

The sixth of Vergil's Eclogues, like the second and fourth, is not a dialogue, nor even a monologue, but a narrator's report on an astonishing poetic performance. Tityrus here speaks with Vergil's own voice, describing the song Silenus sang about the creation of the world, a song so beautiful it seemed more marvellous, more full of joy than even the music of Apollo or Orpheus—quite a claim! This complex short poem is dedicated to Varus by Vergil-Tityrus, apparently on Apollo's instructions, who has warned the poet to stay away from grand militaristic themes ('reges et proelia'): 'pastorem, Tityre, pingues / pascere oportet ovis, deductum dicere carmen.' Yet it seems that Varus' exploits are warlike, so Vergil leaves them to the many other poets of the day to compose their praises and himself takes up his shepherd's pipe and listens to the inspiration of his rural Muse ('agrestis Musa') as Apollo recommends.

Yet the song that Silenus the old satyr sings, when he has been cornered by two lively young fellows and a naiad in a cave and tied down, while still asleep, with the party-garlands he was wearing from the night before, is at first more reminiscent of some of Lucretius' great themes than of pastoral poetry. Then Silenus turns to some of the well-known myths: Pyrrha, Prometheus, Pasiphaë; he mentions Hylas, Atalanta (though not by name) and Phaethon's sisters. Suddenly his song turns from Greek myth to a Roman poet, Gallus, depicting him honoured by Apollo and the godlike singer Linus as he, Gallus, finds his Muse and his poetic voice ('the reedpipes of Hesiod,' as Vergil describes it). Then back to myth, as Silenus sings of Scylla and the whirlpool Charybdis as they attack Odysseus' ships, and of the grisly tale of Tereus and Philomela. Tityrus' report of the satyr's performance seems scarcely to fulfil Apollo's request for 'a modest song'.

Eclogue Seven again reports the poetry of other singers, although Meliboeus, unlike Tityrus, quotes the two contestants' songs in their own words. Corydon and Thyrsis, two handsome young Arcadian shepherds, sing alternate stanzas filled with rural sights, sounds and scents: the ivy-leaves, the milk bowl and honey cakes offered to the garden god, Priapus, the fountains and their green banks, the vine-shoots, the resin-filled logs on a winter hearth, the chestnuts and junipers, hazels and ash-trees and poplars all conjure up the countryside and its seasons in vivid succession. Corydon won the contest, says Meliboeus, but we are not shown Thyrsis' failings. Cleverly, Vergil avoids the problem of writing some 'bad' verses for Thyrsis by making Meliboeus' memory fail him after only half a dozen

stanzas from each of the young men: "Haec memini," says Meliboeus, "et victum frustra contendere Thyrsin. / ex illo Corydon, Corydon est tempore nobis."

A dedication again begins the eighth Eclogue, probably to Pollio, a contemporary of Vergil who wrote tragedies which Horace also praised (*Odes* II.1), although his name does not actually appear here. Interestingly, Vergil says that Pollio has been in some sense the 'beginning' (*principium*) of his poetry and asks him to accept the verses which were begun at his orders. Again the songs which follow are in the voices of the competing countrymen, Damon and Alphesiboeus, but unlike the singing contests in earlier Eclogues (such as Three or Seven), each contestant here has the stage all to himself until he is done. Damon begins, with a lament, apparently the last song of a dying man, as he plans to end his life with a dramatic plunge from a cliff-top into the sea. The reason for his suicide is the recent (or perhaps impending) marriage of his childhood love, Nysa, to another man. In a delicately charming reminiscence of his first sight of Nysa, when he was barely twelve, Damon tells how one glimpse of her was enough to be the end of him:

Saepe in nostris parvam te roscida mala
(dux ego vester eram) vidi cum matre legentem,
alter ab undecimo tum me iam acceperat annus,
iam fragiles poteram ab terra contingere ramos.
ut vidi, ut perii! ut me malus abstulit error! (ll. 37-41)

In our orchards, when you were little, I saw you,
Picking dewy apples with your mother, as I guided you
Both. I was just turning twelve then, could just
Touch the fragile twigs from the ground below.
I saw you and I was lost! What a fatal mistake to make!

After Damon's last dramatic call upon his flute, this time commanding it to fall silent, Alphesiboeus takes over the poem. His song is not in fact in his own voice, for it is sung by Amaryllis as she concocts a complicated spell intended to bring her rather too down to earth husband, Daphnis, home from the city. Amaryllis' witchery, assisted by some herbs (obtained far away in northern Turkey and provided by the powerful sorcerer and werewolf, Moeris) actually appears to work, for her last refrain, just like Damon's, unexpectedly differs from all the preceding ones: "Parcite, ab urbe venit, parcite, carmina, Daphnis."

The next poem, Nine, is again an exchange between two countrymen, Lycidas and Moeris (who seems quite a different fellow from the sorcerer in the previous song). The two meet on the road to the city. They are

displaced 'coloni' or small tenant-farmers who have been evicted by a new landowner—in fact, old Moeris claims that he and Menalcas barely survived some actual violence ('tela inter Martia'). Menalcas is evidently a much-loved local poet who has made a valiant attempt to save their lands through an appeal in verse, but quite in vain. Lycidas and Moeris then recall as many pieces of his poems as they can—at one point Lycidas can remember the tune but not the words, while Moeris complains that in his old age he cannot remember all the songs of his youth and in any case, his voice is going. But there's still some way to go with the flock of goats into town, the weather seems uncertain, and Moeris won't take Lycidas up on his suggestion that they should sing along as they go. The songs will sound better, he says, when Menalcas himself returns: "carmina tum melius, cum venerit ipse, canemus."

The last Eclogue is dedicated to Gallus, the friend of Vergil whom he calls 'Hesiod's heir' in Eclogue Six. It seems to be a response to a request for a poem about Gallus' troubled love-affair with Lycoris ('sollicitos amores'). Vergil begins, while Gallus was undeservedly dying for love, by asking "Which woods and groves kept you away, young nymphs?" Everyone else, it seems, came to listen to his sad song—sheep and shepherd, Menalcas and the other swineherds, Silvanus, Pan and even Apollo himself. Even the trees and hills wept for sympathy, unlike Pan, who pointed out that Gallus' lament certainly would not move 'crudelis Amor' to pity. Gallus is not a usual resident of Arcadia, and so his song expresses his regret that he and Lycoris could not have spent their days together in the pastoral landscape. A mad passion for the soldier's life has consumed him, he says, and now Lycoris has fallen for another military fellow and abandoned Gallus, to brave the rigors of the north:

Tu procul a patria (nec sit mihi credere tantum)
Alpinas ah dura nives et frigora Rheni
me sine sola vides. ah te ne frigora laedant!
ah tibi ne teneras glacies secet aspera plantas!

Ah, cruel Lycoris! Alone, without me, far from home,
(Must I believe so much?) you watch the snows
Of the Alps and the chilly Rhine. May the cold do you
No harm! May the harsh frozen ground
Not slash your tender feet for you, alas, alas!

However, Gallus soon ends his poem a little more cheerfully by opting for a hunter's life, realising that he must yield to Amor's power, for "omnia vincit Amor: et nos cedamus Amori." The Eclogue ends abruptly but elegantly—evening approaches, the shade is bad for singers and crops alike, and it's time for the goats to go home from pasture.