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Translators' Preface

Kimberly Johnson

Many English translations of the *Georgics* elect to render its hexameter lines in prose, recognizing that it is nearly impossible to approximate in English the quantitative meter of Virgil's Latin (which measures its lines according to the length of vowel sounds). Other translations, following perhaps the model of John Dryden's influential seventeenth-century rendering of the poem, use iambic pentameter, which traditionally has been thought, because of its stately pace and suggestiveness of the natural human breath-span, to provide a rough equivalent of dactylic hexameter. This translation departs from those conventions, adopting instead a loose meter most reminiscent, perhaps, of Gerard Manley Hopkins' "sprung rhythm," with five to six stressed positions in each line. This metrical strategy is meant to acknowledge the dynamic quality of Virgil's lines, in which the metrical structure asserts itself in counterpoint to the natural stress of individual words. It also enacts the agility of the original meter, which allowed the unstressed position to be occupied by either a single syllable or two syllables. This translation has made a particular effort to replicate the syntactic experience of reading Virgil's Latin, to preserve original structure as far as possible. Although this tactic occasionally results in English sentences that require slower reading, it does go some way toward preserving the linear accumulation of detail in the poem, an important consideration in a work so conscious of structure and the accumulation of tension through details. Moreover, Virgil's attention to the etymological connection between poetry and plowing—contained in the roots of the word *verse*, *versare*, to turn—recommends at least some endeavor on the part of the translator to sow the details of language in order, so that they can be reaped with their original associations intact.

GEORGICS 2.136-176

Sed neque Medorum, silvae ditissima, terra,
 nec pulcher Ganges atque auro turbidus Hermus
 laudibus Italiae certent, non Bactra neque Indi
 totaque turiferis Panchaia pinguis harenis.
 Haec loca non tauri spirantes naribus ignem
 invertere satis inmanis dentibus hydri
 nec galeis densisque virum seges horruit hastis;
 sed gravidae fruges et Bacchi Massicus humor
 inplevere; tenent oleae armentaue laeta.
 Hinc bellator equus campo sese arduus infert;
 hinc albi, Clitumne, greges et maxima taurus
 victima, saepe tuo perfusi flumine sacro,
 Romanos ad templa deum duxere triumphos.
 Hic ver adsiduum atque alienis mensibus aestas
 bis gravidae pecudes, bis pomis utilis arbos.
 At rabidae tigres absunt et saeva leonum
 semina nec miseros fallunt aconita legentis
 nec rapit inmensos orbis per humum neque tanto
 squameus in spiram tractu se colligit anguis.
 Adde tot egregias urbes operumque laborem,
 tot congesta manu praeruptis oppida saxis
 fluminaque antiquos subter labentia muros.
 An mare, quod supra, memorem, quodque adluit infra
 anne lacus tantos? Te, Lari maxume, teque,
 fluctibus et fremitu adsurgens Benace marino
 an memorem portus Lucrinoque addita claustra
 atque indignatum magnis stridoribus aequor

Selections from *Georgics* by Virgil

Translated by Kimberly Johnson

GEORGICS 2.136-176
The Praises of Italy

Neither Media, opulent in her woodlands,
 nor the gorgeous Ganges, nor Hermus strewn with gold
 can rival Italy's glories — neither Bactra nor India
 nor Panchaea duned with thurifying sand.
 Here no bulls with nostrils snorting flame 140
 harrowed for planting a dragon's monstrous teeth,
 no human harvest bristled up with helmets and serried spears
 but bursting fruits and Bacchus's Massic nectar
 freight us, olives and fat flocks hold sway.
 Here warhorses charge haughty on the field,
 here white herds of bulls, the noblest sacrifice —
 washed often by your holy waters, o Clitumnus —
 have led Roman triumphs to the altars of the gods.
 Here is spring eternal, and summer in unwonted months,
 twice calve the cows, twice the tree is fit for fruit. 150
 But nowhere raving tigers, nor the lion's savage brood,
 no monkshood dupes hapless cullers,
 nor darts the scaly snake his looping bulk across the marl
 nor clenches his vast train up in a coil.
 And reckon all the remarkable cities, monuments of toil,
 so many towns heaped with hands upon stony steeps
 with rivers underflowing ancient walls.
 Should I mention the sea, laving the shore up north
 and down south, or our great lakes? You, Como most splendid,
 Benacus surging with swells and thunderous like the sea? 160
 Should I mention ports, or the breakwater upon Lucrine,
 or the water's roaring clamor at the affront

Iulia qua ponto longe sonat unda refuso
 Tyrrhenusque fretis inmittitur aestus Avernis?
 Haec eadem argenti rivos aerisque metalla
 ostendit venis atque auro plurima fluxit.
 Haec genus acre virum, Marsos pubemque Sabellam
 adsuetumque malo Ligurem Volscosque verutos
 extulit, haec Decios, Marios, magnosque Camillos,
 Scipiadas duros bello et te, maxume Caesar,
 qui nunc extremis Asiae iam victor in oris
 inbellem avertis Romanis arcibus Indum.
 Salve, magna parens frugum, Saturnia tellus,
 magna virum; tibi res antiquae laudis et artem
 ingredior, sanctos ausus recludere fontis,
 Ascraeumque cano Romana per oppida carmen.

where far the Julian waves boom as the bore gorges back
 upon itself and the Tyrrhenian tide pours into Avernus froth?
 This land flaunts her silver rills, the copper lode
 in her veins, and with gold abundant flows.
 She bore a flinty race of men — Marsians and the Sabine youth,
 the Ligurian inured to plight, the Volscian dartmen,
 Deciuses and Mariuses and mighty Camilluses,
 war-tempered Scipios... and you, greatest Caesar,
 who already victor on the farthest fronts of Asia now
 fend the unwarlike Indian from the fortresses of Rome.
 Hail exalted mother of fruits, Saturnian land,
 exalted mother of men! For you the theme and craft
 of ancient praise I undertake, daring to unseal the sacred springs
 and sing through Roman plazas the song of Ascra.

GEORGICS 3.138-208

Rursus cura patrum cadere et succedere matrum
 incipit. Exactis gravidæ cum mensibus errant,
 non illas gravibus quisquam iuga ducere plaustris,
 non saltu superare viam sit passus et acri
 carpere prata fuga fluviosque innare rapacis.
 Saltibus in vacuis pascunt et plena secundum
 flumina, muscus ubi et viridissima gramine ripa,
 speluncaeque tegant et saxea procubet umbra.
 Est lucos Silari circa ilicibusque; virentem
 plurimus Alburnum volitans, cui nomen asilo
 Romanum est, oestrum Grai vertere vocantes,
 asper, acerba sonans, quo tota exterrita silvis
 diffugiunt armenta; furit mugitibus aether
 concussus silvaeque et sicci ripa Tanagri.
 Hoc quondam monstro horribilis exercuit iras
 Inachiae Iuno pestem meditata iuvencae.
 Hunc quoque, nam mediis fervoribus acrior instat,
 arcebis gravido pecori, armenta que pasces
 sole recens orto aut noctem ducentibus astris.
 Post partum cura in vitulos traducitur omnis,
 continuoque notas et nomina gentis inurunt
 et quos aut pecori malint submittere habendo
 aut aris servare sacros aut scindere terram
 et campum horrentem fractis invertere glaebis.
 Cetera pascuntur viridis armenta per herbas:
 Tu quos ad studium atque usum formabis agrestem,
 iam vitulos hortare viamque insiste domandi,
 dum faciles animi iuvenum, dum mobilis aetas.
 Ac primum laxos tenui de vimine circlos
 cervici subnecte; dehinc, ubi libera colla
 servitio adsuerint, ipsis e torquibus aptos

GEORGICS 3.138-208

Mothers, Calves and Colts

By turns, the care of sires starts to wane, the care of dams
 to wax. When, their months accomplished, swag-bellied they range
 let no one allow them in yoke to drag heavy carts, 140
 or leaping to pass their way, or at a brisk gallop
 to devour the meadow's breadth, or to swim in eddying streams.
 In open glades the herdsmen graze them, and along the brimming
 river, where moss and greenest banks of grass,
 where coves may shelter, rock-shadows may lie outstretched.
 There is among the Silaran woods and greened holms
 of Alburnus a swarming fly, whose Roman name
 is *asilus*, called *oestrus* in the evolving Greek,
 aggressive, shrilly buzzing, before whom terrified
 the whole herd stampedes the forest: the shocked ether crazes 150
 at their bellowings, and the woods, and the droughted banks of Tanager.
 With this monster Juno once worked her dreadful wrath,
 who hatched a plague for Inachus's daughter, heifered Io.
 This too (for under sultry noon more fierce its torment)
 you must fend from the pregnant flock, and pasture the herd
 with the sun fresh up or when stars lead down the night.

After calving every care devolves upon the calves.
 Straightway the stockmen sear them with a brand and mark their caste:
 those they want to rear for the herd's sustaining,
 those to keep sacred for the altars, those to tear the soil 160
 and busting clods to upturn the ragged fields.
 The other cattle are grazed among green grasses.
 Those you will mold for pluck and rustic work
 coax while yet calves, and enter in the way of training
 while pliant their young spirits, while nimble their age.
 First, slack loops of slender willow tie
 around their necks. Then, when their freeborn necks
 get used to servitude, yoke them in pairs

iunge pares et coge gradum conferre iuencos;
 atque illis iam saepe rotae ducantur inanes
 per terram et summo vestigia pulvere signent;
 post valido nitens sub pondere faginus axis
 instrepat et iunctos temo trahat aereus orbes.
 Interea pubi indomitae non gramina tantum
 nec vescas salicum frondes ulvamque palustrem,
 sed frumenta manu carpes sata; nec tibi fetae
 more patrum nivea implebunt mulctraria vaccae,
 sed tota in dulcis consument ubera natos.
 Sin ad bella magis studium turmasque ferocis,
 aut Alpea rotis praelabi flumina Pisae
 et Iovis in luco currus agitare volantis:
 primus equi labor est, animos atque arma videre
 bellantum lituosque pati tractuque gementem
 ferre rotam et stabulo frenos audire sonantis;
 tum magis atque magis blandis gaudere magistri
 laudibus et plausae sonitum cervicis amare.
 Atque haec iam primo depulsus ab ubere matris
 audeat, inque vicem det mollibus ora capistris
 invalidus etiamque tremens, etiam inscius aevi.
 At tribus exactis ubi quarta accesserit aestas,
 carpere mox gyrum incipiat gradibusque sonare
 compositis sinuetque alterna volumina crurum
 sitque laboranti similis; tum cursibus auras,
 tum vocet, ac per aperta volans ceu liber habenis
 aequora vix summa vestigia ponat harena;
 qualis Hyperboreis Aquilo cum densus ab oris
 incubuit, Scythiaequae hiemes atque arida differt
 nubila: tum segetes altae campique natantes
 lenibus horrescunt flabris summaeque sonorem
 dant silvae longique urgent ad litora fluctus;
 ille volat simul arva fuga, simul aequora verrens
 Hinc vel ad Elei metas et maxuma campi

from those same halters fastened, and urge the steers keep step together;
 and often now let unloaded carts be dragged by them 170
 across the land, grooving only the topmost dust.
 Later beneath a rugged weight let the greased beech axle
 creak, a bronzed tongue to pull the wheels.
 Meanwhile give their untamed youth not just meadowgrass
 nor half-browsed willow leaves and marshy sedge
 but hand-plucked grain. Your brood cows will not
 brim their snowy milk-pails in the custom of our fathers
 but all their udder squander on their darling calves.

But if for war you hanker more, for squadrons brave,
 or to glide on wheels beside Pisa's river Alpheus, 180
 through Jovan groves to drive the chariot to flight...
 the horse's first task is to witness the nerve
 and weaponry of warriors, to endure the clarion, to stomach the groan
 of the dragged wheel, and in the stall to hear bits jangling,
 then more and more to thrill at the honeyed praises of the trainer,
 to love the sound of his neck patted.
 All this let him tackle as soon as he's weaned from his mother's teat,
 and bit by bit let him tender his mouth to soft halters
 while weak and trembling still, still green in years.
 But when, three summers having passed, the fourth draws nigh, 190
 let him start to storm around the training course, to ring his paces
 evenly, and let him bow the alternating flexion of his legs:
 let him be as exertion's self. Then let him challenge
 the wind to laps, and over the exposed flats flying, as unreined,
 barely set his hoofprint in the surface sand.
 As when from Hyperborean coasts the clenched northwind
 hammers down, shoving Scythian frosts before it
 and rainless clouds, then tall wheatfields and the marine plain
 ripple in the gentle gusts, the treetops rustle and long
 toward the shoreline rollers press, 200
 and on it soars, swift, sweeping soil and seas the same.
 A horse like that will sweat the vast courses of the plain

sudabit spatia et spumas aget ore cruentas,
Belgica vel molli melius feret esseda collo.
Tum demum crassa magnum farragine corpus
crescere iam domitis sinito: namque ante domandum
ingentis tollent animos prensique negabunt
verbera lenta pati et duris parere lupatis.

toward the finish posts at Elis, and blow bloody foam from his mouth,
or will bear the Belgian chariot more bravely, steady of neck.
At last with thick mash let their bodies plump
after they've been broken in — before their breaking,
immoderate they rouse their spunk, and caught they scorn
to truckle to the limber lash, to heed the jagged bit.