

ABSTRACT

A Phenomenology of Vergil's Landscape: Embodied Sensory Perception in Eclogues I & IX

As wild, rustic, bucolic, or simply “Arcadian” spaces, the landscapes of the *Eclogues* defy classification. In the first and ninth Eclogues especially, the intrusion of Augustan land confiscations into Arcadia’s isolated setting have motivated scholars to reconcile formalist problems regarding genre and style (Alpers 1979; Clauson 1994; Connolly 2001; Martindale 1997), as well as authorial identity (Leach 1974) and experience (Dominik 2009; Jenkyns 1989; Kutzko 2006) through Vergil’s connections to the landscape he constructs. Yet, scholarly understanding of Vergil’s countryside is incomplete *precisely because* it seeks to disentangle the lived and imagined experiences of “Roman” and “Arcadian” Vergil – elements that were inextricably united in the lived experience of both Vergil the author and his poetic figures. Already in the first lines of *Eclogue I*, the political reality of Vergil’s roman life (*patriae/patriam*) fades into the bucolic sensation of a sweet (*dulcia*), shady (*umbra*), Arcadian wood (*silvas*) (lines 1-5). The shifting sensory landscapes of Vergil’s literary production are better understood from the theoretical vantage point of archaeological phenomenology, which emphasizes the co-existence of material and experiential landscapes (e.g. Tilley 1994; 2004 and Bender 1998; 2002). From a phenomenological perspective, the experience of landscape is grounded in the human body through movements and structures of feeling or emotion.

In this paper, I interweave the objective and subjective experiences of immediate sense perception from *Eclogues I* and *IX* with both historical accounts (from *agrimensores*) of the lived experience of land-confiscation and visual evidence (aerial photography) for the transformation of the Roman landscape before and after the landscape-limiting, Arcadia-constricting process of centuriation. A phenomenological approach to these texts highlights the processual nature of multi-sensory experience as presented in the poems. Scent, touch, taste, sight, and sound are intertwined through the subjectivity of both reader and poet as sensory bodies. An embodied perspective highlights both the permanence of land confiscations and the incongruence between this poetic rupture and a historically-informed analysis of the land confiscations as bureaucratic, geometric, and profoundly mathematical. A phenomenology of Vergil’s landscape helps us embrace a sensory-rich subjectivity, which allows for a lived reality of landscape via the transhistorical mechanisms of land (re)distribution.

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