

1. INTRODUCTION: *Onomatologia*

In Virgil's poetry, *nomina* are often *omina*: when Virgil describes Dido as *errans*, "wandering," he is, as Ralph Hexter has reminded us, not only invoking one of his own favorite themes—exile—but also helping Dido fulfill, on the level of image and destiny, the fate inscribed in her Semitic name, *ndd*, the one who wanders. In Virgil's poetry, too, *nomina* also form rococo structures: as Richard Thomas and Nicholas Horsfall have emphasized, in the *Georgics*, Virgil emblazons his patron in symmetrical positions in each book; perhaps this was meant to keep Maecenas' name at the top of a column, but who knows? In the next twenty minutes, I will engage in an experiment that I call *onomatologia*, "telling stories through names," using, as a case-study, Virgil's first *Eclogue*.

Taking step from the recent word-play research of Fred Ahl, Jim O'Hara, and others, aim to show that Virgil's first three character-names—Tityrus, Amaryllis, Meliboeus—are what linguists like to call "talking, or, speaking, names," that is, names that *do* things, that *mean* something, and not only as inert identifiers. In particular, I aim to show that these names do three particular things: 1) that they actively engage with the plot and moral debates of the first *Eclogue*; 2) that they adumbrate certain themes—shadows, exile, compassion, and conquest—that are at the center of Virgil's career-long interests; and 3) that they play a role in structuring not only the *Eclogues*, but also the *Georgics* and the *Aeneid*.

At best, you'll walk away from this paper more convinced of what Klingner termed *die Einheit des Lebenswerkes*, "the unity of Virgil's life's-work;" at the very least, and more likely, you will walk away knowing a bit more about the first *Eclogue* and some odd etymologies that you can pull out of a hat at tonight's parties. If my method seems to bear an uncanny resemblance to the onomastic allegories of Servius, Fulgentius, or the *Vitae*, this is by intention: as they and Varro knew, there can be a great deal in a name. I'll begin with an extended treatment of *Eclogue* 1, and then make some brief suggestions regarding the *Georgics* and, very much more tentatively, and only if you all promise not to call the men in the white coats, the *Aeneid*.

2. AMARYLLIS

I begin at the beginning, with a poem we all know well, Virgil's first *Eclogue*, which tells the story of Meliboeus, exiled from the bucolic world, and Tityrus, who will remain within it. Meliboeus begins:

<i>Tityre, tu patulae recubans sub tegmine fagi siluestrem tenui Musam meditaris auena; nos patriae finis et dulcia linquimus arua. nos patriam fugimus; tu, Tityre, lentus in umbra formosam resonare doces Amaryllida silvas.</i>	Tityrus, you, resting under roof of spreading beech, Meditate the woodland Muse on slender reed; We our country's boundaries leave behind, and the sweet fields, We our country flee; you, Tityrus, pliant in the shade, Teach the woods to re-echo 'lovely Amaryllis.'
---	---

The critical debate over this *Eclogue* resembles that over the *Aeneid*: is it the happiness of the victor, or the sadness of the vanquished, that has the most weight? The question can be redescribed in the terms of that bucolic, and Virgilian, key-word, that we have all spent a great deal of time, I am sure, meditating: *umbra*, "shade." When the poem begins, *umbra* is a symbol of Tityrus' pastoral bliss, the defining condition of Tityrus' classroom of Amaryllis-resonating trees, of pastoral as it might have been and as, good students of bucolic, we might have expected it to be. But *umbræ* will also be the first *Eclogue*'s last word, this time, far more ambivalently,

marking the eminent departure of Meliboeus on his dark and foreign exile. Finally, *umbræ* as hostile silencers of song and stillers of fertility will be the closing symbol of the book of *Eclogues* as a whole, as we leave behind *umbræ* “dangerous for singers, dangerous for the junipers, and *umbræ* also bring harm to fruits.” *Umbra* cannot be simply good or bad, here, but may be a symbol for what Paul Alpers and Kathryn Gutzwiller, two recent scholars of the *Eclogues*, have called Virgil’s emphasis on “pastoral suspension” and the “elusive balance” of joy and sorrow.

Amaryllis, the first of the “speaking names” I’d like to explore, has a role to play in this balance. She arrives in the fifth line, in a phrase typically Virgilian in its catachresis, perhaps the first instance of what Agrippa termed Virgil’s *cacozelia*, the poet’s unnatural use of language. For *resonare*, as Clausen noted, is not meant to be transitive, and is not otherwise so in the *Eclogues*. The word’s oddness inspired a clarifying, and banalizing comment, from our colleague, Maurus Servius Honoratus [HANDOUT], and a rather richer reflection in the 1608 commentary of Juan Luis de la Cerda, who, having missed the opportunity when writing on the *Eclogues*, returns to the question in the *Georgics*: “Look,” he writes on *Georgics* 3.334, “at this wonderful turn of phrase (*flexum mirum orationis*)! Earlier, the poet had said that rocks cast shadows on the grove, now, inversely, the grove casts the shadows. Similarly, shores echo halcyons, thistles the thistle-finch, the woods Amaryllis; inversely, the halcyon echoes the shore, the thistle-finch the thistles, Amaryllis the woods.”

De la Cerda’s note points us to the first *Eclogue*’s back-story: while Tityrus was pining away, love-sick and with no *cura peculi*, “no care for his *peculium*,” Meliboeus had marveled at Amaryllis: “How you called out, sad, to the gods...Tityrus was gone, and you, Tityrus, the pines, fountains, and trees themselves called out.” As the symmetry of these lines suggests, Amaryllis had called out Tityrus (*vocares*), so the trees had called back Tityrus (*vocabant*). If we restate the main action of Meliboeus’ first stanza as “Tityrus, you teach the trees to echo Amaryllis” and restate the main action of his later stanza as “Amaryllis, your calling caused the trees to call out Tityrus” then we realize that part of the joy of pastoral is the joy of the echo-chamber: you get to hear what you yourself say, and you yourself say what you hear, in an, ideally, unbroken cycle of frictionless exchange. This is related to what Mark Payne and Brian Breed have seen as the *Eclogues*’ obsession with fiction and textuality: if Amaryllis is only the projection of Tityrus, then could not Tityrus be projection of Amaryllis, and so on and so on?

That Amaryllis should be involved in such a *flexus mirus* of echoing names, and of a happy kind of balance or suspension, may, perhaps, be hinted at by her name. Amaryllis is, as Gow noted vis-à-vis Theocritus’ third *Idyll*, derived from Greek ἀμαρύσσω, “to shine, or shimmer,” used of stolen glances and flowering fields. Amaryllis is, then, the muted, more sparsely illuminated, counterpart to that other bucolic name, *Aegle*, meaning “blindingly bright light.” Remember that Meliboeus paints Tityrus as *lentus in umbra*, “pliant in the shade,” as he teaches the trees the Amaryllis-song, and recall that Tityrus is in the shade, *in umbra*, because, as the poem’s first line describes it, he is “couched under a roof of spreading beech.” Why is this “shade” not dangerous to his song, and to the trees that are to carry it? The answer: Amaryllis, the semi-light that breaks through the trees, the perfect balance, suspension, or equilibrium point, if you will, of light and dark. Amaryllis represents everything that humanist and humanizing critics like Alpers and Gutzwiller would like to see as at the thematic center of Virgil’s *Eclogues*, leaving us with the confidence that, whatever life’s sorrows, a beautiful and classical balance can, and perhaps has been, achieved, if not by all, then at least by some, if not in fact, then at least in fiction.