

Amant Alterna Camenae: Elegiac Influence in Vergil's Eclogue 3

Eclogue 3 is the first amoebaeon song contest in the *Eclogues* and is modeled on similar contests in Theocritus, including *Idylls* 4, 5, 7, and the pseudo-Theocritean *Idyll* 8 (which Vergil probably regarded as genuine: Gow 1950, Gutzwiller 1996). Oksanish 2017 has argued recently that the rustic qualities of *Eclogue 3* and its reference to “alternating” verses (*alternis dicetis: amant alterna Camenae*, 59) align it with contemporary discussions of alternating Fescennine verses and their role in Roman literary history. It is true, as Oksanish discusses, that early Italian proto-drama is Vergil’s explicit concern in *Georgics* 2.380–396 and that Vergil’s portrayal of rusticity in *Eclogue 3* evinces the same insecurity about early Roman literature as we see in Horace’s discussion of Fescennine verses (*versibus alternis*, *Ep.* 2.1.139–155) and the Saturnian meter (156–60). But by focusing on “amoebaeon” as the meaning of *alterna* in *Eclogue 3*, Oksanish overlooks the generic influence of elegy, which the elegists characterize as *alternus* because of its alternating verse lengths (Sharrock 1990: e.g. *Ov. Trist.* 3.1.11; cf. Martorana 2020). Henkel 2023 has argued that Gallan love elegy is an important influence on Vergil not just in *Eclogue 6* and 10, but also in *Eclogue 1* and throughout the book; I argue that *Eclogue 3* can be read similarly as a dialogue between two competing visions of pastoral: one that closely imitates Theocritus, represented by Damoetas, and one heavily influenced by Callimachean and Gallan elegy, represented by Menalcas. The very provenance of Menalcas suggests such a reading, since he appears first in pastoral in *Idyll 8*, where a hexameter frame introduces a contest that Menalcas and Daphnis sing in amoebaeon elegiac couplets. Indeed, the judge’s instruction that Menalcas and Damoetas sing *alterna* in *Eclogue 3* comes precisely where Menalcas and Daphnis switch to couplets in *Idyll 8*.

Where other scholars have argued that the singers of *Eclogue 3* are more rustic than its judge Palaemon, I argue that one singer is notably more rustic than the other (as in Theocritus *Idylls 4* and *7*) and that Damoetas's relative rusticity aligns him more closely with the bucolic tradition (like Lycidas in *Idyll 7*) while Menalcas's relative sophistication aligns him both with contemporary poetics (like the author figure Simichidas in *Idyll 7*) and with the urbane values of Roman love elegy. For reasons of time, I focus not on the narrative frame but on the singers' amoebaeon songs themselves, which show a strong contrast in the relative strength of each singer's erotic attachments. As appropriate to bucolic, Damoetas casts himself into the role of Polyphemus from *Idyll 11*, celebrating his love for Galatea and the rustic gifts he brings her (64–65, 68–69); but when Galatea seems to betray her promises (72–73), Damoetas contemplates the love of Phyllis (76–77) and Amaryllis (80–81) just as Polyphemus swore to find “another and prettier Galatea” in *Idyll 11* (*Id.* 11.72–76). In contrast to this quasi-Epicurean quietude about love, Menalcas shows an erotic obsession strongly characteristic of Roman love elegy. Menalcas loves a boy Amyntas, just like the author figure Simichidas does in *Idyll 7* (see Hunter ad *Id.* 7.2, 132). Menalcas spends time and gifts on the boy (66–67, 70–71) but is spurned (74–75); yet, like the elegiac lover—and in strong contrast to the easy lover of bucolic—Menalcas remains exclusively committed to his hopeless love (*mihi solus Amyntas*, 83).

Other sections of *Eclogue 3* support this reading by aligning Damoetas and Menalcas, respectively, with features of hexameter and elegiac poetics (especially following the invocation of Pollio at 84–89). Perhaps surprisingly, it is the elegiac-leaning Menalcas who emerges as the master singer and author figure later in *Eclogues 5* and *9*. But we know from *Eclogues 6* and *10* how much Vergil admired Callimachean and Gallan elegy, and the blending of genres is a defining trait of Vergil's mature poetry.

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