

CAVES, PAN, AND SILENUS: THEOCRITUS' PASTORAL EPIGRAMS AND VIRGIL'S SIXTH ECLOGUE

According to Servius Virgil borrowed from Theopompus the motif of the captured Silenus as the narrator of philosophical or cosmic subjects (Serv. *ad Ecl.* 6.13; see Aelian, *Var. Hist.* 3.18).¹ There are, however, a number of similarities between the scene of Silenus' capture in *Eclogue* 6.13—26 and the Third and Fifth pastoral *Epigrams* of Theocritus which indicate that these poems, certainly as likely to be familiar to Virgil as Theopompus, may have suggested to Virgil some of the details of his setting.

The Sixth *Eclogue* above all is the place where one may expect a fusion of different sources.² The name Chromis in line 13, as commentators note, certainly points back to Theocritus (*Id.* 1.24). Although the transmission of the text of these epigrams is obscure (there is no certain evidence for their inclusion in a collection of *Boukolika* prior to the first century A.D.³) and although there is no absolute certainty that they are by Theocritus himself,⁴ it is not unlikely that a poet as learned and as interested in Hellenistic pastoral as Virgil would have access to these works. His familiarity with and use of the Hellenistic epigram for the *Eclogues* is proven by his adaptation of Callimachus, *Epigram* 2 Pfeiffer =34 (1203ff.) Gow-Page, to the bucolic setting of *Ecl.* 9.51—2.

¹ See in general F. Skutsch, *Aus Vergils Frühzeit* (Leipzig 1901) 29f.

² See especially O. Skutsch, „Zu Vergils Eklogen”, *RhM* 99 (1959) 193—201; Z. Stewart, „The Song of Silenus”, *HSCP* 64 (1959) 179—205; C. Segal, „Vergil's Sixth Eclogue and the Problem of Evil”, *TAPA* 100 (1969) 407—35 with the bibliography cited in note 1, p. 407; E. A. Schmidt, *Poetische Reflexion: Vergils Bukolik* (Munich 1972) 261ff.

³ See R. J. Smutny, „The Text History of the Epigrams of Theocritus”, *UCPCP* 15.2 (1955) 75ff.; A. S. F. Gow, *Theocritus* (Cambridge 1950) I. Ixix—Ixii; U. v. Wilamowitz, *Die Textgeschichte der griechischen Bukoliker*, *Philologische Untersuchungen* 18 (Berlin 1906) 113ff. Wilamowitz would date a collection in the first half of the first century B. C., which Gow allows as possible, but unprovable, while Smutny stresses the lack of evidence for a collection prior to the latter half of the first century A. D.

⁴ Gow (previous note) II.527 inclines toward accepting these epigrams as Theocritean.

The generation of Catullus, Cinna, Calvus had made the Hellenistic epigram the literary property of subsequent Roman writers.

The Third *Epigram* of Theocritus reads as follows (Gow's text, OCT 1952):

Εῦδεις φυλλοστρῶτι πέδῳ, Δάφνι, σῶμα κεχυπόν
 ἀμπαύων, στάλικες δ' ὀρτιπαγεῖς ἀν' ὄρη·
 ἀγρεύει δέ τυ Πάν καὶ ὁ τὸν κροκόεντα Πρίηπος
 κισσὸν ἐφ' ἴμερτῷ κρατὶ καθαπτόμενος,
 5 ἄντρον ἔσω στείχοντες ὁμόρροθοι. ἀλλὰ τὸ φεῦγε,
 φεῦγε μεθεῖς ὑπονού κῶμα τὰ καταγρόμενον.

Pan and Priapus, the latter's head crowned with crocus and ivy, are „hunting“ Daphnis as he rests, tired from setting out his hunting nets, on the leaf-strewn earth. In the fifth line we learn that the setting of this „leaf-strewn ground“ is a cave. The little poem ends with an exhortation to Daphnis to throw off sleep and flee.

The rapidity of the vignette in sketching the situation and creating an evocative mood of pastoral myth colored by a rustic and unreal eroticism has been justly admired.⁵ It is just this mood of myth and imagination which Virgil has created at the beginning of the Sixth *Eclogue*.⁶ To enhance his mythical atmosphere he combines the cave setting with the mythical Silenus and the possibly mythical Chromis and Mnasyllus, whom I take to be fauns, not ordinary shepherds.⁷

As in Theocritus' third *Epigram*, there are two figures who approach a sleeping third figure in a cave (*in antro*, *Ecl.* 6.13). Although Aegle in 19—20 changes the composition of the group from two intruders to three, Virgil makes it clear that she is a special addition, a kind of afterthought (20):

addit se sociam timidisque supervenit Aegle.

As „the most beautiful of the Naiads“ (*Aegle Naiadum pulcherrima*, 21) however, she also has the function of reinforcing the mythical element and of adding the erotic note which in Theocritus is carried by Pan and Priapus themselves (cf. *huius aliud mercedis erit*. 26).

Virgil's choice of a setting in a cave is natural enough; but the cave plays no part in the capture of Silenus in any

⁵ See Wilamowitz (above, note 3) 120—1.

⁶ See Segal (above, note 2) 414ff.; Schmidt (above, note 2) 258: „Der Leser ist auf Erhebendes und Geheimnisvolles, auf wunderbare Tiefsinnige Enthüllungen gerichtet“.

⁷ C. Segal, „Two Fauns and a Naiad? (Virgil, *Ecl.* 6, 13—26)“, *AJP* 82 (1971) 56—61.

of his Greek sources of this tale⁸, nor does it seem to figure in the Silenus mosaic which Saint-Denis adduced as a close visual representation of Virgil's scene.⁹ One of the earliest versions of a capture of Silenus, Herodotus 8.138, locates the event in the gardens of Midas.

Silens' garland, like Priapus' wreath, receives special emphasis (*Ecl.* 6.16):

serta procul tantum capiti delapsa iacebant: cf. lines 3—4 of the Third *Epigram, supra*. Both wreaths also have associations with Dionysus, for ivy is the usual plant of the Dionysiac garland¹⁰, and Virgil specifically mentions Iacchus in the line just before the garland (*Ecl.* 6.15):

inflatum hesterno venas, ut semper, Iaccho.

If Theocritus' Third *Epigram* suggested to Virgil some of the details for the attack of two rustic demigods (assuming Chromis and Mnasyllus to be fauns) upon a sleeping pastoral figure in a cave, the Fifth *Epigram* may have suggested the connection of that cave setting with the theme of song. In a scene possibly imitated from the beginning of the First *Idyll* (*Id.* 1ff. and 15ff.) the speaker imagines a small group of herdsmen, including the cowherd Daphnis, who will sing and play their instruments, a gathering which also resembles *Idyll* 7.71ff. The setting is „a shaggy oak behind a cave” where they will „deprive the goat-mounting Pan of sleep”:

Λῆς ποτὶ τᾶν Νυμφῶν διδύμοις αὐλοῖσιν ἀεῖσαι
ἀδύ τί μοι: καὶ γά πακτίδ' ἀειράμενος
ἀρξένυμαί τι κρέκειν, ὁ δὲ βουκόλος ἄμμιγα θέλξει
Δάφνις κηροδέτω πνεύματι μελπόμενος.
5 ἐγγύς δὲ στάντες λασίας δρυὸς ἀντρου δύτισθεν
Πάνα τὸν αἰγιβάταν ὄρφανίσωμες ὑπνου.

The exact relation of the singers to the cave remains rather vague¹¹, but the blend of a rustic setting with pastoral mythology, the awakening of a rustic god from sleep, and the

⁸ See Aelian, *Var. Hist.* 3.18; Xen., *Anab.* 1.2.13; Cic., *Tusc. Disp.* 1.114 (Crantor); Plut., *Consol. ad Apoll.* 27, 115Bff. (Aristotle and Crantor); Paus. 1.4.5; Ovid, *Met.* 11.90ff. For further references see Frazer *ad* Paus. 1.4.5 and E. Rohde, *Der griechische Roman und seine Vorläufer*³ (Leipzig 1914) pp. 219—20 with notes 3—4.

⁹ E. de Saint-Denis, „Le chant de Silène à la lumière d'une découverte récente”, *RPh* 37 (1963) 23—40, esp. 35ff.

¹⁰ E. g. Pratinas 708.15 Page; *h. Hom.* 21.1; Aristoph., *Thesm.* 987 and 999f.; Eurip., *Bacch.* 81 with the note of E. R. Dodds. Euripides, *Bacchae*² (Oxford 1960) *ad loc.*; Kurt Lembach, *Die Pflanzen bei Theokrit*, Bibl. d. klass. Altertumswiss., N. F., 2 Reihe, 37 (Heidelberg 1970) 119—20.

¹¹ Gow (above, note 3) *ad Epigram* 5.5.

presence of a cave all suggest affinities with the Silenus scene of the Sixth *Eclogue*. The magical „charm” (θέλξει, 3) of Daphnis' song reminds us that Daphnis, like Silenus, is a famous singer whose music creates a special sympathy between man and nature (cf. *Ecl.* 6.27—30 and *Id.* 1.71ff., 115ff., *Id.* 7.75—7).

Virgil, of course, has individual touches not to be found in the Theocritean epigrams: the amusing drunkenness of Silenus, the painting of his face with mulberry juice, the subtle mixture of humor and dangerous mythic power in his reaction to the garlands which bind him (*Ecl.* 6.23—4). But even if we cannot definitively prove that these two Epigrams influenced Virgil's conception of the capture of Silenus, the comparison shows how much of this kind of playful mythological-pastoral poetry there was in the literary tradition for Virgil to draw upon and how fully he was able to incorporate the fanciful mythology and light eroticism of such poetry into the large and complex dimensions of his own bucolic poetry, with its more serious and more comprehensive concern with myth, art, and love.*

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* Since the submission of this paper there has appeared a valuable re-examination of Virgil's use of Silenus in the Sixth *Eclogue*: M. Hubbard, „The Capture of Silenus”, *PCPhS* 201 (N. S. 21) (1975) 53—62. Mrs. Hubbard's doubts about Virgil's possible use of Theopomitus (pp. 56—57) seem to me to rest on subjective and uncertain grounds. Her arguments in favor of the influence of Cicero's philosophical works are plausible, but in any case do not change the conclusions reached in my essay.