

Transpositions in the *Bucolics*? (On *Ecl.* 7. 53-60)

A contribution from the President

In more recent times transpositions have not been much in vogue among editors of Virgil. Readers of Mynors' respected Oxford-edition (1969) will find very few of them in his text: none in the *Bucolics*, one in the *Georgics* (4. 292-293) and two in the *Aeneid* (10. 663-664; 10. 714-716). But according to Edward Courtney, there are good reasons to consider at least nine more for a place in the sun.¹ Much information about earlier proposals can be found in Geymonat's Paravia-edition (1973). In his critical apparatus, Geymonat records 21 transpositions in the *Bucolics* alone,² two-thirds of which are from the 20th century (due mostly to the concentrated efforts of Léon Herrmann³); five critics from three centuries are responsible for the rest (six transpositions), the last of which was published in 1897.⁴ I do not intend here to pass verdicts on these. Most of them belong probably to the spacious dustbin of unsuccessful textual criticism. I will concentrate on a proposal published in 1961 but regrettably passed over in silence by Geymonat and recent commentators.⁵

Some words about the 'subgenre' which the Seventh Eclogue belongs to are not irrelevant to our issue. This eclogue is, together with the Third, an example of a singing-match where Virgil is a sort of meta-competitor himself insofar as he constantly evokes his predecessor Theocritus and must be measured against him. The Seventh Eclogue presents a dramatic scene pointing clearly to the Eighth Idyll of Theocritus.⁶ The fact that our two singers, Corydon and Thyrsis, are Arcadians highlights Virgil's *aemulatio* of the Greek model. The Roman poet who grew up along the banks of Mincius would hardly have expected to meet Arcadian shepherds there in real life. The 'immigrants' are bringing with them the art of their homeland, making it shine with brilliance in their singing-matches. Virgil's native river as scene for these Greek virtuosos visualises the passing of the genre from Greece to Italy and its transformation from its original idiom to Latin. The *Bucolics* may be seen as Virgil's first attempt at "transporting the Muses from Helicon to Italy" (cf. *Ge.* 3. 11) and thus as programmatic for his ambition in all three of his poems.

Some basic conditions and requirements characterize competitions like the duel between Corydon and Thyrsis. The outcome will be either victory for one and defeat for the other or alternatively

a draw. Eclogues Seven and Three illustrate these two possibilities respectively. A singing-match requires moreover an umpire or judge (*iudex certaminis*). In its basic structure, the Seventh Eclogue reminds us of a Platonic dialogue (like e.g. *Phaidon* and *Symposium*): the account is put in the mouth of a narrator, Meliboeus, who is comparable to Plato's Phaidon or his Apollodoros. The narrator introduces the scene and the 'dramatic agon' that took place there. Towards the audience of Meliboeus,⁷ he has to be an actor capable of presenting the participants' spoken lines and exchanges. We tend to forget that most of Virgil's early readers were listeners whose literary enjoyment depended to a large extent on the reciter's histrionic talent. The reciter would, like the narrator Meliboeus, start off being 'Meliboeus', then act 'Daphnis', the organiser,⁸ whereupon he had to mobilize his best abilities to perform the two singers' quatrains, constantly attentive to their individual character and style; otherwise his audience would pretty soon face the difficulty of holding them apart, and the thrill of the match would be lost on them. Of course a serious reciter would have prepared and rehearsed his 'roles'. He would above all try to achieve success by trying to differentiate the personalities involved and take care of the clues in the text for this. Few would doubt today that Virgil made an effort to characterize his singers with individual traits.

To start with I can do nothing better than to quote Coleman's short summary of Corydon's and Thyrsis' characters:⁹

The singers are finely characterized through their quatrains: the arrogant and self-assertive Thyrsis contrasted with a gentle modest Corydon reminiscent of the pathetic lover of *Ecl.* 2. Here and there a slight coarseness in Thyrsis' language (e.g. 26) or versification (e.g. 35) stands out against Corydon's uniform elegance. Sometimes Thyrsis' figures are inept (51-2) and his imagery more repellent (41-42), even where (49-50) it is intended to please. [...] In any case the difference between the two singers, a matter of accumulated detail, must not be exaggerated; Thyrsis shows considerable ingenuity in the construction of his responses and it is no disgrace to have been defeated by a Corydon in such superlative form.¹⁰

I allow myself, however, to expatiate on this sketch. From the start, Thyrsis tries constantly to outdo his colleague. Compare, in the first exchange, Thyrsis' quatrain (25-28) with Corydon's (21-24). Thyrsis' manner of response is not likely to arouse enthusiasm in a good judge: for him Codrus has become a rival of the worst sort, not as he was for Corydon, an inspiring and admired example. Then, in the second exchange, Thyrsis promises Priapus a statue of gold¹¹ ostentatiously trumping Corydon who had promised his deity Diana (only!) a marble statue. A similar impression is left by the singers' relation to 'Galatea' in the third exchange. Instead of, like Corydon, hoping for a warm response from his admired girl-friend, Thyrsis is an importunate wooer parading his love in a coarse way and eagerly looking forward to open-air love-making in broad daylight.¹² Also, the fourth exchange is in tune with this character drawing, when Thyrsis plays down shivering cold as a trifling matter, whereas Corydon is bent on defending his goats against the heat of summer by mobilizing a personalised *locus amoenus* to help him.

As can be seen above, Coleman said nothing about lines 53-60, the fifth interchange. If one turns to Pöschl's generally thorough and empathic analysis of our eclogue, he addresses the issue of quality and personality in this interchange as well.¹³ Though having Corydon's superiority as the governing idea of his overall interpretation of the competition, he finds the fifth interchange to be somewhat of a surprise and exception: not only does Thyrsis cut a far better figure here than elsewhere, but "love seems to give his poetical power wings".¹⁴ The fifth interchange consists of the following two stanzas:

*stant et iuniperi et castaneae hirsutae;
strata iacent passim sua quaeque sub arbore poma;
omnia nunc rident: at si formosus Alexis
montibus his abeat, videas et flumina sicca.*

Here stand junipers and shaggy chestnuts;
strewn beneath each tree lies its native fruit;
now all nature smiles; but if fair Alexis
should quit these hills you would see even the rivers dry.

*aret ager, vitio moriens sitit aëris herba,
Liber pampineas invidit¹⁵ collibus umbras:
Phyllidis adventu nostrae nemus omne virebit,
Iuppiter et laeto descendet plurimus imbri.*

The field is parched, the grass thirsty, dying because of the tainted air;
Bacchus begrudges the hills the shade of his vines:
but at the coming of my Phyllis all the woodland will be green,
and Jupiter will descend abundantly with propitious rain.

Above I have left the attribution to singers out on purpose. That lines 53-56 (*stant et iuniperi* etc.) should be attributed to Thyrsis (and not to Corydon as in *MP* and all editions) and 57-60 (*aret ager* etc.) to Corydon, and that the stanzas therefore should change place, was an idea first launched by Jacques Perret in 1961,¹⁶ though not adopted in his text.¹⁷ His reasons were these:

1. lines 53-56 seem to take up again a theme put forward much more naturally in lines 57-60: without water spring will be barren, but in autumn dry weather is on the contrary the most favourable for fruit to ripen.¹⁸
2. lines 57-60 have elegance, gracious images and the nobleness characterising Corydon, whereas line 53 is written in the bitter, generally offensive style of Thyrsis, calling forth images of stiff and prickly objects; line 56 is prosaic and without phantasy, ending his quatrain with the disagreeable vision of nature having retired.

According to Perret, the ancient editors were convinced that only Corydon could take any fancy for an ‘Alexis’ and therefore changed the order of the two quatrains. But the Alexis of line 55 is in fact a *rusticus* living in “our mountains”, while the ‘Alexis’ of the Second Eclogue is a city-dweller; homonymy, then, is of no importance.¹⁹

Harald Fuchs soon accepted Perret’s reasons as “überzeugend”²⁰ but rejected his hypothesis of why the ancient tradition had manipulated the order of the text.²¹ As further arguments in favour of Perret’s idea, Fuchs²² pointed to line 53 with its two unparalleled hiatuses, the second of which is moreover in a spondaic fifth foot, the result of which is unpleasant (“Unbehagen”); he further emphasized Corydon’s *dolce stil novo* (cf. Dante, *Purg.* 24, 57) characterized by smooth, liquid and sonorous verses²³ and referred particularly to the relevance of Horace’s compliment to Virgil (cf. *molle Sat.* 1.10.44). Fuchs may be read to the effect that a transposition should be earnestly considered, indeed that it deserved to be adopted by future editors.

As a first step towards an assessment, I want to compare the Theocritean model for the fifth interchange, *Id.* 8.41-47:²⁴

Menalcas

ἐνθ' οἷς, ἐνθ' αἴγες διδυμάτοκοι, ἐνθα μέλισσαι
 σμήνεα πληροῦσιν, καὶ δρύες ὑψίτεραι,
 ἐνθ' ὁ καλὸς Μίλων βαίνει ποσίν, αἰ δ' ἂν ἀφέρρη,
 χῶ ποιμὴν ξηρὸς τηνόθι καὶ βοτάναι.

There does the sheep, there do the goats bear twins; and there the bees
 fill the hives and the oaks are taller,
 where fair Milon steps. But should he depart,
 then the shepherd is parched and so is the pasture.

Daphnis

παντᾷ ἔαρ, παντᾷ δὲ νομοῖ, παντᾷ δὲ γάλακτος
 οὔθατα πιδῶσιν, καὶ τὰ νέα τράφεται,
 ἐνθα καλὰ Ναῖς ἐπινίσσεται, αἰ δ' ἂν ἀφέρρη,
 χῶ τὰς βῶς βόσκων καὶ βόες αὐότεραι.²⁵

Everywhere is spring, and pastures everywhere, and everywhere udders
 gush with milk and younglings are fattened,
 where fair Naïs ranges. But should she depart,
 then wasted is the neatherd and the cattle wasted.

Both singers in Theocritus adhere to the same pattern: 1) Nature is thriving and animals are producing wealth 2) (owing to the presence of the loved one) 3) but if he / she should disappear from the scene, then 4a) the shepherd as well as 4b) his pastures / his cattle will wither away.

Virgil follows the same pattern in *stant et iuniperi* etc. though varying it by emphasizing trees²⁶ and their fruit as nature's particular blessing due to the presence of the loved one. But the formation and contents of the first line (*stant et iuniperi et castaneae hirsutae*) show indeed some anomalous aspects. Why just *iuniperi* and *castaneae*? One should have expected cultivated fruit trees to be prominent right from the start. Even if one thinks that the juniper's berries and the nuts from the chestnut tree are useful, one cannot free oneself from the impression that Virgil plays down nature's blessings compared with Theocritus. The juniper, which is in Italy often "a shapely tree eighteen or twenty feet high",²⁷ is hardly a tree to admire, either for its beauty or for its product depicting the landscape in the wake of Theocritus. In a passage in the First Idyll often shining through in the *Bucolics*, the dying Daphnis couples the juniper, ἄρκευθος,²⁸ with plants like βάλτος (bramble) and ἄκανθα (some thorny plant not identified for certain) and contrasted with the καλὰ νάρκισσος adorning it when he envisages how nature will react abnormally in protest to his death (1. 133). So the *iuniperus* is in itself an unpleasant tree not worthy of high praise as part of any thriving landscape. This rather low evaluation of the tree chosen for mention is yet further accentuated by the epithet *hirsutus* going with *castaneae*. The *castanea* (the tree, not the fruit) is not disagreeable owing to its shaggy nutshells. The singer's praise of blessed nature seems, then, to start off somewhat perversely. Moreover, almost in contradiction to the trees specified, the singer uses a highly artificial metrical form for the line. Hiatus combined with a spondeiazon occurs only here in the *Bucolics*, never in the *Georgics* and five times in the *Aeneid*.²⁹ The epic examples have names and epithets pointing to Greek influence; in one case Virgil applies the same form to an Italian locality giving it thereby high dignity (*turrigeræ Antemnae* 7. 631), whereas *hirsutus* at *Ecl.* 7. 53 (combined with the loanword *castanea* from Greek *καστανέα*) lends the same exquisite metrics a deflating effect. This tension between Greek-inspired artificial form on the one hand and an unpleasant

adjective³⁰ on the other reveals that the singer has no feeling for harmony between contents and form. Should we not then consider whether these lines suit Thyrsis better than Corydon?

Although the motive of nature's prosperity is not particularly marked in line 53,³¹ it gets more emphasis in line 54 and reaches its climax in the first half of 55 (*omnia nunc rident*). In Theocritus, on the other hand, words like *διδυματόκος, πληροῦσιν, ὑψίτεραι* and milk streaming from udders are meant to depict the pastoral landscape in its most blessed state.³² But the effect of the beloved person's disappearance is less drastic in the finishing lines of both Menalcas and Daphnis: the lover and his cattle will indeed wither away, but not necessarily all nature as in Virgil's stanza, where the result will be a *non plus ultra* of dryness, cf. "even dry rivers" (*et flumina sicca*).³³ Though not specifically mentioned by Perret, this is another argument in favour of transposition, on the assumption that Thyrsis is trying to cap Corydon's withering landscape (57) by means of another knock-out hyperbole.

A greater economy of expression concerning the lover, i.e. the singer himself, and the beloved person can be observed in Virgil's version. Instead of describing the effect both of the beloved person's presence and of his disappearance as in Theocritus, Virgil's stanza concentrates only on his/her change of quarters, varying this respectively as (his) disappearance (56) and (her) appearance (59). Like Theocritus, Virgil does not explicitly mention the singer's affection but, even more economically, does not even mention either the lover or his miseries. But who would fail to feel the lover's presence through the singer and grasp how he was affected both *in bonam* and *in malam partem*?

The *aret ager* stanza does not begin in the traditional way above, with the presence of the beloved girl in a thriving landscape. The singer starts from the other end, describing the effects of her absence; the landscape is suffering from draught, preventing the vines from producing their valuable fruit.³⁴ The singer does not mention her absence explicitly, he is focussed instead on showing what kind of metamorphosis will follow from the return of the loved one in the form of joyous rain, which in turn, so I believe, will be answered by his colleague with a depressing picture of total drought. In the 'meta-competition' with Theocritus, Virgil achieves in this way a successful variation of the traditional form, worthy of a master of bucolic song. I would, then, prefer to attribute this stanza to Corydon. Thyrsis moves on the other hand with no elegance within a well-known Theocritean pattern.

As to Fuchs' criticism of the motive Perret assumed behind the transposition (viz. in order to re-establish Corydon's love for Alexis on the basis of the Second Eclogue), Perret's observation is valid enough as a general principle: 'Menalcas' in the Third Eclogue is not necessarily the same man as his namesake in the Fifth, 'Lycidas' at 7. 67 does not pop up again in the Ninth, 'Meliboeus' in the Seventh is not the exiled 'Meliboeus' from the First, the 'Galatea' of Tityrus (1. 30) is not the 'Galatea' Corydon and Thyrsis admire in the Seventh. On the other hand, *Phyllis nostra* (59) seems to be the same 'Phyllis' who is so admired by Corydon in his next stanza (63).

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NOTES

- 1 E. Courtney, "The formation of the text of Vergil", *BICS* 28 (1981) 13-29. (None in the *Bucolics*; however, two in the *Georgics* and seven in the *Aeneid*.)
- 2 ecl. 2: *Herrmann* transp. 10. 16-18 post 33, 60-62 post 27; 3: *Cartault* 98-99 post 93; 4: *Herrmann* 11-14 & 8. 6-13 post 4. 59, *Kloucek* 23 post 20; 5: *Herrmann* 4 post 7, 16-18 ante 10, 81-90 [Mopsus] ante 53 (*qui v. cum duobus sequentibus Menalcae attribuitur*); 6: *Herrmann* 1-2 ante 6; *Scaliger* (& *Heyne*) 64-73 post 74-81; 7: *Berlage* 17 ante 16; 8: (*quod attinet ad Herrmanni transpositionem versuum 6-13 v. ad ecl. quartam*) *Herrmann* transp. 26 ante 25, 42 ante 41, 57 ante 56, 88 ante 3, 95-100 post 104, *Haupt* 108 ante 107; 9: *Herrmann* 37-50 ante 26, 39-43 ante 21; 10: *Scaliger* 16-18 post 8 (*quod ad Herrmanni coniecturam attinet vide ecl. secundam*).
- 3 L. Hermann, "Notes critiques sur les Bucoliques de Virgile", *Latomus* 11 (1938) 12-19.

- 4 Only one transposition gets approval even today, W. Klouček's (1873) transposition of 4. 23, accepted by Geymonat and now usual in Italian editions (but not in Castiglioni-Sabbadini). Mynors' silence is followed by Coleman (1977). Clausen (1994) has a discussion (149, n.9); Goold accepted it in his revised edition of Fairclough's *LCL* edition (1999). And so *adhuc sub iudice lis est*
- 5 Like Coleman (1977), Coleiro (1979), R. D. Williams (1979), and Clausen (1994).
- 6 It is a matter of no importance whether this idyll stems from Theocritus' pen or not.
- 7 i.e. = Virgil's audience. And so 'Meliboeus' becomes in a way 'Virgil' and in that respect unlike Plato's narrator, who has his own internal audience.
- 8 As *certaminis iudex*, Daphnis is the centre of the pastoral tableau. He is obviously from the start something more than a casual listener, appearing gradually as an ἀγωνοθέτης: he is the first person on the scene, before Corydon and Thyrsis. Daphnis invites Meliboeus to attend the coming match (*certamen* 16), and last, but not least, we must conclude that he has been appointed judge by the two competitors. In the end we are to think of him as the one who adjudges victory to Corydon (cf. *victum frustra contendere Thyrsin* 69).
- 9 Coleman, *Virgil. Eclogues* [Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics] (Cambridge 1977) 266.
- 10 Wendell Clausen (1994) has in my view missed the mark when he concludes with the following *aporia*: "By making his [i.e. Virgil's] poem dramatic – the imperfect recollection, that is, of a witness [i.e. Meliboeus] to an event, and not, like the Third *Eclogue*, an omniscient poet's description of it – Virgil frees himself from the obligation, or possibly the embarrassment, of justifying his umpire's decision." (213).
- 11 For a possible ambiguity in *aureus* cf. J. Foster, *SO* 56 (1991) 109 f.
- 12 See V Pöschl, *Die Hirtendichtung Virgils* (Heidelberg, 1964) 102 ff.
- 13 *ibid.* 129-137.
- 14 "Die Liebe scheint auch seine dichterische Kraft zu beflügeln" (*ibid.* 129).
- 15 Most probably present and not perfect.
- 16 J. Perret, *Virgile, Les Bucoliques* ["Érasme". Textes lat. 4] (Paris 1961).
- 17 In his note on line 60, p. 82 f. This could be compared with conjectures presented in an *app. crit.* by a half-hearted *fortasse, malim* or the like.
- 18 I take this to mean that dry weather is at odds with the singer's intention to create a strong contrast between the first and the second half of the stanza.
- 19 "Nous croirions volontiers que les anciens éditeurs, convaincus que seul Corydon pouvait s'intéresser à un Alexis (en marge du v. 53, *P* a inscrit *cor*, d'est-à-dire Corydon), ont échangé ici les strophes des deux chanteurs. En fait l'Alexis du v. 55 est un campagnard qui habite 'nos montagnes'; celui de *B* 2 est un citadin, l'homonymie n'a donc aucune signification. Les v. 53-56 semblent la *retractatio* d'un thème posé beaucoup plus naturellement en 57-60: sans eau, le printemps serait infécond; mais en automne un temps sec est au contraire le plus favorable à la maturation des fruits. Les v. 57-60 ont l'élégance, les images gracieuses, la noblesse qui caractérisent Corydon; le v. 53 est écrit dans le style âpre, volontiers heurté, de Thyrsis, il évoque l'image d'objets raides et piquants; le v. 56 est prosaïque et sans fantaisie, il termine le quatrain sur la vision désagréable d'une nature rétractée."
- 20 H. Fuchs, "Zum Wettgesang der Hirten in Vergils siebenter Ekloge", *MH* 23 (1966) 218 n.1
- 21 *ibid.* 218-223.
- 22 *ibid.* notes 1 and 7.
- 23 *ibid.* 219 and 223.
- 24 The opening of the first stanza raises some minor questions without much bearing on our main issue: 1) How closely do lines 53 and 54 belong together? The *juniperus* carries every second year ripened *baccae* whereas the *castaneae* have *nucēs* (or *glandes*) as their fruit. It seems that both trees may be called *pomiferae*, as also *pomum* (54) can be used in its wide sense. If so, is the singer in line 54 envisaging the juniper's berries and the chestnut's nuts underneath their respective mother trees? I would not think so, however. There is a contrast between *stant* and *strata iacent* that makes us think of the trees in line 53 in all their pride before they have shed their fruit. 2) *Hirsutae* has been taken predicatively (e.g. by Pöschl) with *stant* (one could point for instance to Horace's famous *Odes* 1. 9. 1f (*Vides ut alta stet nive candidum / Soracte.*), but I find this less natural here for the same reason as under 1), that *stant*, suggesting 'standing erect', is set against (*strata iacent* in the next line. 3) Further one could ask whether *hirsutae* belongs to both nouns in line 53 or to *castaneae* alone as a kind of *hypallage adjectivi* (thus *TLL*). The latter idea is attractive. It is not so much the chestnut-tree itself as its shellnut that is *hirsuta*, but all the same, for the singer, the tree and its nuts are a whole.
- 25 As can be seen from Gow's Oxford-text these lines were reshuffled by Bindemann: the line numbers are 45, 46, 47, 44, 41, 42, 43, 48.
- 26 In Theocritus' lines, the only trees to be mentioned are δρῦες ὑψίτεραι (cf. Virgil's *stant*) in Menalcas' stanza; these are also a sign of affluent nature.
- 27 J Sargeant, *The Trees, Shrubs, and Plants of Virgil* (Oxford, 1920) 64.
- 28 cf. K. Lembach, *Die Pflanzen bei Theokrit* (Heidelberg, 1970) 85 f suggesting that it is a strong perversion of nature when the beautiful narcissus shall bloom on a tree either unfruitful or at best with sour black berries.
- 29 *Dardanio Anchisae* 1. 617 = 9. 647; *Nereidum matri et* (cf. *juniperi et*) *Neptuno Aegaeo* 3. 74; *turrigeræ Antennæ* 7. 631; *Parrhasio Euandro* 11. 31.
- 30 *Hirsutus* is used once elsewhere in the *Eclogues*, at 8. 34, of an uncouth goat-like appearance. If the stanza is attributed to Thyrsis, one would ask whether it would allude to the singer's own appearance.
- 31 Pöschl (n. 12) (129) tries to evoke such a picture of affluence in the first line, but this is exaggerated at best: "Wacholder und Kastanien stehen in struppiger Fülle" (my italics).
- 32 *Omnia nunc rident* seems influenced by Daphnis' first line with its emphatic anaphora: πανταῖ ... πανταῖ ... πανταῖ ('everywhere').
- 33 Line 56 has not *ipsa* but *et* ("even") to outshine some previous image of dryness, it seems.
- 34 That *pampini* rank higher than *juniperi* and *castaneae* few would contest.