

VERGIL'S SEVENTH *ECLOGUE* AND ITS READERS: BIOGRAPHICAL ALLEGORY AS AN INTERPRETATIVE STRATEGY IN ANTIQUITY AND LATE ANTIQUITY

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VERGIL'S *ECLOGUES* contained roughly the same words in antiquity and late antiquity that they do today, but readers then and now were confronted by different poems because they asked different questions of their texts.¹ When we today read the *Eclogues*, we tend to ask such questions as: What is the work's relationship to its literary antecedents? to its own times? How does it use individual words or images? Many readers in antiquity and late antiquity began by asking: What does this character or thing stand for in Vergil's life? They read the *Eclogues* as biographical allegory.²

The ancient commentators on the *Eclogues* will allow us to see these readers at work. Although Servius is relatively familiar, the other commentators are little known. The *Explanatio in Bucolica Vergilii*, commonly known as Philargyrius, dates from the fifth century C.E. but contains some much older material.³ It exists in a longer version and a shorter version, which are closely related to each other but contain some different material. The *Scholia Bernensia* or Berne Scholia are a later potpourri of notes, but include much older material. Lastly, the Verona Scholia are an extremely fragmentary compilation. Although the antiquity of some of the material in these collections does not guarantee the antiquity of everything they contain, the overall risk to my analysis is tolerable, since biographical allegorizing is relatively common in many of the commentaries on a spectrum running from the sceptical Servius at one end to the *Explanations* and the Berne Scholia at the other, with the mutilated Verona Scholia probably falling closer to Servius.⁴ There would also be little reason for Servius to

1. In general on allegorical interpretations of Vergil, see Gino Funaioli, "Allegorie Virgiliane," *RLC* 2 (1920): 155–90; idem, *Esegesi Virgiliana antica* (Milan, 1930), 332–67; and, recently and with further bibliography, Edward Coleiro, *Enciclopedia Virgiliana*, vol. 1 (Rome, 1984), 108–10, s.v. "Allegoria: Esegesi allegorica." Antonino Romano, "L'Allegoria della prima ecloga di Vergilio secondo gli antichi comentatori," *Miscellanea di archeologia, storia e filologia dedicata al Prof. Antonino Salinas nel XL anniversario del suo insegnamento accademico* (Palermo, 1907), 118–25 is particularly helpful.

2. The modern hunt for biographical details in ancient works sometimes produces readings of individual details that are virtually allegorical, but it usually does not apply allegory systematically to an entire work. See E. A. Schmidt, *Poetische Reflexion: Vergils Bukolik* (Munich, 1972), 136–39, on modern uses of allegorical interpretation, and Jochem Küppers, "Tityrus in Rom—Bemerkungen zu einem vergilischen Thema und seiner Rezeptionsgeschichte," *ICS* 14 (1989): 34–35, with further bibliography in notes, on the figure of Tityrus in *Eclogue* 1.

3. Cf. Funaioli, *Esegesi*, 233.

4. The Verona Scholia list a variety of allegorical identifications for Codrus (ad 7.22), for instance, but comment ad 3.37 on the name Alcimedon: "Fictum nomen artificis: nusquam enim laus huius operis

express such hostility to biographical allegorizing (see below) if it were not relatively common by his time. For my purposes, these commentaries are best taken as representing a tradition rather than individuals, since it would be extremely difficult at best to separate the various strands in the scholia.⁵ The scholia other than Servius do not reflect the interpretative standard of the most sophisticated readers, as even a cursory contrast of the Berne Scholia with Servius reveals. Nor do they necessarily reflect their own authors' or compilers' potential, since they may present the kind of comments made to comparatively low-level students. Such comments, however, may help to reveal the assumptions and interpretative strategies that formed young readers and were passed from generation to generation.

Allegory is a two-sided issue.⁶ On the one side stands the author, who may or may not use allegory, while on the other side stands the reader, who may or may not read a text allegorically. But the two sides are not necessarily related. Although an author may try to alert the reader to allegorical meanings by, for example, giving characters special names (e.g., Virtue, Vice), the reader may not perceive the clues or, conversely, the reader may read a text allegorically that the author did not write allegorically. The interpretation of the text, therefore, is to a certain extent independent of whatever its author may have originally intended.⁷ The interpretation of the text at any given time is also at least potentially independent of its prior readings, although a continuous tradition of interpretation can create a kind of interpretative inertia.

Various kinds of allegory were available to ancient readers. At an extremely simple level, Latin poets were thought to conceal their beloveds' names beneath metrically equivalent names, e.g., "Lycoris" for "Cytheris" (see DS ad 10.2). Somewhat more advanced allegorical interpretation relied on a straightforward one-to-one correspondence of people in a poem and people in real life. Still more pervasive allegorizing took the final step of assuming that everything—not just people—stood for something else. Philosophical and moral allegories were also possible, in which characters stood for concepts or moral qualities or categories, an approach popular with the *Aeneid* and Homer as well as with mythology and religious texts.⁸ The biographical allegory we find in our commentaries is pervasive, in that virtually everything can be taken to stand for something else, but it is historical and biographical, not philosophical or moral. It is distinguished from simple allegory by the wide range of possible referents: people, animals,

invenitur. Et voluit obscuriorem sensum reddere. No[m]en] aut[em] addens] artificis pocu]lorum pignus futurae concertationis adiuvit," although the SB confidently identify Alcimedon with Hesiod.

5. As Funaioli tried to do in his massive study.

6. See, in general, P. B. Rollinson, *Classical Theories of Allegory and Christian Culture*, Duquesne Studies in Language and Literature, vol. 3 (Pittsburgh, 1981), 18–22.

7. This leaves aside, of course, the question of the validity of authorial intention as an interpretative criterion and focuses on the simple case of an author who wanted his or her text to be interpreted allegorically but whose reader, for whatever reasons, did not comply.

8. See Fulgentius, e.g., and Domenico Comparetti, *Vergil in the Middle Ages*, trans. E. F. M. Benecke (New York, 1895), 104–18. In general, with a focus on epic poetry, see P. R. Hardie, *Virgil's "Aeneid": Cosmos and Imperium* (Oxford, 1986), 26–32, with further bibliography in notes.

and things in the poems can stand for anything from a person to a city, and their actions can represent historical and literary events.

Since there was little or no tradition of using biographical allegory to interpret pastoral poetry,⁹ the use of this interpretative strategy represents a choice exercised by the readers of the *Eclogues* as members of an interpretative community. Their choice of approach, however, was not completely unconstrained. They were limited by the loss of the *Eclogues'* literary ancestors, which would have provided a general literary context in which to understand Vergil's poems. 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.¹⁰ Furthermore, instead of recognizing literary commonplaces, the scholiasts discover history and biography. When Thyrsis in *Eclogue* 7 uses the common motif of nature-is-bleak-without-my-beloved, for example, the Berne Scholia see an allusion to bleakness caused by the land confiscations, a bleakness that would be reversed by Octavian (SB ad 7.57). Thyrsis' day that seems longer than a year without his beloved is transformed into a "day of foreign wanderings or day of exile."¹¹ Yet literary ignorance in itself does not sufficiently explain why readers chose biographical allegory as their interpretative strategy, since allegory started to surface at a time near Vergil's own, when the literary background was still relatively accessible.

Biographical allegory is far older than Servius or the Berne Scholia.¹² Vergil himself sometimes seems to encourage allegorical analysis, as when he has Menalcas in *Eclogue* 5 quote variants on the opening lines of *Eclogues* 2 and 3 (5.86–87). Some passages were read allegorically relatively soon after the poems were released to the public. Within sixty years or so, Asinius Gallus suggested that he was the miraculous child of *Eclogue* 4 (DS ad 4.11). We even hear of presumably humorous self-allegorizing by the notorious critic Remmius Palaemon, who claimed that Vergil had "Palaemon" judge the poetry contest in *Eclogue* 3 "because he had a presentiment that Palaemon would be the *iudex* of all poets and poems" (Suet. *Gram.* 23). Calpurnius Siculus and Martial both interpreted parts of the *Eclogues* allegorically, while Quintilian understood Menalcas in the

9. The Theocritus scholia have very little truck with it (see Schmidt, *Poetische Reflexion*, 121; Robert Coleman, ed., *Vergil: Eclogues* [Cambridge, 1977], 33), for example, and Servius supplements it with several other approaches.

10. Servius: see, e.g., ad *Ecl.* 8.1, 9.1, and 9.23. Other commentators: *Expl.* I and II ad 6.1, SB ad 6.1; Theocritus is said to appear in the Second *Eclogue* in the guise of Damoetas (*Expl.* II, *praef.* ad *Ecl.* 2; SB at 2.37), for example, but there is no appreciation of the deep penetration of the poem by *Idyll* 11.

11. SB ad 7.43. For the motif, see Coleman, *Eclogues*, ad loc.; Macrobius, *Sat.* 4.6.16, uses the line as an example of amatory *pathos* based on hyperbole.

12. See, e.g., Comparetti, *Vergil in the Middle Ages*, 59–60; Funaioli, *Esegesi*, 333–34; F. R. Hamblin, "The Development of Allegory in the Classical Pastoral" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1922), 25–29; V. Langholf, "Vergil-Allegorese in den Bucolica des Calpurnius Siculus," *RhM* 133 (1990): 356–57; R. Levis, "Allegory and the Eclogues," *Electronic Antiquity* 1.5 (Oct. 1993). Annabel Patterson, *Pastoral and Ideology: Vergil to Valéry* (Berkeley, 1987), 24, sees Servius as "chiefly responsible" for the historical and political allegorizing of the *Eclogues*, but the interpretation's roots go far deeper.

Ninth *Eclogue* as Vergil himself.¹³ Servius refers explicitly to the *allegoriam* . . . *antiquam* of Alexis in *Eclogue* 2 standing for Augustus (ad 2.73). But pervasively detailed allegorizing of all of the *Eclogues* seems not to have occurred near Vergil's own lifetime: allegorizing seems to have been largely restricted to a few *Eclogues*, especially the First and the Fourth.¹⁴

Servius can serve as a control to give us a sense of how pervasively the ancient world allegorized the *Eclogues*. In general, he hesitates to admit allegory.¹⁵ For instance, he insists that in *Eclogue* 1 "we ought to understand Vergil under the *persona* of Tityrus; but we shouldn't do that everywhere, but only where reason demands."¹⁶ He insists that the *Eclogues* should not be interpreted allegorically except when it concerns Vergil's farm: "refutandae enim sunt allegoriae in bucolico carmine, nisi cum, ut supra diximus, ex aliqua agrorum perditorum necessitate descendunt."¹⁷ Servius explicitly identifies the loss and recovery of the farm as the *causa* of the *Eclogues*¹⁸ and says that "in some passages *per allegoriam* he thanks Augustus and other nobles through whose favor he recovered the farm he had lost."¹⁹ Although in general he does not approach the allegorical orgies of the *Explanationes* or the Berne Scholia, the farm can permeate Servius' interpretation even of very small details, as when he interprets *latet anguis in herba* in Damoetas' contest-song at 3.93 as an allegory directed toward the people of Mantua, "who were living amidst armed soldiers, who, there is no doubt, can inflict death, as snakes can."²⁰ To explain why Tityrus reclines specifically under a beech in the First *Eclogue*, Servius turns to an allegory even more elaborate than those of the other commentators: This is *allegoria* . . . *honestissima*, he explains, since the beech bears nuts that were used for food in an earlier period (he suggests that *fagus* is derived ἀπὸ τοῦ φαγεῖν); Servius then gives the hidden meaning: "You are stretched out under the shade of a beech in your own fields, retaining your own possessions, by which you are nourished, just as men used to be nourished earlier by nuts" (ad 1.1).

If we consider allegorizing as a process,²¹ we can see the scholiastic tradition making three underlying and probably unexamined assumptions about the nature of the *Eclogues* as a literary text. First, the tradition assumed that

13. Calpurnius: Schmidt, *Poetische Reflexion*, 122–25; Langholf, "Vergil-Allegorese," passim; Küppers, "Tityrus in Rom," 37–41. Martial: Schmidt, *Poetische Reflexion*, 126–27, esp. discussing Martial 8.55 (56); Langholf, "Vergil-Allegorese," p. 352, n. 5. Quintilian: 8.6.46–47.

14. Cf. Levis, "Allegory."

15. Cf. Funaioli, *Esegesi*, 335; Schmidt, *Poetische Reflexion*, 128; Comparetti, *Vergil in the Middle Ages*, 58–59. In general, see the brief but insightful discussion of Servius and allegory in Claudie Balavoine, "Vie et mort de l'allégorie dans les commentaires des *Bucoliques* virgiliennes à la Renaissance," in *Hommages à Henry Bardon*, ed. Marcel Renard and Pierre Laurens, Collection Latomus, vol. 187 (Brussels, 1985), 13–16.

16. Ad 1.1. E.g., he condemns the allegorizing of the ten golden apples in *Eclogue* 3 as the ten *Eclogues* as "superfluous" (ad 3.71).

17. Ad 3.20. See Patterson, *Pastoral and Ideology*, 34–38, on Servius' use of "discontinuous allegory."

18. Thilo-Hagen, p. 3.1.2.14–3.14. See Patterson, *Pastoral and Ideology*, 32–33.

19. Thilo-Hagen, p. 3.1.2.14–19. In this, Servius thinks Vergil differs greatly from the *simplex* Theocritus because *necessitate compulsus aliquibus locis miscet figuras* (Thilo-Hagen, p. 3.1.2.19–22).

20. Serv. ad loc.; see Levis, "Allegory and the *Eclogues*."

21. In general, see Levis, "Allegory and the *Eclogues*."

the *Eclogues* reflect the actual events of Vergil's life. Lycidas' description of the landscape in 9.7–10 was often thought to fit Vergil's farm (the opinion of *alii* in DS ad 9.7), for instance, while the appearance of Amaryllis and Galatea in the Third *Eclogue* led some to think that *duas mulieres Virgilius habuit* (see *Expl.* II ad 3.64). The death of Daphnis in *Eclogue* 5, according to some scholiasts, reflects the death of a brother of Vergil named Flaccus, while the grief of Daphnis' mother shows that Vergil's mother did not long survive this Flaccus' death (see *Expl.* I ad 5.20, *Expl.* II ad 5.22, and SB ad 5, *praef.*). The works of the Greek poets were also mined for biographical details that are not trustworthy.²² The works, in other words, created the lives. In the case of Vergil and the *Eclogues*, the initial step was the same: many of the details of Vergil's life were created out of the *Eclogues*.²³ The difference comes in the next step: once the *Eclogues* had been used to help create the few meager "facts" about Vergil's life, those "facts" were then used in a perfect circle as a light to illuminate the very works that had created them. The *Eclogues*, in short, created Vergil's life, which, in turn, created the detailed biographical allegory of the *Eclogues*.²⁴

Second, readers assumed that a book of poems has a single theme or subject, an attitude discernible in ancient commentaries on the *Aeneid* as well (e.g., Serv. ad *Aen.*, *praef.*, Thilo-Hagen 1.4.10–11). The scholiasts see the theme of Vergil's farm and his thanks for recovering it proclaimed in the First *Eclogue* and assume that it is, therefore, continued in the other poems.²⁵ In *Eclogue* 3, for instance, the Berne Scholia interpret a dog barking at a goat-thief as Mantua, the bark being understood *allegorice* as *plurimis reclamantibus* (ad 3.18). In the opening scene of the Seventh *Eclogue*, when Daphnis sees Meliboeus shielding his plants and calls to him, the *Explanatio* imagines Octavian seeing and summoning Vergil, who is trying to recover his property (*Expl.* I and II ad 7.6). Meliboeus' wandering goat represents the farm, which Vergil, a.k.a. Meliboeus, is trying to recover (SB ad 7.7).

Third, the commentators assumed that the *Eclogues* needed to be understood in their own political and historical context, which they took to be the struggle between Octavian and Antony overlaid by a tale of poetic rivalries between Vergil and various other poets.²⁶ They were not reading ahistorically, as might be the case with philosophical or moral allegory. They were fully aware that Vergil's historical circumstances were not the same as their own, although they did not fully understand those circumstances

22. See M. R. Lefkowitz, *The Lives of the Greek Poets* (Baltimore, 1981), *passim*.

23. See Michael Winterbottom, "Virgil and the Confiscations," *G&R* 23 (1976): 55–59, reprinted in *Virgil, Greece & Rome Studies*, ed. Ian McAuslan and Peter Walcott (Oxford, 1990), 65; Tenney Frank, "What Do We Know about Vergil?," *CJ* 26 (1930–31): 3–11; Funaioli, *Esegesi*, 391; Coleman, *Eclogues*, 89 (final note on *Ecl.* 1).

24. Hamblin, "Development of Allegory," 55; John Van Sickle, "How Do We Read Ancient Texts? Codes and Critics in Vergil, *Eclogue One*," *MD* 13 (1984): 109, 116.

25. See Romano, "L'Allegoria," 119–20; cf. Hamblin, "Development of Allegory," 37–38.

26. See Hamblin, "Development of Allegory," 49–50.

and reveal their ignorance in many notes.²⁷ The Berne Scholia see the contest of Corydon and Thyrsis as a contest between Vergil as Corydon, who is said to compete "in defense of Caesar," and Cornificius and perhaps even Antony himself as Thyrsis (SB ad 7.16). It is implied that Vergil himself had to make a choice and that he chose Octavian.²⁸ The Berne Scholia even imagine a reference in 2.43 to Cleopatra trying to lure Vergil away from Octavian.²⁹ The scholiasts see Vergil sometimes as criticizing Augustus, as when they read *impius miles* in *Eclogue* 1.70 as honest criticism of Augustus,³⁰ sometimes as expressing his willingness to accompany Octavian into battle.³¹ Their interest in history, however, is a code-breaker's interest in a code: they are interested not in placing the *Eclogues* in Vergil's historical context but rather in breaking the code, in removing the characters' masks and revealing their true identities.³²

My discussion will focus on the Seventh *Eclogue* precisely because it does not lend itself easily to allegorical interpretations, by contrast to the First *Eclogue*.³³ Meliboeus begins the poem by explaining that he had been pursuing an errant goat when Daphnis saw him and invited him to hear a singing contest between Corydon and Thyrsis. The body of the poem (7.21–68) is composed of the quatrains sung in alternation by Corydon and Thyrsis, which include invocations of gods and various love songs. The *Eclogue* ends with Meliboeus' brief report that Corydon won a glorious victory. Although a few modern scholars have interpreted the poem allegorically,³⁴ the general consensus of modern scholars as their own interpretative community is to regard it as a poem about poetry, not about contemporary history and politics.³⁵ Many ancient readers, however, felt far otherwise.

27. We should not expect historical accuracy, however, since even Servius thinks that the *Eclogues* date from the time of the Battle of Actium. See J. E. G. Zetzel, "Servius and Triumviral History in the *Eclogues*," *CP* 79 (1984): 139–42. In the scholiasts it often seems that all the events of Vergil's literary life are compressed into a single moment, so that he is thinking about the *Aeneid* as he writes the *Eclogues* (see, e.g., *Expl.* 1 ad 2.71); the same kind of compression of time is visible in Calpurnius Siculus' Vergil: see Schmidt, *Poetische Reflexion*, 122.

28. See Funaioli, *Esegesi*, 360. See SB ad 7.8. On Corydon's exhortation to himself in *Eclogue* 2 Servius reports that "some people want to take this passage as containing an *allegoriam* . . . *antiquam* directed at Augustus, so that we would understand it to mean: 'you will find another leader, if Augustus holds you in contempt as you plead for your fields'" (ad 2.73). He goes on to reject the interpretation: "*sed melius simpliciter accipimus hunc locum: nam nihil habet, quod possit ad Caesarem trahi.*" See *Expl.* 1 ad 2.14; SB ad 2.15.

29. See SB ad 2.43: "allegorice Cleopatra uxor Antonii, et hoc accipitur quasi rogaret Virgilium ut ei cantaret."

30. SB ad 1.71. See Patterson, *Pastoral and Ideology*, 37. Cf. *Expl.* 1 ad 1.70; cf. Serv. ad 9.5, 9.18.

31. SB ad 2.29. Servius knew of a similar story, ad 3.74.

32. I would partially exempt Servius from this analysis: see Patterson, *Pastoral and Ideology*, 34–35, who contends that Servius' use of discontinuous allegory shows that he had "a grasp of how a historicist theory of intention and allusion must work"; see also pp. 39–41. Cf. Schmidt, *Poetische Reflexion*, 121.

33. On allegorizing in the scholia on *Eclogue* 7, see Funaioli, *Esegesi*, 356–61. On *Eclogue* 1, see Van Sickle, "How Do We Read Ancient Texts?," 107–28.

34. E.g., Leon Herrmann, *Les Masques et les Visages dans les Bucoliques de Virgile* (Brussels, 1930), passim; J. J. H. Savage, "The Art of the Seventh *Eclogue* of Vergil," *TAPA* 94 (1963): 248–67; W. R. Nethercut, "Vergil and Horace in Bucolic 7," *CW* 62 (1968–69): 93–98.

35. See, e.g., Coleman, *Eclogues*, 22; E. E. Beyers, "Vergil: *Eclogue* 7—A Theory of Poetry," *AClass* 5 (1962): 38–47; cf. Charles Fantazzi and C. W. Querbach, "Sound and Substance: A Reading of Vergil's Seventh *Eclogue*," *Phoenix* 39 (1985): 355–67, who argue that it is more than a pastoral trifle but still not

All the major figures in *Eclogue* 7 were believed to conceal real people important in Vergil's life. Daphnis was commonly thought to conceal Octavian, but the *Explanatio* and the Berne Scholia suggest that he could be Octavian or Gallus.³⁶ Meliboeus represents Vergil or Varus.³⁷ Corydon stands for Vergil, presumably because he wins the contest,³⁸ even though Vergil has already appeared under the guise of Meliboeus. Thyrsis presents more serious interpretative problems. Servius notes that "many people" equate Thyrsis with a "malicious critic of Vergil" and adds, "of course that means either Bavius or Anser or Maevius, who were *horrible* poets" (ad 7.21). The *Explanations*, however, match Thyrsis with Varus (*Expl.* II ad 7, *praef.*) or Aemilius Macer (*Expl.* ad 7.16). The Berne Scholia suggest that he represents Cornificius (a stock villain in the scholia), or Macer, or even Mark Antony.³⁹

The minor characters in the poem also have hidden identities. For example, Alcippe and Phyllis, two women whom Meliboeus says he does not have available to help him, represent Mantua and Cremona in the Berne Scholia (ad 7.14). Priapus, who is invoked by Thyrsis, stands for Antony (SB ad 7.33). Codrus, a poet whom Corydon praises, is identified by Servius Danielis merely as "a poet of the same time" (ad 7.22), and the *Explanations* suggest that he was a friend of Vergil, Helvius Cinna (ad 7.22). The Berne Scholia go a step further: Codrus stands for Cinna or Theocritus.⁴⁰

Allegorizing is not limited to people. The hazels mentioned by Corydon stand for the people of Mantua, for example, while the summer heat stands for the wrath of Octavian; the Mincius River stands for "the power of Augustus"; and the ilex tree stands for the state.⁴¹

As we have seen, identifications shift from line to line: one historical person can be represented by several different figures within the same poem, and one literary character may stand for any of a variety of people. The identifications operate on a line-by-line or quatrain by quatrain level, and the identifications may change with the alternating speakers within the poem. When the positive figure Corydon praises Codrus, for example, Codrus stands for Theocritus or Cinna, but when the negative figure Thyrsis wishes ill on Codrus, then Codrus must represent an enemy of Thyrsis, either Vergil himself or Octavian.⁴²

"a paradigmatic model of Virgilian poetic aesthetics" (367). B. D. Frischer, *At Tu Aureus Esto: Eine Interpretation von Vergils 7. Ekloge* (Bonn, 1975), argues for a philosophical interpretation.

36. Octavian: cf. the opinion of *multi* reported but not necessarily endorsed by Serv. ad *Ecl.* 7.21. Octavian or Gallus: *Expl.* I ad 7.1; *Expl.* II ad 7, *praef.*; SB ad 7.1.

37. Vergil or Varus: *Expl.* I ad 7.1, *Expl.* II, *praef.* ad 7; SB ad 7, *praef.* (or Gallus, earlier in the note).

38. *Expl.* II ad 7, *praef.*; SB ad 7, *praef.*; Hamblin, "Development of Allegory," 37.

39. Cornificius: ad 7, *praef.*; ad 7.2; Macer: ad 7, *praef.*; Mark Antony: ad 7.16. Cornificius as a stock villain: see *Expl.* I ad 2.39; SB ad 2.39; *Expl.* ad 5.89. The identification of Thyrsis with the *Vergilii obrectator* presumably reflects Thyrsis' defeat by Corydon/Vergil (Schmidt, *Poetische Reflexion*, 131).

40. SB ad 7.22. Cf. the fragmentary *Scholia Veronensia*, which list identifications proposed by various proponents: Codrus might be Vergil, Cornificius, or Cinna (ad 7.22).

41. Hazels: *Expl.* I and II and SB ad 7.63; heat: SB ad 7.47; Mincius River: SB ad 7.12; ilex tree: SB ad 7.1.

42. See the SB ad 7.22 and 7.26; cf. Hamblin, "Development of Allegory," 48. Instead of simply condemning this practice, perhaps we could see it as an example of the radical specificity (as opposed to abstract generality) discernible in various spheres of Roman culture, e.g., law, as well as in ancient critics' tendency to favor small-scale over large-scale discussion. I hope to explore this in a future paper.

Identifications can also be affected by the interpretation of who is speaking: Is it Vergil the actual poet? the narrator? or one of the contestants?⁴³ For instance, when Thyrsis addresses Lycidas in his last quatrain, the Berne Scholia say, "*Allegorice*, either Cornificius says this about Antony or Vergil says it about Caesar, or about Cornelius Gallus."⁴⁴ Even for the relatively logical Servius, the speaker's identity is not always clear in the *Eclogues*, as when Tityrus in *Eclogue* 1 says *candidior postquam tondenti barba cadebat* (1.28), which throws Servius into a quandary caused by a combination of allegory and literalism: Vergil was too young to have a white beard when he wrote the *Eclogues*, so perhaps Tityrus does not stand for Vergil in this passage. He solves the problem by altering the natural flow of the passage to make *candidior* agree not with *barba* but with *libertas* in the previous line.⁴⁵

The shifting analysis is radically unstable.⁴⁶ This instability, in part, reflects standard educational practice in antiquity. The teacher was expected to present various alternative interpretations, not necessarily to argue for one position over another, although he could do so. Jerome's *Contra Rufinum* (1.16) provides the classic discussion:

What is the commentators' task? They explain the words of someone else. They make clear in plain language things that were written obscurely. They repeat the opinions of many and say "Certain people explain this passage this way, others explain it that way." They attempt to support their own interpretation and view with certain testimonies and a certain explanation, so that the practiced and prudent reader, after he has read various explanations and learned many persons' opinions that must be approved or disapproved, may decide which is truer and, like a good banker, reject money of fraudulent stamp.⁴⁷

Jerome cites a plethora of famous examples: Asper on Vergil and Sallust, Vulcatius on Cicero's orations, Victorinus on Cicero's dialogues, Donatus on Terence and Vergil and, he adds, "the commentaries of others on other authors, Plautus, of course, Lucretius, Flaccus, Persius, and Lucan." He is being tendentious, defending himself against a charge of including heretical material in his work, but if we turn to the commentators on the *Eclogues*, we find that they commonly do express preferences for one interpretation over another, but they also commonly leave questions open. This suggests a model of education in antiquity that is less rigid than has

43. Cf. Serv. ad 10.16: "et quod ait 'nostri,' miscuit suam personam, ut frequenter facere consuevit: nam erat integrum 'tui nec paenitet illas.'"

44. SB ad 7.65. In *Eclogue* 3, another contest, *Expl.* 1 does not distinguish between the speakers of the couplets 94–95 and 96–97: both passages show Vergil talking about his own life (ad 3.95 and 3.97).

45. Serv. ad *Ecl.* 1.28. See Funaioli, *Esegesi*, 337–38. Patterson, *Pastoral and Ideology*, 35, uses Servius' entire note to show Servius thinking about the concept of *persona*, which is true, but Servius comes down heavily here on the side of literalistic allegory rather than subtle reading. Cf. *Expl.* 1 ad 1.46, where the scholiast uses a dodge: "idest non ad aetatem Virgilii refert, sed ad fortunam futuram praesago usus verbo." Cf. SB ad 1.47.

46. Cf. Schmidt, *Poetische Reflexion*, 130; Levis, "Allegory and the *Eclogues*," n. 16.

47. Anthony Grafton, *Defenders of the Text: The Traditions of Scholarship in an Age of Science, 1450–1800* (Cambridge, 1991), 37, notes that many early Renaissance commentators presented contradictory alternatives without making a choice, a practice they justified by appeal to Jerome. Patterson, *Pastoral and Ideology*, 41–42, tentatively (and to me unconvincingly) suggests that Servius' use of the *variorum* commentary form allowed him to conceal his own opinions, wise practice, she says, in the later Empire.

been commonly allowed. The teacher was not required to remain neutral: he could take a stand and support it. But he was not required to propound a single answer. These teachers and these commentators might leave their students free to make up their own minds on their ways to becoming "prudent readers."

What are the effects of the scholiastic tradition's use of biographical allegory as the dominant interpretative strategy for reading the *Eclogues* in general and the Seventh *Eclogue* in particular? First and foremost, it restricts their experience of the poem, as does almost any approach used to the exclusion of others.⁴⁸ Servius' more inclusive stance produces a more complex reading and hence a more complex poem than the more monotonal approach surviving in the Berne Scholia or the *Explanatio*.

Second, biographical allegory produces a reading that cannot be escaped once it has been set in motion. Because allegory works with a hidden code, the potential failure of allegory as an interpretative strategy does not cause the reader to question the approach but merely its application. If Thyrsis doesn't stand for Bavius, maybe he stands for Anser, and if not for Anser, then maybe for Maevius, and so on. As you make your substitutions, you are not necessarily even restricted to the same category of referent: at various points in the tradition, for example, the two *capreoli* Corydon says he's saving for Alexis in *Eclogue* 2 are identified as the two books of the *Georgics*, the *Georgics* and the *Aeneid*—or as Cassius and Brutus (see SB ad 2.41). If you keep substituting long enough, eventually you can break the code.

Third, biographical allegory and its wonderfully elusive code create a narrative in the poems and in Vergil's life. Although the *Eclogues* contains individual poems that have narrative backgrounds, such as the First *Eclogue*, the book as a whole is not a continuous narrative. The scholiasts, however, find a narrative framework or at least impose one, by their constant reference to Vergil's farm, the land confiscations, and the dynastic struggle between Octavian and Antony. They impose this narrative on the individual poems rather than necessarily seeing plot development from the first to the last poem. The narrative creates a coherence that makes the individual poems and the book as a whole accessible and comprehensible. The coherence comes from outside the poems, it is true, from Vergil's life: it is (pseudo)-historical, not literary. But we should appreciate the potential dilemma they faced: if they could not understand the *Eclogues*, they would be admitting that they were cut off from more than ten poems. They would be admitting that they were cut off from their own cultural tradition.

Finally, this approach builds the commentator and the reader directly into the literary tradition represented by the *Eclogues*.⁴⁹ Without the commentator the poems would be incomprehensible, while the reader is continually

48. See the general comments of M. C. J. Putnam, *Virgil's Pastoral Art: Studies in the "Eclogues"* (Princeton, 1970), 69.

49. See R. A. Kaster, "Macrobius and Servius: *Verecundia* and the Grammarian's Function," *HSCP* 84 (1980): 235, on Macrobius' view of the *occultissimam diligentiam* shown by Vergil and the *diligentia* expected of his readers.

being asked to take at least a provisional stance on the identities of the various characters. Commentators and readers are not Vergil's equals, but room is left for future commentators and future readers. In fact, we can wonder whether the readers *wanted* to break the code they saw in the *Eclogues*. Obviously, the code is not broken, either by the scholiastic tradition as a whole or by the comments gathered in an individual set of scholia. As we have seen in Jerome, it was typical practice to present alternatives without necessarily taking the step of selecting only one. This standard practice may have been particularly appealing to readers of Vergil because of the role Vergil played in ancient and late antique cultural life.⁵⁰ He was not the same as any other author: his work was crucial to the entire educational system. Perhaps our readers simply did not care to find the truth in any objective or absolute sense. Finding the truth would have implied closing the circle of interpretation⁵¹ and ending the interaction with Vergil. Their goal was not closure, but ongoing interaction with Vergil and, therefore, with their cultural heritage.⁵²

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50. See the insightful analysis of Francesco della Corte, "Genesi e palingenesi dell'allegoria virgiliana," *Maia* 36 (1984): 116.

51. On the movement in the Renaissance away from presenting various alternatives without choosing one, Grafton, *Defenders of the Text*, 54, comments, "... the whole point of their new genre was to show off their ability to solve problems once and for all."

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