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## SACRIFICE, SOCIETY, AND VERGIL'S OX-BORN BEES

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“The relationship between humanity and its system of values is never the same as that between an ant and the organization of its life. The discrepancy can find expression in tragedy, as well as in the hilarity of the trickster god.”

—Walter Burkert<sup>1</sup>

In the fourth book of the *Georgics*, Vergil presents two significantly different accounts of the birth of a new swarm of bees from the corpse of a slaughtered ox. The discrepancy between these accounts has received scant attention from commentators and critics, yet the differences can hardly be considered accidental. In the first account, marking the transition between the cultural history of bees and the story of Aristaeus, Vergil describes the new swarm of bees as born from an ox that has been killed without the shedding of blood, squeezed into a dark and virtually airless shed, and left to putrefy for an unspecified period of time (*Georgics* 4.281-314). This account closely parallels one preserved in the *Geoponica*, especially in its explicit description of the bees as born from the ox's blood (*insincerus apes tulerit cruor*, *G.* 4.285; cf. *Geop.* 15.2).<sup>2</sup> At the end of the fourth book of the *Georgics*, however, Aristaeus receives from his mother Cyrene instructions to perform a different kind of ritual: he is to kill four bulls and four heifers at the sanctuaries of the nymphs, let the blood of the victims flow from their slit throats (*sacrum iugulis demitte cruorem*, 4.542), leave the bodies of the slaughtered cattle in a leafy grove (*frondoso luco*, 543), and then, nine days later, offer sacrifice to Orpheus and to Eurydice. Aristaeus obeys his mother's commands, and the result of his action is the miracle of rebirth with which Vergil closes the narrative of the fourth book.

There can be no doubt about the relevance of these two passages to one another. Together they frame the story of Aristaeus' transgression against Eurydice, Orpheus' hopeless attempt to rescue her from the Underworld, and Aristaeus' search for the proper means of appeasing the powers he has offended. In addition, the consequences of the ritual actions performed by the unnamed Egyptians in the first passage and by Aristaeus in the second passage are expressed in similar language and imagery. In the Egyptian tale the bees are born from liquid that has grown warm (*tepefactus*, 308); as soon as their

wings are formed the bees set to buzzing (*stridentia*, 310); and their appearance from the putrefied cadaver is likened to a summer cloudburst (*ut aestiuis effusus [210]nubibus imber*, 312). In the Aristaeian *bugonia*, the slaughtered oxen's innards have turned liquid (*liquefacta*, 555); from them the bees buzz (*stridere*, 556) and burst forth (*ruptis ... costis*, 556: cf. *erupere* at 313); in their swarming they resemble immense clouds (*immensasque trahi nubes*, 557). Such similarities and cross-references with regard to the actual birth of the new swarm of bees only make more puzzling the differences between the first (and apparently traditional) account of bees born from the blood of oxen that have been smothered and buried, and the second account of bees born from the victims of a conventional Greco-Roman blood sacrifice. W. B. Anderson's explanation, repeated by Wilkinson and others, that the Egyptian system is the up-to-date "perfected" one, while the Aristaeian constitutes the "rude beginnings," is literally true, but fails to explain why Vergil returns to "rude beginnings" or to "rude beginnings" of this sort in the final scene of the *Georgics*.<sup>3</sup> Gary Miles notes the resemblances between the latter portion of Aristaeus' ritual and the Roman Parentalia, and rightly interprets this connection as an attempt on Vergil's part to relate the universal, mythic truths of the Aristaeus episode to the particular concerns of Roman culture; but he overlooks the sacral nature of Aristaeus' entire performance, and does not discuss the symbolic appropriateness of blood-sacrifice as the concluding action of the *Georgics*.<sup>4</sup>

Paradoxically, it is David Ross' recent study of the *Georgics*, which, despite its denigration of the final panel of the Aristaeus episode (Ross calls it an "empty reminder of the beginning, of where it all started"), points the way to a full appreciation of the passage, one attentive both to its resonance in Greco-Roman religious practice, and to its relationship to the literary tradition in which Vergil self-consciously situates his text.<sup>5</sup> In his study, *Virgil's Elements: Physics and Poetry in the Georgics* (the title itself is a reminder of the ambitious nature of Vergil's project), Ross argues that Vergil's account of the society of bees in the first half of the fourth book should be read as a diachronic history of bee-society, rather than as a static or synchronic presentation of the internal workings of the bee-kingdom.<sup>6</sup> Like the humans of Book 1, the bees of Book 4 pass from a distinctly pre-historic state, in the case of the bees figured in their rude habitation and simple social organization, to a "mature society," with the transition between the stages of cultural evolution marked by the excursus on the old man of Tarentum (*G.* 4.116-48) and by the express intervention of Jupiter (*G.* 4.149-50), who is, after all, god of the universe in history as opposed to the Golden Age. In their new status the bees endure the passage of seasons (as opposed to continuous spring) and acquire the arts necessary for the construction and governance of a complex urban society. As we, the readers, follow through Book 4 in its chronological development, we learn of the birth, development, and eventual death of the race of bees. Yet at the same time, as I have already indicated, the story of the bees figures forth the story of humanity—in Ross' words, we may assume "that the bees in some way

stand for men, if not Man..."<sup>7</sup> The relationship of bees to humans is not, as in early medieval allegory, a strict one-to-one correspondence; rather, as in Renaissance allegory, the life and times of the bees serve as an extended metaphor in which the similarities between tenor (humanity) and vehicle (bees) are alternately stressed and ignored.<sup>8</sup> Ross' acknowledgment of both the [211]chronological and metaphorical aspects of the bee-section of Book 4 provides a welcome respite from scholarly debate over the similarities and dissimilarities between bees and humans. Like the other creatures of the *Georgics*, the bees have their own story; but it is a story told in terms familiar from and evocative of the cultural history of humans.

Ross' reading of Book 4 breaks down as he turns to the first of the *bugonia* passages, and collapses entirely when he arrives at the second. Vergil's description of the bloodless slaughter of the young heifer and the birth of a new swarm from her decomposed corpse is, he tells us, citing Thomas, "a colorful ethnographical notice" ... 'an Eastern *thaumasion*, pure and simple' whose main function is 'to provide a transition to the epyllion on Orpheus.'<sup>9</sup> That the first version of the *bugonia* is a "colorful ethnographical notice" tells us why it looks the way it does, and helps us to understand Vergil's suspension of disbelief with regard to its efficacy, but it does not tell us why this story is told at this point of the narrative. Nor is the appeal to "transition" ever likely to be satisfactory, least in the case of Vergil, who, if nothing else, could have created another transition with some more obvious relationship to its surroundings had he so intended. Ross' remarks on the "final panel" of the poem are even less satisfactory than his treatment of the first account of *bugonia*, for, according to Ross, the lengthy presentation of Cyrene's instructions and Aristaeus' fulfillment of them constitute "simply an empty reminder of the beginning, of where it all started."<sup>10</sup> Vergil is thus reduced to concluding the entirety of the *Georgics* with an "empty reminder" of a "colorful ethnographical notice" whose primary purpose is "transition."

A more fruitful way to approach the first *bugonia*, as well as the Aristaeus story and second *bugonia* which follow from it, is to pursue Ross' original line of interpretation. While the mention of a magical rite for creating a new swarm of bees leads naturally enough to the story of such a rite's discovery, it also continues the historical account of the development of bee-society. Once a bee-society has come into existence, passed from a primitive to a mature state, and then died out, it remains to ask how the process can be begun again. And so Vergil gives us an elaborate account of the birth of bees from a dead ox, an etymology, as it were, for the familiar description of bees as "ox-born." The story is placed in exotic Egypt; but it is presented as relevant to and useful for anyone in Vergil's implied audience who wants to restore a swarm of bees (see *quem* at 281, *nobis* at 315). This is a repeatable action which, according to Vergil's fiction, can allow anyone to commence again the history of the bees.

If the phenomenon of the *bugonia* follows naturally on the chronological, or syntagmatic, extension of the poem (birth, evolution, death, followed by rebirth), it falls short as a continuation of the paradigmatic or metaphorical

relationship between bees and humans. The first *bugonia*, it can be said, has as little to do with the restoration of human society as exotic Egypt has to do with Rome. Human society, like bee society, may grow, evolve, and eventually die, but stuffing an ox in an airless room is not going to restore us to life. But another sort of ox-killing is closely connected with the questions of the origins and stability of human society, at least in ancient thought, and that form of ox-killing is ritual sacrifice. And indeed, it is through an account of conventional [212]animal sacrifice, the central and defining ritual of Roman, as of Greek religion, that Vergil completes the history of the bees, and celebrates the potential for renewal of human society as well.

That Aristaeus' ritual actions at the end of Book 4 constitute animal sacrifice, adapted to the needs of the *bugonia* story, is easy enough to demonstrate.<sup>11</sup> There is the location of the slaughter on altars (*aras*) in the sanctuaries of the deities (*delubra dearum*), the free flow of blood (*sacrum iugulis demitte cruorem*, 542), as opposed to its stoppage in the first instance of ox-slaughtering, and the separate slaughter of the black sheep and the heifer in honor of Orpheus and Eurydice as part of the same sacral complex. The language of the passage evokes traditional ritual, both in its vocabulary (*uenerare, ueniam, uotis, orandi, aras, delubra, sacrum, inferias, mactabis, placatam, uenerabere*) and in its verbatim repetition of Cyrene's precepts in the description of Aristaeus' actions: lines 550-52 repeat, with the exception of three words, lines 538, 540, and 544. Note too the resemblance between victim and deity in the offering of a black sheep to the dead Orpheus, a female calf (*vitula*) to Eurydice, and, to the virgin nymphs, heifers that never knew the yoke (*intacta cervice*, 540, a phrase ignored or misinterpreted by all the commentators).<sup>12</sup> Finally, the sacrificial nature of Aristaeus' action is apparent even in what is omitted in the second narrative in contrast to the earlier rite: in the Egyptian rite, Vergil expressly describes the ox as struggling greatly against its captors (*multa reluctanti*, 4.301), a detail which, if repeated in the Greco-Roman context of the Aristaeus episode, would have required the abandonment of the procedure altogether and its resumption with a willing victim.<sup>13</sup>

The one detail that differentiates Aristaeus' slaughter of the oxen from conventional religious practice is the crucial one of the disposal of corpses in a leafy grove and the spontaneous generation of bees therefrom. (Ordinarily the victim's flesh would be cooked and divided among the *participes*.)<sup>14</sup> Yet even this feature fits the religious context of the passage, if we keep in mind the metaphorical relationship of bees to humans operative throughout the poem, for in sacrifice it is the flesh of the sacrificial victim (as opposed to its blood) which, in its distribution among the participants in the rite, defines the limits of the social group (those who eat, belong) and renews the bonds of kinship and common-feeling among the participants.<sup>15</sup> Vergil has made every detail of the Aristaeian ritual correspond to Roman religious ritual except the one that is essential to keep the component of bee-birth; and even this one is altered from the specific reference to blood (*Geoponica* 15.2, and Vergil, *G.* 4.285, cf. *umor* at 4.308) to the vaguer claim that the newborn bees "buzz throughout the

liquefied flesh" (*liquefacta bouum per viscera toto / stridere apes utero*, 4.555-56). Restoring the balance between Vergil's culture-hero Aristaeus and the powers he has offended is the timeless ritual of animal sacrifice, the very heart of the Greco-Roman system of worship.

To the modern student of sacrifice, the relevance of an *action* of sacrifice at this point in the *Georgics* will be obvious. Sacrifice is a means of establishing the relationship between human and divine, of defining the order of society and the universe, and of restoring that order when it has been disrupted.<sup>16</sup> By killing a domestic animal as part of an offering to or shared meal with a deity, human [213]beings differentiate themselves from the types of creatures closest to ourselves—beasts and gods.<sup>17</sup> It was with the first, Promethean, sacrifice to Zeus that human relations to the gods were defined for all time, and it is in acceptance—or rejection—of the conventions of Promethean sacrifice that an individual expresses his acceptance or rejection of the politico-religious system that informs the Greek community.<sup>18</sup> In Roman religion, as in Greek and other religions organized around the institution of sacrifice, sacrifice not only defines membership within a group (those who eat of the same sacrifice are bound to one another physically and psychologically) but establishes hierarchy as well, with the most important (Roman *princeps*) receiving the first and sometimes largest portion of the flesh.<sup>19</sup> Sacrifice, which involves the slaughter of beasts with whom humans share work and habitation, all for the pleasure and nourishment of humans, is an inherently more problematical, guilt-laden, and at the same time more familiar, phenomenon, than the Egyptian wonder of rebirth from a cudgeled bull. The Egyptian rite is presented as distant, rare, in need of detailed description; while the Greco-Roman sacrifice of Aristaeus is extravagant in its bloodiness (four bulls, four heifers, a black sheep and a calf) and yet familiar enough not to require a detailed description. In a purely technical sense, then, the blood-sacrifice performed by Aristaeus completes the metaphorical account of the birth, evolution, death, and rebirth of human society that was implicit in the story of the bees. The bees will be reborn through an impossible, exotic, and unbelievable technological marvel; but civilized human society must forever restore itself by re-establishing the right relations between humans, gods, and beasts in the act of sacrifice and all that it stands for.

But of course, in concluding the fourth book of the *Georgics*, Vergil has much more in mind than ending the story of the human-like bees with which he began. In explaining the switch from pulverization to sacrifice in terms of the ultimate impossibility of the metaphor "bees = humans," we may have described the economy of Vergil's poem, but we have hardly explored its significance. To do that, it is necessary to move backward into Vergil's own text, as well as into the texts of the Greco-Roman literary tradition that inform and sustain it, and outward, into the larger issues raised by the real and symbolic function of sacrifice in Greco-Roman society. As we do so, a reading of *Georgics* 4 rather different from the pessimistic one increasingly popular among contemporary scholars will emerge. Such a reading cannot be worked

out in detail in the brief compass of this essay; and to be honest, I do not feel sufficiently well-acquainted with all aspects of the *Georgics* to promote it here. But it seems important to take Vergil's allusion to sacral procedure and his employment of cultural symbolism seriously, and to try to let these features of the poem speak for themselves, rather than discarding them or forcing them to fit contemporary critical fashion.

In order to discover the significance of Vergil's climactic presentation of animal sacrifice, let us consider first another, related passage from the *Georgics* which deals with the issue of ox-slaughtering. At the end of *Georgics* 2 Vergil presents a vision of the golden world of rustic Italy, one that blurs the boundaries between archaic Rome, the contemporary countryside, and the [214]mythical Golden Age.<sup>20</sup> In the countryside, Vergil tells us, the labor of the year sustains the fatherland and posterity, the herds of cattle and the deserving oxen (*hinc anni labor, hinc patriam parvosque nepotes / sustinet, hinc armenta boum meritosque iuencos*, 2.514-15). This is the life that Rome's ancestors enjoyed, before the reign of Jupiter, and before an impious race feasted on slaughtered cattle: *ante etiam sceptrum Dictaei regis et ante / impia quam caesis gens est epulata iuencis* (*G.* 2.536-37).

The distinction between a Saturnian age and the age of Jupiter situates Vergil's discussion in the larger discourse concerning the Golden Age in ancient literary texts.<sup>21</sup> Some sixty lines earlier he has referred to the departure of Justice from the earth in the perfect tense (2.474); yet in the intervening lines he has suggested that the farmer, described in the gnomic present, lives a life of oneness with nature characteristic of other Golden Age accounts. Thus, Vergil has recapitulated, in the compass of sixty or seventy lines, the three categories of "Golden Age" to be found in ancient literature: chronological, in the sense of an age that precedes other ages; geographical, as exemplified by descriptions of Isles of the Blest or other places removed from the turmoil of "real life"; and cultural or racial, in the description of people who live by rules entirely different from those employed in the author's historical present. In chronological terms, Vergil's Golden Age pre-dates the departure of *Iustitia*, the rule of Jupiter, and the commencement of ox-slaughter. Geographically, his golden world is that of an idealized rural Italy. And culturally, his Golden-Age denizens avoid politics and abstain from ox-flesh.

By invoking all three versions of the Golden Age or golden world, Vergil has avoided the specifically political and moral implications of the Golden Age account of his Roman predecessor Catullus and reclaimed the wide-ranging symbolic force of Golden Age imagery to be found in Greek literature. At the end of poem 64 Catullus describes a world in which Jupiter visits the earth to partake in feasts of slaughtered oxen, only to leave in disgust at the criminality of humans. Catullus thus describes a glorified version of *polis*-society, one with the rites and procedures characteristic of contemporary Rome. The departure of the gods is not a mark of a cosmic or social re-ordering, but a response to the evil actions of people just like those who live in the present. Vergil's Golden Age at the end of *Georgics* 2 is both prior, like Catullus', and

other. In particular, the detail of the working relationship with the bull in the golden world, contrasted with the impious consumption of slaughtered oxen in the world of Jupiter, aligns Vergil with a long line of Greek writers who use the myth of a Golden Age or golden world as a way of imagining a society and a universe organized in a drastically different way from that of the conventional city-state. In these accounts, commencing with Hesiod's *Theogony*, the sacrifice of animals, especially oxen, becomes a defining characteristic, a *sine qua non*, of the world as we know it.<sup>22</sup> To perform sacrifice (in its dual components of ritual slaughter *and* feasting) is to mark off the world of humans from the world of gods and the world of beasts; and to reject sacrifice, as the Pythagoreans and Orphics do, is to undermine the foundations of civilized society and seek a recreation of human interrelations on entirely different terms.

[215]Vergil's invocation of ox-slaughter as a sign of the transition/difference between the Golden Age/world and the present status of human society is itself justification for our interpretation of the end of *Georgics* 4 as an *aetion* of sacrifice that completes the account of the evolution and reconstitution of human society implied in the earlier portions of that book. But it also makes it difficult to determine the significance of the concluding panel of *Georgics* 4. That is, at the end of *Georgics* 2, Vergil would seem to be on the side of the Golden Age. His rapturous rhetoric employs images of flight and escape from the here and now, of the supreme felicity of life among the rustic gods and goddesses (*Georgics* 2.475ff.). The race that saw fit to feast on slaughtered oxen is described as impious—a provocative oxymoron in a context describing a sacral procedure.<sup>23</sup> Yet at the commencement of Book 3, slaughtered oxen appear again, this time as part of the ceremonies Vergil envisions being held for the victorious Caesar (*iam nunc sollemnis ducere pompas / ad delubra iuvat caesosque videre iuuenos*, *G.* 3.22-23). Two interpretations of ox-slaughter—as impious crime and as unifying ceremony—are delicately balanced at the very center of the *Georgics*. Does Vergil maintain the balance in *Georgics* 4, or does he tilt it in the direction of sacrifice as a unifying and re-creative social phenomenon? To answer this question we must return yet again to the literary traditions that inform Vergil's accounts of ox-slaughter in *Georgics* 2 and 4. The use of ox-slaughter as a symbol of the transition from Golden Age to world of Jupiter, and as a sign of the rebirth of bee and, metaphorically, human society puts us in mind of another Greek foundation myth, that of Prometheus as the creator of ritual sacrifice. In the myth of the ages of *Works and Days* Hesiod provides the prototype for later accounts of the Golden Age or world. The story of Prometheus as told in the *Theogony* expresses in mythic terms what is in fact accomplished in the act of sacrifice: the solidarity of the human social group in the face of beasts and gods. Prometheus' slaughter of the ox, his presentation to Zeus of the inedible portions, and his preservation for humanity of the nourishing flesh constitute an *aetion* for the conventional sacrificial procedure and at the same time mark the commencement of a new status for humans, separated from both beasts and gods.<sup>24</sup>



The myth of Prometheus contains another element that is relevant to an understanding of Aristaeus' role in the fourth book of the *Georgics*. In creating sacrifice, and thereby enforcing a division between humans and gods, Prometheus has in effect lowered the position of humanity vis-à-vis the divine. As recompense for this loss, he supplies humans with fire, a substance symbolic of the creative, technical skill of humans that propels their self-development.<sup>25</sup> Prometheus' transgression thus marks the end of the Golden Age (broadly conceived) not just in that it puts an end to the easy intercourse of gods and humans, but in that it creates the skills constitutive of human culture. This connection between the discovery of sacrifice, the creation of the *technai* of human culture, and the development of the new (and current) order of the universe is restated in another archaic Greek text, the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*. There, as Walter Burkert has suggested, Hermes' sacrifice of Apollo's cattle, with the compensatory creation of the art of music, constitutes the "nocturnal theft," the instance of destabilizing *akosmia* that is the *sine qua non* [216] for the creation of *kosmos* "in its double sense" of universe and order.<sup>26</sup> Like Prometheus, Hermes is a trickster god, whose ambivalent relationship with his divine counterparts redounds to the benefit and detriment of humankind.

Literary historians are in the habit of minimizing the direct connection between rugged Hesiod and the Ascræan song of the learned, artful Vergil. But it should not surprise us if Vergil was more closely drawn to Hesiod's ambitious recounting of the origins of divine and human order than the contemporary Latinist is. Aristaeus is a post-Callimachean Prometheus. Child of a god and a nymph, he is nonetheless responsible for all the human arts—agriculture, husbandry, and apiculture—that Vergil has celebrated throughout the *Georgics* (see *G.* 4.326-32). His transgression, in the form of an assault on Eurydice, is of a different order from that of Prometheus, and his behavior more petulant, yet the chain of destruction set in motion by his crime threatens to engulf the entire universe of Vergil's poem. Aristaeus' bees have been destroyed, and unless they are replaced, he will forego all honor of mortal life, all that he has gained through tending of crops, flocks, and forests. And his mission, to learn the proper form of recompense, combines symbolic death (his journey to the underworld of his mother's watery home) with a cosmic confrontation with the forces of undifferentiation, figured in the ever-changing Proteus. At risk in Aristaeus' violation of Eurydice is the entire society celebrated by Vergil throughout the poem and concentrated in the imagery of the bees, just as at stake in the conflict between Prometheus and Zeus was the status of humanity. And just as the first sacrifice settled forever the place of humans in the universe, so the sacrifice performed by Aristaeus restores the order of his world, and leads to the re-creation of the swarm of bees, suggestive as they are of reborn human society.

At the end of *Georgics* 2, in the context of a diatribe against the ugliness and brutality of corrupt urban life, sacrifice, as the mark of transition from the Golden Age to the world of history, is bound to be treated with ambivalence or even contempt. But in the fourth book of the *Georgics*, Vergil has stripped

away the trappings of political life and, through the story of the bees, concentrated our attention on the essential features of societies—the interrelatedness of individuals, the interdependency of generations, the fragility of community life. In this context, social interaction and human culture come to be seen in a positive light, and, with them, the institution of sacrifice that makes their existence possible.

For a less ambitious poet, the restoration of order in a universe riven by lust and greed would have been quite enough by way of conclusion to a poem celebrating the separation and intermingling of the cosmic elements. But here again Vergil reveals both his rigorous honesty and his incorrigible polyphony. Embraced by the story of Aristaeus, the modern trickster, the would-be hero of a society founded on the clear distinction between human and divine and on the inner order created by the rite of sacrifice, is another story, that of Orpheus. This, too, cannot be understood by the impressionistic methods of contemporary criticism, but requires clarification in terms of the well-established symbolic function of Orpheus and Orphic belief in the Greco-Roman religious system. If Hesiod's cosmogony, and Prometheus' re-shaping of it, [217]constitute the foundation myth of conventional society, Orpheus and his teachings form a rallying point for many of those who would undermine that society and build a new one in its place. Guthrie, arguing against earlier scholars, such as Cumont and Nock, has suggested that during the Hellenistic and Roman period, the "conspiracy of silence" concerning Orphism "is broken ... [I]n writers of the Graeco-Roman age we find explicit references to Orphic rites and initiations as well as writings."<sup>27</sup> While the prevalence of Orphism in Vergil's day cannot be known, it is clear that Orphic rites and texts were recognized and discussed by Vergil's near contemporaries. Cicero alludes to the Orphic *sacra*; and a comment of Servius points to Nigidius Figulus' interest in Orphic texts.<sup>28</sup> Vergil himself made use of the Orphic accounts of *catabasis*, or descent to the underworld, in his narrative of Aeneas' descent,<sup>29</sup> although it is important to note that in *Aeneid* 6 he follows the Orphic description of the underworld up to the point at which it clashes with the conventional Roman view of glory after death.<sup>30</sup> In any event, educated Romans, including Vergil, knew Orpheus not only as a figure of Greek mythology, but as the focus of a distinct religious system.

Just how distinct Orphism was from the conventional politico-religious system of ancient society has recently been elaborated by Detienne.<sup>31</sup> As he has shown, Orphic beliefs and myths constitute an inversion of conventional Hesiodic ideology on any of a number of grounds. Hesiodic cosmology, with its progression from Chaos to differentiated order, is replaced by the gradual disintegration of the perfect Orphic egg. Hesiodic theology, with its emphasis on sacrifice as a ritual of division between human and divine, is subverted by an Orphic abstention from the shedding of blood, in particular an abstention from sacrifice. And Hesiodic history, in which the Golden Age gives way to the real, albeit corrupt world of human culture, is replaced by communion between human and god. Guthrie, less interested than Detienne in the structural

opposition Hesiod/Orpheus, expresses the conflict between Orphism and conventional religion succinctly: in his survey of Orphism in the world of Hellenistic Greece and classical Rome, he writes that “we have seen Orphism to be a system of belief whose message was universal, because it was addressed to every individual as an individual, and we have noticed that this non-social character formed a contrast with the reigning spirit of Hellenic religion, which had its roots in the reigning political conception, that of the city-state.”<sup>32</sup>

Given his function in the larger discourse of Greco-Roman culture, Orpheus is the perfect foil to the “civilized” world of Aristaeus and his bees.<sup>33</sup> Just as Vergil’s account of the Golden Age in Book 2 avoids the narrowly political interpretation of the departure of justice, so here Vergil’s Orpheus does not become the focal point for political rebellion. In the fourth book of the *Georgics*, the opposition between Aristaeus and Orpheus is figured in terms that are simultaneously cosmic and social, as a struggle between utilitarian technology and pure art, between sexual desire in Aristaeus’ assault on Eurydice and the abstinence from heterosexual intercourse that precedes Orpheus’ death, between an acceptance of death in Aristaeus’ performance of sacrifice and a hopeless attempt to deny death’s finality in Orpheus’ harrowing of hell. Regardless of the differences that may be present between Vergil’s Orpheus [218] and the familiar Orpheus of Greek religion, Orpheus’ symbolic status as representative of a world-view opposed to that of the Promethean culture-hero remains the same. It is unfortunate that modern scholars persist in regarding the opposition between Aristaeus and Orpheus in simplistic, moralizing terms, thereby missing the richer and more deeply rooted opposition between a world in which humans, gods, and beasts keep to their assigned roles and humanity progresses against heartbreaking odds, and one in which art links all three orders, yet in its self-absorption produces only frigidity and death. Just as Vergil presents two accounts of *bugonia*, so too he presents, in the figures of Aristaeus and Orpheus, two compelling yet mutually opposed worldviews.<sup>34</sup> And again we may ask, to what end?

In a recent study of the fourth book of the *Georgics*, Jasper Griffin has criticized those scholars who regard the finale of the poem as a “happy ending” and declared “For my part I cannot feel that the restoration of the bees outweighs the suffering and the death of Orpheus and Eurydice.”<sup>35</sup> Clearly his view is shared by Ross, who prefers to neglect the final panel altogether and writes that “the end [of Book 4] is Orpheus’ death.”<sup>36</sup> No doubt Orpheus is a more appealing character than a swarm of bees, but that is not the issue Vergil asks us to evaluate in the final book of the *Georgics*. To write as if it were is to miss the real source of tension in *Georgics* 4, the symbolic opposition that Vergil creates by invoking the struggle between Hesiodic and Orphic worldviews. It is not the restoration of the bees in and of itself that constitutes the end of the *Georgics*, but the victory of Aristaeus as against the failure of Orpheus. Aristaeus may not be a likable figure to the modern reader, but he represents the entire universe that Vergil has labored to create throughout the *Georgics* and that the institution of sacrifice originates and sustains in the world

beyond the poem. To celebrate Orpheus alone, or even at the expense of Aristaeus, would be to deny the world of human history, of ordered relations between gods, humans, and beasts, and to subvert the world of Jupiter and seek to return to an impossible Golden Age. Ross writes of the various "lies" that Vergil perpetrates throughout the *Georgics*, the violations of nature and history that he embellishes with his poetic art; but in the final portion of the poem, Vergil concentrates such lies—of life beyond death, of virtue unadulterated, of the power of art—in the figure of Orpheus, and lets the maenads tear him to pieces.

And yet for all that Aristaeus is clearly triumphant and Vergil might seem to take the side of Hesiod, the story of Orpheus is not presented merely to be dismissed. As Michael Putnam has seen, Aristaeus is made to hear the story of Orpheus precisely because of the lessons it can offer him. Of Aristaeus he writes: "...the Orphic element remains crucial in his makeup. By it we understand his distinction from a hero such as Prometheus for it furnishes the magic that can lure life from death and raise technology to the level of art."<sup>37</sup> Even the bees incorporate the power of Orpheus: whereas those produced by the first *bugonia* buzz about noisily and form a threatening storm cloud or a hail of Parthian arrows, those produced by Aristaeus' sacrifice, despite their noisiness and resemblance to clouds, make their final appearance as a cluster of grapes suspended from the branches of a tree (*iamque arbore summa / confluere et lentis [219]uuam demittere ramis*, 4.557-58). As Putnam puts it, "it is as if the bees, too, had undergone the ritual learning of Aristaeus and served to epitomize in their innate response the saga of their begetting." They "exemplify the beauty of energy controlled through artistic endeavor."<sup>38</sup> Putnam has intuited the close connection between Aristaeus and Prometheus that I have developed here in more detail in light of both heroes' role in the creation of ritual sacrifice, and he has eloquently articulated Vergil's vision of a world in which Aristaeus makes recompense for his transgression against Orpheus.

Ultimately, Aristaeus' sacrifice recapitulates the very ambiguities it seeks to erase. Coming at the conclusion of the fall of Orpheus it can be read as a sign of the triumph of Aristaeus and the conventional socio-religious system he represents. And yet at the same time, for all of its apparent close connection to traditional Greco-Roman sacrificial procedure, Aristaeus' sacrifice is an incomplete, one might even say, perverted one, for it incorporates the element of slaughter without the supplementary actions of distribution and consumption of flesh. As a conclusion to the grand metaphor of Book 4 (bees figure forth humans) the sacrifice works as a sacrifice should: ritual slaughter confirms social regeneration and continued solidarity. But neither of the intersecting stories of Aristaeus and of the bees is complete on its own. Aristaeus' sacrifice does not restore human society, except when supplemented by the metaphor "bees = humans"; and the bees of Book 4 are incapable of regenerating themselves, but rely on the intervention of the culture-hero Aristaeus. Thus, in the final moments of the narrative, Aristaeus and Orpheus, or technology and

art, or history and the Golden Age, although initially positioned as opponents and causes of each other's doom, become interlocked in Vergil's vision of newborn bees, clustered like grapes, rising from the carcasses of oxen slaughtered in Aristaeus' ritual of recompense and renewal.

The quotation from Walter Burkert that opens this paper, although it was written without any reference to the *Georgics*, compresses into two sentences the argument I have tried to develop here. An ant (like a bee) has no self-consciousness about its society, however complex and similar to a human community that society may be. Its community may owe its life to another creature's death, but that is not a source of reflection or commemoration. For humans, our relationship to other creatures, be they gods or beasts, and our relationships to one another, are immensely problematical. They must be celebrated and re-created, and in the context of Greco-Roman religion the locus of such celebration and re-creation is the rite of animal sacrifice. Thus it is only appropriate that Vergil makes the transition from the world of bees to the world of humans—indeed, that he raises the entire issue of the status of humans as a distinct entity in the Jovian world—through an *aetion* of sacrifice. In so doing, he exploits the symbolic potential of ox-killing both as a real action in Greco-Roman religion, and as a literary topos. Yet at the moment Vergil commemorates our creation, our passage from the Golden Age to the world as we are doomed and gifted to know it, he reminds us that, as Burkert sees, our self-consciousness can be a source of tragedy or of joy. Of the tragedy implicit in the *Georgics*, modern scholarship, with its decidedly romantic and anti-worldly bent, has written at length. Without doubt, the failure of Orpheus is a [220]deeply tragic event: the singer is not merely a marker in a symbolic struggle between Hesiodic order and Protean chaos. But that tragedy must not blind us to the success of the trickster Aristaeus with which the poem concludes. Nor, for that matter, should it blind us to the ambition of the trickster-artist Vergil, creator of the world of Aristaeus and the world of Orpheus alike. Like Hermes, who in stealing Apollo's cattle creates a temporary disorder leading to the more glorious order in which sacrifice and music become inseparable, so Vergil claims for himself the gifts of Orpheus and uses them to hymn the Hesiodic cosmos.<sup>39</sup>



## NOTES

1. W. Burkert, "Sacrificio-sacrilegio: il trickster fondatore," *Studi storici* (Rivista trimestrale dell' Istituto Gramsci) 25 (1984) 835-45 (quotation from p. 845).

2. *Geoponica* 15.2: "They take care not to let the ox bleed, for otherwise the bees would not be generated from the blood" (ἐξ αἵματος). The Florentinus whose work was used by the compiler of the *Geoponica* has been dated to the early third century A.D.,

but he specifically attributes his account of the procedure for restoring a swarm of bees to a Democritus and to "Varro, in the Roman tongue" (ἐν Ῥωμαίων γλώσσῃ). Neither of the surviving Varronian accounts (*R.R.* 2.5.5, 3.16.4) is as specific as Florentinus, but the first makes it clear that the bees are born from the putrefied corpse (*ex hoc putrefacto*). Ovid *Met.* 15.365-68 implies that regeneration depends on burying the cadaver, obviously a procedure more like that of Vergil's Egyptians than like that adopted by Aristaeus.

3. W. B. Anderson, "Gallus and the Fourth *Georgic*," *CQ* 27 (1933) 36-45; L. P. Wilkinson, *The Georgics of Virgil* (Cambridge 1969).

4. G. B. Miles, *Virgil's Georgics: A New Interpretation* (Berkeley 1980) 284ff. Another possibility—that the Aristaeian *bugonia* is part of the second edition of the *Georgics*—still requires us to ask why Vergil retained both accounts in the version transmitted to future generations. The following works which I have consulted in the preparation of this paper are silent on the ritual differences between the first and second instances of ox-slaughter: E. Norden, "Orpheus und Eurydice," *Sitz. Akad. Berlin* (1934); W. Richter, *Virgil: Georgica* (Munich 1957); E. Paratore, *Virgilio* (Florence 1954); F. Klingner, *Virgils Georgica* (Zürich and Stuttgart 1963); C. Segal, "Orpheus and the Fourth *Georgic*: Vergil on Nature and Civilization," *AJP* 87 (1966) 307-25; R. D. Williams, ed., *Virgil: The Eclogues and Georgics* (London 1979); M. C. J. Putnam, *Virgil's Poem of the Earth: Studies in the Georgics* (Princeton 1979); P. A. Johnston, *Virgil's Agricultural Golden Age: A Study of the Georgics (Mnemosyne Suppl. 60)*, Leiden 1980; J. Griffin, *Latin Poets and Roman Life* (London 1985); D. O. Ross, Jr., *Virgil's Elements: Physics and Poetry in the Georgics* (Princeton 1987). Since my purpose in this paper is to discuss the end of *Georgics* 4 in terms of the symbolism of Greco-Roman sacrifice—something unattempted by other scholars—I will refrain from noting every instance in which my interpretation coincides with or diverges from that of other Latinists. Needless to say I have benefited from the work of all the scholars listed in this note, especially that of David Ross, whose incomplete interpretation of the fourth book I discuss in more detail below.

[221]5. Ross (supra n. 4), quotation from p. 233.

6. Ross (supra n. 4) 188ff.

7. Ross (supra n. 4) 189.

8. On Renaissance allegory, see T. P. Roche, Jr., *The Kindly Flame* (Princeton 1964). For a rather medieval reading of the Aristaeus epyllion as "an allegory for Augustus, Antony and Cleopatra, and Actium," see Y. Nadeau, "The Lover and the Statesman: A study in apiculture," in T. Woodman and D. West, eds., *Poetry and Politics in the Age of Augustus* (Cambridge 1984) 59-82. Nadeau is surely right to relate the finale of the poem to the re-creation of Roman society following Actium, and to sense that Orpheus is a rejected alternative to Aristaeus. But none of this renders the poem allegorical; and, indeed, in its restriction of Vergil's suggestiveness to the purely political realm, such an argument needlessly lessens the allusive power of Vergil's poetry.

9. Ross (supra n. 4) 215, quoting R. F. Thomas, *Lands and Peoples in Roman Poetry: The Ethnographical Tradition* (Cambridge Philological Society, *Suppl.* 7, Cambridge 1982).

10. Ross (supra n. 4) 233.

11. For details of classical Roman sacrificial procedure (which is virtually identical to Greek sacrificial procedure in its essential components), see G. Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Römer* (Munich 1912) 409-32 and K. Latte, *Römische Religionsgeschichte* (Munich 1970) 379-93. For an interpretation of Roman sacrifice in light of substantial recent work on Greek sacrifice and anthropological theories, see J. Scheid, "La

spartizione a Roma,” *Studi storici* 4 (1984) 945-56. The seminal modern work on Greek sacrifice is K. Meuli, “Griechische Opferbräuche” in *Phyllobolia: Festschrift für Peter von der Mühl* (Basel 1946) 185-288. See also W. Burkert, *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, tr. Peter Bing (Berkeley 1983), a work which, despite the limiting adjectives in its title, is of great help in understanding sacrifice in other cultures as well; and *Le sacrifice dans l'antiquité* (Fondation Hardt, *Entretiens* 27, Geneva 1981). On the relevance of various contemporary theories concerning sacrifice to the study of classical literature, see the chapter entitled “Drama and Sacrifice” in H. P. Foley, *Ritual Irony: Poetry and Sacrifice in Euripides* (Ithaca 1985) 17-64. In writing of the significance of sacrifice for an understanding of one of the central texts of Latin literature, I am reminded of the words of John Scheid (supra) 946: “Non è dunque senza un certo numero di scrupoli che parlerò della divisione e della spartizione delle carni sacrificali, in primo luogo perché il fatto stesso di porre questo problema, se parrà banale agli ellenisti o ai rappresentanti di altre civiltà, sembrerà incongruo a molti colleghi della mia disciplina.”

12. Roman religion is not overly scrupulous about resemblances between victim and recipient, but does in general prefer distinctive sorts of victims for underworld powers, goddesses (as opposed to gods), and so on. See Latte (supra n. 11) 380-81. Thus, female cattle that have never known the yoke (*intacta cervice*) would seem to be an appropriate offering to the virgin nymphs. Servius, in calling attention to sacrificial procedure in connection with the second instance of ox-slaughtering, is surely on the right track. But his comment on *G.* 4.540, to the effect that Vergil is describing a sacrifice with *animalis hostia* (i.e., one in which the god receives only the *anima*) cannot possibly explain the phrase *intacta cervice*.

13. Latte (supra n. 11) 386. Cf. Pliny *N.H.* 8.183. The detail of the recalcitrant bull is absent in other accounts of *bugonia*.

14. Latte (supra n. 11) 389. Cf. Scheid (supra n. 11).

15. Scheid (supra n. 11); cf. Burkert (supra n. 11).

16. Burkert (supra n. 11); J. Rudhardt, *Notions fondamentales de la pensée religieuse et actes constitutifs du culte dans la Grèce antique* (Geneva 1958).

[222]17. M. Detienne, *Dionysos slain*, tr. M. and L. Muellner (Baltimore 1979), ch. 3; J.-P. Vernant, *Religion grecque, religions antiques* (Paris 1976).

18. On “Promethean sacrifice” see Meuli (supra n. 11). On the story of Prometheus as a “foundation myth,” see J.-P. Vernant, “A la table des hommes, Mythe de fondation des sacrifices chez Hésiode” in Vernant and M. Detienne, eds., *La cuisine du sacrifice en pays grec* (Paris 1979) 37-132. On opposition to the Promethean-Hesiodic system, see M. Detienne (supra n. 17), as well as the discussion of Orpheus and Aristaeus below in this paper.

19. Scheid (supra n. 11); also “Sacrifice et banquet à Rome: Quelques problèmes,” *MEFRA* 97 (1985) 193-206.

20. Cf. Johnston (supra n. 4) 47-52, 69-70.

21. For an encyclopedic survey of ancient discussions of the Golden Age and related myths, see B. Gatz, *Weltalter, goldene Zeit und sinnverwandte Vorstellungen*, (*Spudasmata* 16, Hildesheim 1967).

22. At Plato *Laws* 782c1ff., Diog. Laertius 8.20, and Empedocles B128 DK (cf. 136 and 137), the slaughter of oxen implies sacrifice and vice versa. Ovid *Met.* 15.127-29 develops the theology of sacrifice as end of the Golden Age in full detail. Cicero *N.D.* 2.159, Aratus *Phaen.* 96ff., Varro *R.R.* 2.5.4, Val. Max. 8.1 *damnat.* 8, Pliny *N.H.* 8.180 make no mention of sacrifice, but regard the consumption of slaughtered oxen as a significant marker in the ages of the world.

23. Vergil emphasizes the fact of feasting on the slain cattle, yet expresses this in such a way as to indicate awareness that eating is made possible by sacrifice. The term *epulata* at *G.* 2.537 is crucial: it originally refers to eating in connection with a sacrifice (A. Ernout and A. Meillet, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine; histoire des mots*, 4<sup>e</sup> éd. [Paris 1979]); it is still widely used in a sacral connection by Vergil (*Aen.* 3.224, 4.206-207, 4.483, 5.762, 7.173-76, 8.280-84, and perhaps *G.* 4.378) and occurs in such a context in inscriptions from the early Principate (*CIL* VI.10231, X.444, *CIL* VI.32326-32335.iv.8, *CIL* XI.3303); as Scheid (*supra* n. 19) 201 points out, "...même en l'absence d'un lien explicitement formulé avec le contexte religieux, les banquets recourent toujours à la terminologie et aux règles du partage sacrificiel." In the passage under consideration, the collocation of *impia* and *epulata* calls attention to the moral ambiguity inherent in the sacrificial rite.

24. Vernant (*supra* n. 18).

25. In structuralist terminology, the creation of sacrifice and the gift of fire are homologues—different structures conveying the same meaning.

26. Burkert (*supra* n. 1) 841.

27. W. K. C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion: A Study of the Orphic Movement* (New York 1966) 253.

28. Cic. *N.D.* 3.58; Serv. *Ecl.* 4.10.

29. F. Solmsen, "The World of the Dead in Book 6 of the *Aeneid*," *CP* 67 (1972) 31-41. See also A. Vogliano, "Il papiro Bolognese Nr. 3," *Acme* 5 (1952) 385-417; R. Merkelbach, "Eine orphische Unterweltsbeschreibung auf Papyrus," *MH* 8 (1951) 2-11; M. Treu, "Die neue 'Orphische' Unterweltsbeschreibung und Vergil," *Hermes* 82 (1954) 24-51; and R. Turcan, "La catabase orphique du papyrus de Bologne," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 150 (1956) 136-72.

30. Solmsen (*supra* n. 29); T. N. Habinek, "Science and Tradition in *Aeneid* 6," *HSCP* 92 (1988).

31. Detienne (*supra* n. 17) 68-94.

32. Guthrie (*supra* n. 27) 249.

33. "Foil" is the word used by W. S. Anderson to describe the relationship of Aristaeus to Orpheus ("The Orpheus of Virgil and Ovid" in *Orpheus: The [223]Metamorphoses of a Myth*, ed. John Warden [Toronto 1982], 25-50). His argument is based strictly on literary evidence internal to Vergil's text.

34. Mutually opposed, yet not necessarily mutually exclusive. R. Seaford, "Immortality, Salvation, and the Elements," *HSCP* 90 (1986) 1-26 has argued that some mystics (not necessarily Orphics) saw in Prometheus' eventual release from Tartarus and reclamation of his Titanic status a paradigm for the soul's escape from its earthly punishment.

35. Griffin (*supra* n. 4) 176.

36. Ross (*supra* n. 4) 233.

37. Putnam (*supra* n. 4) 317.

38. Putnam (*supra* n. 4) 320. Putnam's view receives further support from the symbolic association of bees with art (see, for example, the appearance of the bee-women at the end of the *Hymn to Hermes*) and with the transition from nature to culture (see Detienne [*supra* n. 17] 55). Thus the bees can be a sign both of the transition from pre-history to history and of the Orphic world that seeks to transcend and replace history.

39. H. Jacobson, in a provocative attempt to reconstruct the "first edition" of the fourth book ("Aristaeus, Orpheus, and the *Laudes Galli*," *AJP* 105 [1984] 271-300),



offers a biographical explanation for the tragic tone of the Orpheus episode—namely, that after the downfall of Gallus, Vergil replaced a positive story of a living Orpheus-Gallus figure, appeased by sacrifice (but *not* a funeral sacrifice), with an emotional account of Orpheus' failure and death. Jacobson's hypothesis is attractive, in that it offers an explanation of Servius' puzzling notes on Aristaeus, Orpheus, and Gallus; but for the purposes of this essay, I have restricted myself to interpreting the text as transmitted. I wish to record here my gratitude to Erwin Cook for his perceptive comments on a draft of this paper.