Virgil can be considered linguistically as a poet who had to solve stylistic problems by selecting words. Latin poets, who depended mostly on Greek models, were aware of these difficulties, and their works bear witness to a conscious effort in this direction. The *Georgics*, half-way between the still irregular poetry of the neoteric young Virgil and the classic epos of the *Aeneid*, show by their vocabulary the evolution of the poet. Virgil in his poetical career became a master of language. Latin poetry depended after him on the language he had shaped. Like Cicero in prose, he was the classic model in poetry.

How did Virgil give form to his poetic style? He was never so critically minded as Horace about his predecessors in Roman poetry. If Horace, bringing to the Roman Parnassus the Muses of Archilochos, Pindar and the Lesbians, had to break away from the neoteric poets and could not find any guidance in the epic tradition, Virgil, only seventeen years younger than Catullus, and just five older than Horace, but educated in the provinces, derived more directly from the current streams of Roman poetry.

Cicero's classicism was eclectic and so was Virgil's, much more than Horace's. The model for the *Georgics* was, especially in book I, Hesiod, although inevitably the old poet, archaic and rough for the cultivated Romans of those times, was imitated by him in a modern and critical spirit.

It is generally known that the first hemistich of *Georgics* I. 299 is a translation: *nudus ara, sere nudus*. But what in Hesiod was a primitive reminiscence, is explained by Virgil rationalistically and, it seems, unnecessarily: nudity in plowing and sowing meant for him that this
operation must be finished before the arrival of the winter: *nudus ara, sere nudus; hiems ignava colono.* Thus Virgil modernizes the Hesiodic prescription (*Erga* 391-93):

\[
\gamma\nu\mu\nu\nu \sigma\pi\varepsilon\iota\epsilon\varphi\iota\epsilon\nu, \gamma\nu\mu\nu\nu \delta'\beta\omega\omega\tau\epsilon\nu, \\
\gamma\nu\mu\nu\nu \delta' \dot{\alpha}\omicron\alpha\epsilon\iota\nu, \epsilon'i\chi'\omicron\rho\omicron\alpha \pi\acute{a}n\upsilon\tau' \dot{\epsilon}\thet \lambda \tau\theta\alpha \\
\dot{\epsilon}r\gamma\alpha \kappa\omicron\mu\acute{i}\zeta\epsilon\sigma\sigma\tau\alphai \Delta\mu\acute{\mu}t\epsilon\tau\rho\omicron\sigma\iota\varsigma\varsigma....
\]

Posterity could not understand these archaic customs, and in fact Virgil contradicts his own explanation\(^1\) in the following verses (305-310), in which he speaks of the farmer’s activities during the *ignava hiems*, the quiet winter. Some contemporary readers did not accept Virgil’s rationalization, and, as the *Vita Donati*\(^2\) says, an envious detractor of the poet parodied Virgil’s line thus: *nudus ara, sere nudus: habebis frigore febrem.*

Grammarians who commented on Hesiod had difficulties with the passage in the *Erga*. We find in the scholia\(^3\) two interpretations: one of them, which Virgil followed, simply prescribes doing the job before the cold arrives (and perhaps because of that Virgil did not translate the Hesiodic *\dot{a}\omicron\acute{m}\alpha\epsilon\iota\nu* ‘‘to harvest’’); the other, which seems to be older, and is considered by Wilamowitz\(^4\) to be Proclus’, states that the plowman should not wear any clothes which could impede his movements. Even the *\imath\acute{\imath}\acute{\mu}\alpha\tau\iota\nu\upsilon* of the scholia would be too much.

In fact, it is well attested that nudity was usual in plowing among the ancients. Wilamowitz\(^5\) draws attention to a vase of Nicosthenes, and in M. L. West’s commentary\(^6\) examples of Greek vases, collected by A. S. F. Gow, confirm that plowing and sowing were carried out both in the nude and with some clothes on. In the Hesiodic *Scutum Herc.* 287 plowmen wear clothes tucked up.\(^7\) Modern commentators have compromised by sometimes translating the Virgilian *nudus* as

---

2. Ed. I. Brummer, p. 10.
“ohne Oberkleid,” “just with a tunic,”\(^8\) forgetting that Pliny (\textit{Nat. hist.} XVIII. 20) speaks of the nudity of Cincinnatus who was called to his military duties from the plow (cf. also Livy III. 26. 9).

Since Virgil was imitating Hesiod’s \textit{Erga}, he was obliged, in spite of being nearly a neoteric, to accept, under the influence of Lucretius, the whole epic tradition of Roman literature. Let us consider now a few epic elements in Virgil’s vocabulary.

The adverb \textit{ceu} never appears in the \textit{Bucolics}, or in the \textit{Appendix}. But for epic comparisons \textit{ceu} was the right word to translate \textit{\(\dot{a}\sigma\tau\varepsilon\)} or \textit{\(\dot{a}\sigma\tau\varepsilon\)}. Thus \textit{ceu} is not found in the old comic poets, or in prose previous to Seneca, but it occurs\(^9\) in Ennius and Lucretius, and in Catullus’ epic poem 64 (v. 239); in using it Virgil gives the necessary epic flavor to his style in the \textit{Georgics}:

\begin{quote}
       \textit{ceu pressae cum iam portum tetricere carinae}\ldots \textit{(I. 303)}
       \textit{ceu naupra corpora fluctus}\ldots \textit{(III. 542)}
       \textit{ceu pulvere ab alto}\ldots \textit{(IV. 96)}.
\end{quote}

It is interesting to observe that among the scanty fragments of Varius, the intimate friend of Virgil, one has been preserved (Morel, \textit{Frag. poet. latin.}, p. 100, no. 4) where \textit{ceu} introduces the comparison of a bitch pursuing a hind. The Epicurean subject of this poem \textit{De morte} imposed a Lucretian vocabulary on Varius.

Virgil’s wish to stress his epic vocation by evoking Ennius is found in the use of expressions like \textit{nox intempesta}. This had been coined by Ennius (\textit{Ann.} 102 and 167 Vahlen). But Virgil underlines the archaic style by closing the hexameter with a monosyllabic word:\(^10\) \textit{aut intempesta silet nox} (I. 247). Virgil’s allusion to well-known verses of Ennius is often transparent. Thus in his variations on the epitaph of the old poet of Rudiae: \textit{Volito vivos per ora virum} (\textit{Epigr.} 18 Vahlen): Virgil desires poetic glory, and finally \textit{virum voltare per ora} (\textit{Georg.} III. 9). The same motif (already imitated by Lucr. IV. 38, \textit{umbras inter vivos voltare}) appears also in \textit{Georg.} IV. 226: \textit{viva volare}.

The epic style carried a traditional weight. Yet Virgil, who had started his poetry under the influence of the \textit{cantores Euphorionis}, never renounced neoteric methods. Let us examine for instance \textit{Georg.} III. 338: \textit{litoraque alcyonen resonant, acalanthida dumi}. Of the two birds

\begin{flushright}
\begin{footnotesize}
\hspace{1em}10 As in the ending of the light-hearted hexameter \textit{Georg.} I. 181: \textit{exiguus mus}; cf.
\end{footnotesize}
\end{flushright}
named in this line, the halcyon had already been taken up into Latin poetry,11 but the other name, acalanthis, was apparently odd even in Greek, and belongs to erudite elements in the Alexandrine tradition. The word seems to be a variant form of the better known ἀκαλανθίς 'goldfinch, Fringilla carduelis' or 'linnet, Fr. linaria', which is attested in Aristophanes, Antoninus Liberalis and several lexica.12

Greek words play a role in poetry, following the long Greek tradition initiated by Homer and Hesiod with their euphonic catalogues of Nymphs and Nereids. The artistic verse of Georg. I. 437, with its hiatus and elision, Glauco | et Panopeae et | Inoo Melicertae, is, as Aulus Gellius XIII. 26. 3 says, an imitation of the modern poet Parthenius, but the Virgilian line is, according to the same scholar, "νεωτερικῶτερος et quodam quasi ferumine inmisso fucatior."

Greek words were necessary for every learned subject, but sometimes they are used simply for the sake of euphony. So with the quasi hapax hyalus:

eam circum Milesia vellera Nympheae
carpebant hyali saturo fucata colore (IV. 334-35).

Locks of wool "that had been dyed a deep glassy green,"13 i.e. hyalino, vitreo, viridi, nymphis apto (Servius in loc.), displayed a preciosity new in Latin poetry, one that was still imitated in later times by Ausonius and Prudentius (Thes. ling. Lat. VI. 3130).

The meanings of such euphonic words are sometimes difficult to determine. This is probably the case too with the passage in which the poet speaks of the most convenient herbs to plant around the beehives:

Haec circum casiae virides et olentia late
serpylla et graviter spirantis copia thymbrae
floreat, inriguumque bibant violaria fontem (Georg. IV. 30-32).

The Greek θυμβρα is usually considered to be 'savory' (Satureia thymbra for the botanists, LSJ). But Columella, trying to be more precise, and in a chapter which begins with a reference to this Virgilian text, enumerates (IX. 4. 6; cf. also section 2 of the same chapter) as the

Norden, op. cit. in the previous note, p. 440.


12See F. R. Adrados and collaborators, Diccionario griego-español, I (Madrid 1980), p. 107, where we find for ἀκαλανθίς the translation "jilguero, Fringilla carduelis." Servius in loc. vacillates between luscinia and carduelis, but the commentary attributed to Probus (Thilo-Hagen III, p. 383) prefers rightly carduelis.

most convenient herbs, in first place thyme, then, as the next best, thymbra, serpyllum and origanum. In the translation of E. Heffner (Loeb) these correspond to “Greek savory, wild thyme and marjoram.” Then Columella adds as tertiae notae, sed adhuc generosae, marinus ros et nostras cunila, quam dixi (same chapter, section 2) satureiam. In the last place come all the other herbs. In Columella’s very extensive explanation, thymbra occupies a higher place than the Latin satureia ‘savory’, and evidently the learned agriculturalist used the word to describe another plant, which is confirmed by a passage in his poetic book on gardens (X. 233): et satureia thymi referens thymbraeque saporem. It seems probable therefore that Virgil referred to some plant, perhaps encountered in a Greek author, which he did not trouble to identify. The new Oxford Latin Dictionary has rightly reopened interpretation by proposing for thymbra “an aromatic plant, perh. Cretan thyme, Corydothymus capitatus.”

But the beautiful Virgilian lines, sprinkled with euphonic Greek words, were in their details not intended to be a manual for real farmers.

Madrid-Tübingen

---

14 The Servius auctus (in loc.) identifies thymbra and satureia: thymbre est, quam cunila vocamus.
