, she writes: "The problem arises from attempts to reconcile the form of Lycidas, the pastoral elegy and its attendant

[2] NB. "[...] one point should be made from the outset. To call these poems imitations is not to deny Virgil originality: to a Roman, to be the first to match one of the great achievements of the Greek writers was a claim to originality" (Du Quesnay 36).

conventions, with the powerfully original statement the poem's readers have always felt it made" (Johnson "Fiction and Grief" 69). The critical problem is resolving the conflict between the felt quality of certain pastorals, and the intellectual assumption that the form's conventions ought to prevent this quality from shining forth. Excellent poets have always been able to create exceptional pastoral poems, which seem to stretch the limits of the form, and this is because the best of pastoral poets have had the scholarly and technical know-how to unravel what the best pastoral poems have had to offer and then make something new out of it. That the tradition of pastoral poetry has continued so long (and it neither had to exist nor is it intrinsically a necessary mode or genre for literature) is that it allows a considerable flexibility in allowing poets to express themselves while at the same time providing a considerable font of poetic power at the touch of the slightest allusion. Pastoral is a genre that relies heavily upon its traditions and therefore does not easily fit on an anxiety-of-influence model. But then I do not believe there is an agonistic basis for all imaginative literature (although perhaps this is my misreading of Bloom). Seamus Heaney wrote: "As a mode of writing, the pastoral requires at least a minimal awareness of tradition on the part of both the poet and the audience" (Heaney 2003 1). And it is an awareness of the past, rather than a struggle with it, that defines the pastoral. This is not to say that poets do not misread Virgil and Theocritus but that they do not always do so on an agonistic basis. The best pastoral poets use Virgil and Theocritus not merely as static models, but as to intensify the vatic power of their own poetry. Pastoral poets can use Virgil and Theocritus as a medium to channel their own poetry rather than as a model to imitate or outdo.

There are numerous generic and period studies outlining the history and developments of the pastoral and its various outcrops, such as the pastoral romance and pastoral comedy. Some of these studies take a historical approach, first cataloguing developments (who did what first and whom did it influence) and then either attempting to find conventions and common generic functions of various ages or offering a series of close readings. Usually these studies end with a figure such as Milton, Wordsworth or Mallarmé who is said to complete, or at least finish off the pastoral. On the other hand, genre studies (and there is some overlap here with literary history) attempt to break the pastoral down into a handbag of motifs, functions and rhetorical tricks. Although both kinds of studies work to accommodate the diversity of existing pastoral literature, both eventually have trouble when they attempt to work out an all-encompassing definition of pastoral. One of the most popular of such pastoral definitions that scholars fall back on is William Empson's "process of putting the complex in the simple" (Empson 23), which only manages to account for the full-range of pastoral by conjuring up a definition so broad that it includes any piece of literature read wryly enough. Aside from allowing Empson the opportunity to apply his eccentric genius to a range of literature, his definition is functionally useless.[3] Yet there remains a difficulty in devising a more limited definition. The *New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, for example, shows the limits of definitions when trying to fence in the pastoral:

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[3] On Empson, Paul de Man writes, "What is the pastoral convention, then, if not the eternal separation between the mind that distinguishes, negates, legislates, and the originary simplicity of the natural? A separation that may be lived, as in Homer's epic poetry (evoked by Empson as an example of the universality of its definition), or it may be thought in full consciousness of itself as in Marvell's poem [The Garden]. There is no doubt that the pastoral theme is, in fact, the only poetic theme, that it is poetry itself. Under the deceitful title of a genre study, Empson has written an ontology of the poetic, but wrapped it, as is his wont, in some extraneous matter that may well conceal the essential" (de Man 239).

> The p. is a fictionalized imitation of rural life, usually the life of an imaginary Golden Age, in which the loves of shepherds and shepherdesses play a prominent part; its ends are sometimes sentimental and romantic, but sometimes satirical or political. To insist on a realistic presentation of actual shepherd life would exclude the greater part of the works that are called p. Only when poetry ceases to imitate actual rural life does it become distinctly p. It must be admitted, however, that the term has been and still is used loosely to designate any treatment of rural life, as when Louis Untermeyer speaks of Robert Frost as a "p." poet. (Congleton & Brogan "Pastoral")

Although this definition allows a considerable flexibility, it is hard to imagine how Virgil's fourth eclogue, for example, would fit. Although the canonical placement of that poem makes is hard to imagine a pastoral without it.[4] The *New Princeton* definition follows the influence of Renaissance and later pastoral theorization in that it responds to (but does not agree with) a critical insistence on "realistic representations of actual shepherd life." This insistence is at the root of much eighteenth-century pastoral poetry; that great age of pastoral whose sensibilities are the most removed from our own.[5]

---

[4] Although it should be said that Fontenelle, in his influential treatise on the pastoral, does in fact reject the fourth eclogue as a pastoral: "Il n'appartient point aux Bergers de parler de toutes sortes de matières, et quand on veut s'élever, il est permis de prendre d'autres personnages. Si Virgile vouloit faire une description pompeuse de ce renouvellement imaginaire que l'on alloit voir dans l'Univers à la naissance du fils de Pollion, il ne falloit point qu'il priât les Muses pastorales de le prendre sur un ton plus haut qu'à leur ordinaire; leur voix ne va point jusqu'à ce ton-là : ce qu'il y avoit à faire, étoit de les abandonner, et de s'adresser à d'autres qu'à elles. Je ne sais cependant s'il ne devoit pas s'en tenir aux Muses pastorales; il eût fait une peinture agréable des biens que le retour de la paix alloit produire à la campagne, et cela, ce me semble, eût bien valu toutes ces merveilles incompréhensibles qu'il emprunte de la Sibylle de Cumes, cette nouvelle race d'hommes qui descendra du Ciel, ces raisins qui viendront à des ronces, et ces agneaux qui naîtront de couleur de feu ou écarlate, pour épargner aux hommes le peine de teindre leur laine" (Fontenelle "Discours sur la nature de l'églogue" 396).

[5] Helen Cooper was no doubt right that "The history of the mode in the eighteenth century is an account of its decline" (Cooper 1977 7), but only in that eighteenth-century conceptions of pastoral inevitably led to atrocious poetry, not that the age signalled the pastoral's literary demise.

Nowhere is this as evident as in the poems of Ambrose Philips, which although popular in their time, now appear excessively light:

> Ah well a day! how long must I endure
>
> This pining pain? or who shall work my cure?
>
> Fond love no cure will have; seeks no repose;
>
> Delights in grief; nor any measure knows. ("First Pastoral" 11-14)

Philips' poem fails to enduringly capture an audience, not because it is conventional, but because of its failure to follow conventions appreciable to a modern reader.

The *New Princeton Encyclopedia* is part of the lengthy tradition of critical writing that has tried to determine what pastoral is and what it ought to be. But this field of writing is made far more complex by the range of pastoral poets who were also pastoral critics. From the ancient scholiasts to the Renaissance editions of Virgil's *Bucolica* with several differing commentaries, from Servius to Seamus Heaney, pastoral poetry has always intertwined with pastoral criticism. Indeed it is not surprising that the second citation in Paul Alpers' seminal study, *What Is Pastoral?* (1996), is from Seamus Heaney's review of an anthology of pastoral verse, nor is it surprising that Heaney in turn cites Alpers' book numerous times in his lecture "Eclogues *in Extremis*", and passes Alpers' critical reflections on the pastoral into his own poetry. It is because of this relationship between pastoral criticism and poetry that this study steps back from theorizing the pastoral; not to abandon a theory of pastoral but to try to find a theory based in poetic praxis. The poet writing pastorals likely has knowledge of his poetic predecessors and a conception of the genre, but is essentially free to create any form of

poem desired. Only after the poem is published is it of any import how the poem is catalogued. Through the accident of history, western literature has a genre (or mode) called pastoral. Only after it is agreed that the pastoral exists, does the critic trouble to stretch and contort the concept to include literature as diverse as Wordsworth, the *pastourelle* of medieval poetry, Thoreau, *As You Like It* and the pastoral of John Kinsella's Australian wheatbelt. The concept of pastoral itself suggests no certain critical boundaries. It is unlikely the proletarian novel, recognizably pastoral to Empson, would have been so to Scaliger or Servius. The critical context itself of pastoral is as unstable as the genre itself, and the result of this is that descriptions of pastoral will always remain unstable, or at least as long as pastoral is a living tradition; which likely explains why historical studies tend to seal themselves off somewhere rather than address near-contemporary pastoral poets. Remarkably, literary history provides us with many diverse and influential misreadings of the *Bucolica*, but as of yet there is no ironclad scholarly corrective to these misreadings. To account for the diverse range of pastoral poetry and criticism, this current study will focus on pastoral orthopraxy rather than how poems adhere to existing pastoral theories or definitions. That is, the relation of individual poems will be examined in terms of terms of rightness of action (how they activate the pastoral tradition in a recognizable fashion) rather than rightness of thought (how they follow or deviate from a fixed model or prescribed formula). Yet orthopraxy needs a practical basis and for this study, that basis is Virgil's *Bucolica*. Poetry that uses the *Bucolica*, as a well of inspiration, or as a model to follow, or deviate from will form the basis of this study. In consequence, this study moves away from the pastoral as a whole, for which there are a number of justifications. Firstly, Virgil's *Bucolica* exert a

tremendous influence on western literature and contextualizing them within the broader context of the pastoral obfuscates various threads of their influence which deviate from a preconceived model of pastoral. This is evident in the lack of attention to pastoral currents in twentieth-century and contemporary poetry, which tend to confine the influence of the *Bucolica* to a hand-picked set of classically trained modernists, and when handling the broader pastoral fall into vagaries and useless theorizations trying to hammer nature and environmental writing, as well as anything slightly rusticated into the old pastoral handbag. [6] The fact that the influence of Virgil's *Bucolica* (and his other poem as well) permeates twentieth-century and later poetry, which can easily be shown empirically, would come as a surprise to anyone versed in these studies. Tolstoy observed: "One indisputable sign that distinguishes true art from counterfeit is the infectiousness of art" (Tolstoy 120). The infectiousness of Virgil's *Bucolica* itself is therefore taken as the object of study in all its manifestations, without recourse to more general theorizations. Planting this study in a key text allows not only for an account of the diverse streams of Virgilian pastoral, neither leaving anything out for not fitting in a theoretical framework nor stretching a framework so to fit radically diverse poems, but also it allows for the open descriptions of how different poems engage Virgil's texts. It is understood that "The literary allusion is a device for the simultaneous activation of two texts" (Ben-Porat 107), and therefore the influence of the *Bucolica* itself can most fruitfully be accounted for through a series close readings of later poems' engagements rather than any abstract theorization. One central purpose of the study is to open up

---

[6]Terry Gifford's *Pastoral* (1999) is a key example. His 'anti-pastoral' and 'post-pastoral' are more an unimaginative attempt to invent radical new theories in the already overpopulated critical discourse of pastoral than an attempt to garnish any real understanding of literature. Gifford's study runs into trouble having to displace Marinelli's *Pastoral* (1971) in the *Critical Idiom Series* and therefore desiring to find something radically new to say, but without any reason other than for newness' sake.

previously ignored manifestations and interpretations of Virgil's *Bucolica* without worrying overly about the excess baggage of the wider pastoral discourse.

In the context of this study, the *Bucolica* themselves are therefore to be understood according to the diverse streams of interpretation and theoretical frameworks that have been attached to them. Therefore, it is partially a realization of Martindale's anticipations, that "The aesthetic critic of the future will, among other things, want to discover what beauties others have found in the past in such poems, thus employing reception as an appropriate mode of inquiry" (Martindale 2005 53). It is hoped that an understanding of the various frameworks and interpretations that have been applied to Virgil's poetry will enhance the reader's understanding of these poems themselves. This study is primarily a study in hermeneutics, and the emphasis is on how interpretations of the *Bucolica* affect later poetry rather than how they affect Virgil. The complexity and difficulty of Virgil's poetry ensures that when invoked, "[...] the alluding text's relation to the source text and its very effect on that text may become complex and difficult" (Thomas 55). And this complex exchange between Virgil and later poets is the primary reason for undertaking this study. Perhaps least excusable is this study's treatment of the poetic and critical influences on Virgil's poems, most particularly Theocritus. Theocritus is interpreted through the medium of Virgil, which goes against all scholarly understanding of Theocritus as a poet in his own right. It in fact promotes a misunderstanding of Theocritus. The justification for this is that, although there are pastoral poems that look to Theocritus rather than Virgil, more often Theocritus functions as a corrective to Virgil's pastoral. Theocritus when used as a model for pastoral poetry

seldom serves as a model in his own right.[7] This is not a set rule, as Lord Tennyson, for example, often demonstrates. Tennyson's "Œnone", although borrowing the story from Ovid, contains a number of allusions in wording, stylistic devices and echoes in tone to remind the reader of Theocritus. For two examples:

> The lizard, with his shadow on the stone,
>
> Rests like a shadow, and the cicala sleeps
>
> ("Œnone" 26-27)
>
> "Σιμιχίδα, πᾷ δὴ τὺ μεσαμέριον πόδας ἕλκεις,
>
> ἁνίκα δὴ καὶ σαῦρος ἐν αἱμασιαῖσι καθεύδει,
>
> οὐδ' ἐπιτυμβίδιοι κορυδαλλίδες ἠλαίνοντι;
>
> Whither now, Simichidas, art thou footing it in the noontide, when even the lizard sleeps in the wall and the tomb-crested larks fare not abroad?
>
> (Theoc. *Id.* VII.21-23)[8]

and

> Of movement, and the charm of married brows. ("Œnone" 74)
>
> Κἤμ' ἒκ τῶ ἄντρω σύνοφρυς κόρα ἐχθὲς ἰδοῖσα
>
> Me too from out her cave a maid with meeting brows spied (Theoc. *Id.* VIII.72).

These instances are nevertheless the exception in the history of pastoral, where Virgil's influence overshadows Theocritus. This is unfortunate because of the rich possibilities Theocritus has to offer to modern poetry, but it is not surprising. Ezra Pound notes:

---

[7] Leigh Hunt commented long ago that although Theocritus is sometimes considered a superior poet to Virgil, his poetics is never fully exploited by a modern poet. This remains so: "The world has long been sensible of his superiority. But, in one respect, even the world has not yet done justice to Theocritus. The world, indeed, takes a long time, or must have a twofold blow given it as manifest and sustained as Shakespeare's to entertain two ideas at once respecting anybody. [...] People suppose he can handle nothing stronger than a crook" (Hunt 72).

[8] All translations of Theocritus here and after are by A.S.F. Gow.

"Greek in English remains almost wholly unsuccessful, or rather, there are glorious passages but no long or whole satisfaction" (Pound 1954 249). Regardless if this holds true for other Greek poets, it certainly does for Theocritus.

There remains, however, much to clarify regarding the investigation of the influence of Virgil's *Bucolica* on later literature and the form of reading this type of influence study necessitates. As mentioned, this study is an exercise in hermeneutics and a study of reading. It begins with an analysis of various interpretations and readings of Virgil's *Bucolica*, not in order to arrive at a central understanding of the text, but in order to show the "kaleidoscope of perspectives, preintentions, recollections" (Iser 54) that the activity of reading brings into the text. When Ovid wrote (here in Marlowe's translation):

> What age of Varro's name shall not be told,
> And Jason's Argos and the fleece of gold,
> Lofty Lucretius shall live that hour,
> That nature shall dissolve this earthly bower.
> Aeneas' war, and Tityrus shall be read,
> While Rome of all the conquered world is head, ("Book I Elegia XV" 21-26),

it is unlikely that he considered the possibility of the influence of Latin poetry surviving the Roman Empire. Yet it has, and a key result of this is that Latin poetry has been read, interpreted and described in ways that are entirely different from its original context. Virgil has become a classic, but it is a mistake to limit the significance of this to academic canonization. Italo Calvino has stated: "I classici sono libri che esercitano

un'influenza particolare sia quando s'impongono come indimenticabili, sia quando si nascondono nelle pieghe della memoria mimetizzandosi da inconscio collettivo o individuale." ("Classics are books which exert a particular influence, whether this means that they leave their indelible mark on the mind or whether it means that they hide in the folds of memory camouflaging as the collective or individual unconscious " Calvino 13). That is, the status of a classic rests in its influence on the individual reader not in its institutional status. If Virgil failed to impress his readers, he would no longer remain a classic: "Il «tuo» classico è quello che non può esserti indifferente e che ti serve per definire te stesso in rapporto e magari in contrasto con lui." (" 'Your' classic is one which you cannot feel indifferent towards and which helps you to define yourself in relation to and in contrast with it" Calvino 16). And when a classic's readers are poets, this is precisely the form of expression poetry takes. The key poets of this study are Louis MacNeice, Robert Frost, and Seamus Heaney. Virgil's *Bucolica* is a classic for these poets. This means that Virgil's poetry is drawn into their personal ideological and poetic understandings, and also that something poetically significant occurs thereby. "The history of an art is the history of masterwork, not of failures, or mediocrity" (Pound 1952 7). The poems chosen for analysis are chosen because it is believed that close readings of them can reveal something of aesthetic value. It is fully realized that this approach is therefore limited to values of the age and author, and that pastoral poems popular in their time but not in ours are therefore abandoned. Very little attention is given to the chronology of various interpretations and poems, and this is deliberate in the hopes that this will destabilize conceptions of the Virgilian pastoral as following a coherent development. It is hoped that this approach will assist the reader in seeing the poems

studied as poetry and not as archaeological artefacts of merely historical curiosity. I sincerely believe that all the poets examined in this study have something to offer the reader as poetry.

The emphasis of this study on three near-contemporary poets, it is hoped, will highlight overlooked aspects of their own poetry, but also actively demonstrate the complexity and diversity of Virgilian pastoral at a much closer level than a study that encompasses a larger number or more diverse selection of poets would afford. The influence of the Virgilian pastoral in contemporary poetry runs against an idea that not only dominates much modern Virgil scholarship, but for poetry was also most pugnaciously expressed by Ezra Pound and Robert Graves--that Virgil's poetry was imperial and bad. Robert Graves wrote that "Whenever a golden age of stable government, full churches and expanding wealth dawns among the Western nations, Virgil always returns to supreme favour" (Graves 1962 13). In his poetry, he characterized him as:

Maro, whose golden and lick-spittle tongue
  Served Caesar's most un-Roman tyrannies,
Whose easy-flowing Georgics are yet sung
  declamations in the academies--- (Graves 1999 "Virgil The Sorcerer" 5-8)

Graves, Pound and their ilk are reacting against Virgil as a canonical school-boy's text representative of imperialism, reactionary poetics and generally everything the credible twentieth-century poet ought to rebel against. But this image of Virgil often leads to the assumption that Virgil is no longer relevant for modern poets; and it leads to the

assumption that positive receptions of Virgil must offset or counteract this image. Furthermore, this assumption then leads to critics reading pastorals only as acts of bursting originality, with the constraints of genre and tradition only existing to be rebelled against. The poets of this study, even when they rebel against Virgil's model, still first internalize his poetics rather than merely disestablishing it. The tradition of the Virgilian pastoral holds with all the nice etymologies the word 'tradition' has to offer: 'handing down', 'transferring' as well (from the Latin *traditio*) the meanings 'giving up', 'surrendering', 'teaching,' 'a saying handed down' or even a 'betrayal.' It is a tradition that does not need any act of rebellion to invoke rich layers of allusion, meaning and intertexuality. If anything, it should be evident that the reason the pastoral tradition has endured a lengthy stay in Western literature is that is allows considerable flexibility and pathos in its form. It is conventional critical practice to claim that the best pastorals somehow undermine or subvert their constraints, and this will continue as long as subversion is popular in critical discourse. It is not necessary to deny that some pastorals contain a subversive element, but to overemphasize this element denies the possibility of unveiling other viable methods of pastoral writing and therefore is self-limiting. One ought to consider that Marlowe's passionate shepherd yields a pleasant poem, even without Raleigh's reply to give the critics something to gossip about. It is hard to imagine, in spite of strict adherence to Renaissance conventions, that the poem will ever lose its enduring appeal in:

> Come live with me and be my Love,
>
> And we will all the pleasures prove
>
> That valleys and groves, hills and fields,

Woods, or steepy mountain yields.

(Marlowe "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" 1-4)[9]

With that said, the extent to which Heaney, Frost, MacNeice and the other poets of this study subvert the pastoral will be deferred. The study will remain a study of poetic influence and exchanges with Virgil's *Bucolica* and a larger conception of pastoral, with its motifs and conventions, will remain on the periphery. A final word borrows from a study on the decline in favour of academic painting:

> But it is profoundly characteristic of the impressionist temperament to feel that beauty of nature as he sees it is something that need not be improved upon. 'Cannot be improved upon,' is a phrase that is more likely to come to his lips. It was for their attempt to improve upon nature that the impressionists most severely berated the academicians. They failed to see that the academics were sincerely absorbed in rendering an imagined world of the mind with the maximum intensity as they themselves were sincere in rendering the world before their eyes. They further failed to see, or at least explain to their followers, that the great academicians did not seek to improve upon nature but, by a process of selecting from elements found in nature, to create their ideal world. (Gammell 84-85)

Gammell, who was a painter, argues that the late nineteenth-century academics, through careful and rigorous study and formal technique created masterpieces which convey an astonishing intensity of expression, and that this is obscured by the privileged status of first, the avant-garde, and then the postmodern. As there is now a resurgence of interest

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[9] *England's Helicon* (1600) version.

in late nineteenth-century academic art and its traditional techniques,[10] I believe there is room for an appreciation for poetry, which adheres to a classical model, such as Virgil, whose poetry also requires careful study to acquire an appreciation.

[10] This trend is reflected in that over the past twenty-five years the value of nineteenth-century art has soared in comparison with the value of art from other periods. Furthermore, the Art Renewal Center (http://www.artrenewal.org) was formed in 2000 to promote classical realist art and revive interest in neglected nineteenth-century masters.

II Some Aspects of Virgil's *Bucolica*

The focus of this study is on the Virgilian stream of pastoral poetry. That is, it includes any poem indebted to Virgil's *Bucolica* and excludes pastoral poetry free from Virgil's direct influence. It is therefore more or less a study of the influence of Virgil's *Bucolica* on later poetry, although there is still a critical concern with the pastoral because poetry indebted to the *Bucolica* is almost always written as within an understanding of pastoral that is influenced by but not reducible to Virgil. Furthermore, there is no single definitive method of interpreting the *Bucolica*, and later Virgilian pastorals respond to Virgil in vastly different ways. For this reason, it is prudent before tackling later poetry, to examine the various ways in which the *Bucolica* have been understood. It is not possible to circumscribe what is meant by Virgilian pastoral, but the analysis of commentaries, translations and critical writings on Virgil's *Bucolica* helps elucidate how later poets developed their own understanding of Virgil's poetry and applied what they learned to their own creative efforts. The strength of Virgil's poetry, and the essential reason for its powerful influence, is its usefulness to its borrowers. But no analysis of readings of the *Bucolica* will ever reveal a singular understanding of Virgil's text or a fixed set of assumptions or principles that each reader takes to the text. Citing Djuna Barnes: "An image is a stop the mind makes between uncertainties" (Barnes 111). Following this thought, interpretations of Virgil's *Bucolica* are understood as a stream of images representing stops in the minds of various readers, but they do not dispel the uncertainties of the text. Critics, commentators or translators make decisions to decide upon meaning, but each new engagement is free to find something new. And the ambiguities of Virgil's *Bucolica* and its accessibility to allegorical readings ensure

that good readers will always devise new and interesting readings. The purpose of this chapter is to show how some of the various readings of Virgil's *Bucolica* have worked, not to devise a methodology for reading Virgil. There will remain shades (*umbrae*) of uncertainty in every reading of the *Bucolica*.

Virgil and his origins

The nature of creativity and originality underlies both the pastoral genre and Virgil's *Bucolica*. Virgil's readers are always faced with the fact that Theocritus was Virgil's model. There are other poetic influences on Virgil's *Bucolica*; Lucretius, Catullus and Callimachus are only three that provide fruitful insights into Virgil's poetry, and the loss of many Greek and Latin texts ensures that the full extent of Virgil's literary borrowings will never fully be explained. One scholar argues that: "Virgilio utiliza los recursos de la tradición poética teocritea para enmarcarlos en aquella visión filosófica ofrecida por Lucrecio y darles, de este modo, carácter sociológico acorde con la reconstrucción moral de aquellos tiempos." ("Virgil uses the resources of the Theocritean poetic tradition to frame that philosophical vision offered by Lucretius and to give them, in this way, a sociological character in agreement with the moral reconstruction of the times" Alberte 229). This double vision of poetic and philosophical influences marks modern understandings of Virgil and provides the contemporary reader with far more complexity than earlier commentators were likely to comprehend. But despite his other debts, readers almost universally give Theocritus credit for providing the material (*silva, ὕλη*) for Virgil's pastoral poetics.[11] C.S. Lewis wrote that: "Indeed it is the curse and the

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[11] N.B. "L'imitazione formale anche assai stretta dell'exemplar non implica affatto la riproduzione della particolare atmosfera poetica; il che, del resto, sarebbe in realtà impossibile data la manifesta irrepetibilità del tono caratteristico di ogni singola composizione artistica: il Poeta infatti, anche attraverso l'inserimento in un nuovo contesto dei versi attinti a Teocrito, ricrea il passo conferendogli un tono nuovo, personale"

fascination of literary history that there are no real beginnings" (Lewis 749), and for this reason, Virgil's poetic influences are likely to be continuously reinvented and endlessly explored. Moving further along, it is notable that even when recognition is given to Theocritus, Virgil is usually credited with creating the pastoral genre. And challenging this is not easy. "Studiare Virgilio di fronte a Teocrito è un terreno molto meno agevole di quanto possa sembrare." ("The study of Virgil opposite Theocritus is to enter an area more troublesome than it can seem" Grilli 85). So it is unsurprising that many scholars accept the traditional position of Virgil as the creator of the genre. On this, Alpers writes: "However, Theocritus did not give ancient pastoral its definitive generic form. As we shall see, there are no clear boundaries between his 'pastoral' and 'nonpastoral' *Idylls* and no coherently developed set of conventions that mark certain 'bucolics' as what we would call 'pastoral.' That was the work of later Greek pastoralists and was brought to completion by Virgil, whose *Eclogues* give ancient pastoral its generic identity" (Alpers 1996 66). This interpretation is, however, complicated by the fact that, if Virgil demarcates the boundaries through refining Theocritus, the same can be said for Virgil through the refinements of later poets. Furthermore, "Vergil's Eclogues do not easily yield a definition of pastoral; despite many centuries of study and imitation, they remain among the most haunting and elusive of all the poems we know" (Leach 19). And their elusive nature makes any generic identity created from Virgil's *Bucolica* elusive to say the least.

("Very strict formal imitation of the exemplar does not at all imply the reproduction of the particular poetic atmosphere; this would be in reality impossible, given the manifest irrepeatability of the characteristic tone of every single artistic composition: the Poet, in fact, through the insertion of the lines in a new context reaches back to Theocritus, and recreates the passage giving it a new personal tone." Grillo 59).

The relation between Theocritus and Virgil comes into play at the beginning of the sixth eclogue, "Prima Syracosio dignata est ludere uersu / nostra neque erubuit siluas habitare Thalea" ("My playful muse first chose Sicilian verse / She did not blush to dwell among the woods." Verg. *Ecl.* VI.1-2).[12] Servius comments on meaning of the first line: "ostendit ergo se primum post Theocritum bucolica scripsisse." ("He indicates that he was the first to write bucolic verse after Theocritus" Servius *Ecl.*VI.1). Servius likely understands part of Virgil's intent, but the Latin emphasis on *prima* foregrounds the complex problem of Virgil's relation to Theocritus, and the complex relationship between the two poets and pastoral genre. Dryden translates the first two lines as "I first transferred to Rome Sicilian strains; / Nor blushed the Doric Muse to dwell on Mantuan plains." (Dryden "Pastoral VI" 1-2). He interprets the lines as an assertion that the poem is Romanizing Theocritus, but removes from *prima* the artistic 'assertion of primacy' (Clausen 178). But if the two lines acknowledge a debt to Theocritus, they also raise the critical questions of artistic primacy and superiority. And the question of artistic primacy and the related concept of originality often occupy the centre stage in the relation between Theocritus and Virgil. Often times, especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the opinion is expressed that: "Certainly, the most wonderful, the unique, point, about the Greek genius, in literature, as in everything else, was the entire absense [sic] of imitation in its productions" (Pater 82). When this perception of Greek literature is held, the presumption that Theocritus is close to nature is never far off. Thus with a similar perspective in mind, Lady Montagu wrote to Alexander Pope: "I no longer look upon Theocritus as a romantic writer; he has only given a plain image of the way of the life

[12] All translations of Virgil's *Bucolica* are from Alpers' *The Singer of the Eclogues* (1979) unless specified otherwise.

amongst the peasants of his country [...]" (Montagu 247). When Theocritus is praised for his closeness to nature and rustic life, Virgil is often faulted for his imitations and artificialities. Yet critics do not universally praise Theocritus' supposed rustication. Fontenelle, who weighs Theocritus and Virgil with an even balance against his own poetics in his "Discours sur la nature de l'églogue," faults those who praise Theocritus unquestioningly as "le Prince des Poëtes Bucoliques." He laments critics who are readier to excuse Theocritus' *grossiereté* [sic] than to praise the *délicatesse* of other pastoral poets (Fontenelle 395). Scaliger, after analyzing Virgil's imitations of Theocritus concludes: "Quare pauci corruptique iudicii, infelicissimae eruditionis Grammatici exuant perditam illam temeritatem, qua professi sunt a Theocrito Maronem superatum" ("Whereby let those of little and corrupt judgement, scholars of most unproductive learning, lay aside that depraved thoughtlessness, in which they publicly declared Virgil to have surpassed Theocritus." Scaliger 251). When critics praise Virgil it is often for his refinement; that is, improving upon his model.

Regardless of who is held to be the greater poet, Theocritus' relation with Virgil is an essential concern for readers of the *Bucolica*. Influential contemporary critics such as Alpers, often see Virgil's role in the creation of the pastoral as selecting elements from Theocritus to form a coherent pastoral model: "By reducing Theocritus's figures and usages to a more homogenously rendered world of shepherds, Virgil established the conventions of the pastoral" (Alpers 1996 154). Other critics more perceptive to the Theocritus' own poetry as forming something in itself and more concerned with modern theoretical discussions on allusion, imitation and intertexuality, more often see

considerably complexity in the interaction between the two poems. One critic writes: "Difference amidst suspicion of sameness is the hallmark of Virgil's engagement with Theocritus" (Hunter 116). But the possibility that Virgil's use of Theocritus could exceed simple imitation escapes many earlier critics and commentators. This is likely in part due to a scholarly awareness of the *Bucolica*'s debt to other poets such as Lucretius or Callimachus, whose writings were unavailable for a long period of readers' engagements with Virgil. An awareness of Virgil's subtle interactions with Callimachus's poetics makes it more likely that the reader will notice the subtleties of his interactions with Theocritus. One classicist has pointed out that "Although Servius shows some awareness of the importance of Theocritus, for the other commentators the Greek poet was little more than a name to invoke to explain Vergil's references to, say, Syracusan verse" (Starr 131). But for the greater part of the middle ages, for example, it is unlikely that many readers had access to Theocritus at all. One such commentator, Nicholas Trivet (1258?-1328) glosses the first two lines of eclogue six: "**prima** in latinis scriptoribus bucolicorum" ("**First** among Latin writers of bucolic verse" Trivet 141) and "**dignata est** quia superior dignitate quam grecorum muse ex imperio romano" ("**deemed worthy** because held higher in esteem than the muse of the Greeks on account of Roman authority" Trivet 141). Trivet reads in *prima* 'first' and 'foremost' and grants Virgil the status of first writing Latin bucolic as well as the role of worthy pastoral poet.

Tityrus and the rusticum carmen

The first line of Virgil's sixth eclogue recalls the opening line of his first eclogue (Clausen xxv) and therefore it is to the beginning of the *Bucolica* to which we move. Regarding the first eclogue, E.R. Curtius famously wrote: "From the first century of the

Empire to the time of Goethe, all study of Latin literature began with the first eclogue. It is not too much to say that anyone unfamiliar with that short poem lacks one key to the literary tradition of Europe" (Curtius 190). Therefore, it is not surprising that the opening lines of this poem, which form a poetic programmatic statement, have produced endless commentary and debate. The first eclogue begins: "Tityre, tu patulae recubans sub tegmine fagi / siluestrem tenui Musam meditaris auena;" ("You, Tityrus, under the spreading, sheltering beech, / Tune woodland musings on a delicate reed" Verg. *Ecl.* I.1-2). The name Tityrus, taken from Theocritus, often in allegorical readings represents Virgil.[13] There are two consequences of this, the first is that Tityrus becomes a voice for Virgil and his poetics (although what is said to Tityrus, such as these first two lines, is incorporated into Virgil's poetics also) and the second is that the eclogue is then read as a political statement, usually of Virgil expressing gratitude to Octavian for restoring lands to him that were taken from him by soldiers after the Battle of Philippi.[14] These political and the poetic contexts become of fundamental import in this poem's reception in western literature.

The poetic context of the *rusticum carmen* symbolized by the *siluestrem Musam* suggests a simplicity in contrast with the sophistication of the poem; a sophistication which seems more complex to each passing generation of readers. Even the woodland

[13] Cairns argues (using Athenaeus *Deipnosophistae* 182d as a basis) that 'Tityrus' is from the word the Dorians in Italy used for 'reed pipe' and is therefore a reference to Theocritus. He writes: "Thus we learn that titurinos, associated here with the kalamos, first a Dorism, and second an Italian Dorism. In this way Tityre constitutes the desiderated, i.e., Theocritean bucolic transplanted to Italy" (Cairns 292). Unconvincing as this argument is, it shows the lengths scholars use classical literature to find new allusions and expand the range of meaning for Virgil's text.

[14] N.B. "Tityrus is Virgil in respect of poetic aims and inspiration that is at the level of the poem which involves literary symbolism. He is not Virgil in respect of his non-literary attributes, that is at the level which treats of an apparently real-life saga about countrymen and their land" (Wright 112).

muse's Theocritean antecedent is no longer clear cut, as it seemingly also responds to Lucretius' "silvestrem [...] musam" (Lucr. IV.589) and "agrestis [...] musa" (Lucr. V.1398).[15] The map of literary history is more complex than a road plotted from Theocritus directly to Virgil suggests. Yet although commentators now are likely to see allusion to Lucretius or Ennius[16] and report engagements with Callimachus and neoteric poetics, it is still Theocritus who is regarded as the basis for these lines, especially in the opening of his first *Idyll*:

> Ἁδύ τι τὸ ψιθύρισμα καὶ ἁ πίτυς αἰπόλε, τήνα,
>
> ἁ ποτὶ ταῖς παγαῖσι μελίσδεται, ἁδὺ δὲ καὶ τὺ
>
> συρίσδες·
>
> Sweet is the whispered music of yonder pinetree by the springs, goatherd, and sweet too thy piping. (Theoc. *Idyll.*I.1-3)

There is a contrast between the rustic Doricisms of Theocritus' poetry and the "stylistic heightening" which form Virgil's "sprinkling of rusticity" (Nisbet 327). Virgil's use of *meditaris* has spawned a host of interpretations. It is a Latin replacement for Theocritus's συρίζω "piping" or perhaps for μελίζω "singing" as Servius suggests.[17] The English ear is likely to recall Milton's "Alas! What boots it with uncessant care / To tend the homely, slighted shepherd's trade, / And strictly meditate the thankless Muse? ("Lycidas" 64-66). The Italian humanist, Giovanni Tortelli (1400-1466) in his annotations cross-referenced this use of *meditaris* with *meditatur* in book IV of the Aeneid: "nec iam furtiuum Dido

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[15] Breed notes in these lines that there is "an important Lucretian intertext." (Breed 7). Although Lucretius is important for Virgil's poetics, the emphasis here is on allusions that have formed a larger impact on the tradition of the Virgilian pastoral.
[16] In *sub tegmine* for example.
[17] For μελίζω cf. Theoc. *Idyl.* VII.89.
Smith argues that the lack of a Latin equivalent of συρίζειν necessitates the use of *meditari* (Smith 1970 506). Van Sickle further recommends ἐξεπόνασα (Theoc. *Idyl.* 7.51) and ἔχον πόνον: (Theoc. *Idyl.* 7.139) for *meditari* (Van Sickle 2004 347 ft.71).

meditatur amorem" "No more does Dido meditate on secret love" (Verg. *Aen.* IV.171). Tortelli's annotation, like other glosses and commentaries suggest that whatever *meditaris* is understood to mean, it makes Theocritus' singing and piping more abstract and figurative. This move towards abstraction assists allegorical or philosophical readings. Virgil's Tityrus is not merely singing rustic songs, but contemplating the nature of poetry.

The language and style of the *Bucolica* never lose their status as an important feature of pastoral poetry. This concern is evident in how the opening lines of the first eclogue are translated. For several examples,

> Tityrus, there you lie in a beech-tree shade,
> Brooding over your music for the Muse
> (Ferry I.1-2)
> Tityrus, here you loll, your slim reed-pipe serenading
> The woodland spirit beneath a spread of sheltering beech.
> (Day Lewis I.1-2)
> O Tityre, tandis qu'à l'aise sous le hêtre,
> Tu cherches sur la flûte un petit air champêtre
> (Valéry I.1-2)
> Tú, Titiro a la sombra descansando
> desta tendida haya, con la avena
> el verso pastoril vas acordando.
> (León "Egloga I" 1-2)

These selections show the considerable flexibility Virgil's original has provided translators. Fray Luis de León's *acordando* provides the sense of "tuning" while using an abstract verb. The other renditions of Virgil's *meditaris*, "brooding", "serenading" and "cherches" are also so varied that is hard to believe they render the same word. León's Spanish allows him to echo Virgil's placements of "Tu Tityre" and "avena" and copy Virgil's alliterative dentals. León does not hesitate to follow Cicero's advice for translators, "non verbum verbo necesse habui reddere" ("I did not deem it necessary to translate word for word"), in rendering two lines into three. Virgil's *siluestrem Musam* becomes a *verso pastoril* for León, following Servius's gloss on Virgil's phrase, "rusticum carmen"; as does Paul Valéry's "un petit air champêtre". David Ferry prefers the simple "Muse" and C. Day Lewis provides "woodland spirit." Translations of the *Bucolica* faced with the inability to fully render the density of Virgil's meaning tend to attempt to capture more of the spirit of his 'rustic song' than the philosophical and poetic density.[18] They, in effect, often work in the opposite manner from Virgil's commentators who tend to elaborate the complexities of the text almost beyond comprehension. The tendency of the *Bucolica* to philosophical abstraction or allegory is not a fundamental aspect of the poems' reception. Although Virgil is "very much a learned poet's poet" (Heaney 2003 3), during his lifetime, "Admiration for Virgil was immediate and popular [...]" (Horsfall 47). Part of this popularity is reflected in the "antibucolica" parodies of Numitorius, "Tityre, si toga calda tibi est, quo tegmine fagi?" ("Tityrus, if your toga is warming, why the cover of beech?" Don. *Vit.*43). Numitorius, aside from mocking Virgil's use of the odd phrase "tegmine fagi" emphasizes the alliterative 'tee's of Virgil's

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[18] Translators also tend to ignore or re-contextualize the political aspects of Virgil's *Bucolica*. For a full discussion of the political aspects of the first eclogue, see (Gordon Williams 310-312).

first line. It is therefore a parody that requires a familiarity with Virgil's poetry as spoken, not merely read. Perhaps it represents Numitorius's frustration towards the *Bucolica*'s popularity in public performances.

Virgil and the political eclogue

The first and ninth eclogues are pivotal in interpretations of Virgil's poetry that stress the political nature of the *Bucolica*. A feature that separates Virgil from Theocritus is the encroachment of civil war upon the pastoral landscape, where civil discord (*discordia ciuis*) threatens the ease (*lentus*) and leisure (*otia*) of Virgil's shepherds. Nowhere is this clearer than in the fate of Meliboeus, who has been driven off his land by an impious soldier ("impius ... miles" Verg. *Ecl.*I.70).[19] Commentators are quick to read the first eclogue as a kudos from Virgil to Octavian, and in various readings Octavian appears to creep up in the most unlikely places. Nicholas Trivet sees the protective beech-tree as symbolizing Octavian, "fagus patula Octavianum" (Trivet 76). Meanwhile, the Renaissance scholar, Juan Luis Vives, in his "In Allegorias Bucolicorum Vergilii" expands on Servius' suggestion that Tityrus' love-object *Amaryllida* is Rome to include Octavian. "*Amaryllida.* Haec Roma est, vel Octavianus, quem ipse tenui avena canebat, [...]" ("*Amaryllida.* This is Rome, or Octavian, whom used to sing with a slender reed" Vives 6). Attached to these competing readings is the 'freedom' (*libertas* I.27) Tityrus receives from his 'god' at Rome. The political nature of the word *libertas* will be lost to

[19] Servius gives interesting reasons as to why the soldier is impious: "IMPIVS MILES iratus Meliboeus impios milites dicit, seu quod agrum suum teneant, seu quod civile gesserint bellum. IMPIVS MILES qui pro Antonio arma portavit. IMPIVS M. quia bella civilia gessit et desiderat. IMPIVS M. hic Vergilius Octavianum Augustum laesit; tamen secutus est veritatem: nam miles portando arma et vincendo alios pietatem praetermittit" ("IMPIOUS SOLDIER: the angry Meliboeus calls the soldiers impious, either because they held his own cropland, or because they waged civil war. IMPIOUS SOLDIER: who bore arms for Antony. IMPIOUS SOLDIER: because he waged civil wars and desires them. IMPIOUS SOLDIER: here Virgil injured Octavian Augustus; nevertheless he aimed at the truth: for he makes no mention of soldiers bearing arms or piety in conquering others." Servius *Ecl.*I.70).

no one of any era, but in Virgil's time, it was specifically the political slogan of Octavian's party in the civil wars (Clausen 43). "Further, the concept of libertas in the sense of se-curitas (freedom from) that we see in the Eclogues, remained the defining aspect of libertas in Augustus' reign" (Galinsky 8). But the meaning extends far beyond this political usage. It is a freedom in the sense of emancipation from slavery (Clausen 43), and freedom for Tityrus to continue tending his flocks, pascite ut ante boues, pueri; submittite tauros." ("Graze cattle as before, lads, breed your bulls" Verg. *Ecl.*I.45). Freedom could also be understood as the Epicurean freedoms from anxiety (*ataraxia*) and from pain (*aponia*). But regardless of how these details are interpreted, the placement of Octavian in the poem, should the reader accept it, forces a decision over whether to identify with Tityrus or Meliboeus. The question raised is whether the reader should praise Octavian for restoring Tityrus, or perceive a subtler intent in poem, with the hard fate of Meliboeus undermining the imperial praise. Contemporary readers tend to favour the subtler reading. Against this thematic freedom, some scholars ironically assert that "La poésie de Tityre est une poésie de l'enfermement" (Brisson 81).[20] For some readers, the fact that Tityrus is dependent on Rome/Octavian for his freedom destabilizes his claims for freedom. These ambiguities concerning poetry and the political are a central feature of many later pastoral eclogues that take Virgil as their model.

[20] Conversely, the bucolic are sometimes said to be a poetry of flight. "La Bucoliche rappresento fondamentalmente un luogo d'evasione e di fuga, fuga dalla realtà, dalle sofferenze e costrizioni che reca ma anche dai progetti e dalle opere che in essa sono intrapresi" ("The *Bucolica* represent fundamentally a place of escape and of flight; flight from reality, and from the sufferings and constraints that reality brings, but also from the plans and from the works that in it are undertaken." Bonelli 65).

Virgil's first and ninth eclogues work as a thematic pair, the biographical and political allegory of the first extends into the later poem.[21] In the ninth eclogue, Moeris laments "Mantua uae miserae nimium uicina Cremonae." ("Mantua all too near to sad Cremona." Verg. *Ecl.*IX.28). The disruptions of the first eclogue have past but the social consequences of civil war lingers. The civil discord and uncertainty of the first eclogue is left for a "desolate peace" (Clausen 266) and social malaise in the ninth. In this setting, Virgil through the voice of Moeris questions the role of the poetry. Moeris states:

> Audieras, et fama fuit ; sed carmina tantum
> nostra ualent, Lycida, tela inter Martia quantum
> Chaonias dicunt aquila ueniente columbas.
> quod nisi me quacumque nouas incidere lites
> ante sinistra caua monuisset ab ilice cornix,
> nec tuus hic Moeris nec viveret ipse Menalcas
> You heard what people said; but all our songs,
> Lycidas, no more prevail with weapons of war
> Than the oracle's doves, they say, when the eagles come.
> Had I not somehow cut fresh quarrels short,
> Warned by hearing a crow on a hollow tree,
> Your Moeris would not be alive—nor would Menalcas.
> (Verg. *Ecl.*IX.11-16)

Moeris's passage points to the impotence of poetry in response to civil war, and the arbitrariness of fortune. The pathos of these verses exists in the friction between the

[21] NB "La nona ecloga canta il dolore del poeta spoglio ormai per sempre del suo campo; la prima, invece, l'illusione di poterlo conservare" ("The ninth eclogue sings the pain of the poet cast off his field; the first eclogue, instead, sings the illusion of being able to preserve it." Barra 9).

pastoral world and its instability resulting from the intrusions of violence and conflict. This is more than merely a lament, as the pastoral peace first built up and then fractured. The description of poetry's ineffectuality is itself eminently poetic and the loss of its power as poetry echoes the loss of the pastoral *locus amoenus*. Virgil's pastoral landscape is not a device to step back from and then criticize civil life; rather it is a place, richly nuanced with the indeterminacy of political life, poetry and life in general. Virgil uses the pastoral to return to the city (the sphere of politics) from which Theocritus's shepherds retreat. "Il cammino dei cittadini fuori dalla città (Teocrito) diventa lo sfondo per il cammino dei poeti pastorali verso la città. Così Virgilio sottolinea la novità della sua poesia: il cammino verso la città è il simbolo della scoperta della politica per la poesia." ("The city-dwellers' road out of the city (Theocritus) becomes the background for the road for pastoral poets towards the city. Thus Virgil emphasizes something new in his poetry: the road towards the city becomes the symbol of the discovery of politics through poetry" Schmidt 119). And this sets the stage for the collusion of poetry and politics in the pastoral from medieval didactic and satirical pastorals until Seamus Heaney translates the ninth eclogue and transplants it into turn-of-the-century Ireland.

The messianic eclogue

There is no pastoral poem with a more complex history than Virgil's fourth eclogue. For the greater part of the poem's existence, it was read as predicting the birth of Christ. It essentially made Virgil into something of a prophet, the aura of which continues to haunt his reception today. Tossing together the consul Pollio, Sibylline oracles, the treaty of Brundisium, the golden age, cycle of ages, the birth of a mysterious child, myths of Prometheus and Pandora and other mysterious elements, the poem

fascinates readers but resists interpreters, despite the fact they cannot resist interpreting. Notably for modern scholarship "while classical scholars agree that the poem does not support this Christian reading in its particulars, they nevertheless find difficulty in constructing other, coherent interpretations" (Perkell 13). The cryptic nature of the poem therefore continues to cast Virgil as somewhat of a vatic magician. Christian interpretations of the fourth eclogue fail to please contemporary scholars; they always fail to account, for example, for the neoteric and Alexandrian elements of the poem. However, even when the Christian interpretations of the poem are abandoned or ignored, the 'prophetic nature' of the fourth eclogue continues to influence how pastoral poems are written.[22] An understanding of the various approaches to messianic interpretations illuminates, in fact, the understanding of the pastoral genre, as it exists in Western literature.

Dryden gives the argument to his translation of the fourth eclogue as: "The poet celebrates the birthday of Saloninus, the son of Pollio, born in the consulship of his father, after the taking of Salonæ, a city in Dalmatia. Many of the verses are translated from one of the Sibyls, who prophesied of our Saviour's birth" (Dryden 460). The identification of the poem as a genethliacon, honouring the son of Pollio or the child of Octavia and Antony (who turned out to be a girl) form part of the framework in which the poem is read.[23] Notably, Dryden attributes the messianic element to Virgil's use of

[22] Attempts are still made to connect the fourth eclogue with Jewish or near eastern texts. Cf. Chapter XII of John Joseph Collins' *Seers, Sybils, and Sages in Hellenistic-Roman Judaism (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism* 2001).

[23] Interestingly the Scholia Bernensia glosses *progenies* (Verg. *Ecl.*IV.7) as "Progenies, Saloninus uel Augustus uel Christus uel Marcellus, Octauiae filius" ("The progeny is either Saloninus or Augustus or Christ or Marcellus, the son of Octavia." Hagen 107), to cover all possibilities.

sibylline oracles. This attribution goes back to early Christian writing and has the advantage that it allows individual lines to be interpreted as messianic without needing to incorporate this into a complete reading of the poem. The identification of the Sybil as a prophetess is apparent in the "Oration of Constantine" appended to Eusebius's *Life of Constantine*.[24] The oration, which survives in Greek, gives a full Christian interpretation to the poem. The translation into Greek assists the commentary by making the messianic allusions far more explicit. Compare:

> Οὗτος ἄρ' αἰώνων ἱερὸς στίχος ὤρνυται ἡμῖν·
>
> Ἥκει παρθένος αὖθις, ἄγουσ' ἐρατὸν βασιλῆα.
>
> Magnus ab integro saeclorum nascitur ordo:
>
> Jam redit et virgo; redeunt Saturnia regna.
>
> (Constantinus Col. 455)

"The maiden returns, Saturn's reign returns" becomes "The virgin arrives, bringing in the lovely king."[25] The oration presents the translation as a corrective as it accuses Virgil of obscuring the oracle's message in order to present the poem to a pagan audience. Edward Gibbon comments on Constantine's interpretation:

> Forty years before the birth of Christ, the Mantuan bard, as if inspired by the celestial muse of Isaiah, had celebrated, with all the pomp of oriental metaphor, the return of the Virgin, the fall of the serpent, the approaching birth of a godlike child, the offspring of the great Jupiter, who should expiate the guilt of human kind, and govern the peaceful universe with the virtues of his father; the rise and appearance of a heavenly race, primitive nation throughout the world; and the

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[24] The authorship of this oration is debated.
[25] My translations.

gradual restoration of the innocence and felicity of the golden age. The poet was perhaps unconscious of the secret sense and object of these sublime predictions, which have been so unworthily applied to the infant son of a consul, or a triumvir; but if a more splendid, and indeed specious interpretation of the fourth eclogue contributed to the conversion of the first Christian emperor, Virgil may deserve to be ranked among the most successful missionaries of the gospel. (Gibbon 651-652).

There is considerably irony in Gibbon's remark that a "specious interpretation" could contribute to Constantine's conversion. Gibbon's comment highlights the weight messianic interpretations of the fourth eclogue carry as an 'authentic historical force'[26] in shaping the pastoral literary history, as well as the historical significance of the interpretations themselves.

Yet it is important to understand that there is no single messianic reading of the fourth eclogue.[27] If the possibility of a messianic reading is opened, there remains numerous ways of embarking on a full or partial interpretation. Furthermore, these interpretations invite further questions on Virgil's knowledge of his own revelations and the theological implications that entails. Augustine, in his *De civitate dei,* applies lines 13-14 of the fourth eclogue to Christ while acknowledging that Virgil himself applied the

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[26] "We know other genres, as genres, in their completed aspect, that is, as more or less fixed pre-existing forms into which one may then pour artistic experience. The primordial process of formation lies outside historically documented observation. We encounter epic as a genre that has not only long since completed its development, but one that is already antiquated. With certain reservations we can say the same for any other major genres, even for tragedy. The life they have in history, the life with which we are familiar, is the life they have lived as already completed genres, with a hardened and no longer flexible skeleton. Each of them has developed its own canon that operates in literature as an authentic historical force" (Bakhtin 3).

[27] "Il n'existe pas une exégèse chrétienne de la quatrième Églogue, comme on le dit à l'ordinaire, mais plusieurs. Elles coïncident en ce qu'elles interprètent cette Églogue en fonction du fait chrétien; mais elles s'opposent souvent aussi l'une à l'autre" (Courcelle 294).

lines to someone else. There is an ambiguity concerning Virgil's knowledge towards the verses messianic meaning:

> De quo etiam poeta nobilissimus, poetice quidem, quia in alterius adumbrata persona, veraciter tamen, si ad ipsum referas, dixit:
>
> Te duce, si qua manent sceleris vestigia nostri,
>
> Irrita perpetua solvent formidine terras. (Virgil. Eclog.4, vers.13, 14.)
>
> Ea quippe dixit, quae etiam multum proficientium in virtute justitiae possunt, propter hujus vitae infirmitatem, etsi non scelera, scelerum tamen manere vestigia, quae nonnisi ab illo Salvatore sanantur, de quo iste versus expressus est.
>
> "It is about Him that the most famous poet speaks, poetically indeed, because shaded in another person, yet verily, if you refer it to Him:
>
> With you as a leader, what traces of our crimes remain
>
> Are void, and the earth is freed from everlasting fear.
>
> In which he indicates, that on account of his life's infirmity, even much is possible to accomplished in virtue of righteousness, there remains if not crimes, then traces of crimes, not cured unless by the Saviour, about whom that verse speaks (August. *De civ. D.* X.xxvii; Col. 305).[28]

Augustine does not dwell on Virgil's intentions, but his use of Virgil's lines to illustrate Christ's forgiveness of sins is corrective to Virgil's application of the verses to the son of Pollio (or whomever). It also implies that Virgil received his verses following a Platonic theory of inspiration where the divine inspiration comes without comprehension. Petrarca in his *De Otio Religioso* writes that when Virgil wrote about Christ he wrote

[28] My translation, including the lines of Virgil.

without comprehension (*dicerent ignorantes*).[29] The consequence of this is that, again, it preserves a messianic interpretation without insisting upon a coherent reading. Virgil likely reworked his inspired lines into the genethliacon to make sense of what he scarcely understood; or perhaps his poem only contains brief flickers of revelation. Yet there lies a problem here in the confusion between prophetic and poetic inspiration. This is evident in many places. Isidore, for example, discusses sibyls directly after his chapter on poets and compares the madness (*vesania*) which inspires the Roman vates with the inspiration of the prophets. "Etiam per furorem divini eodem erant nomine, quia et ipsi quoque pleraque versibus efferebant." ("Indeed on account of madness prophets have the same name [as vates], and because they commonly express themselves in verse" Isid. *Etym.*VIII.vii.3-4). But Isidore's conflation of pagan *vates* with the prophets is by no means a given. Isidore perceives prophetic madness as an external force (*vis*) not as a state of mind as in this can connect it with the voice (or spirit) of God which speaks through his prophets. This is fine, but the identification of this 'force' with madness changes the understanding of prophecy,[30] as Hebrew prophets, although sometimes ecstatic, are called to communicate and act effectively and reliably, while Virgil himself is evidently left in a state of darkness. The result is that an understanding of poetic inspiration, essentially pagan and derived from Plato (especially *Ion*) where the poet is in

[29] From: "Et hec quidem ac mille alia de cristo diu ante carnalem eius originem dicta erant et circa ipsum tempus originis repetita sune, quibus vero et eterno Dei filio temporalis fides hominum quereretur ; quod non modo per prophetas "et electos suos, sed per alienigenas, sive sanctos qualis est Iob, ***sive etiam infideles actum est, quid dicerent ignorantes***. Huc enim et illa trahi possunt que Virgilius in Bucolicis de alio loquens ait "Iam redit et Virgo, redeunt saturnia renga, Iam nova progenies celo demittitur alto" (Petrarca 1958 28-29).
[30] NB. The vulgate only uses *vesania* in a negative sense. Cf. "Prophetae eius vesani viri infideles; Sacerdotes eius polluerunt sanctum, iniuste egerunt contra legem," ("Her prophets are mad treacherous men; her priests polluted the holy, they have acted unjustly against the law." Sophonias 3:4) or 2 Peter 2:16 where it translates the Greek "παραφρονίαν." St. Jerome uses *furor* many times for the wrath of god, often paired with *ira,* but not in connection with divine inspiration.

a state of creative madness and does not even necessarily comprehend what he is saying is extended to the Hebrew prophet. Any differences between the *vates* and prophet become difficult to articulate as the terms intersect. Therefore, for Virgil to communicate the divine, not only involves a Christianization of Virgil but a paganization of prophecy. Confirming the sacred through the profane ("prophana sacris confirmare")[31] contaminates the sacred with the profane. The truth in Virgil's poem is first confirmed through its agreement with prophecy. Once the premise that the fourth eclogue is inspired becomes generally accepted, it becomes an authority in itself and is no longer dependent on scripture or the magisterium for its validity. The role of the *vates* is subsumed into the role of prophet without the reader's awareness so that the meaning of prophet is indistinguishable from the *vates*. Thus when Trivet writes in his commentary on the fourth eclogue that "Christus natus est incepit etas aurea" ("Christ's birth begins the golden age" Trivet 121), at the same time he is acknowledging understanding of heaven and Eden that is influenced by the pagan golden age, as represented in Virgil and Ovid. Furthermore, Abelard in his *Introduction to Theology* has Virgil "postmodum in alia ecloga divinam Trinitatem non mediocriter innuens" ("in another eclogue, hinting not lightly at the Holy Trinity" Abelard 1032B). The offending lines are from the eighth eclogue (73-75) and in line 73, he reads "Trina" for "terna". Thus Virgil's poetry is interpreted as not only messianic, but revealing a great deal of the Christian mysteries. Although this interpretation still does not mean that Virgil was aware of the meaning of his words, there is the full shift from using Virgil's poetry to confirm revelation to arguing theologically for an understanding of prophecy, which includes pagan poetry as valid prophetic works. Messianic interpretations are not essential to scholarly work on

[31] From Ascensius commentary on the *Aeneid* cited in (Kallendorf 358).

Virgil's *Bucolica*, but such interpretations carry such a philosophical, theological and historical weight, that their influences are still in effect.[32]

Otia and amor

This study does not attempt to exhaust the themes of Virgil's *Bucolica*, but something deserves to be said regarding the themes of love and leisure. The central reason the genre is called pastoral, is of course between of the presence of shepherds and herdsmen, but the reason for shepherds is the creative fiction that shepherds' lives are those of leisure. One word for pastoral leisure is *otia*, which a ninth-century Carolingian manuscript glosses as "Otia : securitate; felicitate; requie" (*Codex Laudunensis 468.* Fol.18r.). That is, 'freedom from care', happiness and repose, although the Latin meanings are more abstract. It is also a freedom from toil and so renders farmers and anglers inappropriate; shepherding is considered closer to golden age living than the other rural occupations. It is also a freedom from the city and society, greed, cunning and deceit and becomes a pleasant *via contemplativa* fit for musings and philosophical meditations.[33] It is also a way of life that although essential for the pastoral genre, does not make it past the opening lines of Virgil's first eclogue intact (and from then on, the pastoral *otia* is continuously disturbed). The intrusion of civil war and social strife mars the *Bucolica*, but love itself makes its presence felt. The distressed lover of the second eclogue, Corydon, is modeled after Polyphemus of Theocritus *Idyll XI* (who in turn is taken from Homer), and becomes for western literature the archetypal lovelorn shepherd. The passion Corydon bears for Alexis does not invite the censor some modern

[32] For an elucidation of the classical context of the fourth eclogue, see (Gordon Williams 274ff).
[33] Scholars often discuss *otium* (leisure, freedom from the necessity of labour) in relation to the concept of *negotium* (business, employment, the negation of leisure). André's *L'Otium dans la vie morale et intellectuelle romaine, des origines à l'époque augustéenne* (1966) traces the changes in meaning the *negotium-otium* topos undergoes in Roman intellectual history.

commentators on the pastoral seem to expect.[34] The reasons for this are somewhat obvious; firstly, medieval interpretations of Virgil's poetry gave it a sacred flavour that places it above suspicions of perversity and secondly, it was easy enough to allegorize as to obviate the need to handle details that clashed with social mores. Lord Byron's quip, "But Virgil's songs are pure, except that horrid one / Being with 'Formosum Pastor Corydon' " provides an understanding of the poem that lies implicit for most of the poem's history. It is in fact a great irony that the love the poem makes explicit is first obscured by allegory and then, when alluded to or hinted at, is always treated as if it were somewhat implicit or hidden the whole time. That is not to argue that Corydon's love for Alexis is emphatically celebrated in the poem, but to say its nature is not hidden. Donatus, in *Life of Virgil*, writes on the passions of the poet: "libidinis in pueros pronior, quorum maxime dilexit Cebetem et Alexandrum, quem secunda Bucolicorum ecloga Alexim appellat, donatum sibi ab Asinio Pollione, utrumque non ineruditum, Cebetem vero et poetam." ("Virgil's passion was inclined toward boys, of whom Cebes and Alexander he prized the most. Alexander, whom he named Alexis in the second eclogue, was a gift to him from Asinius Pollio. Neither was unlearned and Cebes was verily a poet" Don. *Vit.*9). The Scholia Bernensia, which tends here towards allegory, firstly confirms Donatus's identification, secondly, identifies Alexis with a shepherd in Theocritus and thirdly, following Servius identifies him with Augustus.[35] What follows

[34] NB "Love is a dominant, persuasive, ambivalent motif in the Eclogues. The love which constitutes the cardinal value of Virgil's pastoral ideal is unequivocally not sexual passion" (Boyle 21).

[35] "Sub Alexis *nomine* nomina in hac ecloga tria intellegenda sunt; primo uetus pastor historialiter, quem Theocritus scripsit in amorem pueri arsisse; secundo Virgilius allegorice in puerum Asinii Pollonis, ut Asinio placuisset, qui Transpadanam prouinciam regebat; tertio Virgilius Octauianum superbum uidetur allegorice adolari ut ab eo honoratus fuisset. ("In this eclogue, under the name Alexis, three names ought to be understood: the first is historically an old shepherd, whom, Theocritus wrote, burned with love for a boy; secondly, Virgil refers allegorically to Asinius Pollonus's boy, so that he might please Asinius, who

from this is an allegorical reading where Corydon (Virgil) laments Augustus's (Alexis) inattention or lack of appreciation. This relation between the poet and kingly patron leads to Juan del Encina's interesting paraphrase:

> Coridón, siendo pastor
>
> trobador
>
> muy aficionado al rey,
>
> espejo de nuestra ley,
>
> con amor
>
> desseava su favor;
>
> mas con mucha covardía
>
> no creýa
>
> de lo poder alcançar,
>
> por los montes de salía
>
> cada día
>
> entre sí, solo, a pensar.
>
> Corydon, shepherd troubadour was very fond of the king, the mirror of our law. With love he wished for his favour, but very cowardly he did not believe it possible to achieve it. He wandered through the mountains each day by himself, alone, to think. (Encina "Égloga segunda" 1-12).

Encina transforms "crudelis" (Verg. *Ecl.*II.6) Alexis into King Ferdinand, and he continues to praise his king throughout his translation of Virgil. But for Encina's Corydon, it his own cowardice that prevents him from gaining his king's royal favour,

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governed the Transpadanus Province; thirdly, Virgil seems allegorically to be honouring the victorious Octavian so that he might in turn be honoured by him." Hagen 87).

rather than his king's inattention. There are some attempts made to actually translate Virgil directly, Virgil's "resonant [...] cicadis" (13) becomes "cantar cigarras" (60), although Encina's rhyme scheme makes the poem almost four times as long. Encina adds his own lines both to fit the rhyme scheme and he frequently insert his own remarks, namely in praise of his majesty or sometimes in praise of "los cantos pastoriles" (63). The allegorical reading of the poem in relation to Augustus is transformed to fit in with early sixteenth-century Spain. Corydon's passion is transformed into laudatory homage of King Ferdinand.

The translation shows in the extreme the transformative power of the Virgilian commentators, in effect, to recreate the text. Encina's poem does not strive for a literal rendition but its approach to the poem is grounded in a long tradition of allegorical interpretation and more specifically one where Alexis is identified with a king. Interpretations of Virgil's *Bucolica* have gone through considerable permutations during the history of its reception. Virgil's poems are foundational in establishing what is pastoral. The complexity of the *Bucolica*, compounded with the wide array of interpretative strategies used to approach the texts, ensures that there exists no single key to understanding their meaning. They exhibit a strong influence on western literature, but are elusive and mutable when doing so. They also ensure that no tradition of Virgilian pastoral will ever be complete or exhausted; there will always be room for another layer of interpretation that will utterly change our understanding. If the *Bucolica* can be said to reflect human nature, they reflect the varied personas of the poets, translators and commentators who looked into the poems and have transmitted to us what they saw.

III Virgil's Pastoral Tradition

One consequence of over two thousand years of reception is that Virgil's *Bucolica* have become a rich depository for the poet who turns to them for profit. And poets still return to the *Bucolica* for inspiration. This chapter focuses on twentieth-century Virgilian pastoral, partially to lead into the following chapters, but also in a response to the claim, frequently made, that "Pastoral is no longer a living literary mode, even if by stretching the term a little it is possible to find one or two twentieth-century examples" (Jenkyns 174). It is often claimed that the pastoral is or has become conventional or static, "e pur si muove."[36] In fact, more so than other poetic genres, the Virgilian pastoral has profitably adapted itself into modern poetics.[37] And the pastoral has primarily survived due to its adaptability. The modern poets who have written Virgilian pastorals have read Virgil's *Bucolica* in a different manner than most predecessors. Their poems not only return to Virgil, but to the tradition of the Virgilian pastoral in all its permutations. These poems often make uses of Virgil as well as the pastoral tradition as a whole (and often incorporating other traditions as well). But there are some changes which tend to mark the Virgilian pastoral from the modernists and onward.[38]

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[36] "And yet it moves." Galileo supposedly muttered this phrase after the inquisition forced him to recant his belief that the earth resolved around the sun.

[37] NB. However, "Despite multiple permutations and variations, pastoral poetry has proven remarkably durable and consistent in its long journey from ancient Greece and Rome to the culture of modern Europe and America. The bucolic poetry of Tasso, Milton or even Mallarmé is far closer to its classical models that is, say, Shakespearean tragedy to Sophocles or the nineteenth-century novel to Apuleius or Heliodorus" (Segal 3).

[38] On modernists and the break with tradition note that: "It is a commonplace among critics to mention the break with, or negation of, tradition as a central characteristic of modernism, only to discard it as far too general an approach. Of course no one can, strictly speaking, write without tradition. As Edward Schils notes, a writer can have a good deal to say as to which tradition he adopts: 'What he cannot do is become a writer without any tradition at all.' But Emrich's actual approach to modernism shows that he does need the notion of negation in order for his concept of 'literary revolution' to make sense. It seems to me decisive that we are dealing with a negation of prevalent traditions, a process of becoming critically aware of the

Importantly, Virgil's poetry has come from being "quella fonte / che spandi di parlar sì largo fiume"[39] to "a familiar compound ghost." Virgil is less a model to imitate and more a poetic font to tap. But other developments are best examined in praxis lest modern uses of the Virgilian pastoral are reduced to a formula. The purpose of this study remains to describe uses of the Virgilian pastoral as they are found, not prescribe a method of finding them. This approach is necessary as most modern poets recognize Virgil's poetry and its traditions as almost too familiar, and those who do not reject it outright, seek to make it unfamiliar[40], and therefore create poems which, although noticeably Virgilian, are resistant to formulization. Furthermore, a key strength of the Virgilian pastoral is in its resistance to the ossification of its uses.[41] The scholar Giovanni Viperano has pointed to the wealth of offerings contained in the pastoral: "Materia multiplex, vota, gratulationes, laudationes, obtrectationes, altercationes, cohortationes, pollicitationes, conquestiones, gaudia, pompæ, cantus, hilaritates, ioci, & amores : omniaque videri debent ex agris nata, aut educata in agris" ("The subject matter is many layered: prayers, rejoicing, praising, disparagements, disputes, encouragements,

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tradition that constitutes a writer's immediate background and environment, that is, the history out of which he or she emerges. Those traditions, at least during the early stages of modernism, were conceived and fostered by the social, political, and cultural forces of the nineteenth century. Before the heyday of modernism, that heritage had already been under severe attack from one of modernism's most important precursors, Friedrich Nietzsche" (Eysteinsson 53).

[39] ("that font that spreads so wide a river of speech" Dante "Inferno" I.79-80)

[40] Borrowing from Wallace Stevens: "It seems to be a constructive faculty, that derives its energy more from the imagination than from the sensibility. I have spoken of questioning, not of denying. The mind retains experience, so that long after the experience, long after the winter clearness of a January morning, long after the limpid vistas of Corot, that faculty within us of which I have spoken makes its own constructions out of that experience. If it merely reconstructed the experience or repeated for us our sensations in the face of it, it would be the memory. What it really does is to use it as material with which it does whatever it wills. *This is the typical function of the imagination which always makes use of the familiar to produce the unfamiliar*. What these remarks seem to involve is the substitution for the idea of inspiration of the idea of an effort of the mind not dependent on the vicissitudes of the sensibility" (Stevens 165).

[41] "And yet it is not too much of a paradox to suggest, following the example of Virgil's fourth eclogue, that pastoral literature (more, I suspect, than any other kind) has the peculiar tradition of rejecting its traditions in order to renew itself in a more radical and historical context" (O'Loughlin 146).

promises, bewailing, joys, processions, songs, cheerful jokes, jests and loves: and all things that ought to be seen either growing out of the field or being raised in the field" Viperano 144). That is, the pastoral encompasses the immense range of natural human emotion.

Reclining under a shaded beech tree

Michael Longley's poem, "The Beech Tree", marks itself as part of the Virgilian pastoral tradition:

> Leaning back like a lover against this beech tree's
> Two-hundred-year-old pewter trunk, I look up
> Through skylights into the leafy cumulus, and join
> Everybody who has teetered where these huge roots
> Spread far and wide their motionless mossy dance,
> As though I'd begun my eclogues with a beech
> As Virgil does, the brown envelopes unfolding
> Like fans their transparent downy leaves, tassels
> And prickly cups, mast, a fall of vermilion
> And copper and gold, then room in the branches
> For the full moon and her dusty lakes, winter
> And the poet who recollects his younger self
> And improvises a last line for the georgics
> About snoozing under this beech tree's canopy. (Longley "The Beech Tree")

The opening line, with the poet reclining under a beech tree, alludes to Tityrus in the first line of Virgil's first eclogue. But more than this it places itself not only in relation to that

poem, but the traditions of that poem. For Virgil it is Tityrus under the beech tree and for his readers Tityrus is the poet Virgil ("sub persona Virgilium" Servius *Ecl.*I.1). The pastoral shade (*umbra*) here serves its traditional function both as a place of rest and for composing poetry. The poet (Virgil) looking back to the beginning of his first eclogue after finishing his last georgic adds an elegiac chord, unsurprising for those familiar with Longley's poetry. The diction is part colloquial and the meter is clearly reminiscent of Virgil's hexameters. It is a short and lyrical poem, but meditative--not singsong or carpe diem. It is meditative especially in the difficult, polysemous and figurative sense that recalls Virgil's use of "meditaris" (Verg. *Ecl.* I.2). It is not something that Virgil would have written, but it is clearly in his tradition. The reason for this is that the nature of Virgil's poetry ensures that its imitations form not systematic copies, but synthetic constructions incorporating other pastoral and poetic traditions, similar to Virgil's imitations of Theocritus.[42] Servius wrote on Virgil's imitations, "intentio poetae haec est, ut imitetur Theocritum Syracusanum, meliorem Moscho et ceteris qui bucolica scripserunt" ("The poet's intention is to imitate Sicilian Theocritus better than Moschus and the other bucolic poets" Servius *Ecl.*proem). To make better or improve upon necessitates recognizing defects and then fixing them. Whether or not this was Virgil's intention, it indicates that Theocritus was a starting point for Virgil, but not a finishing one. And this is the case with later pastorals, regardless of whether or not they sought to improve upon Virgil. Fontenelle similarly writes: "Virgile, qui, ayant eu devant les yeux l'exemple de Théocrite, s'est trouvé en état d'enrichir sur lui, a fait ses Bergers plus polis

[42] "Avant tout, il convient de faire remarquer que l'imitation de Théocrite par Virgile n'affecte jamais la forme d'un calque systématique; aucune pièce latine ne peut être considérée comme un démarquage pur et simple d'une Idylle théocritéenne. L'imitation se fait toujours, selon un procédé cher aux poètes français de la Renaissance, par contamination" (Martin 189).

et plus agréables" (Fontenelle "Discours sur la nature de l'églogue" 388). Likewise, the example of Virgil serves to 'enrich' his imitators. Returning to "The Beech Tree," the example of Virgil provides a means of poetic enrichment, but it also provides a form of sanction. The poem places Longley "as the latest practitioner of the genre, in dialogue with its past masters" (Heaney 2002 2), and in doing so presents a sense of poetic continuity and thus affirms the continued viability of poetry. The pastoral space becomes a place of retreat, in the sense that it is secure from the mutability and conflicts of the world, and it becomes a place of endurance and stability symbolized in the "Two-hundred-year-old pewter trunk," under which the poet rests. It is with considerable irony that Virgil's poems, faced with all the uncertainties of the Roman civil wars as they intrude upon his Theocritean pastoral, have endured to provide this sense of continuity and security.

Peace and security have a precarious existence in the Virgilian pastoral since its beginning in the Roman civil wars. Along with security, poetry is open to vulnerability. A key statement repeated throughout the pastoral tradition on the power of poets over princes is, "So much power haue they with men of might, / As simple doues when Egles take their flight" (Barclay "The fourth Egloge" 589-590).[43] And the effectiveness of poetry is a perennial concern of the pastoral; although it is not always pessimistically rejected. One form that pastoral poetry takes to ensure its security that is now out of vogue is through a pledge of faith in the monarch. This derives from allegorical readings of Virgil's *Bucolica* in favour of Augustus, as in the poetry of Calpurnius, but it quickly adapts Christian imagery, where the monarch becomes a Christ-like king and shepherd.

[43] Derived from Virgil via Mantuanus, whose eclogue Barclay follows here.

For English letters, Spenser's *The Shepherd's Calendar* is an essential text of this tradition and its overt praise of Queen Elizabeth derives from Clément Marot's eclogues in praise of King Francis. Marot (as Robin) in his "Eglogue au Roy" addresses King Francis, disguised as Pan, and exhorts him to "Escoute ung peu, de ton vert cabinet, / le chant rural du petit Robinet" (Marot "Eglogue au Roy" 13-14).[44] As in allegorical interpretations of Virgil's first eclogue, the ruler is represented as a god and the pastoral is used to represent the humble poet (whose name even is in the diminutive). Furthermore, Marot's poem is truly an appeal for pastoral security as it is an appeal to King Francis for his assistance in the poet's old age. These verses were Englished by Spenser in his "December" as "Hearken awhile, from thy green cabinet, / The rural song of careful Colinet." 17-18). "Careful" means full of care or concerns. Since Spenser's cycle of months represents in part life's journey it is expected that the poem "December" will remind us of the impermanence of life. This poem of Spenser's is not addressed to a monarch, and the change from Marot's poem gives it a more elegiac tone and fatalistic, partially in it the poet lacks the protection of the divine-sanctioned ruler. The lack of august authority for the pastoral emphasizes life and love's impermanence. It eventually leads to the emotions invoked in Mallarmé's complex pastoral "L'après-midi d'un faune: églogue" and especially its final refrain "Couple, adieu; je vais voir l'ombre que tu devins" (116), where pastoral shade (*l'ombre*) collapses into illusion.

Arcady and the golden age

But where the age of a monarch is held in esteem, the Virgilian pastoral can dispel uncertainties. This tradition is evident in Ambrose Philips, who praises the reign of

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[44] This phrase, descriptive of the *locus amoenus*, was adapted for Rosenmeyer's study of Theocritus' poetry and its relation to the pastoral tradition (*The Green Cabinet* 1969).

Queen Anne through allusion to Virgil's praise of Augustus and Spenser's praise of Elizabeth[45]:

> When Virgil thought no shame the Dorick reed
> To tune, and flocks on Mantuan plains to feed,
> With young Augustus name he grac'd his song;
> And Spencer, when amidst the rural throng
> He carol'd sweet, and graz'd along the flood
> Of gentle Thames, made every founding wood
> With good Eliza's name ring around;
> Eliza's name on ev'ry tree was found.
> Since then, thro' Anna's cares at ease we live,
> And see our cattle in full pastures thrive;
> ("The Third Pastoral. *Albino*." 1-10)

Ironically, although this form of pastoral is rooted in allegorical interpretations of Virgil, it dispels the ambiguities and uncertainties of Virgil's poetry, and allegory becomes "a cloake of simplicitie" (Webbe 52) to hide its adulation. But this cloak soon succeeded all too well and pastoral strives for mere simplicity itself and to imitate rustic life, from which follows much of the eighteenth-century debates on pastoral. Although, as Alexander Pope reminds us, the natural lives of these shepherds are still only in their ideal state: "If we copy Nature, it may be useful to take this consideration along with us,

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[45] Purney's *A full enquiry into the true nature of pastoral (1717)* argues for the importance of the Elizabethan period for pastorals: "Queen Elizabeth's Age is to us what Augustus's was to the Latins; we must never hope to have so many noble Genius' adorn any one Age for the future; I might have said, any twenty Ages. Therefore if any English Dialect survives to the World's End, 'twill certainly be theirs; and 'twill be prudence in any After-writer to draw his Language as near theirs as possible; that if theirs are understood a thousand Years hence, his may too" (Purney 63).

that pastoral is an image of what they call the Golden age" (Pope 1977 298). But this version of the pastoral is also an unmodern one, as both old humanist and postmodern readers tend now not to trust absolute rulers and care not for golden ages. Anthony Barnett's poem, "Peace," is however, as close as any modern poem comes to an idyllic pastoral:

> This scene is pastoral.
>
> A flock of sheep grazing
> in the meadow
>
> as an ornament.
>
> And the daffodils beneath the trees. (Barnett "Peace")

Barnett's poem is a sparse portrait (idyll) of a pastoral scene and the title tells us that it is peaceful, but it is difficult not to notice the absence of the shepherd or that the flock itself seems "an ornament". It is pastoral in the fullness of simplicity, but it nevertheless illuminates its own impossibility, and we cannot fail to note that daffodils are poisonous. Anthony Hecht's "Eclogue of the Shepherd and the Townie" is an eclogue that renews the old pastoral debate between city and country. In the poem, the townie states the trouble with the golden age or messianic vision:

> It is the dream of a shepherd king or child,
> And is without all blemish except one:
> That it supposes all virtue to stem

From pure simplicity. (Hecht "Eclogue of the Shepherd and the Townie" 55-58)

That is, simplicity itself, the hallmark of the pastoral ideal, is accounted too small to affect a cure for the ills of the world.

Another short and meditative Virgilian pastoral is George Oppen's poem, titled simply "Eclogue", which collapses Virgil's *Bucolica*, especially the fourth eclogue, into sixteen brief lines:

The men talking
Near the room's center. They have said
More than they had intended.

Pinpointing in the uproar
Of the living room

An assault
On the quiet continent.

Beyond the window
Flesh and rock and hunger

Loose in the night sky
Hardened into soil

Tilting of itself to the sun once more, small

Vegetative leaves

And stems taking place

Outside---O small ones,

To be born!

(Oppen "Eclogue")

The poem is recognizably pastoral, but only in a highly elusive manner. The room the men are talking in is a pastoral space disturbed by "Flesh and rock and hunger" outside. The scene's "soil" and "vegetative leaves" are rustic details, and as with Virgil's fourth eclogue, a child is addressed, "To be born!" The poem's evocative power would almost be dispelled by too detailed an interpretation. The messianic power of Virgil's fourth eclogue and the civil discord of his first and ninth are tapped, but without confrontation or resolution. At the end of this poem, we recall "modo nascenti puero" ("the boy at his birth" Verg. *Ecl.*IV.8),[46] but prophecy is replaced with a lacuna. Oppen's eclogue extends Virgil into a late modernist poetics and a politics of instability.[47] But the social and political disturbances that the poem touches upon reach not only to Virgil but also to the complex history of messianic and imperial interpretation attached to the poem. This is more evident if the poem is compared with Virgil's successors. For following is from the song of Faunus, sung by Ornytus in the first eclogue of Calpurnius Siculus (possibly a

[46] My translation.

[47] An aside: Of particular interest in the history of political uses of the eclogue form are the works of 18th-century anti-slavery poets, who adapted the form to protest outrages in the West Indies, America, Africa, India, and Ireland. See especially: *West-Indian Eclogues* (Rushton, Edward. London: printed for W. Lowndes, and J. Philips, 1787) and *Poems chiefly on slavery and oppression, with notes and illustrations* (Mulligan, Hugh. London: printed for W. Lowndes, 1788.) Similarly, Southey's *Botany Bay Eclogues in Poems* (1797) draw attention to the plights of convicts, whom he represents as victims of the state.

Neronian poet), and it skilfully adapts Virgil's eclogues for political and prophetic effects:

> vos populi gaudete mei: iuvat omne vagetur
> securo custode pecus nocturnaque pastor
> claudere fraxinea nolit praesepia crate:
> non tamen insidias praedator ovilibus ullas
> afferet aut laxis abiget iumenta capistris.
> aurea secura cum pace renascitur aetas
> et redit ad terras tandem squalore situque
> alma Themis positi iuvenemque beata sequuntur
> saecula, maternis causam qui uicit Iulis.
> dum populos deus ipse reget, dabit impia victas
> post tergum Bellona manus spoliataque telis
> in sua vesanos torquebit viscera morsus
> et, modo quae toto civilia distulit orbe,
> secum bella geret: nullos iam Roma Philippos
> deflebit, nullos ducet captiua triumphos;
>
> Rejoice, ye people who are mine! All the herd may stray and yet no care trouble its guardian: the shepherd may neglect to close the pens at night with wattles of ash-wood—yet no robber shall bring his craftily plot upon the fold, or loosing the halters drive the bullocks off. Amid untroubled peace, the Golden Age springs to a second birth; at last kindly Themis, throwing off the gathered dust of her mourning, returns to the earth; blissful ages attend the youthful prince who

pleaded a successful case for the Iuli of the mother town (of Troy). While he, a very god, shall rule the nations, the unholy War-Goddess shall yield and have her vanished hands bound behind her back, and, stripped of weapons, turn her furious teeth into her own entrails; upon herself shall she wage the civil wars which of late she spread o'er all the world: no battles like Philippi shall Rome lament henceforth: no triumph of her captive self shall she celebrate. (Calp. *Ecl*.I.37-49)[48]

The song of Faunus (who stands for Nero or another emperor) heralds a new golden age of peace. Particularly, the song calls the end of civil war (*civilia bella*), symbolized in the Battle of Philippi and echoing Virgil's first eclogue ("discordia ciuis" Verg. *Ecl*.I.71). *Virgo*, the maiden justice of Virgil's fourth eclogue returns, but here she is named Themis. The differences between Calpurnius and Oppen reflect some modernist changes in the manner Virgil's eclogues are interpreted. Notably, both Calpurnius's and Oppen's poems address the same political and prophetic elements of Virgil's *Bucolica*. Calpurnius uses these elements to celebrate the reign of his emperor and thereby provides a resolution to Virgil's poetry, incorporating his poetics into a new order of peace. It is essentially a pastoral of affirmation, but also one of retreat. It affirms Nero (or whomever) as presiding over a new golden age, but then it retreats into this golden age, attempting to disable further political considerations. It reduces the Virgilian pastoral to flattery, of course, but more than that, it establishes hope in the existing order. And it is best appreciated as poetry of hope rather than complacency or assurance. And whether it is in the coming of the messiah, the praise of a king or emperor or another new golden age, much pastoral is poetry of hope. Oppen's poem, on the other hand, does not oppose this form of pastoral directly but, like many modern pastorals, calls attention to the

[48] Text and translation from Duff's *Minor Latin Poets* (1982).

absences in Virgil's poetry. In Oppen's "Eclogue", there is no messiah or new king, and there is no mention that there ought to be. Instead, we are reminded that these things are present in Virgil only through their absence in Oppen. Oppen's approach to the Virgilian pastoral is to exploit the ambiguities and instabilities in Virgil's *Bucolica* and to identify with the absence of order or meaning in Virgil's poetry.

There is more to be said regarding these absences in the tradition of the Virgilian pastoral. Oppen's poem is not new in uncovering nuances and ambiguities in Virgil's poetry. George Crabbe's "The Village: Book I" for example, concerns itself with the demoralization of the pastoral and the absence of a new golden age. But where in Oppen the absence of a golden age resists final significance, in Crabbe's poem it results in a demoralized and sorrowful vision:

> No shepherds now in smooth alternate verse,
>
> Their country's beauty or their nymphs' rehearse;
>
> Yet still for these we frame the tender strain,
>
> Still in our lays fond Corydons complain,
>
> And shepherds' boys their amorous pains reveal,
>
> The only pains, alas! they never feel (Crabbe "The Village: Book I" 9-14)

The shepherds of Virgil return as Crabbe's poor labourers; they are denied even the unhappy love of Corydon. The words toil, labour and pain repeat throughout the poem against the expected *otia* of the Virgilian pastoral. Here rustics are degraded and dejected. Because an idealized pastoral is held in hostile opposition, the poem purports a realistic vision. The suffering in Crabbe's poem feeds upon the golden age pastoral and

contrasted happiness to highlight the misery of an English country village. The pastoral muse is scorned for her ignorance: "Yes, thus the Muses sing of happy swains, / Because the Muses never knew their pains" (21-22). Into the end, the poem can only painfully pulls away from the bucolic mode in order to enter the eighteenth-century English hamlet. In both Oppen's and Crabbe's poems, there is a conflict between golden age ideals and the forces that disturb it; this is in essence a Virgilian mode in that it works against its own conventions and ideals. It intrinsically represents the agonistic relationship between the ideal and the actual pastoral spheres. Although poems such as Calpurnius's first eclogue effectively work in this same agonistic sphere, the difference here is between whether the idealized vision or the essential conflict receives emphasis.

The modern use of the pastoral in John Kinsella's "An Aerial View of Wheatlands in Mid Autumn"[49] continues with Crabbe's contrast between actual rural life and the pastoral ideal. The poem dwells upon on the Australian farmland and moves through images like "Bleats of sheep on their way to be slaughtered, / The drift as a neighbour sprays weedicide" (17-18). At one point, the landscape is compared with the Virgilian pastoral:

> Forget that the land looks scarred and tortured:
>
> That call for order in the rural scene,
>
> For Virgil's countryside satiated
>
> With weighty corn and Campanian wine,

[49] Kinsella's poem alluded to the *Georgics* rather than the *Eclogues* but its concern with the undisturbed pastoral space makes it applicable to a pastoral study. In any case, allusions to Virgil's *Georgics* are frequent in pastorals and the division between the two books is not always clear-cut.

And consumed by olives and wealthy swine,

Is not the harmony of this decade. (23-28)

These lines allude to Virgil's second georgic mediated through Cecil Day Lewis' translation:

This land of ours has never been ploughed by bulls fire-breathing

Nor sown with dragon's teeth;

It has never known a harvest of serried helmeted spearmen;

Rather is it a country fulfilled with heavy corn and

Campanian wine, possessed by olives and prosperous herds.

(Day Lewis II.140-144)

The pleasing and fruitful landscape of Virgil's *Georgics* is contrasted with Kinsella's tortured Wheatland. The poem makes the statement that the pastoral locus of modern Australia is not an Arcadian vision.

Although there is no single method of unsettling upon the pastoral, there are endless possibilities for "traces of deception" ("uestigia fraudis" Verg. *Ecl.*IV.31) to intrude upon the pastoral vision. The Virgilian pastoral represents a golden age or idyllic Arcadia where "Here we feel not the penalty of Adam." But at the same time there is the whisper, the "greenest arcadias have ghosts too" (Auden 15). Pastoral poetry holds in one hand nature, leisure and rustic simplicity and in the other artifice, troubles, and Alexandrine complexity. Civil war is a key source of disruption for the genre, and its evil and uncertain nature is always behind the pastoral praises of emperors, kings and queens as symbols of order and stability. Even in the simplest pastorals there is the fear of the

impious soldier ("impius [...] miles" Verg. *Ecl.*I.70"). The soldier, as a source of trouble, comes to full force in Andrew Marvell's The Nymph Complaining for the Death of her Fawn":

The wanton troopers riding by

Have shot my fawn and it will die

Ungentle men! They cannot thrive

To kill thee. Thou ne'er didst alive

Them any harm: alas nor could

Thy death yet do them any good. (1-6)

Marvell dwells on the senseless injustice of the "wanton troopers" at the beginning of the poem, intertwining *discordia ciuis* with the pastoral elegy. The poem uses an elegiac strain to establish an emotive connection with social discord lurking in the background of the poem. In English poetry, the combination of pastoral elegy and civil discord reached its highest form in Milton's "Lycidas". These two functions are made explicit in the poem's 1645 preface: "In this monody the author bewails a learned friend, unfortunately drowned in his passage from Chester on the Irish Seas, 1637. And by occasion foretells the ruin of our corrupted clergy then in their height" (Milton "Lycidas"). Milton's poem is a synthesis of Italian, English and classical pastorals, and aside from Virgil's *Bucolica*, no other pastoral poem has been so victimized by allusion hunters. The clergy are conventionally described as wolves gorging on the Christian flocks:

The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed,

But swoll'n with wind, and foul contagion spread:

Besides what the grim wolf with privy paw

Daily devours apace, and nothing said,

But that two-handed engine at the door,

Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more. (Milton "Lycidas" 125-131)

The prophetic is not new to the pastoral but it is noteworthy how Milton ties it with the politics of his day. Aside from the religious allegorical and pastoral elegy, it is possible to find a number a number of pastoral streams in the poem; interpreting the poem in terms of Milton's poetic career and a step towards writing his epic is one. No other pastoral poem has come as close to Virgil's *Bucolica* in terms of provoking interest while denying a completeness of understanding and unity of meaning.

The prophetic turn

Milton's "Lycidas" illustrates the fine line many pastorals cut between the prophetic (from the Hebraic tradition) and the satiric, in terms of social criticism and confrontation. And pastoral allegory quickly lends itself social commentary. This is the case with W.B. Yeats's "Shepherd and Goatherd", published in 1919 and loosely modeled on Virgil's fifth eclogue. It takes the form of a pastoral elegy, but the elegy for the dead youth in turn comments upon the First World War:

Shepherd. He that was best in every country sport

And every country craft, and of us all

Most courteous to slow age and hasty youth,

Is dead.

Goatherd. The boy that beings my griddle-cake

Brought the bare news.

Shepherd. He had thrown the crook away

And died in the great war beyond the sea.

(Yeats "Shepherd and Goatherd" 20-27)

The image of the youth's death overseas is laden with political implications, especially for a poem published in the same volume as "An Irish Airman foresees his Death." It calls into question the Irish peasant's death in a far-off war. It also vaguely calls to mind Theocritus where the sea contrasts with the homely pastoral:

ἐντὶ δάφναι τηνεί, ἐντὶ ῥαδιναὶ κυπάρισσοι,

ἔστι μέλας κισσός, ἔστ᾽ ἄμπελος ἁ γλυκύκαρπος,

ἔστι ψυχρὸν ὕδωρ, τό μοι ἁ πολυδένδρεος Αἴτνα

λευκᾶς ἐκ χιόνος ποτὸν ἀμβρόσιον προΐητι.

τίς κα τῶνδε θάλασσαν ἔχειν καὶ κύμαθ᾽ ἕλοιτο;

There are bays and slender cypresses; there is dark ivy, and the sweet-fruited wine, and cold water, which Etna puts forth for me from her white snowfields, a draught divine. Who would rather choose the sea and its waves than these?

(Theoc *Idyl.*XI.45-49)

Yet Yeats's shepherd abandons the pastoral place, not for any Galatea, but for war. For his shepherd the *discordia civis* does not come to him, rather he goes to it. In this way, the poem distances itself from the tradition of allegorical celebration of the ruling powers. It represents the turn away from the form of Virgilian pastoral which seeks comfort in stable rule. Rather it plays an elegiac cord against the social order.

Francesco Petrarca's sixth eclogue (entitled "Pastorum Pathos") also turns the pastoral against the social order, particularly through exploiting the tension between the

Virgilian and Christian conceptions of the shepherd. It is intrinsically different from modern pastoral, primarily because its concern with religious institutions is no longer as widespread. Its use of the amoebaean form is specifically medieval, as it is more in line with a medieval debate-poem than a song-contest or dialogue. Yet the poem shows the satirical nature of the Virgilian pastoral in its most developed form[50] and is therefore useful, if only for contrast with modern approaches to the pastoral. The two speakers are Pamphilus and Mitio, whom a commentator tells us represent St. Peter and Pope Clement VI.[51] The poem begins with Pamphilus speaking, "Quis nemus omne vagis lacerandum prebuit hircis?" ("Who has neglected my woodlands, permitting the ravaging he-goats / Wantonly thus to waste them" VI.1)[52]. The he-goats are the corrupt cardinals and the woodlands are the Church, entrusted to the shepherd (*pastor*) Mitio. Pamphilus uses pastoral imagery to point to the sufferings inflicted on the church (the flock, *grex*). He contrasts Mitio's abandonment of the flock to the ravages to the he-goats to his own defence of his flock, mentioning the persecutions under Nero:

> [Pamphilus:] Nonne ego pastor eram, dum trux, turpissime rerum,
>
> Nereus, aduerso pascens in uertice tauros,
>
> Transversum deiecit humi, et pecus omne parabat
>
> Vi rapere? obluctor; donec violentior ille

---

[50] Helen Cooper notes, "The Petrarchan eclogue is the end of a development: it could be imitated – unfortunately it was – but not taken further" (Cooper 46). Most of Petrarca's eclogues are simply awful.

[51] From the commentary of Francesco Piendibeni da Montepuliano: "Collocutores etiam sunt Pamphylus et Mitio. Pamphylus est Sanctus Petrus dictus a *Pan* quod est *totus* et *phylos* quod est *amor*, quia totus in amore Christi fuit. Mitio intelligitur Clemens papa Quintus plurimum voluptatibus indulgens, a Mitione Terrentiano cognominatus, de quo Commedia quarta Terrentij bene legitur" ("The speakers are Pamphylus and Mitio. Pamphylus is Saint Peter, who is called *Pan* which means "whole" and *phylos,* which means love, because he was fully in Christ's love. Mitio is understood to be Pope Clement V who indulged in many pleasures; he is named after Terence's Mitio, the main character of Terence's fourth comedy" Petrarca 1906 272).

[52] The Latin here and after follows Mattucci's edition. The translation is from Bergin (1974).

Exuit hirsutam tunicam, ***nudumque reliquit***. [my emphasis]

Vilest of men, was I not then the shepherd when truculent Nero,

Grazing his bulls on the opposite summit, attacked me and cast me

Down to the ground for I stood in his way when he, being stronger,

Stripped off my shaggy tunic and left me lying there naked (VI.46-50)

The end of line 50 is reminiscent of Virgil's first eclogue: "hic inter densas corylos modo namque gemellos / spem gregis, a, silice in ***nuda*** conixa ***reliquit***" ("Here in thick hazels, laboring on a bare rock, / She left the flock's one hope, her twins just born" Verg. *Ecl.*I.14-15). Thus Pamphilus draws a parallel between the sufferings of the Church and the sufferings of Virgil's eclogues. In contrast, Mitio speaks for self-interest and attempts to create for himself the *locus amoenus* that is denied his flocks. Mitio is presented as, "Multa canens que dictat amor, nec crastina curans" ("Singing the songs love bids me and taking no thought for the morrow." VI.79). He tenuously grasps for a carefree existence. He calls for the idyllic carefree existence representative of the pastoral world, but only through ignoring the sufferings inflicted on the flock. In effect, Mitio abandons the role of the Christian shepherd to enjoy his bucolic leisure. That Mitio gives "no thought for the morrow" ("nec crastina curans") is a subtle hint at the infernal fate that awaits him. Yet he still resists the woes involved in worrying about the future:

[Mitio:] Quid, pater, obscuris animos ambagibus imples?

Longaque nunc seris quid litibus otia frangis?

Desine iam mestis alacres incessere verbis.

Dic, age: dic breviter quicquid fert impetus et mens.

Father, why must you fill my mind with problems so vexing?

Why must you trouble my lengthy repose with your tardy objections?

Cease to annoy happy folk with your words of ill omen. Come, tell me,

What do you want? Pray reveal the thrust of your purpose – but briefly.

(VI.117-120)

Mitio sees in Pamphilus's admonitions only disruptions to his own leisure (*otia* 118). He is content to ignore the sufferings of the flock, as long as his own pastoral grace is preserved. In fact, Mitio claims (98-105) to have made a satanic alliance to preserve his own wealth and leisure, regardless of the destruction of his flocks. But Pamphilus is relentless in his objections to Mitio's abandonment of pastoral duty:

[Pamphilus:] Es meritus post vincla crucem, post verbera ferrum.

Supplicium breue! Quin potius sine fine dolores

Carceris eterni, vel si quid tristius usquam est,

Serue infide, fugax, dominoque ingrate benigno.

Cross after fetters and iron after rods-such treatment would suit you-

No—it would be too little. Say, rather, to match your merit,

Torment unending in durance eternal—unless there's some worse thing.

Ingrate! Evasive servant, untrue to a kindly master! (VI.121-124)

Throughout the poem, this contrast between pastoral retreat and pastoral duty grows. Pamphilus threatens: "Vive late, gaude vitij maioris ad umbram." (Live out your lavish life in the dark of your increasing vices" VI.174). The pastoral shade, in which at the beginning of Virgil's *Bucolica* we find Tityrus happily reposing, becomes a "shade of vice" (*vitti* [...] *umbram*) slowly enveloping the shepherd. The ideals of Christ the Shepherd as protector of His flocks come into conflict with the expectations of pastoral

ease. Yet the poem sustains its power, and rather than deteriorating into crude satire or didacticism, it holds in a state of tension the conflicting conceptions of the pastoral. Mitio desires wealth and is corrupt, but it is desire for the happy life and his passivity to the corruption of others that receives emphasis. It is possible to empathize with Mitio's desire for easy living, even as we see him desert his calling to share in the pain and sufferings of the True Shepherd. Mitio rejects his call to bear the cross ("gestare crucem" 125) in favour of the tempting call of Arcady: "Letus agam, moriarque dolens" ("Life will be happy for me and death a sorrow" 175). And it is only reluctantly that we accept, at Pamphilus's insistence: "Infelix, sic noscis herum? dum tutus in umbra / Stare putas, aderit, prevertens gaudia luctu." ("Little you know of your lord. Hapless wretch, while you lie in the shadow, / Thinking yourself secure, he will come, changing joy to sorrow" 207-208). Pamphilus' insistence is that to truly enjoy the green pastures one must not fear the valley of the shadow of death, but rather walk through it in obedience to one's calling. Still, Mitio's pastoral happiness cannot escape from this forever, for his Arcadia is transient, hollow and artificial. In this way, Petrarca's poem contrasts the Christian and Virgilian conceptions of the shepherd and is representative of the tradition than that incorporates the biblical into the pastoral. But it also fully realizes the tension between those two conceptions of pastoral and emphasizes their incompatibility. It is a pastoral form no longer practiced for the simple reason that its conceptions of the classical and Christian shepherd are no longer held (at least in the same manner).

Moving from Petrarca's eclogue to Robert Hass's "Berkeley Eclogue" is a dramatic shift, but as Petrarca's poem brings to the Virgilian pastoral social concerns so

does Hass's poem. However, where Petrarca represents a decidedly fourteenth-century worldview, Hass is excitingly modern. In Hass's poem there are two voices, but it is difficult to tell if they are two speakers or an internal monologue. The poem is colloquial but it is not dramatic. It is slightly philosophical but more playful. There are many facets to the various modulations occurring throughout the poem, but what it most relevant here is its relation to the Virgilian pastoral. The poem begins:

> Sunlight on the streets in afternoon
> and shadows on the faces in the open-air cafés
> *What for?* Wrong question. You knock
> without knowing that you knocked. The door
> opens on a century of clouds and centuries
> of centuries of clouds. The bird sings
> among the toyons in the spring's diligence
> of rain. *And then what? Hand on your heart.*
> *Would you die for spring? What would you die for?*
> *Anything?* (1-10)

As in Virgil's first eclogue, the word shadow is re-echoed throughout the poem and signals the pastoral, here it is transformed into a California café. The pastoral mode is evoked primarily for its meditative aspects. The "toyons" denote distinctly Californian vegetation. The inner voice represented by italics thunders out "*What for?*" and question the purpose of this caffeinated *locus amoenus*. "*What would you die for?*" makes the question both vital and moral. Like Petrarca's poem it challenges he complacency of the Virgilian pastoral, but where Petrarca challenges it with the alternative image of the

Christian shepherd, Hass challenges it with an inner conflict between the simple pleasures of the café and the causes and concerns of the larger world. The inner voice asks:

> [...]   *You want to sing?*
> Tra-la. Empty and he wants to sing.
> A pretty river, but there were no fish.
> Smart fish. They will be feeding for a while.
> *He wants to sing* . Yes, poverty or death.
> *Piety or death, you meant, you dope*. You fool, (14-19)

The inner voice taunts him to sing but the speaker's song comes out small and trivial. Pressed he will sing about larger themes such as "poverty or death." Poverty and piety are thematically related, but their opposition here implies that the first is a poverty of social injustice and the second of humility. The two voices throughout the poem clash the trivial with larger social concerns:

> *You can skip this part*. The moths, the apples,
> and the morning news. Apartheid, terror,
> boys in a jungle swagging guns. *Injustice*
> *in tropical climates is appalling,*
> *and it does do you credit to think so*. (39-43)

The inner voice takes a tone of self-congratulation, such thoughts might give credit but they do little good. The contemplative and poetic life of the café is held in tension with the injustices it can think about but not change. This tension is more immanent as it turns from global affairs to more immediate social ills:

[...] She cried.

Her mother hit her. Then it seemed like blood.

A flood of tears, then. You remembered

never to interfere. It humiliates them.

They beat the child again when they get home. (76-80)

These lines attempt to justify inaction at a scene of abuse immediately witnessed. The excuse for inaction hints more at guilt than justification. The poem ends with the word "*Anything?*" (169), which is reminiscent of the first question. Much is addressed but little is resolved. Even the identity (or identities) of the voices of the poem remains uncertain. But the issue of complacency in art is raised. The strain of Virgilian pastoral where the good king reigns and the happy shepherd sings is implicated for its retreat from social concerns. As in Petrarca's poem, the pastoral retreat from the world is challenged, but the moral considerations are translated into late twentieth-century terms.

The modern eclogue makes use of the varied traditions of the Virgilian pastoral, but it also naturalizes these traditions in a modern poetics. Northrop Frye said: "Poetry can be made out of other poems, novels out of other novels. Literature shapes itself" (Frye 1957 97). And the Virgilian pastoral survives as it becomes a composite element in new pastoral poetry. If it is conventional, its conventions are neither those of ancient pastoral nor those of any other era. The modern pastoral eclogue is an organic development in an ancient and enduring tradition; it is not bound by past generic constraints but led by an understanding of what the genre has to offer. Modern pastoral is not based upon following certain rules, as much eighteenth-century pastoral was, but is more openly engaged with the tradition. Rather than follow Virgil's poems as a model,

modern poets tends to treat him as a fellow poet to elaborate on or critique. As the modern pastoral is a living and organic tradition, its nuances and complexities will only suffer if an attempt is made to reduce it to a more rigid description. But with some of its features and uses in mind, more detailed close readings will provide an estimate of the full potentiality of the modern Virgilian pastoral.

IV Louis MacNeice and the 1930s Pastoral

In the 1930s Louis MacNeice wrote four pastoral eclogues: "An eclogue for Christmas", "Eclogue by a five-barred gate", "Eclogue from Iceland" and "Eclogue between the motherless." As modern pastoral eclogues, MacNeice's poems are unusually long, but this is not so for the tradition of satirical pastorals that reached its zenith in the pastorals of Baptista Mantuanus, and to which category MacNeice's poems clearly belong. Temporally, the poems belong distinctly to 1930s Europe, but geographically they are estranged (although place-names occur they are no more fixed that Virgil's geographically uncertain Italy and Arcadia). The lack of national identity in MacNeice's eclogues, although it contrasts, for example, with the pastoral eclogues of Robert Frost or Seamus Heaney, demonstrates a common advantage for the poet turning to the classics: they allow an escape from national and ethnic borders.[53] The classics are our common heritage but their culture is not ours. Virgil's *Bucolica* and the pastoral tradition provide a point of comparison, a common ground sometimes neutral and sometimes contested to build upon. On the other hand, MacNeice's eclogues display a distinctly Irish feature in their independent treatment of Virgilian pastoral themes.[54] Although his poems are formally similar to Virgil's *Bucolica*, especially the first and ninth eclogues, they only obliquely allude to Virgil's poetry. In MacNeice's poems, Virgil's poetics is thoroughly internalized, more so even than with other classically trained poets.

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[53] "A user of Latin can construct and lay claim to linguistic communities in ways fundamentally different from users of a (nationalist) vernacular precisely because of the multiple ownership of the language (which signals allegiances other than the nationalist or ethnic" (Bloomer 211).
[54] "First, from the earliest times [in Irish literature] there has been a high degree of independence in employing classical themes, as can be seen as clearly in the early medieval versions of the Odyssey, as in Joyce's Ulysses" (Stanford 86).

An eclogue for Christmas

Seamus Heaney in his lecture on the pastoral eclogue comments upon the difference between MacNeice and Virgil in "An eclogue for Christmas":

> No Tityrus or Meliboeus here, no kids in baskets or reed pipes, and yet as in Virgil's first and ninth eclogues, the road to town is still the meeting place and the ones who meet and talk are every bit as shadowed by disastrous times as Virgil's goatherds ever were; neither of MacNeice's protagonists is heading into exile but each is alienated and angst-ridden, and the subject of their conversation is the threatened state of the country. Economic depression, collapsing confidence in traditional faiths and institutions, revolution on the horizon at home, war on the horizon abroad the familiar 1930s backdrop is ever so slightly de-familiarised by the decidedly classical word 'eclogue' in the title and by the conventional utterance, the unapologetically literary arc described by the seven simple words that open the poem: 'I meet you in an evil time.' (Heaney 2003 19)

Tityrus and Meliboeus in fact are transformed into two speakers denoted 'A' and 'B', both are featureless expect that B is from the country and A the town. They are marked as everyman and no-man, they represent each and no individual member of the unnumbered masses. The title and the setting of the poem reduce the celebration of the coming of the Saviour to a demoralized holiday, which is a subtle response to the messianic allegory of Virgil's fourth eclogue. The poem continues:

> B. The evil bells
>
> Put out of our heads, I think, the thought of everything else.
>
> A. The jaded calendar revolves,

> Its nuts need oil, carbon chokes the valves,
>
> The excess sugar of a diabetic culture
>
> Rotting the nerve of life and literature;
>
> Therefore when we bring out the old tinsel and frills
>
> To announce that Christ is born among the barbarous hills
>
> I turn to you whom a morose routine
>
> Saves from the mad vertigo of being what has been. (2-11)

The bells, "old tinsel and frills" have all become rotten and Christmas itself seems to signal the evil times. The year becomes jaded and mechanical, which signals the disruption to the natural order, an old pastoral motif. With nature, life and literature turn to rot and sink into industrialized decay. Like Virgil's Meliboeus, the speakers have nowhere to turn "when your towns and town-bred thoughts / collapse" (15-16), for "One place is as bad as another." (18). There is no *deus* or *Roma* to provide sanctuary for these shepherds. Celebrating Christmas for them is meaningless and routine. The essential meaning is lost, but the decay itself is rusted and dull, in contrast with the phantasmagoria representing the collapse of civilization of Eliot's *The Wasteland.* A philosophical edge cuts through the speakers' self-reflection. 'A' speaks as if aware of the hollowness of his identity:

> [...] I have not been allowed to be
>
> Myself in flesh or face, but abstracting and dissecting me
>
> They have made of me pure form, a symbol or a pastiche,
>
> Stylised profile, anything but soul and flesh:

And that is why I turn this jaded music on

To forswear thought and become an automaton. (34-39)

The speaker is analyzed, philosophized and studied to the point of meaningless abstraction. There is no identity left in a world of endless social and psychological theorization that forgets the subject is essential human and partly spiritual. The brain itself seemingly ceases to function: "A Mind that does not think, if such a thing can be, / Mechanical Reason, capricious Identity." (70-71). "Capricious" indicates both mercurial and performs an etymological play (Latin *caper*, goat) on the speaker's status as a herdsman.[55] B of the country speaks:

Women in the forties with terrier and setter who whistle and

swank

Over down and plough and Roman road and daisied bank,

Half-conscious that these barriers over which they stride

Are nothing to the barbed wire that has grown round their

pride. (42-47)

The scene represents an amalgamation of pastoral scenes from Virgil's roadside meeting-place to a clearly English pastoral. The phrase "daisied bank" appears throughout English pastoral verse but is most likely to recall for the reader of English poetry Thomas Hardy's "Milkmaid" or Samuel Johnson's *Life of Gray*, where it presented as an example of distasteful grammar. The barbwire hints at the closing-in of the pastoral but also

[55] Cf. on the word egloga and the goat-song, "Egloga dicitur quasi egaloga, qui ego dicitur capro, logos sermo. Inde egloga, dicitur sermo de capris." ("*Eclogue* is derived from *egaloga*, from *ego* for goat and *logos* for speech. Therefore, *eclogue* refers to 'the speech of goats.' " My translation. From a ninth-century MS Vita Gudianca II quoted in Cooper 1974 364).

alludes to coming war. A panorama of the countryside presents the overwhelming malaise:

> A. In the country they are still hunting, in the heavy shires
> Greyness is on the fields and sunset like a line of pyres
> Of barbarous heroes smoulders through the ancient air
> Hazed with factory dust and, orange opposite, the moon's glare,
> Goggling yokel-stubborn through the iron trees,
> Jeers at the end of us, our bland ancestral ease; (52-60)

The sunset scene is reminiscent of "et iam summa procul uillarum culmina fumant, / maioresque cadunt altis de montibus umbrae." ("Already rooftops in the distance smoke, / And lofty hills let fall their lengthening shade" Verg. *Ecl.*I.82-83) at the end of Virgil's first eclogue. The landscape mocks the speakers and the pastoral *otia* becomes a complacent and fruitless "bland ancestral ease." Pastoral life is represented by an atrophying country aristocracy.

> B: The country gentry cannot change, they will die in their shoes
> From angry circumstance and moral self-abuse,
> Dying with a paltry fizzle they will prove their lives to be
> An ever-diluted drug, a spiritual tautology. (99-102)

Society has become spiritually and morally bankrupt which carries on without purpose and diminishing vigour. The outcome is considered in the form of a fragmented question: "What will happen when our civilisation like a long-pent / balloon---" (132-133), which leaves little doubt that the entire system of industrial and modern society is about to crash. Yet the full satiric effect is never realized. There is no cleansing of the

old miasma. The world simply stagnates as it sits on the verge of complete collapse.

B. Let all these so ephemeral things

Be somehow permanent like the swallow's tangent wings:

Goodbye to you, this day remember is Christmas, this morn

They say, interpret it your own way, Christ is born. (172-175)

The allusion is to *Richard III*: "True hope is swift and flies with swallow's wings." The speakers depart and remind the reader that this is a Christmas poem. But the significance of the Nativity is stripped bare; replaced throughout the poem with ephemeral conceits and trivial vices. Along with it, the entire messianic tradition of pastoral is brought crashing down. Edna Longley wrote that "The 'Eclogue' reflects, and reflects on, transition from the literary 1920s to the 1930s" (Edna Longley 44). The poem also reflects the Virgilian pastoral brought to a collision with economic depression, social malaise, and industrialization. Symbols of hope are smothered, but for all its gloom the poem laments the demise of civilization. No social plan is called for to thwart this corruption, and this is significant with regard to the rise of radical ideologies in the 1930s. In spite of its modernist guise, the poem is gripped in the pastoral tradition and hangs on to the society on the age; the rage against Christmas is a cathartic moment against the anxieties and concerns the season provokes.

Eclogue between the motherless

The poem "Eclogue between the motherless" is another pastoral eclogue with two speakers, A and B. The poem begins with the two speakers asking each other, "What did you do for the holiday?" (1). The poem does not directly follow "An Eclogue for Christmas" but the holiday could well have been the Christmas of the first poem. The

stress and torment of "An Eclogue for Christmas" gives way to an encounter that ranges from social apathy to incoherence. The answer from both speakers on what they did is: "I went home for the holiday" (4). And this acts as a jumping point to explore the backgrounds of both speakers' personal and family histories. As "An Eclogue for Christmas" looks at the collapse of society, this poem examines the break down of relationships on psychological and linguistic levels. As the poem progresses, the speakers' powers to communicate deteriorate. The two speakers become unable to communicate to each other and, as a result, what they say becomes incomprehensible to the reader. Near the end of the poem, A mentions that he intends to marry, but he does not seem able to provide more information about this:

> B.   Who is the woman?
>
> A.   relying
>
> B. Who is the woman?
>
> A.   She is dying
>
> B.   Dying of what?
>
> A. Only a year to live
>
> B.   Forgive me asking
>
> But   (163-170)

The failure of the classic form to communicate in the modern world is a distinctly modernist conception. And it is ironic that a classical form is used precisely to

communicate this collapse of communication. In these lines, there is almost an attempt to build a pastoral elegy, although the woman in question is not yet dead. The rhyme "dying"/ "relying" fades into the half rhyme on "asking", stressing the collapse of the poetic form into free verse dialogue. On every level, the pastoral poetic is pulled apart into incoherence. The pastoral lament is for poetry, for feeling and for human bonds themselves, as they collapse in this poem.

Returning to the earlier parts of the poem, working against the title there is a preoccupation with marriage and motherhood. But the poem does not break with the tradition of the pastoral where the female voice (here of the wives or mothers) is silent. Although there are exceptions, Arcadia is primarily a land of male singers, and this poem is no exception. Yet the relations between the female figures of the poem and the speakers, even in their failure, are more important for the poem than other social bonds. The two speakers, before their capacity to communicate collapses, suggest that they share some familial or social relationship, but the nature of this relationship is uncertain. They do not share the same parents, and if their meeting is that of friends, their friendship is as empty as the other bonds in the poem. The speakers speak primarily about themselves and only accidentally seem to address each other. The degeneration of mutual empathy or communication between the sexes is more of a concern for the speakers than a failure to communicate amongst each other.

A. As far as it went---In a way it went too far,

Back to childhood, back to the backwoods mind;

> I could not stand a great deal of it, bars on the brain
>
> And the blinds drawn in the drawing-room not to fade the
>
> chair covers (10-14)

The speaker retreats into childhood, a literary theme coterminous with the rise of romanticism.[56] But the retreat to childhood here is turned into a claustrophobic regression. Childhood itself becomes a cage. The regression continues to his moment of birth: "A sense of guilt like a scent---The day I was born / I suppose that that same hour was full of her screams" (69-70). The "sense of guilt" is unsettlingly Freudian, but also obliquely hints at the guilt (*scelus*) of Virgil's fourth eclogue. The scent of it connects with the "scent of syringa" (100) found later in the poem. The word *syringa* relates to reed-pipe (σύριγξ) and gives the Virgilian pastoral a liminal presence. Speaker B remarks on his father's new wife:

> B. My new stepmother is wealthy, you should see her in jodhpurs
>
> Brisking in to breakfast from a morning canter.
>
> I don't think he can be happy (24-26)

B's fathers new wife is wealthy and fit but B cannot imagine her as a source of contentment; B is also divorced and A's sister unhappily keeps house for him. The speakers' visible relations are primarily to women. But their relations to women are devoid of spiritual, emotional or intellectual connections. Their relations are relations of

[56] That is specifically the theme of childhood, not the symbol of the child as it appears in Virgil's messianic eclogue. Coveney notes on the rise of childhood in literature: "The appearance of the child was indeed simultaneous with the changes in sensibility and thought which came with the end of the eighteenth century. The simultaneity of the changes and the appearance is too exact to be coincidental. It seems inescapable that the appearance of the modern literary child was closely related to the revolution in sensibility which we call the 'romantic revival'. The creation of the romantic child came from deep within the whole genesis of our modern literary culture" (Coveney 29).

failure. On the termination of his marriage B only comments: "I can drop the ash on the carpet since my divorce" (34). Marriage was only a barrier against such petty unsociable pleasures. B advises A:

> Never you marry, my boy. One marries only
>
> Because one thinks one is lonely---and so one was
>
> But wait till the lonely are two and no better. (35-37)

The love of the Virgilian pastoral often remains unfulfilled and torments the pastoral singers. But the convention in turned inward, the singer's love is not scorned but even in fulfillment it proves hollow. On his ex-wife, B notes that she was vibrant and beautiful:

> B. My wife was warmth, a picture and a dance,
>
> Her body electric---silk used to crackle and her gloves
>
> Move where she left them. How one loves the surface
>
> But how one lacks the core---Children of course
>
> Might make a difference. (45-49)

As with A's father's new wife, B's wife had desirable marital qualities. No real or serious grievances are brought against the women in the poem. There is no character fault to blame for the collapse of the marriage. The termination of marriage itself is meaningless. There is only the bare fact that, in the poem, love can be grasped but not spiritually consummated. Intimacy fails: "[...] closeness was / Only a glove on the hand, alien and veinless" (137-138). At a level deeper than the collapse of interpersonal relationships, there is the collapse of language and with it poetry. The form of the pastoral eclogue is fragmented and pushed to its own dissolution. It is the final stretch that MacNeice exerts on this aged form, before he gives it up.

Eclogue by a five-barred gate

In "Eclogue by a five-barred gate", this final collapse of the form has not yet come to pass. In contrast with "Eclogue between the motherless", "This is the most authentically 'classical' of his eclogues" (Edna Longley 101), or at least the one that adheres the most to pastoral motifs. The poem is another roadside meeting, here between two shepherds (1 and 2 rather than A and B) and death, who stand at the five-barred gate of the title blocking their path:

> D. There is no way here, shepherds, read the wooden sign,
>
> Your road is a blind road, all this land is mine.
>
> 1. But your fields, mister, would do well for our sheep.
>
> 2. They could shelter from the sun where the low hills dip. (1-4)

Soon after the shepherds' sheep appear in death's pastures leaving the shepherds flockless. Death verifies that he has taken their flocks:

> D. That's right, shepherd, they was so just now.
>
> Your sheep are gone, they can't speak for you,
>
> I must have your credentials, sing me who you are.
>
> 1. I am a shepherd of the Theocritean breed,
>
> Been pasturing my songs, man and boy, this thirty year--- (12-16)

The first shepherd indicates that he is a shepherd of the pastoral tradition, that is, he is a singer; he pastures songs not sheep. The second shepherd answers Death, "And for me too my pedigree acceptances / Have multiplied beside the approved streams" (17-18). It is a puzzling answer and seemingly represents his qualifications as being somewhere between those of a college certification and those of a prize animal. Death asks, "Have

you never thought of Death?" (21). This is a *memento mori* marking death's presence in Arcadia.[57] Death mocks their songs. The shepherds, however, fail to see the futility of their songs. The first speaker replies with a couplet: "Only off and on, / Thanatos in Greek, the accent proparoxytone---" (22-23). The speaker sees death only as a word, something for the poet to put in verse and to play with. The second speaker corrects this, "That's not what he means, he means the thing behind the word / Same as took Alice White the time her had her third---" (24-25). The second speaker's first line seems to perceive Death's meaning, but then stutters. The second line descends into rustic English and then breaks off. The collapse of communication, which is a common theme of MacNeice's eclogues, prevents the implications of death to be realized. As in Virgil's ninth eclogue where pastoral songs are forgotten ("oblita [...] carmina" Verg. *Ecl.*IX.53) and all is silent ("omne [...] silet" Verg. *Ecl.*IX.53). Death first dispels the pastoral song and then continues to heckle the shepherd-poets:

> D. I thought he was a poet and could quote the prices
> Of significant living and decent dying, could lay the rails level
> on the sleepers
> To carry the powerful train of abstruse thought--- (30-33)

Death expects the poet to set the track for serious meditation, to act the role of the philosopher or visionary. Death himself scorns the pastoral mode for its seeming inability to grasp at greater themes or reach towards higher truths. The shepherds only marvel at the thought:

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[57] See Panofsky's article "*Et in Arcadia Ego*: Poussin and the Elegiac Tradition" in *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (1955).

1. What an idea!

2. But certainly poets are sleepers,

The sleeping beauty behind the many-coloured hedge---

D. All you do is burke the other and terrible beauty, all you do is

hedge

And shirk the inevitable issue, all you do

Is shear your sheep to stop your ears.

Poetry you think is only the surface vanity, (34-41)

“Terrible beauty” alludes to the refrain in Yeats's "Easter, 1916", to a poem that is both socially-engaged and on a higher mode than the pastoral. Death criticizes the levity of the pastoral mode. In the context of MacNeice’s eclogues, the poet stands against the breakdown of society and of communication itself. Death admonishes the poet who does not stand against this, who instead engages in a poetics of complacency and retreat. Here Death is not merely an intruder on the idyllic pastoral, he is the poet of a higher mode singing against the “false answers” (67) of the bucolic. Death is the ultimate truth, the ultimate flaw in golden age vision. And on this vision Death comments: “This escapism of yours is blasphemy” (68).

D. Can't you understand me?

Look, I will set you a prize like any of your favourites,

Like any Tityrus or tired Damon;

Sing me, each in turn, what dream you had last night

And if either's dream rings true, to him I will open my gate. (76-80)

Death becomes the judge of a singing-match and calls the shepherds to address the higher themes. The use of the singing-contest, however, raises the level of the pastoral. Death has not come to destroy the pastoral but elevate it to greater themes. The traditional function of death in the pastoral is changed; he is no longer the unwelcome intruder or the painful reminder. Death is now the judge, like Palaemon in Virgil's third eclogue. His presence in the pastoral forces the shepherd to address the world they would otherwise flee from. The singing contest begins:

> 1. Last night as the bearded lips of sleep
> Closed with the slightest sigh on me and I sank through the
>   blue soft caves
> Picked with light delicate as the chink of coins
> Or stream on the pebbles I was caught by hands
> And a face was swung in my eyes like a lantern
> Swinging on the neck of a snake.
> And that face I knew to be God and I woke,
> And now I come to look at yours, stranger,
> There is something in the lines of it--- (102-111)

The first shepherd's song presents a dream. The dream displays hints of a distorted Eden, but it takes place in the realm of the unconscious. It touches on the deeper plane of poetry becoming a poetics of transcendence. The second shepherd also sings his dream:

> 2. Well, I dreamt it was a hot day, the territorials
> Were out on melting asphalt under the howitzers,

> The brass music bounced on the houses. Come
>
> I heard cry as it were a water-nymph, come and fulfil me
>
> And I sped floating, my feet plashing in the tops of the wheat
>
> But my eyes were blind,
>
> I found her with my hands lying on the drying hay,
>
> Wet heat in the deeps of the hay as my hand delved,
>
> And I possessed her, gross and good like the hay,
>
> And she went and my eyes regained sight and the sky was full
>
> of ladders
>
> Angels ascending and descending with a shine like mackerel---
>
> Now I come to tell it it sounds nonsense. (114-126)

His dream of "territorials" and "howitzers" hints of the First World War but this quickly gives way to the fragments of a sexual encounter. As in Virgil's third eclogue, the contest produces no clear winner. Both shepherds go off either in transcendence or to true death:

> 1 & 2. We will go together to these pastures new ...
>
> D. So; they are gone; life in my land ...
>
> There is no life as there is no land.
>
> They are gone and I am alone
>
> With a gate the façade of a mirage. (142-146)

Having elevated the shepherd's songs to a *locus* beyond language, a realm of abstract through, death fades into illusion. The singers achieved what the speakers of "Eclogue

between the motherless" failed to achieve. That is, they reach a state of transcendence, a poetics beyond language. As the speakers of "Eclogue between the motherless" succumb to the loss of communication, the speakers of this poem transcend it.

Eclogue from Iceland

"Eclogue from Iceland" takes place in the most unlikely location for the pastoral, treeless Iceland. In it, Ryan and Craven (the speakers in this eclogue are given names) meet with Grettir, the ill-tempered man-slaying hero of *Grettis saga*. The out-of-the-way location of Iceland makes it a place of retreat, and as with "Eclogue by a five-barred gate" the function of pastoral as a poetics of retreat is called into question. The poem is suggestive of Auden and MacNeice's journey to Iceland in 1936. Ryan and Craven do not directly stand for Auden and MacNeice, but they do represent some of the poetic concerns of MacNeice, as Tityrus gives an elusive voice to Virgil's own poetics. Grettir greets the two wanderers:

> G. Good evening, strangers. So you too
>
> Are on the run? I welcome you.
>
> I am Grettir Asmundson,
>
> Dead many years. My day is done.
>
> But you whose day is sputtering yet---
>
> I forget.... What did I say?
>
> We forget when we are dead (11-17)

Grettir is the ghost of an old legend, but he is almost a guardian spirit of the Icelandic landscape Ryan and Craven visit. Yet in his forgetfulness, Grettir does not dwell upon the past, instead he asks:

How are things where you come from?

C. Things are bad. There is no room

To move at ease, to stretch or breed--- (32-34)

"Things are bad" returns us to the "evil time" of "An eclogue for Christmas." But the English countryside of that poem is far behind. The old theme of fleeing the town for the country turns into an escape to Iceland, a retreat from the violence brewing in Europe. Grettir's own presence alludes to the violence of Iceland's saga history, and for this reason undermines Iceland as a *locus* of retreat.

G. Too many people. My memory will go,

Lose itself in the hordes of modern people.

Memory is words; we remember what others

Say and record of ourselves---stones with the runes.

Too many people—sandstorm over the words. (39-43)

The city is not only the corrupt and vice-ridden pastoral motif, but also its crowds erase the identity of the individual. Too many voices and all that is heard is a riotous clamour. The voice of the poet ceases to have significant against this clamour of the crowd. Words themselves become forgotten and therefore so will Grettir, who only exists in words. Grettir inquires to where the others have come from and Ryan responds:

R. I come from an island, Ireland, a nation

Built upon violence and morose vendettas.

My diehard countrymen like drayhorses

Drag their ruin behind them.

Shooting straight in the cause of crooked thinking

Their greed is sugared with pretence of public spirit.

From all which I am an exile. (48-54)

Like Meliboeus, he is exiled from his country and caught in the grips of social unrest. But this passage does not only highlight the troubles of Ireland, it makes Ryan's journey to Iceland a journey of exile rather than a retreat to Arcadia.

C. Yes, we are exiles,

Gad the world for comfort.

This Easter I was in Spain before the Civil War

Gobbling the tripper's treats, the local colour,

Storks over Avila, the coffee-coloured waters of Ronda,

[...]

And the scrawled hammer and sickle:

It was all copy---impenetrable surface.

I did not look for the sneer beneath the surface

Why should I trouble, an addict to oblivion

Running away from the gods of my own hearth

With no intention of finding gods elsewhere? (56-59; 65-70)

Craven's exile is not from his homeland; his speech begins with him as a tourist not a native in pre-civil war Spain. The "scrawled hammer and sickle" forms almost a written testament to the troubles of Europe. The oblivion recalls the "ever-diluted drug" ("An eclogue for Christmas" 99) behind the social and spiritual malaise of MacNeice's first eclogue. The god of Virgil's first eclogue is called to mind; but where Tityrus went to Rome to meet his god, Craven flies to Iceland to escape from his.

Further along, a "Voice from Europe", seeming to have pursued Ryan and Craven from the continent to Iceland, calls out. The voice does not directly address anyone, but declaims in a detached and haunting manner.

VOICE. Blues ... blues ... high heels and manicured hands

Always self-conscious of the vanity bag

And puritan painted lips that abnegate desire

And say 'we do not care' ... 'we do not care'---

I don't care always in the air (181-185)

The voice hints at the trivial cares and petty vanities of an emotionally deprived culture. Its anthem and refrain is pure apathy. In response to the voice of Europe, Grettir sends Ryan and Craven back to Europe, and the poem ends:

C. Could only offer our humble

Deaths to the unknown god, unknown but worshipped,

Whose voice calls in the sirens of destroyers.

G. Minute your gesture but it must be made---

Your hazard, your act of defiance and hymn of hate,

Hatred of hatred, assertion of human values,

Which is now your only duty.

C. Is it our only duty?

G. Yes, my friends.

What did you say? The night falls now and I

Must beat the dales to chase my remembered acts.

Yes, my friends, it is your only duty.

And, it may be added, it is your only chance. (310-322)

The "unknown god" recalls not only the god of Tityrus but also the unknown god of Athenians. Grettir does not state that by returning to Europe, the two poets will evince any good, but he calls it their duty nonetheless. Gettir calls the poets to offer themselves on the altar of higher truth, even if the remainder of the world neglects that truth. He in fact calls the poets to act in a role of defiance against the corruption, violence and apathy engulfing western culture. This is essentially a humanist mission and it is no accident that this humanist voice takes the form of a Nordic hero. Grettir's identity holds out against warped Aryan ideologies and the perversion of Germanic culture. He symbolizes the reappraisal of that culture into humane values. As with MacNeice's other pastoral eclogues, the ideal of escape or retreat is challenged. The modern poet is forced to address the world, even if he goes unappreciated. The poem ends with "it is your only chance" (322). There is no surety in this, but it does in a small way restore the element of hope to the pastoral context.

Some conclusions

MacNeice's pastoral eclogues dance around themes of language, truth, poetry and civilization. Towards these themes, the tone is contemplative. But the eclogues are not homogenous in either their treatment or conclusions. The final missionary calling of "Eclogue from Iceland" shares little in common with the collapse of language and emotive bonds in "Eclogue between the motherless." Views vacillate and truth, intermittently sought after, is ultimately never realized. The four poems, as a whole, represent an entire reappraisal of the Virgilian pastoral and more than any other modern

adaptation of this pastoral. They deserve to be imitated. Yet only the subliminal threads of the pastoral hold these poems together with that tradition, so even direct signals to the Virgilian pastoral such as:

1. On his flute---

2. On his oat---

("Eclogue by the five-barred gate" 28-29)

seem fragmented and uncertain. Yet in spite of this pastoral form of the poems is highly developed and successfully transferred into a modern context. MacNeice places his eclogues in a poetic space between his classical training and his modernist poetics. They exhibit, on one hand, a humanist concern for tradition and civilization and, on the other, the anxiety that the modern world has rendered these things null and void. But neither side is allowed to extinguish the other. Poetry is upheld but the world is not yet saved. In this manner, they evoke all the complexities, uneasiness and uncertainties of Virgil's *Bucolica*. They, in essence, reopen the potentiality of the Virgilian pastoral for a modern context.

V Robert Frost and the American Pastoral

Robert Frost is undeniably a pastoral poet, but he is also a poet whose pastoral exhibits a richness and complexity worthy of the higher order of the mode. He is, in the words of Joseph Brodsky, "a very Virgilian poet" (Brodsky 19). Yet the influence of Virgil in Frost's poetry is difficult to fix to a prescribed order or singular vision. "Unlike a number of his illustrious contemporaries, Frost never wears his learning on his sleeve—mainly because it is in his bloodstream" (Brodsky 17). Virgil's *Bucolics* and his *Georgics* are in Frost's blood and, as well, they are imbedded in the blood and soil of Frost's rural New England. Yet a study of Frost's poetry will not likely profit from bleeding it dry in search for allusions or influences. Virgil is an influence, more in similarity to the ethereal fluid of astrological influences, rather than a compelling or authoritative force. Frost has said that "he first heard the 'sound of speech' in poetry while reading one of Virgil's eclogues" (Lynen 127). There is one poem, however, in which Frost directly engages with the Virgilian pastoral. That poem is "Build Soil - A Political Pastoral" which is as a parody of Virgil's first eclogue. And as with all parodies, Frost could not write it as well as he did if he did not have a deep understanding of Virgil's poem. In this poem, Frost invokes a range of nuances from both his poetics and Virgil's. He then refigures the pastoral eclogue in terms of his own pastoral, repositioning Virgil's poem into his own poetics. In "Build Soil", Virgil provides the raw material, but Frost is the compelling force which gives it shape and functionality.

Frost's "Build Soil" draws the reader into the troubled waters of biographical criticism. The poem is explicitly engaged with Frost's political as well as poetical

concerns. And for a full appreciation, it ought to be read in the context of its original performance. Regarding this, there is a note attached to the table-of-contents in *A Further Range* (1936) which reads: "As delivered at Columbia University, May 31, 1932, before the National party conventions of that year" (Frost 563). This detail does not merely provide historical detail of the original poem, but prescribes the setting and context in which the poem fits. When reading "Build Soil," is best to imagine Frost reading at Columbia in order to appreciate the full force of the poem as a "political eclogue."

Whereas Virgil's first eclogue veils its politics from the reader, in Frost's poem the politics quickly surface and take the form of a philosophical meditation. The beginning of "Build Soil" immediately takes us from Virgil's first eclogue into 1930s New England:

> Why, Tityrus! But you've forgotten me.
>
> I'm Meliboeus the potato man,
>
> The one you had the talk with, you remember,
>
> Here on this very campus years ago.
>
> Hard times have struck me and I'm on the move.
>
> For interest, and I've bought a mountain farm
>
> For nothing down, all-out-doors of a place,
>
> All woods and pasture only fit for sheep.
>
> But sheep is what I'm going into next.
>
> I'm done forever with potato crops ("Build Soil" 1-10)

Tityrus represents Robert Frost as for ancient commentators the name represented Virgil. As in Virgil, Meliboeus is the initial speaker. The two speakers have met before "on this very campus" which alludes to the initial reading of the poem at Columbia.[58] As with his namesake in Virgil's first eclogue, Meliboeus has left his land. Virgil's Meliboeus has left his lands for exile: "At nos hinc allii sitientis ibimus Afros, / pars Scythiam et rapidum cretae ueniemus Oaxen / et penitus toto diuisos orbe Britannos." ("Ah but we others leave for thirsty lands-- / Africa, Scythia, or Oxus' chalky waves, / Or Britain, wholly cut off from the world" Verg. *Ecl.* I.54-66), but Frost's Meliboeus moved to a "mountain farm" and shifted his business from potatoes to shepherding. There is much irony in that Meliboeus has turned to the pastoral life not for *otia* but for economic reasons; but there is more irony in the shift in social disruption from civil warfare in Virgil to economic depression in Frost. As Meliboeus continues,

> I've had to give my interval farm up
> At thirty cents a bushel. Give me sheep.
> I know wool's down to seven cents a pound.
> But I don't calculate to sell my wool.
> I didn't my potatoes. I consumed them.
> I'll dress up in sheep's clothing and eat sheep. (11-16)

In spite of the lack of commercial opportunity for agriculture, Meliboeus is able to adjust, and still the individualistic New Englander he does not succumb to collectivized farming. The allusion to Aesop's "wolf in sheep's clothing" is more likely to suggest cunning or willingness of exploit opportunity than suggest the disastrous end that Aesop's wolf met.

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[58] "Campus" is suggestive of Virgil's farmers' cornfields, as well as the pastoral *locus amoenus*.

The phrase, however, suggests that Meliboeus is not as powerless as he appears beneath his wisecracking farmer's persona. Meliboeus is quick to turn his wit against Frost:

> The Muse takes care of you. You live by writing
> Your poems on a farm and call that farming.
> Oh, I don't blame you. I say take life easy.
> I should myself, only I don't know how.
> But have some pity on us who have to work.
> Why don't you use your talents as a writer
> To advertise our farms to city buyers,
> Or else write something to improve food prices.
> Get in a poem toward the next election. (17-25)

Beneath the surface of Meliboeus' remarks are Frost's own consistent failures to support himself through farming. This jocular self-criticism (at Columbia it was Frost reading the poem) sweetens the poem's politics for the reader or listener offended by Frost's country-conservatism. But it also affirms Frost's identification with Tityrus, and through him Virgil. In the first eclogue, Tityrus's freedom (*libertas*) was dependant on the grace of his god at Rome (Verg. *Ecl.* I.6-10), who is often identified as Augustus. The implication is that the even the lowly shepherd, Tityrus, is dependent upon the graces of his rulers. This is the reason Meliboeus urges Frost to use his writing to assist his fellow farmers, and of course, this is what Frost was doing first reading and then publishing his poem. Meliboeus's remarks force another issue implicit in Virgil's poetry to surface, that of the effectuality of poetry to affect the wider world:

> Oh, Meliboeus, I have half a mind

To take a writing hand in politics.

Before now poetry has taken notice

Of wars, and what are wars but politics

Transformed chronic to acute and bloody? (26-30)

Tityrus seems to affirm the power of poetry to influence politics, but does not fully acquiesce to taking "a writing hand in politics." Meliboeus responds to Tityrus' hesitation: "I may be wrong, but, Tityrus, to me / The times seem revolutionary bad." (31-32). "Revolutionary" does more than suggest the times are drastically bad; it implicates the radical newness of modernization and socialist politics. Tityrus does not dispute this, but rather accepts Meliboeus' summarization of political affairs. Throughout the poem, Meliboeus lends tacit support to Tityrus's politic views. In fact, Meliboeus largely functions as a foil for Frost's political views. Tityrus often corrects his course of action, but not his perception of the political situation. But the great divide between the speakers is poetry. Both speakers work to convey Frost's mind (that is, the poem is a philosophical meditation in which Frost expresses his ideas concerning politics and poetry), but whereas Meliboeus represents the political views of the independent New Englander farmer, which Frost identifies with, Tityrus represents Frost as a poet. About Frost's own farmer persona, Brodsky writes: "He is generally regarded as the poet of the countryside, of rural settings—as a folksy, crusty, wisecracking old gentleman farmer, generally of positive disposition. In short, American as apple pie. To be fair, he greatly enhanced this notion by projecting precisely this image of himself in numerous public appearances and interviews throughout his career" (Brodsky 6). But in "Build Soil" the two identities of farmer and poet are allowed to separate and thereby the

difference between Frost and the New England farming community is highlighted, namely in the differences created through being not only a farmer but also a poet and lecturer.

It is easy for some readers, troubled by Frost's politics, to miss the pathos of this poem. The strength of the poem is not in its refutation of New Deal politics (although Frost is very direct about his views) but in its power as an introspective meditation on the troubles facing 1930s farmers and Frost's own comparative security and duty as a writer. Few writers could be as forthright about their views while opening themselves to the vulnerability of introspective thought as Frost is in this poem. The form of the pastoral eclogue allows a lightness of diction and farmer's humour, but as in Virgil's eclogues, it is possible to read deeper into the philosophical implications. Tityrus's next response to Meliboeus further touches the question of the poet's social function:

> The question is whether they've [the times] reached a depth
> Of desperation that would warrant poetry's
> Leaving love's alternations, joy and grief,
> The weather's alternations, summer and winter,
> Our age-long theme, for the uncertainty
> Of judging who is a contemporary liar-
> Who in particular, when all alike
> Get called as much in clashes of ambition.
> Life may be tragically bad, and I
> Make bold to sing it so, but do I dare

Name names and tell you who by name is wicked? (33-43)

The problem Tityrus expresses in turning poetry to politics is not troubled by an anxiety as to its effectiveness when the eagle comes.[59] Tityrus does not doubt poetry's power. His problem stems rather from the poet's responsibility of making the correct judgements. He represents a movement in Frost's poetry, from a poetics that affirms joy and comforts grief (from the pastoral of Frost's earlier work), to the uncertain realm of politics. An uncertain and perilous realm for the poet to enter, Wyndham Lewis and Roy Campbell are only two examples of writers who were once popular but whose political allegiances permanently damaged their reputations in the 1930s. Furthermore, Virgil's own poetry has been maligned at various times in the twentieth-century by writers and critics who were uncomfortable with the connections they felt between the ancient Roman's politics and his poetry, as well as a perception that Virgil upheld a vision of empire that is reprehensible in light of the consequences of European empire-building. Frost's refusal to "name names" risks becoming a cop out; he laments the times but does not dare risk offering a solution:

Whittier's luck with Skipper Ireson awes me—

Many men's luck with Greatest Washington

(Who sat for Stuart's portrait, but who sat

Equally for the nation's Constitution).

I prefer to sing safely in the realm

Of types, composite and imagined people:

To affirm there is such a thing as evil

[59] "sed carmina tantum / nostra ualent, Lycida, tela inter Martia quantum / Chaonias dicunt aquila ueniente columbas." ("But our songs, Lycidas, have no more power amidst the din of war, than Chaonian doves when the eagle comes." My translation. Verg. *Ecl.* IX.13).

Personified, but ask to be excused

From saying on a jury "Here's the guilty." (44-52)

John Greenleaf Whittier's ballad "Skipper Ireson's Ride" with its refrain "Old Floyd Ireson, for his hard heart, / Tarred and feathered and carried in a cart / By the women of Marblehead!" (Whittier 9-11) is not overtly political,[60] but there is an interesting historical aside to the poem. Skipper Ireson's mutinous crew blamed him for not aiding a wrecked ship, which in fact they were responsibility for abandoning. The townspeople of Marblehead then unjustly tarred and feathered Ireson, to which he allegedly replied: "I thank you for my ride, gentlemen, but you will live to regret it." Nearly a century later, Whittier who remembered hearing the refrain from a schoolmate, wrote his poem largely from scratch. But to the consternation of the townspeople of Marblehead, whenever they announced where they were from, people would ridicule them with Whittier's poem. Thus, the poet avenged Ireson against the people of Marblehead for this old injustice ("Skipper Ireson" 12). Gilbert Stuart's most famous portrait of Washington was never finished, but is now found on the American one-dollar bill, and his attachment to Washington has certainly brought him lasting acclaim. The "composite and imagined people" humorously refers to the present poem; "composite" emphasizing the sedimentary layers of tradition attached to Virgil's characters. Meliboeus is unimpressed at this explanation: "I doubt if you're convinced the times are bad" (53). Tityrus's dependency on writing is implicated here; his source of income apart from his farming separates him from the experiences of the economic depression deeply felt by other farmers. Nevertheless, Tityrus does not openly acknowledge this divide. In response, he only argues that:

[60] Whittier's abolitionist politics, however, have won the verdict of history.

I keep my eye on Congress, Meliboeus.

They're in the best position of us all

To know if anything is very wrong.

I mean they could be trusted to give the alarm

If earth were thought to change its axis,

Or a star coming to dilate the sun.

As long as lightly all their livelong sessions,

Like a yard of schoolboys out at recess

Before their plays and games were organized,

They yelling mix tag, hide-and-seek, hopscotch,

And leapfrog in each other's way—all's well.

Let the newspapers profess to fear the worst!

Nothing's portentous, I am reassured. (54-66)

Here Frost engages in rhetorical trickery. Frost disguises his endorsement of laissez-faire system as a renewed refusal to engage with politics. Tityrus's Congress is there to step in when there is disaster, but until Congress steps in, everyone is to continue their schoolboy games and not engage in political or economic interference. Meliboeus bluntly responds: "Is socialism needed, do you think?" (67). Frost's refusal to "name names" does not entail that he will avoid giving general advice. Frost does not reject socialism, but questions its manifestations and the applicability of its specific programs:

We have it now. For socialism is

An element in any government.

There's no such thing as socialism pure–

Except as an abstraction of the mind.

There's only democratic socialism,

Monarchic socialism, oligarchic–

The last being what they seem to have in Russia.

You often get it in monarchy,

Least in democracy. In practice, pure,

I don't know what it would be. No one knows.

I have no doubt like all the loves when

Philosophized together into one—

One sickness of the body and the soul. (68-80)

Socialism cannot exist in its pure form because it would require government's full control over the individual, and the equality offered would require each citizen to relinquish the very liberties such a level of equality would hope to sustain. Pure socialism is compared with the concept of love as a singular abstraction. Frost argues:

There is no love.

There's only love of men and women, love

Of children, love of friends, of men, of God:

Divine love, human love, paternal love,

Roughly discriminated for the rough. (84-88)

That is, love, like socialism, does exist in the world as an abstraction or as a Platonic ideal, but only through its manifestation in particulars. The implication is that it is nonsensical to speak of socialism as a concept, rather than its specific manifestations as social initiatives. But Tityrus leaves himself on dubious grounds, as first he refuses to

use his poetry to endorse specific programs or politicians, and here he refuses to fall into metaphysical abstractions, thereby shirking the issue from both sides; for Tityrus previously attempted to retreat behind abstractions, ("I prefer to sing safely in the realm / Of types" 48-49). Meliboeus attempts to pin Tityrus down by asking "But don't you think more should be socialized / Than is?" (92-93). Tityrus plays Socrates by asking what he means by 'socialized' to which Meliboeus replies, "Made good for everyone [...] not just the great exploiting businesses" (94-96). It this sense, Tityrus responds surprisingly, if not playfully, that it is not greed that needs to be socialized, but ingenuity:

> But the worst one of all to leave uncurbed,
>
> Unsocialized, is ingenuity:
>
> Which for no sordid self-aggrandisement,
>
> For nothing but its own blind satisfaction
>
> (In this it is as much like hate as love),
>
> Works in the dark as much against as for us.
>
> Even while we talk some chemist at Columbia
>
> Is stealthily contriving wool from jute
>
> That when let loose upon the grazing world
>
> Will put ten thousand farmers out of sheep. (101-110)

Finally, when Tityrus is drawn into politic statement he overcomes his initial anxieties with a prophetic capacity and vision. One is usually hard pressed to find derisive remarks about human ingenuity, but Frost takes a shot at it. His statement is neither anti-progress, nor Luddite nor a form of pre-Industrial nostalgia, but rather calls for a subordination of ingenuity and inventiveness to social needs and boundaries. The question is would it be

better not to invent something that will have disastrous social consequences? As one university researcher could end Meliboeus and all other shepherds' livelihoods through one careless invention, it follows that there is as much if not more need to cull ingenuity as greed. Yet Tityrus is not against ingenuity or inventiveness but merely expresses a need to subordinate it as, as with any human emotion such as love, greed or ambition, to the social good. Elsewhere, Frost wrote: "[...] there are no two things as important to us in life and art as being threatened and being saved. [...] All our ingenuity is lavished on getting into danger legitimately so that we may be genuinely rescued" (Barry 76). This, alongside "Build Soil" aptly summarizes the silliness behind continuously using human ingenuity to solve the problems it has created; the present predicament concerning man-made disturbances to the ecological balance aptly fits Frost's insight. Furthermore, this distrust of invention, ingenuity and progress fits with the pastoral anxiety where such complexities are antithetic to idealized rustic simplicity: "Bounds should be set / To ingenuity for being so cruel / In bringing change unheralded on the unready" (123-125).

Another politicized context of "Build Soil" is the concept of freedom (*libertas*) as derived from Virgil's *Bucolica*:

> Everyone asks for freedom for himself,
>
> The man free love, the businessman free trade,
>
> The writer and talker free speech and free press.
>
> Political ambition has been taught,
>
> By being punished back, it is not free:
>
> It must at some point gracefully refrain. (111-116)

'Freedom' operates in a polysemous[61] capacity, but it particularly draws attention to the role of freedom for the individual and society. It is in the relationship of the individual and society, more than anywhere else, in which the structures of the poem operate. "The relationship between the individual and civil society was more natural, and more important to Frost, than the relationship between human nature and external physical 'nature' itself" (Stanlis 220-221). In this context, Tityrus calls into question an advocacy for individual freedom uncurbed by social obligations, particularly a model of positive liberty extending to all arenas of love, business and politics. For Virgil's Tityrus, it is Rome ("Vrbem quam dicunt Roma" "The city they call Rome" Verg. *Ecl.* I.19) that ensures his freedom. Freedom in the first eclogue, although ambiguous, could mean manumission or freedom from general social chaos and disorder. It is a 'freedom from' rather than a 'freedom to', a freedom dependant upon human or divine grace and possibly suspect due to its lack of protection extended to Meliboeus. But for Frost's Tityrus, freedom is a freedom, which firstly can only be disturbed by government intervention or protection, and secondly necessitates a natural and mutually beneficial relationship between the individual and civil society. Everyone asks for their own freedom and for their own good, but this needs to be balanced with personal social obligations. Positive liberty, without this harmonized relationship leads to, among other negative consequences, the excesses of political ambition, which then begins to disrupt the natural balance in social relationships. As Žižek described in terms of the modern interpretations of human rights (freedoms to) when removed from the context moral obligation to one's fellow creatures (which the Decalogue is a revelation thereof):

[61] Interestingly, the word polysemous (*polysemus*) first occurs in Servius, when he begins his commentary on Virgil's poetry, specifically commenting upon *cano* in book I line 1 of the *Aeneid*.

> The only way to grasp how human rights function today is as a systematic negation of the Decalogue. The right to privacy. This means you can cheat your wife as long as you are not caught in public. The right to freedom of press, what does it mean? Freedom to lie, in a way. The right to private property, what does it mean? Freedom to steal. The right to bear arms, freedom to kill. The right to religious freedom, the freedom to celebrate false gods. That's another story. (Žižek 110)

The point is, for Frost's Tityrus, it is human social bonds not government's laws that need to restrain freedom. The best form of action is where these natural social bonds are not violated, which is all the government (whether Roman or American) can do.

Although I believe these elaborations direct attention to the forms of philosophical questioning that Frost's Tityrus undertakes, one must resist trying to force his generalized remarks into a fixed politics. Meliboeus asks what Tityrus would do if he ruled the world, to which Tityrus replies: "I'd let things take their course / and then I'd claim credit for the outcome" (128-129). Humorously, he advocates the laissez-faire system against intervention from above, in favour of dependence upon the natural relation between the individual and society. But as the poem moves deeper into philosophical dialogue, Tityrus the poet and philosopher becomes more certain. Tityrus still will not "name names" (43), but he now says: "I'm not afraid to prophesy the future, / And be judged by the outcome, Meliboeus" (134-135). Yet Frost continues to resist an expansive political outlook and his advice is grounded on an individual rather than governmental or social level:

My friends all know I'm interpersonal.

But long before I'm interpersonal,

Away 'way down inside I'm personal.

Just so before we're international,

We're national and act as nationals.

The colors are kept unmixed on the palette,

Or better on dish plates all around the room (141-148)

What this means is that all relationships social, economic and international are relationships between individuals. Therefore relationships are merely modes of connections and do not form entities themselves. When things in themselves are confused, the confused jumble: "It's hard to tell which is the worse abhorrence, / Whether it's persons pied or nations pied" (155-156). But should this mean nations and individuals are good on their own and but muddled when mixed? It is unlikely in view of Tityrus's belief in a natural relationship between individuals. More likely, it is a plea to keep focused on the individual and resist a collectivized mentality. This further translates into an anxiety over collectivized farming and socialist reform. This concern is followed up later in Tityrus's piece of advice:

Don't join too many gangs. Join few if any.

Join the United States and join the family—

But not much in between unless a college.

Is it a bargain, Shepherd Meliboeus? (280-283)

That is, only the most basic commitments to kin and country should interfere with ones individual existence, a conservative ideal of a nation of independent farmers. This

conservatism takes on a decisively pastoral form in its retreat from socialist or collectivist problems and the ingenuity of industrialization. It is a flight from, rather than a confrontation with, economic depression. It is an assertion that in spite of stock market crashes, social or natural disasters that the yeoman farmer can persevere. It is also a decidedly American idealism. Notably, in spite of his increasing role in the poem in serving as Tityrus's foil, Meliboeus persists in bringing up his economic troubles. Even though at the end of the poem Meliboeus is inclined to agree with Tityrus that "We're too unseparate" (291), his concerns are left unsettled. Meliboeus asks:

> Tityrus, sometimes I'm perplexed myself
>
> To find the good of commerce. Why should I
>
> Have to sell you my apples and buy yours? (163-165)

Tityrus predictably responds that the answer is more self-sufficiency and less dependency upon the market. But there is still a discrepancy between the two farmers. In Virgil's first eclogue, there is the unsettling fact that Tityrus has had his land restored, while Meliboeus, and those he speaks for, have not. In "Build Soil" Frost (Tityrus) has his poetry and teaching. Meanwhile for Meliboeus, "Hard times have struck me and I'm on the move" (5). The allusion to Virgil's poem unsettles the strength of Tityrus' position and arguments. His philosophical abstractions aside, the poem hints at larger problems that its pastoral constructions can deal with. This does not clash with or contradict Tityrus's social outlook, but it places the yeoman farmer in a world, which is more complex than his arguments can account for. As with Virgil, the discrepancy between Tityrus and Meliboeus is not addressed, but neither is its presence extinguished.

Nevertheless, "Build Soil" holds to the world of yeoman farmers against social, political and economic interests that seek to disturb it.

> Needless to say to you my argument
>
> Is not to lure the city to the country.
>
> Let those possess the land, and only those,
>
> Who love it with a love so strong and stupid
>
> That they may be abused and taken advantage of
>
> And made fun of by business, law, and art;
>
> They still hang on. (185-191)

The freedom of the farmer is not a freedom from harm, whether natural or human caused, but a calling for those who love it. It is based upon a natural bond between man to nature and beyond concerns of security and comfort. It is this bond both links Frost's Tityrus and Meliboeus to the land and defines their common ground. Beneath his role as university lecturer, philosopher and poet, Tityrus shares Meliboeus' status as the independent farmer. Their status as independent farmers is what united them to the soil. Without this status, they would be cast adrift as Virgil's Meliboeus was. For this reason, their relation to the soil is presented as part of their fundamental nature, and the social, economic and technological factors that threaten their status as farmers work against the bonds of nature itself. It is essentially the old pastoral paradigm of rooting human social order in the natural order, translated into the ideal of the American farmer. But this transformation also changes the relation of the country to the city. The established pastoral tactic of using the country to attack the mores of the city is severed and the country retreats from the city altogether:

No, refuse to be

Seduced back to the land by any claim

The land may seem to have on man to use it

Let none assume to till the land but farmers.

I shall speak to you as one of them. (206-210)

In Frost's pastoral world, it is for the farmers to cultivate their lands, as the *urbs* is kept divided from the country. The country is a place reserved for those who through their nature belong; it is for the true farmers themselves to etch out their existence and their shaky relationships with the outside world. Plans to lure the city poor into the country could only lead to disaster. There is no finality to Frost's model of the pastoral world, no fixed set of lessons to learn or complete understanding to arrive at. For the farmer, Tityrus's advice is "To build the soil" (217). "Build Soil" could be a party slogan or a personal motto; its imperative is reminiscent of Tityrus famous command: "pascite ut ante boues, pueri; summittite tauros" ("Graze castle as before, lads, breed your bulls" Verg. *Ecl.* I.45). The command is to keep developing your farms as before, to resist changes brought from outside. The connection with the Virgil's herdsmen affirms that there are always bad times and uses this to affirm that herdsmen or farmers will still survive as long as they hold on to their way of life. As in Virgil disaster sets in when this way of life is intruded upon:

Friends crowd around me with their five-year plans

That Soviet Russia has made fashionable.

You come to me and I'll unfold to you

A five-year plan I call so not because

It takes ten years or so to carry out,

Rather because it took five years at least

To think out. (222-228)

Of course, Tityrus's five-year plan is to "Build Soil" (234). But the admonition is to avoid a Soviet form of socialism, a system where the government intrudes upon the country (among other catastrophes and excesses). It is a plea to avoid excessive action in the face of current economic or social plights, as the action's disruptive effects will outlast their benefits.

Frost's "Build Soil" ends with the words of Meliboeus: "We're too unseparate. And going home / From company means coming to our senses" (291-292). The ending is the pastoral motif of the shepherd's separation after the singing contest and it is the moral lesson at the end of a medieval debate poem. It is a warning to the herd-mentality and party politics and a call to think for the self. Alpers argued: "[...] the characteristic way of making pastoral interesting is to claim that it undermines or transcends itself" (Alpers 1996 35). But for "Build Soil" this strategy is a bit of a stretch, as although the poem deals in abstractions, it is explicit in its outlook. And Frost's politics are not undermined in the poem, implicitly or otherwise. The tension in the poem is between the anxiety of the depression and the call to 'hold on' and weather the storm. It is the intrinsic tension between poetry and social reality that is so keenly felt in Virgil's *Bucolica* that Frost reworks into his own poetry. Frost once wrote: "All metaphor breaks down somewhere. That is the beauty of it" (Frost 1966 41). And those words explain the nature of pastoral, in that the metaphor breaks down somewhere between Arcadia and reality. In a way,

pastoral poetry lends itself to allegory and satire, but it is distinct from both. Pastoral attempts to step back into its own world, not to then find itself free, but only to see reality swift in pursuit. There is room for sentimentality and nostalgia: "Fled are those times, if e'er such times were seen, / When rustic poets praised their native green" (Crabbe "The Village: Book I" 7-8). But pastoral comes with the uncertainty that e'er such times were ever seen. Fate always seems to govern the pastoral world with a degree of arbitrariness and purposelessness, it is a place where certainty is kept at bay ("vicitque pium fors dura favorem" "hard luck overcomes divine favour" Petrarca 1970 *Ecl.*II.16).[62] In the context, of "Build Soil" Frost faces his personal philosophy against the economic depression of the 1930s. He is aware that his vocation as a lecturer and poet separates him from farmers like Meliboeus, but rather than deny the economic hardships of others he holds on harder on to his own way of life. Like poetry, farming is more than a vocation or a form of production. It is an intimate connection not only with nature but also with human society; in a sense the traditional story of the pastoral Good Life, when free from the corruptions of the city. Frost, however, combines the traditional pastoral with Yankee agrarian idealism. His farmer sustains the ideal of self-sustainable small farm against adversity or sources of interference, such New Deal policies. The translation, or Americanization, of Virgil is more than a rhetorical strategy meant to naturalize the idealism of the poem. It is built on a felt connection with Virgil's poetry and is an attempt to place another *gradus ad Parnassum* atop of Virgil's foundation.

[62] My translation.

VI Seamus Heaney and the Irish Pastoral

Although much of Seamus Heaney's poetry is pastoral (or at least rural and provincial), his main contributions to the Virgilian pastoral are in the form of a paper he delivered to the Royal Irish Academy on June 6, 2002 entitled "Eclogues *in extremis*: On The Staying Power Of The Pastoral," and in several poems from his collection *Electric Light* (2001) including "Bann Valley Eclogue," "Glanmore Eclogue" and "Virgil: Eclogue IX." A longer version of "Bann Valley Eclogue" appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement* on 8 October 1999 prior to its publication in *Electric Light.* These poems in a truly Virgilian manner draw from a wide variety of poets, as well as intertwine themselves with both the history of pastoral poetry and the history of Heaney's own poetics. Bann Valley and Glanmore, loci that exhibit a long history in both Heaney's poetic landscapes collide with the Roman visions of Virgil. Contemporary politics, personal landscapes, Latin, English, Irish and other poetic traditions, millennial celebrations and prophesies, combine into an intricate web of poetry. The intricacies of this web, which weaves its way through the poems in *Electric Light* has entangled some readers and reviewers, who have then left these poems with more a sense of puzzlement than enrichment. But there is a great deal to be gained for the patient reader, not through unravelling the complex thread of these poems, but through examining the rich patterns they create. This chapter will attempt to explore one of the important threads, that of the Virgilian pastoral, but it is hoped that how Heaney handles this one tradition in *Electric Light* will help elucidate the other patterns in this rare volume of poetry.

In his lecture "Eclogues *in extremis*," Heaney examined pastoral eclogues in the works of Michael Longley, Louis MacNeice, Czesław Miłosz and Miklós Radnóti, two Irish and two Eastern European poets. Through examining the pastoral in these modern poets, Heaney developed an argument for the pastoral as a powerful poetic mode and challenged its detractors' claims that pastoral is dead, is reduced to artificiality or merely an antiquated form for reactionary propaganda. He shows how pastoral poets have developed "[...] a trust in historical continuity and the viability of classical techniques" (Heaney 2003 2). He argues that the pastoral eclogue is still a viable form of poetry and still capable of being exploited. Rather than turn against complexity of the Virgilian pastoral, Heaney argues that Virgil's *Bucolica* provide an exceptional poetic model in its intricacies and form:

> Virgil's *Eclogues*, you could say, are a kind of Crystal Palace, beautifully structured and strong because of inner relationships and symmetries; the author in late Republican Rome, like the engineer in Victorian England, was fully aware that artificial conditions were being created, but he was also proud of his extraordinary ability to contrive the transparent tegument. (6-7)

That is, Heaney embraces the Virgilian pastoral as a vehicle for investigating significant poetic themes rather than celebrating or emulating rustic life. Heaney's critical discussions in turn serve as insights on how to approach his pastoral eclogues. Heaney's collection *Electric Light,* "with a universal scope of place and time" (Moi 173), meditates on the higher themes of poetry, friends and fellow poets, love, life and death. The role of the pastoral eclogue in this collection is to hold together these themes in a "Crystal Palace" structured with the "inner relationships and symmetries" of Heaney's own

poetics. Careful attention to these symmetries then illuminates the beauty and architectural integrity of these pastoral eclogues, as well as Heaney use of Virgil's *Bucolica* as a poetic model.[63]

Bann Valley Eclogue

"Bann Valley Eclogue," which refigured Virgil's messianic eclogue is, in my opinion, the most highly developed of Heaney's three pastoral eclogues. Consisting of a dialogue between two speakers, Virgil and Poet, it was first published in the *TLS* before the turn of the millennium as a 66-line poem, it was cut-down to 42 lines for *Electric Light*. The most dramatic changes between the two versions are the deletion of four of Poet's stanzas, including the final stanza. The poem begins:

POET: Bann Valley Muses, give us a song worth singing,
Something that rises like the curtain in
Those words *And it came to pass* or *In the beginning*.
Help me to please my hedge-schoolmaster Virgil
And the child that's due. Maybe, heavens, sing
Better times for her and her generation. ("Bann Valley Eclogue" 1-6 b) [64]

The opening, "Bann Valley Muses," alludes to the opening line of Virgil's fourth eclogue: "Sicelides Musae, paulo canamus" ("Sicilian Muse, let's sing a nobler song" Verg. *Ecl.* IV.1). Virgil's "Sicilian Muse" in turn alludes to both Theocritus poetry and Moschus' "Epitaph on Bion." Aside from adding an additional layer of allusion, Heaney

[63] "NB On symmetry and understanding: "If symmetry, then, is a principle of individuation and helps us to distinguish objects, we cannot wonder that it helps us to enjoy the perception. For our intelligence loves to perceive; water is not more grateful to a parched throat than a principle of comprehension to a confused understanding. Symmetry clarifies, and we all know that light is sweet" (Santayana 60).
[64] The *TLS* version is cited as (a) and the *Electric Light* version as (b). My analysis is of the *Electric Light* version.

translates the Theocritean and Virgilian pastoral into his own personal and poetic North Irish landscape.[65] Yet this does more than transport Virgil's Arcadia and Theocritus' Sicily to the locality of Bann Valley; it connects the oracular nature of Virgil's eclogue with Heaney's poetic voice. It connects the civil wars, the treaty of Brundisium, and perhaps even the coming of Christ in Virgil's time with the upcoming second millennium, and Ireland's hope in ceasefires, economic growth and peace of the late in the 1990s. Furthermore, regarding the hope for peace and growth in his own time, Heaney raises Virgil's anxiety over the peace between Anthony and Octavian reaffirmed at Brundisium. Continuing to unpack this opening, it is apparent that the tone and meter are somewhat akin to MacNeice's "Eclogue for Christmas" or "Eclogue from Iceland," which is likely because of the conversational pace it sets. Also present in the opening lines is the use of alliterated "s" to create the effect of incantation in a phonetic parody of Virgil's opening lines.[66] These styles of diction assist the Poet to take on the role of the Roman *vates* and the Irish bard. The phrase, "And it came to pass," is markedly biblical, occurring hundreds of times in the King James Bible, and the phrase "In the beginning" from Genesis adds the role of Hebrew prophet to the poetic roles of bard, oracle and *vates*. Virgil is referred to as "my hedge-schoolmaster Virgil" intertwining the poet's role to the roles of prophet, teacher and upholder of tradition.[67] Hedge-schoolmasters

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[65] Bann Valley appears as part of Heaney's poetic landscape most notably in "Bann Clay" in *Door into the Dark* (1969).

[66] cf. "Bann Valley Mu***ses***, give ***us*** a ***so***ng worth ***si***nging,
Something that r***ises*** like the curtain in
Those words *And it came to* ***pass*** or *In the beginning*." (1-3 b)
and
"***si*** cana***mus siluas***, ***si***luae ***sint*** con***su***le dignae" (Verg. *Ecl.* IV.3)

[67] The 'hedge-schoolmaster' connected underground schools which taught math, classics and the Irish bardic traditions in Ireland after a law was passed in 1695 which forbade Catholics to teach in schools. The national school system led to their decline in the 1880s. McManus describes the social role of the hedge-schoolmaster in her book *The Irish Hedge School and Its Books, 1695-1831*. She writes, "Though poor in

were not only teachers and the guardians of traditions but often poets, whose wit was feared. As McManus notes, "The people feared the satire of the poet/hedge schoolmaster just as much as the priest's tirade from the pulpit (McManus 95)." Finally, there is the predicted birth of a child and the hope for "Better times for her and her generation" (6 b). These first lines aptly justify the comment that "Heaney's work is an unbroken voyage" (O'Brien 1995 190). The Nobel Prize winning poet looks back to his own poetics and poetic traditions as well as to the future with a mix of hope and anxiety. "Bann Valley Eclogue" begins with an invocation for a rebirth, a renewal and a revision of both Heaney's own poetics and the poetic traditions he invokes. Virgil responds to his call:

> VIRGIL: Here are my words you'll have to find a place for:
>
> *Carmen, ordo, nascitur, saeculum, gens.*
>
> Their gist in your tongue and province should be clear
>
> Even at this stage. Poetry, order, the times,
>
> The nation, wrong and renewal, then an infant birth
>
> And a flooding away of all the old miasma. (7-11 b)

All the elements pertaining to the messianic nature of the eclogue are highlighted: "*Carmen, ordo, nascitur, saeculum, gens*" and the "infant birth." In the final version of this poem, all these elements retain an ambiguous presence in tune with the enigmatic fourth eclogue on which this poem draws upon. But the *TLS* version pulled these threads closer together. In *Electric Light* version, alongside several other changes, Heaney deleted three stanzas with the Poet speaking, which occurred after this stanza. In the first

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worldly possessions, the peasants had a rich treasury of folk culture which had been handed down to them by previous generations and which was carefully nurtured by their poets and hedge schoolmasters" (McManus 100). Brian Friel introduced the role of the hedge-schoolmaster to modern Irish letters by in his play *Translations* (London: Faber & Faber, 1981).

of the deleted stanzas, the Poet addresses Virgil as if he was literally a hedge-schoolmaster or teacher:

Poet: *Lucina*. Rhyming with Sheena. Vocative First
Declension. Feminine gender. The Roman
St. Anne. Who is *casta Lucina*, chaste
Star of the birth-bed. And a secular star,
Meaning star of the *saeculum*, brightness gathering
Head great month by month now, waiting to fall. (13-18 a)

The association of Lucina, goddess of childbirth, with St. Anne, the mother of Mary, explains a puzzling element of the final version of the poem: the female gender of the prophesized child. The *TLS* version recasts the messianic Christian readings of Virgil's fourth eclogue into a messianic reading of Mary's birth and Immaculate Conception. St. Anne is the "chaste / Star of the birth-bed" meaning that she prepared the way for Mary's birth free from sin, which in turn prepared the way for the birth of Christ. The phrase "secular star" puns on *saeculum,* which can mean a race, generation, lifetime, spirit of the age, or a century. It calls into question the validity of the messianic reading invoked. The exclusion of this stanza alongside other changes adds to the ambiguity of the poem, but at the expense of these expansive evocations. The other missing stanzas more explicitly invoke the troubles of ancient Rome and modern Ireland. The final version, it must be mentioned, achieves a finer balance between expansiveness of meaning and ambiguity.

Returning to the words of Virgil, the next stanza continues and amplifies the prophetic strain:

> Whatever stains you, you rubbed it into yourselves:
> Earth mark, birth mark, mould like the bloodied mould
> On Romulus's ditch-back. But when the waters break
> Bann's stream will overflow, the old markings
> Will avail no more to keep east bank from west.
> The valley will be washed like the new baby. (12- 18 b)

Amidst the interweaving of myths of floods, Romulus, births, floods and renewals is a local legend and prophecy tied to the flooding of the Bann River:

> In it a tradition on both sides of the Bann that this river, as also Lough Neagh, was caused by the overflow of a well. A lady, as related, went out to draw water from a spring. During her absence a black pig jumped between the hooks of a pot on the fire. Excited by the severe scalding it received, the pig made off at a mad rate down the valley. Owing to this occurrence, the lady rushed from the well, forgetting to restore its stone cover, and immediately the water issued forth in great volume, forming the Lough and the Bann. From that day to this, according to the tale, the whole stretch of country through which the Bann flows has been called the Valley of the Black Pig.
>
> There is connected with this story an old prophecy, oft quoted, which informs us that when the black pig re-appears, in the same neighbourhood, there will be a

great convulsion in the physical world, and the terrible revolution in the State, portending the end of the present dispensation. (Sibbett 20)

This legend tied to the flooding of the Bann gives local colour to the poem and affirms that in spite of its expansive and universalizing themes the poem is tied to a specific geographic and cultural locus. This locus, however, is also tied to the tradition of the messianic eclogue. As the poem vacillates between the past and the future, it expands and deflates its locality, grasping threads from several locations before pulling them together. The Poet, puzzled by the immensity of the themes before him, speaks:

POET: Pacatum orbem: your words are too much nearly.
Even "orb" by itself. What on earth could match it?
And then, last month, at noon-eclipse, wind dropped.
A millennial chill, birdless and dark, prepared.
A firstness steadied, a lastness, a born awareness
As name dawned into knowledge: I saw the orb. (19-24 b)

Pacatum orbem is taken from the fourth eclogue where the prophesized child is seen: "pacatumque reget patriis uirtutibus orbem." ("Ruling the world calmed by his father's hand" Verg. *Ecl.* IV.17). "A millennial chill" was "An Avernus chill" (40 a) in the *TLS* version, a change which adds emphasis on the chiliadic aspects of the poem at the expense of an allusion to the entrance to the underworld from Virgil's *Aeneid.* The "noon-eclipse" refers to the 11 August 1999 total solar eclipse.[68] When the Sun's photosphere is completely covered by the Moon, it is truly a miraculous sight, at which the Poet can only respond: "I saw the orb." Through the specificity of the 1999 eclipse,

[68] Although this might be a stretch, it is notable that the area of darkness under an eclipse is the *umbra,* a word which takes us back to Virgil's first eclogue sitting under the shade of a beech tree. An eclipse carries its own connotations of prophecies, endings and beginnings.

Heaney draws fully together the various prophetic and poetic threads he invoked. This vacillation between the specifics of time and place and the ambiguity of poetics and prophecy assists Heaney develop his pastoral eclogue as an intricate crystal palace. It creates a tension between expansive themes and the construction of the pastoral simplicity of pre-millennial Bann Valley. One scholar writing on Heaney's early works referred to him as "a simple straightforward, readily accessible writer [...]. A backwater all to himself, he is seen as lying outside the main currents of contemporary European and Anglo-American intellectual life; a throwback to an earlier age, he is admired precisely for not being a 'modern' " (Morrison 11-12).[69] And the context of Heaney's earlier work and earlier pastoral cannot go ignored without losing a grasp of his later poetry. Underlying "Bann Valley Eclogue" is the earthy pastoral of his first collections. The locale of Bann Valley is not only rooted geographically in Ireland but poetically in Heaney's oeuvre. As closely as this poem looks to the future, it focalises on the past and waters Heaney's own personal and poetic roots. As the poem moves along, it further interweaves the poetics and locality of Heaney's Bann Valley with Virgil's Arcadia:

> VIRGIL: Eclipses won't be for this child. The cool she'll know
> Will be the pram hood over her vestal head.
> Big dog daisies will get fanked up in the spokes.
> She'll lie on summer evenings listening to
> A chug and slug going on in the milking parlour.
> Let her never hear close gunfire or explosions. (25-30 b)

The image of the child shaded by the hood of a pram carriage, near or in a milking parlour, parodies the stock image of the shepherd relaxing in the shade. "Fanked" is a

[69] Morrison's work covered only up to Heaney's *Field Work* (1979).

rustic sounding word and according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* means "To put (sheep) in a fank; to pen up" ("fank, v." OED). This adds another twist to the pastoral image, firstly because the ruin of the flowers in the wheel is put into pastoral terms and secondly because the daisies, a symbol of innocence, are portrayed as being uprooted to provide a comfortable place for the child. Celtic myth relating daisies as symbols of birth and renewal perhaps is relevant:

> The first origin tale [of daisies] is Celtic and is, apparently to be found in the poems of Ossian. Every child who dies unborn, the story goes, returns to earth as a new flower. Thus, a woman named Malvina, who mourned the death of her baby, was consoled by the Maidens of King Morven, who told her that the child had been turned into a flower with a golden disk surrounded by silvery petals. It looked like an infant playing in a field; and it became, therefore, the very symbol of the innocence of a newborn baby. (Kell 42)

This symbolism of innocence and rebirth of this stanza is tied with hopes for the child to live free from "close gunfire or explosions"; a not so oblique reference to the ceasefire talks in North Ireland in the 1990s. As with Virgil's fourth eclogue, signs of hope and peace are left indeterminate amidst a puzzling array of allusions and images. As the voice of the poem shifts back to the Poet, the pastoral scene moves from the child to the poet's own pastoral and childhood imagery:

> POET: Why do I remember St. Patrick's mornings,
> Being sent by my mother to the railway line
> For the little trefoil, untouchable almost, the shamrock
> With its twining, binding, creepery, tough, thin roots

All over the place, in the stones between the sleepers.

Dew-scales shook off the leaves. Tear-ducts asperging. (31-36 b)

The image of a child gathering shamrocks near the railway is reminiscent of world of Heaney's early poetry, particularly the poems from *Death of a Naturalist* (1966). The shamrock, a symbol of Ireland, the Holy Trinity and good luck is represented as "tough," but with "thin roots," existing in a duality of strength and vulnerability, hardy but easily uprooted. The "sleepers" are the timbers which support the rails, but the word also refers to spies or saboteurs who wait inactive for a period of time before commencing their activities. The lines also allude to MacNeice's "Eclogue by a five-barred gate," where Death speaks:

D. I thought he was a poet and could quote the prices

Of significant living and decent dying, could lay the rails level

on the sleepers. (30-32)

The Poet calls upon themes from Heaney's early poetry and interweaves them with the uncertainties, ambiguities and mystifications of Virgil's fourth eclogue. "Tear-ducts asperging" is a puzzling phrase; presumable the Poet is recalling his own tears while gathering shamrocks, but this is uncertain. "Asperges" usually refers to the Roman Catholic rite where the priest sprinkles the congregation with holy water before Mass. The word in this context comes from the Latin Vulgate version of Psalm 50 (51) "Asperges me hyssopo, et mundabor; / Lavabis me, et super nivem dealbabor." ("Sprinkle me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; / Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow" Psalms 50:9).[70] The religious imagery and diction are never allowed to become

[70] My translation. The numbering (50:9) is that of the Vulgate. In most, if not all (I have not checked), modern English translations these lines appear at Psalms 51:7.

dominant or dogmatic, but works to draw in another thread of meaning. Signs of faith function as signs of hope, which if anything is the key thematic element of the element. Hope is neither secure nor infallible, but flutters around the poem and is tied to the prophetic functions of both speakers, Virgil and the Poet. The final stanza of the poem is closely connected with the final lines of Virgil's fourth eclogue:

> Child on the way, it won't be long until
>
> You land among us. Your mother's showing signs,
>
> Out for her sunset walk among big round bales.
>
> Planet earth like a teething ring suspended
>
> Hangs by its world-chain. Your pram waits in the corner.
>
> Cows are let out. They're sluicing the milk-house floor. (37-42 b)

The pram and milk-house await the child and the "planet earth" hangs in suspense, but the child's birth does not take place in the poem. The birth of the child remains as a symbol of hope. In a final stanza, present in the *TLS* version of the poem, the birth of the child was more explicitly connected with the ending lines of Virgil's fourth eclogue: "We, know, little one you have to start with a cry / But slime soon too, a big one for your mother" (61-62 a). The deletion of these lines makes the allusion implicit and better suiting the subtle but potent nature of the poem. Recalling Virgil's final lines, however, do not disambiguate the ending of Heaney's poem:

> Incipe, parue puer, risu cognoscere matrem
>
> (matri longa decem tulerunt fastidia menses)
>
> incipe, parue puer: qui non risere parenti,
>
> nec deus hunc mensa, dea nec dignata cubili est.

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. (Verg. *Ecl.* IV.60-63)

The final line is reminiscent of descriptions of Hercules (Clausen 145) and points to the heroic nature of the child. Virgil's child must smile at his mother in gratitude for carrying him through a long pregnancy in order to receive the grace of the gods.[71] It is a perplexing ending, and it remains uncertain, as in Heaney's poem, that the child will fulfill his role as a symbol of hope. Heaney's poem ends with uncertain hope, not through a pessimistic stance, but because of the complexities and uncertainties of the world. The newborn child, the new millennium, the eclipse of 1999, peace treaties and ceasefires, and other signs of a new beginning come together in a state of flux. Virgil's poem commemorating the peace at Brundisium gave way to civil wars, which reminds us that peace is uncertain. Embedded in the ideal of the pastoral is the reality of constant change, growth and decay. The renewed cycle of ages present in Virgil's fourth eclogue translates into changes in life and poetry. Its calls to us re-examine the past, but also to look towards the future. "Bann Valley Eclogue" is a political and social poem, in that it is embedded in social and political realities, but it is not a partisan poem. It draws on these realities, but pulls them into a poetic landscape rooted in the pastoral tradition and Heaney's early poetry. Its technique is rooted in Virgil, but it also partially indebted to the allegorical and parabolic styles that poets, such as Zbigniew Herbert and Czesław Miłosz, used to defy communist censors. "Bann Valley Eclogue" is a highly literary

[71] Some contrary interpretations argue that line 62 should read, "Recognize the mother by *her* smile" (Postgate 36) (R.D. Williams 121).

poem in that it demands the reader possess a certain degree of literary lore, but this should not be surprising. Consider a comment Heaney wrote regarding North Irish poetry:

> The only reliable release for the poet was the appeasement of the achieved poem. In that liberated moment, when the lyric discovers its buoyant completion, when the timeless formal pleasure comes to its fullness and exhaustion, in those moments of self-justification and self-obliteration the poet makes contact with the plane of consciousness where he is at once intensified in his being and detached from his predicaments. It is this deeper psychological compulsion which lies behind the typical concern of Northern Irish poets with style, with formal finish, with linguistic relish and play. (Heaney 1985 7)

"Bann Valley Eclogue," true to the form of the Virgilian pastoral eclogue, ends on a moment of "buoyant completion." But it also possesses a psychological depth and underneath its "formal finish" and linguistic game-play is a serious meditation on peace, hope and renewal.

Glanmore Eclogue

As "Bann Valley Eclogue" corresponds to Virgil's fourth eclogue, "Glanmore Eclogue" corresponds to Virgil's first eclogue and its themes of civil strife and land evictions. In 1972, the year known as Bloody Sunday in Derry, Heaney moved from his home in North Ireland to Glanmore cottage in County Wicklow (in the Republic of Ireland). Important for both Heaney's personal and poetic geography, Glanmore cottage appeared in the "Glanmore Sonnets" published in *Field Works* (1979) and the sequence "Glanmore Revisited" in *Seeing Things* (1991). The "Glanmore Sonnets" already draw

together with Glanmore Cottage: Horace's Sabine farm, Dorothy and William Wordsworth's Dove Cottage, Virgil's Georgics, Dante and a number of both English and Irish poems. Furthermore, several lines from the sonnet sequence "Glanmore Revisited" (from *Seeing Things* 1991) already connect Glanmore Cottage with the pastoral of Virgil's first eclogue: "We're on our own / Years later in the same *locus amoenus*, / Tenants no longer, but in full possession / Of an emptied house and whatever keeps between us" ("II The Cot" 5-8). Although not directly invoking these earlier Glanmore poems, "Glanmore Eclogue" is works directly in the poetic context Heaney developed for Glanmore Cottage.[72]

Another geographical context of "Glanmore Cottage" comes from its corresponding poem, Virgil's first eclogue, and interpretations of that poem as an expression gratitude to Octavian for supposedly restoring Virgil's land that soldiers had previously seized from him after the Battle of Philippi. Through this connection, the implications of civil strife and dependency on the grace of political powers to sustain a peaceful pastoral existence, which Virgil's poem thinly veils, rise into background of Glanmore Cottage. As in Virgil's poem, the speaker Tityrus is traditionally understood as representing Virgil, the 'Poet' here stands partially for Heaney himself. Significantly, the second speaker's name, Myles, derives from the Latin *miles* (soldier) but is in sound

[72] Furthermore, perhaps Heaney's Glanmore poems are a response to accusations that in leaving North Ireland for Glanmore Cottage he was in some way betraying his duty as poet to engage directly political matters. Although I agree with little of his article as a whole, Twiddy writes: "Pastoral can betray, but this is familiar territory for Heaney. His 1972 move from Belfast, in the midst of the Troubles, to Glanmore in County Wicklow, was perceived by some as a betrayal of artistic responsibility. The position of 'inner émigré' consisted of an oblique approach to political matters, while the pastoral of 'Glanmore Sonnets' of 1979 offered a luxuriant, peaceful vision, an alternative to war. Indeed Heaney wrote that 'I have occasionally talked of the countryside where we live in Wicklow as being pastoral rather than rural, trying to impose notions of a beautified landscape on the word, in order to keep "rural" for the unselfconscious face of raggle-taggle farmland'. Pastoral offers a sanitised view of a place" (Twiddy 59).

similar to the Greek word μῆλον, meaning either a sheep or a goat and its cognate the Irish *míl*, (small) animal. His name also suggests Míl Espáine (Miles Hispaniae or Mil of Spain), the legendary founder of the Goidelic Celts and common ancestor of the Irish, which suggests he stands for the Irish everyman.[73] Myles is the first speaker in the poem:

> MYLES: A house and ground. And your own bay tree as well
>
> And time to yourself. You've landed on your feet.
>
> If you can't write now, when will you ever write?
>
> ("Glanmore Eclogue" 1-3)

The bay tree suggests the laurel wreath awarded to great poets, but also great military commanders.[74] As Meliboeus commences the first eclogue commenting on Tityrus's peaceful existence under a beech tree, Myles lauds the Poet's success, *otia*, and happy homestead. The Poet's response is directly reminiscent of the first eclogue: "O Meliboee, deus nobis haec otia fecit. / namque erit ille mihi semper deus, illius aram / saepe tener nostris ab ouilibus imbuet agnus." ("O Melibee, a god grants us this peace-- / A god to me forever, upon whose altar / a young lamb from our folds will often bleed" Verg. *Ecl.* I.6-8). The identity of the 'god' of Tityrus, although often interpreted as Augustus, is notoriously ambiguous.

> POET: A woman changed my life. Call her Augusta
>
> Because we arrived in August, and from now on
>
> This month's baled hay and blackberries and combines
>
> Will spell Augusta's bounty. (4-7)

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[73] Myles could also refer to Myles na gCopaleen, the Irish penname of Flann O'Brien (Brian O'Nolan).
[74] Perhaps alluding to Heaney's Nobel Prize.

As with the child in "Bann Valley Eclogue" we find the identity of a veiled male character (Octavian) changed into a female. Furthermore, Augusta stands for Ann Saddlemyer, who rented Glanmore Cottage to the Heaney family.[75] Heaney takes the tradition of reading Virgil's first eclogue as kudos to Augustus and transforms it into an expression of thanks to Saddlemyer. Myles's response echoes the lamentations of his corresponding character in Virgil's eclogue:

> MYLES: Outsiders own
>
> The country nowadays, but even so
>
> I don't begrudge you. You're Augusta's tenant
>
> And that's enough. She has every right,
>
> Maybe more right than most, to her quarter acre. (8-12)

Myles, "I don't begrudge you," echoes Meliboeus's "Non equidem inuideo" ("I am not envious of you" Verg. *Ecl.* I.11).[76]

> Talk about changed lives! Those were the days---
>
> Land Commissions making tenant owners,
>
> Empire taking note at last too late . . .
>
> But now with all this money coming in
>
> And peace being talked up, the boot's on the other foot.
>
> First it was Meliboeus' people
>
> Went to the wall, now it will be us,

[75] "The real Augusta must be Ann Saddlemyer, who once owned the cottage in Synge country and rented it to the Heaneys, and who is recognized in the poem by personal gratitude and praise for her knowledge of the region and her work on Synge, the Meliboeus of the poem. She is a Yeats scholar too, but the naming of Yeats' patron and hostess [Lady Augusta Gregory] seems gratuitous" (Hardy 197). This identification is confirmed *District and Circle* (2006) where these lines are cited in the dedication to Saddlemyer. Another fact of interest: Synge's father's family were connected with Glanmore Castle in County Wicklow.

[76] My translation.

Small farmers here are priced out of the market. (18-25)

In these lines, with a moment of political pellucidity, Myles directly engages turn-of-the-century Irish social and political situations. This perhaps represents a shift in the locus of Glanmore Cottage from a place of pastoral retreat to pastoral allegorical engagement. These lines allude firstly to the Irish Land Commission, which assisted the transfer of lands from landlords to tenants until its dissolution on March 31, 1999; here obliquely connected with the turmoil surrounding the appropriation and distribution of land by Roman civil war veterans.[77] Also alluded to here are the ceasefires in North Ireland and the economic boom of the late 1990s, which here present their own anxieties for Myles. Although rooted in contemporary Irish politics, the allusion to Virgil serves to connect Myles complaints with those of "small farmers" throughout the world and throughout history.

POET: Backs to the wall and empty pockets: Meliboeus

Was never happier than when he was on the road

With people on their uppers. Loneliness

Was his passport through the world. Midge-angels

On the face of water, *out in the rain falling.*

His spirit lives for me in things like that. (26-31)

The Meliboeus of Virgil is transformed into a romantic tramp, and identified with J.M. Synge through the quote "*out in the rain falling*", taken from the beginning of Synge's

[77] Virgil was from Mantua, which in his time was part of Cisalpine Gaul, which might suggest that he was of Celtic ancestry. His use of Latin tongue, the tongue of his people's conqueror could then parallel Heaney's use of English instead of Irish. And even if Virgil was not a Celt, the language of his ancestors might have been Etruscan or Umbrian and nevertheless disappeared in face of the language of the conqueror.

play *In the Shadow of the Glen*; set as with "Glanmore Eclogue" at a cottage in County Wicklow. This identification demystifies part of Myles' earlier speech:

> She [Augusta] knows the big glen inside out, and everything
>
> Meliboeus ever wrote about it,
>
> All the tramps he met tramping the roads
>
> And all he picked up, listening in a loft
>
> To servant girls colloguing in the kitchen. (12-17)

Augusta, the Synge scholar Ann Saddlemyer, would certainly know Meliboeus's (Synge) writings inside and out. But as the fate of the characters Tityrus and Meliboeus is contrasted in Virgil's first eclogue, the lives of Heaney and Synge are brought into contrast here. Synge is presented as the Irish tramp, taken from in his own plays[78], while Heaney writes from his secure rustic cottage.

Myles is quick to challenge the Poet's placement of himself as a pastoral writer, emphasizing his dependence on literary culture rather than the land, in a manner reminiscent of Robert Frost's "Build Soil":

> MYLES: Book-learning is the thing. You're a lucky man.
>
> No stock to feed, no milking times, no tillage
>
> Nor blisters on your hands nor weather-worries. (32-35)

"Book-learning" is likely to refer to Heaney's various University posts, which here given the poet freedom to enjoy pastoral (or rather rural) *otia* without the adjoining labour; to which the Poet can only reply with clever pun: "POET: Meliboeus would have called me 'Mr Honey' "(36). Firstly a play on Meliboeus's name (cf. Latin *mel*, and Greek μέλι),

[78] NB The significant role of tramps in plays of another Irish playwright, Samuel Beckett.

and secondly a play on how Synge would have pronounced “Mr Heaney.”[79] The association of honey with poetry is an ancient and longstanding one. Theocritus’ first *Idyll* describes honey as the proper food for the singer Thyrsis: “πλῆρές τοι μέλιτος τὸ καλὸν στόμα, Θύρσι, γένοιτο” (“Filled may thy fair mouth be with honey, Thyrsis” Theoc. *Id.* I.146).[80] Myles replies to the Poet’s wordplay with his own linguistic lament:

> MYLES: Our old language that Meliboeus learnt
> Has lovely songs. What about putting words
> On one of them, words that the rest of us
> Can understand, and singing it here and now? (37-40)

“Our old language” could refer to Synge’s study of the Irish language and therefore lament its decline due to the influence of English, or it could refer to his musical training, which makes better sense in this context. Line 37 also alludes to Milton’s “Comus.” The speaker is the Attendant Spirit who takes the form of a shepherd and instructs the Lady’s brothers how to defeat Comus:

> Yet stay, be not disturbed, now I bethink me,
> Some other means I have which may be used,
> Which once of Meliboeus old I learnt
> The soothest shepherd that e'er piped on plains.
> (Milton “Comus” 819-822)

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[79] There is also a possible allusion to the Greek for song (μέλος).
[80] For one of many comparisons in Greek literature between the roles of poets and bees, cf. “λέγουσι γὰρ δήπουθεν πρὸς ἡμᾶς οἱ ποιηταὶ ὅτι ἀπὸ κρηνῶν μελιρρύτων ἐκ Μουσῶν κήπων τινῶν καὶ ναπῶν δρεπόμενοι τὰ μέλη ἡμῖν φέρουσιν ὥσπερ αἱ μέλιτται, καὶ αὐτοὶ οὕτω πετόμενοι: καὶ ἀληθῆ λέγουσι” (“For the poets, I suppose, tell us that they bear us songs plucked from out of the honey-flowing springs of certain gardens and glens of the Muses, just like the bees, and winged so, and they speak truthfully” Plat. Ion 534a-534b). My translation.

Furthermore, Meliboeus, here is Milton's name for Spenser, who in turn in "The Shepherd's Calendar" uses Tityrus for Chaucer, creating a chain of poetic allusion invoked though Heaney's text. The Poet takes up the challenge:

POET: I have this summer this song for the glen and you:

Early summer, cuckoo cuckoos,

Welcome, summer is what he sings.

Heather breathes on soft bog-pillows.

Big-cotton bows to moorland wind. (41-45)

"*Welcome, summer*" is from the roundel at the end of Chaucer's "The Parlement of Fowls" here and through to the end of the poem, re-envisioned in a light and comical, but distinctively Irish context.

Virgil: Eclogue IX, a translation

Heaney's translation, "Virgil: Eclogue IX", which precedes "Glanmore Eclogue" in *Electric Light*, moves Virgil's eclogues further into an Irish context. Pairing "Virgil: Eclogue IX" and "Glanmore Eclogue" emphasizes the shared themes of the source poems, Virgil's first and ninth eclogue, and Heaney's translation of the ninth eclogue into his own Hiberno-English sets the stage for similar linguistic and cultural appropriations which took place in his translation of *Beowulf.* The social instability during the Roman civil war and the seeming impotence of poetry to stop it or provide solace, which are the overarching themes of Virgil's ninth eclogue are drawn into Heaney's Ireland. Heaney translates by the speech-clusters of the speakers, Moeris and Lycidas, rather than attempting to achieve a line-by-line rendering. Nevertheless, Heaney follows close to the

spirit of Virgil's Latin, keeping the references to Mantua, Bianor's tomb and other references to Italian and Roman geography and culture in tension with the Hiberno-English diction. The famous lines: "sed carmina tantum / nostra ualent, Lycida, tela inter Martia quantum / Chaonias dicunt aquila ueniente columbas. (11-13) are rendered "But songs and tunes / Can no more hold out against brute force than doves / When eagles swoop" (Verg. *Ecl.* IX.13-15). A literal rendition is cut down for direct and colloquial diction. But Heaney is still careful to attempt to capture as many semantic features as the English will allow:

The Pierian muses
Made me a poet too, I too have songs,
And people in the country call me bard,
But I am not sure: I have done nothing yet
That Varius or Cinna would take note of
. I am a squawking goose among sweet-throated swans.
("Virgil: Eclogue IX" 40-45)

et me fecerem poetam
Pierides, sunt et mihi carmina, me quoque dicunt
uatem pastores; sed non ego credulus illis.
Nam Vario uideor nec dicere Cinna
digna, sed argutos inter strepere anser olores. (Verg. *Ecl.* IX.32-36)

The rendition *vates* as bard is common to other translations but perhaps adds a Celtic tinge, but for the most part the rendering is into reasonably literal but imaginative language. But linguistic playfulness occurs, however, when "occursare capro (cornu ferit

ille) caueto" (Verg. *Ecl.* IX.25) is translated as "and watch / the boyo with the horns doesn't go for you" (32) and in several other movements. Over all the local Irish flavour enriches rather than diminish the force of the original, as far as translation allows. The translation plays out what Heaney has written that: "Writers, after all, are among the most sensitive of readers, and they will certainly have internalized the form of the dominant literature" (Heaney 1990 9). For, if nothing else, Heaney's translation and adaptations of Virgil's eclogues demonstrate a unique power for internalizing Virgil into his own personal style and poetics.

Conclusion

Seamus Heaney's pastoral eclogues, however, represent more than an internalization of Virgil. As the elegies of *Field Work* re-established the classical elegy in the context of Heaney's poetry, these poems rework the pastoral eclogue.[81] They work in the context of a highly developed literary pastoral based upon the intricacies of Virgil's poetics, but after unravelling Virgil's poetry and attached literary traditions, it is rethreaded into Heaney's own poetry. These pastoral eclogues then form a part of the intercultural and interlinguistic connections" (O'Brien 2002 161) which comprise *Electric Light.* Through these connections, childhood, dead relatives and poets are revisited while the future is contemplated. Pentameter dominates, while many of the poems depart into a linguistic playground. A style develops which is at once the colloquial one of Heaney's earlier poetry and is, at the same time, Alexandrian and complex. Yet what holds the collection together is its tributes to poetry, Virgil providing only one means for reflections on past and present poets. This places the collection, and

[81] N.B. "There are no gods in these *Field Work* elegies, and one could read them all as part of the distinctive (and often successful) modernist effort to rewrite, in more believable terms, the heroic, sublime and religious conventions of the classical elegy" (Vendler 72).

the pastoral eclogues, firmly in the modernist tradition in that it is an attempt to shore together various fragments of the literary tradition, rather than embrace their ruin. And this represents, what begins to take place in earlier poems of Frost and MacNeice, and that is the internalization of Virgilian pastoral into the modern poetic tradition.

VII Conclusion

The single decisive conclusion both of Virgil's original *Bucolica* and the tradition of the Virgilian pastoral is that there are no conclusions. The modern pastoral, especially as it is exemplified in the poetry of Louis MacNeice, Robert Frost and Seamus Heaney resists decisive form. An apophatic approach yields some understanding: these pastoral eclogues do not follow the neo-classical standards of the eighteenth century or the pastoral lyrics of the Renaissance. They do not follow prescribed rules of simplicity or rustic diction, although they sometimes play with these conventions. Modern poets do not use the form for flattery of monarchs or emperors, although for a long time this was a major function of the genre. On the other hand, a descriptive approach might state that modern pastorals tend to philosophical abstraction. It could claim that the messianic nature of Virgil's fourth eclogue and the political and poetic nature of the first and ninth are imitated or addressed more often than aspects from Virgil's other pastoral poems. The song of Silenus is sadly, to my knowledge, never imitated in modern pastorals. But these descriptions are only of general tendencies, they do not prescribe the borders of the modern pastoral. Another tendency is that the modern pastoral is generally modernist as opposed to post-modernist; it drinks deep the waters "Beneath the Ortygian shore" and is resistive to relativism and incoherence. Its dependency on knowledge of the classical tradition makes it dependent on continuity and human institutions that the postmodern rejects or laughs at.

There remains more to be said on the classical tradition and the pastoral. Valéry jokingly writes in the preface to his translation of the *Bucolica*, "Virgile de mes classes,

qui m'eût dit que j'aurais encore à barboter en toi?" (Valéry 210). And many poets jest of their schoolboy Virgil. But this should not be taken seriously. Valéry's *Virgile* is that of a conscientious and classically-minded poet not that of a child fumbling his Latin primer. Modern poets working in the Virgilian pastoral are immersed in Virgil's *Bucolica.* They are not passive receivers of ancient traditions but work actively and engagingly to synthesize Virgil into their own poetics; they manifest Matthew Arnold's claim that:

> [...] creative literary genius does not principally show itself in discovering new ideas; that is rather the business of the philosopher: the grand work of literary genius is a work of synthesis and exposition, not analysis and discovery; its gifts lie in the faculty of being happily inspired by a certain intellectual and spiritual atmosphere, by a certain order of ideas, when it finds itself in them; of dealing divinely with these ideas, presenting them in the most effective and attractive combinations, —making beautiful works with them, in short. (Arnold 12)

One of the strengths of Virgil's eclogues is that they offer no single "order of ideas" and that they are pliant to the needs of poets. In this way, Virgil wrote his poetry as a synthesis of what was before him, as did Theocritus before him. This is the reason Virgil, as well as other Greco-Roman classics, continues to insight interest. "Un classico è un libro che non ha mai finito di dire quel che ha da dire" (A classic is a book which has never finished saying what it has to say" Calvino 13). That is not that a classic can mean just anything, but that as the world changes it continuously seems to add something to our understanding. In a nondescript way, it says something universal. Poets who work in a classical mode (as opposed to merely alluding to or adapting classics) are invited to both attach on to this understanding and add to it. In addition, the true classic is a

personal classic: "There is no 'verdict of history,' other than the private opinions of the individual" (Trevelyan 49). The great classics are merely those which are classics for great individuals. The classic is a source of inspiration that breaths through great poets in their act of creation: "Great poets seldom make bricks without straw; they pile up all the excellencies they can beg, borrow, or steal from their predecessors and contemporaries, and they set their own inimitable light atop of the mountain" (Pound 1952 162). This form of poetry should not diminish the achievements of poets who make use of it. The classics provide a standard that imitators will be weighted against but this will not inhibit great poets. Rather it will show the lesser poets in light of what they are; for evidence of this, it is only necessary to read any third-rate pastoral poem from the Einsiedeln Eclogues to Allen Tate's "Eclogue of the Liberal and the Poet."[82]

Gilbert Murray said: "[...] the Graeco-Roman element forms the main stream. It comes from great minds. It is a stream from which commonness has been strained away. It has formed the higher intelligence. It is ubiquitous and unescapable [sic]" (Murray 7). This is uncomfortable for some and plain wrong for others, but it is a premise behind revisiting the classics as poetry (as opposed to as archaeological artefacts). The classics provide a common line for communication. When Alexander Pope wrote: "Beneath the shade a spreading beech displays" (Pope 2006 "Autumn The third Pastoral" 1), it was undeniable that he was referring to the beginning of Virgil's first eclogue. That is, he was revisiting the same place that Nemesianus signalled he was revisiting when he wrote:

[82] "The emphasis, too, on originality, on the expression of the artist's unique personality, on the never-ceasing creation of something new and strange and never before heard of, has not only tended to inflame the vanity of the artist, but to suggest standards of comparison and valuation in which the elements of novelty, of newness for its own sake, are somewhat unduly overprized" (Smith 1924 36).

nec sumus indicti calamis: cantamus avena,

qua divi cecinere prius, qua dulce locutus

Tityrus e silvis dominam pervenit in urbe.

nos quoque te propter, Donace, cantabimur urbi,

si modo coniferas inter viburna cupressos

atque inter pinus corylum frondescere fas est.

Nor am I without skill on the reed-pipe. I sing on a flute whereon gods have sung ere now, whereon Tityrus made sweet music and so advanced from the woodland to the imperial city. Me too on your account, Donace, the city will celebrate, if only the cypress with its cones be allowed to burst into leaf among the osiers or the hazel among the pines. (Nemesianus II.82-87)[83]

or that Baptista Mantuanus evoked with:

Can. O memorum dulces umbrae mollesque susurri,

quos tecum memini gelidis carpisse sub umbris

turturis ad gemitus, ad hirundinis ac philomenae

carmina, cum primis resonant arbusta cicadis.

Ah, the sweet shade and soft murmuring of the groves! I remember gathering the delights of these with you in the cool shade close by the turtledove's sighs and the songs of the shallow and nightingale when the orchards first begin to echo to the cicada's note. (Mantuanus "Eclogue IX" 67-70)[84]

The nightingales, beech, cypress, shade, cicada, reed-pipes, Tityrus as the poet, the city, the cypress and the poetic echoes themselves all point to themes that first reached their

[83] Text and translation from Duff's *Minor Latin Poets* (1982).
[84] Translated by Lee Piepho.

magnity of expression in Virgil's *Bucolica.* Mantuanus touches the same passage of Virgil that inspired Tennyson's immortal: "The moan of doves in immemorial elms, / And murmuring of innumerable bees." Virgil's poetry has gone through over two millennia of acervation of meaning. It has become a "human inheritance" (Ricks 221) to which may endlessly return; each new successful pastoral poem enriches this tradition. In this way, each pastoral poem pretends to be the last; to sing "My pleasant songs now shall you hear / no more on mountains high. (Googe "Egloga secunda" 61-62). But whatever else the pastoral is, it is the lengthy and enduring reading and rereading of the *Bucolica* and other pastoral poems. Its traditions and "staying power" (Heaney 2003 2) rests in the ongoing exploitation and elaboration of, and therefore renewed potency, if its symbols and central themes. For this reason, it does not surprise us with its ability to synchronistically incorporate other poetic and philosophical streams. The Carolingian poet, Theodulus, exemplifies this in his eclogue's debate between truth (*Alithia*) and falsehood (*Pseustis*), between Christianity and old paganism:

> P. Splendorem tanti non passus Iupiter auri
> expulit illatis patrem crudeliter armis;
> discolor argento mundi successit imago
> et iam primatum dedit illi curia divum.
> A. Exulat eiectus de sede pia prothoplastus
> as cinis in cincerem naturae mutat honorem.
> ne tamen aeterni temeremur stipite pomi,
> flammeus ante fores vetat ensis adire volentes.
> Falsehood. Jupiter could not stand the brightness of so much gold,

so taking up arms cruelly banished his father;

the golden age gave way to silver,

and the court of the gods gave him first rank.

Truth. Thrown out from a tender home the first-made was an exile,

and ashes to ashes he lost the honour of nature.

Lest the trunk of the everlasting fruit tree disgrace us,

before the gates a flaming sword forbids those wishing to enter.

(Green "Theoduli Ecloga" 45-52)[85]

The golden age of Virgil's fourth eclogue (and Ovid and others) is given a thematic link with an Augustinian account of the Fall. In Theodulus's poem the result is the celebration of Christian truth over pagan falsehoods. As with modern poets, he uses the pastoral form for the richness in thematic elements that it offers. Theodulus uses the singing-contest of Virgil's third eclogue to communicate his world-views and Christian truth. For different objectives, modern poets return to the *Bucolica* but they do so in the same tradition that provided Theodulus a means for expression.

It is no surprise that with its difficult Alexandrian beginning and piled-on sedimentary layers of interpretation, the Virgilian pastoral is a self-conscious, reflective and difficult art form. Allegory along with all forms of figurative interpretation is a permanent feature of the genre (regardless of whether Virgil meant to be read

[85] My translation.

allegorically).[86] In this context, it is no surprise that Garcilaso de la Vega was understood as writing a personal allegory when he wrote:

> Salicio:
>
> ¡Oh más dura que mármol a mis quejas,
>
> y al encendido fuego en que me quemo
>
> más helada que nieve, Galatea!
>
> Oh Galatea, harder than marble to my complaints
>
> and more freezing than snow
>
> to the fire in which I blaze!
>
> (Garsilaso "Égloga I" 57-59)

These lines have long been interpreted as expressing Garcilaso's love for Isabel Freyre. The reason for this it rooted in allegorical interpretations of Virgil's second eclogue. "Allusion is parasitic" (Lee 3), and allegory is too. Garcilaso's poem does not only allude to Virgil, it inevitably takes on Virgilian modes of interpretation. When we come to the modern Virgilian pastoral these modes of interpretation are renewed. In the same interpretative light, we see MacNeice and Auden on tour in "Eclogue from Iceland". We conceive Frost as Tityrus in "Build Soil" both a speaker in the poem and the reader of the poem before the national convention. We envision Heaney in his family home in "Glanmore Eclogue." Their poems stretch over the contours of an ancient tradition and form it into a new poetic landscape. The pastoral eclogues of these three poets hide behind the veils of mythological allusions and allegory, but become intensely personal.

[86] "Virgilio invero fece uso dell'allegoria, ma piuttosto per cose di fatto che per idee, e ciò fece, come tutti sanno, singolarmente nelle Bucoliche." ("Virgil, as everyone knows, made use of allegory singularly in the *Bucolica*, but he used it for facts rather than for ideas." Comparetti 71). This may be so, but an allegory of ideas quickly became part of interpretations of Virgil's *Bucolica*.

Donald Davie said in regard to translating poetry: "Translation is not impossible. But it is damnably difficult." (Davie 840). And the successful pastoral poet is a successful translator; one who bridges the gap between the classical form and the personal poetic space and who bears new meaning across into the pastoral space.

Northrop Frye said of "Lycidas": "For literature is not simply an aggregate of books and poems and plays: it is an order of words. And our total literary experience, at any given time, is not a discrete series of memories or impressions of what we have read, but an imaginatively coherent body of experience" (Frye 1983 213). Seamus Heaney, Robert Frost, Louis MacNeice and other modern pastoral poets have added to this body of experience that forms the pastoral. They have not only provided a modernized version of the ancient form, they have altered the tradition itself. A study of the pastoral as a whole no longer can stop with Milton or Wordsworth; the order keeps going and the tradition flourishes. The new pastorals re-echo (*resonare*) as loudly as the old ones. The Portuguese poet, Almeida Garrett, said regarding the pastoral: "Idoles dorées d'Asterae, agréables fictions de la Grèce antique, qui avez charme mon enfance et ma jeunesse, adieu, adieu pour toujours. Je m'envole vers d'autres pays, vers d'autres hémisphères, vers d'autres autels, vers d'autres dieux… Adieu" (quoted in Castonnet des Fosses 63). As he says goodbye, new visitors are ready to welcome Arcadia, and the comings and goings of the pastoral continue.

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