A READING OF VIRGIL'S FOURTH GEORGIC

C. G. PERKELL

IT HAS BECOME CONVENTIONAL in interpretations of the *Georgics* to characterize Books 1 and 3 as pessimistic, Books 2 and 4 as optimistic.[1] The last book especially, because it concludes with the miraculous rebirth of the bees, is felt to resolve the tensions of the poem and to portend a positive future. According to this reading the miracle of resurrection reflects Virgil's faith in the political and moral renewal of Rome under Augustus. I would like to suggest that such a positive interpretation of the poem's conclusion is based on a misapprehension both of the symbolic significance of the *bougonia* and of the relationship of bees in this book to the stories of Aristaeus and Orpheus. My thesis is that Book 4, rightly understood, reveals the same pervasive and thoughtful melancholy which recent critics have observed in the *Aeneid* and in Books 1 and 3 of the *Georgics*.[2]

A proper reading of this book requires that we acknowledge and examine certain questions which Virgil raises by his unconventional treatment of traditional material. (1) Why does Virgil write at such length about bees, to the exclusion of other small farm animals treated, for example, by Varro? (2) What have bees fundamentally to do with the Aristaeus epyllion? Do they serve any function other than aetiological? (3) For what purpose does Virgil alter the traditional myths of Aristaeus and Orpheus? That is, why does Aristaeus commit a crime, or establish the *bougonia*? Why does Orpheus lose Eurydice? Why does Virgil integrate the stories of Aristaeus and Orpheus? All these, as far as can be determined, are innovations of Virgil. (4) Finally, why does Virgil conclude a didactic, ostensibly practical poem with the fabulous tale of *bougonia*, a gesture, as Klingner remarks,[3] unparalleled in didactic poetry? Answers to these questions will, I think, result in an enhanced and juster appreciation of the fine and tense ambiguity of this book.[4]

[1]Cf. L. P. Wilkinson, *The Georgics of Virgil* (Cambridge 1969) 74–75; C. P. Segal, "Orpheus and the Fourth *Georgic*: Virgil on Nature and Civilization," *AJP* 87 (1966) 307–308; B. Otis, *Virgil: A Study in Civilized Poetry* (Oxford 1963) 151; J. Perret, *Virgile* (Paris 1965) 86; F. Klingner, *Virgil: Bucolica, Georgica, Aeneis* (Zurich 1967) 194. These works are cited hereafter by author's name alone.

[2]See M. C. J. Putnam, "Italian Virgil and the Idea of Rome," in Louis J. Orlin (ed.), *Janus: Essays in Ancient and Modern Studies* (Ann Arbor 1975) 171–200 for negative implications about Roman society even in *Georgics* 2.

[3]Klingner 324: "Er gibt der *Bougonia* den Ehrenplatz als Bekrönung, den sie in den Lehrbüchern wohl nie gehabt hatte."

[4]Although B. Otis in "A New Study of the *Georgics*," *Phoenix* 26 (1972) 40–62, D.

PHOENIX, Vol. 32 (1978) 3.

Virgil's decision to devote so much space to bees, space out of proportion to their agricultural significance, has puzzled critics. Dahlmann[5] observes that the jussive form of the verb, characteristic of didactic poetry, is infrequent in this book. Rather Virgil focuses on a description of the bees' *mores*. This suggests that Virgil does not have a conventional didactic purpose in mind here, but rather that he is concerned with bees because of their *fama*, their way of living—as he represents it. Many critics, noting such apiary virtues as loyalty and selflessness, have seen in the bees Virgil's model for the moral and political renewal of Rome.[6] Indeed, Virgil's humanizing portrait of bees is unmistakable from the book's opening verses with their reference to *magnanimosque duces . . . et populos et proelia*. What is he implying about human beings by personifying bees in this way?

It is true that bees, throughout antiquity, were perceived as paradigms of social activity. Aristotle classed them with wasps, cranes, and men as πολιτικαί and as having a κοινὸν ἔργον.[7] To give an example from Latin, Varro also noted their similarities to human beings and perceived in them models of cooperative effort.[8] Must we then conclude that Virgil intends the bees to serve here as a positive social model for Romans? Closer reading of the text seems to suggest that the bees are too flawed to represent a moral or social ideal for human beings.[9] They may represent an alternative mode of living, but not a perfected one. Hence their "resurrection"—if it is one (a question discussed below)—at the poem's conclusion cannot signify a perfected future.

What are these flaws? They fall into two categories, physical and spiritual. The bees are vulnerable to destruction of several sorts: like the farmer of Book 1, they have tiny enemies who undo their labor (13 ff.);

Wender in "Resurrection in the Fourth *Georgic*," *AJP* 90 (1969) 424–436, and Segal all recognize aspects of ambiguity and pessimism in the fourth book, they do not consider these to be determining.

[5]H. Dahlmann, "Der Bienenstaat in Vergils *Georgica*," *Abh Mainz*, Geistesw. Kl. 10 (1954) 552 (= *Kleine Schriften* [Hildesheim 1970] 186).

[6]E.g., Dahlmann 555 (189); Perret 83–85; S. P. Bovie, "The Imagery of Ascent-Descent in Virgil's *Georgics*," *AJP* 77 (1956) 353; D. E. W. Wormell, "Apibus quanta experientia parcis: Virgil, *Georgics* IV.1–227," in H. Bardon and R. Verdière, eds., *Vergiliana: Recherches sur Virgile* (Leiden 1971) 430. Language implying human activity is presented in detail in Dahlmann.

[7]The major sources on bees in antiquity are Arist. *Gen. An.* 3 (on theories of bee generation), *HA* 5.21–23; [*Aristotle*] *HA* 9; Varro *Rust.* 3.16; Columella 9.14; (*Geoponica* 15.2–9).

[8]Varro *Rust.* 3.16.3, 3.16.6.

[9]On flaws in the bees as Virgil describes them see M. C. J. Putnam, "The Virgilian Achievement," *Arethusa* 5 (1972) 57; E. Stehle, "Virgil's *Georgics*: The Threat of Sloth," *TAPA* 104 (1974) 360; Wormell (above, note 6) 433. K. Büchner, "P. Vergilius Maro," *RE* 8 A 2 (1958) 1308.

the beekeeper plunders their wealth at will (228–229); in self-defense they lose their lives (238); finally, the entire hive, as Virgil represents it, can be lost through disease (281). Here Virgil intends to dramatize the bees' vulnerability, for he exaggerates the incidence of fatal disease among them. Columella, for example, in declining to discuss the *bougonia* method of generating bees, writes (9.14.6): *quam rationem diligentius prosequi supervacuam puto, consentiens Celso, qui prudentissime ait, non tanto interitu pecus istud amitti, ut sic requirendum sit.*[10]

The moral flaws of the bees are, perhaps, even more suggestive. Their mindless and passive loyalty to their king is contrary to Roman republican tradition. Worship of kings was associated with the decadent, effeminate East. As Stehle notes, the Romans did not admire the peoples mentioned in 210–212:

> *Praeterea regem non sic Aegyptus et ingens*
> *Lydia nec populi Parthorum aut Medus Hydaspes*
> *observant.*

Furthermore, the bees' *labor* is mindless. It is not, as with men, a "conscious act of experience and understanding."[11] Virgil, concerned to demonstrate their flaws, attributes to bees a contrived belligerence. For example, since bees do not fight on the wing, their battle is a "literary flight of fancy."[12] Yet Virgil's bees are passionate for war, especially civil. Although they do not weaken their bodies with sexual activity (198–199), they do expend them carelessly in battle (217 f.). Yet even their lauded continence (198–199) is more apparent than real. Bees are not truly continent for they have merely replaced sexual *amor* with another sort:

> *Cecropias innatus apes* amor *urget habendi*
> *munere quamque suo. . .* (177).

(*Amor habendi* is a grave flaw for it, along with *belli rabies*, causes the dissolution of the Golden Age in *Aen.* 8.327.) That Virgil indeed intends to represent the gathering of honey as a substitute for sexual activity is indicated by terms which denote passion and birth:

> *tantus* amor *florum et* generandi *gloria*
> *mellis* (205).

Bees, then, like other animals, are driven by passion, but their passion results in honey—not in children. In sum, the bees' acquisitiveness, belligerence, and fragility compromise them as models for a human

[10]On the improbability of such a bee malady ever having existed see Wilkinson 268; H. M. Fraser, *Beekeeping in Antiquity* (London 1931) 41.

[11]Stehle (above, note 9) 360 and n. 19.

[12]Wilkinson 263; cf. Klingner 304 and Büchner (above, note 9) 1304 for epic language used to describe the bee battle.

society renewed and perfected. And with these faults they have not the virtues which distinguish human culture, e.g., poetry or (occasional) satisfaction.

If the bees are not intended to be paradigms of right living, then what function do they serve? Bayet asserted that the themes of Book 4 are chastity and resurrection.[13] This, I think, suggests the key to this book. The bees' reputation for chastity, arising from their presumably asexual means of reproduction, was a central feature of the lore concerning them in antiquity.[14] They were thought to require exemplary purity in their keeper. For instance, the beekeeper was advised to shave his head before approaching his bees. This was to avoid carrying any bodily odor which might connote sexual activity.[15] Bees were thought to be especially repelled by illicit sexuality. Plutarch (*Mor.* 144d–e) states that the beekeeper must not be contaminated by sexual relations with women other than his wife. Columella (9.14.3) prescribes abstinence from *res venereae* for a day before approaching bees. Virgil underlines the bees' chastity by adducing the least scientific and most poetic of contemporary hypotheses to explain their reproduction (200 f.):

> *verum ipsae e foliis natos et suavibus herbis*
> *ore legunt.*

Since bees especially disapprove illicit sexual activity (Plut. *Mor.* 919e), it becomes instantly clear why Aristaeus lost his bees. He had been guilty of (attempted) rape. Thus the bees, as guardians or symbols of chastity, are integrally and not peripherally related to the Aristaeus epyllion, whose fundamental theme is uncontrolled passion and its consequences.

That uncontrolled passion is the subject of the Aristaeus epyllion emerges from a comparison of Virgil's treatment of Aristaeus and Orpheus with the traditional accounts of them. Other than in Virgil, as far as can be ascertained,[16] Aristaeus is always an exemplary figure, a culture hero, benefactor of men through his teaching of agriculture, cattle-breeding,

[13]J. Bayet, "Les premières Géorgiques de Virgile," *RPh* 56 (1930) 246.

[14]Since bees could not be observed to copulate, they were assumed to be chaste. This gave rise to various theories of generation. Cf., for example, Aristotle *HA* 5.21.20 where it is suggested that bees may find their offspring in flowers, or that somehow the leaders generate the bees, who then find the drones in flowers. Cf. Wilkinson 266 for other theories. Note that Aristotle does not mention *bougonia.*

[15]M. Detienne, "Orphée au miel," *QUCC* 12 (1971) 11–12: "Si elles détestent les parfums c'est parce qu'elles haïssent la mollesse et la volupté, parce qu'elles n'ont pas d'ennemis plus grands que les débauchés et les séducteurs, tous ceux qui font un mauvais usage des aromates et des onguents."

[16]Cf. W. H. Roscher, *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie* (Leipzig 1884–1890), s.v. "Aristaeus" and Hiller v. Gaertringen, "Aristaios," *RE* 2 (1896) 852–859.

hunting, and bee-keeping. In the *Georgics*, however, he is personally unappealing—whining, petulant, self-pitying, guilty of rape. He is clearly an aggressive character.[17] Oddly, in Virgil's version he establishes the *bougonia*, to the ancients a procedure both costly and—most significantly—of dubious value (see Varro, who hedges at 3.16.4 and omits *bougonia* altogether at 3.16.37–38, and also Columella 9.14.6). Here it is essential to remember that it is not only we scientific moderns who know that the carcass of a bull, however treated, will not yield bees. This was suspected by the ancient authorities as well. Therefore, one might infer that when Virgil attributes *bougonia* to Aristaeus, who is elsewhere a true culture hero, he is perhaps implying that the value of culture is illusory. (This possibility will be further discussed below.)

Virgil makes Aristaeus representative of all post-Golden Age men in that the glory of his mortal life, as he himself declares, is his productive *labor* (326–328):

> *en etiam hunc ipsum vitae mortalis honorem,*
> *quem mihi vix frugum et pecudum custodia sollers*
> *omnia temptanti extuderat. . . .*

The phrase *vitae mortalis honorem* indicates that Aristaeus symbolizes the human condition. As he strives to fulfill the capabilities existing within him, as he strives to achieve his greatest ambitions—represented, I think, by his hope of divinity (*quid me caelum sperare iubebas?* 325)—, he represents the continuing aspirations of all men. Yet in Virgil's version this tutelary god of agriculture is not only guilty (*magna luis commissa*), he is guilty of a very specific crime—rape. We must consider why Virgil has chosen to portray Aristaeus as guilty of this particular crime. It is a thematic leitmotif of the *Georgics* that agricultural productivity or progress absolutely requires the destruction or domination of natural things.[18] This is clearly implied by, for example, the military language which Virgil employs to describe the farmer's tasks. Such a usage as *arma* for agricultural tools is not at all conventional but is original with Virgil (Wilkinson 80) and hence is significant. If we interpret rape as a gesture symbolic of aggression and domination, we can see that it represents the paradigmatic relationship of productive man to nature since man must commit aggression against nature in order to make it productive for his

[17]Cf. W. Richter, *Vergil: Georgica* (Munich 1957) 388 (more kindly): "Aristaeus ist auch sonst nicht ohne Energie und Kraft."

[18]Cf. Wender (above, note 4) on repeated violations of nature as necessary to the farmer's life. Segal (317) observes that Proteus, Orpheus, Eurydice, and the nightingale "are victims of Aristaeus and what he stands for." On Eurydice as a nature symbol see, e.g., A. Oltramare, *Etude sur l'épisode d'Aristée dans les Géorgiques de Virgile* (Geneva 1892) 158, and Wender 431.

own purposes. Therefore, by making Aristaeus guilty of the rape and (inadvertently) of the death of the nymph Eurydice, Virgil makes him epitomize the human experience in relation to nature as a whole. In his *labor*, then, in his striving for *honor*, in his aggression against natural forces, in his need to atone (cf. 1.501–502 where the Romans also must atone for previous crime), Aristaeus is a paradigm of the human experience.

Struggle and violence are required for Aristaeus to learn the cause of his suffering and its cure:

> *nam sine* vi *non ulla dabit praecepta, neque illum*
> *orando flectes; vim duram et vincula capto*
> *tende* (398–400)
>
> *tantum effatus. ad haec vates* vi *denique* multa
> *ardentis oculos intorsit lumine glauco,*
> *et graviter frendens sic fatis ora resolvit.* (450–452)

This necessary violence is not uncongenial to him, as we have seen. Proteus, having endured his assault, addresses him as *iuvenum confidentissime* (445). Virgil seems to imply that it is precisely his vitality and aggression, when productively channeled, which allow him to survive. Thus Aristaeus—though guilty—survives punishment, while the bees, Eurydice, and Orpheus—though innocent—die. We are clearly meant to see at what a high price Aristaeus' survival is bought. Virgil's sympathy for plants and animals[19] as well as for the victimized human being led him to see depredation where others saw progress. In his portrait of Aristaeus he intended to embody the destructive as well as creative aspects of culture. It is for this reason that he chose to portray Aristaeus, the fabled culture-hero, as capable of violence and aggression. His passion, inappropriate and uncontrolled, destroys his bees and nearly dooms his entire *labor* and hope for *honor*.

How does Aristaeus relate to Orpheus? Some (e.g., Richter [above, note 17] 392, 402) have thought not at all. There are, however, significant contrasts and similarities between them. In his relationship to nature Orpheus is the antithesis of Aristaeus, both here and in the traditional accounts of him.[20] The legend portrays Orpheus as a gentle man who, through music and magic, through unique harmony with nature, could accomplish feats impossible for others. Thus Aristaeus is represented by Virgil as being aggressive towards nature, while Orpheus is in mysterious

[19]An attitude which "has no real parallel in pagan literature," Wilkinson 124.

[20]On Orpheus see especially J. Heurgon, "Orphée et Eurydice avant Virgile," *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire* (1932) 6–60; E. Norden, "Orpheus und Eurydice," *SBBerl* (1934) 626 ff., (= *Kleine Schriften* [Berlin 1966] 468–532); K. Ziegler, "Orpheus," *RE* 17.1 (1939) 1200–1316.

harmony with nature. As a further contrast, Aristaeus is productive of material things, while Orpheus is productive of non-material song. Therefore Aristaeus and Orpheus are fundamentally contrasted in their productivity and in their relationship to nature.[21] In sum, they represent polarities of human experience.

What is striking and unconventional in Virgil's portrait of Orpheus is his loss of Eurydice and the passionate flaw which occasions that loss. In this quality alone Virgil makes him parallel to Aristaeus. It is crucial to a correct reading of this passage to remember that the traditional story of Orpheus, prior to Virgil, is that he was successful in retrieving Eurydice from Hades.[22] Diodorus' account of Orpheus (4.25) is valuable to us because he is contemporary with Virgil. Here is his version of Orpheus' retrieving Eurydice from the lower world:

διὰ τὸν ἔρωτα τὸν πρὸς τὴν γυναῖκα καταβῆναι μὲν εἰς Ἅιδου παραδόξως ἐτόλμησε, τὴν δὲ Φερσεφονήν διὰ τῆς εὐμελείας ψυχαγωγήσας ἔπεισε συνεργῆσαι ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις, καὶ συγχωρῆσαι τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ τετελευτηκυῖαν ἀναγαγεῖν ἐξ Ἅιδου.

The reader will note that Diodorus makes no mention of a second disappearance of "Eurydice" (her name fluctuates in the tradition) nor of a passionate flaw in Orpheus. That Orpheus, traditionally a gentle, civilizing figure, should lose his wife through *dementia* and *furor* is antithetical to tradition, both in Orpheus' failure and in the emotions which Virgil attributes to him. Virgil has turned a story of success into one of tragic loss. The tale in Virgil is tragic as it is; in the context of the reader's expectations, it is emphatically so Either by inventing this version or by purposely choosing an obscure variant on a traditionally happy story, Virgil underlines the tragedy of Orpheus' loss and the failure of his endeavor through uncontrolled passion. The triumph of love or song over death is not the message here (as Büchner states [above, note 9 col. 1313, 1314]). The poet is defeated by passion and death. It is in this one thing, this yielding to passion, that Orpheus resembles Aristaeus. This similarity

[21]On the polarity between the productive/aggressive man and the artistic/gentle man see A. Bradley, "Augustan Culture and a Radical Alternative: Virgil's *Georgics*," *Arion* 8 (1969) 358–359 and H. Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (Boston 1966) 161, 171.

[22]For bibliography see above, note 20. Prior to Virgil the only known versions of Orpheus' descent to Hades for Eurydice (i.e., Euripides *Alcestis* 357–362; Isocrates *Busiris* [11] 7 ff.; Hermesianax *Leontion* Book 3; [Moschus] *Lament for Bion* 123–125) tell of his success. Even some versions subsequent to Virgil (e.g., Manilius *Astronomica* 5.326–328; Lucian *Dial. Mort.* 23.3 Jacobitz) have happy endings, showing that that tradition was still viable. It has been supposed by some (Bowra, Heurgon, Richter) that a now lost Hellenistic poem, which described Orpheus' loss of Eurydice, was imitated here by Virgil. Otis ([above, note 4] 58) sums up the situation: "The important point is that Virgil either invented or selected a very unusual variation of the myth for an obvious purpose, i.e., to depict an attempt at resurrection that was frustrated by passion."

transcends the profoundest differences between them and confirms the significant observation of Book 3: *amor omnibus idem*. Both Aristaeus and Orpheus see the results of their *labor* menaced by passion:

> *Non te nullius exercent numinis irae:*
> *magna luis commissa; tibi has miserabilis Orpheus*
> *haudquaquam ad meritum poenas, ni fata resistant,*
> *suscitat et rapta graviter pro coniuge saevit.* (453–456)

and

> *ibi omnis*
> *effusus labor atque immitis rupta tyranni*
> *foedera, terque fragor stagnis auditus Avernis.*
> *illa 'quis et me' inquit 'miseram et te perdidit, Orpheu,*
> *quis tantus furor?'* (491–495)

Surely this was Virgil's intent in contriving to integrate the stories of Aristaeus and Orpheus: to picture the destructive effects of passion in the most disparate of natures. Yet Aristaeus has the requisite tenacity and vital ruthlessness of purpose to triumph over obstacles to survival. Orpheus is too gentle, too inward, too isolated from others to struggle continually against the defeats and compromises of living.

Every reader of the Orpheus story experiences its haunting and melancholy beauty. Its sadness overshadows the fourth Book and lingers in the reader's memory. The tragic tone of the episode predominates since Virgil engages the reader's sympathy with Orpheus and Eurydice, the victims or losers, and not with Aristaeus, who—though inadvertently—causes the deaths of his bees, of Eurydice and Orpheus, and of the four bulls and four cows which he sacrifices. Virgil guarantees the reader's sympathy with Orpheus by, for example, asking rhetorical questions which involve us with him, e.g.:

> *quid faceret? quo se rapta bis coniuge ferret?*
> *quo fletu manis, quae numina voce moveret?* (504–505)

or by explicitly expressing his own sympathy with him:

> *cum subita incautum dementia cepit amantem,*
> *ignoscenda quidem, scirent si ignoscere Manes.* (489–490)

(See Otis 201 ff. for a discussion of Virgil's "subjective" style here.)

Are these deaths sufficiently redeemed by the *bougonia*? As was previously mentioned, in all other known accounts, Aristaeus is associated with the discovery of real and practical improvements in agricultural techniques. Here alone, it would appear, is he credited with establishing the fantastical *bougonia*. Certainly *bougonia* occasioned scepticism among ancient authorities (e.g., Varro 3.16.4 and 3.16.37–38 and Columella 9.14.6) and would have been an undesirable procedure in any case

since bees are much less valuable than the steer which would have to be killed (Klingner 324). These negative factors must be considered when we attempt to estimate the symbolic value of the poem's conclusion. In addition, Klingner (324) and Büchner ([above, note 9] 1309–1310) both observe a change in Virgil's narrative style at this point, although they do not pursue some of the implications of this change. The narrative becomes impersonal: (4.295 ff.) "a place is chosen," "they enclose it." Virgil implies that this event occurs in a distant land from which there is only hearsay. So although, as Büchner says (1309), it would be difficult to prove that Virgil did not believe in the reality of this procedure, nevertheless he certainly describes it as something unverified, something alien, something of which neither he nor his compatriots had experience. Let us for the moment, then, adopt the hypothesis that Virgil (and his contemporaries) did doubt the value and/or reality of *bougonia*. If this is the case, then the conclusion of the poem acquires a significance very different from that which is usually attributed to it. The general view, as was previously indicated, is that the *bougonia* portends resurrection and a positive future. I suggest, however, that the effect here is parallel to that of the conclusion of *Aeneid* 6, where Aeneas leaves the underworld through the Gate of False Dreams.[23] There Virgil seems to be casting doubt upon the reality and truth of Aeneas' whole experience in the underworld, with its glorious prophecies of Rome's future. Here the effect of crediting Aristaeus, the culture hero, with this uncertain and ambiguous process of contriving life out of death is similarly to question, to place in doubt the value or validity of cultural achievements.

Such an interpretation is supported by the dynamics of *bougonia* as the ancients understood it. To them it did not signify rebirth or resurrection. Clearly, new bees are born, but they are not reborn as there is no regeneration of the same bees which had previously died; these are irretrievably lost. Most important, this process requires the destruction of a bull, for its body and soul are needed to generate the new bees. For the ancients this was not an image of a dead creature coming again to life. Rather it was an exchange of death for life, for the soul of the slaughtered bull was presumably then able to animate the bees. "The main idea seems to be that the life of the bull passes into that of the bees; the closing of the ears and nostrils, as well as the insistence on death by slow contusion, seem to aim at preservation of the soul within the carcass."[24] This is not a purely positive image but rather a symbolic representation of the thematic

[23]The disturbing overtones of these lines are noted by W. Clausen, "An Interpretation of the *Aeneid*," *HSCP* 68 (1964) 146 f.

[24]B. G. Whitfield, "Virgil and the Bees: A Study in Ancient Apicultural Lore," *G&R* 3 (1956) 117. Cf. Wormell (above, note 8) 432; T. J. Haarhoff, "Virgil and Cornelius Gallus," *CP* 55 (1960) 103; Wilkinson 268.

leitmotif of the entire poem: the ambivalence of culture, the necessity of destruction for progress. Virgil does not allow the reader to ignore the brutality of this exchange of death for life (285, 299–302, 555–556). The description of the killing is distasteful[25] and arouses our sympathy for the victim:

> *tum vitulus bima curvans iam cornua fronte*
> *quaeritur: huic geminae nares et spiritus oris*
> *multa reluctanti obstruitur, plagisque perempto*
> *tunsa per integram solvuntur viscera pellem.* (299–302)
>
> *hic vero subitum ac dictu mirabile monstrum*
> *aspiciunt, liquefacta boum per viscera toto*
> *stridere apes utero et ruptis effervere costis,*
> *immensasque trahi nubes . . . .* (554–557)

In order to confirm that our distaste is not an aberration of modern sensibility, we may also observe that the similes used to describe the birth (312 ff.) are not positive ones:

> *donec ut aestivis effusus nubibus imber*
> *erupere, aut ut nervo pulsante sagittae,*
> *prima leves ineunt si quando proelia Parthi.*

This birth is simultaneously miraculous and monstrous (*dictu mirabile monstrum* [554]). In sum, Virgil seems to be more concerned here with the notion of death and destruction as the basis of new life than he is with resurrection. The *bougonia*, therefore, does not embody the pure joy of success but rather the ambivalence of compromise, the consciousness of loss, and the pessimism of the fundamental perception that there is no guiltless path to survival.[26]

What should we infer about Virgil's view of culture or progress when we consider Aristaeus' survival as opposed to Orpheus' demise? Aristaeus' fundamental lack of appealing traits has already been noted. He acquires his new bees at great cost; violent action is not alien to him. Orpheus, on the other hand, is gentle, perhaps passive, too idealistic to survive. What remains of him is intangible—the pathos of loss, the vulnerability of love and artistic strivings, and also the beauty of poetry which sings

[25]Cf. Büchner (above, note 9) 1310: "Die Brutalität, mit der das zweijährige Kalb, aus dem in einer Kammer neues Leben erstehen soll und das sich verzweifelt wehrt, erstickt wird, verlockt auch kaum zur Nachahmung und entspricht der Barbarei der Ferne."

[26]Contrast Stehle (above, note 9) 360: "To regenerate (*sic*) the bees is to recall nature from destruction back to creativity. It is the final *ars* because it symbolizes man's complete understanding of and control over nature, hence ability to maintain nature at a level of productive activity that can become an inspiration to man himself, as the bees are . . ." Similarly Otis 213; Segal 325.

of these things.[27] Of these two figures, it is clearly Orpheus who has our sympathy. Virgil has assured this by making us share Orpheus' loss and regret. The nightingale image which concludes the epyllion illuminates this truth. Just as Orpheus is, among men, the master of song (*mulcentem tigris et agentem carmine quercus* [510]), so, of all birds, the nightingale sings songs most beautiful and sad, songs of loss she was helpless to prevent:

> *qualis populea maerens philomela sub umbra*
> *amissos queritur fetus, quos durus arator*
> *observans nido implumis detraxit; at illa*
> *flet noctem, ramoque sedens miserabile carmen*
> *integrat, et maestis late loca questibus implet.* (511–515)

Orpheus and the nightingale are united in their beauty and impotence.

With this vignette of the farmer who plunders the nightingale's nest, Virgil expands our understanding of life's ambiguities. In Book 1 our sympathy was with the farmer (*durus agrestis* [160]) who struggled continually against deprivation and hardship, against enemies large and tiny who undermined his labor. Here we see that same farmer (*durus arator* [512]) no longer as a sympathetic figure, but rather as predator and ravager of the nightingale's helpless young, the agent of destruction, loss, and sorrow. This is the quintessence of the poem. Virgil's vision is of man both as victim of the gods and nature (as in Book 1) and also as aggressor against nature and morality. Virgil is sensible above all of the destruction of the beautiful but non-productive in that ambivalent process which is civilization. This vision is perfectly symbolized in the *bougonia* which concludes the poem, for here we see, not resurrection and salvation, but the brutality required for survival, the compromise of innocence, the pathos of loss. Aristaeus by his self-assertion (*iuvenum confidentissime*) achieves his desired divinity (implicit at 1.14, where he is invoked with other deities), while Orpheus, whose sorrow we are made to share and regret, is the eventual victim of Aristaeus' passion and of his own.

DARTMOUTH COLLEGE

[27]One might take solace in the following verses with which Jean Cocteau prefaces his *Orphée*:

> *Qu'il est laid le bonheur qu'on veut*
> *Qu'il est beau le malheur qu'on a.*