

Blessings and curses in Virgil's *Eclogues*

PAOLA GAGLIARDI*

University of Basilicata, Potenza, Italy

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ABSTRACT

In Virgil's *Eclogues* curses and blessings are the heritage of the Theocritean tradition, which in turn reproduced a common feature in folk poetry. But in comparison to Theocritus, who uses these topics to give his poems a folkloric flavour, the Latin poet treats them in a very different way, removing excessively vulgar phrases from his verses, and using curses and blessings in order to give voice to deep feelings on the part of his characters. Sometimes these *τόποι* express positive or negative hopes in a contrasting pattern (in *ecl.* 3. 89–91; 7. 21–28, and, first of all, 1. 59–66, which is a special case), while sometimes there is only a positive (*ecl.* 5. 60–61, 65 and 76–77; *ecl.* 9. 30–31) or negative (*ecl.* 8. 52–58) view. The most common figure of speech for curses and blessings is the *adynaton*.

KEYWORDS

curses, blessings, Theocritus, Virgil's *Eclogues*, *adynaton*

CURSES AND BLESSINGS IN THEOCRITUS

Blessings and curses, intended respectively as positive or negative wishes, belong to folkloric culture and for this reason – paradoxically – find a place in learned Alexandrian poetry, in which

* Corresponding author. E-mail: paolagagliardi@hotmail.com

the search for originality often underlies attention to the daily aspects of life, to magic and superstition.¹ This is even more important for Theocritus, a refined poet who makes the popular element, elegantly conflated with his learned taste, the primary stylistic feature of his bucolic production:² in the new style he creates, he also welcomes elements of “curse poetry”, appropriately adapted to the pastoral genre.³ In the inimitable equilibrium between these antithetical aspects of his poetry, the appeal to popular spells and beliefs has different functions: it can be a simple folk touch, which helps to characterize and define the naivete,⁴ and sometimes the roughness, of his shepherds (3. 28–30 and 37–38,⁵ 5. 20,⁶ 6. 39–40⁷). Sometimes positive or negative wishes can take a very beautiful form, like the delicate expression of 3. 54 (ὥς μέλι τοι γλυκὺ τοῦτο κατὰ βρόχθοιο γένοιτο, “may this be as sweet honey in your throat”), although used by a very uncouth character. Alternatively, the wishes can be particularly incisive, as the half-serious one that Lacon makes to himself at 5. 15–16 (ἦ κατὰ τήνας / τὰς πέτρας, ὠνθρωπε, μανεῖς εἰς Κραθὶν ἀλοίμαν, “Hey, man, / may I go crazy and jump from hill-top to Cratis’ stream below!”).

The most elegant form of blessings and curses in poetry is the *adynaton*, a very effective figure aimed at representing the intensity of a feeling or a hope.⁸ In Theocritus two examples, one positive and one negative, are worthy of particular attention: at 5. 124–127, two couplets in the singing contest between the protagonists are good wishes, in which the description of impossible events conveys the meaning of a blessing, and the unreal situations desired seem less distant, thanks to the familiar setting created by names of local rivers (Himer, Crathis, and the spring Sybaris)⁹:

¹So-called “curse poetry” is well established in Alexandrian production: consider works like Callimachus’ *Ibis* or Euphorion’s *Arai*, though of course this genre has very deep roots that go back the archaic lyric poetry: on this topic, see WATSON, L.: *Arae. The curse poetry of antiquity*. Leeds 1991, and *Theocritus. A Selection: Idylls 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 11 and 13*. Ed. by R. HUNTER. Cambridge 1999, ad *id.* 7, 109–114, 184–185.

²The attention to these themes is evident in his other poems as well, as we can deduce from the importance of magic in *id.* 2, which, however, is not a bucolic poem but an urban mime.

³As HUNTER (n. 1), ad *id.* 7. 109–114, 185, rightly affirms, Theocritus “produces a ‘bucolized’ version of a contemporary poetic style”.

⁴See HUNTER (n. 1) ad *id.* 3. 37–39, 121.

⁵On Theocr. *id.* 3. 28–30 (ἐγνων πρᾶν, ὅκα μοι, μεμναμένω εἰ φιλέεις με, / οὐδὲ τὸ τηλέφιλον ποτεμάξατο τὸ πλατάγημα, / ἀλλ’ αὐτῷ ἀπαλῷ ποτὶ πάχει ἔξεμαράνθη “I learned, while I was wondering if you loved me, not long ago, / the poppy petal did not adhere crushing, / but shrank and shrivelled on the soft of my arm”), cfr. HUNTER (n. 1) ad *loc.* p. 119; on 3. 37–38 (ἄλλεται ὀφθαλμός μιν ὁ δεξιός· ἄρα γ’ ἰδῆσῶ / αὐτάν; “I feel a twitch in my right eye: maybe I’ll see / her?”), cfr. HUNTER (n. 1) ad *loc.* 121.

⁶Αἶ τοι πιστεύομαι, τὰ Δάφνιδος ἄλγε’ ἀροίμαν; “May Heaven send me the pains of Daphnis if ever I believe that tale.”

⁷Ὡς μὴ βασκανθῶ δέ, τρις εἰς ἐμόν ἔπτυσσα κόλπον· / ταῦτα γὰρ ἂ γράϊα με Κοτυτταρις ἐξεδίδαξε; “As the old Cotyttaris taught me, I spit thrice in my breast.” On spitting as a form of apotropaic magic in many cultures, see HUNTER (n. 1) ad *id.* 6. 39–40, 259.

⁸On the *adynaton* in Greek and Latin poetry, the only complete dissertation is still DUTOIT, E.: *Le thème de l’adynaton dans la poésie antique*. Paris 1936; cfr. also ROWE, G. O.: The *Adynaton* as a Stylistic Device. *AJP* 86 (1965) 387–396, and GUIDORIZZI, G.: I delfini sui monti: appunti sull’*adynaton*. *Ricerca Folklorica* 12 (1985) 19–22.

⁹Himera is a Sicilian river, Crathis and the spring Sybaris are in Calabria.



ΚΟ. Ἰμέρα ἀνθ' ὕδατος ρεῖτω γάλα, καὶ τὸ δέ, Κραῖθι,
οἶνω πορφύροις, τὰ δέ τοι σία καρπὸν ἐνείκαι.

ΛΑ. Ρεῖτω χά Συβαρίτις ἐμὴν μέλι, καὶ τὸ πότορθρον
ἀ παῖς ἀνθ' ὕδατος τᾶ κάλπιδι κηρία βάψαι

(*id.* 5. 124–127)

Komata: “May Himera flow, not with water, but with milk: and may you, Crathis, / blush with wine, and let rush bear fruit.” / Lacon: “Let Sybaris spring bear honey for me, so that / the girl can draw honeycombs instead of water.”

Equally powerful is the reverse situation at l. 132–136:

Νῦν ἴα μὲν φορέοιτε βάτοι, φορέοιτε δ' ἄκανθαι,
ἀ δὲ καλὰ νάρκισσος ἐπ' ἀρκεύθοισι κομάσαι,
πάντα δ' ἄναλλα γένοιτο, καὶ ἀ πίτυς ὄχνας ἐνείκαι,
Δάφνις ἐπεὶ θνάσκει, καὶ τὰς κύνας ὠλαφος ἔλκοι,
κῆξ ὀρέων τοὶ σκῶπες ἀηδόσι γαρύσαιντο

(*id.* 1. 132–136)

“Now you, thorns and brambles, bear violets, / and let the lovely daffodil flower on the juniper / and let all things run contrary, and let the pine tree sprout pears, / since Daphnis dies, and let hounds be torn by stags / and let nightingale cry out to owls from the hill”.

Here the *adynaton* depicts an upside-down world at the death of Daphnis, who seems to assume the role of a god of vegetation, perhaps originally connected to his figure:¹⁰ so, when he dies, the whole of nature reacts by subverting its laws.¹¹ Here the *adynaton*, perfectly adapted to the bucolic setting and language, is embellished by a highly learned stylistic device, the final rhyming of vv. 132, 133 and 134, which gives the ensemble the sing-song effect of a magic spell.¹² This passage will be an essential point of reference for Virgil, given the importance of Theocritus' first idyll for the definition of the bucolic genre.¹³ Indeed, in some ways these Theocritean verses are the model of the *adynata* in subsequent bucolic poetry.

In some cases Theocritus changes these *τόποι* of popular poetry, adapting them to higher-level poems. This happens in *id.* 7, a crucial text in the Theocritean production.¹⁴ Here, within the exchange of songs, the two protagonists express wishes, one positive, the other negative. Lykidas' performance, a *propemptikòn* for Ageanax, the beloved boy embarking for Mytilene by

¹⁰On the connection with Eastern deities like Dumuzi, cfr. BERG, W.: *Early Virgil*. London 1974, 12–22; *contra*, HALPERIN, D. M.: The Forebears of Daphnis. *TAPhA* 113 (1983) 186, who supposes (191–192; cfr. also MÜLLER, H. P.: Daphnis – ein Doppelgänger des Gottes Adon. *ZDPV* 116 [2000] 27–29 and 33) that Daphnis could be a Sicilian variation of this divine type. The most recent study on Daphnis is SCHOLL, W.: *Der Daphnis-Mythos und seine Entwicklung: von den Anfängen bis zu Vergils vierter Ekloge* [Spudasmata 157]. Hildesheim – Zürich – New York 2014.

¹¹The archetype of this kind of *adynaton*, employed in order to describe the world upside down, is probably Archil. fr. 122 W., which Theocritus skillfully reworks, increasing the number of inverted elements; a choice completely consistent with the setting and the features of his poetry, in which he “bucolicizes” the figure of the *adynaton*.

¹²As is rightly noted by HUNTER (n. 1) ad *id.* 1. 132–136, 103.

¹³See HUNTER (n. 1) 60–61; BREED, B. W.: *Pastoral Inscription. Reading and Writing Virgil's Eclogues*. London 2006, 112 and 118.

¹⁴On its programmatic importance, see HUNTER (n. 1) 149, and G. SERRAO in *Enc. Virg.* V (1990) 114, s. v. *Teocrito*.



sea, wishes him a peaceful journey, safe from the dangers of the sea.¹⁵ Verses 61–62¹⁶ are particularly beautiful:

Ἀγεάνακτι πλόνον διζήμενῳ ἔς Μιτυλήναν
ᾧρια πάντα γένοιτο, καὶ εὖπλοος ὄρμον ἵκοιτο

(*id.* 7. 61–62)

“I wish that everything goes well for Ageanax, who wants to go to Mitylene / and I hope he has a fair sailing.”

Here the wish is expressed in very plain but appropriate words: it is interesting that the singer attaches to his wish the condition that, in turn, the boy rescue him, who is burned by Aphrodite.¹⁷ The relationship proposed by the poet between sea storms and tempests of love, between water and fire dangers (in which fire symbolizes erotic passion) is particularly elegant. The meaning of this passage is not clear (perhaps the distance of the beloved will help the lover to appease his passion?¹⁸), but the important feature is the relationship that makes the fulfilment of a wish depend on another situation, as often in traditional prayers. Simichidas, the other singer, reworks these elements, reversing them in his song, also on an erotic theme. Pleading the case of his friend Aratos, unhappily in love with a boy, Simichidas invokes Pan, the god of shepherds, and begs him to persuade the boy to accept Aratos’ love (vv. 106–114):

κεῖ μὲν ταῦτ’ ἔρδοις, ᾧ Πᾶν φίλε, μήτι τυ παῖδες
Ἀρκαδικοὶ σκίλλαισιν ὑπὸ πλευράς τε καὶ ᾧμως
τανίκα μαστίζοιεν, ὅτε κρέα τυτθὰ παρείη·
εἰ δ’ ἄλλως νεύσαις, κατὰ μὲν χρόα πάντ’ ὀνύχεσσι
δακνόμενος κνάσαιο καὶ ἐν κνίδασι καθεύδοις·
εἴης δ’ Ἡδωνῶν μὲν ἐν ᾠρεσι χεῖματι μέσσω
Ἔβρον πᾶρ ποταμὸν τετραμμένος ἐγγύθεν Ἄρκτω,
ἐν δὲ θέρει πυμάτοισι παρ’ Αἰθιόπεσσι νομεύοις
πέτρᾳ ὑπο Βλεμύων, ὅθεν οὐκέτι Νεῖλος ὁρατός

(*id.* 7. 106–114)

“And if you do this, dear Pan, never / may the leeks of the Arcadian boys beat you / when meat is too few; / but if you don’t listen to my prayer, may nettles / make your bed, and set you scratching tooth and nail, / scratching from heel to head, / and may you be in the hills of Thrace, on the banks of the Hebrus, / under the Little Bear, in middle winter, / and in summer may you graze your sheep with the distant Ethiopians, / under the Blemyan rock, beyond Nile’s earliest spring.”

Here too in the prayer, expressed in a colloquial and joking tone, as appropriate to a naive god like Pan, there are specific conditions: if the god does what Simichidas asks, may his statue not get a whipping from children dissatisfied with having received too little meat, according to a local Arcadian rite¹⁹ (a reference that allows the poet the clever insertion of a hint of folklore,

¹⁵Since Mitylene is the destination of Ageanax, these verses are surely rich with echoes of Sappho, but also of other lost poetry, as HUNTER (n. 1) ad *id.* 7. 52–69, 166, affirms.

¹⁶In these verses also, Theocritus uses sound effects that may suggest magic incantation, as in Virg. *ec.* 8. 80: cfr. HUNTER (n. 1) ad *id.* 7. 61–62, 170.

¹⁷See HUNTER (n. 1) ad *id.* 7. 52–89, 167.

¹⁸Cfr. HUNTER (n. 1) ad *id.* 7. 55–56, 168.

¹⁹Reconstruction and interpretation of this rite are very difficult because of the absence of sources: cfr. HUNTER (n. 1) ad *id.* 7. 107–108, 183–184.



enriching the passage with a popular flavour²⁰). On the other hand, if Pan does not help Aratos, may he be in torrid places in summer and freezing ones in winter: the semi-serious negative wish conflates trivial realism (the hint of banality is suited to the rough figure of Pan, see vv. 109–110),²¹ with elements of erudite geography, in the *τόπος* of the ‘ends of the world’.²² It is an elegant example of Theocritus’ skill in juxtaposing very different linguistic and conceptual levels.

CURSES AND BLESSINGS IN VIRGIL’S *ECLOGUES*

When Virgil takes up the bucolic genre and employs its *topoi* and conventions, he fully appreciates the importance of blessings and curses in bucolic poetry and Theocritus’ wise use of them. In his continuous reworking of Theocritean poetry, however, he gives these elements features and functions very different from his model. Rather, he places them at the service of his vision of art, which, beginning with the first *Eclogue*, he presents in all its remarkable peculiarities.²³ Conspicuous among these is the emotive participation in feelings and sufferings of the characters, whose voice often finds a ‘subjective’ space in the text, emotionally involving the reader. Also innovative is the tendency, which already announces the ‘classic’ taste of Augustan poetry, toward order and measure, instead of the apparent disorder of Alexandrian art, justified by the search for variety. Virgil’s desire for balance is associated with a search for beauty and with a rejection of Theocritus’ most banally realistic or harshly coarse features. It is also intolerant of the ugly, which sometimes characterizes Theocritus’ verses.²⁴ Another notable aspect of Virgil’s originality is the presence of contemporary events in his bucolic poetry, both when he represents dramatic situations such as land confiscations, when he mentions real people by name (Pollio, Varus, Gallus), and when he refers to great politicians (Octavian in *eccl.* 1,

²⁰Such threats are frequent in magical papyri, which confirms the origin of this pattern in folklore: cfr. HUNTER (n. 1) ad *id.* 7. 109–114, 184.

²¹The comic effect here is due to the “incongruity between offence and punishment”, typical of ‘curse poetry’: so WATSON (n. 1) 135–137.

²²This is a very successful schema in Latin poetry: see for example Catull. 11, or Virg. *eccl.* 1. 59–66 and 10. 64–68, Hor. *Iamb.* 1. 11–14. The elegists often conflate this *τόπος* with that of the timeframe from sunrise to sunset (cfr. for example Prop. 2. 3. 43–44; Ov. *amor.* 1. 15. 29; *ars* 3. 537). Several facts suggest the possibility that this *topos* was found in the poetry in Gallus. First, Ovid uses this pattern referring to Gallus, and it recurs also in Virg. *geo.* 4. 465–466 on Orpheus; at *eccl.* 10. 65–68 it is Gallus who recites vv. 65–68. These hints suggest the possible presence of the *τόπος* in Gallus’ poetry: see BRUGNOLI, G.: *Corneli Galli Fragm. MCr* 18 (1983) 233–236, and DOMENICUCCI, P.: L’elegia di Orfeo nel IV libro delle “Georgiche”. *GIF* 16 (1985) 245.

²³A reading of *eccl.* 1 as a comparison between Theocritean and Virgilian poetics, symbolized by the two characters, has been proposed by GAGLIARDI, P.: *L’eccl. 1 e l’eccl. 10 di Virgilio: considerazioni su un rapporto complesso. Philologus* 157 (2013) 94–96 and 101–102.

²⁴At *eccl.* 3. 8–9, for example, although Virgil closely imitates Theocr. *id.* 5. 41–44, he removes the obscenity (in *novimus et qui te transversa tuentibus hircis, / et quo – sed faciles Nymphae risere – sacello*, “we know who... you, while even the goats / looked shocked – and in a shrine too! But the Nymphs are easy-going, they only smiled at it”, with the ellipse of an indelicate verb after *qui*). In *eccl.* 7 a contrast is developed between a poetics of the beautiful as expressed by Corydon (cfr. vv. 37–38 or 45–48), and a poetics of the ugly, as represented by Thyrsis (vv. 41–43 or 49–52): the undisputed victory of Corydon illustrates the opinion of Virgil.



Caesar perhaps in *ecl.* 5 and certainly in *ecl.* 9). In this way, the *Bucolics* reflect the tendency (or the need) of the poet's contemporaries to deify human figures, in order to entrust to them the expectations and hopes of those difficult years, a need well understood and exploited by the most able politicians of the time.

These innovations Virgil cleverly combines with the most characteristic features of Theocritean bucolic poetry, imitated above all in images, language and style. For this reason we can find references to popular beliefs and superstitions, but they are far more sporadic and generic than in Theocritus, pure and simple markers of the genre, with which Virgil pays a debt to the bucolic tradition. Examples include the negative *omina* of oaks struck by lightning in *ecl.* 1. 16–17, or the voice that fades away at the sight of the wolves in *ecl.* 9. 54. Yet one can well say that Virgil is not very interested in magic, unlike the other Augustan poets.²⁵ Only the second half of *ecl.* 8 (vv. 64–109) is about magic, but the description of the love spell is more a question of Theocritean imitation than the result of a real interest.²⁶ Rather than blessings or curses, however, here the hopes of the sorceress are entrusted to the magic rite.

Blessings and curses in the *Bucolics* are connected not only with the sphere of magic and superstition; sometimes Virgil uses them to express the mood and feelings of his characters, as in the short negative wish addressed by Moeris to the new owner of his land in *ecl.* 9. 6: while he brings kids to him, his hope (expressed in an archaic formula, well suited to the language of the shepherd, *quod nec bene vertat*, “I hope it will go wrong”²⁷) is that the new *possessor* may not enjoy the offering. In his way the victim of land confiscation gives voice to his resentment and anger at his new master.

CURSES AND BLESSINGS ADDRESSED TO REAL PERSONS

Through curses and blessings Virgil expresses also thoughts and needs of another kind, thus transforming the *τόποι* of the Theocritean tradition into original means to depict actuality or to develop a poetic dialogue with his models. In two interesting cases, curses and blessings are juxtaposed by contrast and included in a sphere far removed from the bucolic world and involving contemporary themes and persons. At *ecl.* 7. 21–28, the first exchange in the contest between Corydon and Thyrsis is about the judgment on Codrus. Corydon considers him an almost divine singer, and so he asks the Nymphs to allow him a song like that of Codrus; otherwise, he promises to renounce composing altogether:

*Nymphae, noster amor, Libethrides, aut mihi carmen
quale meo Codro concedite – proxima Phoebi
versibus ille facit – aut, si non possumus omnes,
hic arguta sacra pendebit fistula pinu*

(*ecl.* 7. 21–24)

²⁵Think, for example, of Hor. *iamb.* 5 and *serm.* 1. 8, but also of the elegists: see the noteworthy examples of Tib. 1. 2; Prop. 1. 1. 19–24; 2. 2. 35–38; 3. 6. 25–30; 4. 5; Ov. *amor.* 1. 8.

²⁶Not by chance does the passage contain many literary quotations and references to learned contemporary poetry, and this diminishes the realism and distances the poem from the humble world of Theocritus.

²⁷For the archaic flavour of the phrase, employed in ancient formulae, both legal and religious, see Vergil, *Eclogues*. Ed. by R. COLEMAN. Cambridge 2001⁸, *ad loc.* 257.



“Nymphs of Libethra, whom I love, either grant me a song / such as you gave my Codrus (he makes verses / nearest to Phoebus’s own): or if we’re not all so able, / let my tuneful pipe hang here on the sacred pine.”

His words are overturned by Thyrsis, who wishes Codrus to die with envy, and superstitiously searches a protection from *mala lingua* of his enemy, even if Codrus would address him too much praise for being true:

*Pastores, hederā crescentem ornate poetam,
Arcades, invidia rumpantur ut ilia Codro;
aut, si ultra placitum laudarit, baccare frontem
cingite, ne vati noceat mala lingua futuro*

(*ecl.* 7. 25–28).

“Arcadian Shepherds crown your new-born poet with ivy, / so that Codrus’s heart bursts with envy: / or if he praises me beyond what’s pleasing, circle / my brow with cyclamen, lest his evil tongue harms the bard-to-be.”

The importance granted here by Virgil to superstition resumes a typical Theocritean feature,²⁸ and the extremely colloquial language, unusual in his poetry, is well adapted to the roughness of thought; the negative wish for the rival in 7. 26 and the protection that Thyrsis seeks for himself are not only a concession to certain aspects of Theocritus’ poetry, nor do they only represent Thyrsis’s answer to Corydon. Behind the character of Codrus, who provokes such opposite judgments in the two shepherds, a contemporary poet may perhaps hide,²⁹ and this would seem to reflect the literary polemics and rivalry that were usual in Roman literary circles like that of Pollio, to which Virgil belonged. Thus, the hostile wish may be connected to real contemporary life and be part of a literary discourse external to the text, as in the works of the refined Alexandrian authors.

In the same original way, blessings and curses are linked to another aspect of Virgilian bucolic poetry, the tribute to a powerful protector, also absent in bucolic idylls of Theocritus.³⁰ In *ecl.* 3, the two singers, Damoetas and Menalcas, praise Pollio, the patron of Virgil: it is the first explicit appearance of a contemporary person in the *eclogues* (in *ecl.* 1 Octavian is not clearly named, but only presented as a young god). After exalting Pollio as both an audience for, and an author of, poetry, Damoetas conveys at 3. 88–89 a typical blessing for those who love him. This takes the form of a short wish composed of *adynata* (*Qui te, Pollio, amat, veniat quo te quoque gaudet; / mella fluant illi, ferat et rubus asper amomum*, “Pollio, let him who loves you come

²⁸Cfr. for example Theocr. *id.* 3. 28–30 (ἐγνων πρᾶν, ὅκα μοι, μεμναμένῳ εἰ φιλέεις με, / οὐδὲ τὸ τηλέφιλον ποτεμάξατο τὸ πλατάγημα, / ἀλλ’ αὐτῶς ἀπαλῶ ποτὶ πάχει ἐξεμαράνθη “I learned, while I was wondering if you loved me, not long ago, / the poppy petal did not adhere crushing, / but shrank and shrivelled on the soft of my arm”); Theocr. *id.* 3. 37–38 (ἄλλεται ὀφθαλμός μεν ὁ δεξιός· ἀρά γ’ ἰδησῶ / αὐτάν; “I feel a twitch in my right eye: maybe I’ll see / her?”); Theocr. *id.* 6. 39–40 (Ὡς μὴ βασκάνθῳ δέ, τρίς εἰς ἐμὸν ἔπυσσα κόλπον· / ταῦτα γὰρ ἂ γράϊα με Κοτυτταρίς ἐξεδίδαξε; “As the old Cotytaris taught me, I spit thrice in my breast”).

²⁹Cfr. CUCCHIARELLI, A.: Publio Virgilio Marone, *Le Bucoliche*. Introduzione e commento di Andrea Cucchiarelli. Traduzione di A. Traina. Roma 2012, *ad loc.* 289, who at v. 22, 385, indicates Gallus, followed by GAGLIARDI, P.: Cornelio Gallo nell’*ecl.* 7 di Virgilio. *Prometheus* 42 (2016) 104–105.

³⁰In Theocritus this happens with the encomium of Ptolemy in *id.* 14. 59–64, or with the praises of Hieron and again of Ptolemy in *idd.* 16 e 17, which are all non bucolic poems.



where he also delights in you:³¹ / let honey flow for him, and the bitter briar bear spice”); the model of Theocr. *id.* 5. 124–127 is recognizable:

KO. Ἰμέρα ἀνθ' ὕδατος ρεῖτω γάλα, καὶ τὸ δέ, Κραῖθι,
οἶνω πορφύροις, τὰ δέ τοι σία καρπὸν ἐνείκαι.

ΛΑ. Ρεῖτω χά Συβαρίτις ἐμὴν μέλι, καὶ τὸ πότορθρον
ἀ παῖς ἀνθ' ὕδατος τᾷ κάλπιδι κηρία βάψαι

(*id.* 5. 124–127)

Komata: “May Himera flow, not with water, but with milk: and may you, Crathis, / blush with wine, and let rush bear fruit”. / Lacon: “Let Sybaris spring flow with honey for me, so that / the girl can draw honeycombs instead of water.”

This choice confirms the vocation of Damoetas as faithful follower of Theocritus,³² but at the same time the fabulous tone of these verses seems to anticipate the atmosphere of *ecl.* 4.³³ Perhaps even more interesting is the response of Menalcas (*Qui Bavius non odit, amet tua carmina, Maevi, / atque idem iungat vulpes et mulgeat hircos*, “Let him who doesn’t hate Bavius, love your songs, Maevius, / and let him harness foxes, and milk he-goats”, *ecl.* 3. 90–91), who by contrast expresses a negative wish for the enemies of Pollio, providing for them, also by means of *adynata*, unpleasant or absurd situations like yoking foxes or milking he-goats. The two phrases are not in any ancient proverbs we know, and it seems plausible to suppose that they are Virgilian inventions;³⁴ this would confirm the original characterization of Menalcas, who in this *eclogue* appears independent from Theocritean tradition.³⁵ So the *τόποι* of blessings and curses are not used by Virgil only in accordance with the conventions of the bucolic genre, but – according to his attention to the psychology of his characters – they are useful for refining the representation of the protagonists and the definition of their poetics.³⁶ In this passage, however, the references to Bavius and Maevius are also noteworthy. Behind these names there are undoubtedly contemporary poets, rivals of Pollio’s group, even if their precise identification is elusive.³⁷ In this way, Virgil’s bucolic production appears deeply rooted in the current cultural

³¹ Another reading of this sentence is possible, as Serv. *ad loc.* suggests, affirming that *gaudet* has to be impersonal, and that the meaning must be “come where it delights you also (to have come)”.

³² On this interpretation of the character, cfr. HUBBARD, T. K.: *The Pipes of Pan: Intertextuality and Literary Filiation in the Pastoral Tradition from Theocritus to Milton*. Ann Arbor 1998, 68, and HUBBARD, T. K.: Allusive Artistry and Virgil’s Revisionary Program: Eclogues 1–3. In VOLK, K. (ed.): *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies. Virgil’s Eclogues*, Oxford – New York 2008 (= MD 34 [1995] 37–67) 101; VAN SICKLE, J.: *Poesia e potere. Il mito Virgilio*. Bari 1986, 41–42.

³³ On the relationship between *eccl.* 3 and 4, cfr. SEGAL, C.: Pastoral Realism and the Golden Age: Correspondence and Contrast between Virgil’s Third and Fourth Eclogue. In SEGAL, C.: *Poetry and Myth in Ancient Pastoral*. Princeton 1981, 235–264 (= *Philologus* 121 [1977] 158–163).

³⁴ Cfr. *Virgil, Eclogues*. With an introduction and commentary by W. V. CLAUSEN. Oxford 1994, *ad loc.* 113; COLEMAN (n. 27) *ad loc.* 123; CUCCHIARELLI (n. 29) *ad loc.* 231.

³⁵ A. LA PENNA (Lettura della terza bucolica. In GIGANTE, M. [ed.]: *Lecturae Vergilianae* I. Napoli 1981, 133–134) affirms that, from the beginning, even in his use of more refined language, Menalcas distinguishes himself from Damoetas. E. KARAKASIS (*Song Exchange in Roman Pastoral*. Bertislin – New York 2011, 94–95) notes the unusual features in Menalcas’ language also from a metrical point of view. Cfr. also FARRELL, J.: Literary Allusion and Cultural Poetics in Virgil’s Third Eclogue. *Vergilius* 38 (1992) 68, and CUCCHIARELLI (n. 29) 203.

³⁶ According to FARRELL (n. 35) 68, the poetics of Theocritus and Virgil can be seen reflected in Damoetas and Menalcas respectively. Cfr. also CUCCHIARELLI (n. 29) 203.

³⁷ Cfr. CUCCHIARELLI (n. 29) *ad loc.* 230–231.



environment and involved in debates on literary and poetic questions:³⁸ positive or negative wishes also contribute to this and help to ‘bucolicize’ aspects of contemporary cultural life.

The technique of juxtaposing contrasting volitive elements carries a different perspective in the short wish of *ecl.* 9. 30–31:

*sic tua Cyrneas fugiant examina taxos,
sic cytiso pastae distendant ubera vaccae*

“so may your bees flee Corsican yews, / and your cows browse clover, and swell their udders.”

This takes the traditional form, perhaps of popular derivation,³⁹ of the auspicious *sic*,⁴⁰ and it is noteworthy the different tone from the solemn wish of 9. 27–29:

*Vare tuum nomen, superet modo Mantua nobis,
Mantua vae miserae nimium vicina Cremonae,
cantantes sublime ferent ad sidera cycni*

“Varus, singing swans will bear your name to the stars above us, / if only Mantua is left to us, / Mantua, alas, too near to wretched Cremona.”

Here, a high fame, guaranteed by poetry, is promised to Varus, if only Mantua escapes from land-confiscations. The contrast in tone between great poetry, symbolized by the *cycni*, and the humble bucolic features of the following verses (honey not contaminated by yews, abundant milk)⁴¹ highlights not only the contemporary figure of Varus but above all the dramatic situation of confiscations, that are the real poetic and emotional focus of the passage (note the pathos of 9. 28, underlined by *vae*). In comparison, the wish of 9. 30–31 is no more than a means to ‘bucolicize’ the context.

CURSES AND BLESSINGS IN THE DIALOGUE WITH THEOCRITAN MODELS

The same form, with the auspicious *sic* and the subjunctive, occurs in the wish to Arethusa at *ecl.* 10. 4–5:

*sic tibi, cum fluctus subterlabere Sicanos,
Doris amara suam non intermisceat undam*

“so may bitter Doris not intermingle her stream / with yours, when you glide beneath Sicilian waves.”

This too exemplifies Virgil’s ability to adapt the *τόπος* of wish to original contexts and themes, detached from bucolic conventions. Here the wish is addressed to a deity with a request for assistance. This resembles Theocr. *id.* 7. 106–114,⁴² where, however, we find a humorous

³⁸So CUCCHIARELLI (n. 29) 202; cfr. also KARAKASIS (n. 35) 105.

³⁹Cfr. CLAUSEN (n. 34) *ad loc.* 276.

⁴⁰This is a *τόπος* in Latin poetry: cfr. for example Catull. 17. 5; Hor. *carm.* 1. 3. 1; Tib. 2. 5. 121; Prop. 3. 6. 2; Ov. *Her.* 4. 169–174.

⁴¹It must be said that vv. 30–31 have been understood (by COLEMAN [n. 27], *ad v.* 30, 263) as the continuation of the previous passage, namely, as a part of Menalcas’ verses quoted by Moeris, instead of Lycidas’ speech.

⁴²See *supra*, 3–4.



representation of a popular way of understanding the relationship with the divine, expressed in a manner appropriate to the rough figure of Pan. In Virgil, there is rather an echo of the Roman religious mentality, based on the contractual logic of *do ut des*.⁴³ Even the tone is different from Theocritus: explicit threat is missing⁴⁴ and the language is elevated, adapting itself to the mythological figure of Arethusa, who, transformed into a river, crosses the sea without her waters becoming salty. Two unusual compound verbs, *subterlabere* and *intermisceat*, and the erudite geographic epithet *Sicanos*⁴⁵ embellish the passage. The stylistic elegance, however, is not an end in itself but is rather justified both as a tribute to the dedicatee Gallus, a learned poet, and as anticipation of the complex literary dialogue that will be played out in the eclogue, finely synthesized in the myth of Arethusa, the Arcadian Nymph who comes to Syracuse. In the eclogue, in fact, Virgil will claim his own originality by comparison with the great Theocritean model, placing Gallus in Arcadia, the mythical homeland of the bucolic genre, and making him a ‘new Daphnis’, parallel to the Theocritean Daphnis who, originating in Sicily, creates the bucolic tradition in Theocritus 1.⁴⁶ So the path of the new Daphnis, which at the end of the Virgilian *liber* brings bucolic poetry back to its mythical origins, beyond its Theocritean model,⁴⁷ is the opposite of Arethusa’s journey, which moves that genre from Arcadia to Syracuse. It is a good example of Virgil’s skill in using a typical feature of the popular attitude towards divinity in a very different manner from Theocritus. No longer a realistic or playful trait, it is rather the means of a refined poetic dialogue in which each reference to the bucolic world, even if only formal, is lost.

This is not the only case in which Virgil, in comparison to Theocritus, transforms the *τόπος* of wish in order to express vastly different ideas and feelings. Highlighting his distance from his model, he sometimes employs it in an easily recognizable way, so that the reader can notice the differences when the texts are compared. In *eccl.* 10, the joking threat to Pan in Theocr. *id.* 7. 106–114⁴⁸ explicitly recurs in the last words of Gallus (10. 64–68):

*Non illum nostri possunt mutare labores
nec si frigoribus mediis Hebrumque bibamus
Sithoniasque nives hiemis subeamus aquosae,
nec si, cum moriens alta liber aret in ulmo,
Aethiopum versemus ovis sub sidere Cancri*

“our labours cannot change that god, / not even though in winter frosts we drink the Hebrus / and brave the Thracian snows and wintry sleet, / not even though, when the dying bark withers on the lofty elm, / we drive to and fro the Ethiopians’ sheep beneath the star of Cancer.”

⁴³Cfr. GAGLIARDI, P.: *Commento alla decima ecloga di Virgilio* [Spudasmata 161]. Hildesheim – Zürich – New York 2014, ad v. 4, 96.

⁴⁴According to COLEMAN (n. 27) ad v. 4, 276 “perhaps even a hint of a threat” can be heard in *sic*.

⁴⁵On these lexical peculiarities of the passage see GAGLIARDI (n. 43), *ad loc.* 95–98.

⁴⁶On the “daphnidization” of Gallus (the word is used by CONTE, G. B.: *Virgilio. Il genere e i suoi confini*. Milano 1984, 20) cfr. GAGLIARDI, P.: Dafni e Gallo nell’*eccl.* 10 di Virgilio. *Antike und Abendland* 57 (2011) 56–73.

⁴⁷On the meaning of Arcadia in the eclogue, cfr. GAGLIARDI, P.: Virgilio e l’Arcadia nell’*eccl.* 10. *Eirene* 50 (2014) 130–146.

⁴⁸See *supra*, 3–4.



In the Virgilian verses, however, the context is dramatic, since the *τόπος* of the ‘ends of the world’ allows the unhappy lover to expose the cruelty of the god of Love, who is not moved even in the face of the most extreme suffering of lovers. In Virgil’s re-working, the Theocritean passage does not even remotely resemble a curse. It rather has the flavour of despair, in line with Gallus’ mood, maintaining and even enhancing the elevated style with learned geographical references.⁴⁹

An interesting *locus* is *ecl.* 8. 52–58:

*Nunc et ovis ultro fugiat lupus, aurea durae
mala ferant quercus, narcisso florebat alnus,
pinguia corticibus sudent electra myricae,
certent et cycnis ululae, sit Tityrus Orpheus,
Orpheus in silvis, inter delphinas Arion.*

“Now let the wolf itself run from the sheep, let tough oaks / bear golden apples, let alders flower with narcissus, / let tamarisks drip thick amber from their bark, / let shriek-owls vie with swans, let Tityrus be an Orpheus, / – an Orpheus in the woods, an Arion among the dolphins –.”

The comparison with one of the most remarkable passages in Theocritus, *id.* 1. 132–136, is unavoidable:

*Nῦν ἴα μὲν φορέοιτε βάτοι, φορέοιτε δ’ ἄκανθαι,
ἀ δὲ καλὰ νάρκισσος ἐπ’ ἀρκεύθοισι κομάσαι,
πάντα δ’ ἄναλλα γένοιτο, καὶ ἅ πίτυς ὄχνας ἐνείκαι,
Δάφνης ἐπεὶ θνάσκει, καὶ τὰς κύνας ὦλαφος ἔλκοι,
κῆξ ὀρέων τοῖ σκῶπες ἀηδόσι γαρύσαιντο*

“Now you, thorns and brambles, bear violets, / and let the lovely narcissus flower on the juniper / and let all things run contrary, and let the pine tree sprout pears, / since Daphnis dies, and let hounds be torn by stags / and let nightingale cry out to owls from the hill.”

The similarity of situation (the last words of a dying person) is only apparent, since Daphnis in Theocritus is dying by the will of Aphrodite, and the prediction of natural upheaval is in line with his ancient characterization as a god of vegetation, whose death represents that of plants and fruits. The Virgilian shepherd, on the other hand, spontaneously decides to die, and the *adynaton* in his words reflects the upheaval of his soul and the absurd (in his eyes) indifference of nature and gods to his betrayal by his beloved girl, who, after having sworn loyalty to him, is about to marry another man. Virgil does not quote Theocritus literally; his images are varied, and he enriches the extreme simplicity of Theocritus’ words with impressive epithets. For example, *aurea durae* in *ecl.* 8. 52 contrasts the beauty of fruits with the rough nature of oaks, while *pinguia* in 8. 54 denotes the density of precious amber compared to the humble tamarisk. Further, the reference to song in the concluding two lines is not limited to the birds (*σκῶπες* and *ἀηδόνες*), that symbolize it both positively and negatively in Theocritus. Rather, Virgil expands it, with a meaningful antonomasia, to the unknown Tityrus, Orpheus, and Arion. The

⁴⁹This allusion to Theocr. *id.* 7. 106–114 is also important for the relationship that these Virgilian verses create with *ecl.* 1. 59–66, so that the *liber* ends in an ideal *Ringkomposition*, reaffirming the affinities between Gallus and Meliboeus, often suggested in the last eclogue: on this point, see GAGLIARDI, P.: Virg. *Ecl.* X, 64–68 e la fine delle *Bucoliche*. *Emerita* 83 (2015) 289–307.



careful Theocritean arrangement of the *cola* in half lines or whole verses is distorted by Virgil with the *enjambement* at 8. 52–53, and the random succession of images creates a powerful *κλίμαξ* culminating at 8. 58 (*omnia vel medium fiat mare*, “be the whole earth turned to mid-ocean”) into the vision of all things transformed into sea, in which the shepherd is about to throw himself. If at 8. 58 there is an allusion to Theocr. *id.* 1. 134 (πάντα δ’ ἀναλλὰ γένοιτο, “all things run contrary”),⁵⁰ it should be read as an amplification: Virgil modifies the generic phrase in Theocritus and presents an apocalyptic vision of all of nature transformed into sea, at the acme of the upheaval imagined by the dying shepherd. The presence of the sea, an element completely unrelated to the bucolic world, can be traced back – as I think – to Archilochus’s renowned *adynaton*, fr. 122. 6–9 W.:

Μηδεῖς ἔθ’ ὕμέων εἰσορέων θαναμαζέτω,
μηδ’ ἐὰν δελφῖσι θῆρες ἀνταμείψωνται νομόν
ἐνάλιον καὶ σφιν θαλάσσης ἡχέεντα κύματα
φίλτερ’ ἡπείρου γένηται, τοῖσι δ’ ἦ δύνηιν ὄρος

“May none of you who see this be surprised / when we see forest beasts taking turns in the salted field / with dolphins, when the echoing waves of the sea become / dearer to them than the sand, and the dolphins love the wooded glen.”

In this case, we would have a learned contamination of two models, one taken from the bucolic tradition, the other employed because of its importance for the *adynaton*. In any case, what remains undisputed is the ability of the Latin poet to use the figure of *adynaton*, already exploited by Theocr. *id.* 1. 132–136, in a psychological sense. In his rewriting, in fact, the vision of the world overturned is nothing but the reflection of the shepherd’s anguish and despair: he can no longer understand the meaning and logic of things, and in his bewilderment he sees the entire world falling with him. This is another great glimpse of the poet’s psychological penetration and of the attention that he devotes to representing his characters and their feelings.

BLESSINGS IN *ECL.* 4 AND 5

The image of an overturned world, however, does not always express a tragic and painful point of view in the *Eclogues*: it can also be the effect of divine blessing or the fulfillment of long-awaited expectations and hopes. So the things that mix and overlap in a positive sense signal, for example, the fulfillment of ancient prophecies that at the birth of the blessed *puer* give rise to a new golden age in *ecl.* 4, a poem pervaded by this almost messianic expectation. Here, the *adynata* (particularly remarkable at vv. 18–25, 28–30, 41–45) seem to become real, and the poet’s oracular tone shows them already in place, giving the verses the flavour of a miracle.⁵¹ All the *τόποι* of the *adynaton* that accompany the growth of the *puer* are becoming more and more

⁵⁰Today, scholars do not think that Virgil read ἐναλλὰ instead of ἀναλλὰ at Theocr. *id.* 1. 134, as J. CONINGTON – H. NETTLESHIP (*The Works of Virgil with a Commentary*. Vol. I: *Eclogues*. Fifth edition revised by F. Haverfield, with a new general introduction by Ph. Hardie and an introduction to the *Eclogues* by B. W. Breed. Exeter 2007, *ad loc.* 99) suggested (*contra*, cfr. COLEMAN [n. 27] *ad loc.* 242; CLAUSEN [n. 34] *ad loc.* 254); CUCCHIARELLI (n. 29) *ad loc.* 410, supposes that Virgil intentionally changes the Theocritean phrase.

⁵¹On the close link between *adynaton* and oracular language see ROWE (n. 8) 394, and GUIDORIZZI (n. 8) 20.



extraordinary, involving the whole of nature and finally erasing all traces of the mankind's *prisca fraus*. In this eclogue, the *τόπος* of blessing extends to the entire world that starts to regenerate itself, and the poet is able to re-elaborate a convention of bucolic poetry in order to express feelings and expectations that become ever stronger in the dramatic years in which he lives.

All these themes have in *ecl.* 4 the most appropriate place and the highest tone, but their importance impels Virgil to continue his treatment of them also in the next eclogue, the fifth, in which the palingenesis of the world is the effect not of a birth but rather of Daphnis' death, followed by deification, in a path that includes first despair and then joy. At the death of the legendary shepherd, nature reacts with an astonished stillness that distorts its laws (animals refuse food, lions cry, mountains and woods echo their lament, only sterile plants are born, 5. 24–28 and 35–39), but the prodigious events are reversed in a positive direction when Daphnis is received in heaven (5. 58–64). Then, in a new Golden Age no different from the scenario in *ecl.* 4, the new god is blessed by shepherds who invoke his protection in the language of ritual (*sis bonus o felixque tuis*, “o may you be good and propitious to your people”, 5. 65) and promise him vows. As in *ecl.* 4, the usual features of blessings are adapted to themes of great and painful actuality.

At 5. 76–78 (*dum iuga montis aper, fluvios dum piscis amabit / dumque thymo pascentur apes, dum rore cicadae, / semper honos nomenque tuum laudesque manebunt*, “as long as the boar will love the mountain ridge, the fish the stream, / as long as the bees will browse the thyme, the cicadas the dew, / your honour, name, and praise will always remain”) it is interesting to note the series of images that overturn the figure of an *adynaton* in order to express the idea of immutability. Instead of the change – sometimes positive but more often negative – detailed in the *adynata* that convey the absurdity of an overturned world or, alternatively, the dream of a mythical Golden Age, here the eternal devotion to Daphnis is affirmed through unchangeable features. So, if the *adynaton* often expresses the idea of ‘never’, its opposite underlines the concept of ‘always’.

BLESSINGS (AND THEIR REVERSE) IN *ECL.* 1

A wonderful instance of a blessing in form of an *adynaton* occurs in the words of Tityrus at *ecl.* 1. 59–66, where, however, the immediate overturning of the *τόπος* by Meliboeus clearly reveals the deep ambiguity of the *Weltanschauung* in the *Bucolics*. If, in fact, Tityrus has received from the young *deus* the chance of keeping his possessions and continuing his usual life, Meliboeus, like so many others, is driven out of his lands as a result of confiscations. His words in the whole eclogue echo his nostalgia and give voice to the pain of the new exiles, who foresee a destiny of wandering and deprivation. So when Tityrus expresses his eternal gratitude for the god who allows him to remain on his land (1. 59–63), he chooses the images and the classic details of the *adynaton* (deers grazing in the sky and fishes landing on dry land):

*Ante leves ergo pascentur in aethere cervi
et freta destituent nudos in litore piscis,
ante pererratis amborum finibus exul
aut Ararim Parthus bibet aut Germania Tigrim,
quam nostro illius labatur pectore vultus*



So the swift deer will sooner feed on air, / and the seas leave the fish naked on shore, / or the Parthian drink the Arar, the German the Tigris, / both in exile wandering each other's frontiers, / than that gaze of his will fade from my mind.

At the same time, he adds to them another *τόπος* that is more learned, that of the 'boundaries of the world', where East and West exchange places imagining of the exiles who drink in rivers very far from their homeland.⁵² Only when all of this happens, says Tityrus, will he be able to erase from his memory the countenance of his benefactor. The *adynaton* here is useful for affirming the eternal duration of memory and gratitude, recalling the opposite idea of the absurd and the impossible.

Meliboeus's reply (l. 64–66) is quite unexpected and most impressive:

*At nos hinc alii sitientis ibimus Afros,
pars Scythiam et rapidum cretae uenimus Oaxen
et penitus toto divisos orbe Britannos*

"But we will go hence, some to the thirsty Africans, others to Scythia and to the chalk-snatching Oaxes / and to the Britons wholly separated from all the world."

Reworking Tityrus' *τόποι*, Meliboeus overturns the sense and the spirit of his words and gives them a great dramatic power and concreteness. In fact, what seems absurd from Tityrus' perspective is translated into an imminent reality for Meliboeus and for his companions in misfortune, who will soon actually be likely to find themselves in very distant countries. Opposing the unique condition of Tityrus to the common situation of so many dispossessed (*nos alii . . . pars*),⁵³ Meliboeus bitterly invokes only the 'ends of the world', particularizing the idea so as to include the four extreme points of the earth (Africa in the South, Scythia in the North, the river Oaxes in the East,⁵⁴ and Britain in the West), whereas Tityrus stops with the East (Parthians and Tigris) and the West (Germans and Arar).⁵⁵ There is no place for *adynata* in Meliboeus' words, for he speaks of concrete possibilities, of a reality that the exiles could face in the very near future. The reversal of Tityrus's blessing does not become a curse, but is only the painful observation of a reality accepted with resignation. The pathetic effect is even more pronounced, because the comments are not expressed by the character but are entrusted to the sensitivity and reflection of the reader.

The importance of this passage is easily deduced when it re-appears in subsequent eclogues, in tones that vary with the context and with a point of view that is different in the two halves of the poem. So in the *adynaton* at *ecl.* 5, a normal situation is represented in order to affirm the

⁵²The phrase 'to drink the water of a river' means 'to live near the banks of a river': cfr. *Il.* 2. 825; *Aen.* 7. 715; *Hor. carm.* 2. 10. 1; 2. 20. 20; 4. 15. 21.

⁵³Even if Tityrus uses the plural (*nostro*) at v. 63, this does not equate his condition with that of many dispossessed: from the beginning, the poet has underlined this contrast with the refined chiasmus *tu . . . nos . . . nos . . . tu* at vv. 1–5.

⁵⁴It is difficult to identify this river exactly, and many proposals have been made: cfr. WELLESLEY, K.: Virgil's Araxes. *CPh* 63 (1968) 139–141; CLAUSEN (n. 34) *ad loc.* 56; COLEMAN (n. 27) *ad loc.* 86; CUCCHIARELLI (n. 29) *ad loc.* 163. In any case, it obviously is an Eastern river, as CLAUSEN (n. 34) *ibidem*, rightly notes.

⁵⁵Of course, these verses give the poet the opportunity to show his geographical erudition, following Alexandrian models such as Euphron (cfr. WATSON, L. C.: Cinna and Euphron. *SIFC* 54 [1982] 100–101) and Parthenius (cfr. R. SCARCIA in *Enc. Virg.* III (1987) s. v. *Partenio*, 988).



idea of ‘always’ through the immutability of nature, and the attitude is positive, as it is in the words of Tityrus. In this way, the first half of the poem concludes with hope and somehow dispels the aura of anguish and regret created by the shadow of confiscations in *ecl.* 1. After the suffering evoked by the figure and the story of Meliboeus in the first eclogue and by the death of Daphnis at the beginning of *ecl.* 5, the resurrection of the mythical shepherd and the shepherds’ eternal devotion for him forecast a new and purified world. In the second half of the collection, however, Virgil’s point of view becomes much darker,⁵⁶ and many features already present in the first eclogues are reworked in a negative way: think of the confiscations that in *ecl.* 9 inflict pain on all the characters and bring the song to an end, or of the ‘new Daphnis’ of *ecl.* 10, namely, Gallus dying for pain, and finding no salvation in the bucolic world. In this changed perspective, there is no room for blessings, and it is not by chance that the figure of *adynaton*, so often employed in order to express these blessings, is reverted in a negative direction and gives voice to the desperation of the suicidal shepherd in *ecl.* 8 and to the painful love of Gallus in *ecl.* 10.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the use of blessings and curses, which Virgil inherits from Theocritus as bucolic conventions, is thoroughly reworked in his collection, according to the new needs and features of his poetry. Maintaining a formal relationship with the models and adapting these *τόποι* to the language of the shepherds, he expresses through them different feelings and spiritual needs and shows how his pastoral departs from tradition. So curses and blessings are employed in a poetic dialogue with Theocritus (*ecl.* 1. 8 and 10), but they also underline the elements of actuality in Virgil’s work: this allows them to serve as an homage to powerful protectors (Octavian in *ecl.* 1, Pollio in *ecl.* 8, Varus in *ecl.* 9), and they also describe the desired palingenesis of a distorted and degraded world (*ecl.* 4 and 5). Perhaps even more remarkable is the use of these formulas to represent the psychology of the characters, giving voice to their innermost feelings and to their partial or upset vision of the world (*ecl.* 1, 8, 10). The frequent use of *adynaton* gives a peculiar charm to curses and blessings, which receive a vague, but no less impressive tone.

Virgil’s use of curses and blessings does not stop with the *Eclogues*. In the *Georgics* and the *Aeneid*, as he continues to exploit the possibilities offered by these *τόποι*, he will use them again for portraying his characters and for conveying a world view. Great elegance can be the result, as in the *laudes vitae rusticae* at *geo.* 2. 458–540, where the idealized tones of *ecl.* 4 seem to be echoed.⁵⁷ Or great power can accrue, as in *auri sacra fames* (“accursed hunger for gold”) at *Aen.* 3. 56–57, or when Dido curses Aeneas in *Aen.* 4. 607–629. Of course, the tone, and even the language, are different; for example, the *adynata* – that are so prominent the *Eclogues* – will no longer have the same importance in the more concrete world of the *Georgics* or in the tragedies

⁵⁶Cfr. OTIS, B.: *Virgil. A Study in Civilized Poetry*. Oxford 1964, 130–131.

⁵⁷In *geo.* 2. 483–489, toward the end of the book, the poet imagines a ‘bucolic’ style of life and poetry. For the importance of the *Bucolics* for these lines, cfr. BARCHIESI, A.: Lettura del secondo libro delle *Georgiche*. In GIGANTE, M. (ed.): *Lecturae Vergilianae* II. Napoli 1982, 57. Moreover, we should not forget that the *Georgics* close with the quotation of the first verse of *ecl.* 1. Even in the *Aeneid* the humble life of Evander and his Arcades is described in tones not far from the eclogues.



of the *Aeneid*.⁵⁸ Yet the memory of the first, great poetry of the *Bucolics* will continue to influence Virgilian writing⁵⁹ and will confirm the fundamental importance of the *Bucolics* in Virgil's life and poetry, enabling us to appreciate how much, for the rest of his life, this work continued to influence his spirituality and his vision of the world.

⁵⁸The normal usage of the *adynaton* in low poetic genres and its association with folkloric and magic topics are perhaps due to the folk origin of this figure (affirmed by DUTOIT [n. 8] 50–52), or to its close link to proverbs (ROWE [n. 8] *passim* and mainly 391–395). When the *adynaton* is used (rarely) in epic, it occurs in speeches of the characters, not in the high style of the author: cfr. ROWE (n. 8) 393–394.

⁵⁹See for example the blessing of Aeneas to Dido at *Aen.* 1. 607–610 (*In freta dum fluvii current, dum montibus umbrae / lustrabunt convexa, polus dum sidera pascet, / semper honos nomenque tuum laudesque manebunt, / quo me cumque vocant terrae*, “O, while the rivers run / to mingle with the sea, while shadows pass / along yon rounded hills, and while from heaven's unextinguished fire / feed the stars, so long your glorious name, / your place illustrious and your virtue's praise, / abide undimmed, wherever my fate calls me”). Here, the *adynaton* is reversed in order to express the idea of ‘always’, as in *eccl.* 5. 76–78: cfr. JANKO, R.: Vergil, *Aeneid* 1.607–9 and Midas Epitaph. CQ 38 (1988) 259.

