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Genre Trouble in Early Modern English Writing (1500–1800)

Generic Hybridity

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## Spenser's Popular Pastoral: Hodgepodes and Genre Trouble in *The Shepheardes Calender*

*La pastorale populaire de Spenser : amalgames et problèmes génériques dans The Shepheardes Calender*

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### Résumés

English Français

The article explores the role played by popular culture in Edmund Spenser's *Shepheardes Calender* (1579). Highlighting references to almanacs, ballads and festival culture, alongside the poem's use of regional and colloquial language, I argue that Spenser's distinctly English pastoral includes a commingling of classical precedent with popular motifs. The result is a cultural hodgepodge in which disparate literatures and voices combine to produce new effects, but whose constituent parts significantly remain legible to the reader. The *Calender* thus offers a playful, and provocative, reimagining of pastoral which advertises Spenser's roving cultural palate and solidifies his claim to be England's new poet.

Cet article étudie l'appropriation de la culture populaire par Spenser dans *The Shepheardes Calender* (1579). En soulignant les références aux almanachs, aux balades et à la culture du festival ainsi que l'utilisation d'un langage oralisé et régional, nous démontrerons que la pastorale anglaise de Spenser se fonde sur l'amalgame d'une tradition classique et de thèmes populaires. Il en résulte un méli-mélo culturel dans lequel des voix et des littératures disparates se combinent pour créer de nouveaux effets mais dont les différents éléments restent facilement déchiffrables pour le lecteur. Le *Calender* offre ainsi une réécriture ludique et provocatrice de la pastorale. Elle met en lumière l'éventail culturel de Spenser et consolide son statut de nouveau poète anglais.

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### Entrées d'index

**Mots-clés :** Spenser (Edmund), The Shepheardes Calender, pastorale, culture populaire

**Keywords:** Spenser (Edmund), The Shepheardes Calender, pastoral, popular culture

## *Texte intégral*

- 1 Edmund Spenser's remarkable contribution to the genre of pastoral, *The Shepheardes Calender* (1597), has been thoroughly unpacked in relation to continental and classical precedent, and mined for its ecclesiastical and political allegory.<sup>1</sup> Many critics, including Paul Alpers and Helen Cooper, have emphasised Spenser's variety and inclusiveness (Alpers 1997, 174 and Cooper 1977, 155). Ruth Samson Luborsky sees the *Calender* as "a unique combination of many books," its presentation "planned deliberately to be allusive" (Luborsky 1980, 20) and Patrick Cullen celebrates Spenser's ability to juxtapose different perspectives in order to critique pastoral and its "multiform ambivalence" (Cullen 1970, 18).<sup>2</sup> The work's multiform and often critical relationship to genre also extends to Spenser's engagement with Virgil. As Cooper has demonstrated, for all the *Calender's* debt to the *Eclogues*, "the differences are much more marked than the similarities" and she points out that Spenser locates the work squarely within the English poetic tradition at the outset with references to Chaucer and Skelton preceding Virgil (Cooper 2018, 461-2 and 466-7).<sup>3</sup> Catherine Nicholson, highlighting the "vexed" nature of pastoral for English poets, who have to negotiate with Virgil's assumption in the *Eclogues* that Britain is "no place for pastoral", argues that, for Spenser, pastoral is a space of "alienation, exclusion, and the paradoxical virtues of exile". Nicholson contends that it is by harnessing this feeling of English alterity and undertaking a radical defamiliarising of the English language that Spenser, paradoxically, creates a space for a new English pastoral, finding "in the rudeness and rusticity of the mother tongue the materials of its own peculiar eloquence" (Nicholson 2008, 42-5).<sup>4</sup>
- 2 Built on dense old wood but also vibrating with new green shoots, Spenser's pastoral is alive with suggestive associations that recall the classical and medieval past while also being playfully innovative. In what follows, I will argue that Spenser's lively and inclusive approach to the genre of pastoral incorporates a sustained and knowing engagement with popular culture. Exploring references to almanacs, ballads and festival culture, phenomena that represent aspects of native culture familiar to the broadest possible readership, I will make a case for popular culture being a significant component of the work's allusive eclecticism. <sup>5</sup>The capacious nature of popular culture is notably distinct from the narrower elite reading culture represented by Virgil. <sup>6</sup>Nonetheless, in many ways, Spenser's harnessing of popular culture is appropriate for a genre which celebrates the rustic songs of shepherds. As George Puttenham states in *The Arte of English Poesie* "all eclogues and pastoral poems" should be "in the low and base style" (Puttenham 1589, 237).<sup>7</sup> The inclusion of the popular also reflects the emphasis upon decorum in grammar school education. Knowledge of the appropriate style and language befitting the circumstances, and genre, of the text as well as the rank of the reader was central to students' rhetorical training (Pugh 2006, 5). The inclusion of native popular culture in a work whose self-presentation frequently evokes Virgil's *Eclogues* may therefore be apposite to the genre, rather than necessarily in tension with an elite reading culture. Nonetheless, Spenser moves beyond a decorous use of a "base" style for his shepherds' songs, choosing to include extraneous broader cultural motifs and references (including visual and stylistic allusions to popular print and festival culture) which signal his eclectic reading practises and bring a notably popular English sensibility to the work.
- 3 The resulting mixture of cultural types in the *Calender* is both capacious and heterogeneous. In this way it is reminiscent of the "hodgepodge" (90-1) of stewed meats that the shadowy editor E.K. uses as an image for deriding linguistic borrowings in the Epistle to the *Calender*. Criticising the use of Italian and French to supplement English, E.K. claims that writers "have made our English tongue, a gallimaufrey or hodgepodge of al other speches" (96-7). E.K. goes on to claim that such is ignorance of "olde word[s]" (99) that upon hearing English some people believe that it is "gibbrish" (101), finding themselves "straungers" and "alienes" (104) to "their own mother tonge" (103).

The image of a hodgepodge of linguistic borrowings is therefore a counterpart to what E.K. sees as an alienation of the English from their own language. Both unable to recognise their own tongue and reliant on the importation of foreign words, the English have become doubly estranged.

- 4 Transporting E. K.'s scornful culinary metaphor from the realm of language to that of culture more broadly conceived, I will counter-intuitively emphasise the productive work done by English cultural mixtures and hodgepodes – disparate literatures and voices that combine to produce new effects, but whose constituent parts significantly remain legible to the reader. Aptly encapsulating the *Calender's* ability to be at once strange and familiar, the hodgepodge provides a way of thinking about genre which foregrounds the mixture rather than isolated lines of influence. As Matthew Harrison notes, Spenser's eclogues are "given form and texture by the play of contrasts" (Harrison 2014, 241), and a significant contributor to this antithetical dynamic, I argue, is the dialogic juxtaposition and mixture of high and low cultural types into a literary stew which tests and potentially transforms the poetic palate of the reader. Pastoral has always evoked "self-contradiction" (Haber 1994, 1) to borrow Judith Haber's term, consistently questioning and problematizing its own definition, and Spenser's work arguably represents a continuation of this approach to genre rather than a radical rupture with the literary past. It is precisely the genre's capacity for self-critique, its harnessing of a rude and base style and its use of antithesis that provide such an apt foundation for Spenser's playful use of the popular when shaping his hodgepodge pastoral world.
- 5 In Spenser's hands, classical eclogue is energised by its association, and commingling, with aspects of English popular culture such as almanacs, festival culture, regional voices and ballads. These practices and genres exemplify the porousness of boundaries between elite and popular cultures. Festival culture is accessible to all and cultural cross-pollination is facilitated by the mobility of popular print and oral culture, as is evidenced by the broad readership for almanacs and the importance of ballad metre for the development of the English sonnet. Spenser harnesses this cultural porousness and the generative possibilities created by juxtaposing elite and popular, to forge a new English vision of pastoral which incorporates the rude, the homely and the quotidian at the level of content as well as style. Spenser composed the *Calender* when cultural boundaries were often being policed more rigorously, with a consciousness of elite and popular difference helping to shape hierarchies as the educated and godly worked to reform and purify the culture of the people (Burke 2006, 207-22). The drive to reform popular culture often targeted play and entertainment, notably festivals and ballad culture, as well as popular religion and superstitions (Burke 2006, 208). Despite this, the *Calender* playfully highlights moments of cultural intersection and dialogue. In Spenser's English pastoral, traffic between elite and popular cultures energises the genre, creating new mixtures and associations which provocatively reimagine the Virgillian eclogue for the hodgepodge English present.

## Almanacs/calendars/festivals

- 6 One of the most visible links to popular culture in *The Shepheardes Calendar* is Spenser's use of the almanac (Shinn 2009, 139 and Reid 2019, 63). Allusions to the almanac include the calendrical format of the poem and the inclusion of woodcuts which head each eclogue, providing visual and material cues to the reader that the work is in conversation with other genres and modes. As Spenser likely had overall responsibility for the work's design (Luborsky 1990, 655 and Borris 2022, 24) such cues are significant for how I read the *Calender's* imagining of a new English pastoral.
- 7 The almanac, a hugely popular printing phenomenon, combined natural astrology (the belief that the planets and stars affected the natural world) and judicial astrology (the attempt to interpret planetary influences and make predictions) in order to inform

its readers of the effects of celestial events on crops, livestock, the body and the weather (Capp 1979, 16). Almanacs typically included a calendar along with lists of holy days, fairs, tide tables and distances between different communities. They usually culminated in a prognostication for the forthcoming year in which predictions were made concerning the weather, crop yields, wars, births, disease and death – sometimes accompanied by a series of woodcuts depicting appropriate scenes for each of the twelve months, or more generic scenes of labour (Capp 1979 and Bosanquet 1917). The almanac clearly advertises its purpose by adhering to this roughly standardised format. Almanac-writers often adopt the same publication style over several years and continuity of design was a way of ensuring that your readership could identify your wares from those of competitors. Adherence to a loosely standardised formula also meant that the almanac was itself a publication distinct and separate from other booksellers' merchandise. Peter Burke notes that this stability of form may have helped to “preserve and even diffuse traditional popular culture” (Burke 2006, 257). It is this continuity which makes the link between Spenser's *Calender* and the almanac tradition so marked, as the poem includes several features which recall these standard attributes. Such visual prompts allow the *Calender* to obliquely reference the popular print culture of the almanac, a publication which was familiar, ubiquitous and consumed across the social scale.

8 Firstly, the calendrical format is reminiscent of the almanac's typical inclusion of a calendar as well as the month-by-month prognostications. Secondly, the title of the work evokes a well-known almanac the *Kalender of Sheparden*. Thirdly, the inclusion of newly commissioned woodcuts depicting pastoral scenes and scenes of labour in Spenser's poem, which head each eclogue, imitates the woodcuts included in many almanacs and calendars. I will outline some specific links between the *Calender's* woodcuts and a series of woodcuts which were used in a broadside almanac written by Simon Huring in 1551 and later recycled in a 1567 almanac written by John Securis and published by Thomas Marsh. I will also briefly consider how the almanac's referencing of important dates, including notable days in the ritual year, helps to animate the poem's wider interest in festival culture.

9 The almanac was a topical and frequently local publication. Most related to a specific year and often almanac writers used a local meridian from which to calculate their prognostications. During the sixteenth century, the English almanac became more geographically specific and, by the Elizabethan period, English almanacs began to diverge from their Continental counterparts with the work of native astrologers outselling the French translations that had dominated the market in the earlier part of the century. English almanacs were relatively inexpensive and designed for a popular audience, sold by peddlers and booksellers in both town and village (Capp 1979, 270-74). The almanac's inclusion of a calendar (almanacs were likely to be one of the most common sources of calendar time) with its listing of national holidays to celebrate the accession of the monarch and the battles fought and won by the Protestant church helped shape ideas of national identity. As David Cressy states: “no other nation employed the calendar as the English did to express and represent their identity” (Cressy 1990, 31). English almanacs also began the year in January rather than the more traditional March, something mimicked by Spenser in the *Calender*. The links with almanacs are a significant aspect of Spenser's pastoral innovation, serving as they do to localise Spenser's engagement with the genre. Alison Chapman points out that all too often the calendrical format of the *Calender* has been seamlessly incorporated into pastoral convention so that the originality of this move is occluded. “By subsuming the calendar within the conventions of pastoral, critics [...] disregard the fact that the calendrical format constitutes Spenser's *break* with the conventions of pastoral, since no precedent exists in pastoral poetry for his text's monthly arrangement” (Chapman 2002, 2). The unprecedented monthly organisation of the *Calender* is also a visible link to the almanac as these were the publications in which calendars were widely disseminated.

10 Spenser's decision to name his publication the *Shepheardes Calender* further associates his work with the frequently reprinted almanac the *Kalender of Shepeardes*, as the editor E. K notes in the Epistle: "applying an olde name to a new worke" (168). This was a large perpetual (or everlasting) French almanac, the *Compost et kalendrier des bergers*, first translated into English in 1503. The perpetual nature of the *Kalender* may have a bearing on Spenser's claim in the epilogue that "Loe I have made a Calender for every yeare" (1). The *Kalender* was a more luxurious and expensive publication than the cheap yearly almanacs produced by writers such as Heuring and Securis, the astrologers that I discuss below, and it had an obviously devotional bent, including a number of elaborate woodcuts depicting heaven and hell. Beyond the similarity in title, there are no specific visual correspondences between the *Kalender* and the *Calender*. Borris calls it "no template but rather an allusive reference for some modal assimilation" (Borris 2022, 39). The titular echo provided by the *Kalender* is nonetheless a further indication that Spenser's presentation of the poem is informed by almanacs. The reference to the *Kalender* is also a reminder of the almanac's social range, which encompasses ephemeral annual publications destined to be used as wastepaper and more expensive long-term manuals. This range in style and cost was accompanied by the broad readership which consumed almanacs of different kinds, from readers with only partial literacy to elite consumers. Yet, despite the potential for securing an elite market, many almanacs identified their readership as being closely associated with agriculture rather than necessarily coming from the higher orders of society. The focus on agricultural matters explicitly allies almanacs with pastoral as a focus on the natural world serves as a source of imaginative retreat for the reader who may play-act the role of rustic, imagining themselves adopting the position of labourer or shepherd even if they reside in a more urban environment. For the reader of the *Kalender*, this play-acting served to facilitate a devotional practice which concentrated their thoughts on spiritual renewal and meditation. The significance of Spenser borrowing the title of this well-known perpetual almanac may lie in the fact that it immediately primes the reader to read for further allusions to different publications and genres. They can then enter a playful world where attention to such allusions provides a satisfying game of "spot the reference".

11 When turning to the visual presentation of Spenser's eclogue book, it is also possible to find clues to the work's interest in almanac culture. The *Calender's* woodcuts reference almanac woodcut images in some contexts, although illustrative styles varied across different almanac publications, from elaborate woodcuts of the astrological man to crude depictions of astrological signs. The unsophisticated nature of the *Calender's* woodcuts is likely deliberate, as it corresponds to the rustic nature of pastoral, which also potentially accounts for the inconsistencies in quality (Borris 2022, 88). Their rusticity, however, is also reminiscent of the woodcuts included in cheaper almanac publications. Simon Heuring's broadside almanac for 1551 (see fig. 1) includes small monthly woodcuts which have some resemblance to Spenser's illustrations.

**Fig. 1: Simon Heuring, *An almanack and pronostication for the yeare of our Lorde. M.D.LJ.* London: N. Hill for John Turck, 1551. The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, Broxb. 95.62.**



- 12 Heuring's woodcuts were later redeployed in John Securis' almanac for 1567, having apparently come into the possession of his printer Thomas Marsh. Woodcuts were often recycled and Marsh himself frequently reused frontispieces across a variety of publications (Shinn 2014, 220). Marsh was a wide-ranging printer who published almanacs by Securis and the physician Leonard Digges, but also Thomas Elyot's *Book Named the Governor* (1557), *A Mirror for Magistrates* (1559, 1563 and 1571), a 1577 collection of proverbs and epigrams by the dramatist John Heywood, and texts by Cicero, Seneca and Ovid, amongst others. It is possible that Marsh's shop on Fleetstreet was known to Spenser. Gabriel Harvey had copies of Marsh's editions of *A Mirror for Magistrates* and William Thomas's *Historie of Italie* (1561) in his library (Stern 1972, 20, 47). Spenser makes an oblique reference to a novella collection whose later editions were published by Marsh, *The Palace of Pleasure* (1569, 1575 and 1580), in Book II of *The Faerie Queene* (Shinn 2014, 207). While Marsh's use of the woodcuts in the Securis almanac is the version more likely to have been familiar to Spenser, I have included images from the earlier Heuring publication here as the surviving copy of the Securis almanac of which I am aware is badly damaged.
- 13 The woodcuts in Heuring and Securis's almanacs are simple and georgic in character (with the exception of the woodcut for May, all of them depict scenes of labour). Every woodcut includes astrological symbols that float in the sky, bounded by cloud formations (see Figs. 2 and 3).

**Fig. 2:** Illustration for May, *ibid*.



Fig. 3: Illustration for October, *ibid.*



14 This is a design clearly echoed by the *Calender* whose woodcuts incorporate a strikingly similar cloud-bound use of astrological symbolism (see Figs. 4, 5 and 6).

Fig. 4: Edmund Spenser, "May", *The Shepheardes Calender* (London: Hugh Singleton, 1579), sig. D4r.



15 Fig. 5: Illustration for "October", *ibid.*, sig. H3r.



Fig. 6: Illustration for "August", *ibid.*, sig. H3r.



16 There are also some similarities between the Heuring/Securis woodcut for May and the *May* woodcut in the *Calender* (see figs. 2 and 4). The almanac's May woodcut incorporates the symbol for Gemini top left and depicts a couple on horseback, probably the May king and queen, the woman grasping what appears to be a hawthorn branch in her hand. The woodcut for the *May* eclogue in the *Calender* also incorporates the cloud-bound astrological sign and depicts the May king and queen in a carriage, holding branches (although as I discuss below, the imagery is multi-layered). These are allusive similarities, the woodcuts are in no way identical, and the May woodcut may represent a "stock" image of sorts, but the correspondences are striking and I believe legible to Spenser's contemporary readership. While the influences behind the presentation of the woodcuts are multiform, Annabel Patterson, for example, has identified a visual debt to the woodcuts included in a 1540 French translation of Virgil's *Ecloques* (Patterson 1998, 123), the important point is perhaps that the woodcuts in the *Calender* are able to evoke both cheap almanacs *and* the visual culture of classical pastoral.<sup>8</sup> It is the mixture of generic references, the hodgepodge, that matters, rather than charting a line of influence from one specific source.

17 One visual indication of the cultural hodgepodge of almanac and eclogue in the *Calender* is the woodcut that heads *October* (see fig. 5). Here the visual field is divided horizontally. Cuddie is on the right in shepherd's garb, his hose threadbare at the knees and wearing an unadorned, wide-brimmed hat. He is approached by Piers, who is crowned with laurel and proffering a set of pipes. Piers appears to have just descended from a Greco-Roman building surrounded with Corinthian columns which has an unidentified cluster of figures in the foreground. Cuddie's background is dominated by

the natural, pastoral landscape and the cloud-bordered image of the astrological sign for Scorpio high in the sky to the right. Cuddie's side of the woodcut is reminiscent of Heuring and Securis's almanac woodcuts, while Piers' is redolent with classical allusion. The aged Piers can be read as Virgil, proffering his oaten reeds to the reluctant Cuddie (Oram *et al.* 1989, 167). The image mirrors the eclogue's description of Piers' plea to Cuddie to "Lyft up thy selfe out of the lowly dust: / And sing of bloody Mars, of wars, of giusts" (37-8) as he entreats him to follow the path of Virgil and abandon pastoral for epic. Visually, the attempt to persuade Cuddie to energise his verse by moving from the lowly and base genre of pastoral to the elevated genre of epic looks rather like an invitation to move from the world of almanac-pastoral to that of the artistic space of Virgillian endeavour. Cuddie does not complete this transition between genres, however, claiming that the only poet fit to do so is Colin. In the woodcut Piers/Virgil and Cuddie remain distinct and unreconciled, fixed in adjacent generic and cultural spaces. This is a clearer demarcation between types than what I will discuss in the *May* eclogue with its complex overlaying of symbolism but it represents one of the dialogic reimaginings of the relationship between classical sources and contemporary popular motifs.

18 While I don't wish to overstate the significance of the almanac as a model for the *Calender*, I do want to emphasise how popular print acts as an important element in the cultural hodgepodge that is Spenser's pastoral. As the allusions to almanac woodcuts such as those reproduced by the printer Thomas Marsh indicate, references to almanac culture have the potential to influence the reader's experience of the text as the recognition of non-classical, popular, and native elements help to shape their conception of its pastoral world.

19 Allusions to almanacs also help to animate a number of thematic links between the poem and the ritual year. The *Calender* includes references to specific festivals, the dates of which would typically be included as part of the almanac's more practical elements such as a calendar and lists of holidays and fairs. One example is the *May* eclogue's focus on raucous May Day festivities. The associated woodcut (see fig. 4) depicts the bringing in of the may (hawthorn blossom) with the image centred on a wagon drawn by winged horses which bears the triumphant May king. The scene is headed by the astrological sign for Gemini, bounded by clouds, reinforcing the visual link to almanacs such as Simon Heuring's and John Securis's discussed previously. There are also a number of goats, one that is held in a pen on the left and two roaming free on the right. They reference the eclogue's inclusion of the fable of the fox and the kid, and the goat on the left is facing a fox on the other side of the fence carrying a pack on its back, the "trusse of tryfles" (239) which are part of its disguise as a "pedler" (238). As well as directly referencing the substance of the poem, the woodcut's inclusion of goat imagery is a link to the sexual nature of Maying. Goats are commonly associated with lustfulness, exemplified by the half-man half-goat satyr who follows the God of festival misrule, Bacchus (Henry 2015, 309-311). Their presence therefore reinforces the sexual connotations of May festivities central to the eclogue's discussion of the appropriate behaviour of churchmen, but also recalls classical images of human-animal hybridity linked to misrule and sexual licence. To the back left of the woodcut stand two shepherds, apparently deep in conversation, representing the two debating shepherds Piers and Palinode, their disproportionate size perhaps emphasising their importance. They stand apart and do not survey the scene in the foreground, which acts as a visual tableau of their conversation.

20 The focus of the image is the May king and queen's carriage which is surrounded by dancers, four of whom link hands as if the group are on the cusp of creating a ring in a choreography that mirrors that of maypole dances. The winged horses driving the carriage are reminiscent of Pegasus and a common classical image for poetic inspiration as Perseus's steed was famous for having created the fount of the Muses by striking the ground with his hooves (Borris 2022, 105). The seated May king holds a branch aloft in the rear of the vehicle and the horses hold branches in their mouths. While on first glance the reader may assume that they grasp hawthorn, the leaves arguably look more

like laurel, connecting the ritual to classical images of poetic triumph (Borris 2022, 98). Placing laurel into the hands of the May king produces a hybrid image in which native hawthorn is replaced by a Mediterranean plant that would be a stranger in the rural English environment. In this way, poetry itself is yoked to English festival culture, with the collecting of hawthorn blossom equated with classical models for poetic invention. A complex reimagining of the kind of image found in Heuring's and Securis's broadside almanacs, the *May* woodcut teases the reader with a mixture of allusions which require careful attention in order for them to be successfully parsed.

21 *May* is the first of three ecclesiastical eclogues depicting a debate between Piers and Palinode, who represent "two formes of pastoures or Ministers, or the protestant and the Catholique" (Argument). Following the telling of the fable of the kid and the fox, however, both men agree to fear the Romish fox. So despite the description in the eclogue's argument, Palinode is more obviously a pattern for a brand of Protestantism that wishes to preserve aspects of popular festivity, which the more Puritan-minded Piers looks upon with suspicion. The importance of May Day festivities for the eclogue is of a piece with the calendrical nature of the *Calender*, but the importance of the festival for highlighting the discord between the two shepherd-pastors also signals the divisive nature of popular rituals in post-Reformation England, holidays which were marked by almanacs but subject to increased policing by ecclesiastical powers (Cressy 1990, 22).

22 Early in the eclogue, Palinode wistfully evokes celebrations "When love lads masken in fresh aray" (2) and the "Kirke pillours" are decorated with "Hawthorne buds, and swete Eglantine" (12-13). Piers curtly states that such "follies" (17) are for the young, prompting a further outpouring of longing from Palinode, who describes having seen "a shole of shepehardes" following a "lusty Tabrere, / That to the many a Horne pype playd" (20-4):

To see those folks make such jouysaunce,  
Made my heart after the pype to daunce.  
Tho to the greene Wood they speeden hem all,  
To fetchen home May with their musicall. (25-28)

23 Palinode's envy of the festivalgoers culminates in a description of the crowning of a May king and queen, "Lady Flora", and his expression of his desire to "helpen the Ladyes their Maybush to beare" (34). Palinode wishes to join in the merrymaking, highlighting the sexual nature of maying in the process by describing women bearing or carrying the weight of the hawthorn. The phrase "to bear" was often equated with women bearing men in sex and later bearing children; Mercutio uses it in this fashion in his Queen Mab speech in *Romeo and Juliet* (1.4). The festival was associated with young men and women going into the forest, or other wild space, returning with hawthorn but also a green coat, having lain together in the grass (Cressy 1990, 21) and Palinode's longing is partly animated by the fertility rite's sensual history. Piers calls Palinode "a worldes childe" (74), arguing that shepherds (by which he means pastors) "Mought not live ylike, as men of the laye" (76). He then proceeds to tell the tale of the fox and the kid in order to illustrate the threat of the Romish fox and how "when as good is meant, / Evil ensueth of wrong entent" (101-2). The debate between Piers and Palinode thus uses festival culture as a way of animating a broader set of arguments about the appropriate behaviour of churchmen and the risks of pleasurable distractions. When the content of the eclogue is read alongside the woodcut image, however, the ritual of bringing in the May becomes elided with laureate triumph and poetic inspiration.

24 Images of rural festivity were harnessed as part of court entertainments during Elizabeth's reign. Philip Sidney's entertainment, "The Lady of the May", performed at Wanstead, Essex, in the spring of 1578 or 1579 took the form of a dramatic pastoral centred on maying's association with courtship. The Lady of the May cannot decide between two suitors, a forester and a shepherd, and the Queen is asked to help the Lady of the May decide (Bates 1992, 61-9). Elizabeth chooses the shepherd, Espilus, who

Katherine Duncan Jones has plausibly argued represented Sidney's uncle, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester (Duncan-Jones 1991, 150). Festival culture and the rural world evoked by almanacs therefore provides a space of playful fantasy and courtly allusion for the elite in a variety of contexts. The tone of the *Calender*, with its descriptions of thwarted love and frustrated ambition, is often bleak and evokes a world far from the celebratory realm of elite courtly entertainment; the shepherds are subject to the vagaries of bad weather and sick sheep and the woodcuts often depict scenes of labour and struggle (Low 1985, 66). Spenser's festival world is less fantastical, and more prosaic, than the Wanstead entertainment but it represents another space in which the popular is harnessed by the elite in order to explore narratives of identity and power.

## Ballad/popular voices

25 The work's links to the almanac are accompanied by references to another form of popular print, the ballad. Printed broadside ballads were "the cheapest and most accessible form of print" (Watt 1991, 11) and must have been ubiquitous at all social levels. One of the significant stylistic collisions in the *Calender* is between ballad metre and pentameter verse (Dolven 2010, 387). The rivalry between the two verse forms reaches its apogee in the *August* eclogue.

26 The *August* eclogue is organised around a singing competition between the shepherds Willye and Perigot, judged by Cuddie, "the vmpere of their strife" (107), and ends with Cuddie's rendition of a song composed in iambic pentameter by the absent shepherd Colin Clout. Despite using very different meters, there are some similarities between the singing competition, which is described as a "roundelay" (56) (a simple song incorporating a refrain), and Cuddie's rendition of Colin's lamentation. Both Perigot and Colin suffer from unrequited love and love's grief is connected to the pastoral environment. Perigot's complaint is punctured, however, by Willye's ironic "undersong" (128), with the effect that it becomes comic, despite Perigot's professed depth of feeling.

27 Perigot and Willye's competition revolves around the extemporaneous production of a roundelay, composed in common ballad metre, which is focused on the charms of a young woman who wears a green kirtle reminiscent of the green "coats" worn by women returning from maying. The roundelay opens with a reference to love found on holy days or holidays, a common time for courtship, further solidifying the links between festival time and literary invention in the poem:

*Perigot.* It fell vpon a holly eue,  
*Willye.* Hey ho hollidaye,  
*Per.* When holly fathers wont to shrieue:  
*Will.* Now gynneth this roundelay. (53-56)

28 The roundelay then proceeds by repetition, a song in which the singers repeat words or motifs, handing them between one another in a dextrous and witty exchange. It includes the refrain "hey ho", which is sung by Willye. Refrains are a hall mark of roundelay but they are also a commonplace in ballads. For example, the ballad *Mad Merry pranks of Robin Goodfellow*, printed by Henry Gosson, repeats the line "with ho, ho, ho" at the end of every stanza (c. 1625), and the ballad *A Newe well a daye / As playne maister Papist, as Donstable waye* (1570) repeats the refrain "well a daye." More significantly, the roundelay's dialogue form directly echoes some two-part ballads, sometimes called jigs, which often had the parts designated as male and female (Clegg 2015, 120). Examples of surviving dialogue jigs include *A mery balade, How a wife entreated her husband, to haue her owne wyll* (1568), *Frauncis new iigge, betweene Frauncis a gentleman, and Richard a farmer* (c. 1617), *Clods Carroll: or, A proper new Iigg, to be sung Dialogue wise, of a man and woman that would needs be married* (1620) and *A mery new iigge. Or, The pleasant wooing betwixt Kit and Pegge* (c. 1630). Most of these examples postdate the *Calender*, but given the ephemeral

nature of ballad publication it is highly likely that two-part ballads were already a feature of oral culture and circulating in print in the 1570s. Perigot and Willye identify their song as a “roundelay” (56; 124) but it has clear associations with a jig or a ballad.

29 One meaning of “roundelay” is a dance in the round, and it is worth remembering that ballads were strongly associated with physical movement. As Bruce Smith points out “the term *ballad* ultimately derives from the late Latin *ballare*, ‘to dance’” (Smith 1999, 170). The jigs typically performed at the end of a play were “narrative ballads that happen to have been danced as well as sung” (Smith 1999, 169) and broadside ballads could direct the singer to jump or dance. It is thus possible to imagine that as Willye and Cuddie compose their roundelay they could also be dancing. In the eclogue’s accompanying woodcut (see fig. 6) the two shepherds are conspicuously standing facing one another, and while they are not shown in motion (in contrast to the dancers in the *May* woodcut), they have a relaxed stance, their knees slightly bent. One shepherd, presumably Perigot as his pledge of a lamb is in the foreground, has his right hand raised and his mouth open in song while the other, likely Willye as he has a mazer, or decorative cup, at his feet, pipes an accompaniment. While they are not yet dancing, their deportment leaves open the possibility for movement, as if they are poised on the cusp of a jig. Cuddie, however, is seated. The embodied nature of ballad singing, and its relationship with dance, may thereby energise the roundelay’s references to the “bouncing Bellibone” (61) “Tripping over the dale alone” (63), whose movements could be enacted, and even parodied by the two men. There is also the possibility that we are to imagine Willye punctuating his repetition of the phrase “hey ho” by thrusting his crook into the air or thumping it onto the ground to mark time as in Morris dancing (Forrest 1999, 74). Both shepherds are depicted with their crooks inverted in the accompanying woodcut, which may facilitate the viewer imagining them knocking them together in a manner reminiscent of stick or sword dances (Forrest 1999, 98 and 116). In contrast, the implied stasis of Cuddie links his recital of Colin’s song to the stillness of a body that has no dancing partner, perhaps a further indication of the disparities between the two traditions of song represented by the shepherds.

30 Reading very differently to the roundelay, Colin’s song, composed in a variant of the Provençal *sestina*, is formally complex, temporally unfixed, and has already been memorised by at least one reader/singer in Cuddie. The roundelay relies upon the witty repetition of words and rhymes but Colin’s complaint takes repetition to a different level. End words are redeployed throughout in a sophisticated pattern which consistently augments the rhythm of the poem, including the augmenting of the end word “augment” itself. This produces a high level of formal intricacy which would be nigh-on impossible to create spontaneously, and which E.K. conspicuously fails to comment upon, his silence potentially highlighting his limitations as a reader of poetry.

31 Alongside these formal disparities there are distinctions in theme and symbol. Perigot and Willye look back to spring, the holiday of May Day, and therefore draw on imagery associated with festival culture. The bonny woman, or “Bellibone” (61), wears a chapelet of violets – a flower that blooms in late winter and early spring – and her green kirtle can be linked to the sexual freedom of maying. Colin’s song, while also embedded in pastoral, does not recall festival culture or a specific moment in the ritual year. It links his grief to the increasing power of the natural world and he calls for other sounds and voices to deepen the resonance of his feeling. Tears are combined with “streames” (156) for example, so that the pastoral world amplifies his grief. The “forest wide” (159) and “wild woddes” (166) contain no seasonal markers. The exception is Colin’s eliding of himself with the nightingale, a migratory bird which arrives in England in April. The nightingale only appears at the end of the complaint, however, signalling the imagined return of the absent Rosalind, her “voyces siluer sound” (181) changing his “chereless cryes” to “cheerefull songs” (182). Colin’s shift from keeping vocal company with the “shrieking sound” of generic “banefull byrds” (173) to imagining a world where he can “take a part” (183) with the night-time song of a specific species, one associated with the myth of Philomela, is a hopeful imagining of

the effects wrought by the return of his beloved and therefore looks to a yet uncertain future.

32 The roundelay thus reads as spontaneous, reciprocal, comic, ephemeral and occasional. A display of varied and witty repetition which uses Willye's ironic undersong to puncture Perigot's grief, it utilises the imagery of popular festival culture, harnesses ballad meter, and may fall into absurdity. It emphasizes superficiality, but also a clownish rusticity, jocular bawdiness and the possibility of dance. Colin's complaint, in contrast, is memorial and rehearsed, and takes itself very seriously (also perhaps to the point of absurdity). It does not include the equivalent of Willye's deflating undersong and may be imagined as a largely static recital.

33 The playful antitheses of the two complaints embedded in the *August* eclogue highlight a number of differences between popular and elite song but they can nonetheless potentially be reconciled. Ballads represent the possibility for cultural crossover as both oral transmission and print facilitate the mobility and porousness of the popular genre (Fumerton 2018, 420).<sup>9</sup> While ballads were typically described as a low form of song, ballad meter was utilised by early English sonneteers and ballads could be composed in pentameter so that the boundaries between ballad and lyric are often more blurred than might be expected (Fumerton 2018, 428-9 and Nebeker 2009, 989-1013). This blurring may be reflected in the fact that both songs have the potential to be absurd even as they employ differing techniques. I wonder therefore if the juxtaposition of the roundelay and Colin's song in *August* serves as a reminder for the astute reader of the potential mixing of ballad and lyric in other contexts (a possibility missed by E. K.).

34 The *Calender* was, however, the only time that Spenser engaged in a sustained experiment with ballad meter, which may indicate that this popular form was of particular significance for his reading and re-framing of pastoral before he embarked upon epic. In his later pastoral *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* (1595) Spenser does not employ the same level of variety and uses pastoral to focus more narrowly on courtly matters (Little 2017, 118). Popular culture is an important resource for his first solo publication, and the resulting experimental hodgepodge reflects his self-presentation as an innovative and "new" writer early in his career.

35 As well as harnessing ballad meter, the *Calender* is studded with dialect words and includes numerous colloquialisms. Dialect is a particular feature of the *May*, *July* and *September* eclogues and is thus yoked to themes of morality and satire (Ingham 1990, 215). The repeated use of specifically northern dialect words may reference the region's strong literary tradition thereby adding "a slightly alien literary quality" (Ingham 1990, 216) to a rough vernacular. The reader's attention is drawn to these more popular voices by the editorial incursions of E.K. His decision to translate specific words and phrases indicates that he believes their meaning will be obscure to the reader, although given E. K.'s unreliability and capacity for misreading, this arguably tells us more about him than the imagined audience for the work.<sup>10</sup> Either way, the humanist paratextual apparatus appended to the *Calendar* is one of the ways the poem highlights its linguistic idiosyncrasies. Catherine Nicholson has identified this linguistic mixture as part of a deliberate "poetics of estrangement" in which English is treated as a "quasi-foreign tongue in order to reinvigorate vernacular poetry" (Nicholson 2008, 41). A self-conscious strategy on Spenser's part, in all likelihood the use of dialect terms would be obviously artificial, an instance of an elite writer appropriating popular voices in order to inform the poem's representation of differing social classes. Social status in the early modern period could be expressed through differences in speech (Hunt 2014, 15) and E.K. animates a linguistic hierarchy by identifying certain words and phrases as being potentially unintelligible or obscure to the reader.<sup>11</sup> This hierarchy, while ostensibly an opportunity for E.K. to display his learning and erudition, ultimately draws attention to the vital importance of popular speech for the construction of Spenser's English pastoral.

36 For example, in the *May* eclogue, "The gate" is glossed by E.K. as "the Gote: Northernly spoken to turne O into A" (177). In *April* "Forswonk and forswatt" is glossed

as “ouerlaboured and sunneburnt” (99) (neither word appears in the *OED* but the “for” prefix in Middle English and Germanic usage can imply destructive, painful, or prejudicial effect, including in the verb “forscald”, meaning “to scald or scorch” (“for” prefix e. (a).)). In *September* E.K. glosses numerous words and phrases. “Buxome and bent” is glossed as “meek and obedient” (148); a “Weanell waste” is glossed as a “weaned younglind”, a young weaned animal (198), and “Hidder and shidder” is glossed as “He and she. Male and Female” (211). The *OED* identifies “hidder” as a dialect term for a male sheep. There is no corresponding entry for “shidder” but it seems plausible that Spenser is using it for a female sheep. The relatively high number of dialect or colloquial terms glossed in *September* is read by E.K. as a result of Diggon Davie’s time spent in a “farre countrye”, one identified as Catholic in the eclogue’s argument:

The Dialecte and phrase of speache in this Dialogue, seemeth somewhat to differ from the comen. The cause whereof is supposed to be, by occasion of the party herein meant, who being very freend to the Author hereof, had bene long in forraine countreys and there seene many disorders, which he here recounteth to Hobbinoll. (Argument)

37 But Diggon Davy doesn’t speak with Latinate terms or words associated with foreign travel. Instead, the language of the eclogue is regional, vernacular and colloquial, and it is these elements that E.K. feels compelled to gloss. Does this imply that E.K. is so immersed in learned, standardised English that he cannot recognise the English vernacular and reads it as foreign and in need of translation? If so, then this ironically echoes his earlier derision of readers who fail to recognise authentic English as they have become alienated from their mother tongue. In many ways, E.K. parodies the humanist reader so this may act as a satire on learned men who immerse themselves in elite culture to the extent that they become linguistic foreigners at home, unable to interpret the common speech of their compatriots. This is arguably demonstrated by E. K.’s glossing of Diggon’s use of the word “Leefe” as “deare” (11), a meaning likely obvious to Spenser’s readers, as “lief”, meaning precious, was in common usage. In this instance, E.K. is either demonstrating his own ignorance or displaying a patronising dismissal of the reader’s acuity.

38 In a further demonstration of the *Calender*’s investment in creating a new English pastoral, the use of colloquialisms and regional language allies the work with Medieval poetry—Chaucer had parodied northern English in the *Reeve’s Tale*. E.K. connects the medieval history of English verse to Spenser’s investment in archaic language in the Epistle. Defending the use of “auncient” (26) words E.K. claims that while “of most men unused” (30-1) they echo the history of English poetry and he observes that the poet may think “them fittest for such rusticall rudenesse of shepherds, eyther for that theyr rough sounde would make his rymes more ragged and rustical, or els because such olde and obsolete words are most used of country folke” (40-44). The poetry of Chaucer, and the legacy of English versification that he represents, is an appropriate register for the pastoral voices of shepherds but it is also a link to country people in the here and now as their vernacular serves as a repository of historical language. As E.K. conjectures, this is possibly what provides the rationale for Spenser’s archaisms. In this way, the regional and colloquial may also register a sense of English history. While E.K. is often an unreliable reader of the *Calender*, this is a plausible explanation for the poem’s use of archaisms and may signal that Spenser wished to defend this departure from pastoral norms. Providing a rationale was clearly necessary, as readers were not always convinced by Spenser’s innovation. Philip Sidney in *The Defense of Poesy* criticised Spenser’s archaic style:

The *Shepherd’s Calender* has much poetry in his eclogues, indeed worthy the reading if I be not deceived. (That same framing of his style to an old rustic language I dare not allow, since neither Theocritus in Greek, Virgil in Latin nor Sannazaro in Italian did affect it.) (Sidney 2002, 242)

- 39 Sidney's disquiet stems from the lack of classical or continental precedent for Spenser's archaisms. Rustic language pulls the work too far from the tradition of the pastoral represented by Theocritus, Virgil and Sannazzaro. A truly innovative decision on Spenser's part, the use of archaic language which often emphasises the regional and vernacular thus indicates a willingness to incorporate popular voices, and the different communities that they represent, into the genre of pastoral and thereby to put the work into conversation with contemporary, and quotidian, forms of orality. This is a provocative move by a poet who often departed from convention.
- 40 Adam Fox argues that at precisely the point when Spenser is writing, language became a way of measuring rank and degree and that formal education prioritised the purging of non-standard vocabulary (Fox 2000, 53; 57). It is this purging that makes Spenser's inclusion of the regional and vernacular so striking, but it is also potentially why E.K. believes that the speech of Spenser's shepherds requires glossing. By emphasising that the homely and rude voices of his shepherds lie outside of an increasingly standardised learned English, Spenser playfully acknowledges how humanist education renders the vernacular strange, and how learned readers may misread the mother tongue of their own nation. While it is appropriate for eclogues to utilise the rude and homely voices of shepherds, it is nonetheless significant that E.K. finds vernacular language to be in need of interpretation as this signals that in an increasingly stratified English linguistic culture, the elite is in danger of no longer being able to read the language of the common people.<sup>12</sup> The effect of this is to claim space and value for popular voices as they are employed to further Spenser's lofty project of becoming England's new poet. The *Calender* seems to be signalling that the loss of dialect and colloquialism would be to the detriment of English literature as Spenser foregrounds the lyrical complexity of the English vernacular. The addition of popular orality to his hodgepodge of cultural registers thereby has a similar effect to Spenser's gestures towards almanac, festival and ballad culture in that it asks the reader to be attentive to the native and familiar ingredients which are mixed alongside his references to classical and continental pastoral. The reader who carefully listens to these voices, rather than clumsily translating their meaning, as E.K. attempts to do, will likely realise that popular voices can be employed to lyric effect and that Spenser's manifesto-like poem thereby produces a new image of English verse which is grounded in both the familiar world of quotidian orality and elite continental and classical pastoral.

## Conclusion

- 41 I have argued that as well as classical and continental models, Spenser draws on almanacs, ballads, festival culture and popular voices when shaping his pastoral world. Together, the references to two forms of popular print, the almanac and the ballad, represent a claim on Spenser's part to an amphibious reading culture whereby his elite readers can move between the hyper-literate world of classical precedent and the popular realm of accessible print publications. References to popular print, alongside the wider cultures of popular song and astrology that they represent, are joined by the poem's interest in appropriating vernacular and regional voices. These voices help shape the poem's archaic register, forge links with the Medieval past and represent an innovative, and perhaps unwelcome, transformation of the genre.
- 42 The dense and allusive nature of Spenser's pastoral is enriched by these popular elements as they help him to forge a distinctly English version of an eclogue book, one which while deeply enmeshed in Virgillian precedent is simultaneously looking to the English present. As such, the poem represents a playful challenge to the reader. They must pay attention and identify the constituent parts within the resulting cultural hodgepodge, and if they do so then they will be rewarded with a dynamic vision of pastoral and the future of English poetics.

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## Notes

1 Syrithé Pugh has written a comprehensive analysis of Spenser's use and modification of Virgil (Pugh 2016). On the influence of the Mantuan poet on Spenser, see Alpers 1997, 175. Alpers also emphasizes Spenser's debt to Virgil and his model of the shepherd-singer (Alpers 1985, 85). Patterson argues that Marot provided Spenser with a model for "state pastoral" which adapted the Virgilian address to power to the concerns of the modern European nation (Patterson 1988, 119). On the importance of ecclesiastical pastoral for sixteenth-century poets and Spenser in particular, see Little 2017, 117. Various arguments have been made for the political allegory of the work. See for example McLane 1968.

2 Cullen is primarily interested in Spenser's juxtaposition of Arcadian and Mantuanesque pastoral modes. Berger calls the *Calender* "self-amused pastoral, a critical and comically squint reenactment of attitudes, topics, and norms characteristic of a traditional literary mode" (Berger 1988, 277).

3 Jeff Espie argues that the *Calender* not only engages directly with Chaucer, but also with later interpretations of his work so that poetic succession is "circuitous" and mediated (Espie 2018, 243).

4 Nicholson draws, in part, on the work of Sean Keilen here, particularly his contention that "in the process of retrieving from Antiquity the terms and concepts that introduced new distinctions to the field of English writing, vernacular writers were obliged to confront the radical alterity of England to the ancient world, and of English to the languages and aesthetic canons that they wanted to assimilate" (Keilen 2006, 78).

5 Notable work on popular culture and the *Calender* includes Robert Lane's argument for Spenser's use of popular forms in order to critique social hierarchy (Lane 1993) and Andrew Hadfield's work on the hybrid nature of the *Calender*, which he calls "both an elite and a popular book" (Hadfield 2012, 125). Nancy Jo Hoffman's contention that the innovation of the *Calender* lies in its departure from conventional pastoral themes and embracing of "common human experience" is useful in this regard (Hoffmann 1977, 7).

6 Margaret Trudeau-Clayton emphasizes how the centrality of Virgil to grammar school education, particularly as a source of imitation and translation, "constituted a form of property and power...which served doubly to reproduce the hierarchy between high and low born, gentleman and commoner" (Trudeau-Clayton 1998, 10).

7 See also Stephens 2010, 369.

8 Stephen Orgel argues that the *Shepheardes Calender* is illustrated "not because pastorals are illustrated – for the most part they aren't – but because calendars are; and the very fact of illustration thus connects the book with the newest continental poetry and with the most traditional of native forms" (Orgel 2000, 68).

9 Patricia Fumerton, as well as highlighting the broad appeal of ballads and their mobility, notes that some broadside ballad tunes originated with courtly dances (Fumerton 2018, 420).

10 There is still considerable debate over the identity of E.K. who may or may not be Spenser's old school friend Edmund Kirk. E.K. could be Spenser himself, although Borris points out that E.K. evidences fundamental differences in poetic principle to Spenser (Borris 2022, 29). Hadfield argues that Spenser, Gabriel Harvey and Kirk may have worked collaboratively (Hadfield 2012, 123).

11 Nicholson sees in E. K.'s glossing of the poem's language an echoing of the Protestant approach to vernacular bible translation, an approach "poised between the values of simplicity and strangeness" (Nicholson 2008, 48).

12 Matthew Harrison highlights how Colin Clout's lamentation that his verse is "rude" in the *June* eclogue links him to Skelton but he also finds in the poem a broader "rhetoric of poetic fault" which is emphasized by E.K. (Harrison 2014, 240).

## Table des illustrations

	<b>Titre</b>	Fig. 1: Simon Heuring, <i>An almanack and pronostication for the yeare of our Lorde. M.D.LJ.</i> London: N. Hill for John Turck, 1551. The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, Broxb. 95.62.
	<b>URL</b>	<a href="http://journals.openedition.org/sillagescritiques/docannexe/image/14227/img-1.jpg">http://journals.openedition.org/sillagescritiques/docannexe/image/14227/img-1.jpg</a>
	<b>Fichier</b>	image/jpeg, 3,4M
	<b>Titre</b>	Fig. 2: Illustration for May, <i>ibid.</i>
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	<b>Fichier</b>	image/png, 873k

## Pour citer cet article

### Référence électronique

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## *Droits d'auteur*



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