

R. Kania, *Virgil's Eclogues and the art of fiction: a study of the poetic imagination*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. Pp viii + 175. ISBN 9781107080850. £64.99/US\$99.99.

This book, which owes its origin to the author's Chicago PhD dissertation, presents an attractive and imaginative meditation on the fictional world of Virgil's *Eclogues*. It draws on theories of fiction (Iser, Eco), fictional and possible worlds (Pavel, Ronen, Doležel, Lavocat) and narrative (Genette) to assert the autonomy of Virgil's fictive creations. The approach has more than a passing resemblance to that of M. Payne, *Theocritus and the Invention of Fiction* (Cambridge, 2007), but K.'s readings are original and entirely his own. The book's bold thesis is to reimagine everything in the *Eclogues* as fiction, mediated by the author or by an internal character, who may themselves be fictional personae, and who may be speaking in their own voice or playing a role. The fiction subsumes real and unreal elements, including the poems' literary models, which are a minor focus of this study. Perhaps most radically, at least to historically minded readers, K. sees the land politics, Gallus, and other evidence in the *Eclogues* for the context in which they were produced as fictional projections *within* the bucolic world rather than existing beyond its horizons or trespassing on it. To quote Doležel, "Tolstoy's Napoleon is no less fictional than his Pierre Bezuchov" because both inhabit the fictional world of *War and Peace*' (15). The poems demand a 'cooperative' reader willing to engage with this fictional world as such, and to consider everything represented as an 'in-world' reality.

Chapter 1 (1-33), 'The "World of the Work of Art": Reading the *Eclogue* Book', introduces concepts of fictionality and discusses Theocritus' *Idylls* and the *Lament for Bion* as Virgil's models for setting his fictional world apart from reality (22). For example, performance within Greek bucolic entails a distinction between the representation of ordinary speech and formal song. Repetition of pastoral names teases the reader with the promise of dramatic continuity, which the text ultimately withholds. K. argues that the reader will be frustrated by the tension between hints at a coherent and unified world and a sense of multiple fragmented if overlapping worlds, but still insists on reading for a coherent fictional world across the poems.

Chapter 2 (34-72), 'Worlds apart: dialogue in and on the *Eclogues*', deals mainly with the 'reality problem': how Virgil incorporates contemporary events and characters into his fiction. K. takes issue with 'allegorizing' readings of the *Eclogues* which necessarily privilege external reality as a hermeneutic anchor, even when they allow plenty of scope for Virgil's pastoral fiction. K. instead reads *Eclogues* 1, 9 and 5 not as real-world proxies but for their own 'in-world' politics and sociology. The relational dynamics between characters in these poems involve a mixture of competition and cooperation. Characters weave their own fictions, and their conversations mirror debates between 'optimistic' and 'pessimistic', 'real-world' and 'fictional' interpretations of their own experience. We are invited to imagine the shepherds' unnarrated pasts and futures. Overall, the poems thematise our need for complementary fictions that are either closer to or more distant from our reality; privileging an aesthetic over a political reading, K. argues that the *Eclogues* satisfy our need for fictions that are removed from the quotidian (71-72).

Chapter 3 (73-110), 'The authors of the *Eclogues*', is particularly satisfying. K. reviews ancient theories about modes of discourse (narrative, mimetic, mixed) and modern theories about the author (empirical author, model author, narrator), which provide the scaffolding for a sequential reading of the fourth, fifth and sixth *Eclogues*. The speaker of the Fourth *Eclogue* (a poem with four addressees) fictionalizes the poem's historical moment and, more than issuing a prophecy, invents a desirable future state of affairs in which he himself will participate. The Fifth *Eclogue* reverts to a dramatic mode, which might seem to

place the author's voice at a distance, but Menalcas subverts the reader's perceptions by disclosing himself as the author (or rather channel) of the Second and Third Eclogues. Tityrus' address to Varus, his encounter with Apollo, and the repetition of his name from earlier in the collection would appear to accord him several degrees of authorship and authority, and the poem goes on to involve multiple vertiginous slippages between levels of authorial discourse which play off the two preceding poems. Despite the fragmentation of the author figure, the collection nonetheless retains a coherence and the sense of a single author.

Chapter 4 (111-55), 'Love and other problems: The limits of pastoral representation' offers a sympathetic consideration of the shepherds' ineffable experiences, especially in the erotic sphere, and presents sensitive readings of the tribulations performed in Eclogues 2, 8, and 10. The reader must fill the gaps which textual representation cannot adequately bridge. K. argues for a fluid and virtually indistinguishable relationship between the representation of conversational speech and formal song. Questions over why Corydon wins in Eclogue 7 suggest how short the text falls of representing actual experience, e.g., by not transmitting the music. 'Gallus' has often been seen as an elegiac interloper incompatible with the green cabinet, but K. demonstrates that he has more in common with Corydon and the creations of Damon and Alpheus than might at first sight be apparent.

An epilogue (156-61) applies some of the book's ideas to the *Georgics*.

K. might have made more use of non-Anglophone scholarship, but otherwise engages very fairly with modern criticism. Occasionally his more extreme reading stretch credibility, but this is an exhilarating book.

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