Eclogue 3 is the first amoebaean 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 “amoebaean” 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 amoebaean 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’ amoebaean 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.
Bibliography


