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MELIBOEUS IS DEAD, LONG LIVE MELIBOEUS: CONFRONTING THE SPECTRE OF CRISIS IN NEMESIANUS' *ECLOGUE* 1*

ABSTRACT

Nemesianus' eclogues are an important witness to the development of classical culture, being the last extant collection of bucolic poems before the dramatic socio-political shifts of the fourth century. Within his reuse of Virgilian and Calpurnian characters, tropes and narrative structures, however, resides a consciousness of contemporary issues political, societal and cultural. In none of the third-century poet's four eclogues is this more apparent than in his programmatic first. This article reads Nemesianus' inaugural eclogue as a fictionalization of such concerns, analysing its thematic structure with a view to the poet's historical context. Amidst the preoccupation with loss, senectitude and nostalgia, it becomes clear that Nemesianus intended his eclogues—with the first as its primary expression—to be a poetic response to the crises of his era, one which finds recourse not in hoping for a new political Golden Age but in the consolatory and preservative power of a poetry oriented towards—and reverent of—the past.

Keywords: Nemesianus; Latin bucolic; North Africa; 'third-century crisis'; fiction; genre

A POET MISUNDERSTOOD?

Marcus Aurelius Nemesianus,[1] a North African poet of the latter third century A.D., is the last extant author before the tetrarchic and Constantinian revolutions to contribute to the traditional bucolic genre—a fact which has earned him the moniker of 'last classical pastoral author'.[2] Little is known about his life.[3] In fact, he was only definitively given his own authorial identity within the last one hundred and fifty years, before which his

* All translations are mine unless otherwise stated. I thank David Butterfield, who supervised the thesis which transformed into this piece, and Bruce Gibson and the anonymous readers for their insightful comments.

[1] Of importance to this study are the following editions of (and/or commentaries on) Nemesianus' bucolics: G. Cupaiuolo, *Nemesiano: Eclogae* (Naples, 1997); L. Ferri and L. Moreschini, *Nemesiano: Le Egloghe* (L'Aquila and Rome, 1994); R. Verdière, *Prolégomènes à Nemesianus* (Leiden and Boston, 1974); P. Volpilhac, *Némésien: Œuvres* (Paris, 1975); H. Walter, *Studien zur Hirtendichtung Nemesians* (Stuttgart, 1988); H.J. Williams, *The Eclogues and Cynegetica of Nemesianus* (Leiden and Boston, 1986). So too are the following pieces dealing with Nemesianus' bucolics and general bucolic studies: C. Chinn, 'The reception of classical pastoral in the Age of Constantine', in M.S. Bjornlie (ed.), *The Life and Legacy of Constantine: From Late Antiquity to Early Modern Memory* (London, 2017); G. Davis, *Parthenope: The Interplay of Ideas in Vergilian Bucolic* (Leiden and Boston, 2012); N. Himmelmann-Wildschütz, 'Nemesians erste Ekloge', *RhM* 115 (1972), 342–56; J. Hubaux, *Les thèmes bucoliques dans la poésie latine* (Brussels, 1930); E. Karakasis, *Song Exchange in Roman Pastoral* (Berlin and Boston, 2011); B. Luiselli, 'L'identificazione del Melibeo di Nemesiano e la data di composizione della I ecloga', *Maia* 10 (1958), 189–208; W. Schetter, 'Nemesians Bucolica und die Anfänge der spätlateinischen Dichtung', in C. Gnilka and W. Schetter (edd.), *Studien zur Literatur der Spätantike* (Bonn, 1975), 1–41. A. Brent, *Cyprian and Roman Carthage* (Cambridge, 2010) is critical for contextualizing Nemesianus in third-century Carthage.

[2] Chinn (n. 1), 43.

[3] The *Historia Augusta* claims that Nemesianus was a successful poet with whom Emperor Numerian competed (*Carus* 11.2). For the veracity of this report and its implications for the historical

bucolic poems were often assimilated to those of his predecessor, Calpurnius Siculus.[4] Even though scholars have come to appreciate the originality of his bucolics, he has been accused over the course of his academic lifetime of being a cheap imitator—if not a plagiarizer—of his generic forebears Virgil and Calpurnius, his poetic style moreover said to exhibit a less sophisticated lateness.[5]

Further analyses of his work have sufficiently addressed such accusations. Less appreciated, however, are the political and cultural contexts that gave rise to his poetry, particularly his four eclogues.[6] Though it seems obvious to suggest that his poetry was directly shaped by the times in which he lived, the classical bucolic genre uniquely unifies the fictional and the real, such that it represents and responds to the zeitgeist. This article will argue that Nemesianus built his bucolics around the anxieties of the so-called 'third-century crisis', a political and societal chaos that necessarily would have affected him and his worldview.[7] The narratives, themes and character dynamics of his eclogues make it evident that Nemesianus was responding poetically to a perceived negativity of experience. None of the four poems is more explicit in this regard—nor more important—than the first, which is the focus of this study. Here, Nemesianus inaugurates in programmatic fashion a work primarily concerned with loss, senectitude, degeneration and agnosticism, and it is in this eclogue that such themes are most carefully and deliberately expressed. Before analysing his first eclogue in detail, however, it is necessary to elaborate on the cultural context in which it was written.

person of Nemesianus, see J. Stover and G. Woudhuysen, 'The poet Nemesianus and the *Historia Augusta*', *JRS* 112 (2022), 173–97.

[4] The conflation of both works occurred at least as early as the twelfth century. Though by the sixteenth century scholars were already keen to separate the first seven eclogues from the last four, the debate over authorship continued well into the nineteenth century. Cf. especially M. Haupt, 'De carminibus bucolicis Calpurnii et Nemesiani', in U. von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff (ed.), *Opuscula* 1 (Cambridge, 2014), 358–406; see also C.H. Keene, *Eclogues of Calpurnius Siculus and M. Aurelius Olympius Nemesianus* (London, 2015[2]), 14–22 and Karakasis (n. 1), 47 (especially n. 238).

[5] See especially Williams (n. 1), 5, quoting W.R. Hardie, 'A note on the history of the Latin hexameter', *JPh* 30 (1907), 266–79, 273: Nemesianus' metrical style is said to be the 'weakest and least classical' of Hardie's studied authors. Williams (n. 1), 6 also suggests that Nemesianus' frequent reuse of Calpurnius is typical of 'an inferior poet stealing from another'. See also Karakasis (n. 1), 47 n. 239 for a short list of sources that view his work as plagiaristic. Cf. Hubaux (n. 1), 240, who sees Nemesianus' eclogues as mere school exercises and effectively a clever compilation of references to previous bucolic (243). Himmelmann-Wildschütz (n. 1), 343 reckons that Nemesianus simply did not have much room to be original, given the generic dominance of Virgil. P. Monceaux, *Les Africains: Étude sur la literature latine d'Afrique* (Paris, 1894), 379 also views the generic precedents before Nemesianus as restricting his originality.

[6] That Nemesianus wrote his eclogues first is confirmed not only by a *terminus ante quem* of 283 in his fragmentary *Cynegetica*—after which we have nothing certainly written by him—but also the implication that he was attempting a Virgilian *cursus*, mentioning at *Cyn.* 53–5 that he is departing the comfort of the shade (*umbras*) and the 'reedy wheat stalks' (*harundineas segetes*), a metapoetic reference to bucolic poetry. Moreover, he promises to write what is now a lost or otherwise unwritten epic on the deeds of Carus and his sons (63–85). This would make his *Cynegetica* equivalent to Virgil's didactic *Georgics* and his future epic an '*Aeneid*'. See R. Jakobi, *Nemesian,* Cynegetica (Berlin and Boston, 2014), 17–20 and Volpilhac (n. 1), 19.

[7] Chinn (n. 1), especially 51 and Cupaiuolo (n. 1), 27–8, 32 have tentatively suggested this. None thus far, however, has attempted to unite the political realities to which he must have been exposed with the thematics of his eclogues.

NEMESIANUS AND THE 'THIRD-CENTURY CRISIS'

All information indicates that Nemesianus lived and wrote in North Africa—presumably Carthage—in the mid-to-late third century.[8] He was likely not writing after A.D. 283/4 (see n. 6 above), which also marks the rise of Diocletian after the major political crises which continued from 235. He very well could have witnessed certain cataclysms in this period with his own eyes, though it is impossible to know when exactly he lived. Nevertheless, it is not reasonable to discount the effect such crises at home and abroad in this era would have had on his surrounding cultural dialectic. What follows is a sketch of the world into which Nemesianus, whether as man or poet, was born.

That the events of the third century indicated a cosmic breakdown was an opinion shared by traditionalist Romans and Christians alike. Cassius Dio (d. *c.*A.D. 235) even reckons that a negative shift began following the death of Marcus Aurelius, from which the Empire was yet to recover.[9] Herodian, too, writing well into the political chaos after Dio, sees Maximinus' usurpation against Severus Alexander in 235 as a major shift into a tyranny of violence.[10] The ephemeral emperors of this period (and even their usurpers) clearly also felt the need to assert, almost apotropaically, slogans such as SAECVLVM NOVVM and RESTITVTOR ORBIS on their coins and to present a sort of *renouatio saeculi* in their imperial image.[11] Furthermore, the institutional anxiety for securing the *pax deorum*, confirmed by major legislation commanding universal propitiatory sacrifice as famously done under Decius in the early 250s, indicates a widely perceived existential threat to society and political order.[12]

But North Africa and Carthage in particular, however removed from issues mostly concentrated to the north and the east of the Mediterranean, likewise saw themselves as part of this cosmic decay, having suffered a series of cataclysms of their own in the third century. St Cyprian of Carthage (d. 253), living not overly long before Nemesianus' putative *floruit*, has a preoccupation with the idea of the *senectus mundi* in his writings, employing language with direct parallels in contemporary Stoic discourse, such as *labes*,

[8] MSS N, G, n and x of the eclogues describe him as *Cartāg*, *cartaginensis* and *chartaginensis*, respectively, while MSS A and C of the *Cynegetica* refer to him as *KART(H)AGINIENSIS*; see Williams (n. 1), 9–10, 16, 33, 58, 113. It is important to note, though, that these *inscriptiones* in all cases were added during or after the fifteenth century (see corresponding notes); that these titles were added in concert with manuscript corrections, however, could point to an earlier precedent for identifying him with Carthage. See also H. Kaufmann, 'Imperial and late Latin poetry from North Africa', in R.B. Hitchner (ed.), *A Companion to North Africa in Antiquity* (Hoboken, NJ, 2022), 332–53, at 335 and Cupaiuolo (n. 1), 5 n. 1; *Cyn.* 229 and 259–61 and *Ecl.* 4.54 include specific references to African animals.

[9] From the epitome of Book 72 (Xiphilinus): 72.36.4 … ἀπὸ χρυσῆς τε βασιλείας ἐς σιδηρᾶν καὶ κατιωμένην τῶν τε πραγμάτων τοῖς τότε Ῥωμαίοις καὶ ἡμῖν νῦν καταπεσούσης τῆς ἱστορίας. The text is according to the Loeb edition of E. Cary and H.B. Foster (edd.), *Dio Cassius: Roman History Books LXXI–LXXX* (Cambridge, MA and London, 1927).

[10] 7.1.2–4, 5–6 ὁ δὲ Μαξιμῖνος παραλαβὼν τὴν ἀρχὴν πολλὴν τὴν μεταβολὴν ἐποιήσατο … ἔκ τε πραείας καὶ πάνυ ἡμέρου βασιλείας εἰς τυρρανίδος ὠμότητα μετάγειν πάντα ἐπειρᾶτο …. The Greek text is according to C.M. Lucarini, *Herodianus: Regnum post Marcum* (Munich and Leipzig, 2005). Both this and the remarks of Cassius Dio (n. 9 above) are discussed by Brent (n. 1), 5 n. 13 and 84 nn. 19 and 20. Brent (n. 1), 76–116 contextualizes these two perspectives within Graeco-Roman historiography and notions of cyclical history.

[11] See Brent (n. 1), 149–50 and 153–77 for a detailed list of emperors from Gordian III to Decius and their imperial image.

[12] See Brent (n. 1), 143, 149, 169, 172–4. See especially 177–81 and 186–8 for Decius' edict and its being a response to the *senectus mundi*.

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senium, *uetustas*, *occasus* and indeed *senectus*.[13] Though Cyprian's perspective is naturally a Christian one that anticipates the predicted apocalypse, his narrative of decline and shared vocabulary of it show that he, 'along with his contemporaries, understood both the natural and the social calamities of the third century in terms of a decline in the metaphysical fabric of things'.[14]

And not without reason. The terrors of imperial instability had visited the very heart of the city in 238 when partisans of Gordian I and Gordian II clashed with those of Capellianus in support of the usurper Maximinus, an affair which ended with the Gordians dead and widespread massacre and pillaging. This was followed still—and as a direct result—by a rebellion against Gordian III in 243.[15] Cyprian, who lived through these events, complains about a concomitant lawlessness, immorality and sheer brutality in the forum and even in the courts in flagrant disregard of the Twelve Tables of Roman law which were displayed there.[16] To make matters worse, the city was next visited by the so-called 'plague of Cyprian', which the Christian bishop's writings indicate was viewed as a calamitous, age-ending *prodigium* by pagan and Christian alike.[17] Simultaneously, 'barbarian' groups from outside the imperial sphere in North Africa began a series of settlement raids owing to the lack of military presence, with the legions disbanded as punishment and precaution under Gordian III following the violent rebellions in years previous.[18] For a people whose *saeculum aureum* began under Augustus in 31 B.C. with the dedication of a pastorally themed Ara Pacis—a sign of the city's close connection to Rome itself—it is no wonder that the population would rationalize its troubles in terms of a cycle of ages reaching its nadir.[19]

It is also important to remember that this population was a centre of classical culture and education in the empire. After all, the entirety of extant Latin poetry in the latter half of the third century is a product of North Africa.[20] If Cyprian's writings are any indication of a continuing cultural dialectic, it stands to reason that Nemesianus, particularly as an educated North African, would have been exposed directly to the academic circles which were wrestling with the metaphysical import of such disasters.[21] That Nemesianus represents a 'reconstitution of Latin poetry' after a period of near silence should be a

[13] See Brent (n. 1), 53, 97, 100–1 for citations of Cyprian's use of the words and contextual interpretations thereof.

[14] Brent (n. 1), 50. See Cyprian's *Ad Demetrianum*, wherein the bishop engages in what Brent terms a *communis opinio* ([n. 1], 100): '[Cyprian] shares the same discourse with Demetrian when he ascribes the reason for the *prodigia* to the *senectus mundi*'. Cf. G. Alföldy, 'The crisis of the third century as seen by contemporaries', *GRBS* 15 (1974), 89–111, at 110: 'The obvious decay of the Empire was of course the subject of exasperated discussion between pagans and Christians … [T]here was no fundamental difference between pagan and Christian attitudes towards actual problems or even towards the fate of the Roman Empire.'

[15] Brent (n. 1), 45, 77 and 97–8 citing M.M. Sage, *Cyprian* (*Patristic Monograph Series* 1) (Philadelphia, 1975), 37–46.

[16] See Brent (n. 1), 44–5.

[17] D. Hoyos, *Carthage: A Biography* (London, 2020), 153 and 154–5: the plague killed 'millions' in the empire from the 250s up to 270.

[18] See Hoyos (n. 17), 152–3 for the effect the previously discussed crises had on North Africa as a whole; see especially 153 for discussion of the 'barbarian' raids.

[19] Brent (n. 1), 31–4 asserts that the visibility of this monument was intrinsic to the identity of imperial Carthage. Monceaux (n. 5), 343 suggests that Carthage over time came to rival Rome in its cultural and therefore imaginative glory in the period of 'African emperors', from Septimius Severus to Carus and his sons.

[20] Nemesianus is joined by Commodian and Lactantius in giving 'birth' to late antique poetry; see Kaufmann (n. 8), 332.

[21] Luiselli (n. 1), 198 calls Nemesianus 'uomo di studio e di dottrina' owing to the philosophical principles expressed in *Eclogue* 1. Monceaux (n. 5), 62 speculates that Nemesianus (like Apuleius,

cause for reflection, then, particularly given his choice to inaugurate his poetic project (in so far as there is record) with the bucolic genre.[22] Though this obviously mimics a Virgilian model, it would be far too simplistic to assume that Nemesianus chose to imitate this foremost of Latin poetic models for *ēthos* alone.

The Latin bucolic tradition established by Virgil superimposes contemporary concerns onto itself. Though it is evident that both Virgil and Calpurnius encode historical events and figures into their eclogues, this contemporizing is far more complex, extending to *Weltanschauung* and political commentary alike.[23] In his study of Virgil's eclogues, Gregson Davis argues that Virgil is primarily poeticizing a philosophy of *eudaimonia* in the face of the 'vicissitudes of life' which complicate its attainment, vicissitudes that often straddle a dubious border between particular and universal philosophical concerns.[24] The work takes place in the fictional bucolic world because

> the bucolic scaffolding is useful in furnishing the embedded poets [*sc*. the bucolic characters] with a vantage-point on the sylvan periphery, which allows for a stripped-down representation of the human predicament in microcosm.[25]

Nemesianus, as a self-aware follower of this programmatic genre and tradition, uses this bucolic 'framing' to explicate, just as Virgil did, his own era's 'predicament', one concerned above all with decay, loss and senectitude on a cultural–societal scale.

To be sure, Virgil's eclogues are also marked by pessimism and even 'deconstruction';[26] but Nemesianus' eclogues depart from those of Virgil in that they lack a concretized eudaemonic alternative to the imposition of such discordance.[27] In Nemesianus' bucolic world, there is intense disjunction caused by tragic separation that is all-pervasive, with nearly every character affected. In truth, Nemesianus does, as will become apparent, offer a gradual assertion of the liberating power of song (metapoetically, therefore, poetry itself); but even this liberation is not a resignation to passion (cf. Virgil's crescendo in *omnia uincit amor et nos cedamus amori*, *Ecl.* 10.69) as much as it is anamnesis—that is, a living, quasi-spiritual invocation of the past into the present. In this way, Nemesianus does not suggest philosophical 'problems' and 'solutions' in a Virgilian manner but instead fictionally portrays and metapoetically asserts the importance of a poetry of returning, one which can only be indicative of his own resurrection of the Virgilian poetic tradition in a world exhausted by decline on various fronts. In short, Nemesianus' eclogues are not cheap imitations but original variations, a fictional response to the decline of Roman stability, both politically and culturally. Where Virgil's hope is a coming Augustan Age in the wake of the Civil Wars, Nemesianus has but the memory of a Golden Age in the wake of decline, its fond remembrance in poetic gratitude a cathartic necessity and hope of continuity, of which

Tertullian, Lactantius, Cyprian and later Augustine) was educated in the academy of Carthage amongst statesmen and even the future emperor Numerian.

[22] Kaufmann (n. 8), 335.

[23] I adopt the term from Davis (n. 1). M. Payne, *Theocritus and the Invention of Fiction* (Cambridge, 2007), 150 notes that 'self-consciousness about the bucolic fiction' began with Theocritus and his commentators, but goes on to show how '[t]he fictional world of *Idyll* 1 is, in a single stroke, circumscribed by a larger world of history and politics' (159) through Virgil's first eclogue.

[24] Cupaiuolo (n. 1), 27–8.

[25] Davis (n. 1), 11.

[26] Karakasis (n. 1), 27.

[27] See Karakasis (n. 1), 27–8 and 34–5 for Virgil's thematic approach to his bucolics. Cf. Davis (n. 1), 38–9, which offers such an analysis of Virgil's programmatic first eclogue.

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Nemesianus makes himself the forerunner. What follows is a close reading of Nemesianus' first eclogue, which will clarify these claims.

TITYRUS IN CRISIS

The first eclogue in a series wields influence over those that follow and sets the thematic 'tune'.[28] All bucolic authors from Theocritus himself intentionally employ this structure. It is only natural, therefore, to attribute great import to the narrative, themes and characters of Nemesianus' first eclogue.[29] Its significance is confirmed by the ways in which Nemesianus plays with the expectations of the Latin bucolic tradition.

The poem begins with a certain Thymoetas approaching the musically famous Tityrus and asking him to sing.[30] But Tityrus responds that he is old and that his time is past, and instead compels the young, newly successful Thymoetas to offer up a eulogy for the late Meliboeus. The rest of the eclogue follows Thymoetas' mournful praises and ends with Tityrus urging the young singer not to stop, even expressing a hope that, by his talent, Apollo may extend his fame to Rome itself.

That this poem is programmatic is evident in its Virgilian veneer. Tityrus, as in Virgil's first eclogue, is the responsive, classically supine character approached by another with interest. Only this time, Meliboeus, the other main character of Virgil's first eclogue, is dead, his role replaced by an enthusiastic youth. But Meliboeus' silent 'presence' in the narrative is an obvious sign that Nemesianus is cleverly playing with his audience's expectations, reminding them directly of Virgil yet twisting the plot. This is where his expression of zeitgeist is apparent. To show the union between Nemesianus' poetry and his cultural perspective, it is best to treat Tityrus and Thymoetas singly, both in light of Virgil's bucolic archetype and in light of Nemesianus' unique variations. This will prepare for a full treatment of the absent figure of Meliboeus, most important for Nemesianus' project.

Tityrus

The conversation between Meliboeus and Tityrus in Virgil's first eclogue makes central the latter's newfound ability to transcend the difficulties of life—particularly those caused by the recent Civil Wars—thanks to his devotion to a youthful god in Rome and the security and liberty he provides. In short, Virgil's Tityrus is optimism personified, an optimism adorned with a political and religious vision of a renewed *saeculum aureum*. Meliboeus serves as a foil, his own unhappiness and inability to comprehend Tityrus' ease as proof of the superiority of Tityrus' *Weltanschauung* (and thus Virgil's own).[31]

Nemesianus' Tityrus, however, while not pessimistic *per se*, has rather become a depressive figure like Virgil's Meliboeus. Even he, taught by Pan himself and favoured by Apollo (1.4–5), has no song left. He has hung up his pipe as an offering to Faunus

[28] Cf. Davis (n. 1), 39 on Virgil's first eclogue: 'The "interplay of ideas" in the programmatic Eclogue of the collection sets the stage for a suite of variations on the theme of differential efforts, on the part of Vergil's *dramatis personae* . . . '. See also Walter (n. 1), 6 on Nemesianus' first eclogue directly.

[29] For the evidently programmatic nature of Nemesianus' first eclogue, see Cupaiuolo (n. 1), 121.

[30] For the spelling of Thymoetas' name (otherwise Timetas in the manuscripts), see Haupt (n. 1), 399 and C. Wendel, *De nominibus bucolicis* (Leipzig, 1900).

[31] Davis (n. 1), 7–9; but also throughout 17–39.

(1.14). His passion is gone (1.13 *nunc … ueneres tepuere*).[32] He is old now (*album caput*) and deems his once famed poetic art restricted by his senectitude (1.9–10 *hos annos canamque comam … | tu in carmina cogis?*). But it is not merely that Tityrus is old; after all, in Virgil's eclogue he claims that *libertas* found him 'after my beard was shedding whiter under the shears' (1.28 *candidior postquam tondenti barba cadebat*), and Meliboeus even dubs him *fortunate senex* (1.46).[33] Whereas Virgil's Tityrus, though a latecomer to truth, is happily drunk on love of it, Nemesianus' Tityrus is burdened by time, his entire perspective oriented around its passage. His day was 'whilst an untroubled age yielded lively charms for sport' (1.12 *dum secura hilares aetas ludebat amores*), the imperfect drawing out the sense of decay. He claims that his tired passions have waned *sub annis*, an almost physical sign of burden. What is more, his immediate words in reply to Thymoetas' request that he sing are emphatically *hos annos*, together with the self-descriptive *canamque comam*. His entire focus is senectitude.[34]

There is not, of course, a directly continuous narrative between Virgil's eclogues and those of Nemesianus; but there is a significant parallelism between the two eclogues from the outset. Considering the programmatic hopeful Tityrus alongside the programmatic worn-out Tityrus shows just how emphatic Nemesianus' focus on the passage of time and senescence is in this first eclogue. Tityrus even tells his young companion: *uiximus et calamis uersus cantauimus olim* (1.12). Naturally, Tityrus is not dead; but the difference between saying, as Williams would have it, '[once] I enjoyed life to the full' and 'I am dead' is semantically non-existent here.[35] Nor should one overlook Thymoetas' description of Tityrus in the very opening line of the poem, apparently in the process of weaving a basket (*fiscella*) with a slender reed (*fluuiali … iunco*), a bucolic action typically associated with a productive—even consoling—response to emotional pain.[36] Given that Tityrus claims he has no song any longer, however, this reference perhaps implies *private* poetry, a poetry that slumbers and is inherently monologic, a poetry that avoids the bucolic dialectic and communitarian outlook.[37] It is this portrayal of a wearied and incapable Tityrus that begins to reveal Nemesianus' fictional engagement with the era in which he lived. For the legendary Tityrus to be not only beyond his time but also a

[32] For the Latin text of Nemesianus' first eclogue here and throughout, I use the edition of Williams (n. 1).

[33] Here and throughout, citations of the Latin text of Virgil's eclogues are according to the Loeb edition of H.R. Fairclough and G.P. Goold (edd.), *Virgil: Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid Books 1–6* (Cambridge, MA and London, 1999).

[34] Noted also by S. Heyworth, 'Pastoral', in S. Harrison (ed.), *A Companion to Latin Literature* (Hoboken, NJ, 2005), 148–58, at 156: 'The first of [Nemesianus'] four poems emphasizes belatedness … [I]t stresses the age of Meliboeus himself and of Tityrus'.

[35] For the translation, see Williams (n. 1), 117 on 1.11. *uiximus* is the reading according to the majority of the V family of manuscripts; otherwise *diximus* in MSS NGHiu (see Williams [n. 1], ad loc.). The latter would seem a banalization.

[36] Cf. Theoc. *Id.* 11.73 as well as Verg. *Ecl.* 2.72 and 10.71 for the association between weaving and cathartic elegy, particularly in loss of a beloved. Note R. Hunter, *Theocritus: A Selection* (Cambridge, 1999), 241 on Theoc. *Id.* 11.73 for the literary (bucolic) tradition of manual labour that takes the mind away from the torments of love.

[37] Note W. Clausen, *Virgil: Eclogues. With an Introduction and Commentary* (Oxford, 1994), on Verg. *Ecl.* 10.71: Servius ad loc. claims that the phrase *gracili fiscellam texit hibisco* refers allegorically to private composition of poetry. The willingness of Thymoetas, then, to perform his own private composition (see 1.27–9) is best understood as a renunciation of brooding and an exaltation of the common bucolic (poetic) spirit. In reference to Nemes. *Ecl.* 1.1–2, Karakasis presents Virgil's Corydon's intention to weave (*Ecl.* 2.71–2) as 'a sign of his eventual comeback to "pastoral correctness"'. Walter (n. 1), 8–9, however, views this merely as a practical trope marking Nemesianus' poetic excursion into the bucolic world.

resigned singer is an emphatic programmatic declaration on Nemesianus' part, particularly given the associations drawn between the character of Tityrus and Virgil himself in Latin poetic culture.[38] Tityrus would naturally represent the classical tradition, exemplified by the standard Virgilian persona, his senectitude a near-allegory for its imminent death. And his time may be short indeed. Tityrus closely associates himself with the dead Meliboeus with *mecum* (1.17). As Meliboeus is likewise described as *senior*, Tityrus, in light of his obsession with age, almost suggests that his time, too, is drawing near. Tityrus, as poetry, needs an heir.

Thymoetas

All of Tityrus' age-based modesty is a preparation for praise of Thymoetas. Now is the age of the enthusiastic 'youth dear to the gods' (1.10 *tu iuuenis carusque deis*) who apparently conquered Mopsus in song (1.15–16). The *nunc* of Tityrus' *te nunc rura sonant* (1.15) has almost adversative force in this regard considering his previous six lines of self-deprecation: Thymoetas' musical merit and youth qualify him, rather than Tityrus, for the requested song. Crucially, however, Tityrus does not give Thymoetas free reign to invent whatever he wishes; he nearly compels him to give Meliboeus, who has apparently died, a eulogy, for Meliboeus favoured Thymoetas' talent whilst still alive (1.17–18). The song is thus framed in terms of pious obligation (1.23 *et parere decet iussis et gratia iubentur*). This is striking considering that Thymoetas is said to have made Mopsus' music a laughing-stock (1.16 *risisti calamos et dissona flamina Mopsi*); for Mopsus is, of course, the initiatory singer of the eulogy for Daphnis in Virgil's fifth eclogue (5.20–44). Not only, then, is the scene implicitly set for a poetic focus on death—one at the old Tityrus' bidding—but Thymoetas' contribution will evidently be greater than even Mopsus could give for Daphnis, who is, after all, the bucolic patron par excellence.[39] This thematic colouring with mortality only reinforces Nemesianus' focus on senectitude: the preference for the young, locally famous singer in the face of the tired Tityrus is undoubtedly a reflexive metapoetic statement, an analogue for the rise of Nemesianus as Virgil's worthy heir.[40] That Thymoetas had apparently already written the ode to Meliboeus on the bark of a tree (1.28–9 *accipe quae super haec cerasus … | continet*) is equally a statement of dependence on the development of the tradition under Calpurnius, the focus of whose inaugural eclogue is the finding of a prophecy about the Golden Age recently written on a tree (*Ecl.* 1.20–88). In this latter case, and in Virgil's fifth eclogue, an inscribed poem in the bucolic world represents something of great import: in Virgil's world, Mopsus' eulogy (not unlike Thymoetas') is one he carved onto a tree in honour of Daphnis (5.13–15). This itself marks Thymoetas as the new chosen poet; but his drawing forth the poem preserved in the 'book' of the tree (1.29 *inciso seruans mea carmina libro*) does not necessarily indicate some artistic statement concerning the development of Nemesianus' poetry (*pace* Cupaiuolo) as much as it

[38] For example, Walter (n. 1), 30–1 also notes the parallelism with Verg. *Ecl.* 1.1 and quotes Servius ad loc., who writes: *Tityri sub personam Virgilium debemus accipere, non tamen ubique, sed tantum ubi exigit ratio*. Schetter (n. 1), 5 notes that even Virgil associates himself with the name in *Ecl.* 6.4. Most scholars point rather to Virgil's fifth eclogue as a comparison with Nemesianus' first owing to the eulogy parallel (see e.g. Himmelmann-Wildshütz [n. 1], 346–7). The presence of Tityrus and his position as secondary character, however, lends much significance to parallels with Virgil's first eclogue.

[39] Davis (n. 1), 13.

[40] This is the common reading: cf. e.g. Cupaiuolo (n. 1), 98 and 108–9 on 1.28–9.

locates Meliboeus himself not only amongst matters of great importance but also as an object of Thymoetas' devotion, one not limited to this sudden injunction by Tityrus.[41] In other words, it is deeply significant that Thymoetas' eulogy for Meliboeus is entirely independent even of Tityrus' patronage. Tityrus only compels him to share it as he himself has nothing to offer.

The entire first thirty-four lines of this eclogue, then, are merely a prelude to the core of the poem, which directly orbits the person of Meliboeus, dead and absent from the narrative entirely though he is. It is Thymoetas' eulogy and the indications it gives of Meliboeus' character that especially draw what is otherwise an empty variation on bucolic themes into a political and historically contextualized sphere.

LORD MELIBOEUS

The prominence of Meliboeus is perhaps foreshadowed by Thymoetas' supremacy over Mopsus, as previously mentioned, as well as by his eulogy already having been immortalized on the bark of a tree. But the progression of the eclogue reveals not merely a kind patron or friendly old man but a nearly imperial captain who exercised just governance over Nemesianus' bucolic world. This panegyrical portrayal even distinguishes itself not only from that of Daphnis in Virgil's fifth eclogue, whose merits primarily concern his physical beauty and musical charm, but also from the Golden-Age prophecy of Calpurnius' first eclogue. The entire song is past-oriented and contingent on the power of nostalgia.

Before the eulogy even begins, Meliboeus attracts the attributes *pius* (1.20) and *dignus* (1.24).[42] Moreover, Thymoetas refers to 'the man's manifold deeds and merits' (1.26 *totque acta uiri laudesque*). If this panegyrical phrase did not signal his nearly imperial character enough, Thymoetas includes, in the midst of his own eulogy (1.49–80), a rather vivid description of Meliboeus that bears all the hallmarks of a just ruler (1.51–7):

> . . . plenum tibi ponderis aequi
> pectus erat. tu ruricolum discernere lites
> adsueras, uarias patiens mulcendo querellas.
> sub te iuris amor, sub te reuerentia iusti
> floruit,[43] ambiguos signauit terminus agros.
> blanda tibi uultu grauitas et mite serena
> fronte supercilium, sed pectus mitius ore.

[41] Whilst Cupaiuolo (n. 1), 109 rightly notes that Thymoetas' 'book' speaks to a certain poetic independence on the character's part, he reads this—in so far as he gives comment—only metapoetically, viewing it as an assertion by Nemesianus of his own artistic capability and inspiration independent of political or patronal pressures. This could indeed be true; but it is an extrapolation outside of the direct fictional narrative, the simple message of which is clearly that Thymoetas has a private devotion to the dead Meliboeus, a 'great man'.

[42] He is said to inhabit the *mundus piorum*.

[43] For variant readings of *iusti*, see Williams (n. 1), 124 on 1.54 and Volpilhac (n. 1), ad loc. Whilst *iuris* is favoured by corrections to MSS N and G, it would be a curious repetition of the word in one line; and *iusti* is equally favoured by a second hand in N and a number of the V-family manuscripts. Moreover, it suits the panegyric context. Williams (n. 1), 125 on 1.54 notes that even Volpilhac (n. 1), 44 n. 51 cites the phrase *iusti reuerentia* in Lucan 9.192 despite preferring *iuris* in his edition of Nemesianus.

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Your heart was totally unbiased. Your business had been to settle the disputes of rural folk, enduring their manifold complaints with gentleness. Under you flourished a love of right, under you flourished respect for justice. Your reign stabilized the inconstant fields. In your appearance there was an alluring dignity, and in your bright expression was a harmless sternness; but your heart was gentler than your face.[44]

Clearly, Nemesianus' Meliboeus was a kind of *iudex* with significant authority. Whilst the bucolic *iudex* is a standard aspect of the genre (cf. Tityrus' *iudice me*, 17), judging as he does song competitions in Theocritus, Virgil and Calpurnius, Nemesianus' *iudex* Meliboeus is marked by words befitting actual governance. Perhaps most striking of all is the phrase *sub te*, quite literally implying his rule over the bucolic world, a reign that evidently brought about peace for the 'disquieted fields', a reference with unavoidable *grauitas* given the context in which Nemesianus was writing.[45] This monarchic character is further exercised in his teaching music for relief (1.58–9), his piety towards the Muses into old age (1.61–2), and the fact that, at his death, all the major deities of the bucolic world give him royal semi-religious offerings of garlands, libations and hymns, the latter of which Thymoetas calls 'the dead's highest honour' (1.65–9, 1.70 *manibus hic supremus honos*). Thymoetas even suggests that through his own such hymn (1.71 *nos et modulamur auena*) Meliboeus almost becomes one with nature, with the forest grass, the pine, Echo herself and even the herds all speaking of him in their own way (1.71–4).

Evidently, Meliboeus is a totemic figure and a governor; but it is important that he is, in the words of Schetter, 'one of us' for Tityrus and Thymoetas.[46] He is not a mythological patron like the Daphnis of Virgil's fifth eclogue, but a man (cf. 1.26 *uiri*) who lived among them and shared their art of music; nor is he like Calpurnius' predicted (or present) god–emperor despite his governmental merits.[47] He is likewise distinct from Virgil's unhappy and ignorant Meliboeus, despite the previously discussed narrative parallels. If anything, he resembles more the Meliboeus of Calpurnius' fourth eclogue, whose resonance with Nemesianus' character even reaches the point of near intertextuality (cf. *per te* of 4.37 and *sub te* as above). He, too, has a kind of gubernatorial and patronal role as well as a place of prominence in the bucolic world (4.33–47). Nemesianus is thus evidently displaying his indebtedness to both Virgil and Calpurnius in the person of Meliboeus, which only reinforces his significance for his poetic project.

[44] Commentaries compare the description of the good ruler in *Laus Pisonis* 100–1 (see Cupaiuolo [n. 1], 114 on Nemes. *Ecl.* 1.56–7; Volpilhac [n. 1], 66 on Nemes. *Ecl.* 1.52) and Men. Rhet. (*Rhet. Gr.* 3.420.21–4; see D. Korzeniewski, *Hirtengedichte aus spätrömischer und karolingischer Zeit: Marcus Aurelius Olympius Nemesianus, Severus Sanctus Endelechius, Modonius, Hirtengedicht aus dem Codex Gaddianus* [Darmstadt, 1976], 113 on 51–7). I translate *terminus* (1.55) contextually as referring to Meliboeus' 'term', as it were, of life and/or reign. There is an ambiguity in the poetry itself, however, which could equally and simultaneously justify the translation provided by the Loeb edition of J.W. Duff and A.M. Duff, *Minor Latin Poets* (Cambridge, MA and London, 1934), 461: '[D]isputed land was marked with a boundary line.'

[45] Even if *sub te* is taken temporally, as at Nemes. *Cyn*. 24 (see Williams [n. 1], 163 ad loc.), the idea of Meliboeus' 'time' being one of justice evokes the idea of a regnal period. R. Mayer, 'Latin pastoral after Virgil', in M. Fantuzzi and Th. Papanghelis (edd.), *Brill's Companion to Greek and Latin Pastoral* (Leiden and Boston, 2006), 451–66, at 465 rejects the idea that Meliboeus is a ruler; but this would seem to ignore such striking language.

[46] Schetter (n. 1), 18: 'einer von uns'.

[47] See Calp. *Ecl.* 1.46 … *deus ipse reget* …. The Latin text I have referenced for Calpurnius is according to the Loeb edition of Duff and Duff (n. 44). Cf. also Volpilhac (n. 1), 29, who notes that Meliboeus is evidently not a divinized figure like Daphnis, given the consolatory—not triumphal—nature of the eulogy.

Nemesianus' herdsman, like Calpurnius', knew this Meliboeus personally, and he exercised a significant position among (and over) them. He was 'real'—that is, non-mythological. Nemesianus is evidently intent on emphasizing this actuality in his description of Meliboeus' features (1.56–70), which raises interesting questions about whom this Meliboeus might represent. In any case, he is representative of *something*, otherwise Nemesianus would not include such a lengthy and stylistically striking eulogy, particularly in his inaugural eclogue. This has led many a scholar to speculate widely on who Nemesianus' Meliboeus is 'meant' to be, pointing to historical figures from Nemesianus' presumed patron in Carthage to previous bucolic authors and even to contemporary officials and emperors.[48]

But it would seem that all speculation has spread itself too thin, likely because both of Nemesianus' generic predecessors employ *seemingly* direct references to prominent Romans in their eclogues.[49] There is a danger, however, in too readily identifying bucolic characters with historical individuals. Quite simply, no identification can be proven in the fictional environment of the bucolic world, particularly, as in the case of Nemesianus, where context is less straightforward. Even where suggestions are more probable, one cannot claim an identification absolutely. In fairness to the scholars of Nemesianus who attempt to identify Meliboeus historically, there is a general caution in this regard. But given Nemesianus' historical and cultural contexts as explored at the beginning of this study, it would seem that the broader significance of Meliboeus' eulogy within the fictional thematic framework pertains equally to the zeitgeist as to a hypothetical individual.

The actuality of Meliboeus the governor for the bucolic characters does naturally provoke thoughts of emperors around Nemesianus' time. Some have suggested Gordian I, Carus or even Probus, delving into the *Historia Augusta*, for example, for hints of literary prowess or patronage of arts as well as for indications of good rule.[50] But beyond external conjectures, Meliboeus, in the bucolic narrative, is a leader who evidently ruled well and died an honourable old man (1.43 *senectus*; 1.50 *canente senecta*; 1.50–1 *caelo dignus … | concilioque deum*), whose passing had a wide-ranging, even tragic effect (1.48 *nec tenuit tales communis causa querellas*). Frankly, this bare characterization could fit several of the rather ephemeral emperors of the latter third century, many of whom, such as Aurelian and Probus, were older men who had worked their way up through the military ranks over time.[51] If Thymoetas' eulogy for Meliboeus is meant to serve as a kind of panegyric for Carus, as is sometimes asserted, it does not follow why Nemesianus would frame the poem in terms of senectitude, decay and death: Nemesianus expresses equally high hopes for his sons

[48] See Verdière (n. 1), 4–18 and Luiselli (n. 1), *passim* for the differing views on Nemesianus' putative analogue.

[49] For example, T. Geue, *Author Unknown: The Power of Anonymity in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge, MA, 2019), 166 notes that scholars 'have identified Roman luminaries such as Varius and Pollio and Gallus and Caesar' in Virgil's eclogues, though he, too, expresses reservations about attempts at directly identifying historical figures with bucolic characters. This is, in fact, his entire thesis in his treatment of Calpurnius Siculus, noting that many have attempted to identify, for example, his Corydon with Calpurnius himself (167–8) and Calpurnius' Caesar with 'Claudius or Elagabalus or a host of others better or worse' (188; see 165–97 for a full treatment of Calpurnius' eclogues).

[50] See HA, *Carus* 11.1–3 for the titular emperor's rhetorical and poetic skill. For the problems in identifying him with Meliboeus, see Luiselli (n. 1), 192–3. Others suggest he stands for Theocritus (see Cupaiuolo [n. 1], 122–3), which, while not impossible, would seem to undermine his specifically imperial qualities. For summaries of historical–literal readings, see Luiselli (n. 1), *passim* and Walter (n. 1), 26–9.

[51] See A. Watson, *Aurelian and the Third Century* (Oxford, 1999), 39 and 108.

Carinus and Numerian in his *Cynegetica*.[52] His first eclogue, on the other hand, suggests the end of a Golden Age, with Thymoetas describing 'blessed years and that most recent cycle of our Age' (1.44–5 *felicesque anni nostrique nouissimus aeui | circulus*) as paralleling Meliboeus' life and subsequent death.[53]

Such examples are presented to illustrate that it is entirely up to the reader and researcher to decide which political figure of Nemesianus' relative era deserves such a portrayal, whose influence would impinge on Nemesianus' perspective to a greater extent. Nemesianus' actual words—his poetry itself—then have little to do with the question. As one cannot know for certain when exactly Nemesianus wrote his eclogues, and considering the sheer number of emperors and imperial claimants between 235 and 283 alone, it is simply impossible to employ the so-called 'bucolic masquerade' theory with any specificity.[54] But this neither makes Meliboeus representative of nothing at all, nor does it mean that the eclogue 'pretends to operate in a coherent world of its own' free of all contemporary concerns.[55] Even if Nemesianus had some specific figure in mind (which he may well have had, the identification of which would be known to his contemporaries alone), the genre's fictionality in tandem with the wider themes Nemesianus clearly signposts invites a more symbolic reading that in no way belies the sense of 'institutional' loss the poet was attempting to convey by Meliboeus' death.[56]

Such is Servius' method of interpreting Virgil's eclogues: because unrestricted allegorizing opens the poetry to myriad interpretations, it is better to take the text on its own terms according to its historical context (Serv. *Ecl.* 1.5 *melius est ut simpliciter intellegamus*) when discerning allegory.[57] This context, however, is specifically shaped by the *necessitas* which compelled the poet to write his eclogues in the first place. Nemesianus' *necessitas* will become apparent; but for the moment it is critical to emphasize that, by reading Nemesianus' programmatic eclogue with a broader perspective, one which charitably overlooks certain attempts at specific character identification, the thematic essence of the poem comes to the fore, enabling a balance between the inevitably emblematic character of Latin bucolic with the fictional and autonomous nature of the genre.[58] This in no way belies the sense Nemesianus is

[52] See *Cyn.* 69–75 for Nemesianus' imperial panegyric. On the identification with Carus, see especially Luiselli (n. 1), 194–5. Again, it is worth noting that Nemesianus clearly wrote his bucolics before his *Cynegetica*: see n. 6 above.

[53] Cf. also, as already discussed, Tityrus' talk of 'better times' (1.9–14).

[54] Ferri and Moreschini (n. 1), 37, for example, suggest that Meliboeus is meant to be Carus; but this is a presumption based on the evidently later *Cynegetica*.

[55] J. Reed, 'The imperial poetics of ancient bucolic', in K. Seigneurie (ed.), *A Companion to World Literature* (Hoboken, NJ, 2020), 549–59, at 557. He finds all 'political panegyric' to have been 'expunged' from Nemesianus' construal of the bucolic world.

[56] M. Stöckinger, 'Transgressing pastoral: mediated responses to *Aeneid* 6 in Calpurnius, Nemesianus, and the *Carmina Einsiedlensia*', in C. Burrow, S.J. Harrison, M. McLaughlin et al. (edd.), *Imitative Series and Clusters from Classical to Early Modern Literature* (Berlin and Boston, 2020), 103–4, at 111 notes this political framing and also rejects a literal allegorization; nevertheless, he prefers intertextuality and a literary interpretation to this more historically contextualized reading.

[57] See U. Tischer, '*Miscet figuras*. Servius über Dichtung und Realitätsbezug in Vergils Eklogen', in J.R. Stenger (ed.), *Spätantike Konzeptionen von Literatur—Notions of the Literary in Late Antiquity* (Heidelberg, 2015), 129–54.

[58] This approach is adopted and advocated by Davis (n. 1), 65 in his treatment of the *puer* of Virgil's 'messianic' fourth eclogue, who is 'as a narrative sign . . . both concrete emblem and abstract idea'. Cf. e.g. Wendel (n. 30), 51, who views Virgil's Tityrus as an emblematic '*persona uere bucolica*'. Payne (n. 23), 167–8 believes that the ambiguous nature of bucolic characters lends itself to the safe orientation of the poetic self in a world which is outside but simultaneously reflective of politics, society and culture. Nevertheless, he (strangely) asserts (167 n. 46) that '[Nemesianus'] poems make no reference to contemporary history, and their poet does not appear in them in bucolic disguise'.

attempting to convey regardless. Consider the previously mentioned Calpurnian parallels. Whilst his Meliboeus could mask—questions of dating the poems aside—the poet's putative patron, the *character* Meliboeus is so much more.[59] He is *distinct* from the god–emperor but equally the reason for flourishing under this 'new god' in Rome, like an embodied genius. Clearly, whether or not Meliboeus is Columella (or anyone else), he is emblematic, character-wise, of a broader idea within the fictional economy. So too with Nemesianus' Meliboeus: with a more macroscopic focus, he is not an emperor, governor or patron in particular but almost symbolic of the old dead stability of Roman governance and culture, fictionally personified. As he and Tityrus form a classic bucolic pair, so Nemesianus' Tityrus is himself representative of the old dying (though not quite dead) Roman poetic spirit. Tityrus' inspiration is gone, belonging as it did to a better, flourishing time. The great Meliboeus is dead, and his glad reign is only something fondly to be remembered.

A PHILOSOPHY OF MELIBOEUS

Speculative though it may seem, this reading is encouraged by the fictional narrative and its intertextual nature, which naturally takes precedence in bucolic interpretation.[60] Tityrus is old and resigned, Thymoetas enthusiastic and young, Meliboeus a cherished, lately dead song-master and judge. Tityrus and Thymoetas are meeting in the morning as their cows pasture elsewhere (1.6–8), and Thymoetas sings a song. But the consciously Virgilian contours of this eclogue obviously invite closer inspection. It is uncomfortable, in the Latin bucolic tradition, for Tityrus to claim that he is musically impotent.[61] It is surprising, too, to learn that Meliboeus has died, particularly given the fact that no non-mythological herdsman dies within any extant version of the Latin bucolic world. Thymoetas, likewise, is a new and unrecognizable bucolic name.[62]

By now it is evident that a relationship exists in this eclogue between poetic culture (emblematized in Tityrus and Thymoetas) and political reality (emblematized by the dead Meliboeus). However, although Nemesianus clearly intends Meliboeus to appear an actual governor in the bucolic world, the substance of Thymoetas' song involves a philosophical dynamic that not only reveals something of the cultural perspective with which Nemesianus crafted his eclogues but also reinforces the fictional actuality of Meliboeus and his emblematic correspondence to the external non-fictional world.

Thymoetas' eulogy is by no means a divinization of Meliboeus.[63] Not only is he not prayed to as a god, but no gods whatsoever are invoked to convey Thymoetas' song to him—only the elements *aether*, *liquores*, *tellus* and *aer*, all of which are given epithets relating to life: *omniparens*, *rerum causa*, *corporis … genetrix* and *uitalis* respectively

[59] See N. Ruurd, 'In praise of Meliboeus: Calpurnius Siculus and Columella', *JRS* 111 (2021), 179–202 for identification with Columella. For a summary of the debate over the date of Calpurnius' eclogues, see Geue (n. 49), 165–6.

[60] It is precisely Virgil's adaptation of the Theocritean narrative/thematic template that convinces Servius of the validity of searching for an underlying meaning in his bucolics; see Tischer (n. 57), 131 and 134 for discussion of Servius' preface.

[61] Cf. Schetter (n. 1), 9, who views Nemesianus' portrayal of a worn-out and songless Tityrus as critical for the re-establishment ('Neugestaltung') of his character in the bucolic tradition.

[62] Cf. e.g. Korzeniewski (n. 44), 111 on 1.9.

[63] This could be further evidence that Meliboeus does not represent Emperor Carus, for he was divinized after his death on a Persian campaign in 283: see Jakobi (n. 6), 17 and Nemesianus' description of him as *diuus* at *Cyn.* 64, an adjective never used of Meliboeus in Nemesianus' first eclogue.

(1.35–6).[64] Even where Thymoetas invokes divine forces, he does so counterfactually, describing Meliboeus as the kind of man whom Apollo, Pan, Linus or (NB 1.25 *aut*) Orpheus *would* celebrate in song (1.25–6).[65] What is more, Thymoetas makes concessions about Meliboeus' ability even to hear the song, making ambiguous the rest experienced by the dead and the reality of their heavenly home (1.38–42):

> accipite hos cantus atque haec nostro Meliboeo
> mittite, si sentire datur post fata quietis.
> nam si sublimes animae caelestia templa
> sidereasque colunt sedes mundoque fruuntur,
> tu nostros aduerte modos, ...
> Meliboee ....

Receive this music and convey what I sing to our dear Meliboeus, if the deceased are granted awareness after death. For if lofty spirits do occupy heavenly temples and starry seats and do enjoy a realm [of their own], then give ear to my melodies, Meliboeus.

The conditionals used by Thymoetas express hope more than confidence, with the life-giving epithets of the elements almost a wish for the life of the deceased and his ability to hear the eulogy. And it is here, just at the beginning of the eulogy, that commentators see a strong Stoic influence. Seneca uses a similar quadripartite elemental invocation in a context of mourning at *Hercules furens* 1054–6, and his Theseus speaks of post-mortem *sensus* at *Phaedra* 842–3.[66] Moreover, Nemesianus' description of the afterlife accords with postulations by Cicero in his *Somnium Scipionis*, leading some even to consider Nemesianus a spokesman of Stoic 'theory'.[67] Nor can one overlook the striking linguistic similarities between the cosmic agnosticism of Nemesianus and that of Manilius, who poses rhetorical questions about the location of the souls of the just after death (1.758–61).[68]

This intertextuality is not a case of arbitrary linguistic parallelism, however. Though the cited commentators do not expand on *how* the language of the eulogy expresses Stoic theory, it is apparent in basic Stoic understandings of death. In general, Stoics 'treated [the soul] as a corporeal or bodily entity with a location in space' after death, for some thinkers particularly the 'upper atmosphere'.[69] The physicality of the way in which both Tityrus and Thymoetas refer to the dead Meliboeus is striking in this respect. Thymoetas, of course, concretizes the afterlife in his talk of elements, heavenly temples and starry seats. Yet even before the eulogy Tityrus asserts that 'a section of the world apart (*secreti*

[64] Cupaiuolo (n. 1), 111 on 1.35 notes the distinct lack of deities.

[65] Note the imperfect subjunctives: *concinerent ... sonarent*.

[66] The invocation of the chorus: *lugeat aether | magnusque parens aetheris alti | tellusque ferax | et uaga ponti mobilis unda ...* The text is according to the Loeb edition of J.G. Fitch, *Seneca: Hercules, Trojan Women, Phoenician Women, Medea, Phaedra* (Cambridge, MA and London, 2018). See Cupaiuolo (n. 1), on 1.38 and Volpilhac (n. 1), 65 nn. 37 and 39.

[67] See Luiselli (n. 1), 197–9 for resonances with Cicero's work. For Nemesianus as displaying Stoic theory, see Cupaiuolo (n. 1), 111 on 1.35 and 1.38 as well as Volpilhac (n. 1), 65 n. 39.

[68] Cf. especially Manilius 1.758 *dignataque nomina caelo* and Nemes. *Ecl.* 1.50 *caelo dignus* as well as Manilius 1.761 *aetherios uiuunt annos mundoque fruuntur* and Nemes. *Ecl.* 1.40 *sidereasque colunt sedes mundoque fruuntur*. The text is according to G.P. Goold, *M. Manilius: Astronomica* (Leipzig, 1985). For Manilius' Stoicism/Pythagoreanism in relation to this passage, see K. Volk, *Manilius and his Intellectual Background* (Oxford, 2009), 226–34 and 244–5. Monceaux (n. 5), 135–6 asserts that Manilius was uniquely important for Carthaginian writers, perhaps owing to his having resided there.

[69] A. Long, 'Stoic agnosticisms about death', in G.A. Gazis and A. Hooper (edd.), *Aspects of Death and the Afterlife in Greek Literature* (Liverpool, 2021), 171–88, at 172.

pars orbis) and the realm (*mundus*) of the blessed now hold [Meliboeus]', clearly an emphasis on the locality of the latter's posthumous experience, particularly considering the repeated use of *mundus* at 1.20 and 1.40. Thymoetas' seemingly odd agnosticism, then, would appear but a concomitant aspect of Stoic death 'doctrine', which, for both Seneca and Marcus Aurelius, for example, is the potential of the soul either to be annihilated at death or to be transported elsewhere, somehow.[70] And Tityrus' statement is not at all one of certainty; after all, Meliboeus is effectively merely 'elsewhere'. But what does this Stoic flavour mean for the poem's interpretation in historical context?

To begin with, as previously mentioned, Meliboeus is meant to be merely a herdsman and a musician—a man—like his former companions Tityrus and Thymoetas. This is elevated through his being a kind of bucolic ruler; but clearly, unlike Virgil's Daphnis, no apotheosis awaits him. His heavenly fate, his post-mortem existence itself, is an open question: one which is hoped for more than guaranteed. This grounding of Meliboeus, however, when taken both with his being spoken of by all of nature (1.71–4; see above) and with the classically bucolic *adynata* that Thymoetas claims will result before he ever ceases from Meliboeus' praises (75–80), makes this non-divine governor of the bucolic world almost synonymous with the bucolic world itself. In light of the Stoic belief that the world possesses its own 'soul', as a man does, and is logically identical 'bodily' with that soul, Meliboeus begins to seem far more symbolic of a broader idea at the same time as he could be a fictitious analogue of a historical figure.[71] And such a philosophical reading is by no means shameless conjecture: Nemesianus, as previously shown, lived in a place and culture deeply concerned with Stoic notions of law, nature, decline and crisis. As the Parthenope school grafted into Virgil a convicted Epicureanism which decided the 'message' of his bucolics, so Nemesianus' putative Carthaginian milieu imprinted on his poetry, given the vicissitudes of the time, a Stoic outlook; and it is one which notably emphasizes the mortality and subsequent loss of Meliboeus at the same time as it suggests his oneness with the natural world itself and his intimacy with the flourishing of things.[72] Consider another late antique poet—albeit about three hundred years Nemesianus' junior—Maximianus, who clearly conflates his elegies on the decay of his own body with the decay of the world, employing language charged with Stoic understandings of the *senectus mundi*.[73] This philosophical flavour, even in Nemesianus' eclogue, unites the individual and the emblematic. Perhaps Nemesianus encoded a particular figure into Meliboeus; but he was equally keen to make this character representative of something more.

Consider, too, lines 1.43–5:

> longa tibi cunctisque diu spectata senectus
> felicesque anni nostrique nouissimus aeui
> circulus innocuae clauserunt tempora uitae.

Your drawn-out old age, long respected by all, those blessed years and that most recent cycle of our Age have brought to an end the span of your blameless life.

[70] See Long (n. 69), 178–83.

[71] Cf. Hubaux (n. 1), 244—citing the argument of Monceaux (n. 5), 382—asserts that Thymoetas' song is not meant to remember some kind of real patron but is purely a thematic exercise ('d'un exercise'). This thematic reading is indeed based on the generally Stoic eschatology here present.

[72] For the influence of Parthenope on Virgil, see Davis (n. 1), 165–70.

[73] See J. Uden and I. Fielding, 'Latin elegy in the old age of the world: the elegiac corpus of Maximianus', *Arethusa* 43 (2010), 439–60, particularly 444–6.

Several commentators also associate this reference to the *circulus aeui* with Stoicism, citing Sen. *Ep.* 1.12.6 and its discussion of the *partes* pertaining to *tota aetas*, whether of a man's life or of the world itself.[74] That Thymoetas uses the first-person plural (*nostri*) to refer to this *aeuus* expresses an ambiguity much befitting poetry: perhaps Meliboeus died, in the bucolic world, just as Thymoetas passed a new threshold of maturity; but *nostri* could equally refer to the inhabitants of the bucolic world, or at the very least to Thymoetas and Tityrus, who have experienced in Meliboeus' passing the end of an era. Moreover, this 'old age' was one of happiness (*felices*) and universal reverence (*cunctis spectata*). It is difficult to overlook the epochal–political emphasis.

NOTHING NEW UNDER THE (BUCOLIC) SUN?

Taking such implications seriously, it would seem that Nemesianus constructed his programmatic eclogue in active dialogue with the cultural, societal and political realities around him. Moreover, though concerned with the decline and resurrection of classical culture, it equally centres around a figure representing a lost status quo that allowed such culture to flourish in the first place.

Nemesianus' agnosticism in this first eclogue, explained above, is undeniably more pointed than Virgil's; but this does not restrict him to some kind of dogma.[75] It is not so much that the Stoic flavour of Nemesianus' poetic eschatology proves his formal philosophical outlook but rather that his use of such language and imagery in characterizing the dead Meliboeus gives validity to a 'symbolic' reading of the figure of Meliboeus and of his relationship with the fictional (and therefore real) world, even if he may be masking some historical individual.[76] His secular merit, era-ending demise and de-mythologized afterlife diffuse a sobriety into the bucolic world that can only reflect the contextualized intentions of the poem's author. Nemesianus chose to begin his volume of eclogues with a striking treatment of death, and the death of a leader symbolizing a Golden Age at that. A great thing has ended, and there is only the hope of returning to it anamnetically through song, hence Thymoetas' continuous references to who Meliboeus *was* and what he *did*. The poetic future starts with a mindful return to former glory.

At first glance, however, this narrative portrayal in bucolic is by no means unique to Nemesianus. One could argue that his first eclogue is but a rebranding of Virgil's ninth; after all, both portray a 'severe loss' (albeit of a material kind for Virgil) that 'threaten[s] not only to disrupt, but to undermine, the poetic vocation that defines the bucolic community'.[77] This, too, is only overcome 'by resorting to the consolation of poetic memory', one which directly involves Menalcas, a long-absent poetic leader.[78] Inspired by this eclogue—particularly with its optimistic youth and pessimistic elder dynamics—though Nemesianus may have been, Virgil's Menalcas is crucially *still alive*; and this is emphasized throughout the poem, unto the final reassurance: *carmina tum melius, cum uenerit ipse, canemus* (9.67). Obviously, there is no return for Nemesianus' Meliboeus, nor do Tityrus and Thymoetas, as Moeris and Lycidas, engage in any kind of amoebean reperformance of Meliboeus' songs; rather, it is the historical Meliboeus himself—

[74] See Cupaiuolo (n. 1), 112 on 1.45; Volpilhac (n. 1), 66 n. 45; and Williams (n. 1), 121 on 1.45.
[75] Cf. Davis (n. 1), 8; Verg. *Ecl.* 8.35 suggests the unhearing of the gods.
[76] Luiselli (n. 1), 198, though keen to emphasize Nemesianus' philosophical education, views his application of such themes in this eclogue as mere *disiecta membra* of wider theory.
[77] Davis (n. 1), 41.
[78] Davis (n. 1), 42.

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perhaps even the *idea* of Meliboeus—that is consolatory in recollection, his governance —not his creations—the source of fond memory.[79] He will not return; he must be returned *to* in memory.

Nemesianus' fictional world, as in all bucolic poetry, is obviously intimately concerned with song, a standard metapoetic convention that enables the author to align himself within generic tradition. Yet Nemesianus' programmatic song, the eulogy for Meliboeus, excludes Tityrus entirely from its creation and progression. Moreover, it is entirely past-oriented, an offering of thanks for what once was. Nemesianus' 'answer' to the predicament of loss and decay fictionally depicted in this first eclogue is song rooted in what has come before. There is no spokesman for a message of some political and philosophical salvation as in Virgil or Calpurnius. The 'salvation' that comes is not one of a present political reality or even one to come; rather, it is the rush of nostalgia and fleeting hope predicated solely on musical (that is, poetic) talent. Thymoetas' eulogy ends with Tityrus insisting almost desperately on his continuation: *perge, puer, coeptumque tibi ne desere carmen* (1.81). What is more, he suggests that a pleased Apollo might convey Thymoetas' song even to Rome (1.82–3). Schetter finds it significant, in light of Calpurnius' fourth eclogue, that fame in the 'City' is not sought by the singer but passively resultative and inherently hopeful in its uncertainty.[80] There is no emperor to impress but rather a city—a civilisation—to join.[81] The city itself becomes more like a symbol and therefore also powerfully enhances the memory of a *iudex iustus*, one who 'taught us to lighten our oppressive worries' (59 *duras docuisti fallere curas*) through song. His reign set the very conditions for poetic culture, and it is only by remembering him in grateful song that the conditions arise for a new poetry, not only with the capacity to 'join' Rome but even satisfying the elderly Tityrus, the poetic tradition on the verge of dying like its companion governor before him. The poetic resurrection of Meliboeus is then an almost spiritual resurrection of Golden-Age Roman civilisation, its form in song a metapoetic statement of the importance of the continuity of traditional poetic forms and a representation of Nemesianus' own project in a politically and poetically 'dark' era. This is evidently the Servian *necessitas* that drives his foray into bucolic. Poetry is saved from the brink precisely through reverence for what made it possible.

Nemesianus' first eclogue is therefore almost elegiac, and this generic pull can be felt throughout his bucolics.[82] That Tityrus finds relief to his emotional pain thereby is an obvious continuation of the bucolic trope of poetic liberation from strife, rejection and worry. But this elegiac shift, discerned by Karakasis, is not empty or reducible to intertextuality alone. This first eclogue, as the cornerstone of Nemesianus' work, introduces a dynamic even beyond an assertive triumph of song itself, one inherent to Nemesianus' choice to frame his eclogues in terms of the loss of one era and the yet uncertain rise of another, a loss instantiated both poetically and politically within the fictional bucolic world, a seriousness rooted in decline and decay. When the grounding of blissful reality is gone, what remains is song itself. If that song, if that poetry, is mindful, even reverent, of the bliss that was, it takes on its own life, even bringing the potential of fame, catharsis and, above all, continuity.

[79] For the dynamics of performative anamnesis in Virgil's ninth eclogue, see Davis (n. 1), 46–53.

[80] Cf. Schetter (n. 1), 6–7; he views the predicted success of Thymoetas in connection with Corydon's hopeless desperation to leave the forest for Rome, signalled by *e siluis*.

[81] Tityrus: . . . *et felix* [*Apollo*] *dominam* [*te*] *perducat in urbem* (1.83). Chinn (n. 1), 49 notes that Apollo and Meliboeus are treated separately and reckons that the lack of an imperial reference is likely due to 'the upheaval and instability of the late third century'.

[82] For elegiac dynamics in Nemesianus' other eclogues, see Karakasis (n. 1), 297–338.

CONCLUSION

The record of third-century Latin works is sparse and dominated by legal texts and Christian dogmatic discourse.[83] Apart from two poems by Commodian and (putatively) Lactantius, Nemesianus shines as the one prominent traditionally oriented poetic voice in this period. This fact alone makes him a unique witness to the development of classical culture. But his importance is evidently not limited to his imitation—or shameless plagiarism—of the authors of a past and more 'sophisticated' milieu. The themes with which Nemesianus charges his eclogues are a unique witness to his era's own concerns, while the Virgilian and Calpurnian parallels are equally a sign of poetic reverence and the continuity of genre. Even in the comparative, it is clear that Nemesianus, though consciously a participator in the bucolic tradition, thematically weighs his programmatic eclogue down in its entire construal to a greater intensity—with aging, loss and death—so much so that later pastoralism can be said to be responsive to his 'religious doubt', one which is inextricably tied to a political and institutional doubt.[84] His first eclogue is clearly not, then, a mere chopping and pasting together of previous contributions to Latin bucolic, nor even an imitation of an entire pre-existing bucolic narrative and thematic structure; it is an authentic, informed and unique contribution to what is, for Nemesianus, a hallowed tradition, its loss and resurrection under him a sign of—and answer to—an era of disillusionment and degeneration. In this way, Nemesianus' bucolic project marks a proto-late antique shift in which literary 'mimesis modulated into hermeneutics', a participation not concerned with '*representing* the world through normative texts' but '*interpreting* the world' through them.[85]

For this reason, Nemesianus deserves reassessment as a singular poetic witness to one of the most troubled periods in Roman history before the fall of the West two hundred years after him. He is no historian, nor might he even have been an eyewitness to the crises that directly visited Carthage and North Africa as a whole between 235 and 260. Nevertheless, he was a learned man—a classicist—raised and educated in a world immediately concerned with decline and disjunction, his programmatic first eclogue a deliberate and apparent fictionalization of the zeitgeist. In Nemesianus, then, is revealed not only the power of North African Latinity and the adaptability of the Latin bucolic genre to contemporary context but also perhaps the forerunner of an inherently elegiac, interpretative and crisis-laden poetry of Late Antiquity, a thoughtful Roman citizen grappling with what seemed the great undoing of things.

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[83] D.L. Norman, *The Aesthetics of Hope in Late Greek Imperial Literature: Methodius of Olympius' Symposium and the Crisis of the Third Century* (Cambridge, 2019), 44.

[84] Chinn (n. 1), 64. See also Chinn (n. 1), 58 for the use of pastoral allusions in Constantinian panegyric and their 'actively engaging in the kind of intertextual "correction" we find in the classical tradition' owing to Nemesianus' rather pessimistic contribution to the genre.

[85] M. Vessey, 'Literature, literary histories, Latin Late Antiquity: the state of a question', in J.R. Stenger (ed.), *Spätantike Konzeptionen von Literatur—Notions of the Literary in Late Antiquity* (Heidelberg, 2014), 19–31, at 24, summarizing R. Herzog (ed.), *Handbuch der lateinischen Literatur der Antike 5: Restauration und Erneuerung. Die lateinische Literatur von 284 bis 374 n. Chr.* (Munich, 2002), 32–3.

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