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 Translated Into English Verse  
 Edited by R. C. Trevelyan  
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## PART I THE ECLOGUES



### INTRODUCTION

These ten short poems, called *Bucolics* or *Eclogues*, which are the earliest works that can be certainly attributed to Virgil, were probably written between 41 B.C. and 37 B.C.

Virgil's unassailable fame as one of the greatest of poets does not rest upon his *Eclogues*, but upon his *Georgics* and *Aeneid*; yet it has been the fate of these immature experiments to have had a greater influence upon European literature than almost any other poems. It was they, rather than their parent Theocritus, that became the fountain-head of the vast stream of Renaissance pastoral writers, Italian, Spanish, French and English. Tasso and Ronsard, Spenser, Sydney and Milton, and the innumerable flock of lesser pastoralists, have all been inspired by and borrowed from them; and their spirit, though not their form, may still be discovered in *Adonais* and *Thyrsis*—and also in that last pathetic madness of Don Quixote, when he resolved to live the life of an ideal shepherd, 'and entertain himself among the deserts and solitary places of that country, where he might freely vent out and give scope unto his amorous passions by exercising himself in commendable and virtuous pastoral exercises'.

In one of his letters from India Macaulay made the confession that Virgil, whom he had been re-reading, had not the power to charm him so much as he used to do. He goes on to say: 'The *Georgics* pleased me better; the *Eclogues* best—the second and tenth above all.' Few lovers of Virgil are likely to agree with this verdict; yet it is no more preposterous than the preference that is so often felt by the common reader for Milton's early poems over his later poems. The *Eclogues* are indeed even more artificial and imitative than *Lycidas*, and few of them are such perfect works of art as *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, or *Comus*. But conventional and unreal as their pseudo-pastoral themes may be, the texture and phrasing of the verse is almost always exquisite and delightful. They, even more than the *Georgics*, are pure poetry, by which I mean poetry whose power to charm consists almost entirely in the physical beauty

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of the verse, its imagery, and the atmosphere or the sentiment which it expresses. They are seldom what we can call 'great poetry'; though it would seem unreasonable to refuse that description to such lines as the last two of the first Eclogue:

*Et jam summa procul villarum culmina fumant,  
 Majoresque cadunt aliis de montibus umbrae—*

or as this passage from Eclogue v:

*Nam neque me tantum venientis sibilus Austri  
 Nec percussa juvant fluctu tam litora, nec quae  
 Saxosas inter decurrunt flumina valles—*

lines which, though reminiscent of Theocritus, are no imitations, but are purely Virgilian in quality and sentiment.

It is true that many passages in the *Eclogues* are echoes, sometimes almost literal translations of Theocritus; but it is wiser to forget Theocritus (as Virgil doubtless intended his readers to do) and to enjoy the poetry as it deserves to be enjoyed. Sometimes however, as in the second half of the sixth Eclogue, the Greek poem that he is imitating is so immeasurably superior in its passion and realism and romantic beauty, that the Latin poem seems to be no better than a frigid and uninspired copy. It must be admitted that in these youthful poems Virgil was far inferior to Theocritus in dramatic sense, and in the power of suggesting real human beings. The language talked by his shadowy Mantuan-Sicilian-Arcadian shepherds and goatherds is not racy of any particular Italian soil, but is very much the same as the elaborate poetic diction of the *Georgics* or the *Aeneid*.

Moreover the scenery varies in character even within the same poem. Sometimes it is the Mincius, flowing lazily between gently sloping hills and beech-groves (but there are neither hills nor beeches near Mantua); sometimes the green-clothed crags and caves, and the steep mountains of Sicily and southern Italy. But this eclectic fairyland and its idyllic inhabitants should be no more difficult for the imagination to accept than the Elizabethan Attica of the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, or the sea-coasts of Bohemia.

A more serious stumbling-block for modern readers is the introduction of the poet himself in pastoral disguise, as Tityrus the farm-servant, and

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[More information](#)

## INTRODUCTION

3

Menalcas, the shepherd poet, and the appearance of his patron, the poet and general Gallus, as a bucolic hero, dying for love of the actress Cytheris. The sixth and eighth Eclogues are disfigured by flatteries of Varus; though Virgil's compliments to Octavian in the first Eclogue are no doubt the expression of genuine gratitude and admiration. Such incongruities, though confusing and regrettable, do no very serious damage to the beauty of the poems, and should amuse rather than disgust.

It is always interesting to compare the early experiments of a great artist with his mature works. In the *Bucolics* Virgil already shows himself a deliberate and fastidious craftsman; and his mastery of phrasing and of metre is sufficient for what we might call his Theocritean Muse, who demands no sustained movement, no 'linked sweetness long drawn out', but is content with short periods and end-stopped lines. There is little promise of the intricate and subtle versification which is to be the glory of the *Aeneid*. Again, neither in these poems nor in the *Georgics* do we find his later stylistic habit, so omnipresent in the *Aeneid*, of 'theme and variation', of which the following lines furnish two examples:

*Trojanas ut opes et lamentabile regnum  
 Eruerint Danaï, quaeque ipse miserrima vidi,  
 Et quorum pars magna fui.* (Aeneid II, 4.)

Of such devices Virgil has no need for his present homelier purposes. As yet he rarely attempts the sublime; and when he does, as in the fourth Eclogue, the lines, though dignified and impressive, have none of the freedom and variety of movement which we find, for instance, in the marvellous finale of the sixth Aeneid.

The metre, which I have used, is an unrimed verse of seven, and occasionally eight, accents. Its structure is the same as that of the normal half-stanza of the English ballad, such as:

And mony was the feather bed  
 That flattered on the faem.

I have found that a close translation of a hexameter proves, on the average, to be about the same length as this English verse, and so have been able to translate line for line with very little omission or expansion. The hexameter is undoubtedly a more beautiful and varied medium; but the English metre has at least the merit of swiftness of movement, and

1-2

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can be given considerable variety by frequently changing the place of the caesura, which normally follows the fourth accent. Sometimes I have omitted the syllable that should carry the fourth accent, as in the last line of the first Eclogue:

*And longer fall the shadows from the high mountain crests.*

Sometimes, again, I have added two extra syllables at the end of the line, as in the first line of the first Eclogue:

*Tityrus, thou reclined beneath the covert of a spreading beech.*

These are easy and natural variations of the metre, because in a line of seven or eight accents there is a tendency for the first, third, fifth and seventh stresses to be slightly more prominent than the second, fourth, sixth and eighth, so that if the weak fourth stress be dropped, or an eighth stress added, the fundamental rhythm is not impaired. This alternation of stronger and weaker accents causes a kind of undulation in the rhythm, which gives lightness and swiftness to the verse.

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## ECLOGUE I

## TITYRUS

After the defeat of Brutus and Cassius, the Triumvirs assigned to their veterans the lands of various Italian cities. Virgil's father was thus threatened with ejection from his farm near Mantua, whereupon Virgil went to Rome, and there, in a personal interview with Caesar Octavius, obtained restitution of his father's land.

Such is the background of this Eclogue, in which the shepherd Meliboeus, who has been expelled from his homestead, meets with Tityrus, a more fortunate shepherd, who has lately gone to Rome in order to buy his freedom. But, as T. E. Page remarks in his commentary, the elderly farm-slave Tityrus, who obtains his freedom from his master, disappears and makes room for the young Virgil, who recovers his father's farm by the grace of Octavius. 'The transformation is made with such delicate skill that, if it were not for the painful diligence of commentators, we should hardly notice that line 45 is an absurd answer to Tityrus seeking for his freedom.' In spite of such disconcerting perplexities, this poem is one of the loveliest of the Eclogues.

MELIBOEUS. Tityrus, thou, reclined beneath the covert of a spreading beech,  
 Dost meditate a woodland melody on thy slender reed.

We, banished from the lands where we were born and our loved fields,  
 We from our homes are fleeing; thou, Tityrus, idling in the shade,  
 Art teaching these woods to resound 'beautiful Amaryllis!'

TITYRUS. O Meliboeus, a God is he who blessed us with this peace:

For as a God I'll always deem him; often from our folds

A tender lamb I'll choose to stain his altar with its blood.

Through his kind grace my herd may roam, as you behold, while I

May sit here with my rustic reed and pipe to my heart's content. 10

MELIBOEUS. I grudge you not, but marvel at your luck. Throughout the land

What hurry and tumult! Look how I myself, heart-sick, am driving

My goats along!—Here, Tityrus, is one I scarce can lead.

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 Excerpt  
[More information](#)

## 6

## THE ECLOGUES

For there just now mid the dense hazels painfully she gave birth to twins,  
 The hope of the flock, ah! dropt and left upon the naked stone.  
 Often this misery was foretold me (I remember now)  
 By oaks struck with heaven's lightning—had not my wits been dull.  
 But come now, tell me, Tityrus, who is this God of yours?

TITYRUS. The town which men call Rome, Meliboeus, I, fool that I was,  
 Thought must be like this town of ours, whither we shepherd folk 20  
 Are often wont to drive the tender younglings of our flocks.

Just so I knew that puppies were like dogs, that new-born kids  
 Were like their dams; just so great things with small would I compare.  
 But this town has reared up her head among all other towns  
 As high as cypresses are wont among the bending osiers.

MELIBOEUS. And what cause could there be so great that you should  
 visit Rome?

TITYRUS. My freedom, which, though late, yet looked with kind eyes on  
 my sloth,

When already as I trimmed it my beard was falling whiter;  
 Yet kindly has it looked on me and come after long years,  
 Since Amaryllis has my heart and Galatea has left me. 30

For, now will I confess it, while Galatea ruled me,  
 No thought of savings could be mine, nor hope of liberty.  
 Though many was the victim that was led forth from my byres,  
 And many a rich cheese was pressed for the ungrateful town,  
 Yet never money-laden did I bring my wallet home.

MELIBOEUS. I used to wonder, Amaryllis, why you invoked the Gods  
 So sadly; for whom you left your apples hanging on their trees.  
 Tityrus was gone far from home. The very pine-trees, Tityrus,  
 Were calling for you, ay, the very brooks and copses yonder.

TITYRUS. What else was I to do? Where save at Rome might I escape 40  
 My slavery? Where else find Gods propitious to my prayer?

There it was, Meliboeus, I beheld that youth for whom  
 On twice six days of every year our festal altars smoke.  
 For there he was the first to give a response to my plea:  
 'Pasture your oxen as of old, my children; rear your bulls.'

MELIBOEUS. Happy old man! so still these lands shall be yours, and for you  
 Ample enough. Though everywhere crops up the naked stone,  
 And marshy pools with slime-born reeds encroach upon your pastures,

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## TITYRUS

7

Yet shall no strange unwonted herb poison your pregnant ewes,  
 And no baneful contagion from a neighbouring flock shall harm them. 50  
 Happy old man! Here, wandering amid familiar streams  
 And beside sacred springs you shall delight in the cool shade.  
 Still as of old shall yonder hedge bordering your neighbour's land,  
 Whose willow-bloom Hyblaeon bees are rifling, oft persuade you  
 With gently whispering leaves to welcome sleep; while there beneath  
 The steep rock shall the pruner fling his song on the breeze.  
 Still shall you listen to your darling pigeons' husky coo,  
 Nor shall the turtle cease his moaning from the lofty elm.  
 TITYRUS. Sooner, grown light as air, shall stags roam grazing in the sky,  
 And the seas leave their fishes stranded bare upon the shore, 60  
 Sooner, each o'er the other's frontier wandering, shall the German  
 Quench his thirst in the Tigris, or the Parthian in the Soane,  
 Than from my heart the vision of his countenance shall fade.  
 MELIBOEUS. But we far hence must travel, some to the parched Africans,  
 To Scythia some, or Crete where flows the swift stream of Oaxes,  
 Or to the Britons utterly sundered from all the world.  
 Ah, shall I ever, long years hence, gazing again upon my home,  
 My humble cottage with its turf-piled roof, look round me amazed  
 On what was once my kingdom—a few scanty ears of corn?  
 What! shall some godless soldier possess these well-tilled acres? 70  
 A barbarian these crops? To what a pass has civil strife  
 Brought our unhappy citizens! Have we for these men sown our fields?  
 Go now, Meliboeus, graft your pears, plant out your vines in rows!  
 Away, once happy flock! Let us be gone! Away my goats!  
 Never again shall I, outstretched within a fern-fringed cave,  
 Watch you where far away you are hanging on some bushy crag.  
 No more songs shall I sing; no more, my goats, with me to tend you  
 Shall you crop flowering cytissus and the willow's bitter shoots.  
 TITYRUS. Why could you not for this one night have rested here with me  
 On a green couch of leaves? For look, we have apples ripe for eating, 80  
 And mealy chestnuts, and no lack of cheeses newly pressed.  
 Already wreaths of smoke are rising over the farmhouse roofs,  
 And longer fall the shadows from the high mountain crests.

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 Excerpt  
[More information](#)

8

## ECLOGUE II

## ALEXIS

The Sicilian shepherd Corydon laments his hopeless passion for the beautiful youth Alexis. Much of the poem is an imitation of the eleventh Idyll of Theocritus, in which Polyphemus the Cyclops complains of the indifference of Galatea to his love. This is generally thought to be the earliest of the *Eclogues*.

Once Corydon the shepherd loved the beautiful Alexis,  
 The darling of his master; but in vain he hoped and wooed;  
 So naught else could he do but seek day by day the dense shade  
 Of the tall beeches. There alone uselessly would he fling  
 These uncouth monodies abroad to the senseless woods and hills.

O cruel Alexis, for my songs do you not care at all?  
 Have you no pity then? At last to my death you will drive me.  
 Now even the beasts are searching for some coolness in the shade;  
 Now the green lizards even in the briars are lying hid;  
 And Thestylis for the reapers spent by the scorching heat 10  
 Is pounding her strong-scented herbs of garlic and of thyme.  
 Yet with me, as I trace your footsteps, under the burning sun  
 The vineyards are re-echoing to the shrill grasshoppers.  
 Was it not easier to endure the fierce moods and the proud  
 Disdain of Amaryllis? Ay, and Menalcas too—  
 Brown though he was and dark of skin, while you are white and fair?  
 Ah, lovely boy, beware, nor trust too blindly in your bloom.  
 The white bindweed is left to fall; dark hyacinths are gathered.

So you despise me, Alexis, and ask not what I am,  
 How rich in flocks, and what good plenty of snow-white milk is mine. 20  
 Over the hills of Sicily my lambs in hundreds roam;  
 In summer and in winter too never does fresh milk fail me.  
 Such songs I sing as Amphion of Thebes was wont to sing  
 When he called home his cattle on Actaeon Aracynthus.

Nor am I so ill-favoured. On the shore, when the smooth sea  
 Lay wind-becalmed, of late I saw my face. Were you the judge,  
 Not Daphnis even would I fear, since the image never lies.



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## ALEXIS

9

Oh would you but consent to dwell in comradeship with me  
 Amid these homely fields in lowly cots, and shoot the deer,  
 Or drive the kids together with a green switch of hibiscus, 30  
 With me here in the woods in piping you should rival Pan.

Pan it was who first taught us how to join many reeds  
 With wax; Pan is the guardian of sheep and of their shepherds.  
 Nor would you think it time ill spent with a reed to chafe your lip.  
 To teach himself this art what pains did not Amyntas waste?

A pipe is mine compacted of seven hemlock stalks,  
 Each of a different length, a gift which once Damoetas gave me,  
 And dying said, 'Henceforth its second master shall you be.'  
 So said Damoetas: envy filled the fool's heart of Amyntas.

Moreover two young roebucks—dangerous was the valley 40  
 Wherein I captured them—their hides still sprinkled with white spots,  
 Drain a ewe's udders twice a day. These I am keeping for you.  
 Thestylis has been begging a long while to get them from me;  
 And she shall have them, since my gifts are worthless in your eyes.

Ah, lovely boy, come hither: see, for you the nymphs are bringing  
 Lilies in full-heaped baskets; for you too the fair Naiad  
 Is gathering yellow wallflowers and flaunting poppy-heads,  
 And with them blends narcissus and sweet-scented fennel flowers.  
 Then, twining them with cassia and with other fragrant herbs,  
 She sets off the soft hyacinth with the golden marigold. 50

With my own hands I will pick apples from the quince tree, pale  
 With tender down, and chestnuts, which my Amaryllis loved.  
 Plums smooth as wax I'll add; this fruit shall have its honour too.  
 Then bays I'll pluck and myrtle to be neighbours in one nosegay,  
 For sweetly will they blend their odours when they are thus arrayed.

Corydon! you are a clown. For gifts naught does Alexis care;  
 Nor, should you seek to rival him with gifts, would Iollas yield.

Ah me, what have I done, poor wretch! Let loose among my flowers  
 In madness the south wind, and hoars to befoul my pure springs!

Whom do you flee? Ah fool! Even the Gods dwelt in the woods, 60  
 And Dardan Paris. In the cities she herself has built  
 Let Pallas dwell; to me beyond all else are the woods dear.

The grim lioness hunts the wolf, the wolf himself the goat,  
 The wanton goat roams hunting for the flowering cytissus,

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[More information](#)

10

## THE ECLOGUES

Corydon follows you, Alexis: each by his lust is led.

See now the bullocks drag home by the yoke the hanging plough,  
 And the sun as it leaves the sky doubles the lengthening shadows;  
 Yet me love still is burning; for what limit can love know?

Ah Corydon, Corydon, what is this strange madness that has seized you?  
 Upon the leafy elm trees your vines are but half-pruned. 70  
 Nay, why not rather set about plaiting with pliant reeds  
 And osier withes something at least that daily need requires?  
 Another Alexis will you find, if this one scorns your love.

## ECLOGUE III

## PALAEMON

A rustic singing-match between two shepherds. As in the fifth Idyll of Theocritus, upon which this poem is modelled, the rivals spend some time in lively banter of each other before beginning the contest. The eight lines in which Virgil complements his patron Pollio and sneers at the contemporary poets, Bavius and Maevius, are an artistic blot upon this amusing poem.

MENALCAS. Tell me, Damoetas, who is it owns this flock? Is it Meliboeus?

DAMOETAS. No; Aegon. Not long since Aegon entrusted it to me.

MENALCAS. Poor sheep, ever a luckless flock! So while your master's gone  
 Courting Neaera, still in dread lest she should love me best,  
 Twice every hour this shepherd, this hireling milks his ewes,  
 And the juice from the flock is stolen, from the lambs the milk.

DAMOETAS. You'd best be cautious how you fling such taunts at other men.  
 I know both who was with you, while the he-goats peered askance,  
 And in whose sanctuary you lay—but the easy Wood-nymphs laughed.

MENALCAS. That must no doubt have happened on the day when I was  
 seen 10

With jealous knife hacking the elms and tender vines of Micon.

DAMOETAS. And it was here, beside the ancient beeches, that you broke  
 The bow and shafts of Daphnis; for you had been sore grieved,