

The Shepherdes Calender

by Edmund Spenser (1552?-1599)

The genre of pastoral, which originated with Greek and Latin poets, especially Virgil, was popular with early modern writers of lyric verse. Because the genre represents its subjects from the idealized perspectives of rural life, it gave writers who were critical of the more sophisticated manners of the city a chance to praise the virtues of simplicity and artlessness. In fact, Spenser's eclogues (pastoral dialogue poems) are rhetorically complex, exhibiting a consciously archaic diction and a demanding rhyme scheme. October is "eclogue the tenth" (*aegloga decima*) in a series of twelve eclogues or pastoral poems, published in 1579. Each eclogue was composed for a month of the year and as a whole they formed a "calender." The "Argument" is a prose synopsis of the following dialogue and was written by "E.K.," thought to be Edward Kirke, a friend of Spenser. The notes at the end are his. In the following edition, the words and phrases in bold refer to E.K.'s notes after the main text. Numbered footnotes are editorial.

October.



Ægloga decima.

ARGUMENT.

IN Cuddie is set out the perfecte paterne of a Poete, whishe finding no maintenaunce of his state and studies, complayneth of the contempte of Poetrie, and the causes thereof: Specially hauing bene in all ages, and euen amongst the most barbarous alwayes of singular account^o & honor, & being indeede so worthy and commendable an arte: or rather no arte, but a diuine gift and heauenly instinct not to bee gotten by laboure and learning, but adorned with both: and poured into the witte by a certaine enthusiasmos¹, and celestiall inspiration, as the Author hereof els where at large discourseth, in his booke called the English Poete,² which booke being lately come to my hands, I mynde^o also by Gods grace vpon further aduisement to publish.

esteem

intend

¹ "Enthousiasmos": inspiration. The Greek word originally meant "possessed by a god."

² *The English Poete* is evidently a lost work by Spenser.

Pierce. Cuddie.

CVddie, for shame hold vp thy heauye head,
And let vs cast with what delight to chace:
And weary thys long lingring *Phoebus* race.³
Whilome thou wont the shepheards laddes to leade,
5 In rymes, in ridles, and in bydding base:⁴
Now they in thee, and thou in sleepe art dead?

Cuddye.

Piers, I haue pyped erst^o so long with payne,^o up to now / care
That all mine **Oten reedes** bene rent and wore:⁵
And my poore Muse hath spent her spared^o store, saved up
10 Yet little good hath got, and much lesse gayne.
Such pleasaunce makes the Grashopper so poore,
And **ligge so layd**, when Winter doth her straine.^{o6} constrain

The **dapper**^o ditties, that I wont deuise, pretty
To feede youthes fancie, and the flocking **fry**,
15 Delighten much: what I the bett for thy?⁷
They han^o the pleasure, I a sclender prise. have
I beate the bush, the byrds to them doe flye:
What good thereof to Cuddie can arise?

Piers.

Cuddie, the prayse is better, then^o the price, than
20 The glory eke^o much greater then the gayne: also
O what an honour is it, **to restraine**
The lust^o of lawlesse youth with good aduice: desires
Or pricke^o them forth with pleasaunce of thy vaine,^o spur / talent
Whereto thou list^o their trayned^o willes entice. desire / ensnared

25 Soone as thou gynst to sette thy notes in frame,

³ I.e., let us see how we may pass this long day pleasantly.

⁴ A popular game; here, perhaps a poetry contest.

⁵ The shepherd's pipe is a symbol of pastoral poetry.

⁶ I.e., lie so subdued. The reference is to the fable of the industrious ant who laid up supplies for winter, and the carefree grasshopper who did not.

⁷ I.e., how am I better for that?

O how the rurall routes^o to thee doe cleaue: crowds
 Seemeth thou dost their soule of **sence bereaue**,⁸
 All as **the shepherd, that** did fetch his dame
 From Plutoes balefull bowre withouten leaue:
 30 His musicks might the hellish hound did tame.⁹

Cuddie.

O praysen babes the Peacocks spotted traine,
 And wondren at bright **Argus** blazing eye:
 But who rewards him ere^o the more for thy?^o at all / therefore
 Or feedes him once the fuller by a graine?
 35 Sike^o prayse is smoke, that sheddeth^o in the skye, such / is dispersed
 Sike words bene wynd, and wasten soone in vayne.

Piers.

Abandon then the base and viler clowne,^o rustic
 Lyft vp thy selfe out of the lowly dust:
 And sing of bloody Mars, of wars, of giusts,^o jousts
 40 Turne thee to those, that weld^o the awful^o crowne. bear / awesome
 To doubted^o Knights, whose **woundlesse armour** rusts, dreaded
 And helmes vnbruzed wexen dayly browne.

There may thy Muse **display** her fluttryng wing,
 And stretch her selfe at large from East to West:
 45 Whither thou list^o in fayre *Elisa* rest, choose
 Or if thee please in bigger notes to sing,
 Advance^o **the worthy** whome she loueth best, extol
 That first the white bear to the stake did bring.

And when the stubborne stroke of stronger stounds,^o efforts
 50 Has somewhat **slackt** the tenor of thy string:
 Of loue and lustihead^o tho^o mayst thou sing, pleasure / then
 And carrol lowde, and leade **the Myllers** rownde,
 All^o were *Elisa* one of thilke same **ring**. although
 So mought our *Cuddies* name to Heauen sownde.

Cuddie.

⁸ I.e., hypnotise them.

⁹ In classical mythology, the three-headed dog Cerberus guards the entrance to Hades.

85 Ah *Percy* it is all to^o weake and wanne, too
 So high to sore,^o and make so large a flight: soar
Her peeced pyneons bene not so in plight,
 For *Colin* fittes such famous flight to scanne:¹¹
 He, were he not with loue so ill bedight,^o afflicted
 90 Would mount as high, and sing **as soote^o as Swanne.** sweet

Piers.

Ah fon,^o for loue does teach him climbe so hie, fool
 And lyftes him vp out of the loathsome myre:
 Such **immortall mirrhor**, as he doth admire,
 Would rayse ones mynd aboute the starry skie.
 95 And cause **a caytiue corage** to aspire,
For lofty loue doth loath a lowly eye.

Cuddie.

All otherwise the state of Poet stands,
 For lordly loue is such a Tyranne fell:^o fierce
 That where he rules, all power he doth expell.
 100 The vaunted verse **a vacant** head demaundes,
 Ne wont with crabbed care the Muses dwell:
 Vnwisely weaues, that takes two webbes in hand.¹²
 Who euer casts^o to compasse^o weightye prise, tries / attain
 And thinks to throwe out thondring words of threate:
 105 Let powre in **lauish cups** and thriftie bitts of meate,
 For *Bacchus* fruite is frend to *Phoebus* wise.¹³
 And when with Wine the braine begins to sweate,
 The numbers flowe as fast as spring doth ryse.
 Thou kenst^o not *Percie* howe the ryme should rage. knowest
 110 **O if my** temples were distaind^o with wine, stained
 And girt in girlonds of **wild Yuie** twine,¹⁴
 How I could reare the Muse on stately stage,

¹¹ Cuddie explains that the imperfect, patched wings (“peeced pyneons”) of his own poetic powers are not in condition, but that it is proper for (“fittes”) Colin to attempt (“scanne”) such a high poetic flight.

¹² I.e., the Muses are not accustomed (“wont”) to dwell with those afflicted by love (crabbed care”); he is an unwise weaver who takes two pieces of cloth (“webbes”) in hand at once.

¹³ I.e., let him pour lavish drink but take only a little food, for wine (“Bacchus fruite”) promotes poetry (“Phoebus”--Apollo--is god of poetry).

¹⁴ Worn by followers of Bacchus.

And teache her tread aloft **in buskin** fine,¹⁵
With **queint** *Bellona* in her **equipage**.^o

equipment; retinue

115 But ah my corage cooles ere it be warme,
For thy,^o content vs in thys humble shade:
Where no such troublous **tydes**^o han vs assayde,^o
Here we our slender pipes may safely **charme**.

therefore
times / assaulted

Piers.

120 And when my Gates shall han their bellies layd:¹⁶
Cuddie shall haue a Kidde to store his farme.

Cuddies Embleme.

*Agitante calescimus illo &c.*¹⁷

GLOSSE.

This Æglogue is made in imitation of Theocritus his xvi. Idilion, wherein hee reproued the Tyranne Hiero of Syracuse for his nigardise towarde Poetes, in whom is the power to make men immortal for theyr good dedes, or shameful for their naughty lyfe. And the lyke also is in Mantuane, The style hereof as also that in Theocritus, is more loftye then the rest, and applyed to the height of Poeticall witte.

Cuddie) I doubte whether by Cuddie be specified the authour selfe, or some other. For in the eyght Æglogue the same person was brought in, singing a Cantion of Colins making, as he sayth. So that some doubt, that the persons be different.

Whilome) sometime.

Oaten reedes) Auena.

Ligge so layde) lye so faynt and vnlustye.

Dapper) pretye.

Frye) is a bold Metaphore, forced from the spawning fishes. for the multitude of young fish be called the frye.

To restraine.) This place seemeth to conspyre with Plato, who in his first booke de Legibus sayth, that the first inuention of Poetry was of very vertuous intent. For at what time an infinite number of youth vsually came to theyr great solemne feastes called Panegyrica, which they vsed euery fiue yeere to hold, some learned man being more hable then the rest, for speciall gyftes of wytte and Musicke, would take vpon him to sing fine verses to the people,

¹⁵ “Buskin”: a boot worn by the actors in classical tragedies--hence, a symbol for tragedy.

¹⁶ I.e., when my goats bear their young.

¹⁷ The Latin line, of which Spenser gives the first three words, is from Ovid’s *Fasti* 6.5: “There is a god within us; it is from his stirring that we feel warm.”

in prayse [eyther] of vertue or of victory or of immortality or such like. At whose wonderful gyft al men being astonied and as it were rauished, with delight, thinking (as it was indeede) that he was inspired from aboue, called him vatem: which which kinde of men afterwarde framing their verses to lighter musick (as of musick be many kinds, some sadder, some lighter, some martiall, some heroicall: and so diuersely eke affect the myndes of men) found out lighter matter of Poesie also, some playing wyth loue, some scorning at mens fashions, some powred out in pleasures, and so were called Poetes or makers.

Sence bereaue) what the secrete working of Musick is in the myndes of men, aswell appeareth, hereby, that some of the auncient Philosophers, and those the moste wise, as Plato and Pythagoras held for opinion, that the mynd was made of a certaine harmonie and musicall numbers, for the great compassion & likenes of affection in thone and in the other as also by that memorable history of Alexander: to whom when as Timotheus the great Musitian playd the Phrygian melodie, it is said, that he was distraught with such vnwonted fury, that streight way rysing from the table in great rage, he caused himselfe to be armed, as ready to goe to warre (for that musick is very warlike:) And immediately whenas the Musitian chaunged his stroke into the Lydian and Ionique harmony, he was so furr from warring, that he sat as styl, as if he had bene in mattes of counsell. Such might is in musick. wherefore Plato and Aristotle forbid the Aradian Melodie from children and youth. for that being altogether on the fyft and vij, tone, it is of great force to molifie and quench the kindly courage, which vseth to burne in yong brests. So that it is not incredible which the Poete here sayth, that Musick can bereaue the soule of sence.

The shepheard that) Orpheus: of whom is sayd, that by his excellent skil in Musick and Poetry, he recouered his wife Eurydice from hell.

Argus eyes) of Argus is before said, that Iuno to him committed hir husband Iupiter his Paragon Io, because he had an hundred eyes: but afterwarde Mercury wyth his Musick lulling Argus asleepe, slew him and brought Io away, whose eyes it is sayd that [Iuno] for his eternall memory placed in her byrd the Peacocks tayle. for those coloured spots indeede resemble eyes.

Woundlesse armour) vnwounded in warre, doe rust through long peace.

Display) A poetically metaphore: whereof the meaning is, that if the Poet list showe his skill in matter of more dignitie, then is the homely Æglogue, good occasion is him offered of higher veyne and more Heroicall argument, in the person of our most gracious soueraign, whom (as before) he calleth Elisa. Or if mater of knighthoode and cheualrie please him better, that there be many Noble & valiaunt men, that are both worthy of his payne in their deserued prayses, and also fauourers of hys skil and faculty.

The worthy) he meaneth (as I guesse) the most honorable and renowned the Erle of Leycester, whom by his cognisance (although the same be also proper to other) rather then by his name he bewrayeth, being not likely, that the names of noble princes be known to country clowne.¹⁸

Slack) that is when thou chaungest thy verse from stately discourse, to matter of mor[e] pleasaunce and delight.

The Millers) a kind of daunce.

Ring) company of dauncers.

The Romish Tityrus) well knowen to be Virgile, who by Mecaenas means was brought into the fauour of the Emperor Augustus, and by hin moued to write in loftier kinde, then he erst had doen.¹⁹

Whereon) in these three verses are the three seuerall workes of Virgile intended. For in teaching his flocks to feede, is meant his Æglogues. In labouring of lands, is hys Bucoliques. In singing of wars and deadly drede, is his diuine Æneis figured.²⁰

¹⁸ The Earl of Leicesters device was the bear and ragged staff.

¹⁹ Maecenas was Virgil's patron.

²⁰ The *Georgics* is Virgil's idealising poem about farm life.

For euer) He sheweth the cause, why Poetes were wont be had in such honor of noble men; that is, that by them their worthines & valor shold through theyr famous Posies be commended to al posterities. wherfore it is sayd, that Achilles had neuer bene so famous, as he is, but for Homeres immortal verses. which is the only aduantage, which he had of Hector. And also that Alexander the great comming to his tomb in Sigeus, with naturall teares blessed him, that euer was his hap to be honoured with so excellent a Poets work: as so renowned and ennobled onely by hys meanes. which being declared in a most eloquent Oration of Tulies, is of Petrarch no lesse worthely sette forth in a sonet

Giunto Alexandro a la famosa tomba
Del sero Achille sospirando disse
O fortunato che si chiara tromba. Trouasti &c.

And that such account hath bene alwayes made of Poetes, aswell sheweth this that the worthy Scipio in all his warres against Carthage and Numantia had euermore in his company, and that in a most familiar sort the goode olde Poete Ennius: as also that Alexander destroying Thebes, when he was enformed that the famous Lyrick Poet Pindarus was borne in that citie, not onely commaunded streightly, that no man should vpon payne of death do any violence to that house by fire or otherwise: but also specially spared most, and some highly rewarded, that were of hys kinne. So faouered he the only name of a Poete. whych prayse otherwise was in the same man no lesse famous, that when he came to ransacking of king Darius coffers, whom he lately had ouerthrowen, he founde in a little coffer of siuer two bookes of Homers works, as layd vp there for speciall iewells and riches, which he taking thence, put one of them dayly in his bosome, and thother euery night layde vnder his pillowe. Such honor haue Poetes alwayes found in the sight of princes and noble men, which this author here very well sheweth, as els where more notably.

In derring doe) In manhood and chiuallrie.

But after) he sheweth the cause of contempt of Poetry to be idlenesse and baseness of mynd.

Pent) shut vp in slouth, as in a coope or cage.

Tom Piper) An Ironicall [Sarcasmus], spoken in derision of these rude wits, whych make more account of a ryming rybaud, then of skill grounded vpon learning and iudgment.

Ne brest) the meaner sort of men.

Her peece of pineons) vnperfect skil. Spoken wyth humble modestie.

As soote as Swanne) The comparison seemeth to be strange: for the swanne hath euer wonne small commendation for her sweete singing: but it is sayd of the learned that the swan a little before hir death, singeth most pleasantly, as prophycyng by a secrete instinct her neere destinie As wel sayth the Pote elsewhere in one of his sonetts. The siluer swanne doth sing before her dying day As shee that feeles the deepe delight that is in death &c.

Immortall myrrhour) Beauty, which is an excellent obiect of Poeticall spirites, as appeareth by the worthy Petrarchs saying.

Fiorir faceua il mio debile ingegno
A las sua ombra, et crescer ne gli affanni.

A caytiue corage) a base and abiect minde.

For lofty loue) I think this playing with the letter to be rather a fault then a figure, aswel in our English tongue, as it hath bene alwayes in the Latin, called Cacozelon.

A vacant) imitateth Mantuanes saying. vacuum curis diuina cerebrum Poscit.

Lauish cups) Resembleth that comen verse Faecundi calices quem non fecere disertum.

O if my) He seemeth here to be rauished with a Poeticall furie. For (if one rightly mark) the numbers rise so ful, & the verse groweth so big, that it seemeth he hath forgot the meanenesse of shepherds state and stile.

Wild yuie) for it is dedicated to Bacchus & therefore it is sayd that the Maenades (that is Bacchus franticke priestes) vsed in theyr sacrifice to carry Thyrsos, which were pointed staues or lauelins, wrapped about with yuie.

In buskin) it was the maner of Poetes & plaiers in tragedies to were buskins, as also in Comedies to vse stockes & light shoes. So that the buskin in poetry is vsed for tragical matter, as it said in Virgile. Sola sophocleo tua carmina digna cothurno.

Queint) strange Bellona; the goddese of battaile, that is Pallas, which may therefore wel be called queint for that (as Lucian saith) when Iupiter hir father was in traueile of her, he caused his sonne Vulcane with his axe to hew his head. Out which leaped forth lustely a valiant damsell armed at all poyntes, whom seeing Vulcane so faire & comely, lightly leaping to her, proffered her some cortesie, which the Lady disdeigning, shaked her speare at him, and threatned his saucinesse. Therefore such [straungenesse] is well applyed to her.

Æquipage.) order.

Tydes) seasons.

Charme) temper and order. for Charmes were wont to be made by verses as Ouid sayth.

Aut si carminibus.

Embleme.

Hereby is meant, as also in the whole course of this Æglogue, that Poetry is a diuine instinct and vnnatural rage passing the reache of comen reason. Whom Piers answereth Epiphonematicos as admiring the excellencye of the skylle whereof in Cuddie hee hadde alreadye hadde a taste.

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