

Paulo maiora canamus: The Transcendence of Pastoral in the Neo-Latin Eclogue

The fourth of Boiardo's ten Latin eclogues begins with an invocation to Urania, though in rather apologetic vein:

Tu, dea, ...
Uranie, mecum silvas habitare casasque
Ne pudeat... (Boiardo 673)

(Let it not shame you, goddess Urania, to dwell with me in country cottages.)

After all, says the poet, Apollo too tended cattle.

This address does not resound like Milton's to the same Muse two hundred years later; but it is more unexpected as prefacing a pastoral, not an epic. Boiardo's poem imitates Virgil's fourth eclogue. Virgil's supposed prophecy of Christ's birth finds explicit, almost blasphemous parallel in the advent of Boiardo's patron, Borso d'Este of Ferrara. His ascent to the throne also marks the return of a Golden Age, but one of more bloody and turbulent gestation:

Squalida terribiles animos in proelia Phoebe
Erigit: hesperios jamdudum sanguine campos,
Sanguine et hadriacas spumantes cernimus undas; (Boiardo 674)

(Phoebe aroused terrifying souls to dark strife: at once we saw the western fields and the waves of the Adriatic frothing with blood.)

This is not a passing phase succeeded by a happier age. There is fear of more violence to come, in a passage of dense political allusion:

Hoc superi prohibete nefas: non caedibus hydram
Crescentem innumeris patriae sed viscera ferro Appetet,
hesperio satiari sanguine gliscit. (Boiardo 674)

(May the gods forbid such an evil as this, that the sword comes to be plunged into our fatherland's entrails rather than into the hydra, growing with countless acts of slaughter: it is avid to be glutted with western blood.)

Alongside Boiardo's invocation of Urania, heralding a paradoxical vein of political and martial pastoral, we may place an invocation to Calliope in "Amyntas," the first Eclogue by the Dutch Catholic poet Jakob de Slupere or Sluperius. This is the more remarkable as there is no epic material in de Slupere's poem. Its core is a love-lament, set in an elaborate narrative and reported at several removes, of the shepherd Amyntas, whose beloved Aegle is married to the unsavoury Pamphagus. This pastoral lament is set within a real-life, or at least realistic, journey by the poet and his friends. The clear localization of setting, and the hint of allusion in the name "Pamphagus" ("greedy"), might indicate allegory, perhaps political allegory—conceivably the alliance of the northern Dutch provinces with the Protestant rather than the Catholic powers. But this potentially epic theme, if it exists, is kept out of sight: the poem reads like "art-pastoral," if one may use the unfashionable term.

Unexpected support for invoking the epic muse to pastoral ends comes from an authoritative source. Minturno's *Depoeta libri sex* groups all poetry in three categories: epic, scenic and melic. The first, as including all types not acted or sung, embraces both the heroic and the pastoral. This may be thought a superficial link, but it is strengthened by certain other factors. Heroic and pastoral poetry are both of divine origin, derived from Apollo. Their common verse-form, the hexameter, is said to be the oldest form of verse:

[...] hexametrum carmen omnium antiquissimum esse constat, quod nullo alio quicquam versu conscriptum, ita vetus usquam legatur. Genus autem et Bucolicum et heroum eo carmine tractatur, merito vetustissimum esse utrunque

¹ The chief allusions seem to be, first, to the Angevin bid to wrest command of Naples from the house of Aragon, and second, to the imminent Turkish threat of westward expansion after the fall of Constantinople. See Zottoli's note in Boiardo 750.

apparet. Utrunque enim Apollini veteres, Heroicum Pythio, Nomio Bucolicum adscripserunt. (Minturno 162)

[...] hexameter verse is known to be the most ancient of all: for nothing so old is to be read anywhere, composed in any other type of verse. Both the bucolic and the heroic genre have been presented in such verse, so that these two rightly appear to be oldest of all. The ancients ascribed the origin of both to Apollo—the heroic to the Pythian, the bucolic to the Nomian.²

Mercury's name is also linked to pastoral.

More broadly, Minturno resorts several times to the universally cited premiss that the pastoral or rustic life is *vetustissimum*, and that pastoral poetry originates in early worship of pastoral gods:

Immo veto quia prisci illi Veteres pastoraalem vitam agebant, Deosque ut poterant, maxime colebant, carmen, quod pastores decebat, in sacris adhibitum esse credendum est. (Minturno 162)

(Indeed, because these first ancient people followed the pastoral life, and worshipped the gods as much as they were able, it is to be believed that the song appropriate to shepherds was applied to holy matters.)

This recalls other accounts (e.g., in Eobanus Hessus 12³) of Hesiod as the original shepherd-poet. *Works and Days* and the *Theogony* present two levels of output of an originatory shepherd-poet. *Works and Days* may not be precisely pastoral, but its broader rural concerns are linked to the account of the gods in the *Theogony*.

As is well known, Virgil is thought to have released the loftier potential of pastoral. Theocritus is hailed as master of the simple, delicate vein of the pristine bucolic; Virgil reworks the vein to grander and more serious purpose:

Itaque Virgilius quominus eam tenuitatem assequeretur, et divinam poetae maiestatem, et gravitatem Romanam in causa fuisse putandum est. (Minturno 166)

(So that we are to judge that inasmuch as Virgil follows this lowly vein less, it is owing both to the divine majesty of the poet and to Roman *gravitas*^)

² Apollo "the Pasturer," so called because he tended the flocks of Admetus.

³ The style "Hessus 12" etc. is used to refer to one of a numbered series of eclogues by the same poet.

Thus Virgilian pastoral can even excite the awe and wonder (*admiratio*) that was coming to augment pity and fear as the *tertium quid* of the tragic effect:

Atque in ipsa tenuitate admirabilem se praebet, cum vel in tenuissimo genere movenda sit admiratio. (Minturno 166)

(And he shows himself as admirable even in this lowly vein, in that *admiratio* may be aroused even by the humblest genre.)

In the Proemium to his commentary on Virgil, Cristoforo Landino had drawn out the implications of this premiss earlier and further than Minturno:

Hoc tamen in Vergilio admiror, quod in Theocrito etsi absit non desidero [...] ut quanvis a persona pastorali non discedat, tamen alium sensum longe excellentiorem sub illo vulgari abscondit, ut opus duplici argumento ornatum et illi qui in promptu est inserviat et ilium qui latet perficiat: [...] Et profecto ad maxima quaeque ac divina natus hic poeta, ita in humilioribus a prima aetate se exercuit, ut iam turn maiora ilia et mente conceperit et, ut res ferebant, aliqua ex parte ita edere inceperit [...] (Landino 213-14)

(This, however, we admire in Virgil, what we do not wish for in Theocritus even if he lacks it: [...] that although he does not deviate from the pastoral persona, he hides another sense, far more exalted, beneath the common one, so that the work, endowed with a double sense, both does duty for what is on the surface, and accomplishes what is hidden: [...] And indeed, this poet was born of the highest divine origin, in that he occupied himself in his early years with most humble things, but in such a way that even then he both conceived of these greater themes and, as circumstances allowed, started to present them in some part in this manner [...])

In other words, Virgil does not simply progress from the rustic to the courtly and martial, from the pastoral to the epic, along the standard "wheel of Virgil." He embarks on his total agenda at the outset: his epic is latent in his pastoral.

The premiss of the *duplex argumentum* is, of course, crucial. It is also the most familiar of all Renaissance critical premisses about the pastoral, so that I need not elaborate on it. It was a general postulate that under cover of trifling fictions, pastoral dealt with graver matters. This notion radically affected the writing of Renaissance pastoral and, even more, its interpretation: the imaginative integrity of the pastoral aesthetic was undervalued, deflected

or simply inverted. The commonest classical tag used in support was Virgil's call to the Sicilian Muses at the start of the Fourth Eclogue, *paulo maiora canamus*. It was overlooked that Virgil evokes this loftier vein as a one-time departure from the bucolic norm.

A catalogue of all allusive or allegorical pastoral would be wearisome, and carry little critical import. Instead, I shall focus on some aspects of the practice that best illustrate the engagement with matters *paulo maiora*.

The formal issue is a simple one. The basic pastoral contrast of court and country was often brought out by direct reference to courtly matters. The commonest device was what I have elsewhere (Chaudhuri 31) called the "admiring shepherd" topos, whereby a shepherd visiting the court or encountering a lofty personage describes his experience in terms of wonder and praise. The fictional shepherd thus guides the response of the common urban reader. He extols the clear superiority of the court, in place of the ambiguous interface between complex and simple man (in William Empson's words, "I am in one way better, in another not so good," Empson 19). Such an alignment reworks the original contours of the pastoral but does not totally destroy them, as the contrast of the two milieus is kept up. The integrity of the pastoral fiction is unimpaired, if not that of the pastoral ethos.

Allegoric pastoral undermines this fiction by fusing the court with the country: the latter becomes a mere metaphor for the former. J. C. Scaliger in *PoeticesUbriseptem* restricts pastoral most explicitly to a mediatory formal role of no independent or intrinsic value. There are many types of pastorals, he says; but

Commune autem illud habent: ut cuiusunque generis negotium semper retrahant ad agrorum naturam. Iccirco praeter nemora et agros, siquid ex urbe oblatum canant: ita tractent, ut quasi in agro ortum, aut inventum, aut actum dicant. [...] Quemadmodum vero dicebamus, quodcunque processerit, sub agresti persona comparandum est. (Scaliger 99, 150)

(This, however, they have in common, that they assimilate activities of whatever category to the nature of rural life. Thus if, beyond woods and fields, they sing of something derived from the city, they treat it in such a way as though speaking of something born or created or enacted in the countryside. [...] For which reason we have truly said that whatever the poet treats of, it is to be presented in rustic guise.)

By such a view, pastoral can take in paradoxical variants like the *pastoralia villica*, said by Scaliger to be an innovation of his own times (though he

suggests that, Eke Sannazaro's piscatory eclogues, it might be *ex Theocrito*: Scaliger ISO).⁴ *Villica* suggests the country-house poem or poems about elite rural retreats; but we also find the full-fledged paradox of the pastoral in praise of a city. A good example is Eobanus Hessus's celebration of Nuremberg, *Encomium urbis Noribergae*. The poet is aware of the paradox, and justifies it by *thepau/o maiora* topos:

His quoque sylvestres paulim secedite Musae,
Assuetae salices mecum canere inter opacas [...] Nos maiora vocant reduces in carmina Musae,
Musae non tantum caulas cantare suetae,
Verum etiam clarasque domos, et culta potentum
Quantumvis timido pede limina tangere regum,
Oblitae sylvarum, inopisque per avia vitae. (Oporinus 583)

(Withdraw awhile from here, sylvan Muses,
Accustomed to sing with me among the shady willows. [...] Now the Muses, returning, call us to greater songs —
Muses accustomed to sing not only of sheepcotes
But also of celebrated houses, the estates of powerful men,
And (though with fearful feet) to tread royal thresholds,
Forgetful of the woods and of a poor life among byways.)

At the end, the poet recalls his Muse from such an audacious attempt:

Quo ruis imprudens sylvarum oblita, tuique,
Musa? [...] Haec tibi sunt alia praeconia voce canenda,
Tune, ubi grandisono dignum pede nacta cothurnum
Liberiore manu sublimia plectra movebis.
Nunc pede te decuit proprio consistere mensam
Limite praescripto (Oporinus 588-89)

(Where do you rush headlong, foolish Muse, forgetful
of the woods and of yourself? [...] It is for you to sing
these praises in another voice When, fitted with grand buskins
on your high-sounding feet,

⁴ Scaliger ascribes the origin of the *ecloga villica* to songs of "Hyemen." From his mention of "Anniculas, & Puellas," the reference seems to be to Idyll 15 (the Adonia) rather than to Idyll 18 (Helen's Epithakmion). Needless to say, neither Idyll has any pastoral material.

You pluck the sublime strings with a freer hand.
 Now it behoves you, in a measured way, to remain
 With steps befitting your position within your appointed limits)

In other words, the poet fits his contrasting theme within the "admiring shepherd" topos. More often, the urban or courtly subject is directly subsumed within a pastoral metaphor: the king becomes a shepherd, the court a sheepfold. Assorted examples (most of them, interestingly, epicedia) are Paolo Belmisseri 6 (mourning Louis XII of France), Jean Arnoullet (Arnoletti) 3 (again mourning Louis XII as well as Charles II of Cleves and Nevers), Eobanus Hessus 6 and Euricius Cordus 1 (both mourning Wilhelm, Margrave of Hesse), and Johann Stigel or Stigelius's 'Tolas' (on Philip of Hesse, Wilhelm's son—who proves by the end of the poem to be alive).

In Henrique Cayado 8, the dialogue between Contarenus (Zacharia Contarini, Venetian Governor of the Polesine) and Barbadicus (Agostino Barbarigo, Doge of Venice) is explicitly cast *mpaulo maiora* terms. The context of allusion is the siege of Pisa by the Florentines, opposed by Venice, and Ercole d'Este's arbitration awarding Pisa to Florence. But Cayado is aware of the limited and unsatisfactory nature of the exercise: a true celebration of lofty matters calls for a more ambitious form. As he says in the dedicatory letter to Contarini accompanying this Eclogue:

Caeterum stilo tenui velim imputes quod praetermisi pleraque omnia et quae ipse praeclara egisti et quae maiores tui cum summa apud nos dignitate sunt indepti. Non enim tantarum opum capax est rusculum modico vix farre refertum. Haec ergo differo in aliud poema, non rurestre, quale et hoc, sed urbicum et civile, quod iam parturio, et propediem (modo Lucina faveat) enitar.⁵ (Cayado 90)

(For the rest, I hope you will blame the lowly style for what I have left out: all the illustrious things you have yourself done, and what your ancestors did, which have come down to us with the highest glory. For a small farm, hardly stocked with a little grain, is not capacious enough to contain such riches. Hence I reserve this for another poem, not rustic like this one but urban and civic. I am in labour with this, and (if Lucina so favours) will bring it forth one day soon.)

Fausto Andrelini I goes a step further. Charles VIII of France is no shepherd but Pan himself, hence lauded in a vein that is fittingly *paulo maiora*:

This poem never appeared and has not been identified. See *Les Eglogues d'Henrique Caiado*, ed. Claudie Balavoine (Lisbon: Fundacao Calouste Gulbenkian, 1983), 193, n. 3.

Si loquor haec humiles superantia verbas myricas, Materies
 erexit opus subiecta remissum. Si nescis, nihil est triviali more
 sonandum Ante sacrum numen; virgulta exilia poscunt
 Stridentes stipulas et pastoralia verba. (Andrelini 75-79)

(If I here utter words exceeding the humble myrtles, The
 underlying material raises the slack work erect. Let me tell you,
 if you do not know, that nothing should

be sounded forth in a trivial manner Before the
 holy deity; thin bushes can produce Loud reeds and
 pastoral words.)

Elsewhere too, the ruler or patron is identified not with a shepherd but with Pan or some other god. The most sustained examples are found, predictably, in Boiardo, poet of a markedly autocratic court, in his praise of the Estensi of Ferrara. Boiardo's Latin Eclogue 4, with which I began, applies one of several strategies. In Eclogue 1, Ercole d'Este is not identified with any shepherd, or even Pan, but with Hercules—and is thus held superior to Pan, even within a notionally pastoral poem. In Eclogue 10, Ercole is also praised directly as a king (i.e., not in the persona of a shepherd): his feats in peacetime are lauded by Orpheus, and those in time of war by Boiardo in his own person.

Eclogue 4 also refers directly to war in a pastoral context. War is a surprisingly recurrent theme in the Renaissance eclogue: again we find a trajectory extending from the recognisably pastoral, in terms of structure and ethos, to the totally reductive. Generally speaking, the "admiring shepherd" topos has a sombre parallel in the "suffering shepherd": here the court is contrasted with the country in terms of the poverty, ignorance, deprivation and oppression prevailing in the latter. Among the greatest miseries inflicted on the countryside is war, as seen in Belmisseri 3, Cayado 1 or Navagero's "Damon."

In Boiardo, however, Borso or Ercole constitutes that most contrary figure, the warrior-shepherd, totally subverting the root principle of pastoral. Philip, Margrave of Hesse, is presented rather similarly in Johann Stigel's "Iolas," though embellished with a little more pastoral metaphor. In Marco Girolamo Vida's Eclogue 3, Vittoria Colonna ("Nice") is a shepherdess, but her late husband Hernando d'Avalos ("Davalus") is presented directly as a soldier. In Cornelio Amalteo's "Proteus," Don John of Austria, the victor of Lepanto, is said to inaugurate a Golden Age where navigation will flourish in

security—unlike the traditional Golden Age, as envisioned in Virgil 4, where it will cease.

The upshot of these developments is that, from an urge to extend its scope or simply to exploit its metaphoric potential, pastoral comes to deny or reverse its basic rationale. This self-limiting and self-destructive trajectory suggests why the vast corpus of Renaissance pastoral offers only one halfpennyworth of bread to an intolerable deal of sack. The pastoral poem as developed by Theocritus had a distinctive if narrow and fragile viability. Virgil harnessed it to a range of historical and intellectual themes, crystallising its suggestive metaphoric potential into specific allegory. The move was first affirmed by Virgil's commentators from Probus, Donatus and Servius onward, and then by his imitators from Petrarca through the Renaissance and beyond.

In fact, for Virgil's commentators and imitators, *the paulo maiora vein* was not restricted to Eclogue 4. Donatus identifies three of Virgil's Eclogues as being in this vein: 4, 6 and 10. In Donatus's words, these three should not really be called bucolic ("proprie bucolicae dici non debent": Virgil 1544, sig. *3^v). This is generally accepted in the Renaissance: Minturno, for instance, has a closely similar account (Minturno 162-3). The operation of *the paulo maiora* strain is thus greatly extended.

Virgil begins Eclogue VI by explicitly professing the humble pastoral vein: "agrestem tenui meditabor harundine Musam" (now will I exercise the rustic Muse on a slender reed). So much for Donatus's remark, after citing *the paulo maiora* passage from Eclogue 4, that the poet does the same thing in Eclogues VI and X: "item similiter in aliis duabus facit" (Virgil 1544, sig. *3^b). Yet Silenus's song was generally taken as a varied philosophic discourse, a compendium of universal wisdom. Again we see a deflection of the pastoral trajectory. Pastoral had traditionally presented the figure of the "wise shepherd," learned in the ways of stars, planets and the weather, plants and animals, topographical and mythological lore. The shepherd could thus be the type of the scholar or learned poet. Tito Vespasiano Strozzi's eclogues give a markedly pastoralised account of Guarino da Verona, as in briefer compass does Cayado 2 of Poliziano. There is simple allegory of academic matters in Cordus 10 and Hesus 12: both Germans appear to be recounting the academic situation in Hesse or Erfurt or both. Later on, Giles Fletcher the Elder presents an elaborate pastoralised picture of academic life at Cambridge.

Gradually, the rustic shepherd-sage turns into an elite philosopher of pronouncedly un-rustic bent. The moral and ethical discourses grow too numerous to cite. More germane to my purpose are eclogues of

miscellaneous—or even comprehensive—instruction: most often of astronomy (a traditional preserve of shepherds, yet obviously leading beyond pastoral confines), but also of geography and history, both as often mythological as real. Basilio Zanchi's Eclogue 1 (where the dead shepherd Meliseus stands for Giovanni Pontano), De Slupere 4, Boiardo 6, and Jacopo Sannazaro's fourth Piscatory Eclogue all belong to this category. Sannazaro even provides an opening aquatic equivalent of the Sicilian woods for *his paulo maiora* vein: "Nunc primum notas velis majoribus undas / Currimus" (Sannazaro 176: Now first we run over familiar waters with greater sails). The most substantial, if poetically unmemorable, instance comes from Gervase Sepin or Sepinus, author of six enormously long eclogues of varied instruction for his pupil Henri du Bellay—depressingly followed by a seventh mourning the boy's death.

Scaliger offers an elaborate analysis of this didactic and philosophic vein of pastoral in *Poetices Ubri Septem*. He makes a symbol of Silenus by alluding to the "Silenus of Alcibiades" in Plato's *Symposium*, an unprepossessing exterior hiding deep wisdom within: "Est enim, ut videmus in Platonis Convivio, Silenus reconditae atque compositae sapientiae deus" (Scaliger 99, 150). (Therefore, as we see in Plato's *Symposium*, Silenus is a god of hidden and consummate wisdom.) Scaliger cites various other authorities for this view of "Sileni numen naturae fatigue peritum" (the divine nature of Silenus, steeped in matters of nature and fate).

Predictably, Scaliger also cites *the paulo maiora* passage, though in a rather literal manner. Care of forests, it seems, was part of the official duties of a consul such as Pollio. But Virgil makes the woods *consule dignae* in his own way: "ut quantum depressisset Consulis dignitatem Senatus ad sylvarum usque humilitatem, suis versibus, novaque materiae dignitate extollat ipse sylvas ad fastigium consulatus" (Scaliger 4, 9.) (So that inasmuch as the Senate lowers the dignity of the Consul to the humble level of the woods, (the poet) by his verses, and by the new dignity of his material, exalts the very woods to the consul's high station.) In Scaliger's present context, however, the *nova materia* relates to Eclogue 6. *Thepau/o maiora* tag is extended in the most direct way from one poem to another.

Eclogue 10 is a trickier case. It is worth noting that Servius does not cite this as one of the three non-bucolic or trans-bucolic eclogues. For Servius, besides 4 and 6, the third example is the *Pharmaceitria* section of Eclogue 8 (see Virgil 1528: sig. f8^r). On the surface, Eclogue 10 appears a mere love-lament modelled on Theocritus's First Idyll; its allusive vein is movingly

personal and poetical, but not overtly directed to *the paulo maiora*. The subtle thematic links with Eclogue 6 developed by Charles Segal in terms of love and poetry (Segal 325-9) will not suffice here: we need something more concrete. The appearance of Silvanus and, still more, of Pan *deus Arcadiae*, is undoubtedly part of the answer. Another part might consist in Callus's high political and military station ("Nunc insanus amor duri me Martis in armis / ... detinet" (Now mad passion for the stern god of war keeps me in arms)), or indeed in the link with the exalted compliment paid him in Eclogue 6. Commentators also draw various moral arguments from this poem relating to the destructive nature of love, and the edifying nature of pastoral (read poetic) pursuits.

The *major* claims of Eclogue 10 remain less conclusive than those of Eclogues 4 and 6. But they were a standard premiss of Virgil's reception in that age. This may explain why De Slupere invokes Calliope for his eclogue "Amyntas" with its somewhat similar mix of ingredients.

More fundamentally, it explains—or at least illustrates—what I may call an anxiety of insignificance troubling pastoral poets in a dispensation geared to the epic. Even while writing eclogues, poets generally view the form against the full hierarchy of genres, and work into it the substance of other modes and forms—even those specifically not-pastoral, even those which the pastoral is definitively avoiding or opposing.

In the last analysis, all too many pastoral poets betray a lack of conviction about the worth of their chosen genre: they are reluctant to let the pristine pastoral motive work out its own vindication. That is perhaps the final reason why, despite the fecundity of the genre, pastoral remains the great might-have-been of literary modes.

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