Poetry and Politics in Vergil's Georgics

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POETRY AND POLITICS IN VERGIL'S *GEORGICS*[1]

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Recent work on Vergil's *Georgics* has been dominated by two themes: intertextuality and politics. These topics are, of course, connected, and little progress can be made in trying to elucidate the complex ways in which the poem relates to the historical realities or reconstructions of the period during which it is generally thought to have been written (*c*.36–29 BCE) without an awareness of the equally complex ways in which it reworks other texts and positions itself within the literary traditions of Greek and Latin poetry. But the reader must also be prepared to think hard about many other important matters: the harsh practicalities of farming, climate and disease, landscape and geography, death, war and the divine. As if that were not enough, the closing episode of the poem takes the reader far from the life of the Italian farmer to figures in the world of Greek myth, Aristaeus, Orpheus and Eurydice. Amidst such variety, one unifying principle is to be found in the fact that the poem is a didactic text addressed to farmers (the *agrestes* of 1.41) in which the reader, like the farmer, must play the role of pupil to Vergil the teacher. But if the formal features of the didactic genre tempt the reader to articulate an overall opinion about the message of the work, recent research and its radical critical divergences suggest that the *Georgics* has no simple or single meaning. This extraordinarily complex work still merits detailed study. "After two millennia of technical improvements in agriculture and no improvements whatever in the warmongering habits of the species, it doesn't sound old."[2]

In an attempt to offer a little more reflection on the *Georgics*, I would like in part one ('Science, geography and intertextuality') to suggest three areas for thought, areas in which recent work has made exciting progress and opened up new avenues of research for those attempting to

1. I would like to thank Benjamin Acosta-Hughes, Manuel Baumbach, James Clauss, Christophe Cusset, Joseph Farrell, Karl Galinsky, Reinhold Glei, Philip Hardie, Richard Hunter, Yvan Nadeau, Josiah Osgood, Wolfgang Polleichtner, Alex Sens and Susan Stephens for advice and encouragement of various kinds. As always, it would be misguided to assume that they agree in any way with the ideas expressed here, but in all sorts of ways they have all helped me to formulate them.

2. Heaney (2004).

study this astonishingly complex poem. Subsequently, in part two ('Aristaeus and Orpheus: politics and poetry'), I will attempt to outline some of the ways in which this work may relate to one much-discussed section of the poem, the Aristaeus episode. Overall, the aim is to give some idea of where research on the *Georgics* stands today and to outline some of the avenues it is likely to take in the near future, with particular emphasis on some of the ways in which study of both Greek poetry and Greek history is vital to the understanding of a poem in which cultural and political links between Italy and the Greek world are important and in which the poetry and history of Hellenistic Alexandria seem to be of particular significance.

1. Science, geography, and intertextuality

1.1. *Philosophy and poetics*

David Ross has taught us that the *Georgics* is a poem of physics and science and that Vergil is drawing upon centuries of philosophical speculation about the natural world.[3] More recently, Llewelyn Morgan has advanced a Stoicizing interpretation of important parts of the poem, arguing that its ultimate aim is to show the good that can come from civil war.[4] In turn, Monica Gale has shown how profoundly Vergil is influenced by Lucretius' exposition of Epicureanism, within an overall critical mode that identifies separate intertextual strategies (*e.g.* Vergil's use of Hesiod; Vergil's use of Aratus) and world-views operative in the poem and argues that these cannot be made to cohere into a single authoritative authorial message.[5] In addition, Alex Hardie and I have independently argued for the importance of Empedocles as a model for the whole middle section of the work, the close of Book 2 and the prologue to Book 3. Here, Vergil surveys his poetic career to date, which he characterizes as poetry devoted to the countryside, and outlines alternative poetic modes, particularly that involving understanding of both the natural world, *rerum natura*, and that of Roman power, *imperium*.[6] In doing so, Vergil allots a central role to Empedocles as a poetic precursor, a fact which goes some way to explaining his handling of cosmic themes and the thematic importance of *discordia* (2.496) in this crucial

3. Ross (1987).
4. Morgan (1999).
5. Gale (2000).
6. Hardie (2002); Nelis (2004).

mid-section of the poem. While Vergil's eclectic approach to his scientific and philosophical sources suggests that there is no uniform philosophical standpoint within the poem, due attention must be paid to the coherence with which he approaches his poetic models. He is, for example, perfectly aware of the strong intertextual connections between Lucretius and Empedocles, and he may have associated the latter with Orphic poetry. As a result, it is risky to study Vergil's use of any individual literary model in isolation. Instead, the reader must attempt to make sense of the ways in which Vergil links his poem to a complete, closely interlinked poetic tradition that involves Orpheus himself as a figure of the origin of all poetry but also includes Homer, Hesiod, Parmenides, Empedocles, Callimachus, Apollonius of Rhodes, Aratus, and Lucretius, as has been done most effectively by Joseph Farrell.[7] In particular, fuller appreciation of Vergil's debt to Empedocles may help to provide a useful focal point for exploring the complex relationship between scientific themes and intertextual structures that recent scholarship has detected in the *Georgics*. When one links Vergil's use of the physical elements to the presence of the forces of Love (as in the famous passage about *amor* at 3.242-283) and Strife (for *discordia* and civil war see especially the closing sections of books 1 and 2) in the world of the poem, one is able to see in a new light some old questions about the themes of creation and decay, man's place in nature and even the political context of the work and Vergil's vision of Roman history. Furthermore, deeper appreciation of the Empedoclean background may help to recast the whole question of the poem's world-view by illustrating how those who differ over its basic optimism or pessimism are simply emphasizing one or other aspect of the fundamental Empedoclean duality involving the constant presence of both Love and Strife at every level of human existence.[8] Just as the Empedoclean cycle shifts from decreasing Strife to increasing Love, so Roman society can move from war (*e.g.* the end of book 2) to peace (*e.g.* the opening of book 3), allowing emphasis to be placed on the passing of historical time within the work's narratives and permitting, from different temporal perspectives, both optimistic and pessimistic viewpoints.

7. Farrell (1991). See also on the figure of the poet in the poem Perkell (1989).

8. On optimism and pessimism in the *Georgics* see Cramer (1998). See also Nappa (2005) for a strongly political reading of the poem from a post-Actium perspective. His fine reading of the whole poem builds on the earlier important studies of Klingner (1967), Wilkinson (1969), Buchheit (1972), Putnam (1979) and Miles (1980), all of which revolutionised study of the poem in the 1960s and 1970s.

1.2. *Rome, Italy and the world*

That the city of Rome is a key theme in the poem is clear from the central role Vergil accords its history at certain points, especially the opening of Books 1 and 3 and the end of Books 1, 2 and 4; some scholars read all of the fourth book as an allegorical treatment of contemporary Roman concerns.[9] The figure of Caesar, whether Julius or Octavian/Augustus looms large in this historicizing approach, as does the fact that the *Georgics* is addressed to Maecenas, whatever we make of his *haud mollia iussa* (3.41). But for Vergil, Rome is both the center of the world and simply one city among many; we must relate the *Urbs* both to other *urbes* and to the *orbis* as a whole. In discussions of the famous line *Ascraeumque cano Romana per oppida carmen* (1.176), the Ascraean song has received much more attention than the Roman towns.[10] It is well known that the *Georgics* is full of geographical references that take the reader all around Italy and indeed the known world in an evocative but slightly bewildering manner; the first of these come early in the proem, where the poet mentions the Chaonian acorn and the waters of the Achelous (1.8-9). Subsequently, it becomes clear that there is a design to the way in which Vergil draws into his poem a vision of the world as a whole and Italy's place in it.[11] One key element in this process is that he links Rome and Italy throughout the work, suggesting that we must pay close attention to the relationship between urban center and the rural world of the Italian farmers to whose life and work so much of the poem is dedicated. Vergil invests his text with a strong sense of Italian identity, while at the same time drawing attention to the rise of Rome from humble beginnings to a position of world conquest.[12] At 2.532-535, for example, we read:

> hanc olim ueteres uitam coluere Sabini,
> hanc Remus et frater; sic fortis Etruria creuit
> scilicet et rerum facta est pulcherrima Roma,
> septemque una sibi muro circumdedit arces.
>
> Such was the life the ancient Sabines lived
> And Remus with his brother; thus it was
> That Rome became the fairest thing in the world,
> Embracing seven hills with a single wall.

9. Nadeau (1984; 1989).
10. Cf. Thomas (1995: 201 = 1999: 232).
11. Fundamentally important on this aspect of the poem is the work of Ross (1987).
12. Lack of space makes it impossible to explore fully here the ways in which Vergil conceives of the relationship between Rome and Italy in the *Georgics*. See Putnam (1975: 171-199), Harrison (2007: 138-149); important work is forthcoming from Le Bris, and Burbidge.

Even as Vergil celebrates Rome's origins, the geographical spread of the work can be seen to reflect the rise of the city to world power. At the same time, to write about the land of Italy in the 30s BCE means inevitably to write about the process we call the "Roman revolution." In the prologue to Book 3, for example, where we hear of military victories, a Caesar, a temple, a river and chariot races, Vergil is alluding to Augustan building projects in central Rome, especially the temple of Palatine Apollo and the rebuilding of the monumental Circus Maximus.[13] It is all the more striking, therefore, that the river mentioned in this context is the Mincius rather then the Tiber, a fact that may reflect the poet's desire to evoke both the actual process of the Romanization of the Italian peninsula and, via allusion to the *Eclogues* (cf. 3.15 and *Ecl.* 7.13), poetics and the development of his literary career. Similarly, the relationship in the poem between Italo-Roman and Greek elements reflects both historical realities and their narratives and the dynamic reworking of Greek literary traditions in Latin verse. One further key geographical relationship evoked by the poem is the link that the story of *bugonia* in the fourth book creates among Italy, Greece and Egypt. Much has of course been written about this topic, but it is vitally important to treat the role of Egypt within the wider geographical and ethnographical patterns operative in the work's thematic structure as a whole, especially in the historical context of the Mediterranean world in the late 30s and early 20s BCE.

1.3. *Greece, Egypt and Alexandria*

Mention of Egypt brings us to a Greek city, Alexandria. Over the last twenty years, thanks mainly to the work of Richard Thomas, we have become increasingly alert to the importance of the influence of Hellenistic or Alexandrian poetry, and especially the poetry of Callimachus, on the *Georgics*.[14] The wider context within which Vergil's use of Callimachus must be appreciated has been fixed by Joseph Farrell, who has discussed in detail Vergil's handling of the generic conventions of epic.[15] Recent and significant advances made in research on Hellenistic poetry lend support to Farrell's assessment of the coherence of Vergil's vast poetic program and of the interrelated importance of epic, Homer, the

13. See Nelis (2008). On the historical context in which Vergil wrote the poem see Osgood (2006).

14. Thomas (1988). See also Cadili (2001).

15. Farrell (1991).

Homeric tradition, and Callimachus for the *Georgics*.[16] But as Hellenistic poetry has been brought out of the ivory tower and more firmly historicized in its Alexandrian and Egyptian setting by, among others, Richard Hunter, Alan Cameron and Susan Stephens, it becomes ever more important to recontextualize questions about the extent and nature of Vergil's debt to the *Aetia* of Callimachus in particular, without losing sight of the wider Hellenistic background as a whole.[17] Exactly as is the case with the poem's geography (as suggested above), the study of Vergil's Callimachean intertexts, and of his reception of Ptolemaic *encomium* in particular, cannot be divorced from contemporary political relations between Rome and Alexandria in the years during which Vergil was composing the *Georgics*.[18] The most obvious proof of this proposition is to be found in the prologue to book 3, a passage which has long been read in terms of Callimachean poetics and even labelled by some a *recusatio*, which is directly modelled on the *Victory of Berenice* at the start of the third book of the *Aetia* and which at the same time explicitly offers praise of Octavian for his victory over Egypt (3.26-29).[19]

Whatever their conflicting opinions about the function and meaning of the story of Aristaeus and Orpheus, scholars seem to agree that no valid interpretation of the poem is possible without a proper understanding of the strange story of *bugonia* with which it comes to a close. I agree entirely with this view, and I also have sympathy with allegorical interpretations of Book 4 as a whole. As a result, I see no difficulty in linking Aristaeus to the figure of Octavian/Augustus and Orpheus to Vergil, and in seeing in this story a profound reflection on poetry and the Roman state in the 30s and early 20s BCE.[20] But two aspects merit further study: the influence of Callimachus and the figure of Orpheus, especially if we agree that Empedocles is an important model for the *Georgics* as a whole, and that Vergil will have interpreted the Presocratic philosopher as in some sense an Orphic poet.[21] If we accept that Orpheus in some sense represents Vergil, then we must take seriously the idea, following paths cut by David Ross and Llewellyn Morgan, that Vergil is an Orphic poet and hope that someone will be brave enough to attempt an exploration of all the ways in which Orphic texts may shed light not only on the

16. For the wider context see Hunter (2006).
17. Hunter (1993: chap. 6); Cameron (1995); Stephens (2003).
18. Cf. Hardie (2006); Hunter (2006: 143-145).
19. In general see Cadili (2001).
20. See especially Nadeau (1984; 1989).
21. See Riedweg (1995); more generally, Bernabé, (2002); and from a purely Vergilian perspective see Lee (1996).

Aristaeus episode but on the *Georgics* as a whole. As for Callimachus, despite all the work done by Richard Thomas in his commentary, we still lack a detailed monograph dedicated to working out his influence on the poem as a whole, particularly in the light of some of the most recent work done by specialists in the field of Hellenistic poetry.[22]

2. Aristaeus and Orpheus: politics and poetry

No single discovery and no individual approach will unlock the secret of the meaning of the *Georgics*. But I hope that the three areas for thought suggested here have helped at least to outline some of the advances made by recent research and demonstrate the relevance of the *Georgics* to a colloquium dedicated to 'mythe et pouvoir à l'époque hellénistique'. This is, after all, a text in which the use of myth has long been seen as a way of reflecting on contemporary politics and in which the Heliconian Muses are brought in triumph back from Greece to Italy in celebration of the victories of a Caesar (3.10-16):[23]

> primus ego in patriam mecum, modo vita supersit,
> Aonio rediens deducam vertice Musas;
> primus Idumaeas referam tibi, Mantua, palmas,
> et uiridi in campo templum de marmore ponam
> propter aquam, tardis ingens ubi flexibus errat
> Mincius et tenera praetexit harundine ripas.
> in medio mihi Caesar erit templumque tenebit:
> illi uictor ego et Tyrio conspectus in ostro
> centum quadriiugos agitabo ad flumina currus.

> I will be the first, if life is granted me,
> To lead in triumph from Greek Helicon
> To my native land the Muses. I will be the first
> To bring you, Mantua, Idumaean palms,
> And in green meadows raise a marble temple
> Beside the water where the Mincius,
> Embroidering his banks with tender rushes,
> In sweeping loops meanders.
> In the middle of the shrine, as patron god,
> I will have Caesar placed, and in his honour
> Myself as victor in resplendent purple
> Will drive a hundred chariots by the river.

22. *E.g*. Harder (2003); Fantuzzi & Hunter (2004).
23. All translations are by Wilkinson (1982).

There is of course a question about just how seriously one should take the poet's triumphalism here (the closing lines of the poem will offer a very contrasting image), but it is not difficult to establish a parallel between Caesar's victories in the East (the Ganges, the Nile, Asia and Parthia are all mentioned subsequently in lines 27-31), and Vergil's expression of poetic triumph over Greek poetry – expressed allegorically in the fact that *cuncta Graecia* will come to Italy to participate in celebratory games organised by him (19-20). I would like to use this parallel between military and literary triumphalism in the prologue to Book 3 to elaborate on some of the issues touched on above and to bring out some of the ways in which poetry and politics are related in the *Georgics*. My main focus will be on the Aristaeus and Orpheus episode, which is generally agreed to contain important lessons for the interpretation of the wider work. First, it is necessary to sketch how the Greco-Egyptian setting of their story fits in with the poem as a whole, both in terms of poetics and geopolitics.

It is well known, and has already been noted, that the *Georgics* contains references to and descriptions of many parts of the world. In fact, it provides us with a famous description of the whole world divided into five zones at 1.231-258. The use of Libya and Scythia as the world's extreme geographical limits in this passage reappears in 3.339-383, again stressing both the universal picture and the centrality of Italy. As is generally agreed, Vergil uses these lands against a background of Greek ethnographical writing.[24] But it is also necessary to relate this world-wide vision to the contemporary Roman context. In his book *L'inventaire du monde: géographie et politique aux origines de l'Empire romain* (1988), Claude Nicolet is interested in geography both as a problem and solution: how, during the shift from Republic to Principate, did the Romans reorganise the administration of the vast physical space we think of as the Roman empire? He looks at roads, maps, plans, borders and boundaries, but he is also interested in the symbolism of world conquest, tracing connections back from Augustus to Julius Caesar and Pompey and further back again to Alexander. He is interested too in writers such as Eratosthenes, Hipparchus, and Posidonius, as well as in those who felt their influence in Rome. The issues discussed by Nicolet are very much part of Vergil's social and intellectual milieu, and of course Eratosthenes is the direct model for the description of the five zones just mentioned. Notably, Nicolet starts his second chapter, "Symbolisme et allégories de la conquête du monde," with the citation of

24. See Thomas (1982).

Georgics 3.25-33, and underscores in particular the reference to distant enemies at the world's ends in 32-33. It does not seem unreasonable, therefore, to try to relate the Italocentric picture of the Mediterranean world Vergil offers in the *Georgics* to Octavian's political policies during the 30s BCE.[25] For in this poem, Italy and Rome are part of a cosmos-wide picture, and their history forms part of a world history. The poem's temporal scope, after all, runs from the creation of the world up to the contemporary Roman age.[26]

Within the poem's cosmic perspective, the relationship between Italy and Greece, and especially the cultural relationship between them, becomes a focus of special attention and plays a special role. And so we oscillate in complex and mysterious ways between the harsh day-to-day realities of the life of the Italian farmer and the world of Greek myth. As already noted, the first place named in the poem is Chaonia, the second the Achelous. The latter is considered the oldest of rivers and even the equivalent of Ocean,[27] and is used as a metonym for water and associated with the discovery of wine; the aetiological aspect is evident. It has also been suggested that the choice of Chaonia, whose primary referent here is the acorn that was the food of primitive man, may also be meant to pun on primeval Chaos, prominent of course at the beginning of both Hesiod's *Theogony* and Callimachus' *Aetia*.[28] Vergil is clearly interested in origins and aetiologies and in the processes of history and civilization – processes that obviously pass through Greece. His frequent use of Greek places and names in the poem suggests both cultural and economic links between Italy and both the Greek world and the East more generally. In the Italy Vergil creates in the poem, he imagines knowledge of, for example, Epirus, Olympia, Lesbos and Rhodes, as well as saffron from Tmolus, Indian ivory, and Sabaean frankincense (1.56–57; cf. 2.116-117). At the same time, the period during which the *Georgics* was being written is a period in which the concept of '*tota Italia*' reflected the realities of political conflict, with Octavian's consolidation of power in the west being indissociable from the role of Antony in the eastern Mediterranean, and Egypt in particular, as well as reflecting the historical background of their confrontation.[29] Thus the end of Book 1 paints

25. For the importance of much of the work of re-organisation and reform in Italy and Rome undertaken by Octavian already in the 30s see Millar (2000) on political and constitutional matters, and Scheid (2005) on religion.

26. On the poem's temporal schemes see Hardie (2005; 2009: chap. 2).

27. Morgan (1999: 38 n. 65).

28. Hardie (2009: 23 n. 11, 42 n. 2).

29. Syme (1939: 276–292).

the picture of the spilling of Roman blood on the Greek battle fields of Pharsalia and Philippi in the tragic civil conflict of the 40s BCE, while the opening of Book 3 celebrates, as we have seen, subsequent victory in the east, and over Egypt in particular. And in the second half of Book 4 both Greece and Egypt come to center stage.

If we turn our attention from politics to poetics, we can reflect that the *Georgics* has been read as a meticulous and thorough-going exercise in literary history, as Vergil displays his interest in the dynamics of the Greek literary past. Joseph Farrell's 1991 study is the most powerful statement of this approach. In his view, the *Georgics* encodes a meditation on the relationship between didactic and martial epic, and it reworks Hesiod, Aratus and Lucretius in particular within a tradition which ultimately sees Homer, or an allegorised Homer, as the quintessential poet of nature, and as the first didactic poet. Vergil thus writes Homer into the didactic tradition**.** It is even possible to go back beyond Homer, to Orpheus, the figure of the mythic scientific poet (as David Ross has explained), allowing us to trace connections between Vergil and the supposed inventor of all poetic expression. And as we shall see, Callimachus is a key figure in this context. No attempt to read the *Georgics* as a literary history of didactic *epos* can avoid him. And on this reading too, essential aspects of the poem's meaning appear at the end of Book 4.

Vergil's account of the story of Aristaeus and Orpheus opens with a declaration which establishes immediately the aetiological, and so Callimachean, thrust of the narrative (4.285-286):

> altius omnem
> expediam prima repetens ab origine famam.
>
> I will unfold the legend, tracing it
> In every detail to its very source.

Soon after, the poet asks the Muse for information about *bugonia*, in a manner reminiscent of Callimachus' requests for information in the *Aetia* (4.315):

> Quis deus hanc, Musae, quis nobis extudit artem?
>
> Muses, what deity fashioned for us
> This craft…?

Aristaeus, after the loss of his bee hives, complains to his mother Cyrene, who receives him at the source of the River Peneus. She pours a libation, and the ensuing scene, in which she tells him to go to Proteus to discover why he has lost his bees and how to get them back, is an extraordinarily close imitation of the episode in *Odyssey* 4 involving Menelaus, Eidothea and Proteus. The libation scene reads thus (4.380-383):

> et mater, 'cape Maeonii carchesia Bacchi:
> Oceano libemus,' ait. simul ipsa precatur
> Oceanumque patrem rerum Nymphasque sorores,
> centum quae silvas, centum quae flumina servant.
>
> Then said his mother:
> 'Raise up your goblets of Maeonian wine
> And pour in honour of Ocean'; and she prayed
> Herself to Ocean, father of the world,
> And to the sisterhood of Nymphs that guard
> A hundred forests and a hundred rivers.

These lines offer various signals concerning poetics. The whole scene takes place by the underworld source of great rivers and it mentions Bacchus, commonly a symbol of poetic inspiration. At the same time, the mention of Ocean and the adjective 'Maeonian' evoke Homer, viewed as the primal poet. Llewelyn Morgan catches the literary import:[30]

> When Virgil has Cyrene exhort her son to take up 'Maeonian' Bacchus in order to pour a libation to Ocean, after which the poet undertakes his most ambitious ever imitation of Homer, he is surely tapping into the rich body of imagery with which Greek literature had surrounded the figure of Homer. The libation-scene would seem to be alerting us to the imitation of Homer to come.

Cyrene tells Aristaeus how to find Proteus, and Proteus then recounts the love of Orpheus for Eurydice. Morgan concludes thus:[31]

> Led by Cyrene, patron of Callimachus' home town, Aristaeus enters a spring and finds beneath, beyond or behind it – in a context at first sight Homeric but thereafter with strong Hesiodic and Callimachean colouring – Ocean, and his Homeric encounter with Proteus. Might Aristaeus' entry of the spring figure Virgil's retracing of Callimachean inspiration to its source, Homer, of whom Virgil subsequently advertises his emulation?

This formulation suggests in tentative terms that the libation poured by Cyrene and her guidance of Aristaeus towards Proteus and his telling of the story of Orpheus may be read as a delineation of the literary-historical background to Vergil's poem. Aristaeus' meeting with first Cyrene and then Proteus represents Vergil's relationship with Callimachus and Homer. The relationship between these two figures is presented as essential to the understanding of the development of the Greek epic tradition, and Vergil situates his own Latin contribution in relation to them. In attempting to elucidate the Callimachean background of the same passage, Ralph Rosen and Joseph Farrell end a footnote with this pregnant

30. Morgan (1999: 36).
31. Morgan (1999: 40).

formulation: "Cyrene, of course, was the birthplace of Callimachus".[32] We can, surely, accept their prompting and look for poetic allegory here: Cyrene leads Aristaeus to Proteus as Callimachus leads Vergil to Homer; Cyrene, therefore, certainly 'figures' Callimachus. But what does this formulation actually mean for our reading of the poem?

A key ingredient of the literary subtext of the Aristaeus episode may be set out like this: Aristaeus, in Thessaly, hears first from Cyrene about Egyptian *bugonia*; then he meets the Odyssean figure of Proteus, representative of the epic mode, but who sings an *epyllion*, a story of love, loss and lament, often elegiac in tone, style and mannerism and heavily influenced by Catullus 64 and no doubt also by the poetry of Gallus.[33] The shift from Greece to Egypt and the tension between epic and *epyllion* evoke central aspects in Callimachus' representation of his place in Greek literary history, as a rapid sketch of Callimachean influence on both the poem as a whole and on the Aristaeus episode in particular will demonstrate.[34]

That there is a direct relationship between the *Georgics* and the *Aetia* needs little detailed demonstration here.[35] The former is a four-book work which contains numerous aetiological tales, and the latter is in many ways a heavily didactic work.[36] One important structural pattern links the prologue of book 3 on the victories of Caesar to the *Victoria Berenices* which opened *Aetia* 3.[37] Yvan Nadeau has built on this point and argued for the parallel between the Aristaeus episode of the end of book four with the *Coma Berenices* of *Aetia* 4.[38] Recent work on the *Aetia* by Richard Hunter, Marco Fantuzzi and Annette Harder is also highly relevant, inasmuch as it elucidates Callimachus' use of Hesiod – the *Georgics* is an *Ascraeum carmen* – and helps to historicize the *Aetia* as a poem about Greek history and Ptolemaic culture.[39] Seeing Cyrene

32. Rosen & Farrell (1986: 254 n. 56). Cf. Putnam (1979: 272) for further emphasis on the central importance of Callimachus.

33. See Morgan (1999: 17–49).

34. The term 'epyllion' is of course problematic, but its use is justifiable: see Hollis (20092: 23–26).

35. Overall, Thomas's commentary (1988) provides the most complete reading of Vergil in terms of allusion to the work of Callimachus. Farrell (1991) offers the best contextualisation of the relationship between the two poets in wider literary history. I will concentate on the *Aetia*. The very nature of the Aristaeus episode as an *epyllion* means it is also related in ways we can no longer appreciate to the *Hecale*; crucially important here will have been the similarities between the in-set tale of Molorchus, within the *Victoria Berenices*, and the *Hecale*; see Hollis (20092: 344–345) and Ambuhl (2004).

36. Hutchinson (2003) and Kässer (2005).

37. Thomas (1983).

38. Nadeau (1984; 1989).

39. See Harder (2003); Fantuzzi & Hunter (2004: 51–60).

as a figure for Callimachus, therefore, should be seen as the culmination of a whole intertextual process running throughout the poem.[40] And indeed the concentration of Callimachean material in the Aristaeus episode, even if it does not all come from the *Aetia*, is remarkable by any standards. For example, the catalogue of nymphs at 4.333-347 probably comes from the *On Nymphs* and the catalogue of rivers from Callimachus' treatise *On the Rivers of the Known World*. But most striking of all is the possibility that at the opening of *Aetia* 3, in the *Victoria Berenices*, Callimachus actually referred to the practice of *bugonia*. When news comes from Nemea to Egypt of Berenice's victory, Callimachus describes its journey in precise terms (fr. 143 Mass. = 383 Pf + SH 254). Greece is described as the land of 'cowborn' Danaus, referring to his descent from Io. Egypt is described as the land of the 'prophet from Pallene' and 'the shepherd of seals', referring to Proteus. He then goes on to refer to the Egyptian origin of Argos and to mention 'women who know how to lament the bull with white markings', referring to Apis, identified with Epaphus, Io's son. The fragmentary nature of the text makes it difficult to see exactly how all these details relate to the poem for Berenice as a whole, but it is clear, at the very least, that Callimachus, in describing Berenice's victory in the Nemean games, is emphasising cultural links between Greece and Egypt. Interestingly, in a gloss on the passage about 'cowborn' Danaus, Hesychius refers to bees and the fact that they can be generated from the body of an ox, thus leaving open the possibility that bees and *bugonia* featured in some way near the opening of *Aetia* 3. Furthermore, Nemea is a place where *bugonia* occurred.[41]

The fragmentary nature of the text is frustrating, but it would be simplistic to imagine that Vergil's imitation of Callimachus would fail to pick up on the kind of associations his model seems to be creating here. At a key point in the *Aetia*, the beginning of the third book, we have praise of Berenice and the Ptolemaic family and emphasis on shared cultural links and values between Greece and Egypt, all couched in a poetic form which owes much to Pindaric epinician. In turn, Vergil opens his third book with celebration of Roman victories in Egypt and his own poetic triumph over Greek poetry and then brings his poem to a

40. Elsewhere in the poem, Vergil is certainly keen to highlight Greek literary ancestry by identifying his models by name. At 1.176 he describes the poem as an *Ascraeum carmen*, referring to Hesiod, and his *Corycius senex* has been read as a figure for Philetas (Thomas, 1992), Parthenius (Leigh, 1994) and Nicander (Harrison, 2004).

41. See Nadeau (1989: 100–101); Feeney (2004) for more detailed discussion. Feeney reports that more work is forthcoming on this material by Stephens and Barchiesi; it is eagerly awaited.

close with a mythic narrative which gives prominence to links between Greece and Egypt and which can be read as an allegory of the very triumphs celebrated at the beginning of book 3. In such a context of internal thematic patterns in the *Georgics* and their models in the *Aetia* (the *Victoria Berenices* and the *Coma*), beyond individual instances of imitation and allusion, the role of Vergil's Cyrene as a kind of symbol for Callimachus reflects Vergil's desire to give Callimachus a pivotal role in the *Georgics* and in his literary history of ancient epic and didactic poetry. But it also reflects his keen awareness of the cultural and political background to Callimachus' literary world, that of Ptolemaic Alexandria, and his exploration of Greco-Egyptian cultural links. It is no accident that the third book of the poem opens with reference of the victories of Caesar in Egypt and Vergil's desire to write praise poetry about them, nor that the source of the solution to the loss of Aristaeus' bees is initially set in Egypt (4.287–292). The Egyptian practice of *bugonia* is presented as barbaric and it is thus distanced, apparently set up at the outset as 'the other'. But ultimately, from *bugonia* as practised by Aristaeus comes success and the renewal of the hives. Vergil is here considering the problematic nature of sacrifice in Roman religion in a general sense,[42] but more precisely, and more topically, this shift can also be read as indicating that Egypt is in the process of becoming Romanised. The introduction to the whole episode begins by underlining the Macedonian origin of the Greeks in Egypt (4.287–288 *nam qua Pellaei gens fortunata Canopi/ accolit effuso stagnantem flumine Nilum*, "Where favoured Macedonian colonists/ Dwell at Canopus by the wide expanses/ Of the Nile's flood"). But this cultural shift from Greece to Egypt was, with Octavian's victories over Antony and Cleopatra in 31-30 BCE (cf. most precisely 3.26-29 where the conquered Nile will appear on the doors of the temple to Caesar), turning into a further translation of power, from Alexandria and Egypt to Rome and Italy. Vergil's concerns involve both the current state of Rome's relations with and conquest of Egypt, and the political aspects of Callimachus' *encomium* of the Ptolemaic house. Politics and poetics are enmeshed throughout. For Greece, Egypt and Ptolemy in Callimachus we can read Italy, Egypt and Caesar in Vergil, who is using the poet from Cyrene and his investigations of cultural interactions between Greece and Egypt to reflect on contemporary interactions between Italy and Egypt.

This essay began with a quotation of the Northern Irish poet Seamus Heaney, taken from his review of Peter Fallon's new translation of the

42. See Feeney (2004).

Georgics. The very act of translation affirms the work's grip on the imagination and the belief that it still has something to say to modern readers. At the same time, Heaney's own poetry shows distinct traces of the influence of the *Georgics*.[43] He draws on Vergil for ways of thinking about the land, both as earth to be ploughed and, in a political sense, as territory to be owned, fought over and ruled. Few modern poets have explored in such starkly direct and gripping ways the realities of politics and divided national identity, bloody violence and the role of the poet in times of civil war. In doing so, Heaney has always been close to the spirit of Vergil. In his *Field Work*, first published in 1979, we read, in a series of sonnets reflecting on art and the role of the poet in troubled times, of "Vowels ploughed into other, opened ground,/ Each verse returning like the plough turned round." There could hardly be a better way of underlining the ongoing relevance and importance of Vergil's reflections on poetry and politics, on Greek poetry and on the troubled state of Italy in a poem in which the second line begins with a Latin word meaning 'plough,' *vertere*, which at the same time, by its placement in enjambement, puns on the word for verse, *versus*.[44] To write about ploughing means not only to write about the land, it means also to write about mankind, culture, history and sense of identity. As Heaney explores the "opened ground" of modern Ireland, Vergil 'turns' the earth of Italy and charts the emergence of a new world order. In order to do so, he draws extensively on Greek poetry in the writing of a poem that marks the beginning of a new epoch in the history of Latin literature.

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43. See Thomas (2001).

44. On lines 1-2 as an allusive gesture to Aratus, with punning on his name and ploughing (*terram vertere* = *arare*) see Katz (2008).

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