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Literary Translation of Eclogue I
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A Note To The Reader

My initial gravitation toward – and eventual selection of – Vergil’s Eclogue I was sparked by the remarkably stark contrast between the attitudes, situations, and mannerisms of the two juxtaposed characters of Tityrus and Meliboeus. Though they are both herdsmen conversing under the shade of the same beech on the same plot of farmland, the luck – and thus temperament – that has fallen upon each man is antithetical. Elderly Tityrus, recently having regained his land following a dispossession, displays his contentment with his situation; young Meliboeus, on the other hand, recently having been dispossessed of his land, contrastingly deplures his own banishment. In order to maintain and highlight this titillating contrast of temperament that fuels the entertainment factor of this Eclogue, I have constructed the following translation in two different meters: dactylic tetrameter and iambic hexameter. Meliboeus’ lines are constructed solely of dactylic tetrameter in order to represent the panic and hurry he is feeling, achieved by the jumpy and rushed dactyls in his lines. Tityrus’ lines, however, are constructed solely of iambic hexameter in order to represent his relaxed and content state of mind, achieved by the fluidity and consistency of the stressed and unstressed syllables of iambs. As you read through the translation, aloud if you so desire, I invite you to listen and take note of the meter (which I have outlined below) in order to step into the shoes of these contrasting characters. While I took care to outline the inconsistency between these two characters through alternating meters, I additionally felt the inclination to add some consistency back into the poem in order to provide a sense of unity. Thus, I composed an ABAB, CDCD, EFEF, etc. rhyme scheme for each quatrain, allowing the poem to flow with a constant theme, because, though these herdsmen are in antithetical situations, they still thrive under the mutual theme of rural life. Finally, I implemented stylistic decisions such as rhetorical devices and wordplay to both enhance Vergil’s original meaning as well as to offer alternate interpretations of the text.

Dactylic Tetrameter:

(/ u u) (/ u u) (/ u u) (/ u u)

Iambic Hexameter:

(u /) (u /) (u /) (u /) (u /) (u /)

Meliboeus:

Tityrus, how can you be so relaxed today,
Sitting among the cool shade of a beech down there?
Marvelous melodies moan from the pipe you play,

Just as I'm forced from my land where I've lived, so fair².

Tityrus:

A god, oh Meliboeus, lets me, lazy³, sit
Beneath this beech and sing whatever comes to me,
While carefree cattle graze my fields as they see fit,
And I, with lambs to sacrifice to him, roam free.

Meliboeus:

Envy does not⁴ overcome me – amazement does,
Something the lightning and oaks tried to warn me of.
Leading my goats through this field is a chore because
Twins were born. Tityrus, tell me which god you love.

Tityrus:

This god is Rome, a city elegant and tall⁵,

¹ My choice of this alliteration with “m” here exists for two reasons: one, because an “m” can be sung, which emphasizes the prevalence of song not only in this first Eclogue but in all ten. Two, this repetition of “m” creates a close reference to Vergil’s original word choice of *Musam* (I.2).

² I intentionally describe Meliboeus’ land as “fair” to invoke a double meaning. “Fair” serves as a translation of Vergil’s *dulcia* (modifying *arva*) (I.3), while also implying the irony that exists due to the apparent unfairness of Tityrus’ permission to keep his land and Meliboeus’ lack thereof.

³ My translation of Vergil’s *lentus* (I.4) appears in Tityrus’ reply instead of in Meliboeus’ opening lines in order to explicitly display Tityrus’ self-awareness in regard to his current lazy state.

⁴ I purposely placed the word “not” on the stressed syllable of the second dactyl in order to imply Meliboeus’ lack of envy of Tityrus’ current situation, furthering the irony of the fact that Meliboeus most likely *is* envious and does view this situation as unfair (see endnote 2).

⁵ My addition of the adjective “tall” to describe Rome simultaneously highlights Rome’s physical superiority and includes the personification which Vergil originally created with *caput* (I.24).

With which I adamantly⁶ would compare my town,
Before I learned the difference ‘tween things large and small,

And saw up close all other cities Rome casts down.

Meliboeus:

Tityrus, what was your reason for visiting?

Tityrus:

'Twas freedom. When my hair was dark, my cheese I'd sell,
But had no wealth, nor hope for freedom in young years,
'Fore Galatea left. My youth I've bid farewell,
And white my hair has turned as Amaryllis nears.

Meliboeus:

Often I wondered at why she would call the gods,
Suff'ring, in mournful mood⁷, fruits to be hung on trees.
Dear Amaryllis was missing you by all odds,
As were your rivers, your⁸ mountains, and even bees⁹.

Tityrus:

But what was I to do? I could not leave my chains,
Or find a pow'rful god in lands other than this.
But fortune struck as altar-honored god said, "Swains,
Make sure the cattle graze; don't raise¹⁰ the bulls amiss."

⁶ In these lines, Tityrus says he used to compare his rural town with Rome. Because it is possible that the character of Tityrus may be meant to represent Vergil himself, this rural town he speaks of may be Mantua. In order to encourage this interpretation, I created a Mantua pun within the word "adamantly."

⁷ I included the "m" alliteration of "mournful mood" in order to parallel the "m" alliteration Vergil used here with *mirabar* and *maista* (I.36).

⁸ My choice to repeat the possessive adjective "your" serves as a parallel to Vergil's repetition of *te* (I.38-39). This emphasizes the personal connection and ownership between Tityrus and his land.

⁹ I included "bees" here as a precursor to the *apibus* (I.54) that occur later in the poem, serving as one of the pleasures Tityrus gets to enjoy on his land.

¹⁰ I used this punny translation option for *submittite* (I.45) in order to reference the multiple occurrences of the verb *surgere* throughout the Eclogues: "*surget gens aurea*"

(IV.9), "*surgit paliurus*" (V.39), "*incipiant silvae...surgere*" (VI.39), and "*surgamus*" (X.75).

Meliboeus:

Happy old man! All these lands will forever be
Yours¹¹. You have rocks all around and your pastures slip
This way and that, but your flocks will be safe and free
From any illness which urges full ewes to yip.

Happy old man! You'll recline by the river's shade,
Sleeping beside the sweet sound of the buzz of bees¹²,
Listening closely to songs from the pruning blade.
Even the turtle dove never will cease its pleas.

Tityrus:

Impossibilities¹³ shall sooner come to pass,
Like deer who graze in heaven, seas that e'er run dry,
Or travelers dwelling comfortably on foreign grass,
Than will the memory of him from me be pried¹⁴.

Meliboeus:

Some of us go to the African mountain side,
Others to Scythia or anywhere far away,
Leaving our homes to the unknown. Will someone try,
Ruthless, to seize my good crops full of curds and whey?

If I am ever to look upon home anew,
Think how much strife will ensue. Now's the time to go;
Sheep, whom I'd spy from a cave, I must bid adieu!
Songs, I must cease you! Go, goats, chew a new willow!

¹¹ By means of both enjambment and placement on the first stressed syllable of the line, I'm once again emphasizing the possession of Tityrus' land in order to provide a stark comparison between the fortunes of Tityrus and Meliboeus.

¹² I filled this line with a mix of "s" and "z" alliteration ("Sleeping," "sweet," "sound," "buzz," "bees") to imitate not only the sound of bees but of a snoring sleeper. ¹³ This word stands to highlight the presence of the rhetorical device of adynaton in these lines.

¹⁴ The slant rhyme of “pried” and “dry” further exemplifies the impossibility of this god to be erased from Tityrus’ memory. The failure of perfect rhyme in this stanza represents the failure of these absurdities to ever occur.

Tityrus:

Stay here a while, my friend, recline on leaves with me.

My apples, chestnuts, cheeses – any treats you choose –

Await you. Look! The fumes from yonder houses flee,

And shadows rise¹⁵ up higher as we cease our muse¹⁶.

Though Vergil uses the verb *cadunt* (I.83) to describe the movement of the shadows, I chose to translate it as “rise up” both to highlight the increasing size of the shadows as well as to provide another reference to the prevalence of *surgere* in the Eclogues (see endnote 10).

¹⁶ I used the word “muse” here to mean something along lines of “reflection” or “discussion,” while simultaneously referencing Vergil’s *Musam* I.2) in his opening lines (see endnote 1).