

The genre of pastoral poetry is known to us especially from the writings of Theocritus and Vergil. While the former wrote Greek *Idylls* during the third century BC, the latter published *Eclogues* at Rome in the decade following Caesar's death. But whereas these two poets are well-known and their writings readily available, the pastoral poetry of several other Greek and Latin writers survives, and also is worthy of consideration. Readers of *Labyrinth* will be familiar with Vergil's *Eclogues* from the articles (in volumes 62 and 63) by Prof. Haag. In this issue I would like to introduce a writer of pastoral poems who styled himself upon Vergil, namely Calpurnius Siculus. This author is treated with caution by modern scholars, in part because some are unsure about the dates of his life. Traditionally the writings of Calpurnius Siculus are dated to the reign of Nero, who ruled from AD 54-68, but a number of textual critics and experts of the Latin language have argued that the works belong to the beginning of the third century. Sparing the readers the details of the debate, and not yet convinced that the long-held dating is wrong, I shall assume here that Calpurnius indeed wrote in the first century AD.

The seven *Eclogues* of Calpurnius Siculus appear to reflect the enthusiasm which attended the accession of Nero in AD 54. It will be recalled that the beginning of Nero's reign was quite unlike that of the later years. Still under the influence of such experienced politicians as Seneca and Burrus, and eager to rule according to the example of Augustus, Nero started his rule on a high note. Publicly showing *pietas* to the deceased emperor Claudius and to his mother Agrippina,

Nero was clement to his political adversaries and sought to improve the standard of living at Rome. Moreover, he displayed an avid interest in the arts, and promoted cultural activities. The early years of Nero's reign witnessed a period of prolific literary activity, and two of the most famous post-Augustan authors, Lucan and Seneca, were associated with the court. Perhaps Nero sought to recreate the coterie of authors surrounding Augustus; Calpurnius may have been a member of a circle of writers who sought to reinstate the ideals of the early Augustan age.

The seven poems that comprise Calpurnius' *Eclogues* have as their main literary inspiration the pastoral poems of Theocritus and Vergil, although the influence of Horace and Ovid is also noticeable. It was common during the Neronian era for poets to emulate the "classical" authors of the so-called Golden Age of Latin, and Calpurnius probably saw himself as another Vergil. He increased the scope of Vergilian pastoral, however, by admitting features of other genres. Some passages display elements common to didactic poetry, while others are reminiscent of love elegy or descriptive epigram. Panegyrics become part of imperial literature, and also the *Eclogues* contain high praise of the new emperor. Three poems are explicitly historical and political in subject, lending a quality of realism to the genre.

Like Vergil, Calpurnius enhances the meaning of the *Eclogues* by providing the "book" of poems with a careful structure. Hereby Calpurnius focuses attention upon the emperor Nero, as the first and final poems concern events in Rome directly related to the emperor, while the central poem focuses upon the person of the young Nero. Whereas the second and sixth poems are in the form of pastoral contests, the third and fifth are non-political. Calpurnius' style may be described as unaffected and direct, but at times it is derivative of Vergil. Indeed, critics have charged the poet with attempting too much to imitate his predecessor. But there are differences: like his Neronian contemporaries, Calpurnius enjoyed composing descriptive passages and writing with vivid detail. Highly conscious of the tradition in which he was writing, Calpurnius sought to recreate the pastoral mode in a new political context. Imitation and emulation mark his work.

An important difference has been observed between the tone of Vergil's poems and those of Calpurnius, especially concerning the political climate. Whereas Vergil's pastorals reflect the social unrest and civil struggles which preceded the principate of Augustus, Calpurnius suggests that his pastorals introduce a new golden age. And whereas Vergil infuses his *Eclogues* with a tension between the real world of Rome and the ideal world of the pastoral, Calpurnius unabashedly proclaims the arrival of an era in which the ideal and real are one. This is not to say that Calpurnius' *Eclogues* lack criticism of political or historical situations; indeed, to some the poetry suggests that in the new Rome it will be impossible to promote pastoral ideals. The hindsight of those who lived and wrote after Nero's reign certainly contributes to the notion that a false idealism characterises the *Eclogues*. Unfortunately, not much time would lapse before the optimism of Calpurnius and his contemporaries would be shattered. At any rate, it appears that Calpurnius engages Vergilian pastoral in order to express the positivism of the early reign of Nero.

Two brief examples must suffice to demonstrate the manner in which Calpurnius appropriates features of Vergilian pastoral and places them in the context of the Neronian age. One is the motif of the golden age. It will be recalled that in *Eclogue 4* Vergil employs the image of the carefree and crimeless age to express his hope that a time of social tranquillity and moral order will accompany the birth of an unnamed child. Calpurnius applies the golden age to Nero's reign. With the advent of Nero, Themis, the goddess of justice introduces the new golden age:

"The golden age with certain peace is born again
And to the world at last returns kind Themis,
Having cast aside dust and dirt. Happy days
The young man brings..." (*Eclogue 1.42-45*)

A more specific instance of Calpurnius' emulation of Vergil concerns two comets. In 44 BC a comet had been observed upon the death of Julius Caesar. Vergil incorporates this omen into *Eclogue 9.46-47*, where the shepherds express the hope that the future may prove to be a happier time than the present. The comet which appeared in Calpurnius' day was commonly understood to refer to the death of the

former emperor, Claudius. The poet, however, applies it not to the death of a ruler, but to the new reign of Nero (*Eclogue 1.77-79*). Thus whereas Vergil referred to a more promising future in vague terms and from the perspective of hard times, Calpurnius writes explicitly of imminent prosperity brought by Nero.

These two examples illustrate the more overt relationship between the pastoral and political worlds in Calpurnius' poetry. Under Nero, Rome will be a "paradise restored". Thus, while drawing a parallel between Vergil and himself, Calpurnius suggests that the circumstances of his composition are more favourable than those of the Augustan poet. This was a high compliment to Nero: the "second Vergil" intends to compose poetry befitting the "second Augustus". The idealism in such comparisons is underscored by what we know of Nero's later reign.