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INTRODUCTION

"*Remedies themselves complain*": *pastoral poetry, pastoral criticism*

> Alas! I look for Ease in vain,
> When Remedies themselves complain.
>
> Marvell, "Damon the Mower"

This study had a dual genesis: I wished to account for the persistence of the "antipastoral" in pastoral poetry and to arrive at an interpretation of the Renaissance texts that seemed to me to exemplify the problems signaled by that term – the lyrics of Andrew Marvell. Traditionally, the dominant practice among critics of Renaissance poetry has been to view pastoral as a static, idealizing genre, whose goal was the recovery of an Edenic past – a goal that pastoral poets pursued by creating images of idyllicism within their works, and by imitating their predecessors as closely as possible. Poets who failed to meet these criteria – and the list could include every canonical Renaissance poet – were regularly exempted from the genre, and characterized as "antipastoral."[1] In looking back at classical pastoral, however, I found not a stable origin from which later works deviated, but a mode that worked insistently against itself, problematizing both its own definition and stable definitions within its texts: from the beginning of the genre, presence, continuity, and consolation have been seen as related to – indeed as dependent on – absence, discontinuity, and loss. While the term "antipastoral" seemed, therefore, to be clearly reductive from one perspective, it also clearly answered to a fundamental self-contradictoriness within the genre – a contradictoriness that is frequently registered self-consciously in pastoral poems: the quotation from Marvell that I have chosen for the title of this section could apply to any of the texts I

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examine, although its paradoxical implications would resonate differently with every one.

In recent years, many of the most interesting and vital studies of pastoral have been written from historicist perspectives (new or otherwise).[2] Critics such as Louis Adrian Montrose, Annabel Patterson, and Leah Marcus have made major contributions to our understanding of the genre – not the least of which is their general movement away from prescriptive, idealizing definitions. Almost universally, however, historicist critics underestimate the self-consciousness of Renaissance and classical poets about precisely those assumptions upon which their own criticism is based; they ignore or downplay, that is, the extent to which pastoral texts problematize relations between the literary and the "real," the aesthetic and the material, and the present and the past, creating neither a simple union of contraries nor an equally simple discontinuity. As a result, they reproduce, in different ways, the idealist assumptions they wish to eschew.

This is most obviously true of the leading historicist critic of the genre, Louis Montrose.[3] In a series of illuminating articles, Montrose persuasively demonstrates that even the "simplest" Renaissance pastoral is never wholly simple. He investigates how it "busily negotiat[es] by coulor of otiation,"[4] making play a form of work, and wielding power by acknowledging limitation; he argues that its exclusions are significant, and that its simplifying forms can effectively efface and displace contradictions. But Montrose's perspective causes him to overemphasize both the idealizing force of Renaissance pastoral and its discontinuity from earlier pastoral. He focuses primarily on texts or portions of texts that lay claim to simplicity, purity, and presence;[5] simultaneously, his synchronic approach allows him to posit an ideally "impure" origin in earlier pastoral and in material reality, while his theoretical beliefs call the existence of such an origin into question. Commenting on a court entertainment, he makes it clear that he regards "pastoral's metaphorizing process" as a "process of purification"; he continues:

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The shepherd's assertion demonstrates that the creation of figurative pastoral discourse involves a distortion, a selective exclusion, of the material pastoral world. One of the most remarkable features of this appropriation of pastoral forms by Renaissance court culture is its transformation of what in other contexts was a vehicle of agrarian complaint, rustic celebration, and popular religion into a vehicle of social mystification.[6]

Elsewhere, he maintains that "pastoral itself progresses from the literal pastoralism of the countryside to the metaphorical pastoralism of the court by means of verbal formalization."[7] Such statements underestimate both the extent to which "pastoral's metaphorizing process" has always been a problem in the genre, and the complexity with which that process is presented by pastoral poets.

Montrose's emphasis on the paradoxically impure "purifying" force of pastoral metaphors contrasts strikingly with his own stance: in a series of disclaimers that have become the hallmark of new historicist criticism, he freely admits the impurity of his own representations, and manages to turn this admission into a virtue – into an assertion of a kind of purity.[8] The self-consciousness implicit in this strategy is felt to mark a distance between the critic and the texts he analyzes, a distance made explicit in his formulation of intent, "If the poet's task was to celebrate, the critic's task is to understand the uses of celebration."[9] But Montrose's strategies could, themselves, be characterized as versions of pastoral; they are anticipated in numerous pastoral texts. On the one hand, pastoral poets often thematize his perception that their exclusions signify – that their "purity" depends upon and recreates what it excludes – thus problematizing the distinction between text and context that new historicists simultaneously deny and rely upon. On the other hand (and frequently on the same hand), they often see their own metaphorizing process directly as a mark of impurity – an impurity that consists precisely in a felt distance from "simpler" material and literary realities; and this direct acknowledgment of separation, absence, and lack can become a means of connection to more innocent "simpler" realities that are now seen as not completely innocent. Moreover, the

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question – much debated today – of whether this strategy is legitimate, whether this sort of self-consciousness has "consequences,"[10] is itself a subject of investigation and debate in the texts I consider. Their various responses suggest that the answer will depend on what one means by "consequences" (and on what one means by "answers"). None of them implies that acknowledging one's limitations actually allows one to escape them; attempts to achieve this end invariably recreate what they seek to elude. The one poet I examine for whom absolute freedom from limitation is the only result that would count as "consequential" is Sidney – and he is forced to answer, in effect, that the pastoral strategy has absolutely no consequences; the difficulties inherent in self-consciously assuming this position are, as we shall see, paradoxically demonstrated by his inability to bring his pastoral romance to an effective conclusion.

In contrast to Montrose, Annabel Patterson does emphasize the self-consciousness of most pastoral poetry. She provides a diachronic perspective in her impressive study of Virgil's influence, *Pastoral and Ideology*, and she makes it clear that literary referentiality and poetic utility have been explicit problems in pastoral at least since the *Eclogues*.[11] But Patterson's general approach – and her understanding of literary self-consciousness, in particular – are quite different from my own. To a certain extent, her work reproduces Sidney's uncompromising approach to pastoral (if not his self-critical perspective on that approach). Her study is structured around a series of oppositions – between Virgil and Theocritus, between Virgil's first and second eclogues, between the real and the ideal, the political and the aesthetic, the complex and the simple, content and form. She presents these oppositions as easily separable, and their separation has clear ideological force.

This is perhaps most evident towards the beginning of her book, when she sets up a programmatic distinction between different versions of Virgilian pastoral. After pointing to the presence in the *Eclogues* of an implied "argument ... as to whether poetry has a social function," she declares:

At one end of the argument stand the lovelorn, idle Corydon of Eclogue 2 and his counterpart Gallus in Eclogue 10, the former

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> defined by his opening quality, *formosus*, the lovely one, as belonging to a pastoral in which formal and aesthetic properties count for almost everything, provided the mirror of art does not lie.[12]

A little later, she speaks of a reader for whom "the 'formosum pastor'" represents Cornelius Gallus, and she implicitly associates this phrase with Corydon's scornful beloved, Alexis.[13] The fundamental difficulty with both these interpretations is that there is no "formosum pastor"; neither is there any simply "beautiful" pastoral in Virgil or (even more clearly) in Theocritus. The juxtaposition of the first two words in the opening line of *Eclogue* 2 – *Formosum pastor Corydon ardebat Alexin* ("The shepherd Corydon burned for the beautiful Alexis" [my trans.]) – points, first of all, to their logical as well as their grammatical incompatibility, and to the analogous incompatibility of great and small, of sophisticated urban artifice and simple "realistic" rusticity. The associations Patterson makes are not, of course, unjustified: Corydon *is* an aesthetician, and he becomes a more self-conscious one as the eclogue continues; we are thus forced to rethink the simple oppositions with which we began. By seeing him simply as the embodiment of formal beauty, however, she forecloses the questions that the eclogue foregrounds – questions about the efficacy and the accuracy of poetic representation – and she simultaneously distances the poem from Virgil's explicitly political eclogues.[14] What is occurring here is a kind of aesthetic scapegoating: the creation of a stable category of pure, "empty" idyllic formalism allows for the simultaneous creation of a category of pure, "full" political meaning, of an unmediated real uncontaminated by "the mirror of art."[15]

I dwell upon this reading not to impugn Patterson's scholarship, which is considerable, but because the assumptions that motivate it are operable throughout her book, and are discernible behind much current political criticism. Whereas Montrose repeatedly demonstrates that form has ideological implications, the ideological force of Patterson's work is to assert the primacy and priority of the ideational. The divisions that she effects among and within texts are clearly reflected in her critical methodology. The formal properties of a text are viewed

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as fundamentally non-signifying: form is seen either as emptily self-reflexive, or as a simple veil placed over a real and separable truth – a veil that is consciously assumed in response to external constraints. She thus credits the poets she examines with both too much control over and too little self-consciousness about problems of referentiality, representation, and imitation.

If Patterson settles the question of referentiality too quickly, most thematic political criticism treats it as already settled. The difficulties inherent in this position are particularly obvious in discussions of Marvell, because Marvell thematizes the problematics of earlier pastoral in a particularly radical way; arguments about his poetry tend therefore to revolve – even more frequently than in other cases – around the question of their reference. Ann Berthoff, attempting to remove *Upon Appleton House* from the realm of politics, inadvertently poses the right question when she asks rhetorically, "Would Marvell refer to a somber allegory of the Civil War as 'these pleasant Acts'?"[16] The answer to this question is emphatically "yes" – but to say this is not to say that Marvell's pleasantries, his displacements, his formal exclusions are extrinsic to the real, serious meaning of his poems; it is rather to assert that they are inseparable from anything that may be construed as meaning. By viewing them as dispensable defense mechanisms, even a fine critic like Leah Marcus necessarily reproduces Berthoff in another key,[17] creating a mirror image of the idealist position that views all serious "antipastoral" elements as extrinsic to the genre. What is at stake here – and that stake is, itself, political – is precisely the logical, hierarchical separation between seriousness and play, form and meaning, inside and out, text and context. And while a focus on political thematics is both useful and illuminating, it inevitably obscures this fact. It seems significant that Berthoff is just as – if not more – eager to exclude serious theology from *Upon Appleton House*;[18] and another like-minded critic gestures, despite himself, toward an extreme form of the problem when he attempts to separate the Mower poems from all associations with the Fall: commenting on the frequent appearance of the word "fall" in the poems, he remarks, "the similarity is verbal, not real."[19] Any thematic

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criticism necessarily assents to this opposition. Marvell's poetry does not – or more precisely, like the best new historicism, it simultaneously assents and problematizes, criticizes while making it clear that it cannot avoid reproducing what it criticizes, "celebrates" and uncovers "the uses of celebration."

I am not, of course, attempting to declare specific political readings out of bounds; in fact, I am suggesting that they are inescapably relevant even to poems that appear to erect boundaries around them. Even less would I care to deny the relevance of specific material circumstances to the different texts I examine, although my focus in the following chapters prevents me from considering them in detail. That focus is "literary" in a number of respects – in my choice of exemplary poets and poems, in my methodology, and in my interest in examining the creation (and continual recreation) of a literary tradition. My emphasis in the preceding pages on Virgil's second eclogue is not arbitrary; this study as a whole could be subtitled "some versions of Corydon": it examines the most self-reflexive strain of a self-reflexive genre. In so doing, however, it repeatedly calls the fixity of its own limits into question – and it raises similar questions about the self-consciously limited mode of pastoral and about the category of "literature" in general. I foreground the literary, in other words, not to assert its lack of connection to the social and the historical, but to address the complexity with which those contradictory relations are constructed, understood, and interrogated by pastoral poets themselves. And because my purpose here is to explore contradictions (rather than to "explain" them by appealing to a stable notion of literature or of history), my own account will often reproduce (and emphasize) the terms, the structures, and the problems that I am locating in the poems I examine.

I begin by considering the origins of pastoral in the poetry of Theocritus and Virgil. I would insist on the importance of reexamining Theocritus: the common tendency among critics of English pastoral to ignore or oversimplify his poetry inevitably limits their view of the genre. His position as the

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originator of pastoral is, of course, largely the creation of later poets: he writes, as David Halperin has shown, within the epic tradition.[20] His bucolicism is not, therefore, the expression of a longing for simplicity, but a means of acknowledging his limitations, of ironically distancing himself and his contemporaries from the epic poets and heroes that had preceded them. Theocritus' ironies are, however, quite consciously two-edged. Throughout the *Idylls*, both the poet and his characters repeatedly recreate, in diminished forms, the heroism they leave behind. Attempts to evade this dilemma, moreover, merely succeed in reinforcing it: at its most extreme, the bucolic perspective becomes identified with and indistinguishable from the heroic. While Theocritus' poetry insistently denies any originary force, then, it simultaneously evidences an awareness of the ways in which this diffidence constitutes an assertion, and it anticipates many of the paradoxes of power recent critics have seen in Renaissance pastoral.

When the *Idylls* became a model of poetic practice, the contradictions at their center provided Theocritus' successors with a means of affirming connections to the pastoral tradition while simultaneously acknowledging their distance from it. I trace this development in the chapter on Virgil's *Eclogues*, and I discuss Virgil's transformation of pastoral into the extremely self-conscious, insistently self-reflexive form that the poets of the Renaissance inherited. In the *Eclogues*, the paradoxical ironies of the *Idylls* are rationalized and made explicit, and the oppositions that Theocritus had conflated are suspended or (to invoke the image Virgil uses) "interwoven." Simultaneously, Theocritus' focus on the problematic relation between the limited man and his heroic models is supplemented (and frequently supplanted) by a focus on the parallel relation between the literary image and the literal reality it represents. Virgil's emphasis on the intertwined powers and limits of art is clearly coextensive with his social concerns: it is precisely because he places so much pressure on his poetry to "work" in the world that he is so deeply aware of its insufficiencies. While I concentrate my analysis of his pastoral on the Theocritean

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poems, I therefore attempt to suggest how the questions raised here are related to those in the contemporary eclogues.

In the second part of this study, I focus on Sidney's *Old Arcadia* and Marvell's lyrics (the Mower poems and *Upon Appleton House*), using these texts to address the problems and possibilities that the Theocritean/Virgilian model offered to English poets of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. My emphasis on the *Old Arcadia* may strike some as idiosyncratic. I believe, however, that Sidney's romance presents us with a particularly acute expression of the difficulties confronting Renaissance pastoralists – difficulties that many of his contemporaries (most obviously Spenser and Shakespeare, whom I consider briefly) are repeatedly attempting to resolve. The romance is the quintessential Elizabethan form of pastoral: its structure throws into high relief Renaissance humanist concerns about the persuasive power of poetry and the relation of "fiction" to "history."[21] We are forced to move beyond the self-imposed limits of the eclogue here, to consider the motives for and the consequences of action. As a result, the suspensions that had characterized the *Eclogues* are both anatomized and disrupted, and Virgil's questions about the efficacy of art in the external world become even more pressing. In the *Old Arcadia*, Sidney deliberately heightens the disjunctions that were implicit in earlier pastoral romances, repeatedly presenting us with two mutually exclusive, reflecting alternatives, variously figured as pastime and passion, a lack of discharge and an uncontrollable flood, self-enclosure and public exposure. As he pursues the conflicting implications of his own ideals to their logical conclusions, the paradoxical processes of pastoral recoil upon themselves: traditional consolations are disabled, and self-contradiction becomes self-cancellation.

Marvell's lyrics are frequently seen as a further movement away from the origins of pastoral. In the final chapter of this study, I argue that they also represent a movement back. Marvell sees distance itself as means of connection – indeed, as the only means available to him. Throughout his lyrics, he creates literal reality out of self-reflexive metaphor, enclosure out of violation, innocence out of desire, and continuity out of

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disjunction and displacement. His extreme self-consciousness about the problems Sidney had faced (problems, themselves, of self-consciousness) simultaneously exacerbates those problems and presents itself as their solution. And, by explicitly inverting the ironies with which pastoral began, Marvell effectively reaches beyond his more recent predecessors, and cements his connection to Theocritus.

"Remedies themselves complain" is itself, I believe, one of Marvell's many homages to Theocritus: it translates into English the contradictory meanings of the term *pharmakon* ("remedy," "poison"),[22] which appears prominently in several of Theocritus' idylls (including *Idyll* 11, a source of "Damon the Mower").[23] When Virgil imitated Theocritus' second idyll, he rendered *pharmaka* as *carmina* ("songs," "charms"), characteristically emphasizing his self-reflexive concern with the powers and limits of art. In the Mower poems, Marvell retains (and redoubles) the self-reflexivity that was Virgil's legacy: in so doing, however, he returns to Theocritus' paradoxes, insisting, on many levels, on the coincidence of distance and identity, bucolic and heroic, remedy and complaint. In *Upon Appleton House*, he more directly confronts the dilemmas that were posed by the pastoral romance: he explores the connections that exist between his creations and the greater world, and he acknowledges that his fictions are subject to external constraints; he makes this acknowledgment, however, from a perspective that is itself represented as fictional. He does not abandon his self-enclosed ironies; instead, he unpacks their implications, making explicit the ways in which "greater [is] in less contain'd" (*Upon Appleton House*, 44).

The neat (if paradoxical) narrative structure of the story I am telling is quite clearly dependent on its end. I include an epilogue focusing on John Gay's mock-pastoral, *The Shepherd's Week*, in which I address both the general question of pastoral "endings" – which have been centrally important to the genre since its inception – and my particular reasons for ending with the Renaissance: although Theocritus' ironies continue to exert considerable force after the Restoration, the relation between "pastoral" poets and their classical predecessors undergoes a

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