

PASTORAL CONVENTIONS IN MARTINO FILETICO'S *DE VITA THEOCRITI*



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Martino Filetico (1430–1490) recounts the life of Theocritus in De Vita Theocriti, a brief text of thirty verses. In the traditional description of Renaissance pastoral poetry, Virgil is considered the primary model and the best example, and the authoritative commentators praise his qualities by comparing them to Theocritus': Servius describes Theocritus' style as plain and simple, whereas Virgil has added an allegorical layer to the bucolic verses, which makes his poetry more complex. This paper examines how Filetico describes Theocritus' status and poetry, and how these descriptions relate to normative views on bucolic poetry in general, and on Theocritus.

Martino Filetico (c. 1430–c. 1490) worked as a teacher.¹ He was a student of Guarino Veronese. On Guarino's recommendation, he went to Urbino around 1454 or 1455 to teach the oldest son of Federico da Montefeltro, Buonconte, and Bernardino, son of Ottaviano degli Ubaldini. It was probably during this stay in Urbino that he translated the first seven *Idylls* of Theocritus, preserved in MS. 84 in the Biblioteca del Seminario di Padova.² The translation was revised, and this revised edition was first published in Rome by the publishing house of Eucharius Silber between 1480 and 1482.³

¹ On the life and works of Martino Filetico, I follow Bianca 1997.

² Dedicated to Alfonso V of Aragon, who died June 27 1458. Consequently, this date is a *terminus ante quem* for the translation (Bianca 1997). On this first edition of the translation, see Arbizzoni 1993.

³ Editions accompanied by the *Vita*, all in print:

Rome: Eucharius Silber, c. 1480-1482, ISTC it00146000 (the imprint does not have a kolophon; the attribution to Silber is confirmed by a poem of fourteen verses at the end of the little volume "Idem Phileticus ad Eucharium Argirion impressorem". For the dating, see Dell'Oro 1983, 429 note 9).

Milan: Simon Magniagus?, c. 1483, ISTC it00146400 (*Vita* before translation. Contains poem to Eucharius Silber and is suggested to have been printed by him in GW M45830);

Venice: Bernardinus Venetus de Vitalibus, c. 1498-1500, ISTC it00145000 (*Vita* missing. The last words of the edition is: "FINIS// Phileticus de vita Theocriti in libro de poetis antiquis", f. 22a. As Dell'Oro writes, the last page must not have been printed by mistake. Dell'Oro 1983, 429);

In Eucharius Silber's edition, as well as in several other printed editions, the translation is accompanied by a dedication to Federico da Montefeltro, and by the text that will be the focus of this paper, a short biography of Theocritus, which is presented as an excerpt from a work entitled *De Poetis Antiquis*.

After both his students died of the plague in 1458, Filetico left Urbino for Pesaro and the court of Alessandro Sforza to tutor Battista and Constanzo Sforza, but he returned to Urbino with Battista Sforza in 1460 and stayed there until 1467, as tutor for her and for Federico's illegitimate son, Antonio. During this time, he probably began to work on the *De Poetis Antiquis*.⁴ The work was most likely intended to have a didactic purpose, just as his *De Viris Illustribus*, also written in Urbino between 1460 and 1462.⁵ Filetico went to Rome in 1467, where he came in contact with Pomponio Leto and Bessarion, among others, and where he published his translation of Theocritus with Silber, the publisher closely connected to the Roman academy.⁶

De Poetis Antiquis is not extant as a complete work, and it is uncertain whether Filetico ever completed it.⁷ We know that it included his life of Theocritus, since the *Vita* is introduced as part of *De Poetis Antiquis*, in the edition of Filetico's translation printed by Eucharius Silber – the headline reads: “Phileticus de vita Theocriti in libro De poetis antiquis”.⁸ Similarly, the introduction to a life of Horace at the end of a commentary on the *Ars Poetica* attributed to Filetico⁹ states that it comes from “liber De poetis antiquis”,¹⁰ and the same commentary mentions a life of Homer, also as part of

Venice: Bernardinus Venetus de Vitalibus, 1499, ISTC it00145400 (*Vita* after translation).

Paris: Petit & Ascensius, 1503 & 1510 (*Vita* before translation).

Ms. ÖNB cod. lat. 9977, ff. 123r-141v (16th cent.) contains Filetico's translation and *Vita*.

Editions not accompanied by the *Vita*: ms. 84 in the Biblioteca del Seminario di Padova (first version of the translation), and Urb.lat. 369 (same text as in the printed editions of the translation).

⁴ I follow Dell'Oro's account of the texts of *De Poetis Antiquis* and their fortuna, in Dell'Oro, 1983, 429–431.

⁵ Preserved in manuscript form only: ms. D 262 in the Biblioteca Forteguerriana in Pistoia, and ms. V C 39 in the Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli (Dell'Oro 1983, 430 note 18).

⁶ See Farenga 2007 in Repertorium Pomponianum s.v. Silber, www.repertoriumpomponianum.it/pomponiani/silber.htm

⁷ That a humanist published specimina of a work yet to be written, would not be unusual; Calderini's *Observationes* would be an example contemporary with Filetico, see Campanelli 2001.

⁸ See note 3.

⁹ Ottob. Lat. 1256, attributed to Filetico by Card. Mercati, see Dell'Oro 1983, 430.

¹⁰ Ottob. Lat. 1256, f. 103v (Dell'Oro 1983, 430 note 15).

the *De Poetis Antiquis*.¹¹ Although there are no statements about it, it is quite likely that the transmitted lives of Ovid and Virgil, too, were intended to be part of *De Poetis Antiquis*. The lives of Horace, Theocritus, Ovid, and Virgil were collected and published by Emy Dell'Oro in 1983, with a discussion of their composition and transmission.¹² Previously, the life of Theocritus was published by Pecci, in 1912.¹³

Filetico's interest in Theocritus reflects his own intellectual focus on Greek language and literature and the growing interest in Greek among the humanists in general. His translation of the first seven *Idylls* makes Theocritus accessible to a much broader audience. Theocritus was not completely unknown, since he is mentioned and described by Aelius Donatus and Maurus Servius Honoratus in their biographies of Virgil and in the commentary on the *Eclogues*, but the text of the *Idylls* would have been inaccessible to many. Thus, in *De Vita Theocriti*, Filetico presents a Greek poet and his poetry, well known from secondary sources, but not in his own right. In terms of genre theory, as presented by Maria Corti,¹⁴ one would describe Theocritus' poetry as the *archetype*¹⁵ of bucolic poetry: this is where it all began. Corti argues that genre norms are formed in a dynamic exchange between *great writers*,¹⁶ who do not feel constrained by the genre system, but break it and set new standards, and *minor writers*,¹⁷ who follow the course set by the great writers, consolidating their changes to the genre systems into new conventions. In this perspective, Theocritus and Virgil are both great writers, but in a Renaissance context there can be no doubt that Virgil was the *normative model*, especially in the case of bucolic poetry. Corti does not mention the commentaries in her account of genres, but since they affect how the great writers are read and understood, it seems relevant to consider them as a factor in the consolidation of genre norms. This seems particularly necessary in this case, since there is a normative reading, Donatus-Servius', of the normative model.

In the following sections, the way in which Filetico presents and describes Theocritus and his poetry in his *De Vita Theocriti* is examined. I fo-

¹¹ Dell'Oro 1983, 431.

¹² The life of Virgil is also in Klecker 1994, 318-322.

¹³ Pecci 1912, 113-208.

¹⁴ The following is based on Corti 1978, especially 115-116.

¹⁵ "As Genot has already shown, the principle of imitation of this kind of poetics is the result of an act in which 'the historic, generative, and relatively psychological notion of the archetype' is transformed into the notion of a practical normative model." Ibid., 116 (Corti refers to G. Genot 1970, *Analyse structurelle de Pinocchio*, Florence).

¹⁶ Ibid., 136-137.

¹⁷ Ibid., 133.

cus mainly on passages of the *Vita* in which the poetry is described, and in which Theocritus is described as a poet.

Content and Arrangement

The most evident characteristic of *De Vita Theocriti* may be that it is in verse, a feature of all four extant *vitae* by Filetico. It consists of fifteen elegiac couplets, which makes it the shortest of the four.¹⁸ The text concerns the life of Theocritus, his poetry, and his status as a poet. The information about Theocritus' life seems to be deduced from the *Idylls* themselves, especially the seventh, and from the scholia.

The arrangement of the *Vita* follows a roughly chronological plan. We are told in vv. 3–4 that Theocritus was born in Syracuse on Sicily, and in the last verse, that he died before his time. However, there is also a distinct difference between the poet's status at the beginning and the end of the poetic *Vita*, which makes it a narrative about the poet's progression from the modest social status of his family (“Nascitur hac tenui de stirpe Theocritus urbe/ paupere Simicho [...]”, vv. 5–6) to a position as a prominent and successful poet. Toward the end of the *Vita*, Filetico writes that he was celebrated by famous contemporary poets and intellectuals, such as Aratus,¹⁹ Arastis, Callimachus, and Nicander (vv. 25–28), and that he had the status of an intellectual and a physician, as well as that of a poet (vv. 23–24).

As the text progresses, the sense of difference between the beginning and end of the *Vita* is strengthened. The description of the humble birth of Theocritus is followed, in vv. 7–10, by a description of Theocritus' upbringing. Here, Filetico writes of how the muses delivered the infant Theocritus (“Pierides cepere manu de matre cadentem”, v. 7), and how they took him into their sacred grotto and taught him the precepts of poetry while he was still a boy. The mythical character of this explanation of the origin of Theocritus' poetic skills stands in contrast to a very concrete localization of the poet in time found in the penultimate verse (“Floruit hic laeto Philadelpho tempore regis.”, he flourished in the happy time of king Philadelphus, v. 20).

¹⁸ The life of Ovid consists of 94 verses, the life of Virgil of 134 verses, and the life of Horace of 42 verses.

¹⁹ As Dell'Oro points out in her apparatus, Aratus and Aristis are mentioned in Theocritus, *Idyll* 7.98–100. Whereas Aratus is also the name of a still-famous Hellenistic poet, the identity of Aristis is unclear to us. In his comment on v. 99, Gow writes: “Since T. chooses to play upon it [*i.e. the name*] in l. 100, it is clear that the name is not fictitious. Its owner, from what is subsequently said of him, would seem to have been a singer of some reputation in Cos.” (Gow 1950, 156).

The middle section of the *Vita*, vv. 11–22,²⁰ is concerned first with the nature of Theocritean poetry, then with its quality: Theocritus' poetry is described as poetry for flute (v. 11) and lyre (v. 15), about shepherds and pastures (vv. 11–12), and Theocritus is described as the first to compose poetry of this sort (v. 11). The *Vita* claims that he surpassed other, unspecified, Greek bucolic poets (v. 18), and even Virgil, who is mentioned explicitly (*Maro*, v. 17). In fact, Filetico claims that Theocritus is a better poet than anyone who ever was or ever will be: “Aptius invenies nullum, qui luserit ante/ hoc carmen; nec, qui concinat, alter erit.” The reason why he takes precedence over everyone else must be what is stated in vv. 21–22: that Theocritus' poetry seems to render not his own voice, but the voices of actual shepherds (“Ore quidem non ipse suo, sed turba videtur/ pastorum propriis vocibus ipsa loqui.”).

The recognition of Theocritus, so firmly expressed by Filetico in the middle part of the *Vita*, is reinforced by the documented, contemporary recognition of Theocritus in vv. 25–28 of the final section, but it is also anticipated in the first part of the *Vita*. The first four lines, which I address in the following section, contain an indirect comparison to Virgil; in v. 6, Theocritus is called “the glory of the muses” (*gloria Thespiadum*), and in v. 10 it is revealed that the boy who is mentored by the muses will become a poet who is famous all over the world (“qui toto insignis orbe poeta foret”).

Status I: Homer, Hesiod, and Theocritus

As mentioned in the introduction, Filetico's *Vita* is included in most printed editions of his translation of Theocritus' *Idylls* 1–7. Although the headline of the printed edition of the *Vita* makes it clear that the text was intended for a different context, and therefore was not composed with the purpose of introducing the translation, we must accept that, as it is included in the printed edition as a paratext, it does, in that context, serve as an introduction to the poetry of Theocritus. Furthermore, the fact that the first point of the model for exegetic commentaries, the Servian *accessus* (Servius in Aen. 1 pr. 1), is the life of the author indicates that this is where the understanding of a text begins, for a Renaissance reader. In this section, Filetico's statements about

²⁰ I should stress that there is no sharp division in the text between the first and the middle part. Syntactically, vv. 11–12 depend on v. 9, and content-wise vv. 13–16 have more in common with vv. 7–10 than with the surrounding verses, since they contain a description of how Apollo and Bacchus appreciated Theocritus. My reason for this division is thematic. Following the argumentative structure of the text, it may be more appropriate to talk about a division of the *Vita* in two sections, consisting of vv. 1–16 (birth, genealogy, upbringing) and 17–30 (status compared to other poets, and recognition by contemporaries), but there are weaknesses in such a division too, e.g. the first four lines are, as suggested below, more closely connected to the themes defined for the second section.

Theocritus' poetry and status as a poet will be examined, and compared to expressions of pastoral conventions, especially those found in Servius' commentary on Virgil's *Eclogues* and the *Vita Vergilii*. Filetico does not follow the order of a Servian *accessus* in his *Vita*. As demonstrated, the information is limited to the life of the author and the quality of his work. It includes no reflection on title, number of poems, order of poems, or the like.

The first two couplets of the *Vita* argue for the high quality of the work, by comparing the poet in question to two other ancient poets of indisputably high status, Homer and Hesiod:

Quantum Smyrnaei magno laetantur Homero,
 Hesiodo quantum nobilis Ascra suo,
 culta Syracusiae tantum quoque moenia terrae
 Simichida campis, Sicilis ora, tuis.

(Just as much as the people of Smyrna delight in great Homer, just as much as noble Ascra delights in her Hesiod, so much, Simichidas, do the celebrated walls of the Syracusan region, the Sicilian coast, delight in your fields.)²¹

In her apparatus to these lines, Dell'Oro refers to the *Epitaphium Bionis* vv. 86–93, where we find a similar comparison describing the hometowns of six famous Greek poets, Pindar, Alcaeus, Archilochus, Anacreon (indirectly), Sappho, and Theocritus, lament the death of Bion far more than the deaths of their own poets.²² Hence, there is a clear similarity of concept: the pride of their hometown is used as measure of the poets' popularity. Furthermore, the *Epitaphium* is a bucolic poem lamenting a bucolic poet, and Theocritus is one of the poets mentioned in the comparison, all of which makes describing it as a possible hypotext relevant. However, there are also dissimilarities between the two: Filetico mentions only two poets besides Theocritus, whereas the *Epitaphium* enumerates six, and of these two, only Hesiod is mentioned in the *Epitaphium* (v. 53). At the end of Filetico's biography, more Greek authors are mentioned, but they are not among the six poets in the *Epitaphium*, and they are not part of a comparison, as they serve a different purpose.

If we shift our attention from the way in which the comparison in the *Vita* is presented to whom it presents, it may prove constructive to consult the late antique commentators for yet another parallel concept. In Donatus' *vita*, as well as in the introductions to the *Eclogues* in Servius' commen-

²¹ Unless otherwise noted, translations are my own.

²² Transmitted as Moschus 3 (see Gow 1958).

tary,²³ we find the systematization of Virgil's works following the rhetorical levels of style. I quote from Donatus:

Restat, ut, quae causa uoluntatem attulerit poetae Bucolica potissimum conscribendi, considerare debeamus. aut enim dulcedine carminis Theocriti ad imitationem eius illectus est, aut ordinem temporum secutus est circa uitam humanam, quod supra diximus, aut cum tres modi sint elocutionum, quos χαρακτήρας Graeci uocant, ἰσχνός qui tenuis, μέσος qui moderatus, ἄδρός qui ualidus intellegitur, credibile erit Vergilium, qui in omni genere praeualeret, Bucolica ad primum modum, Georgica ad secundum, Aeneidem ad tertium uoluisse conferre.

(58. We still need to consider what cause primarily prompted the poet's desire to write a bucolic poem. For either he was enticed to imitate Theocritus by the sweetness of his song, or he followed the order of the ages with regard to human existence (as we said above). Or, since there are three styles [modi] of speech – what the Greeks call charaktêrai: ischnos, which is understood to mean “meagre” [tenuis]; mesos, “moderate” [moderatus]; and hadros, “powerful” [validus] – 59. one might think that Virgil desired to devote his *Bucolics* to the first mode, his *Georgics* to the second, and the *Aeneid* to the third, in order to distinguish himself in every kind [genus] of poetry.)²⁴

In this passage, Donatus considers various reasons why Virgil may have composed his works in the order he did. This results in his presentation of the famous and influential classification of Virgilian genres that became a model for the ideal poetic career: one should begin with the pastoral, move on to the didactic, and attempt to write heroic epic poetry only when one had developed expert skills. Due to the popularity of Donatus' commentary, it may be worth considering its influential description of this hierarchical system of genres - known in the Middle Ages as the *Rota Vergiliana* - as an additional hypotext for the comparison in the beginning of Filetico's *Vita*. Donatus' text also describes how Virgil's wish to imitate Theocritus is considered one of the two possible reasons why Virgil began his poetic career with bucolic poetry. Servius describes this, without any alternative, as Virgil's intention with the *Eclogue*.²⁵

It is generally accepted including by the late antique commentators, that the primary model for the *Aeneid* is Homer, and Virgil states clearly in the *Georgics* 2.176 that he follows Hesiod in this work. With this in mind, it

²³ The passage is quoted in the following section.

²⁴ Donatus, *Vita* 58–59, my emphasis. Translation by Wilson-Okamura (see Donatus 2008), with minor modifications.

²⁵ Servius, *Prooemium* p. 2 l. 14.

seems that Filetico may be constructing a Greek parallel to the *Rota Vergiliana*, using the models of Virgil's poetry at the beginning of his *De Vita Theocriti*.

Turning to one of the manuscripts of Filetico's translation of Theocritus, Urb.lat. 369, we find a similar example of how heroic, didactic and bucolic epic is joined together. In addition to Filetico's translation of Theocritus, the manuscript contains a translation of the didactic poem by Oppianus, *De Piscibus*, and an excerpt of the *Iliad* translated by Niccolò della Valle.²⁶ Since there is a list of content on f. 1v that mentions all three texts, and since all three texts are written in the same hand, it seems that the manuscript was intended to form an entity consisting of Greek bucolic, didactic, and heroic epic poetry. This may be taken as another indication of how the conception of bucolic poetry is defined by the conception of Virgil's bucolic poetry, even when it comes to bucolic poetry written by the predecessor who inspired him.

The identification of a possible hypotext for the first four lines of Filetico's *Vita* may not, at first glance at least, contribute to the understanding of the textual level of the *Vita*, but it may be taken as an indication of the paradigm within which Filetico reads and understands Theocritus' poetry. According to my suggestion, this would mean that he understands Theocritus within a framework defined by the conventions of the pastoral, developed on the base of Virgil's poetry, as it is described in the authoritative commentaries. In this connection, it is worth noting that if this is the case, Filetico may be seen to challenge the Virgilian paradigm slightly, since his triad of epic poems is not structured as a hierarchy; the three poets are described according to the criterion of popularity, which allows them to be equals.

The Character and Quality of Theocritean Poetry

As mentioned earlier, the middle section of the *Vita* is where we may find information about the nature of the Theocritean poems. However, the only actual description of Theocritus' poetry is this rather short passage:

Pascua qui gracili primus cantaret avena:
et pecoris plenos simplicitate duces

²⁶ Theocritus, *Idyllia*, translated by Martino Filetico (fols. 2r–24v); Oppianus, *De piscibus*, translated by Lorenzo Lippi (fols. 24v–91v); Niccolò della Valle's translation of Homer's *Iliad* (fols. 101v–194r). Fols. 99v–101v contain the dedicatory letter of Teodoro Gaza to Lelio della Valle.

([He] who first sang of pastures on his graceful flute, and about the simple leaders of flocks.)²⁷

This couplet informs us, at what seems to be a quite general level, about the themes, *pascua* (pastures), and persons, *pecoris duces* (leaders of flocks), in the poems, and about one of the instruments, *avena* (flute), accompanying the songs. But if we look more closely at the possible text-external and -internal allusions in this passage, they may contribute to the discourse suggested in the previous section.

The wording of the description of the pastoral instrument, *gracilis avena* (graceful flute), is not unusual, as such. *Avena* appears quite frequently in bucolic poems, and *gracilis* is one of many Latin synonyms for the Greek term defining the ideal of Hellenistic poetry, λεπτός (small, fine). *Tenuis* is a more frequent Latin term for this concept,²⁸ and we will meet yet another synonym later in this section. But as suggested by Dell'Oro,²⁹ it seems plausible that a reader, well-informed about Virgil and familiar with his works and their exegeses, would recall the construction, *gracili avena*, from the very first verse of the *Aeneid* that Varius was supposed to have removed, along with three other lines preceding *arma virumque cano*:

Ille ego, qui quondam gracili modulatus auena
carmina, et egressus siluis uicina coegi,
ut quamuis audio parerent arua colono,
gratum opus agricolis, at nunc horrentia Martis
arma uirumque cano.

(I am he that once played a song on the slender pipe;
Leaving the forests, I marked off the lands nearby,
That the fields might yield as much as possible to the eager husbandman—
A labor that pleased the farmers. But now Mars' shuddering
Arms and a man I sing [...])³⁰

That this line is considered the possible *incipit* of no less than the *Aeneid* makes it plausible as a hypotext for Filetico's *gracili avena*. The Virgilian line is part of an introductory passage in which the poet summarizes his own career in much the same way as we saw Donatus do previously, but in his description, Virgil remains on a figurative level. The use of this model underlines how Filetico's description of Theocritus is determined by the traditional understanding of Virgilian pastoral as a component in a system of

²⁷ Vv. 11–12.

²⁸ For *tenuis* see Donatus, *Vita* 58 (quoted above).

²⁹ Dell'Oro 1983, 441, on v. 11.

³⁰ Quoted from Donatus, *Vita* 42. Translated by Wilson-Okamura (see Donatus 2008).

three genres. The tendency is even more clear here, since Theocritus' poetry is described with Virgilian words.

If we compare the Virgilian *incipit* and Filetico's v. 11 closely, we find that their grammatical structures are similar, with minor exceptions: The correlate of Filetico's *qui*-clause is found outside of the line (*puerum*, v. 9) and not in the first foot, as in the Virgilian line (*ille ego*). Instead, Filetico has added an object to the sentence, *pascua*, and placed it in the first foot. This position is emphatic in itself, but since *pascua* is an addition from Filetico's hand that differs from the hypotext, it stands out even more. The Virgilian *modulatus* is replaced by a synonym, *cantaret*, and the tense has been changed slightly. Lastly, the Virgilian indicator of time has been moved and changed: the adverbial *quondam* has become the adjective *primus*, and it has been placed immediately after *gracili*, instead of immediately before. The new position means that *primus* is not only emphasized by a caesura, which is also the case with *quondam*, it also attracts attention to the word in that it is given a new position which creates a greater distance between the two components of the hyperbaton, *gracili avena*.

It is remarkable that Filetico uses a Virgilian expression to emphasize what may be considered Theocritus' best-known attribute, that he was the inventor of pastoral poetry. One may consider whether the direct interaction between Filetico's and Virgil's texts has an argumentative or a provocative function, meaning something along the lines of, "Virgil may have composed pastoral poetry, and with great success, but Theocritus was the inventor of the genre." This would mean that the comparison between Virgil and Theocritus, which is explicitly presented in vv. 17–18, had already begun. I would suggest that it continues in v. 12, with Filetico's use of *simplicitate*.

Servius' version of λεπτός is not *tenuis*, as is Donatus', but *simplex*. In his general classification of bucolic poetry, as opposed to the didactic and the heroic epic, he uses the noun *simplicitas* to characterize the persons featured in bucolic poetry:

tres enim sunt characteres, humilis, medius, grandiloquus: quos omnes in hoc invenimus poeta. nam in Aeneide grandiloquum habet, in georgicis medium, in bucolicis humilem pro qualitate negotiorum et personarum: nam personae hic rusticae sunt, simplicitate gaudentes, a quibus nihil altum debet requiri.

(there are, namely, three kinds: humble, middle, and grandiloquent, each of which may be found in this poet's works. For in the *Aeneid*, he uses the grandiloquent, in the *Georgics*, the middle, and in the *Bucolics*, the humble, regarding the nature of things and persons, for the

persons here are rustic, they take joy in simplicity, and nothing lofty should be sought from them.)³¹

Thus, this resembles Filetico's use of the word which is also part of a qualification of the persons featured in Theocritean poetry. But there is a difference: Servius' use of *simplicitas* is part of a restrictive description of bucolic character, in the sense that it is expanded with an emphasis of their lacking grandness, whereas Filetico combines *simplicitate* with *plenos* in his characterization giving it a positive semantic connotation.

The contrast between simplicity and refinement is developed later in Servius' preface. In the following quotation, the adjective *simplex*, modified by *ubique*, is used to characterize Theocritus in a comparison between him and Virgil:

in qua re tantum dissentit a Theocrito: ille enim ubique simplex est, hic necessitate compulsus aliquibus locis miscet figuras, quas perite plerumque etiam ex Theocriti versibus facit, quos ab illo dictos constat esse simpliciter. hoc autem fit poetica urbanitate

(in this respect, he differs a lot from Theocritus: for the latter is simple in every respect, whereas Virgil sometimes, forced by necessity, mixes in figures that he makes cleverly and often even out of verses by Theocritus, which people in general agree to be uttered in a simple manner by him. This becomes poetry with an elegant manner.³²

Here, the meaning of *simplex* is consistent with the use of *simplicitas* in the previous quotation, but its function as a literary term is specified, it becomes a term designating non-allegoric text. The distinction between "simple" and "lofty" presented above is now applied to Theocritus and Virgil, and it becomes the way in which Servius characterizes their respective poetry and the argument for Virgil's poetry being more refined than Theocritus'.

The use of *simplex* and *simplicitas* to designate non-allegoric phrases is found throughout the commentary, wherever Servius considers it best to not read a passage allegorically,³³ and Donatus uses the term in the same way, in his description of allegory, in Virgil:

illud tenendum esse praedicimus, in Bucolicis Vergilii neque nusquam neque ubique aliquid figurate dici, hoc est per allegoriam. uix enim propter laudem Caesaris et amissos agros haec Vergilio conceduntur, cum Theocritus simpliciter conscripserit, quem hic noster conatur imitari.

³¹ Servius, *Prooemium* p. 1 l. 16–p. 2 l. 5, my emphasis.

³² Servius, *Prooemium* p. 2 l. 19–23, my emphasis.

³³ E.g. Servius on Virgil, *Eclogue* 1 v. 5: "et melius est, ut simpliciter intellegamus: [...]" (and it is better that we understand it literally).

(We say at the outset, keep this in mind: in the *Bucolics* of Virgil, something is said figuratively (that is, allegorically) on occasion and not everywhere. These things are conceded to Virgil only so far as the praise of Caesar and the loss of his lands. For Theocritus (whom our poet was striving to imitate) composed in a manner that was plain and simple.)³⁴

In her apparatus, Dell'Oro offers Quintilian 10.1.55 as a parallel to this passage: “Admirabilis in suo genere Theocritus, sed musa illa rustica et pastoralis non forum modo, verum ipsam etiam urbem reformidat” (Theocritus is admirable in his own way, but the rustic and pastoral muse shrinks not merely from the forum, but from town-life of every kind).³⁵ Here, Quintilian praises Theocritus in his own right, but most of the texts of the period are concerned with the limitations of this poetry. However, based on the analyses above, I suggest the texts of the late antique commentators, particularly Servius', as hypotexts for this passage in Filetico's *Vita*. When Filetico characterizes the persons featured in Theocritus' idylls as *pleni simplicitate*, in v. 12, I consider this a paraphrase of the first Servian quotation, “nam personae hic rusticae sunt, *simplicitate gaudentes*”, but with the noted difference that he attempts to avoid the restrictive connotations of Servius' text. We may discuss whether we should read Filetico's text as a statement that the leaders of flocks are not only “full of simplicity” but “fulfilled by their simplicity”, or even perceive the words as a hypallage meaning “fully simple” – this may be taking the interpretation to its limits. However, since Servius and Donatus apply the characteristic *simplicitas* to Theocritus, I suggest regarding this as Filetico's negotiation of the traditional view of Theocritus, as expressed in the late antique commentaries, and, again, consider these verses as paving the way for the comparison of Theocritus and Virgil in vv. 17–18.

Status II: Virgil and Theocritus Compared

After the description of Theocritus' poetry in vv. 11–12, which is connected syntactically to the description of his upbringing by the muses, we have two elegiac couplets describing how Apollo and Bacchus crowned Theocritus, and bestowed musical skills upon him. This means that two more divine sanctions of Theocritus' skills and talent are added to the thorough description of the muses' recognition of him, before we reach the comparison in vv. 17–18, and the subsequent discussion of his status.

³⁴ Donatus, *Vita* 66, my emphasis. Translation by Wilson-Okamura (see Donatus 2008).

³⁵ Translated by Butler (see Quintilian 1922).

In the comparison, we find a clear expression of Filetico's loyalty to Theocritus. He begins in v. 17 by making it clear that there is no competition; Virgil and everyone else in Latium are inferior to Theocritus: "Pace loquar Latia, cessit bona musa Maronis,/ cesserunt Siculae, cetera turba, lyrae" (I shall speak with the permission of the Latins; Maro's good muse was inferior, the Sicilian lyres, the rest of the lot, were inferior, vv. 17–18).

As we have seen, it is not unusual to compare Virgil and Theocritus. In fact, it is almost what we would expect, since it is what Servius and Donatus do in their authoritative commentaries. But Filetico's conclusion does not conform to the conventional conclusions that we saw in the section above. Furthermore, his unusual conclusion is presented in a quite bold manner: before the argument, which makes it appear more like a proclamation than a comparison. However, an argument does follow in the next couplet: "Aptius inuenies nullum, qui luserit ante/ hoc carmen; nec, qui concinat, alter erit" (You will find no one who had earlier played this type of song more appropriately, neither will there be another who will sing on the same level as him, vv. 19–20). The keyword that makes this an argument, and not just yet another assertion about Theocritus, is *aptius*: Theocritus' poetry is measured by its appropriateness. Filetico elaborates in vv. 21–22: "Ore quidem non ipse suo, sed turba videtur/ pastorum propriis vocibus ipsa loqui" (For he does not sing on his own with his own mouth, but it seems like the very crowd of shepherds speaks with their own voices).

According to Filetico, Theocritus' poetry is such a close imitation of its object, the shepherds, that one almost forgets that it is fiction. It is more appropriate than any previous and any future pastoral poetry, exactly because it manages to imitate its object so precisely. In other words, Filetico draws the opposite conclusions from the authorial commentaries, but bases them on the same argument: Theocritus' poetry is superior to Virgil's, precisely because the characters speak about rustic themes in a manner resembling the speech of actual shepherds – because it is simple, and not allegorical. This means that Filetico reevaluates the conventional criteria of bucolic poetry, as well as inverting the conventional view of the relationship between the primary Latin and Greek models, with regard to status.

The use of the term *aptum*, which inevitably connotes Horace's *Ars Poetica* and its emphasis on *decorum* as a criterion for successful poetry, underlines that this is, indeed, a bold attempt to reevaluate bucolic poetics.

A Parallel

Filetico is not the only one who challenges the conventional classification and qualification of the classical bucolic poets. If we examine one of the paratexts introducing the first Latin translation of the entire corpus of

Theocritus,³⁶ we find that the German translator Helius Eobanus Hessus displays a similar predilection for Theocritus, when comparing him to Virgil. The following passage is not from a *vita*, but from Hessus' verse dedication (vv. 29–32):

Tam uaria Andino non est sua Musa Maroni
 Materiæ cultor simplicis ille fuit
 Et tamen agnoscas hîc magni furta Maronis
 Plurima, sed nullo digna pudore legi.

(The muse of Maro from Andes is not as diverse; he was a cultivator of simple material. And yet, one could identify the great Maro's excessive theft here, but I have found it worthy of no shame.)

In this quotation, we see the way in which Hessus emphasizes that the variety of themes is far larger in Theocritus' poems than in Virgil's. Using the term *furtum* (theft) to designate Virgil's intertextual loans from Theocritus may suggest a play on expectations, since it omits the Servian point that Virgil adds a new layer of refinement to the Theocritean passages included in his poetry, and dwells on the unoriginality of the "theft" itself. *Furtum* was the term used by Donatus to describe Virgil's intertextual loans from Homer (*Vita* 46) in an often quoted passage about critical accusations against Virgil emphasizing the difficulty of the transfer and the skill required to carry it out. When Hessus applies this term to Virgil's loans from Theocritus, he appears to problematize Virgil's position and emphasize the superiority of the Greek model. But just as Virgil, according to Donatus, defended himself against his critics' accusation of theft, so Hessus mitigates his accusation in the following line. However, in this playful manner he does manage to bring focus to the value of Virgil's Greek model.

V. 30 is particularly interesting. Here, Virgil is called a cultivator of *simple* material. This means that Hessus uses the term attributed to Theocritus in the late antique commentaries, but instead of describing Theocritus' poetry, it is used about Virgil's. Thus, Hessus moves within the same framework as Filetico, but in this last example, he takes the negotiation of conventional classifications one step further. The tone of Hessus' inversions is different, it is more playful than Filetico's assertive rejection of all other bucolic poets, but the mechanisms are the same. The quoted passage indicates that Hessus' conceptions of the pastoral are influenced by Virgil and

³⁶ The translation is published with Joachim Camerarius's edition of the Greek text. The first edition appeared in 1531. I quote from the 1545 edition.

his commentators, but, like Filetico, he attempts a reappraisal of Theocritus by renegotiating the conventional genre descriptions.³⁷

Conclusion

Genre norms and conceptions are formed by normative models in cases such as that of the pastoral, where we have no theoretical description of genre norms in the poetics, and even if it is widely known that Virgil drew on Theocritus for his bucolic poems, Virgil's *Eclogues* and their presentation in the commentaries shaped the ideals and conventions of the pastoral during the Renaissance.

In Filetico's text we see that the conception of genre is formed by the normative model and that the conception of the author of the normative work affects the way the life of Theocritus is narrated. From the very beginning of the *Vita*, Theocritus is made part of a triad of poets together with Hesiod and Homer, a Greek mirror of the Virgilian *rota*'s three components, which may be taken as an indication of how the way Theocritus is portrayed is determined by the traditional portrayal of Virgil. Whereas Donatus and Servius construct a hierarchical system, Filetico's equalizes: Theocritus is claimed to be as popular among his own people as Homer and Hesiod were among theirs. Thus, even at the very beginning of the *Vita*, we have an acceptance of the generic paradigm as defined by tradition, as well as a negotiation of it. The metaphoric description of Theocritean poetry as "fields" (*campis*, v. 4) is resumed in v. 11, where *pascua*, with its emphatic position, is the first word used to describe the theme of Theocritean poetry. The description of theme is expanded: in addition to "from what", we are told of "whom" Theocritus sang. On the basis of the Virgilian hypotext, *pascua* and the description of the shepherds as *plenos simplicitate* challenge the normative view of the ideal type of bucolic poetry, where the pastures and shepherds are considered signifiers of a higher level of meaning, the allegorical layer and message. Filetico insists that the simple, literal level is ideal and praiseworthy, and he "teases" Virgil by using a Virgilian verse, the incipit of the *Aeneid*, to stress the indisputable fact that, although Virgil may have been the defining, normative, poet of this genre, Theocritus was the inventor, his poetry is the archetype.

The climax of Filetico's negotiation of the generic norms is reached in vv. 17–22, where we find the reevaluation set out in a resolute manner. New conclusions about status are reached by reevaluating the intent and, consequently, the success criterion of bucolic poetry. The validity of the statement that Theocritus' way of writing bucolic poetry is *aptius*, more **appropriate**,

³⁷ See Hass 2013 for a more elaborate examination of Hesus and poetics.

than every other attempt depends on this new conception of intention. In the reappraised view, the intention underlying the composition of bucolic poetry is not literary imitation, but the imitation of actual shepherds and the depiction of actual pastures. Judged by this measure, Theocritus is invincible, Filetico states. The argument is prepared by the statement of popularity in vv. 1–4, mentioned above, and it is supported by listing, in vv. 25–28, prominent contemporary poets who recognized Theocritus' special gift.

In the examined passage of Helius Eobanus Hessus' dedicatory poem, we find the same mechanisms at work: In both texts we found a dependence on the traditional genre conception, which defines the focal points of the description of Theocritus and the terminology applied, but we also detected an attempt to liberate the description of Theocritus from the conventional conclusions about his poetry. Both texts attempt what may be regarded as a very conscious paradigm shift in pastoral genre conventions.

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