1. Prelude: The Poet as Thinker

«Vergil employs the bucolic apparatus partly as a means of exploring philosophical issues relating to the subject of human felicity (eudaimonia)», writes Davis, citing the young Virgil’s involvement with Epicureans in Campania and the growing knowledge of their texts to justify an «approach to his bucolic poetry» that is «somewhat revisionist» (2–3). Davis rejects the arbitrary dichotomy alienating poetry from philosophy as contrived by Plato. He catalogues variants of scholarly neglect and depreciation for philosophy, averring instead that «Vergil’s appropriation of Lucretius’ diction is rarely fortuitous or casual», thus for instance: «Both of the key defining (and synonymous) terms, agrestis musa (‘rustic muse’) and silvestris musa (‘woodland muse’) are taken over unaltered from Lucretian verse». (9) Adding emphasis Davis calls it «clearly inadequate to interpret these flagship phrases entirely with reference to Theocritean poetry, since the replication of Lucretian language nudges the reader to investigate the philosophical context in which the enunciations are made». (9) Further, he proposes «recuperating (or at least restoring to centre stage) the ethical dimension of the dialogues performed under the auspices of the muse, Thalea», and he insists: «The central issues of ethics and epistemology that are obliquely raised in the bucolic exchanges are consistently framed in Epicurean terms». (10)

Continuing to frame his approach through theatrical metaphor, Davis describes «the ‘bucolic scaffolding’» of the book as a space «properly seen as a stage on which to display the psychological complexity of what it means to be a humble mortal in a world subject to external vicissitude». For him the «personae . . . are first and foremost poets/musicians», which he characterizes with express revisionism: «Their fictional status as ‘herdsmen’ of various stripe (whether goatherds, shepherds, or cowherds) plays second fiddle to their front-stage role as dramatis personae who purvey competing ideas of how to pursue a life of happiness in a world ruled by fortuna». (11) He thus makes nothing of the hierarchy of cattle/sheep/goats and their herders in Theocritus and Virgil, nullifying too gratuitous notions of pastoral escapism as well as Snellian Arcadism. (12)

After a glancing paraphrase of the eclogue book, he concludes: «The recurrent spectacle of distressed poets/herdsmen struggling to cope with the vagaries of Tyche is framed in philosophical terms that reflect Virgil’s intimate familiarity with fundamental ideas transplanted from the Garden».(14).

2. Framing a Dialogue on Vicissitude: The Interplay of Ideas in Ecl. 1

His revisionary agenda leads Davis to write that «the admiratio (‘amazement’) of Meliboeus . . . resonates, contrapuntally, with the widespread doctrine of athaumastia (‘freedom from surprise’)». Davis assumes «that Vergil’s carefully orchestrated references to Meliboeus’ over exuberant admiratio are primarily attuned to the modulations of Epicurean ideas that will have to be dealt with in the future scholarship on Vergilian poetics oriented towards developing a comprehensive, systematic study» (170)
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rean teaching and are meant to place the poets/herdsmen’s attitudes to life in a broader philosophical perspective. After thus disparaging the character of Meliboeus as philosophically challenged, Davis lauds Tityrus: «the Tityran world view illustrates a way of coping with external vicissitude that is congruent with fundamental Epicurean precepts». (38) Davis views Tityrus «overcoming his inertia in hard times, honoring the gods, inviting his disconsolate interlocutor to join him in a plain meal» as «wholly consonant with Epicurus’ advice «to be armed against fortune [tyche]». (39)

3. Fracta cacumina: The Consolation of Poetry and Its Limitations (Ecl. 9)

By way of transition to έθνικος, Davis redoubles his philosophical rebuke to Meliboeus for «outright renunciation of all future poetic performance (‘carmina nulla canam’),» as opposed to «the resourceful Tityrus [who] had contrived to have his bucolic enclave preserved». (41) In ε7 Davis, «the existential issue is the preservation, if not restoration, of poetic activity». He contrasts loss of «physical environment (symbolized in fracta cacumina)» with «the attempt to recuperate through the agency of song-exchanges that are partial recollections of earlier compositions in the bucolic repertoire». He writes that old Moeris «reaches for a gnomic statement (sententia) in order to come to terms, philosophically, with the phenomenon of vicissitude: quoniam Fors omnia versat». The frequentative versat «indicates that Moeris recognizes the inherent cyclicity of fortune», which explains Moeris’ augury that «things turn out badly» (non vertat bene) for the new owner. (42) Davis interprets these broken treetops to mean that «the iconic space of bucolic song – the sub tegmine fagi evoked in the first line of the eclogue book – has lost its welcoming cover (tegmen, cacumen) and the resident poets of the district have been, at least partially, dislodged». (43) He aptly links the themes of Menalcas’ powerful song (recalled by Lycidas) to the hymns for Daphnis in ε5 (45); and he goes on: «With the infectious exuberance of youth, Lycidas at once begins to implement a strategy of consolation. . . .snatches of bucolic carmina composed by the master-singer, Menalcas». (46) Davis then contrasts Lycidas’ recollection of amatory verse that is nearly Theocritean with Moeris’ «Vergilian» theme of land loss. (48) He remarks that in the second pair of remembered songs, Moeris performs a «a freer translation of the [Theocritean] original» while Lycidas performs a Vergilian piece that relates to ε5 and ε1, anticipating «a favorable outcome to the seasonal oscillation of vicissitude». (51) Davis concludes by projecting «a successful mission of Menalcas to preserve the landscape». (60)

4. Vicissitude Write Large: The Ontology of the Golden Age (Ecl. 4)

Davis opens by reiterating his revision of ε1 – «the contrasting responses of individual actors to the experience of vicissitudes» – only to shift focus from dramatis personae to poet, as the one who «vastly enlarges the stage» with focus on «cyclicity». (63) Recognizing that Virgil assumes a «vatic voice» for this enlarged stage (64), Davis links it to a «complex of iconic ideas» rather than any one oracle or person. He relates this vatic crost assurance to ε1 and the «ontological premise» of the Tityran world views. (69) He remarks that the projected Bildung of the child includes philosophical study of virtue (67). Referring also to the Georgics, he concludes that «Eudaimonia, for ruler or farmer alike, is contingent on insights gained through nurture and experience». (77) He writes of «patent parallels in Vergil’s diction with the language of Epicurus’ great Roman advocate Lucretius» (76), referring to Georgics (1:490–94), an assertion like his «taken over unaltered from Lucretian verse». (9) That the parallels signal oppositio in imitando he does not remark.

5. Coping with Death: The Interplay of Lament and Consolation in Ecl. 5

Taking as the dominante leitmotif of the Bucolics . . . the predicament of acute loss, Davis argues that here «the ‘centerpiece’ of the collection . . . thematizes the death and transfiguration of Daphnis . . . the very archetype of the bucolic universe». (79) He sets out to study «the dialectical relationship between the two compositions» so as «to shed light
on the poetic ideal represented by the figure of Daphnis. (86) He concludes that «The idea of the reversibility of death lies at the very core of the discourse on loss and consolation that is... a major preoccupation of the Bucolic universe as portrayed throughout the Eclogues», a reversibility «available only to the privileged few (such as the historical Octavian of Ecl. 1 or the legendary Daphnis of Ecl. 3) and typical of «popular belief in the privileged afterlife of benefactors». (96) Of ideological valence in the figures of benefaction, no hint.

6. Coping with Erotic Adversity: Carmen et Amor (Ecl. 2 & 8)

«Reactions of bucolic personae to the traumas of dislocation (Ecl. 1 and Ecl. 9) and of a benefactor’s death (Ecl. 3) give way to «a similar set of questions... what inner resources do the different personae draw upon in order to mitigate or transcend amatory infelicity». (99) By this measure, Corydon saves himself from «pathological mental state» by finding «the path to its alleviation» in philosophical distance. (101) Referring to Corydon’s claim to match Daphnis' beauty, si numquam fallit imago (e2.27), Davis employs careful insights from Alfonso Traina to unveil cognitive complexity otherwise occluded:

«Of course neither Vergil nor his comic persona, Corydon, is here playing the part of an orthodox representative of the school of Epicurus;... invoking an Epicurean illustration of the key concept of the infallible imago, Vergil imputes a modicum of insight (however imperfect and comical) to his woe-begone herdsman.»

Davis identifies another «Vergilian increment» to Theocritean matter in the gnostic and apophoretic tradit sua quemque voluptas (e2.65), which implies a «kind of ‘natural’ sexual attraction... distinct from the passion of amor, which is seen as a form of dementia». (108–9) He then contrasts with Corydon’s cure for demented love the tragic excess of Damon (e8) and the ambiguous outcome of the resort to magical spells by Alphesiboeus (e8) to capture the beloved (118–19).

7. Erotic Vicissitude Write Large (Ecl. 6)

Instead of «a strictly diachronic reading of the whole poem», Davis offers «the conceptual apparatus» brought by Virgil to «the theme of deranged passion (amor insanus) and its severely negative repercussions on the attainment of human felicity». (112) As central to this conceptual apparatus he cites «generic disavowal», where «the author of Ecl. 6 first represents his choice of bucolic poetry as having been ordered by an imperious Apollo». (112) He recognizes the poem’s «repertoire of generic tales that greatly extend the thematic scope of traditional bucolic» and notes that love is a «leitmotif of the ensuing Silenus-song». (113) He distinguishes literary love from erotic dementia, cataloguing instances of both (124). He also interprets the divine commands to feed livestock in e1 and e6 as «programmatic statements», sc. metapoetic, although he equates agrestem tenue meditabur ha-rundine musam (e6.8) with silvestrem tenui musam meditari avena (e1.2), despite his hermeneutic axiom (9), that such Lucretian replication should prompt investigating the source context. (126)

With regard to the cameo of Gallus climbing Helicon, Davis accepts the common view that the motif of his wandering errantem down by Permessus implies his amatory elegies. His climb, however, uphill led by a muse to meet her sisters «makes sense in terms of a projected transgeneric excursion into the realm of bucolic poetry... located in the bucolic genre». (138) Having thus located «in the bucolic genre» Gallus’ etiological venture, Davis argues that it must take the form of «an erotic tale cast in a bucolic mode». (139) He notes that poetic pleasure for Apollo links the proem and the cameo. (142) Twitting «eminent scholars» for finding a «departure from, if not a contradiction with, Epicurean principles», Davis concludes that «a model reader... will certainly have grasped the implicit critique of pathological sexual desire». (149)

8. «Ecquis erit modus?»: The Vergilian Critique of Elegiac Amor (Ecl. 10)

Davis reads the final bucolic of the collection as extending Virgil’s ‘critique of Elegiac amor’ by means of ‘the brilliant rhetorical strategy of making Gallus, the very inventor of Latin erotic elegy, enact his own emotional drama of fantasy-projection followed by disillusionment’. Virgil meanwhile offers Gallus as compensation the poetic love ‘that will guarantee him a greatly increased posthumous reputation’ (141). With regard to the elaborate bucolic scaffolding, Davis writes that he follows several prominent critics in believing that ‘the translocation of the nymph Arethusa from Greece to Sicily symbolically registers Vergil’s adaptation (and transmutation) of Theocritean bucolics’. He translates the narrator’s prayer that Arethusa not become salty, cum fluctus subterlabere Sicanos (110.4), “as you glide beneath the waves of Sicily”, where the Latin future blends with the English present losing its temporal force. He concludes that Arethusa’s story, ‘as a victim/refugee of unwanted amatory advances’, suits her ‘to be the Sicilian muse’ for this ‘poem that thematizes unbridled sexual desire’. (142) Aply he relates Arethusa’s ‘distressful experience of escaping rape’ to her function here. (143) He emphasizes too that the eroticly demented Damon (58) also addressed Arcadian Maenalus (145). Davis goes on to condemn Gallus, who ‘never really makes a sincere effort to engage in the therapeutic self-examination in the manner of say, the Corydon of Ecl. 2 . . . He is emotionally wedded to an elegiac posture of self-pity’. (150) Davis relates Gallus’ fantasy of being with Lycoris ‘wasted by time itself’ with Lucretius’ ‘indictment of vain human striving for pleasures entailing ‘empty cares’ (curis inanibus) that fail to be circumscribed by appropriate limits (5.1430–1432[5ic]). (152–153)

Recognizing ‘a discursive pivot’ in Gallus’ ‘response to his Arcadian audience’, Davis describes Gallus’ ‘intention to redirect his muse to the composition of bucolic poetry (50–51)’, which Davis construes as ‘a wholesale transposition of thematic content unaltered [presumably] from one type of verse to another’, although on a crucial issue he passes: ‘Modern philologists remain divided over what precise form of poetry is designated by the cryptic ‘Chalcidic verse’. We do know however that the speaker plans to re-adapt his former poetry to a brand of bucolic verse that . . . will follow in the footsteps of Vergil (the diction of ‘pastoris Siculi modulabor avena’ pointedly borrows from the language of the Eclogues)’. (114–115) Gallus’ further project of hunting is ‘alien to the poets/herdsmen of the Eclogues’, writes Davis (116) despite the importance of hunting for lovers (44) and Theocritus’ hint that Daphnis hunted on Sicilian hills (id 1.115). Continuing with theatrical metaphor, Davis generalizes, ‘The role enacted on the bucolic proscenium by the figure of Gallus amator incarnates a species of pathological desire . . . insatiable and productive of pain, rather than of true pleasure (vera voluptas)’. (139)

9. Postlude: Dulcis Parthenope

Drawing together his arguments, Davis interweaves again the Georgics: ‘the farmer, whose condition is synecdochic of mankind’s, wisely makes behavioral and emotional adjustments in his ongoing struggle to eke out sustenance’. In view of this philosophohical ideal, ‘far from engaging in the fantasy of a stable condition (the ‘flattening out of vicissitudes’ as we have described in in [sic] connection with the outlook of the Meliboeus figure in Ecl. 1), the wise farmer is able to maintain his commitment to a productive life, secure in his knowledge that, as Vergil’s bosom friend Horace phrases it, ‘mutat terra vices’ (‘the earth rehearses its changes’). (167–168)

Reviewer’s Afterword

Throughout, underlining has marked points to be dealt with in ‘the future scholarship on Vergilian poetics oriented towards developing a comprehensive, systematic study’ that Davis augurs. (170) His keen ear for poetic language and
careful attention to philosophical concerns would animate and refine such conversation, intertwine constructively with some of the following matters in need of more exact reading:

**Dramatis personae.**
A very common interpretative trope pretends to plumb the psychology of fictional figures and judge them as if they were people who take initiatives and harbor beliefs. This psychological or characterological trope, between judgmental and journalistic, undervalues the function of such figures in the inner drama of the poet’s thought.

Take the figure named *Meliboeus* – blamed by Davis for ‘over exuberant admiration’, yet serving Virgil as both the first and arguably the last voice of the book (brought back in e1 and developed to frame the final four eclogues, his goatherd envoi – *ite meae quondam felix / ite domum satureae* – framing the whole book (e1–74 / e10–77), also implied again to close the *Georgics* (‘*Tityre, te cecini patulae sub tegmine fagi*’).^1^

Take the figure named *Tityrus* – praised by Davis for his Epicurean ontological premise, where ontology marks an ideological valence in Virgil’s inner dialectic, sc. the import of a bucolic trip to Rome, *praesentes divos*, and authority for poetic return and growth: Caesar’s patronage, protection, and ideology expressed the vatic vociferation that Lucretius scorned?^2^

**Liber bucolicon.**
The first premise for the comprehensive study of diverse codes that Davis recommends, it would include in their places both e3 and e7, which are omitted here, so as precisely to measure change and thematic development when motifs recur (e.g., beech, the reductive version of o9 such a marked departure from the incrementally varied series that unifies e1 / e2 / e3 // e5).^3^

**Lucretian appropriation.**
Having declared that ‘replication of Lucretian language nudges the reader to investigate the philosophical context’, Davis does not investigate two Lucretian contexts with contrasting poietological thrust. Lucretius demystified Pan and *silvestris musa* as fictions imposed on natural echo by country folk (4.589) by contrast with *agrestis musa* (5.1398), taught by nature to early man – a tension basic to Virgil’s poietological ambivalence. Virgil also transfers Lucretian language of divinity from Epicurus to Octavian (e1.7) and to the dead Julius, flattering the latter in Daphnis deified (e5.64) – an ideological frame for the first half book (*praesentes divos* again), its political thrust occluded by Davis. Nor any word of Virgil’s *opposito in imitando* with respect to Lucretius in e4.4^4^

**Bucolic Scaffolding.**
E1.45 / e6.4–5: Davis recognizes the two divine commands to feed livestock – ‘feed cows as before, bring up bulls’ and ‘feed sheep fat, make song down drawn’ – as ‘programmatic statement’, sc. poietological metonymy, metapoetic. However, he denies bucolic hierarchy nor does he weigh how philosophical import may shift as the book moves on. Both commands vary Hesiod’s initiation on Helicon, but e1 defines poetic work in bucolic terms and adds the opportunistic trip to Rome. It thus programs the ideological *incrementum* (e4.49) of the first five eclogues, where Virgil Romanizes bucolic tradition and projects Caesarist ideology through Octavian and his deified great uncle. By contrast, the second half book opens with the revisionary command (turn from *Roma* to *amor*) to fatten not cattle but only sheep (the property too of Hesiod’s initiation on Helicon).

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E.6.1–13: the narrator «Tityrus» recalls three moments in his career: first «our Thalea» stooped to play in Syracusan verse and dwell in woods (E6.1–2); when «I [Tityrus]» pushed for the heroic range (reges et proelia), Apollo pushed me back down to a middle range (nunc . . . agrestem musam not back to silvestrem musam and Thalea), where sheep recalls Hesiod on Helicon. Apollo did not order return to play in Syracusan verse and woods. This «Tityrus» downgraded by Apollo passes responsibility to the muses: «purgae Pietides» (E6.13). They, not «Thaleas» (pace Davis) report Silenus reporting Apollo’s erotic meditation that compasses Gallus’ meeting with their sisterhood on Helicon.

E.6.64–73: Strongly revisionist, Davis rules out the ancient report that Gallus translated an etiological epos by Euphorion, which featured a contest between Calchas and Mopsus (cf. E5) – a truly transgeneric shift for the elegist, symbolized by getting the pipes of the old man of Asca for a version of epos in the middle range: neither pushing the elegist toward heroic epos nor simply transposing elegy to bucolic epos (‘verse of Syracuse’).

E9: Glossing claims by Lycidas to preempt song (E9.21, 44), Davis aptly relates the wolf root (lyk-) in his name to Moeris’ complaint that wolves saw him first (E9.34): Davis calls the four remembered pieces «Menalcan compositions» (46), yet he also (55) describes Lycidas as «eavesdropping on Moeris» and his piece as «similarly purloined from a rehearsal of Moeris». Davis continues that Lycidas’ theme of Caesar’s katasterism «preempts the potential solacium in the presents», in the Menalcan fragment quoted by Moeris with its plea to Varus to spare land from proscription.

By evoking «the present», Davis provokes analysis. In this eclogue’s dramatic present, expropriation has taken place; thus the remembered plea is revealed as having failed.1 The new proprietor has taken the land, as the godless soldier had Meliboeus’ farm, Menalcas is landless, Moeris on the road – though his destination more like Tityrus’ to Rome than Meliboeus’ to the empire’s ends.

In contrast with these vicissitudes that represent the terror caused by Caesarist expropriation, Virgil has imagined the ebullient Lycidas remembering a song (whether Menalcas’ or Moeris’) imbibed with Caesarist ideology: the star of Dionean Caesar, promising future harvests, recalling the hymns of E5 and emphasizing the Caesarist restoration and its upgrade of the hoary Julian claim to descent from Aeneas - Venus - Dione - Jupiter – essential mythic frame for Virgil’s intended Roman epos, a frame evoked yet distanced by Lucretius. With typical ambivalence and irony toward his own fiction, Virgil contrives the ideological and metaepic figuration of Lycidas as urging song in an unconventional place and under circumstances impossible for the real victims (57–58). Davis concludes by projecting a successful mission of Menalcas to preserve the landscapes, which again ignores the present situation in E1 and E9, that represent the usurpation by Caesarist troops even as they project the Caesarist myth. (60) The motif of return by Menalcas cannot refer to a locus defined by beech ([E1 / E2 / E3 / E5] // E9): Menalcas will arrive to play another part in the structure of Virgil’s mind and book (E10.20).2

E10.1–8. Calling Arethusa the proper «Sicilian muse» for E10, Davis translates Virgil’s reference to her panicky transit from Arcadia to Sicily, cum fluctus subterlabere Sicanos (E10.4), as you glide beneath the waves of Sicily». Yet the future tense implies flight at some future moment after the narrative present, hence Arethusa is imagined as not yet driven to flee from Arcadia at the time when Virgil imagines Gallus dying there of love:3 Virgil can thus claim mythopoetic priority over Sicilian Theocritus, who imagines Arethusa already transferred there and at home. (id1)

E10.50–51. Where Davis would have Virgil transpose Gallan elegy twice over to bucolic guise (E6 and E10), Virgil is more economical and coherent: he imagines transposing the elegist into translating etiological epos (E6),4 then he transposes Gallus back from etiological epos (‘songs in Chalcidic verse’) into erotic madness, no longer redeemed, but rather

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1 Breed, 163–66.
3 Breed, 360.
amplified to fill the role of bucolic hero (writing ‘Love’ on trees that grow!). Hence Virgil uses erotic elegy to achieve a tragic and Roman appropriation of old Daphnis to animate a new and originary bucolic locus, Arcadia, marked by such toponyms as Lycaus, Mae-nalus, and Parthenios: he does not imagine Gallus dying at Syracuse but in Arethusa’s place of origin before precipitous flight. 

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