

## MISCELLANEA

### «IN NONAM HORAM»: A MISUNDERSTOOD PHRASE IN BAPTISTA MANTUANUS' FIRST ECLOGUE

The shepherd Faustus of Mantuan's first eclogue, recalling the onset of his love-sickness, likens it to the heat of day which grows inexorably as the sun rises *in nonam horam*:

Hoc animi tam triste bonum, tam dulce venenum,  
cottidie crudele magis crescebat in horas,  
ut calor, in nonam dum lux attollitur horam<sup>1</sup>.

This time reference has long puzzled Mantuan's readers. After all, as every good shepherd knows, the sun reaches its zenith at midday, and that according to the ancient system of reckoning time is the *sixth* hour, not the ninth. What does Faustus mean?

Two interpretations have been put forth:

a) *Nona hora* means midday. Mantuan's brother Tolomeo explains the phrase as a rustic expression for *meridies*<sup>2</sup>; in this he is followed by Thomas Harvey (1656):

This then so bad a good, so sweet a sowre  
Increases'd more cruell ev'ry day and hour,  
Like *Titans* scorching heat till noon be past<sup>3</sup>.

b) *Nona hora* means midafternoon. Most translators, however, at a loss to explain how the «ninth hour» could refer to the sixth hour, midday, ignore Tolomeo's suggestion and understand the phrase in its ancient sense as indicating midafternoon, or about 3 p.m. But since they are all quite aware that the sun does not keep on rising past the noon hour they translate the line as if the grammatical subject of *attollitur* is not *lux*, but *calor*. It is the sun's heat, they say, which reaches its height at the ninth hour:

LAURENT DE LA GRAVIERE (1558): «Ainsy que fait du Soleil l'ardeur vive, / Quand sur le point de neuf heures arrive»<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> *Ecl.* 1, 119-121, cit. from the ed. by W.P. MUSTARD, *The Eclogues of Baptista Mantuanus*, Baltimore 1911.

<sup>2</sup> *Apologia contra detrahentes operibus Baptistae Mantuani*, Lyon 1516, fol. Dd 2, quoted in W.P. MUSTARD, *The Eclogues...*, note on *ecl.* 1, 148.

<sup>3</sup> *The Bucolicks of Baptist Mantuan*, London 1656, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> *Les Eglogues de F. Baptiste Mantuan*, Lyon 1558, p. 11. M. D'AMBOYSE's transl., *Les Bucoliques de Frere Bap-*



GEORGE TURBERVILLE (1567): «Even as the heate of *Phoebus* flames / augment their scortching blast / And partching powre frō lesse to more, / till nine of clocke be past»<sup>5</sup>.

LUCIA GUALDO ROSA (1964): «come il calore del sole fino all'ora nona»<sup>6</sup>.

FRED J. NICHOLS too (1979), while offering the grammatically correct translation: «like the heat until the sun reaches its height at the ninth hour,» explains that this refers to the time «halfway between noon and dusk, or about the height of the afternoon»<sup>7</sup>.

The fact of the matter, of course, is that the subject of *attollitur* is *lux*, not *calor*, and that the sun rises only till the noon hour, not till midafternoon. Tolomeo, we have to conclude, was right: the heat of day grows more and more intense as the sun rises to its zenith at the noon hour - *nona hora*. In this sense the phrase is indeed a medievalism, or, if you will, a «rusticism».

When and how did this change of meaning take place? By the fourteenth century the prayers which were originally said at the canonical hour of «nones» were shifted from the ninth hour from sunrise to the sixth. The word «nones» (*nona* [sc. *hora*]) now came to mean «midday» both in late medieval Latin and in the vernaculars: English *noon*; Middle High German *nône*, *nôn-zît*; Dutch *noen*; French (still dial.) *nonne*, *nône*, *none*; and Italian *nòna*.

Thus, when Faustus recalls how his passion grew like the heat as the sun rises *in nonam horam*, he means, in his rustic manner of speech, to say: «till the hour of nones», «till the noon hour»<sup>8</sup>.

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*tiste Mantuan*, Paris 1530, was not available to me.

<sup>5</sup> *The Eglogs of the Poet B. Mantuan Carmelitan* (1567), repr., with an Introduction by D. BUSH, New York 1937, fol. 6v.

<sup>6</sup> *Poeti latini del quattrocento*, F. ARNALDI - L. GUALDO ROSA - L. MONTI SABIA ed., vol. XV of *La letteratura italiana. Storia e testi*, Milan [1964], p. 895. A note to this passage declares: «L'ora nona corrispondeva all'incirca alle tre pomeridiane».

<sup>7</sup> *An Anthology of Neo-Latin Poetry*, New Haven 1979, pp. 209 and 671.

<sup>8</sup> MANTUAN, *ecl.* 1, 121, is imitated by two of the German pastoralists, Eobanus Hessus and Euricius Cordus. Cf. EOBANUS, *Bucolicon*, Erfurt 1509, *ecl.* 8, fol. E4r (= *Bucolicorum Idyllia* 12, 30): «...decimam dum sol ascendit in horam»; and CORDUS, *ecl.* 8 (*Delitiae Poetarum Germanorum*, vol. II, 1612, p. 679): «Iamque exorta dies fuit, et sex altior ulnis, / Sol tepidos nonam radios dispersit in horam». In both cases the context shows that the shepherds are reckoning time in hours of equal length, according to the modern system. Eobanus means 10 a.m., Cordus 9 a.m.