

Errabunda Vestigia: The Traces of Catullus in Virgil's Eclogue 6
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In his well known article “Virgil’s *Georgics* and the Art of Reference,” (*HSCP* 1986), Richard Thomas encourages readers not only to make connections between Virgil’s texts and his Alexandrian predecessors, but also between Virgil and his neoteric contemporaries. Influenced by both the Hellenistic and neoteric traditions, Virgil expects the careful reader to identify direct references to other poetry. In this paper, I argue that Virgil is not merely casually alluding to Carmen 64 in *Eclogue* 6, but that he intentionally references it when he employs the phrase “errabunda vestigia” (Catullus 64.113; *Ecl.* 6.58), a phrase noticed but not pursued by Lipka in *Language in Vergil's Eclogues*, (2001). Virgil’s echo of Catullus invites the reader to make further comparisons between the poems.

Eclogue 6’s song of Silenus is narrative, much like the marriage quilt of Carmen 64. Just as the quilt is bedecked with images, so also the song of Silenus is rife with imagery, albeit verbal rather than physical. Silenus sings songs of pathos and unrequited love. In line 45 of *Eclogue* 6, Silenus’ song turns from Hercules and the Argonauts to Pasiphae and the daughters of Proetus, who feign lowing to lure the bull into Pasiphae’s desirous embrace. Although Pasiphae says that the bull is the one with “wandering footsteps,” the phrase ironically best describes Pasiphae herself. She is actually the one wandering over the countryside. The “errabunda vestigia” of the bull calls to memory the “errabunda vestigia” (Catullus 64.113) of Theseus’s footsteps as he pursues the Minotaur. Unlike Pasiphae, Theseus is “sospes” and “regens” as he follows the thin thread through the maze. As “regens,” he directs his footsteps and rules his path. In contrast, Pasiphae tries to control the bull by imploring the nymphs to close the forest glades to bring him “safely” into the stalls; however, she is not the one in power. Love and passion rule her life and guide her steps. Pasiphae can neither control the bull nor herself.

Since Silenus is a follower of Bacchus, a light hearted song of feasting and drinking seems more appropriate than one of loss and suffering. At the end of *Eclogue* 6, his dolorous song resounds through the valleys and the heavens so that the hosts of earth and of heaven hear it. Similarly, the ecphrasis of Catullus’ quilt ends with Bacchus and his maenads. Although Bacchus comforts the lamenting Ariadne when he rescues her from the curved shore, his consolation is for Ariadne alone. In contrast, the song of Silenus provides consolation to all in the valley and in the heavens. Although both poems are cathartic, Silenus’ song is greater because it reaches the stars, while Bacchus and his maenads are contained in a quilt.

Virgil fills *Eclogue* 6 with allusions which invite the reader to examine carefully his “deductum carmen” (*Ecl.* 6.4). Virgil’s incorporation of the phrase “errabunda vestigia” demands that the attentive reader draw out the implications of the comparison between Carmen 64 and *Eclogue* 6. Virgil takes the neoteric style one step further than his predecessor Catullus by using Silenus’ song as a means to tell a story instead of the ecphrasis of the quilt. Virgil is not constrained by the conventions of his predecessor’s poetry. He uses the style, and then departs from it, so that his voice, like Silenus’, resounds through the heavens.