

2. Beginnings

There are lots of theories about the beginnings of Pastoral poetry, most of which spring from cult songs sung in the countryside. But pastoral poetry is secular and not at all cultic. Where did Theocritus come from suddenly? There are echoes of pastoral in old comedy, satyr play, and skolia. Satyr play in particular influence Theocritus. But by and large he created something totally new. There is also just a hint of Epicurianism

3. Simplicity

Pastoral lyric is simple and artless. It is wrong to look for the depth or the high style in it. Simple does not equal clumsy. There are lots of periods and stops, few conjunctions. This simplicity also frees it from the baggage of other genres. The simplicity is child-like, but Theocritus includes no children. He prefers young adults and shuns older figures. They raise only such questions as they can answer, unlike Virgil, who has a character try to remember an astronomer. The real distinction between Theocritus and Virgil is that Virgil's shepherds are less isolated, less innocent, and more sympathetic. Virgil combines disparate segments of his poems to do this. Theocritus locates pleasure in external stimuli, not in the man.

4. Otium

Virgil sees pastoral life and science as alternative that reinforce each other. Science removes anxiety, and only a man calm and without fear can find peace in the countryside. Otium is the result. Virgil likes Otium. Theocritus doesn't use words like it because they are abstract and he doesn't want his characters too aware of the implications of their lives. Otium is not escapism. It is different from the otium of Ovid and Tibullus, who stay in the city. Otium for Theocritus is tranquillity. This is all very Epicurean. For Theocritus, Love is a hindrance to understanding, no better than eating or drinking. He neutralizes love by pitting it against sex. He mocks the frustrated love. Only the present counts, and leisure is king.

5. Freedom

Pastoral argues that freedom is only possible in the country. But while Virgil's pastors seem to be small owner, the Theocritean poimen is a slave. But they act like owners. The Cyclops proves the rule – he is like a nouveau riche owner, but an awkward shepherd. The pastoral world is democratic, without distinctions of class or race. It requires friendship and despises hatred, envy, and contempt, as Epicurus says. There is the exception in the wise man, who is looked up to and revered. Even in death, the pastoral poet shows the dead man entering on a new otium. The gods and religion have no standing in Theocritean poetry, again from Epicurus. No external power can

threaten the otium and well-being of the Theocritean shepherds, or the Epicurean disciples.

6. The Animals

Animals are both tame and wild. Tame animals are usually for conversation pieces, while the wild ones are held in reserve for lamentations and complaints. Animals are never violent. They are friends. The shepherds never eat meat, only non-violent products like milk and cheese. Nor are people compared with animals, since that would be a discredit to them.

7. The Music

Epicurus held that while music can entertain, it has no power to influence the soul. Theocritus stands on the cusp – his poems are meant to be recited, yet music is present in them. Theocritus suggests music rather than imposes it. He refutes that music has no point. His singers are prompters, Virgil's are teachers. Love, especially unrequited love, is especially likely to rear a musical head. Most pastorals have at least two characters. Herdsmen need to talk to friends. It is very simple and straightforward. And when you have two people, you have song contests.

8. The Humor

Pastoral easily lends itself to parody. The author himself might be having fun with tradition. Or, more commonly, the parody is put in the mouths of the herdsmen. This is self-parody. The love song of Idyll 3 is parody. The Cyclops is parody Pastoral, which glories in lack of surprise, also occasionally uses surprise or a punch line. Theocritus uses it, as in Idyll 1. Virgil tends not to.

9. The Pleasance

Nature has little to teach the Theocritean herdsman. He doesn't care. Greek pastoral doesn't praise man's power over nature, or nature's power over him, or even assert a bond between man and nature. Instead, it directs attention to man's virtues and his promise as an enjoyer of life by filling the scene around him. The locus amoenus is a selective arrangement of stage properties. It provides quiet, and a city or villa or field that needed plowing wouldn't do. In pastoral, it is usually just there. It's related to the sacred grove of a god, although herdsmen in poetry are entirely secular. Often the landscape will be in an ekphrasis, like in Idyll 1. It is indeterminate. It provides isolation, It is where songs are sung, and that is all.

10. Anatomy