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). 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. 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.) and although there is no absolute certainty that they are by Theocritus himself, 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.

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1 See in general F. Skutsch, Aus Vergils Frühzeit (Leipzig 1901) 29ff.
3 E. A. Schmidt, Poetische Reflexion: Vergils Bukolik (Munich 1972) 261ff.
4 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. lxxix—lxxii; 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.
5 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):

Εὐδεῖς φυλλοστρώτι τέθω, Δάφνι, σῶμα κεκυκκάς ἀμπακών, στάλκαμες δ’ ἀρτυγαγεῖς ἀν’ ἄρῃ.
ἄγρεῦε δὲ τῷ Πάν καὶ ὁ τὸν κροκόεντα Πρίηπος κισσόν ἑρ’ ἰμερτῷ κρατὶ καθαπτόμενον,
5 ἀντρόν ἐσω στείχοντες ὁμόρροθοι. ἀλλὰ τῇ φεύγε, φεύγε μεθεὶς ὑπνοῦ κώμα † 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. It is just this mood of myth and imagination which Virgil has created at the beginning of the Sixth Eclogue. 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.

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. huic 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

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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 Geheimnissvolles, 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 tale, nor does it seem to figure in the Silenus mosaic which Saint-Denis adduced as a close visual representation of Virgil’s scene. One of the earliest versions of a capture of Silenus, Herodotus 8.138, locates the event in the gardens of Midas.

Silenus’ 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 garland, 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 τῶν Νυμφῶν διδύμως αὐλοῦσιν ἀείσαι
άδυ τί μοι; κηγώ πακτίδ', ἀειράμενος
ἀρξέωμι τι κρέκειν, ὦ δὲ βουκόλος ἀμιγγά θέλξει
Δάφνις κηροδέτω πνεύματι μελπόμενος.
5 ἐγγὺς δὲ στάντες λασῖας ἄρρυτος ἀντρού ἐπισθεν
Πάνα τὸν οἰνοφόραν ὁρφανίσωμες ὑπνου.

The exact relation of the singers to the cave remains rather vague, 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 (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.
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 Theopompus (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.