



[Calpurnius Siculus, Eclogue IV.5-11](#)

Corydon wants to prove to his patron Meliboeus that himself and his brother Amyntas are able to compose a poem for the ruling emperor

Name of the author: Calpurnius Siculus

Date: 55 CE to 56 CE

Language: Latin

Category: Roman

Literary genre: Poetry

Title of work: Eclogues

Reference:

IV.5-11

Commentary:

The dates of Calpurnius Siculus's own life and of his pastoral work, the *Eclogues*, have been debated a lot, but it is highly probable that this work was composed under Nero's reign (for the bibliography see the editions of Calpurnius's *Eclogues* by Jacqueline Amat, p. vii-viii, xix-xxiv; and by Maria A. Vinchesi, p. 15-20). The fourth *Eclogue* is part of the three political poems of the whole work (with *Eclogue* I and VII), poems which "are concerned with praise of the emperor and with the vocation of poetry" (Hubbard, *The Pipes of Pan*, p. 152). Due to the similarities with the first one, the fourth *Eclogue* may have been written soon after it, that is in 55 or 56 CE ([Calpurnius Siculus, Eclogue I.33-88](#); see Jacqueline Amat's commentary, p. 31).

The poem takes place in the countryside with three characters: Corydon, who can be identified with Calpurnius Siculus's, his young brother Amyntas, and Meliboeus who seems to be the protector and patron of Corydon and who has been identified with Seneca or with Calpurnius Pison, the man to whom Calpurnius Siculus dedicated a praise and who was his main protector (for Meliboeus's identification, see Jacqueline Amat's commentary, p. xxvi, n. 51; Maria A. Vinchesi's commentary, p. 26).

At the beginning, Corydon confesses to Meliboeus that he wants to compose poems, *carmina*, which would be different from the pastoral works that he used to write (v. 5). As Thomas Hubbard rightly says, Corydon wanted "to transcend the pastoral genre": he wanted to compose political praise or poetry, using the pastoral milieu as an original background. In this project, Corydon followed the footsteps of Virgil since, among the themes that he wanted to deal with, there is the *aurea saecula* (v. 6-7), the Golden Age – the main theme of Virgil's fourth *Eclogue* – and the praise of *deus ipse* (v. 7), the emperor himself – which is central in Virgil's first *Eclogue* (Hubbard, *The Pipes of Pan*, p. 166; Karakasis, *Song Exchange*, p. 244-245). Corydon's intentions are also very similar to some elements exposed in the prophecy of Faunus, in Calpurnius's first *Eclogue* ([Calpurnius Siculus, Eclogue I.33-88](#)). Actually, Faunus praises a *iuvenis*, probably Nero, and the fact that his advent opens a new *aurea aetas* (*Eclogue* I.42-45). In two passages of his prophecy, he also mentions that the *iuvenis* is a god (*Eclogue* I.46, 73). Thus, Corydon's intention concerning his poetic project seems to fit in with Faunus's prophecy exposed in Book I.

Concerning the *deus* that he wants to praise, Corydon specifies: *qui populos urbesque regit pacemque togatam*, "who is sovereign over nations and cities and toga-clad peace" or, in a word-for-word translation, "who rules the peoples, the cities, and the toga-clad peace". The expression *pax togata* is very interesting. The fact that it is the emperor-*deus* who is said to rule this "toga-clad peace" obviously recalls the main theme of Faunus's prophecy: the advent of the young prince marks the opening of a new age of peace. The image of the "toga-clad peace" echoes Cicero's adage *cedant arma togae*, "Arms to the gown must yield". In both texts, the toga appears as a symbol of calming, peace and unity between the citizens (see Maria A. Vinchesi's commentary, p. 298). The expression *pax togata* can also be compared to a passage from the first book of the *Aeneid*: *Romanos, rerum dominos, gentemque togatam*; "the Romans, lords of the world, and the nation of the gown" ([Virgil, Aeneid I.282](#)). As in our text, the toga is clearly used as a symbol representing Rome and the Roman hegemony, but the expression used by Calpurnius Siculus, through Corydon's voice, is richer. The *pax Romana* not only refers to the fact that the Roman Empire is wholly pacified and that the concord has been restored in the State, but also means



the restoration of the proper functioning of the civil and legal institutions (such an association between peace and the restoration of the *leges* is obvious in [Virgil, *Aeneid* VI.851](#); see Maria A. Vinchesi's commentary, p. 298).

After that Corydon puts forward his will to deal with more serious subjects, his patron Meliboeus reacts and says that Apollo will not be opposed to his poetic ambition. As Thomas Hubbard recalls, Apollo was the god of the poetic inspiration who, in the prologue of Virgil's sixth *Eclogue*, admonished Tityrus, the character representing Virgil himself, to "avoid grand theme and sing slender song" (Hubbard, *The Pipes of Pan*, p. 166). Corydon's ambitions thus seem to depart from the Virgilian model, as Apollo is now said to accept "Corydon's poetological aspiration toward a loftier poetic style" (Karakasis, *Song Exchange*, p. 246). However, Meliboeus's reference to Apollo has also another significance, since, further in the *Eclogue*, the young emperor Nero is clearly identified with the god (v. 72).

Keywords in the original language:

- [Apollo](#)
- [carmen](#)
- [deus](#)
- [numen](#)
- [pax togata](#)
- [populus](#)
- [Roma](#)
- [saeculum aureum](#)

Thematic keywords in English:

- [Apollo](#)
- [concord](#)
- [Golden Age](#)
- [Nero](#)
- [peace](#)
- [Roman hegemony](#)
- [toga](#)
- [Virgil](#)

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