

# HELP ME, PASTORAL MUSE: THE VIRGELIAN INTERTEXT IN MIKLÓS RADNÓTT'S ECLOGUES

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It has become a commonplace in literary history that by the mid-1930s even the most committed avant-garde poets belonging to the so-called "third generation" of writers grouped around the periodical *Nyugat* turned increasingly to closed form. Already in 1925 Mihály Babits had called for a "new classicism,\*\*" by which he meant much more than just a return to traditional versification. Rather, he advocated a return to the "natural totality of eternal art" ["visszatéréssel az örök Művészet ... természetes teljességéhez" Babits II, 139]. In addition, there was the Hungarian literary past stretching back at least to romanticism according to which the poet is supposed to take on the role of national spokesman and unacknowledged legislator. Thus the poets abandoned experimentation as somehow foreign and "un-Hungarian"; one after the other like prodigal, errant sons they dutifully returned to the *alma mater* that refused to tolerate the puerile foolishness and lack of seriousness of any foreign "ism\*" because it was incompatible with the traditional role of the poet.

Radnóti's own "turn\*" in renouncing earlier expressionist and surrealist experimentation in favour of more traditional writing conforms to the general trend, although the decision to reterritorialize is not without a certain ambivalence. As he wrote in his journals in 1942, "'költőiségem' (mit mondjak helyette) nagy veszélye az izmusokra való hajlam" [a grave threat to my poetic identity is the penchant for various isms], and when recalling his having been under the spell of surrealism for a time, he tries to pass it off as if it were little more than an adventure of youth and a near-fatal disease (267). In spite of having received a solid grounding in the Hungarian classics as a major in Hungarian literature, he writes that he knew the poetry of Jean Cocteau "thoroughly" before he knew that of János Arany, adding revealingly that "az Aranyhoz fordulás is a lélek védekezése volt" (ibid.) [my turn to Arany was also the self-defense of the soul]. At the same time he regrets the taming of his visionary powers, and notes with a tinge of ruefulness that "az azzal járt nyelvi bátorságot kellene visszaszereznem újra" [I should recover the linguistic audacity that went with that]. Despite such scattered traces of nostalgia for an

avant-garde past, Radnóti's turn is perhaps the most radical among his contemporaries, for he appears to have taken the call to some new classicism almost literally, to the extent that in the last two or three years of his life almost all his major poems were written in a few select classical meters, chiefly hexameters. Moreover, the series of eight poems that constitute the pinnacle of his oeuvre are adaptations/transpositions of the pastoral, especially its Virgilian version, which Radnóti, after the generic term ("selection") applied to the work of the Roman poet, chose to name "eclogues."

The aim of this paper is to examine the relationship of Radnóti's eclogues to the verse of his roman precursor, placed within the wider context of textual genealogy and appropriation. It is an attempt to find some answers to the question asked by Emery George in the introduction to his translation of Radnóti's selected poems: "Why the eclogue form; what does Radnóti need Virgil for?" (18). The answers critics sought to provide, from at least Imre Trencsényi-Waldapfel through Béla Pomogáts to Marianna Birnbaum and beyond, were in part to emphasize, as does Birnbaum, that "there is a deep affinity between Virgil and Radnóti regarding the purpose in writing their eclogues. As the modern interpreters of Virgil claim, 'at the time of an inhuman world of brute force, Virgil built up his own Arcadia, in order to escape into it'" (14-15). George's own reply is somewhat analogous, claiming that "the Latin poet offers the Hungarian a firm foundation for his very poetic being" (19), and he sets up a kind of dialectic between Radnóti, "the maker of idylls" and the "angry communist poet" [sic], ending up by way of a synthesis "in the transcendent choreography of literary borrowing and repayment" (ibid.). The affinities noted and elaborated by critics are in the main based on biographical, psychological, historical, and ideological grounds, depicting Radnóti's classicism as both a testimony to his rationalism, realism, and return to the values of the great humanist tradition, and a formal weapon of a committed anti-fascist against the »rationalism threatening to destroy those values.

None of these approaches are without interest; however, the present brief inquiry assumes what Theodor W. Adorno wrote about Kafka's work, i.e., that "Kafka's authority is textual" (185). Bearing in mind obvious differences, it is arguable that Radnóti's authority is also textual, or more precisely, *inter textual*. In more exact formal terms Radnóti's recourse to the eclogue constitutes a kind of poetic outdoing. In his diary notes for 1942 he considers his own position in the prevailing literary milieu as anything but attractive: "Poros a költészet még így is körülöttem. Versenyre költők. Kivel versenyezek? Boldog Arany, Petőfi szállt veled, s boldog Ady, Babitscsal szálltál. Attila lenne..." (266) [All around me poetry is covered with dust. Come, poets, let us

compete! Who can I compete with? Happy Arany, Petőfi soared with you, and happy Ady, you soared with Babits. Attila could be...], the last reference naming Attila József, who died in 1937, as the only possible poetic rival. The choice of Virgil and with whom Radnóti in the end decided to compete attests to his desire to find a space, to carve out a poetic niche for himself in a literary situation devoid of true challenge. Instead of some Oedipal struggle, however, the context with a worthy and venerable opponent is fought on a textual plane, and it may more usefully be taken as a line of flight in the sense of Deleuze and Guattari. As they put it, "The question of the father isn't how to become free in relation to him (an Oedipal question) but how to find a path there where he didn't find any" (10).

In a sense, however, Virgil is just a pretext for Radnóti to challenge the authority figure in Hungarian poetry whom he would like to out/undo. It is the assumption of this paper that behind Virgil stands Arany as the fateful precursor - Arany, the quintessential Hungarian poet, the master in all poetic genres. In life and in his metatextual commentaries Radnóti can be seen as the dutiful great-grandson to Arany; of the three pictures adorning the wall of his study, which he calls "family pictures", *Napló* 209 two are of Arany and the third, significantly, is of Ferenc Kazinczy, the language reformer and classicist. Until all his books are confiscated by the guards in the forced labor battalion his most precious possession is a collection of Arany's poems, and when he is asked to read aloud to the other inmates, his choice is *Buda halála* [Buda's Death]. Yet if one looks through Radnóti's entire poetry, one would be hard put to find the slightest reminiscences and echoes even in the manner of a homage, let alone any intertextual traces of Arany's poetry. On the one hand Arany is venerated as both poetic father figure and literary savior from the dangers of various literary fads that would have branded Radnóti a "cosmopolitan," a term of disapproval in Arany's vocabulary, and in some sectors of Hungarian literary life of the 1930's an allusion to the Jew. On the other hand when it comes to actual practice Radnóti does his best to write as if János Arany had not existed. Radnóti's adoption in his later writings of various strict forms, notably the elegiac distich and the eclogue written in hexameters, show a tendency diametrically opposed to Arany who employed the hexameter only in his early mock epic, *Az elveszett alkotmány* [The Lost Constitution], abandoning it completely in favor of more "authentically" Hungarian meters in the later poetry. Along with Arany Radnóti does, of course, wish to escape Virgil as well. The intertextual connection with Virgil in the eclogues is claimed not for the sake of veneration or some solid aesthetic-ideological "ground," but more importantly to correct him, parody him, deface and disfigure his "monumentality" and "originality - to show, in Paul de Man's sense of the

term, the "nonsacred" and "decanonized" character of Virgil's Arcadia (de Man 97-98). By calling, somewhat brazenly, his own series of poems "eclogues," Radnóti lures the so-called cognescenti into believing that nothing matters but some fundamental affinity between Virgil's work and his own, only to confound them by almost constant ironic reversals and displacements. It is important to note in this connection that an element introduced in the later eclogues is the allusions to the Hebrew prophets, notably Isaiah and Nahum, after a somewhat earlier reference to Habakkuk. For someone like Radnóti who refused to consider himself a Jew but wanted more than anything to be taken for "just" a Hungarian, and in no sense a "Jewish-Hungarian" poet, the appearance of the prophets signifies not only a return of the repressed but far from being a kind of "syncretism" of classical and biblical authority, as some critics have suggested, the latter proves to be a corrective to the ruins of the classical ideal.

As scholars have noted, Radnóti's turn to the eclogue form began with his translation of Virgil's *Eclogue IX* for a bilingual edition of Virgil's poems in 1938, a translation which, at least in Trencsényi-Waldapfel's view, decisively influenced Radnóti's turn to the classical (306). As it will emerge in the present reading, in addition to echoes and textual scraps taken over by Radnóti, there would appear to be an even closer relationship between the corresponding eclogues written by the two poets, i.e., between Virgil's *Eclogue I* and Radnóti's *First Eclogue*, and so on, all the way to the final piece in the collection.<sup>1</sup> Radnóti wrote his own first eclogue within a few months of the completion of the translation, and a fair number of lines may be traced back to Virgil's IX. The epigraph to the poem also comes from Virgil, though in this case from near the end of *Georgics I*, 505-506: "Quippe ubi fas versum atque nefas: tot bella per orbem/tam multae scelerum facies;..." [here are right and wrong inverted; so many wars in the world, so many shapes of sin].<sup>2</sup> It is plausible that Radnóti's three dots were meant to suggest that the knowledgeable reader continue to read the intertext, for a few lines later Virgil specifically writes that "hie movet Euphrates, illinc Germania bellum" (509) [here Euphrates, there Germany awakes war], thus through Radnóti's updating alluding not only to Nazi Germany in the west, but wholly unwittingly, and yet prophetically, to the other great power in the east. Both poems have for their main themes the relative weakness of poetry to effect changes in the real world, a preoccupation which will be all-pervasive in Radnóti's eclogues; but the differences are crucial. In Virgil's eclogue the shepherds bemoan the fact that Menalcas, who supposedly stands for Virgil, has sought unsuccessfully to have his farm returned to him after it was confiscated as a result of the triumvirs' rewarding the veterans of the civil war by giving them land. Instead

of a private grievance, a satisfactory resolution of which in any case is recounted in *Eclogue I*, Radnóti's indignation is fuelled by another, the Spanish Civil War, and the whole age is indicted as destructive to poets. (Radnóti mentions Lorca and Attila József as victims of this "horrible world".)

Virgil's lines

sed carmina tantum  
nostra valent, Lycida, tela inter Martia, quantum  
Chaonias dicunt aquila veniente columbas (Ecl. IX, 11-13)  
[but in matters of war our songs, Lycidas, are worth as much  
as, they say, the Chaonian doves when the eagle comes]<sup>3</sup>

are reinscribed far more strongly in Radnóti's First Eclogue as when the Shepherd asks the poet, "Hát te hogy élsz? visszhang jöhet-é szavaidra e korban?" [How do you live? Can your words find an echo in this age?] to which he replies. "Ágyúdörej közt? Üszkösödő romok, árva faluk közt?" [While cannon boom? In smouldering ruins, deserted villages?] For while Virgil's appeal to Octavian will be successful, i.e., the future Augustus respects poets and poetry sufficiently to correct an injustice, the modern era soon to experience total war spares neither the writer nor the work: "S jó, ha a szél a parazsat kotorászva / tört sorokat lel a máglya helyén s megjegyzi magának" [At best only the wind poking through the pyre's ashes will find some broken lines to remember], as if Radnóti's poet were to proleptically conjure up his own fate and the *Bor Notebook* found on his body in the mass grave. The generally positive tone of Virgil's *Eclogue I*, in which the poet practically deifies Octavian for listening to his plea and bringing long hoped for peace to Italy, is countered in the *First Eclogue* by the Poet's profound disgust with the world and a sense of foreboding as to his own inevitable destruction. Comparing himself to an oak tree already marked with a cross to be cut down, the Poet ironically indicates a profanation of the classical ethos which considered the oak sacred to Jupiter, and also again prophetically, Radnóti's later (wholly futile) conversion to Christianity, for having been literally marked with the sign of the cross did not cancel out the other mark of having been branded with the yellow arm band which in the end proved to be the more decisive.

The *Second Eclogue* continues to be preoccupied with the futility of poetry in the midst of war, not surprisingly since it was finished in late April 1941, a few weeks after Prime Minister Pál Teleki's suicide and the German expansion to Yugoslavia and Greece. The transhistorical dialogue between Poet and Pilot is imbued with a sort of antique, quasi-Stoic fatalism, their actions flowing out

of some primal law such as necessity. The Poet, as he says, writes the way the cat miaows or the dog barks or "the little fish flirtatiously lays its eggs"; analogously, the Pilot appears untroubled by the deadly effects of the bombs he drops, for he has become fused with his machine and acts like an automaton. Both speakers appear to lack an ethical dimension: I write, shrugs the Poet, what else can I do? I drop bombs, answers the Pilot, even though I'd much rather be with my lover. But in the Poet's twice repeated statement, "írok, mit is tehetnék" [I write, what else is there for me to do?] there is also something of the defiance of "Hier ich stehe, ich kann nicht anders," suggesting the underlying presence of a moral will. Such moral direction, however, is weakened by the displaced status of both Poet and Pilot, for the Pilot's complaint, of his being homeless between heaven and earth ("ég s föld között hazátlan") ironically reverts on the Poet as well, who despairs of the effectiveness of his words. Further irony may be seen if Virgil's *Eclogue II* is invoked, for there, too, Corydon the shepherd pours out his songs of unrequited love while conscious of their futility. In addition, there is a more definite echo here of the Poet's similar practice of writing as if driven by iron necessity which all nature must obey: "Torva leaena lupum sequitur, lupus ipse capellam, / florentem cytium sequitur lasciva capella, / te Corydon, o Alexi: trahit sua quemque voluptas" (63-65) [the fierce lioness follows the wolf, the wolf himself the goat, the lusty goat follows the flowering clover, and Corydon you, o Alexis; each is led by his desire]. Thus, for Virgil, in proper Epicurean fashion, the goal of all creatures' instinctive pursuit is pleasure; while in Radnóti grim necessity brings about bitterness and indifference in face of a world inexorably descending to darkness. Virgil's Corydon can still legitimately escape to nature; for Radnóti's Poet little remains except to conjure up an image of *homo technologies*, a prospect of dehumanization in which he himself is implicated.

It is not surprising, then, that the *Third Eclogue*, written some six weeks later, is a plaintive invocation of the entire classical literary heritage in order to offer legitimation for the modern poet. The cry, "Help me, Pastoral Muse," repeated several times in the poem, is uttered in a café which the poet with light irony calls "an urban grove," where instead of flute-playing shepherds he is surrounded by a group of noisy salesmen and cigar-chomping lawyers. The image stands both for a desire to transform the sordid present into a semblance of the bucolic past and a simultaneous devaluation of Virgilian rustic simplicity as nothing more than an aestheticization of harsh everyday reality. As in the previous two eclogues, here too, the fear of death, the death of poets, insistently appears; it is against these odds that the poet implores the muse as to the possibility of writing poetry, particularly about the "miracle of love."

Once again the prophetic note is struck: "Úgy halnak e korban a költők... / csak ránkomlik az ég, nem jelzi halom porainkat, / sem nemesívű szép, görög urna nem őrzi, de egy-két / versünk hogyha marad..." [How the poets of this age are dying away... The sky falls in on us, no mound is raised above our ashes, no noble Grecian urn will gracefully hold them, only a few poems remain as if by chance]. The "Grecian urn" nostalgically alludes both to Keats' ode and to Donne's "well-wrought urn," emblems of happier ages when poetry had value and meaning.

Thus, the invocation to the Pastoral Muse, which is borrowed from Virgil's *Eclogue IV* (appearing also in *Eclogue VIII*), is at once more desperate and implicitly critical of the relative ease with which Virgil can prophesy the return of the golden age. *Eclogue IV* predicts the birth of a child who will bring about this new age, "quo ferrae primum / desinet ac totó sürget gens aurea mundo" (8-9) [under whom the iron brood shall first cease, and a golden race shall spring up across the world]. In sardonic contrast to this marvellous child stands the image of the child in Radnóti's own *Fourth Eclogue*, taken from his autobiography. Instead of peace, this child brought death into the world, killing (or so Radnóti assumed) both the mother and his twin brother, a psychological burden that weighed heavily on Radnóti throughout his life. Yet the autobiographical reference is further qualified by the deliberate allusion to that other child who comes to establish a golden era: "És megszületni újra új világra, / mikor arany gőzök közül vakít / s új hajnalokra kél a nap világa" [And to be reborn into a new world, when the sunlight blindingly shoots through golden vapours and rises to a new dawn]. Again, Virgil's wishful thinking combined with a flattery of Pollio or Octavian is displaced onto the plane of history, evoking the possibility of a more just world after the end of the present war. With the line "Az írótaáblák összetörtek" [the writing slates have been shattered] Radnóti continues the topos of the demise of poetry, while paradoxically continuing to write it; there is also an echo of the despair of the dispossessed Meliboeus in Virgil's *Eclogue I* and his mournful note spoken to the self-satisfied Tityrus, "carmina nulla canam" [I shall not sing songs anymore]. Similarly the plea of the displaced poet, "Segíts szabadság, / ó hadd leljem meg végre honnomat" [Help me, Freedom, o let me find my homeland at last] voices a desire to put an end to the Poet's alienation and come in from the cold, as it were. Yet an intertextual hint, coming from one of Attila József's last poems, "Íme hát megleltem hazámat" (József II, 419) [I have finally found my homeland], lends the line a wholly different resonance, one that is bereft of any hope. Such a reading is further corroborated by the undoing of any optimistic closure the Voice, the Poet's interlocutor in the *Fourth Eclogue*, would like to impress on the poem. His highflown suggestion

that "if all is in ruins," then the poet should "inscribe [his wrath] on the sky" [az égre írj, ha minden összetört] is overwhelmed by the earlier line, "A fák között már fuvall a halál" [Death is already blowing through the trees] which will reoccur with slight, though all the more powerful alteration in the *Third Razglednica*, one of the last poems Radnóti ever wrote, "Fölöttünk fú a förtelmes halál" [Above us blows the horror of death]. Radnóti's *Fourth* is thus a deliberate antithesis to Virgil's *Eclogue IV*; and attempting to write the impossibility of writing from the vantage point of imminent death, the Virgilian mode is shown up as little more than an idle pastime.

There is even more direct connection between Radnóti's *Fifth Eclogue* written in November 1943, and Virgil's *V*. Both poems pay tribute to a beloved figure, now dead. In Virgil the person receives the allegorical name of Daphnis, the prototypical bucolic poet, while Radnóti with the dedication "Bálint György emlékére" [In memóriám György Bálint] again appeals to history and the disappearance in the Ukraine of his close friend, the highly respected essayist and journalist, who, like Radnóti, was also made to serve in a forced labor battallion. Radnóti's last line, "Mégsem tudok írni ma rólad" [Still, I can't write of you today] continues as well the by now obsessive topos of writing the impossible. Virgil's shepherds in *Eclogue V* vie with each other in their happy task of deifying Daphnis, who may stand for Caesar, Alfenus Varus, or even Catullus; in Havas's commentary the choice falls on Daphnis as a personification of pastoral poetry (85). So in effect Virgil could then be said to be writing the apotheosis of the kind of poetry he is involved in writing at the time. Despite the surface similarities such as both Daphnis and Bálint having been cut down by a cruel death, and even if the adage "amat bonus otia Daphnis" (61) [good Daphnis loves peace] may be seen to be applicable to both Radnóti and Bálint, the contrast between the two poems is considerable. *Eclogue V* ends in a perfect resolution of justifying the eminence of pastoral poetry and also on a note of poetic amity; by contrast, Radnóti's effort is a self-confessed failure to erect a proper poetic memorial to Bálint. His poem ends up being a "fragment," as indicated by the subtitle he himself affixed to the poem, showing by its disrupted, unfinished shape the disrupted, unfinished life of his friend. Not only can he not praise pastoral poetry, but the only "bucolic" scenes in the poem are the menacing snow clouds of the approaching winter and the vast steppes of the Ukraine where Bálint and thousands of other victims lie buried. The kind of rhetorical gesture whereby Virgil's Menalcas is able to exalt Daphnis to the stars ("Daphnim ad astra feremus," 52) is unavailable to a poet in Radnóti's situation.

The ending of *Eclogue V* where Mopsus offers Menalcas his shepherd's crook as a reward for his superior song will be echoed at the end of Radnóti's



*Eighth Eclogue*, which consists of a dialogue between a Poet and a Prophet. But the prophetic stance as somehow both inimical and desirable is also present in another poem written between the *Fifth* and *Seventh Eclogues*, posthumously titled *Töredék* [Fragment] which, according to the critical consensus, may be taken as part of the missing *Sixth Eclogue* (although Birnbaum is correct in stating that "there is no poem which is undisputedly identified as the Six Eclogue" 17). Yet *Fragment* contains a number of topoi and rhetorical turns that may connect it to Virgil's *Eclogue VI*, making the conjecture more plausible. The Radnóti text describes a monstrous age in which the poet has had to live out his life, and the diction is deliberately overwritten, replete with ghoulish, not to say grotesque and macabre images reminiscent of Poe or Baudelaire, in an attempt to give verbal approximation to the inexpressible horrors he had witnessed: "az ország megvadult s egy rémes végzetten / vigyorgott vértől és mocsoktól részegen" [the country went mad and drunk on blood and filth, it only grinned at its own hideous fate] and "az élő irigylé a férges síri holtat, / míg habzott asztalán a sűrű méregoldat" [the living envied the worm-eaten dead, while heavy poison foamed before him on the table]. Virgil's *Eclogue VI* recounts how the sleeping satyr Silenus is surprised by two boys, either satyrs or shepherds, and a Naiad, and is compelled to sing a song for them. The stories recounted by the satyr are nearly all about monstrous events and unnatural passions: Pasiphaë's lust for a white bull, Scylla with monsters around her waist tearing sailors to pieces, and finally the story of King Tereus and the horrible meal Philomela and Procne prepare and serve up to him. Silenus, himself a kind of monster, relates these aberrant myths for their entertainment value, in order to shock and titillate; hence the dispassionate tone proper for a storyteller who has not lived but only heard and spliced together the stories - not unlike the way Virgil had taken over and then transformed the idylls of Theocritus. In contrast, the speaker in the Radnóti fragment speaks *in propria persona* as having witnessed and lived through the atrocities. And yet, the adoption of the manner of gothic exaggeration may also be taken as a sign of exhaustion, of the inadequacy of the [pastoral] poetic medium as such. A sense of debility and insufficiency is made explicit in the last stanza: "Oly korban éltem én e földön, / mikor a költő is csak hallgatott," [I lived on this earth in an age when the poets, too, were silent], again having recourse to the paradox of writing-while-not-writing. Similarly to the dubious ending of the *Eighth Eclogue*, Radnóti calls for the prophet to take over the poetic function, as the silent poet stands in wait for the return of Isaiah, the only man skilled in the knowledge of terrible words and capable of justly damning this degenerate age.

The *Seventh Eclogue*, written a month before the *Eighth* in July 1944, is a verse epistle to the poet's wife. It bears no resemblance to Virgil's *Eclogue VII*,

which is another *carmen amoebaeum*, a poetic contest in which Virgil is reworking conventional themes derived from Theocritus. Radnóti is writing in Lager Heidenau in Serbia where he and the remnants of the forced labor unit were transported to work in the nearby copper mines, enduring hardships not unlike those inflicted on the inmates in the death camps. The only implicit connection in the two poems may be between the bucolic scene, a kind of paradisaical spot described by Virgil's Daphnis calling on Meliboeus to join him: "hue ipsi potum venient per prata iuveni, / his viridis tenera praetexit harundine ripas / Mincius, eque sacrant resonant examina quercu" (11-13) [here your cows will come across the meadows to drink, here the river Mincius fringes its green banks with waving reeds, and from the sacred oak tree swarm humming bees] and the anti-pastoral scenery around the camp. The poet calls attention to the fact that the wooden fence surrounding the barracks, fringed with barbed wire, is made of oak, the now desecrated tree of the god, which in this metamorphosis has appropriately become "savage" ("a szögesdróttal beszegett vad / tölgy kerítés"). The poet recognizes his own dehumanization - "férgek közt fogoly állat" [a captive animal in the midst of vermin] as he calls himself - who writes in the way he lives, "Ékezetek nélkül, csak sort sor alá tapogatva, / úgy írom itt a homályban a verset, mint ahogy élek, / vaksin, hernyóként araszolgtván a papíron" [Without putting in the accents, just groping line after line, I'm writing this poem here the way I live, in darkness, half-blind, inching my way across the paper like a caterpillar]. Among the sleepers in the barrack only the poet is awake, alone vigilant and conscious of the end while also hoping for a miracle, perhaps the intervention of a god as foretold by the prophets. However, the prevailing tone and sense are those of a profound resignation, of hovering between life and death, recalling the sensation of displacement in the *First Eclogue* as he tells the wife, "nem tudok én meghalni se, élni se nélküled immár" [I can neither live nor die without you].

The reappearance of the prophet in the *Eighth Eclogue* in the persona of Nahum, whose voice prophesied the destruction of Niniveh, would seem to answer the expectations of the poet in *Töredék* overwhelmed by too much horror. At the end of the dialogue between the Poet and the Prophet, the latter, who identifies himself as Nahum, urges the Poet to join forces with him and proclaim the coming of the new era promised by "the young rabbi who fulfilled the law"; "Útrakelünk, gyere, gyűjtsük / össze a népet, hozd feleséged s mess botokat már. / Vándornak jó társa a bot, nézd, add ide azt ott, / az legyen ott az enyém, mert jobb szeretem, ha göcsörtös" [Come, let's go on a journey, gather the people together, bring your wife, cut staffs for walking, staffs are the wanderers' company, look, give me that one over there, let me

have that one, I prefer one with knots]. According to the communist critic Trencsényi-Waldapfel, the borrowing of the pastoral staff image from the end of Virgil's *Eclogue V* testifies to Radnóti's syncretism, to the "identical nature of the bucolic myth and biblical myth," ["a bibliai mítosz azonossága a bukolikus mítosszal"], and beyond that, to his unbroken optimism in the inevitable coming of the golden age, i.e., the age of socialism (318-319). It is true that the Prophet attempts to instill some hope in the dispirited poet, saying "Ismerem újabb verseid. Éltet a méreg. / Próféták s költők dühe oly rokon" p know your more recent poems. Wrath keeps you alive. The wrath of prophets and poets is common]; nevertheless, his words cannot be taken to subsume entirely the voice of the Poet. In other words, the Prophet presents only one side of the picture, and his final appeal does not turn dialogics into dialectics, the cutting of branches for walking sticks serving as a kind of synthesis. The rewriting of the intertext from *Eclogue V* signifies an ironically sustained difference rather than similarity. The Virgilian shepherd's crook is manifestly venerable and a thing of beauty, "with even knots and ring of bronze," an aesthetic object in itself as well as a synecdoche of the pastoral poetic tradition; as such, it is to be treasured and preserved. By contrast, in the *Eighth Eclogue* the staffs to be fashioned from the freshly cut branches are for immediate and practical use, intended as a support during the wanderers' arduous journey. Aesthetic qualities are of little consequence; in fact, the Prophet prefers a gnarled and knotted staff ("jobb szeretem, ha göcsörtös"), an instrument, in other words, whose "truth" is rough and unvarnished. Such preference would seem explicitly, and ironically, to reverse the extravagant praise accorded to the power of poetry in Virgil's corresponding *Eclogue VIII*: "carmina vel caelo possunt deducere lunam, / carminibus Circe socios mutavit Ulixi" (69-70) [songs can even pull down the moon from the sky, by songs did Circe change the companions of Ulysses]. The valorizing of the prophetic stand would also in a more general way go against the grain not only of Virgil's classical style but that of Radnóti's own classicism as well. Consequently, it is not surprising that the poem ends on a note of irresolution, for the Poet makes no answer as if the Prophet's offer of a way out is something he tacitly agrees with but also something he cannot believe in and make his own. So while the differential intertextual borrowing as an allegorical sign testifies to a belated recognition on Radnóti's part of the Hebraic legacy neglected by a near-exclusive devotion to the Greco-Roman tradition, to turn prophet at this stage would be tantamount not merely to overhaul but to repudiate the poetic ideal he had fashioned for himself.

Virgil's adaptations from Theocritus bring about an "Italianate" pastoral, so that his ten eclogues result in a reterritorialization of the Hellenic model,

emphasizing his own proud Romanness and acquiescence in the new order laid down by Augustus. Conversely, Radnóti's commitment to the pastoral may be taken as a sign of his otherness, of a desire to forge a kind of Hungarian identity for himself through a process of poetic self-making whereby he would escape some of his major precursors and also rid his work of the slightest hint or trace of a nationalism he so vehemently detested but which few of his contemporaries were able or willing to do. However ambiguously and inadequately, the invocation of the prophetic persona in the last eclogues may also obliquely indicate the emergence of the Jewishness he so categorically renounced and repressed. Radnóti's use of the eclogue is disruptive of the very tradition in which he had attempted to inscribe the undescribable; and if the four *razglednicas*, his last poems, are any indication - the second one being a sort of farewell to the pastoral and the fourth an exact prophecy of his own death - he may very well have abandoned the eclogue form and the whole classicizing manner along with it, had he lived. After all, he was only thirty-five when he was cut down by the executioner's bullet.

### Notes

1. In order to distinguish between Virgil's and Radnóti's eclogues, I have used *Eclogue* /for Virgil and *First Eclogue* for Radnóti, and so on.
2. In the essay *The Eclogues of Miklós Radnóti* B. S. Adams has stated that this reversal of right and wrong is "the basic idea of the Eclogues" (Adams 391). I am grateful to Clive Wilmer and George Gömöri's edition and translation of Radnóti's selected poems *Forced March* for alerting me to Adams' article. For the translation of Radnóti's eclogues in my paper, while consulting numerous other editions, I have mainly relied on the Wilmer Gömöri translation, with occasional modifications of my own.
3. For Virgil's eclogues I have used László Havas's edition; for my translations I have consulted the Fairclough translation in the Loeb Classical Library.

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