

Virgil's Avian Poetics: Reading a Hesiodic Allusion in *Eclogue* 9

In this paper, I argue that—as in the *Georgics*—Virgil engages with Hesiod throughout the *Eclogues* not only as a symbol of Callimachean style but also as an authoritative poet in his own right. I pass over *Eclogue* 1.44-5 (Hanslik 1955) and 6.61-74 (Ross 1975) in order to consider an allusion in *Eclogue* 9 to Hesiod's *ainos* of the hawk and the nightingale (*WD* 202-212), which I read pessimistically since the Golden Age anticipated in *Eclogue* 4 is not yet inaugurated by *Eclogue* 9 and so—unlike in Hesiod's *Works and Days*—Justice (*Virgo*, *Ecl.* 4.6) is not present to defend the pastoral world.

Efforts to study Virgil's reception of Hesiod outside of *Georgics* 1 have been hampered by an assumption that Latin poets primarily mention Hesiod in order to invoke Callimachus. Echoing his earlier comment that “references to Hesiod in Virgil and Propertius are really references to Callimachus and his conception of Hesiod” (1964, 196), Clausen (1994, 203) comments on the word *Ascraeo* (*Ecl.* 6.70), which appears as Linus passes down the pipes of Hesiod to Gallus, saying that it is “not so much a local as a literary reference, to Callimachus and his conception of Hesiod.” Although Clausen's statements regarding Virgil's use of Hesiod in the *Eclogues* have become commonplace in recent scholarship, Cameron (1995) has compellingly challenged the perception of Callimachus as particularly Hesiodic, and his conclusion—according to Hardie (2005, 287)—has “implications for Latin poetry.” Notably, some scholars have studied Virgil's use of Hesiod as more than an emblem of the Callimachean aesthetic, including—for example—La Penna (1962) who surveys the general influence of Hesiod on Virgil and Farrell (1991, 32-3) who emphasizes that Virgil “seriously and convincingly imitated the authentic, rustic, and archaic Hesiod” in the *Georgics*.

Discussions of Hesiod in the *Eclogues* are regularly relegated to *Eclogues* 1, 4, and 6. In addition, I propose that Virgil also engages with Hesiod in *Eclogue* 9. As Zanker (1985) has previously noted, the unusual pairing of birds in *Eclogue* 9 recalls Hesiod's fable of the hawk and the nightingale in the *Works and Days*. For Hesiod, the fable constitutes a response to the kings who believe that their mistreatment of the poet will go unpunished. While the conclusion of the fable initially seems to confirm their position (i.e., the nightingale shrieks as the hawk declares its natural superiority), Hesiod eventually informs the kings that the hierarchy among birds differs from that among humans, for Zeus has established Justice over men (*WD* 276-8). Moeris' words at *Eclogue* 9.11-13 (*sed carmina tantum / nostra valent, Lycida, tela inter Martia quantum / Chaonias dicunt aquila ueniente columbas*) resonate with this Hesiodic fable as the political again threatens the poetic; the shepherds' songs seem as ineffective against the land confiscations as the cries of the prophetic birds of Dodona against an eagle's assault. Whereas Hesiod counters the fable's apparent moral with an appeal to Justice, Virgil has no such recourse in the *Eclogues* since Justice—as in Aratus' *Phaenomena* (133-6)—has already abandoned humanity. In *Eclogue* 4, Virgil anticipates that the new age of Saturn will precipitate the return of Justice (*Ecl.* 4.6, *iam redit Virgo*); yet, by *Eclogue* 9, the Golden Age has not yet returned to the Italian countryside, and the herdsmen of the eclogue have no means to respond optimistically to the fable (cf. Boyle 1986, 29-30). This pessimism contributes to the distressing fact that Menalcas, who himself experiences a Hesiodic *Dichterweihe* in *Eclogue* 5 and who possesses an Orphic power over nature, is absent at the end of *Eclogue* 9, leaving the pastoral world without a protector.

Bibliography

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