

SOUND AND SUBSTANCE: A READING OF VIRGIL'S SEVENTH ECLOGUE

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THE *certamen magnum* between Corydon and Thyrsis has often been neglected in deference to the more *engagé* compositions of the *Eclogues*, such as 1, 4, 6, and 10. For some, however, it is a very important piece, central to the understanding of Virgil's pastoral poetry. Ettore Paratore, the eminent *cattedratico* of Latin literature at the University of Rome, considers the poem to be the acid test for the comprehension of the *Bucolics*: "la capacità di comprendere e gustare l'ecloga VII è il banco di prova per un vero intenditore della poesia delle *Bucoliche*."¹ North of the Alps another authoritative connoisseur of Augustan poetry, Viktor Pöschl of Heidelberg, paired the First and the Seventh Eclogues, "ein ernstes und ein heiteres Gedicht," as essential readings for the understanding of the *Eclogues*.²

It is our conviction that the Seventh Eclogue is indeed more than a mere exercise and that Virgil through his competing singers wishes to reveal something about the composition of poetry, specifically, bucolic poetry as he conceived it. In form it is the most bucolic of the *Eclogues* in the sense of Theocritus' technical term for the making of bucolic song, βουκολιάζεσθαι (*Idylls* 5.44, 7.36).³ It is a true pitched contest, not an amiable exchange of distichs as in the encounter between Menalcas and Dametas in the Third Eclogue. The singers are evenly matched, Virgil insists:

*Ambo florentes aetatibus, Arcades ambo,
et cantare pares et respondere parati.*

4-5

The point is emphasized by the strong rhetorical figures in these lines, the chiasitic repetition of *ambo* at the beginning and end of one line, and the alliteration and paronomasia of *pares*, *parati* in the other. The fact that their musical offerings are quatrains gives the singers more scope to exhibit their poetic skills and compose something that is more substantial. It would be deluding and unartistic if after the dramatic liveliness of the contest there were no declared winner, or if the decision were without significance. The *certamen magnum* requires a considered judgment, as

¹Ettore Paratore, *Virgilio* (Florence 1954) 112. Cf. also Hellfried Dahlmann, "Zu Vergils siebentem Hirtengedicht," *Hermes* 94 (1966) 218-232, at 218.

²Viktor Pöschl, *Die Hirtendichtung Virgils* (Heidelberg 1964) 7. This work is hereafter referred to simply as "Pöschl."

³Cf. David Halperin, *Before Pastoral* (New Haven, Conn. 1983) 120 f.

Otto Skutsch maintains.⁴ Some commentators hold that the poet arbitrarily assigns a victor. Heyne ironically remarked:

Operose docent viri docti per totam eclogam, quantopere in singulis versibus superior Thyrsi sit Corydon, iis tamen fere argumentis ut si poeta Thyrsin victorem pronuntiasset, iidem huius iudicii caussas et probationes ab iisdem locis ducturi fuisse videantur.⁵

The most lengthy treatment of the poem in recent times is Pöschl's close philological analysis. Would that it were strictly philological! Unfortunately, the author has a thesis to prove, inherited from long-standing Germanic attitudes to classical art. He admits (67) that his standard is Heinrich Wölfflin's famous study, *Italien und das deutsche Formgefühl*, in which the dynamic force of German art is pitted against what Wölfflin labelled the "lässige Spannung" or "relaxed tension" of artistic creation prevalent in the South, a kind of psychological development of Winckelmann's "edle Einfalt." Pöschl uses the First Eclogue as his chief paradigm of this quality, but it also lies behind his analysis of the Seventh.

For Pöschl, everything that Thyrsis utters is inferior and tainted, not only from a technical point of view, but also because of the attitude of the singer. He confuses aesthetic and ethical judgment and identifies the performance with the performer. The whole contest is seen as a confrontation of two antithetical elements of pastoral poetry, which Pöschl identifies as "die verklärte und die karikierte Hirtenwelt" (109). Corydon embodies the one and Thyrsis the other at every moment of the contest. Corydon represents clarity, simplicity, *Gelassenheit*. His verse is the epitome of classicism, "stille Vornehmheit, innere Grösse" (153)—echoes, once again, of Winckelmann. Thyrsis, on the contrary, stands for all the opposing qualities—the aggressive, unpoetic, wild, "die Aesthetik des Hässlichen" (148).⁶ In keeping with this base attitude the verses of Thyrsis are all unredeemably bad.

Yet it would be foolish (and counter-productive) for Virgil to write consistently bad lines for Thyrsis and thus deliberately detract from the beauty of the poetry and the interest of the contest.⁷ If one looks at the singing match with a less prejudiced eye, the victory does not appear at all

⁴Otto Skutsch, "The Singing Matches in Virgil and Theocritus and the Design of Virgil's Book of the Eclogues," *BICS* 18 (1971) 26–29, at 28.

⁵Chr. G. Heyne and G. Ph. Wagner, *Publius Vergilius Maro varietate lectionis et perpetua adnotatione illustratus*⁴ 1 (Leipzig and London 1830) 200, n. 69.

⁶Pöschl reserves a string of unflattering monosyllables—eng, starr, stumpf, plump, derb—to describe Thyrsis' character (153 and *passim*).

⁷"Virgil hat, wie mir scheint, sein Gedicht nicht dadurch verdorben, dass er Thyrsis metrisch und stilistisch schlechte Verse machen liess, wie sie Pöschl überall findet—und verdorben hätte er sein Gedicht durch solcherart Anstösse gewiss—sondern in der Tat einen formal ganz gleichrangigen Wechselgesang gedichtet." Dahlmann (above, n. 1) 220.

so one-sided. In one exchange, at least, viz., the fifth (53–60), Thyrsis seems to emerge clearly as the winner, and in another, the second (29–36), he would seem to have outwitted his opponent. It must be kept in mind that in these amoebean contests the respondent is at a certain disadvantage. His composition is not a free, improvised choice but must answer to a theme that has been set for him. As Servius commented at 3.28, *ita se habet responsio ut aut maius aut contrarium dicant*. For this reason, although he did not recognize any great merit of invention in either singer, Heyne was inclined to award more praise to Thyrsis: *Inventi saltem laudem in neutro video esse magnam, maiorem tamen in eo, cui ex tempore respondendum est ad id, quod alter ex meditato paratum habuerat* (above, note 5). We cannot blame Thyrsis for adopting a blasphemous tone in the first half of the contest in opposition to Corydon's lofty and reverent attitude. He is only conforming to the rules of the game. In this first set of three quatrains Thyrsis produces what is in effect a double *contrarium*, both in subject and in tone. In the second set of three quatrains he abandons the sarcastic tone of parody but maintains, as he must, his choice of opposed subject matter. In the structure of the contest this change of posture on the part of Thyrsis corresponds to a shift of focus in Corydon's choice of theme from persons to nature, a subject that does not lend itself so easily to parody. In view of these considerations, we shall not regard the poetic contest of the Seventh Eclogue as a code of poetics, or, with Perret, as "un catéchisme d'esthétique virgilienne,"⁸ but as a subtle *jeu d'esprit*, a *lusus*, a sophisticated lesson in the art of versification.

The *mise en scène* of the eclogue reminds one very much of the pastoral scenes from Roman frescoes or of the illustrations of medieval manuscripts of the *Eclogues*. In its companion piece, the Third Eclogue, a lively *diverbiū*, modelled on Theocritus' Fourth and Fifth Idylls, is already in progress as the poem opens, with no description at all of the natural surroundings. Here everything comes to pass in a truly idyllic manner. The stage is already set. The singers do not challenge each other; there is no bickering about the stakes of the contest. The shepherd Daphnis is there by chance, seated under an ilex tree, to which both shepherds have driven their flocks. This particular comes from Theocritus:

Δαμοίτας καὶ Δάφνις ὁ βουκόλος εἰς ἓνα χώρον
τὰν ἀγέλαν ποκ', Ἄραστε, συνάγαγον . . . *Idylls* 6.1–2

In that poem, however, there is no judge, and the emphasis is on the ephebic comeliness of the two shepherds. At the end of the contest they exchange gifts, a pipe for a flute, and the closing scene is bathed in a vague eroticism.

⁸Jacques Perret, *Virgile, Les Bucoliques* (Paris 1961) 77.

Each of the first four lines of Virgil's poem is articulated by a delimiting bucolic diaeresis, but in the fifth line the whole musical phrase, as it were, is bound together in the more compact rhythm. The same pattern is used in the next five lines, save that there a dramatic development takes place, and the characters in the scene begin to come to life. Meliboeus, who is only a witness of the singing match, is occupied in covering the myrtle bushes (probably with leaves or straw), a loving detail that is quintessentially Virgilian, and in the meantime the leader of the flock has wandered off. Daphnis calls out to Meliboeus in language that is more elevated and dignified than the usual pastoral dialogue:

*huc ades, o Meliboe; caper tibi saluus et haedi;
et, si quid cessare potes, requiesce sub umbra.* 9-10

Servius and others after him⁹ have thought this supernumerary personage in the scene to be none other than the divine Daphnis himself, but we should rather consider him as a symbolic representation of Daphnis, who is always depicted as a more remote deity of the pastoral rather than a *praesens divus*. At any rate, the invitation continues in a very solemn tone, and the verses assigned to this figure are fashioned with great art, especially lines 11 to 13, with the verb always in the middle position and great variation in the surrounding members of the phrase. As Pöschl points out (99), this form of hexameter was called the lyric type by Marius Victorinus, as distinguished from the heroic. Line 12, with its lovely enjambement

*hic viridis tenera praetexit harundine ripas
Mincius*

is especially beautiful and was used again, of course, in the *Georgics* (3.15).

The reporting of the contest is done in the third person by Meliboeus, who is a mere spectator. This is an original dramatic device of Virgil's, used only here. By this distancing effect the contest is given greater salience and becomes like a play within a play.¹⁰ The songs exist in and for themselves, exemplars of Arcadian, that is to say, Virgilian pipings, a kind of *poésie pure*, free of the earthy mimic banter of their Greek forebears.

The singing begins, fittingly enough, with an appeal to the Muses by Corydon, in language that is quite precious, with its elaborate apposition and *recherché* epithet for the Muses, *Libethrides*, seemingly derived from

⁹William Berg, *Early Vergil* (London 1974) 129.

¹⁰Gordon Williams speaks of the objective framework as constituting a proportion between two fields of ideas: "In Ecl. VII the index is provided by the setting: the shepherds are Arcadians, but they are singing by the river Mincius. In both Eclogues III and VII the index should be taken to be not so much any actual measurement of the proportionality of two related fields as a measurement of a deliberate distance from Theocritus." Gordon Williams, *Figures of Thought in Roman Poetry* (New Haven, Conn. 1980) 241.

Euphorion. Pöschl expresses his admiration for the perfect periodic construction of the quatrain (110), quoting Cicero *Orator* 64.222, that an ideal period consists of four hexameters, but it must be conceded that the parenthesis vitiates the formal perfection; moreover, one hesitates to apply oratorical norms to shepherd pipings. Actually the structure of the sentence seems quite jerky and uncertain, reflecting the modest aspirations of Corydon. The phrase *non possumus omnes*, repeated in the Eighth Eclogue, appears to be a kind of formulaic profession of the humbler type of poetry proper to pastoral. Pöschl takes the simple utterance much too seriously in keeping with his thesis that Corydon is the prototype of the poet of the *Aeneid*. He comments solemnly: "Alles oder nichts. In der Kunst gibt es keine Halbheit" (106). The last hexameter, an elegant and pious *recusatio*, constitutes, in its classic form and rhythm, an excellent ending.

Thyrsis' answer is a perfect foil to the humble prayer of Corydon. It is forthright in statement and in syntax. First of all he addresses himself to his fellow shepherds rather than to the Muses, and his tone is one of self-confidence, even arrogance, in contrast with that of Corydon. With his boast of *nascentem poetam* he counters Corydon's adumbrated renunciation of bucolic song.¹¹ The reiterated apostrophe, strengthened in the first instance by a trithemimeral caesura, *pastores*, and in the second by the hyperbaton and the diaeresis, *Arcades*, lends force and emphasis to his claim. The rather coarse phrase, *rumpantur ut ilia*, maintains the uninhibited tone and once again "caps" Corydon's deprecatory reference to the rival poet Codrus. Through his outspoken realism, Thyrsis succeeds in deflating the lofty description of Codrus' verse, *proxima Phoebi / versibus ille facit*, given by Corydon. Imitating the disjunctive syntax of Corydon's quatrain, Thyrsis responds with a more positive *aut* clause. Rather than be tempted to desist from his art should Codrus call down upon him the envy of the gods, he protects himself in advance, asking his fellow Arcadians to wreath his brow with an herb that will ward off evil tongues.¹² Pöschl assigns great merit to the adonius *fistula pinu* following the bucolic diaeresis in Corydon's last line, and indeed it is rather a lovely, wistful ending. But the phrase can hardly be exalted to the status of an "Ursymbol der Hirtendichtung" as Pöschl claims (111), since, on the contrary, it

¹¹Sabbadini's adoption of the reading of the Mediceus, supported by Servius, is preferable here, since it accords well with the *vati futuro* of line 28 and also, together with the apotropaic *baccar* of line 27, echoes a passage from the Fourth Eclogue, thus associating the new-born poet with the miraculous new-born child.

¹²The word *baccar* has given trouble to the commentators. Servius' explanation that it had apotropaic qualities is regarded as *ad hoc*, although Pliny does say that the plant's root was pungently aromatic so that it might well have been used to dispel evil. It could be considered an incongruous alternative to *hedera* in the first line.

signifies withdrawal from the pastoral world. Thyrsis' own adonius *lingua futuro* in the corresponding position of his quatrain is admittedly, as it stands, less complete in thought than Corydon's, but the sentence structure as a whole is, if anything, even more elaborate than his rival's.

Humility and religious circumspection again characterize the tone of Corydon's next quatrain. It is in the classical form of a votive offering, like those in the sixth book of the *Greek Anthology*, dedicated to the goddess Diana by a certain Micon, whose epithet *parvus* echoes his name, but stands in glaring contrast to the largesse of his vows. The formality of the prayer is conveyed in a very elaborate interlocking of noun and epithet, even to the straining point, it would appear.

*Saetosi caput hoc apri tibi, Delia, parvus
et ramosa Micon vivacis cornua cervi.
Si proprium hoc fuerit, levi de marmore tota
puniceo stabis suras evincta coturno*

29-32

The name Micon, sandwiched in between the two epithets of the stag, seems almost out of place, but it makes for a very liturgical-sounding phrase, so to speak. The pious formula *si proprium hoc fuerit* also contributes to the solemn religious tone. *Hoc*, misunderstood by some commentators, must refer simply to the collective offering, as in the sacred phrases *hoc age* or *hoc macte*, and means "if this be acceptable to you" (which would be signified by some show of favor by Diana). *Stabis* is also used in a pregnant, religious sense for the fulfilment of his vow in the form of a statue.

Thyrsis' response is nowhere more parodistic than here. Everything about his counter-offering is derisive, even blasphemous. Corydon's prayers were concerned with the hunt, a *servitium amoris*, but the very idea of making such an elaborate vow to the garden deity, Priapus, lewd antitype of the chaste Diana, is absurd, as are the offerings. First Thyrsis pretends to placate the god with a yearly pittance of milk and honey cakes. Then he boastfully and improbably asserts, outdoing Micon's promise of a marble statue and his scruples concerning it, that he has already provided a marble statue of the god for the time being (*pro tempore* is patently prosaic), but more, if the flock will increase, he exclaims *aureus esto*. The imperative *esto*, often used in a sacred context, is here put to the uses of parody, while the ludicrous promise of a gold statue of Priapus mocks the offer in such epigrams of a richer gift if one's prayers are fulfilled.

If the tone of the two quatrains is so disparate, the technical difference between them is even more striking. While Corydon's quatrain is quite polished and rich in balanced word order, poetic construction, and vocabulary, Thyrsis' quatrain must be by far the oddest in the entire Virgilian corpus. It is noteworthy, first of all, that the word order is strictly prosaic:

modifiers are adjacent to the nouns they modify (*sinum lactis, pauperis horti*) and verbs, apart from *es*, are in the final position. There are numerous prosaic expressions: *quotannis, sat est, pro tempore*. In the first line there is complete correspondence between ictus and accent and in the remaining verses there is only one non-correspondence in each (*custos, marmoreum, gregem*). The clearest divergence from Virgil's normal patterns lies, however, in word placement. The metrical sequence found in *sinum lactis* (– – / – ♪) at the beginning of the line is rare enough in the *Eclogues* (seven other examples in all), but since all other examples begin either with a function word like *quamvis* or *quantum*, or with a proper noun, this phrase is actually unique. A short monosyllable at the end of the second foot occurs only in this line (*et*) and again in the very next line (*sat*).¹³ The word shape short-long-short, found here in *Priape*, running over the bucolic diaeresis, is also relatively uncommon (twelve occurrences in the *Eclogues*). All in all, this is a most peculiar line. *At tu*, line 35, is unique.¹⁴

In judging this quatrain we are forced to one of two opposite conclusions: either it is so bad that it marks Thyrsis as a hopelessly inept poet, or it is a masterful combination of peasant naiveté with a purely prosaic form that just manages to scan, especially in the first two lines. The first judgement is ruled out by the lyrical ability Thyrsis demonstrates elsewhere, especially in his fifth quatrain. We are left with the second, a *lectio difficilior*, to be sure, that Virgil here offers a demonstration of a poetic *tour de force* in the humblest bucolic language. The ludic element in the poems should not be forgotten either. After all, Virgil could have another shepherd say *cuium pecus* to the delight of future detractors.¹⁵

Corydon's next song is composed with very clever artifice. The first two lines come directly from Theocritus' Eleventh Idyll, the Cyclops' wooing of the sea-nymph Galatea. The first line is a lovely invocation in soft Greek accents: *Nerine Galatea, thymo mihi dulcior Hyblae* (37)—difficult for Thyrsis or any other swain to match. The form *Nerine* is a rare Latinization of the Greek adjective Νηρείνη, found elsewhere only in Haupt's emendation of Catullus 64.28.

The caesura after the trochee in the third foot in lines 1 and 4 is a Greek

¹³There are five other examples in the *Eclogues* of a two-syllable word with the second vowel elided in this position: 1.13, 3.29, 6.35, 7.14, 8.78, but in no other case does yet a third monosyllable follow.

¹⁴While there are three other examples in the *Eclogues* of lines ending in two monosyllables, all these instances involve a coordinate repetition of the same word or phrase that occurred earlier in the line, 5.83, 6.9, 9.48.

¹⁵Cf. the parody of the opening line of the Third Eclogue made by one Numitorius in his *Antibucolica*: *Dic mihi Damoeta; "cuium pecus" anne Latinum? / non, verum Aegonis nostri; sic rure loquuntur*—according to Donatus *Vitae Vergilii*, ll. 171–177 in *Vitae Vergilianae*, ed. J. Brummer (Leipzig 1912).

metrical usage. The comparison in the next line is drawn from Theocritus, although the terms of comparison are more elegant. Theocritus' Cyclops rustically compares Galatea's fair complexion to fresh cheese, while Corydon is more literary, affecting a nice initial alliteration: *candidior cynis, hedera formosior alba* (38). As in the original Theocritean setting, the assignation is for the evening, but in Corydon's adaptation the scene is more campestrial, as is revealed in the next line, which is strongly alliterative, with an interlaced repetition of p's and t's: *cum primum pasti repetent praeseptia tauri* (39). The polite future imperative is reserved until the very end of the last line, thus giving a concise formal structure to the entire stanza from the opening vocative to the concluding verb.

In the face of such lovely verse-making, where all is beauty, sweetness, patience, and polite appeal, Thyrsis resorts to the ploy of countering his rival with ugly images, each of them invented as direct contrasts to those employed by Corydon. The negative cast of his response is signalled immediately by the first word *immo*, and the change of the subject of comparison from Galatea to her hapless wooer is made clear from the start in the pronoun *ego*. Each epithet of Corydon is countered with its opposite: *dulcior* with *amarior*, *candidior* with *horridior*, *formosior* with *viliior*, although all these qualities are then implicitly negated when the figure of speech is revealed at the end of the third line. Perhaps there is also an intended play on words in *alba* balanced against *alga* in the same relative position at the end of the second line of each quatrain. *Tibi amarior* is a deliberate echo of *tibi dulcior* at line 37. In criticism of Thyrsis' technique it has been objected that in line 41 the elision of the pyrrhic in the fourth foot is rare, while the caesura after the fourth trochee is also rare, making the phenomenon rare to the square, as Skutsch humorously remarks (above, note 4, 29), but this rhythm occurs frequently enough not to be branded as unharmonious. To match Corydon's alliterative line Thyrsis devises a fast-moving verse made up predominantly of jerky monosyllables which reflect his impatience and agitation. Rather than wait for the cattle to head home for the stables he hastens them out of the meadow.¹⁶

Thus Thyrsis' response is a complete reversal of Corydon's. He turns praise of Galatea's beauty into pretended self-vilification by Polyphemus;

¹⁶Pöschl again taxes Thyrsis with being short-winded, as if he were not able to make it through the quatrain on one breath. Rather, the insistent, repeated imperative is in contrast to Corydon's polite future imperative. Pöschl also proposes a particularly infelicitous interpretation of the phrase, *si pudor est*, understanding it to mean that the cows should go home out of polite consideration for the lovers, adding (123, n. 35) that it was simply prudery that inhibited true understanding in the past. The phrase is often used in Latin not to indicate literally a sense of shame, *pudicitia*, but more colloquially as here in the sense "haven't you had enough to eat by now? Hie ye to the stables."

he substitutes repellent imagery for more ethereal images and reduces the hour of love-making from a romantic evening rendezvous to a more extemporized late afternoon amorous encounter. In its way Thyrsis' effort is not without success, but despite its ingenuity, we should be inclined to give the palm to Corydon.

Corydon now rises to a higher key, as he sings of the beauties of the Arcadian countryside and the benevolence of nature. In the adverbial phrase, *rara umbra*, Corydon catches with fine painterly skill the mobile, thin shade cast by the slender shrubs. The vine is never too far from Virgil's pastoral etchings and here its buds are a harbinger of the fast-approaching peak of summer. In all, this first quatrain of Corydon has much that is typical of Virgilian pastoral: the concern for the defenceless sheep, the sense of the communion of nature, trees, grass, and springs uniting to give respite to man and beast. The exemplar for this direct colloquy with nature is found in the Alexandrian Eighth Idyll, where vales and rivers, springs and pastures are addressed by the singers: ἄγρεα καὶ ποταμοί, θεῖον γένος (33) . . . κρᾶναι καὶ βοτάναι, γλυκερὸν φυτὸν (37). In that context, however, the apostrophe is more formulaic and vaunting; the singer demands that nature fatten his grazing herds in acknowledgement of the beauty of his singing. Corydon's lines lack any such pomposity. They are an entreaty to a familiar, friendly corner of nature, not to a vast assemblage of mighty forces. There is much rhythmic variation in this quatrain from the lazy spondees of the first line with their euphonic l's and m's, *muscosi fontes et somno mollior herba*, to the faster-moving dactyls of the third line with its initial and final cacophonous groups of s's and st's, *solstitium pecori defendite: iam venit aestas*.¹⁷

As Corydon's verses were a plea to nature to provide shade and restoration to his flock, so Thyrsis, true to the principle of amoebean responsion, reverses the theme to protection from the cold in winter. In contrast to the torrid heat of summer and the sparse shade, he insists on the comfort of his interior scene in a hyperbolic tricolon, climaxing in a well-constructed phrase *adsidua postes fuligine nigri*. In general, however, his answer is distinctly unpastoral, and the *tantum-quantum* correlative clause gives the quatrain a certain prosaic, pedantic ring.

In the next song of Corydon and in Thyrsis' rejoinder, Virgil again draws inspiration from the Eighth Idyll but improves on it in many ways. The structure of the alternate songs of Corydon and Thyrsis is more clearly chiasitic than in previous stanzas. Corydon's vision of autumnal fruitfulness turns to desolation at the departure of Alexis, while Thyrsis' arid landscape becomes verdant at the advent of Phyllis. In the Eighth Idyll

¹⁷This and subsequent comments on euphony and cacophony are based on the principles outlined by L. P. Wilkinson in his *Golden Latin Artistry* (Cambridge 1966) 7-45.

there is no such clear contrast but rather a weak parallelism. Everything becomes blessed with fecundity for each singer wherever the loved one sets foot, and all is parched and withered if he or she depart, as in Daphnis' verses:

Everywhere is spring, everywhere pasture;
everywhere udders flow with milk.
The young are fattened where Nais walks
but if she leave, wasted are both man and beast. *Idyll* 8.41–44

The first line of Corydon's quatrain, with its mention of junipers and chestnuts, does not seem particularly suggestive of autumn, but this season is unmistakably evoked in the ensuing description of fruit strewn profusely under the trees. Perret comments that "*stant* semble contraster avec *iacent*," but even before *iacent* the initial word *strata*, by its resemblance in sound and identical position in the line, is the contrasting counterpart of *stant*.¹⁸ This is a very singular first line for Corydon, with its extremely unusual metre, which features hiatus both at the caesura and in the spondaic fifth foot, almost as if Corydon were experimenting with a new type of rhythm. The choriambic word *castaneae* spanning the bucolic diaeresis is rare (there are only two other instances in the *Eclogues*). *Stant et* is also a rare sequence in the *Eclogues*: initial monosyllabic verbs are scarce enough (11 occurrences), but there is only a single other case in which one is followed by a second long monosyllable (again *et*), and this sequence is only obtained by the elision of the second vowel (*ibo et*, 10.50).¹⁹ Moreover, the word order is prosaic; there are major sense breaks at the penthemimeral caesura both in the third and fourth lines; the juxtaposition of *abeat* and *videas* is rather facile, and the word order of the third and fourth lines is undistinguished.

Thyrsis seizes upon Corydon's last word *sicca* and proceeds to reverse the thematic direction in a counter movement, from drought to verdant woods. The first line is stark and dramatic, with echoes of Lucretian language and science: *Aret ager; vitio moriens sitit aeris herba* (57). *Vitio aeris* recalls *morbidus aer* in Lucretius' description of the plague (6.1097). This line must definitely be considered a plus in Thyrsis' ledger. The trithemimeral caesura is very effective here, as well as the similarity of sound in *aret ager . . . aeris*, preparing us for the resolution of ictus and

¹⁸Once more Virgil shows himself to be an acute observer of the countryside. In the most frequent type of pasture land encountered in Italy, a rather rough maquis, juniper trees are usually found grouped densely together in what is called a *ginepraio*, and their leaves are a favorite food of goats. It should not be forgotten also that the fruit of the chestnut is among the last to fall to the ground and in fact must be beaten from the trees by the *contadini*.

¹⁹*Stant et* occurs also at 10.16, but the *et* is short, *stant et oves*, producing an entirely different metrical effect.

accent in the last two lines. Pöschl seems very insensitive, indeed, to call this dramatic stop *kurzatmig* (135), as if Thyrsis could not make it to the penthemimeral caesura. He also regards the dactylic movement as antithetical to the sombre content of the line, as if dactyls had always to be cheerful. The next three lines all begin with a proper noun but continue each very differently in syntax and rhythm, climaxing in a noble hexameter, *Iuppiter et laeto descendet plurimus imbri* (60), that anticipates the cosmic majesty of *Georgics* 2.325, once again bearing a Lucretian imprint: *Omnis uti videatur in imbrem vertier aether* (6.291). Enemies of Thyrsis are hard put to explain away his producing such excellent verse. Pöschl advances the extraordinary thesis that he has learned from Corydon and that love has given wings to his poetic powers.²⁰

The last entry of Corydon is a graciously paid compliment in the form of a bucolic commonplace, examples of which are found also in the Eighth Idyll. Virgil gives the figure a completely different turn. Certain privileged trees have the glory of being associated with divinities and are favored by them (Servius *ad loc.* is not lacking in etiological explanations). But in the personal mythology of Corydon, the humble hazel tree surpasses all others, for it is beloved of Phyllis. Love, like pastoral poetry itself, can lend new dignity to even the most common features of the countryside. The Corydon of the Second Eclogue had brought similar honor to the plum tree by including it among the gifts to his Amaryllis (2.53).

In this exchange Corydon gives proof beyond any doubt of his greater technical versatility. In the first two lines he prepares the ground, as it were, with a series of parallel enunciations regarding the favorite trees of various gods and demi-gods, with a gradual build-up from Hercules and Bacchus to Venus and Apollo:

*Populus Alcidae gratissima, vitis Iaccho,
formosae myrtus Veneri, sua laurea Phoebus.
Phyllis amat corylos; illas dum Phyllis amabit,
nec myrtus vincet corylos, nec laurea Phoebi.*

61–64

Despite the apparent simplicity of the fourfold repetition of the same structure these verses are fashioned with exquisite art. The first two lines reveal a remarkable variation in word endings, in the placement of the nouns in each phrase, and in the disposition of different caesural breaks to separate the syntactic units. The point of the epigram is still unsuspected.

²⁰"Die Liebe scheint auch seine dichterische Kraft zu beflügeln," Pöschl 137. Perret (above, n. 8) goes even further, maintaining that the strophes were reversed by ancient editors, who were convinced that the mention of Alexis must require a Corydon. In Perret's opinion lines 57–60 "ont l'élégance, les images gracieuses, la noblesse qui caractérisent Corydon" (82, n. 60). This view is shared by Harold Fuchs, "Zum Wettgesang der Hirten in Vergils siebenter Ekloge," *MusHelv* 23 (1966) 218–223.

Then in the third line a simple shepherdess and her favorite tree are introduced in a sudden reversion to pastoral language, *Phyllis amat corylos*, and the delicate compliment is made. The three double l's and the three upsilons lend a marked euphony to the line, and the echo *amat, amabit* is very effective. The final line with its slightly varied repetition of the end of the second, *laurea Phoebo* beside *laurea Phoebi*, makes the whole quatrain into a sort of simple rondeau. Another fine nuance is achieved in the more euphonic accusative plural reserved for the favored tree as against the nominatives used for the other trees. In the context of the poetic match Corydon has successfully taken up Thyrsis' praise of Phyllis and enlarged upon it. There is perhaps also an oblique reference in *laurea Phoebi* to his first quatrain, in which he aspired to match Phoebus' favorite, Codrus, thus effecting a final recapitulation.

Thyrsis tries to replicate as closely as possible the movement of Corydon's verses, but many things go wrong. In the effort to reproduce the parallel relationships that Corydon effected in the balancing of nominative and dative cases, he chooses repetitious adverbial phrases and plural ablatives which do not provide the alternation of endings that his rival managed to attain. The result is an unbroken succession of hissing, rhymed sibilants, not only in the *-us* nominatives and *-is* ablatives but even in the third line, where it could have been avoided:

Fraxinus in silvis pulcherrima, pinus in hortis
populus in fluviis, abies in montibus altis
saepius at si me, Lycida formose, revisas
fraxinus in silvis cedat tibi, pinus in hortis.

65-68

Moreover, in emulating Corydon's echoing effect at the end of the second and fourth lines, he produces in the last line almost an exact replica of his first line. The prosaic, jerky movement of *saepius at si me* is a far cry from Corydon's melodious third line.²¹ There is no subtle involvement of noun and adjective as in Corydon's quatrain, no sustained crescendo. It simply goes nowhere and dies out in the bald repetition at the end. The point of Corydon's comparison of one tree with another is twisted into a rather pointless comparison of Lycidas to trees, and instead of bestowing unrestricted praise on his beloved, he ungenerously makes his praise dependent upon the frequent visits of his lover, Lycidas. It is admittedly a thorough-going *contrarium*, and as such its point is clear enough, but it is a very gauche effort, and as the last compositions of the singers are those that linger in the ear and influence the adjudicator, Corydon easily comes off the victor.

²¹A sequence of three long monosyllables in this position in the line is relatively uncommon in the *Eclogues*. There are five other examples: 3.4, 3.8, 3.67, 4.27, 10.9.

Our analysis has shown that, while it is difficult to come to any firm conclusions about the poem, it is neither a paradigmatic model of Virgilian poetic aesthetics nor a simple pastoral *divertissement*. While the performance of Thyrsis is not to be overrated, Virgil demonstrates a fine skill in giving it enough verve, originality, and poetic quality to warrant at least a grudging admiration. He displays great subtlety in matching euphonic qualities to the thematic content of the alternating quatrains, and he experiments with striking innovations in the metrical and colonic structure of the hexameter, all the while maintaining a rich sense of humor and an appealing bucolic atmosphere.

These quatrains purport to be simple musical improvisations tossed off by the shepherds, as Virgil announced in the opening verses of the *Eclogues*: *silvestrem tenui musam meditaris avena*. But appearances are in this case deceiving. One must muse long over them to discover their secret charm.

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