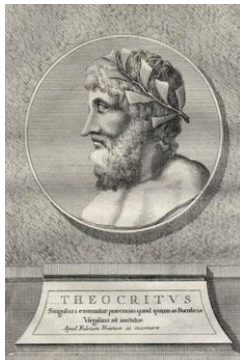


The “pastoral” genre in poetry and literature flourished in the last years of the 16th century.

It had echoes in later poetic forms times, such as the Romantic Movement in the early 19th Century, but the pastoral is an archaic form of literature. My interest in the style is to better understand the context and allusions of Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*.

The pastoral had been an important strand of poetry in classical times. It relied on a fantasy of shepherds (originally goatherds) capable of expressing love and desire in fine poetry, usually accompanied with flutes or pan pipes. Often a wise, older man was mentoring a younger man. Two of its classical exponents were the Greek Theocritus and the Roman Virgil.



Theocritus wrote his “Idylls” set in Sicily and Virgil set his “Eclogues” in the wild region of Greece called Arcadia.

*O Daphnis, what a dulcet mouth and voice thou hast
'Tis sweeter thee to heare than honie-combes to taste
Take thee these pipes, for thou in singing dost excel
If me a Goteheard, thou wilt teach me well,
This broken horned Goate on thee bestowe I will,
Which to the verie brim the paile doth ever fill.*

Theocritus Idyll VIII translated anon. 1588

The popularity of the pastoral depended on the attraction of imagining an escapist life without the “politics” and restrictive conventions of life in the city. Some commentators have divided the pastoral genre into the “soft” (eg Theocritus) where it is an escapist fantasy, and a “hard” form (eg Virgil and his imitators) where it was used a vehicle to propagate ideas too dangerous to expound directly. George Puttenham in the *Arte of English Poesie* (1589) wrote:

“..the poet devised the Eclogue...not of purpose to counterfeit or represent the rustical manner of loves and communication; but under the veil of homely persons, and in rude speeches to insinuate and glance at greater matters, and such as perchance had not been safe to have disclosed in any other sort.”

From classical times, the genre sometimes expressed sexual and gender issues that some might find disturbing. For example, even modern translators have baulked at translating some of the homoerotic lines in Theocritus’ 5th Idyll.

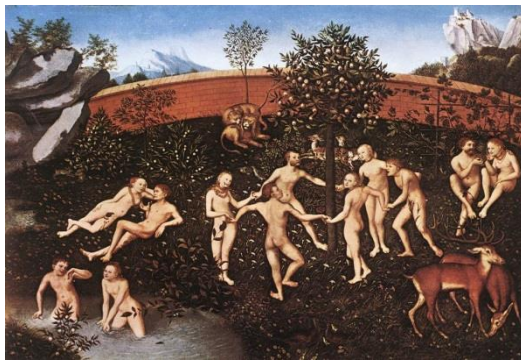
I think we can ask **why did the genre flourish in Shakespeare’s time?** Obviously, during the renaissance there was always going to be a respect for classical literature, where the *pastoral* form was studied alongside others such as *heroic* and *satirical*. Studying and writing imitations of classical pastoral poetry was part of the education of adolescents before the more noble epic forms of poetry were tackled. And pastoral novels and poetry were always an urban form of literature. So I think it was significant that in the 1520s the population of London was about 60 thousand but had grown to about 250 thousand by 1600. And for the form to have any significance the audience needed to retain an emotional bond with the countryside but not actually be living in it. I would draw a comparison with the popularity of Scottish ballads on overseas forces radio in the mid 20th century

or, more recently, the influence of West Indian music on the culture of first and second generation black immigrants.

There were other reasons why the pastoral might have been popular in late Elizabethan England. It was a very restricted society with both men and women living in single sex communities (eg university, inns of court, apprenticeships, domestic service) until they married in their mid-twenties. It must have been a sexually frustrating time for young adults. The *pastoral* provided a *locus amoenus*, an imaginary space full of erotic charge and unbridled desire.

And in a strictly hierarchical society, imagining an alternative Arcadian utopia where men lived in full equality was very attractive. The “Golden Age”, the first of the ages propounded by Hesiod and other classical writers, could act a model.

Ovid, in his *Metamorphoses*, described the mythical Golden Age:



*The Golden Age was first; which vncompeld,
And without rule, in faith and Truth exceld.
As then, there was nor punishment, nor feare;
Nor threatning Lawes in brasse prescribed were;
Nor suppliant crouching pris'ners shooke to see
Their angrie Iudge: but all was safe and free.
To visit other Worlds, no wounded Pine
Did yet from Hills to faithless Seas decline.
Then, vn-ambitious Mortals knew no more,*

*But their owne Countrie's Nature-bounded shore.
Nor Swords, nor Armes were yet: no trenches round
Besieged Townes, nor strifefull Trumpets sound:
The Souldier, of no vse. In firme content
And harmless ease, their happy daies were spent.
The yet-free Earth did of her owne accord
(Vntorne with ploughs) all sorts of fruit afford.
Content with Natures vn-enforced food,
They gather Wildings, Strawb'ries of the Wood,
Sowre Cornels, what vpon the Bramble growes,
And Acornes, which Ioue's spreading Oke bestowes.
'Twas alwaies Spring: warme Zephyrus sweetly blew
On smiling flowres, which without setting grew.
Forth-with the Earth corne, vnmanured, beares;
And euery yeere renews her golden Eares:
With Milke and Nectar were the Riuers fill'd;
And Hony from greene Holly-okes distill'd*



For Elizabethans, the model of Robin Hood's Sherwood Forest would have been another inspiration. In the 1590s there was a revival of interest illustrated by plays such as *The Downfall*

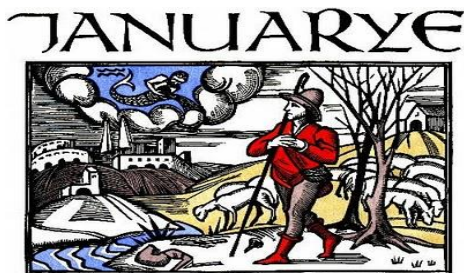
of Robert Earl of Huntington (1598-99). In their real lives to be without a master was a crime but in the fantasy greenwood the company of merry men had no master. Ordinary people might have a brief taste of such liberties during the revelries of May Day, one of the few old pagan festivals that hadn't been taken over as a Christian festival. Young people went into the woods for an all-night party, returning to their village the next morning with a huge tree trunk, which would become the maypole.

Some people were aware of alternative societies found in the Americas where natives existed without the restrictions of Tudor England. For some thinkers, such as Montaigne, the exploration of the New World included the discovery of people living as in the *Golden Age*



Shakespeare could draw on a wealth of contemporary pastoral literature for his comedies such as *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Spencer's *A Shepherd's Calendar* was published in 1579, and was in the pastoral tradition. It was a series of 12 eclogues, one for each month of the year. This extract from *October* describes how the shepherd, Cuddie, has had little benefit from his devotion to learning how to play the pipes; others have still got the girls.



*Piers, I haue pyped erst so long with payne,
That all mine Oten reedes bene rent and wore:
And my poore Muse hath spent her spared store,
Yet little good hath got, and much lesse gayne.
Such pleasaunce makes the Grashopper so poore,
And ligge so laud when Winter doth her straine.*

*The dapper ditties, that I wont devise,
To feede youthes fancie, and the flocking fry,
Delighten much: what I the bett for thy?
They han the pleasure, I a sclender prise.
I beate the bush, the byrds to them doe flye:
What good thereof to Cuddie can arise?*



In 1590 Sir Philip Sidney's *Old Arcadia* was published, a highly idealized version of the shepherd's life with linked to stories of jousts, political treachery, kidnappings, battles, and rapes. It involved cross

dressing but in this case the male (Pyrocles) disguises himself as a woman (Cleophila). In both guises he is quite sexy and seems to adopt the persona of a woman as well as the clothes.

[Description of Pyrocle] *But a litle way off they saw the mast, whose proude height now lay along; like a widdow hauing lost her make of whom she held her honor: but vpon the mast they saw a yong man (at least if he were a man) bearing shew of about 18 yeares of age, who sate (as on horsback) hauing nothing vpon him but his shirt, which being wrought with blew silk & gold; had a kind of resemblance to the sea: on which the sun (then neare his Westerne home) did shoote some of his beames. His haire (which the young men of Greece vsed to weare very long) was stirred vp & down with the wind, which seemed to haue a sport to play with it, as the sea had to kisse his feet; himselfe full of admirable beautie, set foorth by the strangenes both of his seate & gesture: for, holding his head vp full of vnmoued maiestie, he held a sworde aloft with his faire arme, which often he waued about his crowne as though he would threaten the world in that extremitie.*

[Description of Cleophila] *Well might he perceauie the hanging of her haire in fairest qua[n]titie, in locks, some curled, & some as it were forgotten, with such a carelesse care, & an arte so hiding arte, that she seemed she would lay them for a paterne, whether nature simply, or nature helped by cunning, be more excellent: the rest whereof was drawne into a coronet of golde richly set with pearle, and so ioyned all ouer with gold wiers, and couered with feathers of diuers colours, that it was not vnlike to an helmet, such a glittering shew it bare, & so brauely it was held vp fro[m] the head. Vpon her bodie she ware a doublet of skie colour sattin, couered with plates of gold, & as it were nailed with pretious stones, that in it she might seeme armed; the nether parts of her garment was so full of stuffe, & cut after such a fashion, that though the length of it reached to the ankles, yet in her going one might sometimes discern the smal of her leg, which with the foot was dressed in a short paire of crimson veluet buskins, in some places open (as the ancient manner was) to shew the fairenes of the skin. Ouer all this she ware a certaine mantell, made in such manner, that comming vnder the right arme, and couering most of that side, it had no fastning of the left side, but onely vpon the top of the shoulder: where the two endes met, and were closed together with a very riche iewell*

Shakespeare's primary source for *As You Like It* was Thomas Lodge's ***Rosalynde*** (1590), written on a sea journey to the Canaries. Lodge based his plot on the rather bloodthirsty *Tale of Gamelyn*, sometimes included in *The Canterbury Tales* although it is not now believed to have been written by Chaucer . Lodge wrote firmly within the classical pastoral tradition:

"For a shepherd's life, O Mistress, did you but live a while in their content you would say the court were rather a place of sorrow than of solace. Here, Mistress, shall not Fortune thwart you but in mean misfortunes, as the loss of a few sheep, which, as breeds no beggary, so it can no extreme prejudice the next year may mend all with fresh increase. Envy stirs not us; we cuvet not to climb; our desires mount not above our degrees, nor our thoughts above our fortunes. Care cannot harbour in our cottages, nor do our homely couches know broken slumbers: as we exceed not in diet, so we have enough to satisfy: and, Mistress, I have so much Latin, Satis est quod sufficet."

Shakespeare made a number of changes to Lodge's short novel; he changed the emphasis from a tale of an inheritance dispute between two brothers to focus on the love story of a disguised princess (Rosalind/Ganymede) with the hero (Orlando). And no-one dies.

Shakespeare's play is within the pastoral tradition but as usual he gives us multiple perspectives; subverting the genre by pointing out the limitations and unrealistic nature of its conventions. So his central characters are not true rustics but merely playing the part. His "young man" is a woman, and is not the pupil but the teacher. The hero's poetry is dire and one of his female rustics doesn't even know what poetry is. Alongside romantic lovers we have some who are coarse and base. There are new characters not found in Lodge's story, such as the jaded Jacques to sneer at pastoral idylls. And the second "fool", Touchstone, after a shepherd, Corin, extolls his simple life responds earthily with:

"That is another simple sin in you, to bring the ewes and the together and to offer to get your living by the copulation of cattle"

Even Rosalind/Ganymede is realistic about the classic tales of romantic love. She gives this practical advice to the coy, conventional shepherdess of Lodge's *Rosalynde*

*"For I must tell you friendly in your ear,
Sell when you can, you are not for all markets."*

And after listing some of the the classical tales of tragic love she says:

*"But these are all lies; men have died from time to time and worms have eaten them,
but not for love."*

And Shakespeare's band of merry men leave the greenwood and return to the city as soon as the opportunity arises. All the assorted lovers, whatever their motivation, marry and immediately return to their place in the hierarchical society. The audience may have glimpsed a "pastoral" alternative but the holiday was over by the time they left the theatre. However, some may have left a little disturbed after some unusual holiday romances – but that we will consider elsewhere.