



The "Sacrifice" at the End of the Georgics, Aristaeus, and Vergilian Closure

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his better judgment, perhaps⁴⁷—because it was simply too good a story to exclude. As for the dates 42–39, since they actually conflict with Servius' general opinion as to when the *Eclogues* were written, they can hardly be his invention. They are not obviously derived from anything in the poems themselves, nor are they attractive for external reasons. On these grounds, they probably stand a good chance of being right. In the case of such an evidentiary muddle, certainty remains impossible; but unless we can show that the traditional view is wrong—and the theory about Octavian in *Eclogue* 8 is very far from proof—our most reasonable assumption is that 42–39 B.C. are correct dates established by an early scholar and dutifully, if uncritically, handed on by generations of his successors along with the other, conflicting and more obviously unreliable, information.

JOSEPH FARRELL
University of Pennsylvania

47. Zetzel, "Triumviral History," p. 141.

THE "SACRIFICE" AT THE END OF THE *GEORGICS*, ARISTAEUS, AND VERGILIAN CLOSURE

In a recent article on the *bugonia* at the end of the *Georgics*, T. N. Habinek¹ has attempted to apply the findings of W. Burkert and to a lesser extent M. Detienne and other anthropologists and historians of religion to this part of the poem. He aims to account for the difference in detail between the *bugonia* in the middle of the fourth book and that at the end by seeing in the extensive sacrifice detected in the latter a reaffirmation of correct relations between the human and the divine. The poem thus ends well, with Aristaeus, the Promethean "trickster," performing the sacrifice; and it is through this 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" (p. 202). This ends the process begun at 2. 536–37, where at the transition from the Golden Age an impious race feasted on slaughtered cattle—a "sacral procedure" (p. 215). The end of the poem is constituted by "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" (p. 218). And so "the tragedy [of Orpheus] must not blind us to the success of the trickster Aristaeus with which the poem concludes" (p. 220).

Now neither the overall viewpoint here represented (that Aristaeus' success is a positive phenomenon, leaving little or no room for uneasiness), nor the specific focus (that some sort of sacral ceremony resolves the tensions of the poem), is

1. "Sacrifice, Society, and Vergil's Ox-born Bees," in *Cabinet of the Muses: Essays on Classical and Comparative Literature in Honor of Thomas G. Rosenmeyer*, ed. M. Griffith and D. J. Mastronarde (Atlanta, 1990), pp. 209–23.

particularly new.² The attempt to situate such solutions in other passages of sacrificial import in the poem is a novelty, however, as are the appeal to general theories about the meaning of Greek sacrifice and the insistence that these apply to ox-slaughter at the end of *Georgics* 4.³ It therefore seems worthwhile to go over the issue, since this most recent restatement is problematic in several ways.⁴

I suppose that these findings may seem quite attractive for two reasons. First, they fit well into the recently resurgent “Augustan” readings of Vergil; and second, they will perhaps appeal to those whose critical-theoretical interests lie in the area of New Historicism,⁵ as well as to those who, particularly in Greek studies, use the varied documents that have come down to us as a vehicle for the recovery of knowledge and theories about the religious institutions of antiquity, and in turn use those theories (naturally enough and at times productively) as critical tools. But central elements of Habinek’s claims need to be examined against Vergil’s text, as well as in the context of other parts of the poem, for that has not happened in the present case—as Habinek himself admits: “To be honest, I do not feel sufficiently well-acquainted with all aspects of the *Georgics* to promote [a detailed reading] here.”⁶ Criticism of the *Georgics* more than that of any other Latin poem often presents itself as complete or definitive in terms of the overall “message” of the work even though based, as here, on only a small part of the whole—generally “purple passages” such as the ends of Books 2 or 4. We will return to this question later.

Let us look to the evidence. First, the ox-slaughtering at the end of the poem. Is it “easy enough to demonstrate” that this is a formal sacrifice? Cyrene tells Aristaetus how to appease the nymphs and get back his bees (*G.* 4. 538–47):

“quattuor eximios praestanti corpore tauros,
qui tibi nunc viridis depascunt summa Lycaei,
delige, et intacta totidem cervice iuvencas.
quattuor his aras alta ad delubra dearum

2. Here I shall largely confine myself to criticism of the last generation, so as to avoid the charge of *invidia*. F. Klingner’s is one major treatment that saw a satisfying closure to the poem, with renewal and redemption in the *bugonia* outweighing the loss involved in the fates of Orpheus and Eurydice (*Virgils: “Bucolica,” “Georgica,” “Aeneis”* [Zurich, 1967], pp. 326–63). L. P. Wilkinson’s response is just one of many: “What gives one pause is rereading the poem. If Virgil, consciously at least, intended us to draw such conclusions, would he not have described the rebirth of the bees in lines less perfunctory than 554–8? Would he not have given us some clearer indication that this is to be a symbol of resurrection and life everlasting?” (*The “Georgics” of Virgil* [Cambridge, 1969], p. 119). For an earlier judgment against Orpheus (who, in his “moral weakness,” “lacks strength of character”), and for Aristaetus who is “presumed” to learn his lesson (a presumption Habinek shares: see p. 219: “the ritual learning of Aristaetus”; cf. below on this) and whose story is felt to “represent atonement and revival,” see B. Otis, *Virgil: A Study in Civilized Poetry* (Oxford, 1964), pp. 212–14; again Wilkinson (p. 120) finds Otis’ interpretation “inflated and fanciful ‘uplift.’” For prior stressing of the ritual resolution at the end of the poem, see G. B. Miles, *Virgil’s “Georgics”: A New Interpretation* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1980), pp. 284–89; he does not, however, talk of ox-sacrifice, possibly for reasons that will emerge.

3. Habinek talks about “Greco-Roman” sacrifice, religion, etc., but as he admits, scholars such as Burkert do not in fact provide much in the way of evidence for or discussion of the Roman side of things.

4. There is also a certain amount of discussion of the bees, much of which I confess I do not really follow; I shall here confine myself to the primary issue under discussion, that of sacrifice in the *Georgics*.

5. I take this on one level to be a mode that uses texts, broadly (and at times indiscriminately) defined, to affirm cultural and social theories of various sorts, and then presents these findings as in some way equivalent to, or possibly substitutes for, criticism. This may be a productive mode, particularly in terms of cultural history; its applicability as a critical mode to the literary texts of antiquity may, however, be another matter.

6. “Sacrifice,” p. 213.

constitue, et sacrum iugulis demitte cruorem,
 corporaque ipsa boum frondoso desere luco.
 post, ubi nona suos Aurora ostenderit ortus,
 inferias Orphei Lethaea papavera mittes
 et nigram mactabis ovem, lucumque revises;
 placatam Eurydicen vitula venabere caesa.”

Aristaeus then proceeds to carry out both parts of the instructions (*G.* 4. 549–53):

ad delubra venit, monstratas excitat aras,
 quattuor eximios praestanti corpore tauros
 ducit et intacta totidem cervice iuencas.
 post, ubi nona suos Aurora induxerat ortus,
 inferias Orphei mittit, lucumque revisit.

Now Habinek claims that “the separate slaughter of the black sheep and the heifer in honor of Orpheus and Eurydice [are] part of the same sacral complex [as the ox-slaughtering]” (p. 212). So they are, but the two events are distinct in quality and in time: they occur nine days apart, and Vergil is at pains to separate them (544, 552, *post, ubi nona . . .*); the fact that they are linked does not make the ox-slaughtering a part of the sacrifice. Rather, the offerings of poppies (nowhere mentioned—not sacrificial), ewe, and heifer secure the generation of bees from the corpses of the four bulls and four heifers, which have been slaughtered solely to provide the *locus* for that generation. It is also claimed that in this second *bugonia* we are dealing with sacrifice because here the animal does not struggle, as it does in the first (301), a phenomenon that would, in real sacral terms, have caused the abandonment of the ceremony. But if we are to judge the two passages by their adherence or lack of adherence to prescribed form, we should be thorough: what are we to say of the procedural correctness of a “sacrifice” in which the slaughter is followed by the discarding of the entire bodies (543 *corporaque ipsa boum*) of the bulls and heifers for nine days? If animal sacrifice “is basically ritual slaughter . . . with the feast ensuing,”⁷ what sort of feast (none occurs) would that have been on day 10?

In general Habinek is at pains to unite the production of the eight carcasses for the purposes of *bugonia* (538–43) with the offerings, sacrificial and otherwise, which ensure the success of the bees’ generation from those carcasses (544–47), and there are difficulties with the way in which he does this. In the following there is complete disregard for the distinction that Vergil has clearly made: “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).”⁸ Given the errors in this sentence, that it ends as it does is, to say the least, ironical: (1) If the four heifers are offerings to the nymphs, and if they are functionally parallel to the sheep and calf (they are not), so are the four bulls. How do these bulls “resemble” the virgin nymphs? (2) The “black sheep” resembles Orpheus, we presume, as the female calf resembles Eurydice. I assume the sex of the sheep is meant; but our sheep, as we have seen, is

7. W. Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1979), p. 54.

8. “Sacrifice,” p. 212.

a ewe (546 *nigram . . . ovem*). (3) These heifers are said to be appropriate to the nymphs because both groups are virgins. But Eurydice was one of these nymphs and presumably even still considered one by the fellow nymphs who wept at her death (460 *chorus aequalis Dryadum*; 533 *cum quibus illa chorus . . . agitabat*), and she was no virgin (456 *coniuge*; 465 *coniunx*); if her companions were virgins rather than nymphs (there is a difference), Vergil does not tell us so, and it would therefore seem not to be an issue. And as for those other “virgins,” the heifers (*intacta cervice*—“a phrase ignored or misinterpreted by all the commentators”), I wrote in my commentary: “**intacta . . . ceruice**: i.e. not yet used in ploughing,” referring as a parallel to a similar sacral context at *Aeneid* 6. 38–39 *nunc grege de intacto septem mactare iuencos*⁹—where the sex of the bullocks renders any metaphorical level impossible. I stand by this explanation, namely, that Vergil refers to the age of the animals, a standard phenomenon in agronomical treatments.¹⁰ Sometimes the language of yoking is just the language of yoking.

What now of the ox-slaughtering in Book 2, which is said to begin the theme of sacrifice in the poem?¹¹ Again, we should provide a text, in its context. The idealized life of the farmer is being compared to a version of the golden age (*G.* 2. 532–38):

hanc olim veteres vitam coluere Sabini,
hanc Remus et frater; sic fortis Etruria crevit
scilicet et rerum facta est pulcherrima Roma,
septemque una sibi muro circumdedit arces.
ante etiam sceptrum Dictaei regis et ante
impia quam caesis gens est epulata iuencis,
aureus hanc vitam in terris Saturnus agebat.

We are told, with regard to line 537, that “the race that saw fit to feast on slaughtered oxen is described as impious—a provocative oxymoron in a context describing a sacral procedure” (p. 215). Why is this a sacral procedure? Because, we are told, *epulor* may in origin refer to eating in connection with a sacrifice.¹² Various instances are adduced from the *Aeneid* to support this claim, but there is no reference, for instance, to *Georgics* 3. 527, where there is no sacral context (the *epulae* are those of oxen), and where, as often in Latin, the word chiefly denotes the scale and luxury of the feasting. If *epulor* appears along with sacrifice in some epic contexts, that is because feasting and sacrifice often go together in such contexts, but that does not legitimize seeing sacrifice wherever we see the word. Again, small

9. *Vergil: “Georgics,”* vol. 2 (Cambridge, 1988), p. 238.

10. Cf. Varro *Rust.* 1. 20, on breaking oxen; this passage makes it clear that both sexes were used in ploughing: “ubi terra levis, ut in Campania, ibi non bubus gravibus, sed vaccis aut asinis quod arant, eo facilius ad aratrum leve adduci possunt” (1. 20, 4).

11. In fact, there is an earlier reference to real sacrifice, not mentioned by Habinek, at 2. 145–48 (“hinc bellator equus campo sese arduus infert, / hinc albi, Clitumne, greges et maxima taurus / victima, saepe tuo perfusi flumine sacro, / Romanos ad templa deum duxere triumphos”). I have argued elsewhere (*Lands and Peoples in Roman Poetry: The Ethnographical Tradition*, Proc. Camb. Philol. Soc., Supp. 7 [Cambridge, 1982], p. 40) that these lines, with their sole emphasis on the military use of horses and sacrificial victims, strike a discordant note with the designation of Italy as *Saturnia tellus* (2. 173); cf. also Thomas, “*Georgics*,” 1:183. The sacrifice at 3. 22–23, which Habinek mentions in passing (“Sacrifice,” p. 215), likewise appears in the context of military conquest and triumph (cf. 3. 24–33), and has nothing to do with Vergil’s presenting sacrifice as society’s renewal of correct relations with the gods, and the like.

12. So A. Ernout and A. Meillet, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine: Histoire des mots*⁴ (Paris, 1979), p. 199.

words are being made to carry large loads; if Vergil meant that a sacrifice occurred, he would have said so. He could for instance have written *operata* for *epulata*, which he did in a real sacral context elsewhere in the poem (l. 339–40 “*annua magna / sacra refer Cereri laetis operatus in herbis*.”¹³ Or are we simply to see full-blown sacrifice, with all of Burkert’s implications, every time an ox dies or is eaten?

We are next told that to comprehend the ritual and sacrificial import of all of this “we must return yet again to the literary traditions that inform Vergil’s accounts of ox-slaughter in *Georgics* 2 and 4” (p. 215). Suddenly, and for no apparent reason arising from the poem, we are referred to Prometheus and Hesiod—“rugged” Hesiod, whose influence on Vergil, we are elsewhere told, “literary historians [unnamed] are in the habit of minimizing” (p. 216). Perhaps that is because literary historians know that these very lines from *Georgics* (536–37 “*ante / impia quam caesis gens est epulata iuvenis*”) translate the words and context of Aratus *Phaenomena* 131–32 οἱ . . . πρῶτοι δὲ βοῶν ἐπάσαντ’ ἀροτήρων.¹⁴ Aratus, an author never mentioned in Habinek’s article, is discussing the transition from the golden to the later, debased ages. At this transition, men began to eat their ploughing-oxen. These famous lines had already been translated by Cicero (*Arat. frag.* 18 Soubiran “*ausaque funestum primast fabricarier ensem, / et gustare manu iunctum domitumque iuencum*”), and Vergil’s avoidance of the rather clumsy way in which Cicero translated βοῶν . . . ἀροτήρων (“*manu iunctum domitumque iuencum*”) is facilitated by the prominence of the lines in the Greco-Roman tradition of the *Phaenomena*, as well as by the fact that in the *Georgics* *iuencus* is the most common word for “ploughing-ox.”¹⁵ It looks as if Vergil was following Varro: “*iuencus, iuvare qui iam ad agrum colendum posset*” (*Ling.* 5. 96).¹⁶ In each of these cases (Aratus, Cicero, and Vergil) the eating of ploughing-oxen serves as a paradigm for the post-Saturnian Fall; the notion of animal sacrifice, which would mitigate that act and thereby render the lines nonsensical, is not involved in any of the versions. Virgil’s *impius*, incidentally, is thoroughly traditional in this context,¹⁷ rather than a “provocative oxymoron.”

So much for these two “sacrifices,” then, which are not quite sacrifices (one lacks the mandatory eating of the flesh, the other lacks any ceremony or mention of sacrifice), but which are made to carry an interpretative load requiring that they be fully recognizable as conventional instances of sacrifice. When Vergil wants to describe a sacrifice, he is perfectly capable of doing so. And he does in fact do so, in a passage to which Habinek does not refer, although it is the only *actual* instance of a formal sacrifice in the poem. Here it is (*G.* 3. 486–93):

saepe in honore deum medio stans hostia ad aram,
lanea dum nivea circumdatur infula vitta,

13. Cf. also *Aen.* 3. 136 “*conubiis arvisque novis operata iuventus*,” on which Servius notes “*perfecit sacrificia*”; also Livy 1. 31. 8 “*tradunt [Tullum] . . . operatum his sacris se abdidisse*,” and *passim*.

14. For this, see Thomas, “*Georgics*,” 1: 262–63.

15. So at 2. 237, 357, 515; 3. 50, 169, 518; 4. 128.

16. See *TLL* 7. 2. 730. 39–40; the derivation is false, of course, since the word is really related to *iuvenis*.

17. The locus classicus for the use of *pious* to define the ethics of man in the golden age is Hor. *Epod.* 16. 63 (of the Isles of the Blest): “*Iuppiter illa piaev secrevit litora genti, / ut inquinavit aere tempus aureum; / aere, dehinc ferro duravit saecula, quorum / piis secunda vate me datur fuga*.” And cf. Ov. *Met.* 1. 149–50, adapting the same passage of Aratus (as he describes the most debased, iron, age): “*victa iacet pietas, et virgo caede mudentis / ultima caelestium terras Astraera reliquit*.” *Pietas* leaves with Iustitia, Aratus’ Δίκη (*Phaen.* 105).

inter cunctantis cecidit moribunda ministros;
aut si quam ferro mactaverat ante sacerdos,
inde neque impositis ardent altaria fibris,
nec responsa potest consultus reddere vates,
ac vix suppositi tinguntur sanguine cultri
summaque ieiuna sanie infuscatur harena.

This is a real sacrifice (*hostia, aram, infula, vitta, ministros, ferro mactaverat, sacerdos, altaria, fibris, responsa, vates, cultri*), one which man attempts to carry out, with disastrous and disturbing failure, during the disease and death of plague, in the age of Jupiter, which will also be the cultural condition of the disease and death of the bees' society (4. 149–52)—a cultural condition which *bugonia* will hardly avert from their future. For the bees do not secure immortality; a new hive is merely secured, a new hive that will exist with all the frailty that man and beast are subject to in the world of the *Georgics*. Any interpretation of the poem, then, that claims resolution to the problems of this world through sacrifices which are not real sacrifices, and at the same time fails to confront the only actual sacrifice the poem contains, must be found wanting.¹⁸

“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” (Habinek, p. 213). This sounds culturally reassuring and satisfying from the aspect of closure, but what does it mean in the context of Vergil's poem? Or of Vergil? Why should we assume that Vergil is interested in expressing support for the notion of civilized human society's need to “restore itself by re-establishing the right relations between humans, gods, and beasts”? Or that this is what the *Georgics* works toward? It is precisely the assumption that this poem must have a “closed” ending that generates the critical violence necessary to secure that closed ending. D. P. Fowler has recently warned against subscribing to the traditional assumption that the texts of classical literature are generally “closed” rather than “open.” Even with regard to the *Iliad*, whose ending is in some ways satisfactory, he notes that “to make it too satisfactory would smugly ‘shut off’ the events in a way which removed the moral challenge of the poem.”¹⁹ If that is true of the *Iliad*, how much more so of the *Georgics* (I refrain in the present context from mentioning Vergil's next poem). We have a choice: either we accept that this is an “open” ending, as for instance J. Griffin implicitly does: “for my part I cannot feel that the restoration of the bees outweighs the suffering and the death of Orpheus and Eurydice. . . . An exquisite ambivalence surely persists”;²⁰ or we can try to impose a closed ending on the poem, a natural human, but misguided and disastrous critical, tendency.

18. And if we go outside the context of the *Georgics*, to the *Aeneid*, we find the same ambivalence about the efficacy and even the institution of sacrifice. In a brilliant and compelling transference in *Aeneid* 2, Vergil first presents Laocoön engaged in ox-sacrifice (201–2 “Laocoön, ductus Neptuno sorte sacerdos, / sollemnis taurum ingentem mactabat ad aras”—again, when he means sacrifice, he tells us, even if in brief), then proceeds to invert tenor and vehicle, as he so often does, in his description of the death-throes of the priest (223–24 “clamores simul horrendos ad sidera tollit: / qualis mugitus, fugit cum saucius aram / taurus et incertam excussit cervice securim”).

19. “First Thoughts on Closure: Problems and Prospects,” *MD* 22 (1989): 75–122; cf. 82; the article contains extensive bibliography on the topic of closure.

20. “The Fourth *Georgic*, Virgil and Rome,” *GR* 26 (1979): 71 = *Latin Poets and Roman Life* (London, 1985), p. 176.

Even if we allow that sacrifice “re-establishes” these “right relations” in some Greco-Roman thinking, we cannot therefore apply that to the thinking of Vergil, much less call it criticism of Vergil, for Vergil and this poem may give rise to all sorts of like speculation. Depending on what part of the poem we choose to look at, we could judge him (and his whole work, if that is the only part we consider) pantheist, primitivist, atheist or animist, Stoic, Democritean, Epicurean, or fundamentalist Olympian, or any combination of these systems and others like them. And can we ever say of “the Romans” (or even “the Greeks” for that matter) that for them “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” (p. 212)—even if we add footnotes referring to Burkert’s theories on Greek religion? Would not some Romans find such a proposition as ridiculous and trite as we do? Would not some be as horrified and repulsed at witnessing the slaughter of oxen as we would? Or would they feel that they had thereby affirmed correct relations with the gods—whoever they were?

Habinek finds it “unfortunate that modern scholars persist in regarding the opposition between Aristaeus and Orpheus in simplistic, moralizing terms,” and he observes that “Aristaeus may not be a likable figure to the modern reader” (p. 218). On the other hand, he speaks of a “modern student of sacrifice” (p. 212), as if this latter is somehow likelier to get him closer to the “truth” of the poem. It is almost as if we were to imagine that Vergil had read (and believed) such modern students of sacrifice, who after all are merely interpreting texts (broadly defined) themselves, and imposing their own theories about origins and functions when the evidence is largely lost, and where comprehension was largely lost for historical practitioners such as Vergil’s contemporaries.

One frequently finds, as we do here, dismissal of current evaluations of Vergil, particularly evaluations of the “pessimistic” type, on the basis that we are being “modern,” or applying “modern sensibilities” to this poet, and are not considering this or that aspect of “antiquity.” A good instance of such an attitude may be found in K. Galinsky’s recent article, “The Anger of Aeneas,”²¹ in which we also find “Greco-Roman” traditions invoked against the “postulate of modern critics,”²² in this case concerning anger. These Greco-Roman traditions turn out to consist mainly of Aristotelian views of anger and its place in the system of Greek justice—notions which, it might be argued, likewise have a tenuous relation to the Vergilian outlook. In the present case Hesiod’s view of gods and society (as interpreted by modern scholars) and the function of sacrifice (invented by “a descendant of the apes” and interpreted by a modern scholar)²³ are thrust upon us as a way of explaining a whole poem, of which only a handful of lines has been brought under any consideration (and that demonstrably cavalier), and which is written by

21. *AJP* 109 (1988): 325.

22. Does “Greco-Roman” mean much more than “that which is attested as occurring in Greece or (not even ‘and’) Rome?” I doubt it, and if I am right, then the designation is, in cultural and intellectual terms, so inclusive as to be virtually meaningless.

23. Burkert, *Structure and History*, p. 54.

a poet who is further removed in time (and spirit, I would maintain)²⁴ from Hesiod than we are from Chaucer—not to mention from that “descendant of the apes.”

As for the Aristaëus–Orpheus event, we can also talk, as Habinek and others have, of the story of Orpheus in terms of “the lessons it can offer” Aristaëus²⁵—thereby perhaps giving ourselves a kinder, gentler Aristaëus. But there is absolutely nothing *in the poem* to suggest that Aristaëus is in any way affected by the story of Orpheus. The only context in which he figures (547–53) after the song of Proteus is in the carrying out of the practical, utilitarian instructions of his mother, Cyrene (548 *matris praecepta facessit*). He merely does what he has to do in order to recover his bees, for that is his sole obsession: to understand why he lost the hive so as to get it back (4. 396–97 “ut omnem / expediat [sc. Proteus] morbi causam eventusque secundet”). Even Brooks Otis, who is thoroughly representative of the optimistic reader, both of the *Georgics* and the *Aeneid*, was compelled to conclude that “the Aristaëus part of the episode remains a fairy story: we cannot quite take his atonement seriously; the sacrifice to the nymphs seems hardly sufficient and there is no real evidence of contrition in Aristaëus himself.”²⁶

This, however, is probably not the place for yet another view of Aristaëus, and in the present case I should be largely repeating myself.²⁷ Some will be satisfied to be left with a Vergil who presents us with a culmination to his poem that consists of the revival of a society devoid of love, art, and any culture beyond the pursuit of order and toil, and with a successful Aristaëus who is driven only to recreate that society. To do so, however, they will have to ignore large stretches of the poem, and will have to read a great deal into the poem, and will also have to distort its text. But others will continue to find something troubling about the way that Vergil ends the *Georgics*, not only from the vantage point of external, or “modern” sensibility, but also from the perspective of the Vergilian sensibility as it is manifest throughout his corpus. I conclude with some perceptive recent remarks by D. P. Fowler:²⁸

Too many of the New Augustans [those who oppose themselves to the so-called “Harvardian pessimists”] are conducting the debate with the sophistication of the Englishman abroad who thinks that if he shouts loud enough eventually understanding will dawn in even the most stubborn brain. . . . It is no use simply outlining “What The Ancients Thought” and expecting that to make literary criticism redundant: the reconstructions offered are partial and inevitably themselves based on (usually naive) critical reading.

Neither view, fortunately, can be legislated, nor are literary works the property of critics, with single, easy meanings attached to them, but we should attend to the words of Vergil, and to this poem in its complex entirety, as we take our stands.²⁹

RICHARD F. THOMAS
Harvard University

24. To assume otherwise is largely to fall into the “generic fallacy.” I would still maintain (and nothing in Habinek’s article has dissuaded me) that “for Virgil as for Callimachus Hesiod is more of a notional model” (*Georgics*, 1: 6).

25. “Sacrifice,” p. 218.

26. *Virgil*, p. 211.

27. Cf. Thomas, “*Georgics*,” 1: 21–24.

28. “Roman Literature” (omnibus rev.). *GR* 37 (1990): 106.

29. I have profited from helpful suggestions by the Editor and by two anonymous readers.