

My talk aims to address the diachronic development of the pastoral genre from Theocritus and Bion to Vergil. I am especially interested in the presence of the elegiac discourse in the *Eclogues*. I would like to suggest that in the context of the *Eclogues* pastoral genre must be understood as a dynamic principle, not a static one, which involves not just observance but also creative transgression of the expected boundaries of what Wolfgang Iser (1993) referred to as the “pastoral blueprint.”

The history of pastoral criticism from Rapin and Fontenelle to Empson, Rosenmeyer, and Alpers was preoccupied with deciding what are the generic norms of pastoral as the “handbooks of poetic composition” (Conte, 1992) or what Alpers (1996) calls a “representative anecdote” of pastoral. Despite the clear evidence that “each new utterance of genre” (Miller 1994) offers a singular case, that utterance, nevertheless relies on a generalizing force that is implicit in certain basic constituents of the genre.

In antiquity there was a canon of three Greek bucolic poets – Theocritus, Moschus, and Bion (Halperin, 1983). The ascription of Moschus and Bion to bucolic poets is somewhat of a mystery (Hubbard, 1998) since their extant work drastically differs from Theocritus’ bucolic *Idylls*. However, the fragments of Bion especially help us understand the diachronic development of pastoral as a genre from Theocritus to Vergil and specifically shed light on Vergilian *Kreuzung der Gattungen*.

In his *Epithalamium of Achilles and Deidameia* Bion “contaminates” Theocritean “pastoral blueprint” with another epic subgenre of epyllia which perhaps gave Vergil idea of introducing elements of one genre into the textual space of another. The elegiac diversion in theme from the Theocritean recognizable profile of pastoral enabled Vergil to assert that the *Eclogues* represent the new exemplar of the old genre. The introduction of elegiac discourse into pastoral framework may have been inspired again by Bion’s *Lament for Adonis* in which the erotic element is exaggerated in comparison with Theocritus’ First Idyll containing the lament for Daphnis.

However, Vergil did not merely intensify the erotic element in the *Eclogues* but made his shepherds speak the language of the elegiac predicament. By introducing the elements of elegiac discourse Vergil redefines the “representative anecdote” of pastoral. Most of the *Eclogues* contain some erotic discourse but the last Eclogue presents an especially interesting case study of elegy within pastoral. The closing Eclogue creates an ideal synthesis between *eros* and pastoral setting. Relying on the text of the *Eclogues* I would like to suggest that by mixing the two unlikely genre discourses in his early poetic corpus, Vergil questions the viability and future of both genres but especially pastoral in Roman literary tradition.

