

VIRGIL'S THIRD *ECLOGUE*: HOW DO YOU KEEP AN IDIOT IN SUSPENSE?

I. BEGINNING

Two herdsmen meet and bicker; bargain over a stake; duel in balladeering; and ballot their umpire for a final decision. The first half of their poem dramatizes the process of challenge and defiance from which the bout materializes; the result is a draw. Critics attempt what none of its three herdsmen try out loud, namely to solve the pair of riddles with which the song-contest ends, before the judge pronounces the result. Solutions range between putative attribution to the bucolic minds of the riddlers, and ascription to their creator, the intellectual, urban, bookish, Hellenizing poetaster, who here, in any event, dares a touch of rustic needling that he precisely did *not* find in his studies in Theocritea, which include *no* riddles. *Solution* has generally seemed the self-evident challenge to scholar-readers.

If we stress the frame-less nature of the *Eclogue*, a narrator-less mime left to situate itself without editorial comment, like the first, and then each successive odd *Eclogue*, we will begin, instead, from the dramatic scenario of the clash between Damoetas and Menalcas. We will get into the 'ring' alongside these competitors, and follow the agonistic rhetoric of their sallies, until the point where riddle and counter-riddle bring the bout to an end. This is the distinctive approach of Powell, in his lively ringside commentary on the trading of verbal punches between the herdsmen in their songs.¹

On the other hand, if we look over the whole composition, our reading is likely to attend to the internal division where conversational bickering gives way to singing before the appointed judge. The riddles are positioned as the close to singing that began from appropriative rival invocations of the greatest gods of the cosmos and of poetry, Jupiter and Apollo. Thus, Segal's reading follows a sublative movement through the poem, finding that song raises the singers' horizons up to the aether, as high as the budding poet's imagination can lift them.² The business of the wager is now a textual 'operator' which signals the reader to search, in what follows, for the right wavelength for reception of the poem. And the riddles must find uplift to match. The terms of the wager dictate the valorization of the singing, 'proceeding from petty wrangling to an harmonious conclusion'.³

No doubt the songs encourage such transcoded reading, not least by their puncturing the world of Galatea, Amyntas, and their like, halfway through the contest, with flattering praises for Pollio, and scorn for triumviral poetry's Beavis and Butthead—Bavius and Mevius (vv. 84–91). Once the singers play for the approval of Virgil's powerful friend, whose consulate will occasion the straining devotions of the very next poem, the independence of characters from creator is virtually erased. The songs are repositioned in a scene of rivalry between Virgil's production of his dialogue and *his* rivals' own counter-bids to attract praise and authority. To speak plainly, Virgil

¹ B. B. Powell, 'Poeta Ludens: thrust and counter-thrust in *Eclogue* 3', *ICS* 1 (1976), 113–21.

² C. P. Segal, 'Vergil's *caelatum opus*: an interpretation of the Third *Eclogue*', *AJPh* 88 (1967), 279–308 (= *Poetry and Myth in Ancient Pastoral: Essays on Theocritus and Virgil* [Princeton, 1981], pp. 235–64).

³ B. Otis, *Virgil: A Study in Civilized Poetry* (Oxford, 1964), p. 143.

has dressed up in rusticity just such a competitive *soirée chez Pollio* as often graced his salon, and for a moment lets the veil slip so we cannot miss it.

Yet the poem does more than install the reader, through the figure of Pollio, as judge of Virgil's adolescent promise, ready to patronize or scorn his efforts, just like modern critics. The dramatic scenario is not simply abolished by its inclusion of an orientation beyond the frame of its bucolic horizons: before either singer offers a couplet, their poem has already negotiated the question of what they are singing *for*. That is to say, the 'preliminaries' of *Eclogue* 3 do not simply set up its song-contest, but create an opportunity for the participants to discuss the stake of their bout. To be sure, they *argue* rather than discuss; but the product for the reader is a dramatization within the text of the fundamental question of what is at stake in [the] representation. This text parades explicit terms and a direct answer.

Even the surreal rupture of the characterology through the inclusion of Pollio's name is framed within a performance which has already been evaluated in advance: the stake of the singing was settled before ever the song took wing, so we already know what all the contest contains is worth before it arrives—while our retrospect will revalue the wager, and we shall need to reckon again. Prize and reprise problematize each other. The rustic bet tells what the song's flight of fancy *must* be worth; the urbane conceit says this *cannot* be right, so think again.

Or rather, given that the poem stages the scene of self-valuation as *itself* a contest, as well as the exchanges that constitute the song-contest 'proper', what was offered in the first place was no more than a running shuffle of proposals and counter-proposals *toward* fixing a 'pot'. It is not at all clear whether any particular decision was agreed, and what that might be, let alone what it might mean to Virgil, and to us.⁴ We were not handed an undisputed and definitive idea of what the stake was meant to be, whether or not we come to feel that we have to reconsider what we made of it. Nor, on the other hand, are the contributions to the song made by either singer self-evidently apposite and in keeping with the level of dignity represented by the putative prize.

Our combatants are in no position to *comment* on this themselves, since the singers can call no time-out for critical remarks; but every snippet of song fires a salvo in a running battle of mutual disparagement. If we defer to the poet's surrogate

⁴ Almost uniquely, E. W. Leach, *Virgil's Eclogues: Landscapes of Experience* (Cornell, 1974), pp. 174f. claims that Damoetas' 'boasting gives Menalcas a chance to close the bargain and dismiss the heifer. . . . When the singing is over, Palaemon, the judge, seems unaware that the cups had been offered and assumes the prize was a heifer.' But cf. H. J. Rose, *The Eclogues of Virgil* (Berkeley, 1942), pp. 39–42, at p. 41, 'The heifer has not been wagered. . . . [Palaemon] does not know what they are singing for but merely assumes that so earnest a contest must be for a considerable prize.' Powell (n. 1), p. 115n., claims that 'Segal, I take it, has not understood that a heifer is the prize'; but this, I take it, is not quite to understand Segal's position: while it is true that he slights 'the lowly cow' against 'the elaborate cups' (loc. cit., p. 307), and forgets what he is about by remarking that 'The cups and the long debate on the relative value of cups and cow (29–43) are now forgotten' (p. 302), and 'Both *the cups* and the contest of which they *are the prize* become meaningful at a level other than that of rustic realism: both are transformed into something symbolic' (p. 286), Segal wanted his Virgil to find a way to let the Theocritean scenario shine through his own—unresolved—by-play: 'Theocritus has the single shepherd offer both cup and goat. The two gifts are of coordinate value. . . . For Virgil . . . there is a cleavage between the two realms. . . . [H]is scene of bargaining . . . begins to open the dichotomy between practical and aesthetic, "rustic" and "poetic"' (p. 284). 'The issue between them, cups or cow, is still unresolved at the moment when Palaemon, the umpire-to-be, appears and brings an end to this first half of the poem' (p. 286). With 'Palaemon's closing speech . . . the poet returns to and re-affirms the simplicity of his original pastoral setting after he has intimated the larger possibilities that lie within it' (p. 302). My Segal treads a fine line between having his cups and milking them.

authority-figure, and look to Palaemon for a final arbitration, or at least for a summation of what the singers have achieved, still readers are themselves in the interim on trial.

When judgement *is* duly pronounced on the singing, in a formal declaration of the result and award of the prize, the moment has come for stake and songs to bind together the authorized interpretation. We shall be *told* what we have heard, when it is over. But, we should have noticed, the judge Palaemon was not present, as we were, to witness or approve agreement on the stake; he was ushered onto the scene fortuitously, walking into Menalcas' sentence at the very instant he determined to look for someone to play judge (v. 50). Besides, his verdict is a draw, so he does not settle the matter by *implementing* his decision. In fact, quite apart from the question of the stake, his pronouncement has itself generated widely different notions of what he (must have) meant. In any case, it is not, ultimately, at all obvious that the judge does speak either representatively, on behalf of some implied rustic community; or authoritatively, in terms of preferring some rustic values to others; let alone authorially, as the surrogate of the poet's viewpoint. The delivery of his verdict actually puts *his* judgement into question. We judge the judge from the dock.

All the same, the question of the stake of this song, of these songs, is, ineluctably, entangled with the Palaemon's final judgement. But is this, when it comes, 'a neutral decision'? Or is it disparagement of both the contenders, indifference, or nonchalance, or dereliction of duty? Does(n't) Palaemon plump for a quiet life, and elude the recriminations of a loser? May this be no honestly adjudicated and honourable draw, but rather a craven ducking of responsibility, if not an (insulting) insouciance, or outright failure of will? It may. Simple 'parity' is no answer.

So it is that the three components of the mime—its ceremonies of dispute and wager; songs and riddles; final judgement—are inter-implicated in a contest for mastery of the poem's interpretation. But readers must judge between the contestants, including the judge. Since this is a dramatic script, the reader is also the director: we load our version of the squabbling and its climax in the foolery over agreeing the wager; we take our own measure of the entries for the song contest, somewhere from predictable or state of the art, to astounding, to baffling; and we produce a judge we can, or cannot, even must not, trust. This is our beef—it is up to us to load the performance our way.

This is to insist that the poem is dead meat if it is not read in full recognition of this dramatic condition for its realization. Even to pronounce it unsuccessful is, once this is understood, to enter into the scenario. To have judge Palaemon bless, or write off, the singers is also to join in. To answer the riddles is to run the show. To object to Pollio and the gang is to play judge. To fix a price on the contest is to outfox the herdsmen. To enjoy, or deplore, their banter is to understand the rustic other, it may be, all *too* well. But Damoetas and Menalcas here are going to sing whereof they know not, as only the urbane can know, as we read our poet's verses—poetry in which the bumpkins are caught, beyond their ken.

This mime, in short, is all about representation. Song, poetry; impersonation, empathy; worth, valuation; implication, and self-assessment. This is a contest, but also a hoot; and rumination on the spark of collaborative energy, and the pettiness even of humanity's best moments. We shall ponder each of the main sectors of the poem in turn, and stress the 'ethnographic' problem that arises from our insertion into a milieu which we know to be an imagined construct, one specially contrived to exclude the like

of us, and one which performs, but does not explicate, the values its inhabitants hold dear.

II. BICKERING (vv. 1–27)

The exchanges between the herdsmen begin with questions of ownership of animals, and end in insults about talent in song. This could be the most important objective, and we could endure the conversation as a warm-up that evolves the song-contest. Anything unobjectionably plausible by way of striking up dialogue would *do*. In a performance, whether imaginary or staged, Role 1 will approach Role 2, to be joined later, ‘settled on a patch of grass’, by their arbiter (v. 55). In view, ‘this heifer’ in Role 2’s care (v. 29). The talk starts up from nothing, and only gets to the point once the scene has come together. The singing’s the thing.

But a reading on these lines would scarcely amount to more than a formalist’s imperious wave of the hand, bidding the script to mean when it is told to start meaning, and not before. If we go back to the *entrée*, *without* knowing quite so much, we will find that the banter, starting from Role 1’s opening question, has much more to mean than it says.

In the abstract, doubtless, it is best to allow the start to an exchange to open the lines of communication, and let what follows orient and define the discourse more narrowly as it proceeds. But Role 1 does more than let us know that he knows Role 2 well enough to call his name, ‘Damoetas’, and he offers an invitation more precise than ‘Will you respond, if I speak?’ An opening question presses for an answer, so its function is to engage Damoetas’ attention, and participation; but what, the question asks *us*, is Role 1 *saying* with his enquiry? *cuium pecus . . . ?*

At one extreme, ‘Tell me: whose beast(s)?’ could be ostensibly fraternal. Here, then, is rapport. The herder’s prime concern is to watch ‘his’ animals; that is what he is for, why he is here. It must be. This is how one drover sees another. They are fellows. They are defined by the beasts they themselves define. What other question could come first, between such as them?

But this can (also, or instead) be accusation or importunate aggression, whether masquerading as innocent interest in a fellow or not. Fixing by name, ordering a reply, demanding to know—this may be intentionally brusque. Is the insinuation that Damoetas is known well enough to the speaker for him to be sure that the animal(s) *cannot* be ‘his’? Or, if that goes without saying, because the likes of Roles 1 or 2 do not *own* their animals, is the provocation that Damoetas works for one owner after another—who is it this time?—because he is . . . shiftless, unreliable, fast and loose? (Servius’ *ab amaritudine coepit. nam dicendo cuium pecus, ostendit eum esse mercenarium [sic].*) Then the insult will be that Damoetas is known through and through; the interrogative was only a modal ruse to frame this calumny. The only thing Role 1 will be *asking* Damoetas is whether he knows a put-down when he hears one; whether he knows he’s put down when he’s asked if he knows. *Dic mihi . . .* (‘Tell me’, v. 1).

In our poem, the reply is to match, for length (v. 2). There is no phatic engagement with Role 1; no naming of him, no pronoun. And no hint to help us with our readerly dilemma with *an Meliboei* that we do not (yet) know how to deal with the inmates of the bucolic valley of the *Eclogue* Book, whether or not to treat the bearer of a name across separate compositions as significantly the ‘same’ character. Hence we do not know how much sting there is in this suggestion: is collaboration in the dispossession

of Meliboeus the point of this abusive insinuation? Damoetas' *mihi* echoes the questioner's *mihi*, but otherwise, the response makes no overture in reciprocation. If the questioner wanted to learn who owns the beast(s), and made a suggestion—well, the guess was wrong, and the answer is simple. Over, and out: 'No one stole the tarts'. Or else, taking a less aggressive tone, this speaker, Damoetas, accepts that the question is fair enough, because the animal(s) has (have) only just come into his care: the new arrangement counts as news, in this company.

Perhaps, though, the repetition of the true owner's name—'neither Damoetas', nor Meliboeus', but Aegon's, yes, Aegon's'—protests over-defensively (v. 2)? And crows aggressively, proud of being trusted, where the questioner (patently) is not? *That* is why *Damoetas* is not free to wander off to prey on other, responsible hands kept busy watching their flocks, unlike *some* people . . .

So far as the construction of the whole poem is concerned, we will find that this initial exchange, however low key, or abrupt, we decide to make it, whether functional in striking up the mime or ethopoeic in giving the first impressions of the interaction between the roles, proves to pinpoint at once the topic which will connect first to last: 'Who do (does) the beast(s) belong to? Whose are they now?/Who will own it next?'

The first response to Damoetas is to turn away from the human dolt, to pretend solidarity with the sheep: Damoetas is now a non-person: *hic* ('This one', v. 5). He does not relate to the animals, but squeezes them dry, systematically robs the flock of its future; the true owner is the one worthy of rivalry with Role 1, even if he is a loser; what Damoetas is condemned for doing is brought under the heading of the sheep's welfare, from a herdsman's moral high ground (*subducitur*, 'stolen', v. 6). The hierarchy runs down from Aegon, to the flock, and at the bottom comes this displaced nonentity, who does not merit the expenditure of breath or the dignity of address.

The rejoinder to this signals that a 'macho trading of insults' has begun (*uiris . . . obicienda*, v. 7), and bats back more 'askance' rustic 'derision', this time a cocktail of unspeakable sex, with 'profanation' for mixer (vv. 7–9, the ellipse of the verb hinting at unutterable filth: *transuersa tuentibus . . . risere . . . sacello*). Holy cow! Send not to know what peals of nymphette merriment might greet—they palm off a put-on that tolls, sex in the head, for *thee*. The bickering that ensues will hammer on about ownership as a measure of status and worth. Claims to own; the right to appropriate or dominate; stealth as the discourse of propriety, and the property of discourse.

Aegon is supposed to worry whether Neaera rates him as much as Role 1: whose is *she*? Meanwhile, hireling Damoetas '*steals*' their 'mothers' milk' from the lambs (*subducitur*, v. 6). Someone, and it was not Role 1, trust him, vandalized '*Micon's* trees and vine-shoots' (vv. 10f.). Role 1 is, it transpires, 'perverse Menalcas' by name, the one who smashed '*Daphnis*' bow and arrows' in pique (vv. 12f.). Damoetas was spotted bushwhacking '*Dam-on's* billygoat' (vv. 17–20).

The squabbling leads inexorably to the subject of song because that is how 'ownership of a beast' can be won and lost, challenged and vindicated: the voice, or 'the musical instrument you own', can convert into aggrandisement of self (*mea . . . fistula ~ meus . . . caper*, vv. 22–3). And this equation of selfhood with property leads, even, or even specially, in the idyllic countryside, to dispute and special pleading. Somebody may have a moral right to a possession, but the real world may prohibit its realization: a prize may be 'acknowledged as due, but have to remain owing', however much occasion such a claim gives for scepticism (vv. 23–6).

At the same time, the bickering negotiates towards a further episode in a contentious narrative, of claim and counter-claim to prestige, in terms of ownership

arising from musical superiority. On the one hand, this is but the chosen terrain on which to trade insults, boasting laced with spite; but on the other, it obliges Damoetas to prove his claims by risking his winnings, while challenging Menalcas, Role 1, to match him, all the way.

If the trading of insults in this 'flyting' is good-natured, just what you might expect in the country, contemptible *gaucherie*, or whatever, nevertheless it has already performed a 'tango' of cut-and-thrust abuse and innuendo, and has thus provoked outsiders like ourselves to explore how acute or otherwise the trading of responses has contrived to be, so far. Are these simple folk—or cunning coves? Much the same as us sophisticates, *mutatis mutandis*, or unutterably neanderthal? There is no call to take sides yet. We do not even have to decide, or feel we could decide, whether we have only luckily meandered toward a challenge to a singing match, or were shepherded along the way by two old stagers who know the sequence of moves that result in a wager, and enjoy the release from inhibition that goes together with getting to that point. Is this the best 'that countryside song can do—its worst'? (= *stridenti miserum stipula disperdere carmen?*, v. 27).

III. BARGAINING (vv. 28–54)

The singers have talked; they have shown us what they are, put before us the pride and shame of their kind—*peruerse . . . pessime . . . indocte* ('bent . . . worst . . . unschooled', vv. 13, 17, 26). But they have also triggered the sort of show-down 'the pair' have it 'in common' to relish (*inter nos . . . uterque*, v. 28). Desire for winning is on a continuum with lust (vv. 3f., 8–9), it stirs strong, potentially destructive, passions (vv. 14f.), and invests these selves in their successes, their ability to verbalize them, and to command their recognition (vv. 21–4). All the bragging and stabbing have geed up a collision which both men need, as they need each other, and need each other's banter to score from.

The first series of exchanges emphasized that the negotiation is, in a word, a power-play. Its significance may, or may not, be calibrated with the value of the objects put up front, whether in our, or in the actors', reckoning. Like any other possessions, they may only be a convenient currency in personal politics. The dispute gives the chance to meddle, to toy with another's *amour propre*, sting him with loose talk. On the other hand, as the conversation moves toward the formal challenge to sing or be a mockery, the participants jockey for advantage in such a way that they threaten to throw the confrontation into disarray. In retrospect, they have already undermined the security of 'transfer by gift', which may always be 'wrecked' (vv. 12–15), and warped payment of debt by an accusation of 'theft' met with a defence of 'justified assertion of rights' (vv. 16–24). When Damoetas comes to bid first for the stake of the song-contest to come, and challenges Menalcas to name his matching pledge, we are uncomfortably aware that it may be possible to bet 'when you cannot deliver', a trick Damoetas just claimed Damon did with him, for whatever reason, even none (v. 23f.). The very phrasing of Damoetas' current wager already invites, or betrays, suspicion as the name of the game of bargaining: even before he can spit out his 'pledge of a heifer', he has interrupted himself with a 'precautionary defence' of its worth: *ego hanc uitulam . . . depono* interrupted by *ne forte recuses*, vv. 29–31). It is not difficult to play the rhetoric here as an attempt to pre-empt a counter-bid by seizing the initiative given the utterant by his performance of the contractual speech-act of a wager: he plants the suggestion that 'backing-down' would be a sensible reaction to this

impossibly high opening gambit: *forte recuses* (v. 29) construes first with 'heifer' for object, as Damoetas already defends his animal from anticipated scorn; then turns defensiveness into a tack which insinuates that Menalcas may, or would do well to, decline *to make a counter-stipulation*, whether because he is a no-hoper, a mummy's boy wet behind the ears, or because there is nothing on their earth can touch this choice dam and twin calves.

On the other hand, the beauty of the wager is that it always lays a trap for the wary. Why has wily Damoetas—you know he is wily, as wily as you are, Menalcas—bragged out loud the value of his heifer as if it might face his opponent down? Obviously he is guying Menalcas, making sure he cannot decide, however he might choose to conceive, phrase, or dress it up, to back down, since that would be to prove Damoetas to have called him right. Obviously his technique is the same he must have used on Damon, luring him in out of his depth by telling him that was what he was up to, then later robbing him of the bet he was never in a position to make, since he could not pay up. After all, he just told us that was his strategy. Why else did he lay this bluff on Menalcas?

However we choose to direct the scene, we are here training our sights on 'an animal presently being watched over by Damoetas': *ego hanc uitulam* (v. 29) returns us to where we came in, and Menalcas' question *cuium pecus?* (v. 1). This heifer (or cow), for sure, definitely exists, large as life: but the eyes cannot see ownership—is it, too, Aegon's property?⁵ Menalcas thinks this way, at once 'refusing to <pretend he can> bet an animal from his herd' (vv. 32f.). For him to do any such thing would be 'reckless daring' (*ausim*, v. 32). Has he seen straight through Damoetas, then? Does he hint as much by spelling out that when an animal comes to be milked and feeds its young 'twice' [a day] (v. 30), these are routinely scheduled opportunities for their actual owners to check up on them, 'twice a day' (v. 34)?

Or is he trumping Damoetas' move? It is not his fault he has 'a fanatical father and wicked stepmother' (v. 33), but rather it is his opportunity to talk down his opponent. He challenges him not to be impressed by his words, if he can, and presents a description of some beechwood cups he has, stored away untouched (vv. 35–43). It might be telling that he supplies *verbal* cups, but does not produce them. If wagering required actual physical deposition to be in force, this offer would not count as a bet. It is, besides, couched in the future tense: *ponam* (v. 36) does not mean 'I will stake' = 'I am (now) willing to stake', 'I hereby (agree to) pledge', but 'I shall stake' at some later moment, presumably when the cups are directly to hand? At any rate, (i) it does not do to presume that the speech-act can altogether cordon off slippage between the performatively present, and the performatively promissory, guarantee; yet (ii) a wary customer should best wait to clap eyes on pledged goods before accepting them as collateral.

So, the suspicion could grow that Menalcas is showing off to his rival his powerful way with language, and telling him so as he does it: the 'crazy' talk (v. 37) of betting with animals that neither of them have, whether to win or lose, gives way to the hyperbolic praise of the artistic object that sets its word-merchant a cut above his fellow (*fatebere maius*, 'you will admit it's colossal by comparison', v. 35), who could only manage his naïve one-liner of encomium for the plain and simple 'heifer, and her twins' (v. 30). This ribbing is, so you could run the scene, exactly calculated to drive Damoetas wild: predicting that he will be the one to yield, because he will have to

⁵ E.g. R. Coleman, *Vergil, Eclogues* (Cambridge, 1977), p. 113, *ad loc.*, believes the herdsman: 'like the bull in 100 the heifer belongs to himself and not like the sheep to Aegon'.

accept that Menalcas will be doing a good job of capturing the worth of his cups in his sales-pitch, his powers of description already acknowledged (vv. 35f.). The exchanges are still in speech, not song, but they already body forth a series of exchanges, they already contest for rhetorical superiority, they already debate the worth of their eloquence, more or less eloquently or indeed blatantly. Is this all the song-contest we need? If Menalcas has seized his chance to put down his marker, has this actually put him into an unassailable lead? Or does this bartering ruin in advance the singing when it does finally come?

Indeed, let us go one better. Or, at any rate, further. Are these herdsmen spoiling for a fight, or do they mean to spoil their fight? The heifer is 'here', but very likely off-limits as a stake. The cups are only here on the wing of a promise, and there is no attempt to pledge them this instant. They operate, however, as a raising of the stakes to an altogether higher order of magnitude: not the heifer and its routine visits to be milked, her udders to be drunk by her twin calves (v. 30), but (an unspecified number of) 'cups' which 'lips have never touched, pristine and held back from mundane use' (vv. 36, 43).⁶ The cups come loaded with cultural baggage, specially designed to psych out Damoetas who has to listen to it. They are a work of art, not just utensils; they carry the trademark of a genius, 'divine Alcimedon', a name you must know, or else forfeit all claim to *chic* status (v. 37). A connoisseur's description works with the material empathetically,⁷ as if repeating over again in the materiality of well-turned discourse the craftsman's magical creativity: the cups are 'engraved', but we shall 'add on' detail represented in relief, just as the cup offers to the impressionistic the illusion of 'adding' on the outer layers of carved wood to the wood which has actually been left for the core of the vessels (*superaddita*, v. 38).⁸ The simulation of plastic representation by glyptic processes is a marvel not just because 'the chisel' cannot 'add', but only take away, wood, and cannot 'clothe' one layer of relief detail within another (*uestit*, v. 39), however miraculously 'easy' all this may be in the hands of a master (*facili*, v. 39); the 'scattered clusters of berries left to protrude through the tangle of vine-tendrils', implying that many more lie hidden beneath, somehow achieve the relative 'pallor' of ivy (v. 39), whether by some change of hue in the grain of the beech, or as a shading effect from the 'carapace' of vine. The utterance here, whether in Menalcas' rhetoric or in Virgil's hexameters, enacts its apprehension of the cups, with the simultaneity intrinsic to apposition (v. 37), followed by a 'pliant' line of 'easy supplementation' (v. 39) that 'clothes' the 'dispersed' units, or 'clusters' of its verbal material in the interlaced *chiaroscuro* of a final 'Golden Line' (v. 39). If the addressee takes all this in his stride, without qualms, worse follows. In the middle of these cups [you would find] 'two figures' (v. 40), 'one of them Conon, whom, again, you *must* know, unless you're a hick from nowhere, and he's such a big name you're getting no clues, and the other—' (v. 40).

At this point, anacoluthon breaks the mood, and the modality. Menalcas has been performing for Damoetas 'benefit', but his investment in description of the cups has kept him 'before', not 'with', his addressee: now the trap snaps shut, as the name

⁶ Many readers spy 'two beech cups' here, presumably reading back from *et nobis idem Alcimedon duo pocula fecit* ('For me too did the same A. make two cups', v. 44), as if Damoetas were guessing Menalcas had a pair of cups, and perhaps blurring the detail of the 'two signs' (*duo signa*, v. 40) into the bargain, perhaps, even, not managing or deigning to concentrate.

⁷ Cf. Segal (n. 2), pp. 289f. for brief appreciation of the artistry paraded here.

⁸ On the poetic imagery of working 'in relief', cf. Crinagoras, *Anth. Pal.* 9.545.1 (on Callimachus' *Hekale*), τὸ τορευτὸν ἔπος, with G. D. Williams, *Banished Voices: Readings in Ovid's Exile Poetry* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 80f., esp. p. 81, n. 70.

without clues is followed by a clue, with the name to be provided—and provided by Damoetas. Well, 'who was it', represented on those cups, that have never come your way, that have in fact never seen the light of day (v. 43)? If your Menalcas really forgets the name, he comes a cropper, tripping over his own vanity and in his fall suturing and re-establishing the uncrossable divide between herdsmen and urban(e) culture. Perhaps Virgil, and Virgil's educated readers, will find it no trouble to supply the name that Menalcas does not recall; if not, this could be because his clues are inconclusive, as gauche as he is, too clumsy by half. Or *that* could be a problem for those among us who do not already know who it is that belongs in a pair with Conon; an artist, an Alcimedon, who knew Hellenistic iconography could perhaps fill in the name without hesitation, and judge accordingly how poor Menalcas' clues are, while deciding what sort of slip it is to forget so famous a name, of a figure on his own, supposedly most precious, possessions. Or is this too uncharitable for words—to write someone off for a casual temporary blockage, a name stuck on the tip of the tongue? Would a *friend* help out, take the question at face-value? Should it occur to Damoetas that this surprise question has been planted as a peremptory put-down? 'I have forgotten—but you don't even *know*.'

The script has Damoetas react by ignoring the bait. He works back from Menalcas' throw-away last line (v. 43), commandeering that for his own parodic punchline (v. 47), before rubbishing it, and the whole routine that it capped, with an emphatic 'total rejection' (v. 48). Damoetas proves he can ham the connoisseur as well as anyone, parroting the designer-label of 'Alcimedon', before verbally replicating the 'embrace' of his cups by the verse-encircling 'soft . . . acanthus' (v. 45), and making the trees 'follow' Orpheus in the magical illusion of movement across the carving (v. 46). That he has 'two cups', with one figure 'in the middle' (vv. 44, 46 vs. 40, 'two figures in the middle', in the middle of the description), shows that he has registered the by-play of 'two-in-one' motifs that featured in Menalcas' rejoinder. Essentially, though, Damoetas squashes Menalcas' elaborate browbeating and its flourish, the importunate question that put him on the spot. His response to what is (premonitorily) a virtual riddle is to echo the terms used by the riddler. He dispels the glamour of Menalcas' vivid evocation of his proffered stake-to-be, by turning the gaze back to the physical presence of the heifer—all the more real by contrast with these underwhelming disappointments, the common-or-garden cups. A distinct possibility of 'stalemate' in the preliminaries for the contest stands, in the point-scoring of the disputation, for a victory in Damoetas' favour: the opponent cannot produce a worthy stake, so it is a walk-over by default. Cups—who needs 'em'?⁹

In reckoning this far, we must have decided whether to take all this at face-value, complete with the coincidence of both herdsmen happening to own cups by the same genius. To put the point strongly, we must determine whether either of the characters in *our* versions of the mime own, or suppose that the other owns, any such objects. Were they Menalcas' fantasy? Might they just as well be, if you are Damoetas—or if you are a reader anxious that there be a song-contest as the dénouement of this

⁹ Cf. A. J. Boyle, 'A reading of Virgil's Eclogues', *Ramus* 4 (1975), 187–203, at p. 194, 'The works of art [the cups] fail to affect the discord manifest in the herdsmen's world. From the artist's values and perceptions, embodied in his creative work, the herdsmen learn nothing'; M. O. Lee, *Death and Rebirth in Virgil's Arcadia* (New York, 1989), p. 55, ' . . . there is no indication that either of the boys knows what the figures on the cups might mean. Neither of them, in fact, has ever drunk from the cups'; Leach (n. 4), p. 175, 'The cups symbolize all that is lacking in these rustics whose conversation makes disorder its theme and takes no account of the beauty of the natural world.'

bickering? Cups—what cups? Here is the heifer—see?—where are any cups? These cups are a blind: the cups are, Damoetas knows, just a ruse, a blind, cheap talk: these so-called cups are ‘nowhere’ (= *nihil*, v. 48). Damoetas’ sarcasm may puncture the grandiose fantasizing of the hopeless name-dropper Menalcas, who conjured up a figure who encompassed the universe, in a worldwide achievement that captured the axes of time and space for all peoples, putting the seasonal round of all civilization on a rational basis by calculating a calendar for farmers, and for everyone. In caricature, this imaginary figure is mirrored by the figure of Orpheus, drawing the trees to the music of the cups, a counter-myth whose hero outranks any astronomer royale, in or out of a pair, especially when a contest between musician singers is in the offing, and, so far as Menalcas’ reverie is concerned, ‘following’ up that nonsense with his own preferred scene of one single genius leading his audience by the ears. That is his image, the image that will do for him: not cosmic power of ‘description’ (v. 41), but affective power of rhetoric, performative clout. Menalcas can chew on *that*.

Menalcas’ retort makes it quite clear that he has no intention of doing any such thing. On the other hand, it manages not to commit itself, in so many words, to—just about anything. He insinuates that Damoetas meant his sneer as an exit-line: if Damoetas has played an ace in pointing to the heifer, when Menalcas cannot retaliate directly since (for a start) his arrival on Damoetas’ patch denies him on-the-spot access to his prize possessions, then Menalcas can happily sign him a blank verbal cheque. This stunt he pulls off in a breezy gesture that mock-pretends mock-submission—‘Just call and I’ll meet you there, anywhere’ (*ueniam quocumque uocaris*, v. 49)—if it does not rather aim to fudge a way past commitment to any citable terms for the bet. *Has* Menalcas promised to match Damoetas’ heifer with one of his own—even if he does not have one? Another ‘Damon’ story coming up?¹⁰

However we want the bargaining scene played, we find that it has run through a great batch of material as if it mattered in its own right, of vital interest to the herdsmen and essential information for their readers in deciding who they are and what they mean, in much the same way that the bickering already did. The heifer, and then, even more so, the cups seemed so very important to them at the moment they were crying them up. But they are forgotten with such alacrity that we may well wonder if they ever mattered at all. Menalcas’ last word declares as much, in decocting terms for the wager into a purely formal matter, which is best pushed aside before it protects either combatant from entering the fray. ‘Up the *ante* as high as you please, I’ll see you’, provokes speedy assent from Damoetas, who again mimics the other, renouncing further ‘delaying tactics’ (*in me mora non erit ulla*, v. 52 ~ *ueniam quocumque uocaris*, v. 49), agreeing that there is to be ‘no running away’ from the issue (*nec quemquam fugio*, v. 49 ~ *numquam hodie effugies*, v. 53), and swiftly changing the subject to *Palaemon* (vv. 50, 53, same final *sedes*), who steps into the syntax and the type-scene, right on cue to play judge. We could well conclude that the business of settling the wagers has been a prevaricating diversion that both voices finally

10 So Lee (n. 9), p. 54, ‘Through the contest we are never quite sure what the prize will be’; E. A. Schmidt, *Poetische Reflexion. Vergils Bukolik* (Munich, 1972), p. 178: ‘Vergil lasse uns in ecl. III im unklaren darüber, welche Preise eigentlich gesetzt werden.’ Too sure: J. Conington, *P. Vergili Maronis Opera with a Commentary* (London, 1881⁴), vol. I, p. 50 on v. 109, ‘Both ultimately wagered a heifer’; W. V. Clausen, *Virgil, Eclogues* (Oxford, 1994), p. 104, on v. 49, *ueniam quocumque uocaris*, ‘So confident is Menalcas of winning that he now agrees to meet Damoetas on his own ground, i.e. to stake a cow.’ More circumspect, e.g. Coleman (n. 5), p. 116 on v. 49, *ueniam quocumque uocaris*, ‘The phrase suggests that Menalcas has conceded Damoetas’ point and will wager a heifer after all.’

acknowledge to have been intimidatory scare-tactics, as likely as not meant to save on the nuisance of a show-down. Maybe the moves were more stylized than we (can) know, and the banter has been the shadow-boxing of rough-diamond camaraderie. The swagger on display in Menalcas' threats, in exactly the style of *nemo me impune lacessit*, is quite explicit: he has come upon the scene precisely to sink his teeth into Damoetas and not let go until he stops the verbal sniping and gets down to serious business (vv. 49, 51)—what has happened in the meantime should be forgotten, since the only point that matters is to find a judge and get on with it. And the script, comically or limply (in any event, woodenly), gets *that* hole fixed before the arguments have any opportunity to get going . . .

However exactly we colour and tone our performance of these negotiations, we may still reserve the right to react to the 'foil' material in the dilatory skirmishing without falling into line with the characters' expressed views of the matter. We may regard the contrapositioning of (unique) heifer and (both players' putative sets of) cups as the poem's way to get us to ponder their relative charisma, and to compare and contrast the valuations we set on them with those of these denizens of the pastoral regime. In effect, the by-play stages a species of rhetorical *praeteritio*, which brackets the elaboration of the topic of the wager, as a background to the contest to come, a background of uncertain status. Background the heifer and cups may be, but they also foreground the need to call the contest, to gauge its pledge of significance, and find appropriate terms for what is at stake. While the characters' dispute is marked as, for them, inconclusive, we have at least bracketed two dialectically opposed terms and registers within which we can situate our own responses. No way round it, the evaluation of the song is, and is not, fore-ordained.

IV. BALLADEERING (vv. 60–107)

When 'the real song' starts, to put the matter in these terms,¹¹ both Segal and Powell have found their styles of interpretation already operative in the preliminaries. For Segal, the cups are (in his, and his Virgil's, eyes, far more than the heifer) the appropriate register in which to locate the singing. Not the grubby rivalry of two more or less bovine peasants, but A Song of Nature miraculously conjured by a budding master of cultivated poetry; a cosmology as universally harmonic as any astrologer's calendar; a composition as potently attractive as the music of Orpheus. The cups turn out, as it happens, not to be the agreed stake. But Virgil uses them to implant in us a symbolist impulsion toward the grand vistas that inhere in the confines of artwork.¹² This is the *caelum* in 'the larger vision of the *caelatum opus*' ('heaven' in 'the engraved work', v. 37) which provides the poetic emblem for Segal's title.¹³ On the other hand, Powell's *Poeta Ludens* enjoys fun at the expense of any who demand high ideals from verse even when the lines themselves mock, for their part, just such inflation of the currency. It is not that the cups programme for our civilized selves what the heifer may stand for in pastoral eyes, but that the herdsmen discard

¹¹ E. Coleiro, *An Introduction to Vergil's Bucolics with a Critical Edition of the Text* (Amsterdam, 1979), p. 123, 'The real song was from v. 60 to v. 107.'

¹² Cf. D. M. Halperin, *Before Pastoral: Theocritus and the Ancient Tradition of Bucolic Poetry* (Yale, 1982), pp. 185–9, 'Three scenes on an Ivy-Cup', for the arguments in favour of viewing the goatherd's cup in *Idyll* 1 as a figure for themes of bucolic poetry.

¹³ Segal (n. 2), p. 301; cf. M. C. J. Putnam, *Virgil's Pastoral Art: Studies in the Eclogues* (Princeton, 1970), pp. 125f., 'These are strange objects for a humble shepherd to be carrying around—esoteric and highly cultivated'; R. Faber, 'Vergil *Eclogues* 3. 37, Theocritus 1, and ekphrasis', *AJPh* 116 (1995), 411–17, sees in *caelatum* here pastoral figured as parody of epic.

the cups in favour of the heifer. The attraction of entry to the *Eclogues* is precisely that, in this space, values are rated by scales that bear scant, or no, relation to ours. The song-contest will not be a tapestry of antiphonal exultation in universal sympathy, but a grudge match between two lowly primitives whose sole ambition is to do the other down—by hook or by crook. Don't patronize rusticity, try to join in, and play along—do it 'their' way.¹⁴

Damoetas already presses upon our judgement the issue of whose perspective is to prevail: when he notifies Palaemon that 'the affair is not trivial' (*res est non parua*, v. 54), his litotes marks a critical moment for the reader to intervene, and commit the performance to the target of a superlative, or a modest, amplitude? Is this a stage-direction from Virgil, bidding readers to amplify the song-contest as grand as can be; or is it Menalcas sneakily sticking in his oar to influence the judge even as he gets the job, Damoetas seizing the initiative and telling the judge what's what before the action can start?¹⁵

The point is not simply to scotch either continuities, or *brisures*, between the bickering and the balladeering, nor to invite readers to explore the full range of possibilities opened by the script. Rather, the bucolic cutting-contest unsettles the urbanity of the readers it is written for. Virgil's poem has gone out of its way to create an improvisational feel for his mime, perhaps to place the institution of the amoebaeon contest into a social ethos, the herdsman's way of life, so that readers whose first acquaintance with the pastoral world is this very poem can, and aficionadas of Theocritean bucolic must, sense their intrusion into a fictional 'parallel universe'. The exchanges in this poem have not been marked as out of the ordinary (as they were in *Eclogue* 1's tangential moment where Meliboeus' catastrophe crosses Tityrus' miracle); rather, the Roles have interacted with all the emulous intimacy of people in home territory, and on their own turf. Where does this leave us?

'We take our seats' (v. 55), and come under starter's orders: 'Damoetas to start; Menalcas to respond; amoebaeon alternation is the rule' (vv. 58f.). The rest, we must 'know'—i.e. realize we do not know, but must glean, intuit, guess, or else go with the flow . . . Palaemon, Damoetas, and Menalcas do not call for a time-out for clarification of procedure; if the singers have any comments, they are obliged to smuggle them into their lyrics; the judge is not going to intervene, interject asides, or interpret, for them or for us, until the songs are done. All this could be otherwise, and is as good as arbitrary for any of us; whereas *they* know the ropes and leave them unremarked. To realize this is to begin to play the game of apprehending from play what the rules of a game are. Games intrinsically consist, on the one hand, of patterned segments which are perceptible through repetition, and, on the other, of a narrational series of junctures and *termini*. The former can be deduced from a single performance; the latter, of course, cannot.

What rules govern the two voices in an amoebaeon? Should Role 1 respect, find inspiration from, respond to, Role 2's strictly parallel 'echo' of Role 1's last offering? More generally, presumably Role 2 is already doing well, just to keep their end up? But

¹⁴ Contrast Putnam (n. 13), p. 128, 'All in all, this is no competition in the negative sense but an attempt to join in depicting the perfect shepherd's life, with divine assurance and happy love', with Lee (n. 9), p. 55, 'The two shepherds . . . never really pass beyond Sicilian banter in the contest itself.'

¹⁵ Calpurnius' *Eclogue* 6 springs the surprise of allowing the bickering to overflow past the selection of the judge. No songs are heard; rather, the judge finally loses patience and, for his last word, threatens to get some help in putting an end to the back-biting. *Virgil's* closest influence, in this regard, was Theocritus 5 (but see below).

how can Role 1 score points?¹⁶ What does the decision on how long the bursts of song are to last indicate? Is there some notional set of 'licks', a register of topics, even a traditional sequence? Or is this a matter of the *forte* of an individual repertoire, the *ad hominem* agonistics of a game-plan? Are originality, surprise, eccentricity wanted? Would it be more/less aggressive, confident, cavalier, or what, to choose quatrains (as in *Eclogue* 7) rather than the distichs set by Damoetas?

If we are bothered by any of these questions, still we cannot be bothered by them in the way the characters are. Their quarrel is not ours. Instead, we are regaled with a *duet*. A specially constrained pooling of resources, for sure, but nevertheless, for us outsiders an event in tandem. We want a good show; each of them wants a win.

Let us now try to look to the end. However acutely we have made out a running tally of tactical hits and feints between the players, we do not stand an earthly when the end comes. Remarkably enough, commentators have not yet (I would wager) claimed they would have been able to tell that the end is at hand after v. 106. The fact that a matched pair of riddles are the two singers' final renditions before the judge makes himself audible (at v. 108) makes the hypothesis tempting, that the three participants all know the riddle as a method of shutting up shop. As we noticed already, this receives no confirmation from the practice in Theocritean, or other, *amoebaea*. But let us suppose that in 'our' Arcadia it was tried and trusted. In that case, is it a sure sign of exhaustion, panic, satiety in Damoetas that he resorts to riddling? Or does it behove or become the Role who has the lead to contrive some form of 'artistic conclusion' for the duel, so that the sense of an ending can mime a conventional teleology of harmonization,¹⁷ whatever the feelings of the opponents? Since this is a one-off, for us, there is nothing to discount the notion that Damoetas actually had hopes that Menalcas had never come across that old favourite, the ploy of the baited riddle. It might be a poser for any second fiddle to decide if the response should be to attempt an answer. Presumably that is a mistake no one would ever make twice, for riddles are archetypal hermeneutic traps, which illustrate, *in nuce*, just the kind of aporetic play within language in use that the preliminary dialogue exposed to view: a riddle has an answer. A riddle does not have an answer—it has more than one answer. The answer is the answer I choose to tell you after you have taken your pick. Even if I do not cheat on you, and you will never know the answer to that question, still the answer to my riddle is, in any case, my answer to it, the one I choose to make mine. Like an oracle, the power-play of a riddle is therefore a mug's game. Except that it is possible to duplicate it, instead, as Menalcas does.

To judge the performance, or the performances, is to pretend to be *au fait* with the technicalities, but also to impute a set of intentions to the players. Thus we may gather that, between them, the refrains combine to perform a single interactive 'story'. A complex chain of boasts of success and rosy prospects in 'love' grows from Menalcas'

¹⁶ To play by the sane regulations of T. G. Rosenmeyer, *The Green Cabinet: Theocritus and the European Pastoral Lyric* (Berkeley, 1969), p. 159, 'If the palm is to go to the singer with the creative imagination, then it should go to the starter, since it is he who sets the pace initially. If, on the other hand, the victory should accrue to the more accomplished artist, then in many cases the second singer, who has his opponent's model to draw on, ought to get the prize.' Leach (n. 4), p. 176 follows Jachmann in averring 'that the topical linking of the strophes does not appear natural and effortless . . . but artificial and strained. In fact, the singers do not attempt to complement one another or to embroider each other's themes.' Cf. Clausen (n. 10), p. 114 on vv. 96–7, 'Only here does Damoetas take his cue from Menalcas.' I follow the lines of Powell's analysis in finding oblique but engaged and continuous dialectic running clear through the contest.

¹⁷ 'The matching of perceptive beings in a nexus of friendship and equality', as Rosenmeyer defines the song-contest ([n. 16], p. 157), without a trace of cynicism.

first response, where he stresses direct intensity against Damoetas' universality, *Phoebus amat*, v. 62, for [*Iou*] . . . *curae*, v. 61.¹⁸ As Damoetas counts up four 'lovers' (Galatea, Phyllis, Iollas, Amaryllis), and Menalcas rivals, disputes, and disdains his claims, they progress, as well as leap, to Pollio's 'love' for poetry (*amat*, vv. 84, 88, cf. v. 90). Partisan devotion to Pollio gets matched by imprecations on his opponents, and the scene of pastoral poetry then provides images for cutting attacks between Damoetas and Menalcas—'a snake in the grass' vs. 'a silly ram got a ducking' (vv. 93; 95),¹⁹ which passes into the call for less recklessness, backed with notification of a takeover bid, and the worry that the preceding outburst of hot temper will make the flow of creativity dry up, with frustration for everyone (vv. 96–9). Both these catcalls look forward beyond the press of the instant, making pre-emptive strikes to fashion an account of their standing in the realm of song: *ubi tempus erit, omnis in fonte lauabo* ('when the time comes, I shall wash them all in the spring', v. 97) promises safe prospects for pastoral in the care of Damoetas; *si lac praeceperit aestus, / ut nuper, frustra pressabimus ubera palmis* (vv. 98f., 'if sun cuts off the milk, / as just then, we'll squeeze the dugs with our palms and get nowt') portends a barren time for poetry unless it takes a different path. The next insults turn the mood further to the future, imag(in)ing the death of bucolic. Damoetas poisons the air by caricaturing the 'love' sung by Menalcas as a 'bull-in-a-china-shop'²⁰ 'destruction' for him and his (*amor exitium*, v. 101); Menalcas agrees on the prognosis, but retorts that the cause is, not 'love' but Damoetas' poisonous 'evil eye' (*neque amor . . . nescio quis . . . oculus*, v. 103). The song has represented, manipulated, and wielded, but scotched, smeared, and denied, the 'love' it sings; finally, the disputants have managed to agree, in their disagreement, on one thing: the ultimate insult that they can produce is that they are *killing* song. Does the topic of *exitium* point to 'the way out' from the contest? Is this a recognized final move that the herdsmen know and love? Do those who know their amoebaeans know well that riddling is the only way to say more—i.e. by refusing to 'say' more? Or have these two characters sparked each other into a suicide pact, in which the adrenaline which began the bout coarsened into animus that jettisoned all the courtesies and spoiled the whole game?

It should, then, weigh with judges how they think the performers came to bale out. But this is only the last hurdle in the challenge to comprehend an event we realize is all too easy to assimilate to the games we are familiar with in our own sociality. Indeed, as we saw, both singers have joined in, halfway through as it turns out, by allowing themselves to name Pollio, Bavius, and Mevius. *Mutatis mutandis*, wasn't Pollio's recitation-hall the venue for 'amoebaean contests' from poets every bit as cantankerous, prickly, and bitchy as the herdsmen? In this perspective, Virgil uses his rustics to show our values up to us: their value to us is that they oblige us to face, and critique, the nature of our values.

V. BALLOTING (vv. 55–9; 108–11)

As we remarked, the judgement of Palaemon has been played every which way by readers. He is Virgil's accredited expert witness, to be taken at his word: this

¹⁸ The fusion of love-poetry-song-contest is cued already at the outset in v. 59, *amant alterna Camenae* ('the Muses—the only Italian Muses in all Virgil—love alternation').

¹⁹ 'Another marked change of tone suddenly comes over the poem at line 92', Putnam (n. 13), p. 130; Leach (n. 4), pp. 177, 179, ' . . . here the singers' rivalry takes an explicitly unpleasant turn. . . . From this point on the descriptions of the pastoral world become harsh and unpleasant.'

magnum . . . certamen is not a 'great quarrel' (i.e. a 'grudge-match'), but a 'great issue'. He heralds to us that the songs have 'intimated the larger possibilities which lie within it. . . . Both shepherds, then, are equally capable of singing of love and of dealing with larger themes. Hence both have cups carved by the "divine Alcimedon".²¹ Palaemon bids us love the song of 'love' from these 'bitter-sweet lover-singers' (*amores/ aut . . . dulcis aut . . . amarus*, vv. 109f.);²² they both 'deserve the heifer', or at any rate, they 'deserve a heifer', supposing they could either of them produce one, because their contributions have been so splendid (v. 109, *et uitula tu dignus et hic*; recall that Palaemon either did, or did not, hear the bargaining over the pot).²³ Or, to go to the other extreme, Virgil-Palaemon does not lapse into cheap self-congratulations, but enters into the rancorous spirit of this genuinely hostile collision of wills: 'Neither of you are fit to continue'; you have conspired to land yourselves in an impasse, the pair of you, and 'that's *quite* enough' (v. 110, *sat prata biberunt.//*). And, for Pollio's circle, 'this poem's already plenty big enough'. (This *is*, by a short head, the longest poem in the book of *Eclogues*—unless it counts as 'two-in-one', like the other extravaganza, *Ecl.* 8).

In the final instance, how critical *is* judgement in the business of poetry? What credentials are needed to judge, not the judges, but the judging? Is this the quandary set before Pollio's coterie, now ours?

VI. BROWSING: *ET QUISQUIS* . . . (v. 109)

As commentators always particularly note, the 'rustic' phrase *cuium pecus* is displayed in the centre of the first verse, after the peremptory insistence of *dic mihi*. The marked lexis prompts a run of questions. Thus: is *pecus* a singularity or collective? How representative is this animal of any in the herd? May the members of this herd stand for any, anywhere? If we are not herdsmen, what are our 'animals'? Does our poet Virgil have an equivalent? Is bucolic poetry not always and ever an invitation to join the favourite dance of Hellenistic poetics, a myth of origins for our poetry, sought in utopic songs of innocence where *θύος* and *Μοῦσα*, *oues* and *carmen* recover a fusion in culture at one with nature ('sacrifice, Muse; sheep, song'²⁴)? As readers versed in, or (much more likely) turned by Virgil to, Theocritean poetry, *cuium pecus* at once prods us toward intertextuality.

When commentaries refer us straight to *Idyll* 4.1, *τίνος αἱ βόες*; ('Whose cows?'),

²⁰ I borrow this from Powell ([n. 1], p. 120), though it obscures the force of the bull's rutting lust as a caricature for the herdsman.

²¹ Segal (n. 2), pp. 300, 302, 301.

²² Segal, *ibid.*, pp. 296f. attempts to cordon 'love' from 'poetry' as a thematic 'alternation' through the song-contest, but the love of poetry modulates into and out of the poetry of love (cf. K. Schoepsdau, 'Motive der Liebesdichtung in Vergils dritter Ecloge', *Hermes* 102 [1974], 268–300).

²³ So Putnam (n. 13), p. 134, 'The shepherds have not really been challenging each other, as at the poem's outset, but have presented a unity of subject and mood at each stage of the debate. Each is therefore worthy of the prize . . .'; Powell (n. 1), p. 121, 'Palaemon rightly calls it a draw. Each man deserves the sacrificial animal'; W. Berg, *Early Virgil* (London, 1974), p. 192, 'Palaemon blesses both: each is worthy of the heifer, for each has shown that he understands what it is to be a poet.' Contrast Boyle (n. 9), p. 194, 'Palaemon pronounces both singers worthy of the heifer, not of the cups'; Leach (n. 4), pp. 175, 181, 'Or perhaps he considers both contenders unworthy of the cups. . . . It is only fitting that no prizes should be awarded to singers who have distorted their subject to serve their own hostile ends'; Lee (n. 9), p. 55, ' . . . each deserves to win a heifer. Neither, presumably, is worthy of the cups. Works of art have never communicated any message to them.'

²⁴ Callim. *Ait.* fr. 1.23f., Virg. *Ecl.* 6.5.

we cosmopolitan literates arrive at *one* complete answer to *Eclogue* 3's question. This particular animal fattening nicely for sacrifice, and eventually a feast in store for somebody, *belongs to Theocritus*, word for word. Does the Latin poem belong, then, to Theocritus?²⁵ Or has it been transferred, faithfully translated, handed down and handed over, to Virgil's custody and care? This is, it dawns, exactly the preoccupation of the commentators, whose thoughts are so dominated by the fidelity, the subservience, of this *Eclogue* to its Greek avatar. What could it mean to find that the poem still belongs to its previous owner? To the author, that is to say, who had *his* herdsman pose precisely this question for himself? To answer the question is always already to ask it once more, transposed along the line of tradition. And we should turn this round, too: whose poem shall this tralatician text prove to be? Who are destined to take up the theme and repeat the age-old question? *cuicum . . . carmen*? This intricates the broader question 'Whose poetry?' And that may put to us the question: in what sense do we think that poetry 'belongs' to someone; that literature is a dispute and criticism an arbitration; that the arts are the sort of thing that can be 'owned'; that 'appropriation' is a *regrettably* inescapable model for cultural exchange? From the year dot, whether Damoetas/Menalcas', Theocritus/Virgil's, Segal's/Powell's, your/my *amour propre*? From before before, even, since Battus' question in Theocritus 'may allude to the stolen cattle' in the Hesiodic tale of Battus' Watch, when Hermes caught Battus informing on him, to him, for rustling *Apollo's* cows?²⁶

I'll tell (on) you later—

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²⁵ Theocritus' most immediate 'answer' appears at 5.1, *Ἰαίγες ἐμαί*. *Eclogue* 3's multi-evocation of *Idylls* usurps and undoes the schemata of *Id.* 1, even as the poem pastes together *Id.* 4 and 5, destabilizing all three (four . . . more) structures of power and valuation as it does so, and providing us with too many 'answers'—and this is exactly the riddle of intertextuality, where the practice of reading begins its productivity, and of sociality, where it will never be known how Battus (*Id.* 4) would have got on with Lakon (*Id.* 5) or Thyrsis (*Id.* 1), nor Goatherd (*Id.* 1) with Korydon (*Id.* 4) or Komatas (*Id.* 5), nor Menalcas and Damoetas with any of their 'mummies and daddies', nor what 'our' poets would have made of them, with us. And these questions engross the politics as well as the poetics of pastoral, since Virgil turned *Id.* 1.1ff. into the *entrée* to both the exchange between pensioned Tityrus and expropriated Meliboeus, and to the book of triumviral *Eclogues* (cf. J. Farrell, 'Literary allusion and cultural poetics in Vergil's Third *Eclogue*', *Vergilius* 38 [1992], 64–71).

²⁶ A. M. Keith, *The Play of Fictions: Studies in Ovid's Metamorphoses Book 2* (Michigan, 1992), pp. 95–114, esp. 114. Cf. K. J. Gutzwiller, *Theocritus' Pastoral Analogies: The Formation of a Genre* (Wisconsin, 1991), pp. 35–44, 'The animal thief and intellectual activity', esp. p. 40 on *Ecl.* 3.16–20.