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Roman Concepts of the Literary *Persona* and Transtextuality. A Study of Bucolic Poetry

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Abstract: The paper combines an analysis of the distinctive features of the Roman literary *persona* with two issues discussed in modern character theory: the transtextual identity and the ontological status of literary characters. It focuses on the bucolic poetry by Virgil (1st century BCE) and Calpurnius Siculus (1st century CE), as well as on late antique commentaries on Virgil. The bucolic *personae* can be perceived as *characters* – which, moreover, can appear as *textual artifices* or as *non-actual individuals* – or as *masks* for text-external persons. In the commentaries, the identification of the mask with the ›man behind the mask‹ is partial and is discussed in terms of single parameters. The ontological status of such a *persona* is dynamic. It oscillates between that of a character and that of a mask. As a result, the identities of the character and of the author appear to be dynamically modelled, sometimes merging and sometimes separating.

These observations have consequences for the question of transtextuality both within the work of one poet and across works. First, the question concerns not only the identity of the *personae*, but also their ontological status. When homonymous *personae* are transferred from one text to another, they can retain their ontological status, or change it. When a *persona* is perceived as a mask, the question of transtextual identity concerns the level of the mask and of the person ›behind the mask‹. Second, the homonymous characters in Virgil's and Calpurnius' poetry are intricately connected, sharing some characteristics and not others. From this perspective, a network of partial identifications emerges. If the *persona* is seen also as a mask for text-external persons, a second level of identifications is introduced into this network, which further complicates it.

Keywords: bucolics, literary *persona*, ancient literature, literary character, transtextuality

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1 Introduction: Modern and Ancient Concepts of the Literary Character

This paper takes as its starting point the Latin word *persona*, which is central to Roman notions of the literary character and, I will argue, to the phenomenon of transtextuality in ancient literature. The term *persona* can be rendered in English as ›mask‹, ›role‹, ›character‹, and ›person‹. It originates from the world of theatre, where it first referred to the mask of an actor; then it was used for the role played while on stage and for the character embodied. From there, the term found its way into ancient literary and rhetorical theory (cf. *TLL* s. v. *persona* 1716.40–1717.4 for the notion of ›mask‹; 1717.44–1718.7 for the ›role‹ of an actor; 1718.8–1720.7 for the use in literary and rhetorical theory; cf. Fuhrmann 1996, 84–88 for other uses). In classical philology, it is also regularly used as a *terminus technicus* for first-person speakers, particularly in elegy, epigram, and satire. The broad spectrum of meaning shows that studying the Roman *persona* concerns different literary genres and is at the crossroads of several debates that are conducted separately in modern literary studies (about the narrator, the speech of characters, the lyric ›I‹, the dramatic monologue, etc.).

In particular, the notion of the *persona* as a ›mask‹ has attracted much attention. Scholarship has emphasized that audiences throughout antiquity identified the author not only with the nameless first-person speakers in lyric poetry, but saw him behind the *personae* of explicitly named literary and historical characters in all kinds of genres – in epic, drama, narrative fiction, and the literary dialogue, among others (cf. Clay 1998; Mayer 2003; more recently Whitmarsh 2009/2013; Tilg 2019; Grethlein 2021; 2023; Feddern 2021, 80–86, 125–164). The clear-cut boundaries that Genettian narratology draws between factual and fictional texts and between the categories of the author, the narrator, and the text-internal characters (cf. Genette 1988; 1992; de Jong 2014 for its application to ancient literature) do not exist in antiquity. This has consequences for ancient notions of the author and his relation to the text, but also for the understanding of the literary character. The latter has received less attention, possibly because the literary character itself has been less at the center of research in historical narratology than other narratological categories (cf. von Contzen/Cordes/Salzmänn, forthcoming, for an overview).

In what follows, I aim to contribute to our understanding of the ancient literary character by combining an analysis of the distinctive features of the Roman literary *persona* with two issues discussed in modern character theory. The first – in line with the topic of this special issue – is the question of transtextuality, or, more specifically, the question of transtextual identity, i.e. of whether and in what sense homonymous characters appearing in different texts can be identified with

each other. The second, closely related to the first, is the question of the ontological status of literary characters – bluntly put, the question of what a literary character actually is. Modern character theory, as advocated by Uri Margolin and others, proposes different perspectives on character ontology, which are associated with different conceptualizations and theories of the literary character (cf. Margolin 2007). On the one hand, a character can be seen as a »creature of the word«, as a *textual artifice* created in a specific cultural setting. In this perspective, »texts are necessary for characters to exist and subsist; individual minds are needed to actualize them« (Margolin 2007, 67). What needs to be analyzed from this point of view is the way a character is constructed through language. On the other hand, a character can be seen as a *non-actual individual* in the world of a work of fiction. In the reader's imagination, such a character has a fictitious existence »independent [...] of and prior to any narrative about [it]« (Margolin 2007, 71). From this perspective, other questions come to the fore when analyzing a character, including those of »the basic conditions of existence, identity and survival (continuity, sameness) of an individual in a [...] fictional world« (Margolin 2007, 67–76, who also considers approaches from cognitive literary studies that will not be addressed here). In principle, a reader can take both perspectives on a character and its ontology, but the way a text is made can favor one or the other. Depending on which perspective one adopts, the question of whether it is legitimate and instructive to ask about the ›life‹ of a character outside the text will be answered differently (cf. Knights 1933, whose treatise *How many children had Lady Macbeth?* is a classic in this discussion).

It is clear that the issues of transtextuality and ontological status are relevant for characters in ancient literature (cf. Bär 2018; 2019 for instructive narratological analyses in this field). Due to the peculiarities of the ancient literary *persona*, however, it is necessary to analyze how and to what extent the theories and questions developed with regard to modern literature need to be supplemented or modified. Bucolic poetry is an instructive field of inquiry in this regard, as it is one peculiarity of the genre that many homonymous characters appear in the pastoral worlds of Theocritus (3rd century BCE), Virgil (1st century BCE), and Calpurnius (1st century CE), which points to the issue of transtextuality. Another peculiarity is that in antiquity, there were lively discussions about which historical people were hidden behind the ›masks‹ of the bucolic characters, so their ontological status was up for debate.

The latter aspect, the ›bucolic masquerade‹, has been much discussed in scholarship. It is part of the ancient practice of *allegoria*, an interpretation of poetry that sees the poems' literal sense as referring to higher, philosophical (i.e. cosmological, ethical), or religious truths, or that reads the poems' stories and characters as pointing to historical events and persons. The scholia to Theocritus' *Idylls*, which go back to Alexandrian philologists of the 1st century BCE, identify the characters

in the poems with the author and draw supposed biographical information from them (cf. Korenjack 2003, 67 sq.). From the 1st century CE onwards, we can differentiate between »historical allegorical readings« of Virgilian poetry, which identify characters in the poems with the poet and his contemporaries, and »divinatory allegorical readings«, which read the poems as pointing to future persons and events (Langholf 1990). In late antique philology, allegorical exegesis was so widespread that the commentator Servius (around 400 CE) sought to limit it methodologically. In his discussions of Virgil's works, further subcategories of *allegoria* can be distinguished; the interpretation of characters as masks for historical individuals is one of them (cf. Tischer 2015).

While scholars have traced these various types and developments of *allegoria*, the ›bucolic masquerade‹ has not yet been analyzed with regard to the topic of transtextuality and from a perspective informed by modern character theory. In the present paper, this can only be done by means of some illustrative examples, but, as I aim to show, such an approach is able to offer new perspectives on how the bucolic *personae* (and possibly other ancient characters) functioned. Interpretations that read the bucolic herdsmen as pointing to historical individuals have been handed down to us in the scholia and commentaries, that is, in works by specialists. However, given the well-documented impact of such readings on the production of the bucolic poems (cf. Langholf 1995; Korenjack 2003; Tischer 2015) and the widespread practice of biographical readings in different contexts, it is plausible that larger publics among an educated readership reflected on the issues to be discussed here.

In the following, I will focus on the Latin bucolic poetry of Virgil and Calpurnius Siculus, and on the herdsmen Corydon and Tityrus, who play a major role in the works of both authors (a future study would have to include Virgil's predecessor, Theocritus, and his bucolic successors, in particular Nemesianus).¹ Although the bucolic world is not entirely separate from reality, as it contains names of historical places and persons, these bucolic *personae* can be analyzed on a purely textual level. In this sense, they are full-fledged characters. Following Margolin, we can distinguish between a perspective that sees them as textual artifices and one that sees them as non-actual individuals. Yet, as we have seen, the *personae* can also be perceived as masks for the author and other text-external persons. The potential coexistence of the *persona* and the man ›behind it‹ results in an ontological ambiguity (cf. Cordes 2025). It is instructive to discuss how this affects the potential transtextuality of these *personae*, both within the work of one bucolic poet and

1 The text of Calpurnius' *Eclogues* is from Korzeniewski 1971, the translation from Duff/Duff 1934; text and translations of Virgil's *Eclogues* are from Fairclough/Goold 1916.

across works. As we shall see, the degree of individualization also plays a role in this regard, since sometimes the bucolic *personae* have distinct personal traits, but sometimes, rather, they appear typified.

2 ›What's in a Name?‹ The Bucolic *Persona* as Character and Mask

So, who or what is ›Corydon‹?

He is, first and without doubt, a literary character. In Calpurnius' *Eclogues* 1, 4, and 7, the poet's three ›political‹ eclogues, Corydon is endowed with a coherent identity: He is a herdsman, and he has two brothers named Ornytus (1.8) and Amyntas (4.78), and a beloved named Leuce (1.13). He plays flutes given to him by Ladon and Iollas, one of which had previously belonged to Tityrus (1.18; 4.59–63). Corydon evolves over the course of the eclogues in which he appears, as he experiences a series of events: in *Eclogue* 1, he hears of the prophecy of a golden age under Emperor Nero; in *Eclogue* 4, he witnesses and celebrates it; finally, he travels to Rome and returns to the countryside in *Eclogue* 7, enthusiastic about the capital but alienated from the pastoral world. The fact that the reader is presented with a coherent story over the course of the three eclogues suggests that Corydon can be perceived as an individual who exists in the fictitious pastoral world independently of the poem in which he is presented to us.

Scholars have, indeed, discussed the psychological development of this character. For example, there has been a debate about whether Corydon's experiences can be read as a ›chronicle of disappointment‹, as Eleanor Winsor Leach suggested by pointing to Corydon's alienation from the pastoral world and his lack of success in the city (Leach 1973, 87). One of the arguments put forward in the discussion concerns the question of what happens *between* the eclogues in which we encounter Corydon. Arguing that the relationship between the herdsman and his patron Meliboeus is important to evaluate the story, Burghard Schröder, for example, asks whether the latter accepts the invitation to dinner that is extended at the end of the fourth eclogue (4.166 sq.). He argues that the last line of the poem does not eliminate this possibility, and imagines Corydon and his patron subsequently (i.e. after the end of the eclogue) having supper by the river (cf. Schröder 1991, 219; Vinchesi 2014, 288 assigns the last two verses of the poem to Meliboeus). As a result, he prefers not to see Meliboeus' absence from the seventh eclogue, in which Corydon returns from the city and does not mention his patron, as an indication that the two have become estranged. Regardless of how one answers the question of whether Corydon's hopes for patronage were disappointed or not, this kind of argument shows

that the design of eclogues 1, 4, and 7 invites us to see Corydon as an individual in the fictitious pastoral world who exists independently from and prior to Calpurnius' poem. It also invites us to assume that Corydon is the same character in all three eclogues – I will come back to this.

By way of contrast, it is worth taking a look at Virgil's second eclogue, which was written almost 100 years earlier and must be considered a model for Calpurnius. Here, too, a character named Corydon appears; here, too, he is depicted as having his own identity – he is unhappily in love with the boy Alexis, lives in Sicily, and, by his own account, he is rich, beautiful, and talented. However, the poem contains various intertextual allusions to the eleventh *Idyll* of the Greek bucolic poet Theocritus, in which the cyclops Polyphemus sings of his unrequited love for the nymph Galatea. The numerous parallels to the Greek hypotext make Virgil's Corydon appear to be a textual artifice. When, for example, in lines 20–22 he emphasizes that he lacks milk neither in winter nor summer, or when he accuses himself of madness at the end of his song (Verg. *ecl.* 2.69: *A, Corydon, Corydon, quae te dementia cepit?*; »Ah, Corydon, Corydon, what madness has gripped you?«), the knowledgeable audience will notice that his words are allusions to Theocritus *Id.* 11.34–37 and almost a quotation from *Id.* 11.72 (ὦ Κύκλωψ Κύκλωψ, πᾶ τὰς φρένας ἐκπεπότασαι; »O Cyclops, Cyclops, where have your wits flown?«). The design of the poem invites recipients to explore the artificiality of Corydon: to reflect on how the character is made, to analyze the similarities and differences to Theocritus' Polyphemus, to discuss whether replacing the monster with the herdsman destroys the comedy that is characteristic of the Greek poem, and to ponder the question of whether Corydon might have read Theocritus' poem (cf. Coleman 1977, 107; Clausen 1994, 63; Holzberg 2016, 9 sq.).

The impression that the Virgilian »Corydon« is a textual artifice is strengthened in the seventh eclogue. There, a herdsman, who is also called Corydon, sings the praises of a Galatea (Verg. *ecl.* 7.37–40) and thus appears in the same Theocritean speech situation as Corydon in Verg. *ecl.* 2. Although there are differences between the two characters – one is a Mantuan goatherd, the other a Sicilian shepherd (as emphasized by Coleman 1977, 25) – the verses establish a connection between them. The Corydon of Virgil's *ecl.* 7 is therefore, to borrow from German, apparently not *derselbe* (scil. not the same non-actual individual) as the Corydon of *ecl.* 2, but he is definitely *dasselbe* (scil. the same kind of textual artifice): a construct of words, created by Virgil who, for this purpose, draws on Theocritus' *Idyllia*.

Second, the *persona* Corydon can be seen as a mask for the author. In the case of the Corydon of Virgil's second eclogue, this interpretation can be found in the late antique commentary by Servius (cf. Wessner 1923, 1836, for the origin of this interpretation): »Virgil is perceived in the *persona* of Corydon« (Serv. *ad Verg. ecl.* 2.1: *Corydonis in persona Vergilius intellegitur*). For Virgil's seventh eclogue, Servius

refers to the same kind of reading (Serv. *ad Verg. ecl.* 7.21: *et multi volunt in hac ecloga esse allegoriam, ut Daphnis sit Caesar, Corydon Vergilius [...]*; »Many argue that there is an allegory in this eclogue, in the sense that Daphnis is Caesar, Corydon Virgil [...])«. The fact that a character appears as a textual artifice »made« with allusions to and citations from Theocritus therefore does not impede its interpretation as a mask. Yet, for Servius, the combination of a strong intertextual connection to the predecessor and this reading is something worth addressing. In his commentary, he emphasizes that Virgil creates allusive speech from Theocritean verses that in the Greek original were written *simpliciter*, i.e. without double meaning (Serv. *praef. ad Verg. ecl.* 2, 14–22; cf. in detail Tischer 2015, 137–139). Moreover, the example shows that while the Corydones in Verg. *ecl.* 2 and 7 are not identified with each other on the textual level, their interpretation as masks for Virgil establishes a connection between them on the allegorical level.

In the case of Calpurnius' Corydon, the interpretation as a mask is the *communis opinio* even among modern scholars, who are usually (and rightly) cautious about readings that identify a character with the author. In this case, the relevant passage explicitly invites such a reading. In Calp. *ecl.* 4.58–63 Corydon speaks about his *Dichterweihe*. He tells his patron Meliboeus that the flute he is playing was given to him by Iollas, who said that it had formerly belonged to Tityrus (62 sq.). Meliboeus replies »you aim high, Corydon, if you strive to be Tityrus« (64: *Magna petis, Corydon, si Tityrus esse laboras*). Since it was a common interpretation in antiquity to see the *persona* Tityrus as a mask for Virgil, this statement is usually understood to mean that Corydon/Calpurnius is here placing himself in the tradition of Tityrus/Virgil (cf. Langholf 1990, 356 sq.; Schröder 1991, 121 sq.; Beron 2021, 15–20).

On the one hand, a consistent depiction of the *persona* as a character can facilitate an additional interpretation as a mask. Thus, the coherent narrative that makes the Calpurnian Corydon appear as a non-actual individual is cited in scholarship to support the view that Corydon is the same character in all three political eclogues (1, 4, 7) and that the invitation to interpret his *persona* as a mask for the author, which is made explicitly only in Calp. *ecl.* 4, can be applied to Calp. *ecl.* 1 and 7 (cf. Beron 2021, 15–17). On the other hand, a consistent depiction of a *persona* as a character can make the additional interpretation as a mask more complicated. This can be seen in Servius' treatment of Tityrus in Virgil's first eclogue. The commentator extensively discusses the interpretation of the character as a mask because not all elements of this *persona* can be transferred to the author. In his famous introduction to Virgil's first eclogue, Servius therefore emphasizes that the poet is to be seen behind the *persona* of Tityrus; however, not in all parts of the poem, but only »where reason demands«:

Serv. *ad Verg. ecl.* 1.1: *Tityre tu patulae: [...] et hoc loco Tityri sub persona Vergilium debemus accipere; non tamen ubique, sed tantum ubi exigit ratio.*

You, Tityrus, [under the canopy] of a spreading beech: [...] and at this point we must recognize Virgil under the mask of Tityrus; not everywhere, however, but only where reason demands it.

In particular, Servius sees the old age of Tityrus and his low social status as obstacles to a consistent interpretation of the *persona* as a mask, as these characteristics do not fit the author. When Tityrus mentions his »rather white beard« (*candidior barba*) and tells Meliboeus that he obtained his freedom only late in life (*Verg. ecl.* 1.27–29: *Libertas, quae sera tamen respexit inertem, / candidior postquam tondenti barba cadebat, / respexit tamen et longo post tempore venit*). »Freedom, who, though late, yet cast her eyes upon me in my sloth, when my beard began to whiten as it fell beneath the scissors.«), Servius therefore suggests that the passage could be read in a »simple way« (*simpliciter*), i.e. not allegorically, interpreting Tityrus merely as a character and not (also) as a mask for the author:

Serv. *ad Verg. ecl.* 1.27: *Libertas: amor libertatis. et aliter dicit servus, libertatem cupio, aliter ingenuus: ille enim carere vult servitute, hic habere liberam vitam, pro suo scilicet arbitrio agere: sicut nunc Vergilius sub persona Tityri dicit se amore libertatis Romam venire compulsum, et item latenter carpit tempora, quibus libertas non nisi in urbe Roma erat. aut certe simpliciter intellegamus hoc loco Tityrum sicut pastorem locutum: nam ubique eum Theocritus mercennarium inducit, item Vergilius, ut ›Tityre dum redeo, brevis est via, pasce capellas‹ (= *ecl.* 9.23).*

Freedom: The love of freedom. For a slave and a freeborn man each say ›I long for freedom‹ in a different sense: the former wants to be free from slavery, while the latter wants to lead a free life, that is, to act according to his own judgement. *Under the mask of Tityrus, Virgil now says that he was urged to come to Rome by the love of freedom, and he also covertly criticizes the conditions of the time, under which there was no freedom except in Rome. Alternatively, we could certainly interpret in a simple way (= non-allegorically), in the sense that Tityrus is speaking as a herdsman at this point:* Theocritus, after all, introduces him everywhere as a day laborer, and so does Virgil, e.g. in ›Tityrus, till I return – the way is short – feed my goats‹.

Servius considers a »two-voice solution« here, as Ute Tischer has put it. He proposes two different interpretations for what Tityrus says, depending on whether one hears the character speaking or the man ›behind the mask‹: In the first case, *libertas* refers to legal manumission of the enslaved herdsman; in the second case, the same word refers to the hope for (lost) political freedom (Tischer 2015, 148, on Serv. *ad Verg. ecl.* 1.27 and 1.28: »zweistimmige Lösung«). The ambiguous ontological status of the *persona* makes its words ambiguous, too.

With regard to the notions of the literary *persona* expressed here, two things should be noted. First, the identification of the mask with the ›man behind the mask‹ is

partial and can be discussed in terms of single parameters (age, social status, gender). This way of thinking about literary characters and their relationship to the extra-textual world is deeply rooted in ancient thought. As De Temmerman (2019) points out, ancient rhetoric and physiognomy promote a compartmentalized perspective on the literary character: the theory of *ethopoeia*, for example, works with parameters such as age, gender, social status, or the emotional state of a person to determine what kind of language is appropriate for them (on the use of the parameter of gender in first-person-speech, cf. Cordes/Fuhrer 2022). Such a segmented perspective can be adopted also for a character who is presented in the text as an individual with a coherent story and identity (like Calpurnius' Corydon or the Tityrus in Virgil's first eclogue). As soon as a recipient sees it as a mask, such a *persona*, too, appears to be a construct whose parts must be examined in order to see whether and in what way they may refer to people in the extra-textual world. Second, the ontological status of such a *persona* is dynamic. It oscillates between that of a character and that of a mask. As a result, the identities of the character and of the author also appear to be dynamically modelled, sometimes merging and sometimes separating. The *persona* Tityrus, as described by Servius in the commentary to the first eclogue, is sometimes only Tityrus, sometimes only Virgil, and sometimes Tityrus and Virgil »simultaneously and in one person« (Tischer 2015, 147: »gleichzeitig und in einer Person« – the idea that the two men have merged fits in with the notion of the *persona* as a ›role‹, but to discuss this perspective would go beyond the scope of this paper). Both characteristics of the bucolic *personae* have consequences if we analyze their potential transtextuality.

Before we come to this, however, I want to briefly address the degree of individuality that these characters exhibit. As said, the *personae* on whom this paper is focused, Tityrus and Corydon, appear in the bucolic poems not only as characters with distinctive personal traits and individual stories. They also appear as types, i.e. as characters that are not or only scarcely developed individually. This can affect their perceived ontological status and/or potential transtextuality. Tityrus is frequently depicted as a subordinate herdsman in the eclogues of both Virgil and Calpurnius, where he is carrying out someone else's orders and is not equipped with a story of his own (cf. Verg. *eccl.* 3.20; 3.96; 5.12; 9.23–25, referring to Theocr. *Id.* 3.3–5; Calp. *eccl.* 3.19–21; 3.97 sq.). In his commentary, Servius appears less inclined to interpret his *persona* as a mask when it is typified in this way: he regards only the Tityrus of Virgil's first eclogue as a mask for the author; in cases where Tityrus is depicted as a typified herdsman of low social status, Servius describes him simply as such (e.g. *ad* 8.55: *vilissimus rusticus*; »a lowly shepherd«), or does not comment upon him at all (Korenjak 2003, 68 shows that this is different in the scholia to Theocritus where also nameless herdsmen are identified with the poet). In his commentary on *eccl.* 3.96, he even interprets Tityrus as an allegory for Mantua (cf. Tischer 2015, 147n34 for an overview on Servius' readings of Tityrus).

Corydon, on the other hand, is a fully developed character in Virgil (*eccl.* 2, 5, 7). At the end of Virgil's seventh eclogue, however, he is, as it were, deindividualized to become a type and a model for Calpurnius to use: Meliboeus declares Corydon the winner of the singing contest that is at the center of the poem. He says: »From that day on, Corydon was really Corydon for us« (Verg. *eccl.* 7.70: *ex illo Corydon Corydon est tempore nobis*). One way of interpreting the line is to understand the second *Corydon* generically. In this case, the name no longer stands for the specific character of the seventh eclogue, but for the type of the ideal singer (»From that day on, Corydon was really a Corydon for us«, cf. Clausen 1994, 232; Servius *ad loc.*; differently Coleman 1977, 225). This affects the *persona*'s potential transtextuality: It is likely that Calpurnius understood Virgil's verse in this way and for that reason gave his central character, who is also praised by a Meliboeus and, as discussed above, is usually seen as a mask for the poet, the name Corydon (cf. Schubert 1998, 44n4; Beron 2021, 141).

3 Modular Characters and Transtextuality – Or: The Reducible and Expandable Bucolic *Persona*

The question of whether the many homonymous bucolic *personae* (in the work of one author, but also across works) should be identified with each other has been much discussed in scholarship. While some characters, like Calpurnius' Corydon, seem to be clear cases, there is often no definitive answer to that question. Referring to the *personae* in Virgil, Robert Coleman therefore states: »On the whole it seems that [...] there is [...] nothing much to be gained (or for that matter lost) from a general assumption that the recurrence of the same name is significant.« (Coleman 1977, 25; on the relation between homonymy and transtextuality see also Bär and Philipowski in this issue.) It is outside the scope of this paper to discuss the issue in detail, but based on the observations made above, I want to put forward some thoughts that offer new perspectives.

We saw that an approach which distinguishes between the notion of a character as a non-actual individual and the notion of a character as an artifice is of interest to the question of transtextual identity (or: sameness) of the homonymous bucolic characters. Thus, Calpurnius' Corydon seems to be the same character throughout Calp. *eccl.* 1, 4, and 7, due to his depiction as a coherent, non-actual individual in the fictitious bucolic world. Virgil's Corydon, on the other hand, is clearly not the same individual in Verg. *eccl.* 2 and 5, since the information given about the two Corydones is mutually exclusive. If we perceive them not as individuals, but as textual artifices, however, as the text invites us to do, the perspective shifts: We see

that the two Corydones are constructed through allusions to the same Greek hypotext. This gives them ›an overlap‹ of identity, as it were, not only with each other, but also with the Theocritean Polyphemus.

It is clear that the peculiarities of the Roman literary *persona* must be taken into account when discussing the issue. As can be seen from what has been said so far, the question of transtextuality concerns not only the identity of the bucolic *personae* but also their ontological status. When homonymous *personae* are transferred from one text (and context) to another, they can retain their ontological status, or change it. Thus, they can appear as characters in one text and (also) as masks in another; as they migrate, they can retain individual traits or become types (and *vice versa*). When a *persona* is transferred from one text to another and is depicted and/or perceived as a mask, the question of transtextual identity concerns both levels – that of the mask and that of the person ›behind the mask‹.

If we take a look across work boundaries, we see that Tityrus and Corydon differ in this respect. In the case of Tityrus, Virgil depicts him as a type (Verg. *ecl.* 3, 5, 9), as a fully developed character; and, according to ancient exegesis, as a mask for the author (Verg. *ecl.* 1). Calpurnius adopts him in all these statuses: in his *ecl.* 3, Tityrus appears as a typical character of low social status, subject to someone else's orders; in Calp. *ecl.* 4 he is depicted as a character with a specific history and identity, and as a mask for an extra-textual person who, in this case, is still Virgil. The corresponding appearance of Tityrus in both works and Calpurnius' adoption of him as type, full-fledged character and mask, is pointed out by Burghard Schröder: For him, Calpurnius »recognised the inconsistent use of the πρόσωπον Tityrus by Virgil, as identified by ancient exegesis, and took it into account in his own use of the shepherd's name« (Schröder 1991, 121 sq.: »Calpurnius [hat] den von der antiken Exegese festgestellten uneinheitlichen Gebrauch des πρόσωπον Tityrus durch Vergil [...] als solchen erkannt und in seiner Verwendung dieses Hirtennamens berücksichtigt«).

Corydon, on the other hand, is a fully developed character in all of Virgil's eclogues and again, according to ancient exegesis, a mask for the author. Through his achievements in the singing contest of Verg. *ecl.* 7.70 the eponymous type of ideal singer is created. This is then ready to be adopted by Calpurnius, who develops it again into a character with individual traits. He also uses the *persona* of Corydon as a mask for the author – the author who is now no longer Virgil, but Calpurnius himself. Described in this way, the literary *persona* indeed appears as a mask that can be put on by different people or – if we bear in mind that it is also, and simultaneously, a character in the fictitious bucolic world – as an entity that can take on and incorporate different extra-textual identities.

This description fits the way the Roman *persona* is thought of in other contexts. In a yet unpublished book manuscript, the late historian Thomas Habinek empha-

sizes that Roman ideas of personhood and, related to that, of authorship differed fundamentally from modern perspectives. A reason for this is that a Roman *persona* cannot be identified with a single biological individual in many cases. Instead, Habinek argues, the Roman *persona* was »partible, divisible, composite, and extensible«. From the point of view of cultural and legal history, he shows that Romans could see themselves as »particularised mixtures« of different persons and families, and that a *persona* could »contain a multitude of persons«. In his view, a question that arises when looking at the ancient sources is »how many lives does a name contain?«.

In the context at hand, it is important to take seriously the notion of a *persona* that can be analyzed with a view to single parameters. Like Habinek's perspective, it opens up the possibility of a partial identification which is of interest for the bucolic *personae* and the question of their possible transtextuality (and not just for them: in *apologiae* for erotic poetry – another *locus classicus* for analyzing Roman notions of the literary *persona* – the question of whether the poetic text-internal *personae* are to be identified with the authors is discussed with regard to single parameters, too, cf. Cordes 2021). If we consider the various Corydones in Virgil and Calpurnius, we see that they are intricately connected, sharing some characteristics and not others (see Figure 1). As seen, the Corydones of Virgil's second and seventh eclogues herd different animals in different places (goats in Mantua, sheep in Sicily), but they are similar in character and share, among other things, their love for a *formosus Alexis* (Verg. *ecl.* 2.1; 7.55). Moreover, they are both in a speech situation inspired by Theocritus, which makes them form an overlap, as it were, with the Polyphemus from *Idyll* 11. The Corydones in Calpurnius' work appear to be the same character due to the coherent story that is told in *ecl.* 1, 4, and 7. Yet, they are related to the Virgilian Corydones in different ways. The Corydon of the first and fourth Calpurnian eclogue is praised by Meliboeus, as is the Corydon of Virgil's seventh eclogue. The Corydon of Calpurnius' fourth eclogue plays on a flute that praises Alexis (Calp. *ecl.* 4.73–75: [...] *sed prospice, ne tibi forte / tinnula tam fragili respiret fistula buxo, / quam resonare solet, si quando laudat Alexin*). This connects him to the Corydones of Virgil's seventh and his second eclogue, which is cast as a love song for beautiful Alexis (Verg. *ecl.* 2.1: *formosum pastor Corydon ardebat Alexin*). From this perspective, a network of partial identifications emerges, which fits well with the idea of the »partible, divisible, composite, and extensible« Roman *persona* described by Habinek. If one sees the *persona* also as a mask for persons outside the literary work, a second level of identifications is introduced into this network, which further complicates it.

At the same time, the second level has the potential to resolve inconsistencies on the first, textual level. An example of this is Corydon's *Dichterweihe* in Calpurnius' fourth eclogue, the famous passage that invites readers to see Corydon as a mask for the author Calpurnius, who thus places himself in the tradition of Virgil.

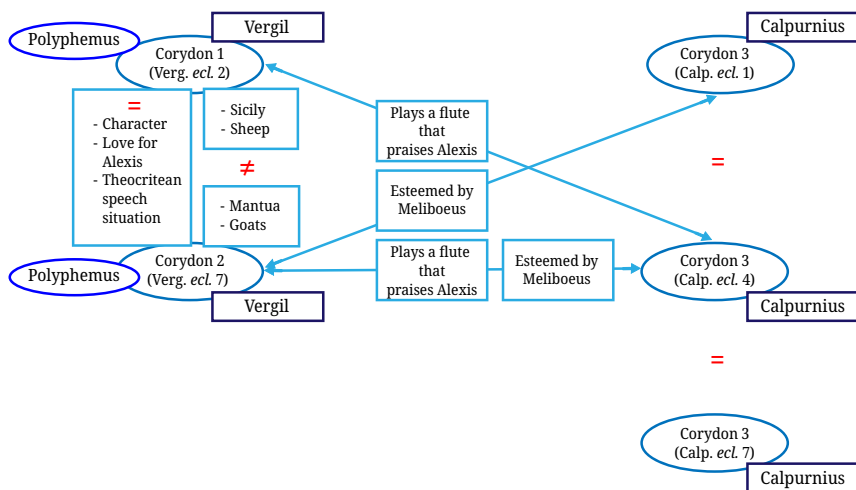


Fig. 1: Corydones in Virgil and Calpurnius

As mentioned above, in Calp. ecl. 4.58–63, Corydon recounts that Iollas gave him a flute that used to belong to Tityrus:

[...] *forsitan illos
experiar calamos, here quos mihi doctus Iollas
donavit dixitque: »truces haec fistula tauros
conciliat: nostroque sonat dulcissima Fauno.
Tityrus hanc habuit, cecinit qui primus in istis
montibus Hyblaea modulabile carmen avena.«* (Calp. ecl. 4.58–63)

[...] perhaps I might make trial of those reeds which skillful Iollas presented to me yesterday with the words, »This pipe wins over savage bulls, and makes sweetest melody to our own Faunus. It once was owned by Tityrus, who among these hills of yours was the first to sing his tuneful lay on the Hyblaeen pipe.«

A few lines later, Meliboeus asks Corydon to sing, and warns him that his flute should not sound so soft as it does when it is praising Alexis (Calp. ecl. 4.73–75: *sed prospice, ne tibi forte / tinnula tam fragili respiret fistula buxo, / quam resonare solet, si quando laudat Alexin*; »but take heed lest perchance your tinkling pipe breathe from boxwood as frail as is its usual sound whenever the praise of Alexis is the theme«). By this, he refers to the love song for Alexis that Corydon sings in Virgil's second eclogue. This eclogue contains another *Dichterweihe* in it; Corydon recounts that he received his flute from a certain Damoetas (Verg. ecl. 2.36 sq.). The *fistula* that Calpurnius' Corydon plays on in ecl. 4 thus used to belong to Tityrus, yet it can also

be identified with the *fistula* that is played by Corydon in Vergil's second eclogue and that used to belong to Damoetas. The inconsistency is resolved if both the Tityrus of the first and the Corydon of Virgil's second eclogue are seen as masks for Virgil. For then, both intertextual references in Calpurnius' eclogue point to the same *Dichterweihe*, namely that of Corydon/Calpurnius by Virgil. The example again shows that the question of the transtextuality of the bucolic characters concerns their different ontological statuses and – due to the widespread interpretation of *personae* as masks in antiquity – potentially two different levels of identification. These levels can interact, but they can also operate independently of each other.

4 Conclusion

A common way of approaching passages like the ones under discussion here is an allegorical reading. E.g., the common interpretation of a flute that »praises Alexis« is that it represents a traditional kind of bucolic poetry, which is replaced by a political bucolic in Virgil's fourth eclogue (cf. Verg. *ecl.* 4.3: *si canimus silvas, silvae sint consule dignae*; »if our song is of the woodland, let the woods be worthy of a consul«). Thus, when in his fourth eclogue, Calpurnius makes Meliboeus ask Corydon that his flute may *not* sound as soft as it does when it is praising Alexis, the Neronian author is pointing toward the political nature of his work. Such interpretations are well documented in antiquity, so they are not disputed here. Yet, as I hope to have shown, in addition to such interpretations, it is worthwhile to take the text-internal level of the bucolic characters seriously and analyze the different constellations of *personae* in the eclogues more closely.

It can be seen that, with regard to Roman bucolics, the aspect of transtextuality cannot be examined independently of Roman concepts of the literary *persona*. First, the question of transtextuality pertains not only to the identity, but also the ontological status of the *personae*. When a *persona* is perceived as a mask, the question of transtextual identity concerns the level of the mask and of the person »behind the mask«. Second, the homonymous characters in Virgil's and Calpurnius' poetry are intricately connected, sharing some characteristics and not others. From this perspective, a network of partial identifications emerges. If the *persona* is seen also as a mask for persons outside the literary work, a second level of identifications is introduced into this network. It may further complicate it, but also resolve inconsistencies on the first, textual level.

It would be worthwhile to examine whether the peculiarities of the Roman *persona* described here are relevant also to the representations and effects of transtextual characters in other literary genres, such as the literary dialogue or

epic poetry. Recent studies of Roman comedy have discussed the possible effects of actor-role divisions in cases where the same actor played different roles, i.e. hid behind different masks (cf. Jeppesen 2023, 49–52). The humor based on such constellations, which can be found, for example, in Plautine comedy, is a further indication that ancient audiences were in general accustomed to considering two levels of identity when thinking about characters.

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