

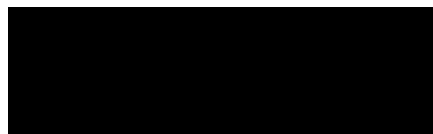
Placuisse apibus mirabere morem:
Understanding Inconsistency and Thematic Shifts in
Vergil's Fourth *Georgic*

By Henry Ross

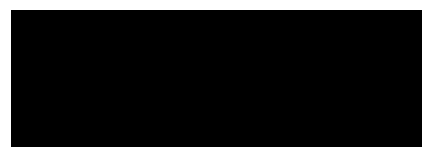
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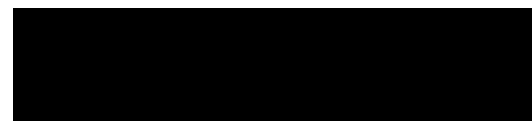
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I. Introduction

As David Ross and others have pointed out, the amount of attention Vergil devotes to bees and beekeeping in his *Georgics* is uncharacteristic of ancient agricultural works.¹ Bees and beekeeping occupy the first half of Book 4, and two descriptions of the rebirth of bees from the carcass of a cow frame the stories of Orpheus and Aristaeus in the second half of the book. Vergil's bee passages have therefore received much attention, much of it focusing on how the passages refer in various ways to the first three books of the poem, to the *Eclogues* and (forward to) the *Aeneid*, and to Vergil's ancient sources.

There is a risk, however, in reading Vergil's account of the bees as a collage of these references, as older scholarship has tended to do.² Such a reading permits inconsistencies in Vergil's treatment of the bees to be attributed to, say, thematic or stylistic differences between Hesiod and Homer, or to Vergil's interest in juxtaposing Hesiod and Homer. This study instead will explore variation in the bee passages as a technique used by Vergil to interweave different themes and narrative perspectives that are primarily Vergilian creations. Without doubt, as part of this technique, Vergil draws occasionally and selectively from other authors. It will be necessary, however, to examine points at which Vergil *distinguishes* his apian elements from—rather than connects them to—the literary tradition.

¹ Ross, p. 188.

² See O'Hara's discussion and footnote 15 on p. 84, citing the resistance of Perkell (1989, p. 113) and others to La Penna's assertion that Vergil was at times unable to integrate his source material fluidly into the *Georgics*.

Narrator, audience, and subject matter do not wed themselves to any one ancient source. These elements also do not conform to a consistent representation within the *Georgics*. They undergo abrupt shifts within sections and even sentences in Book 4. These abrupt shifts create thematic tensions in the poem. In Book 4, is the narrator a beekeeping expert, an aspiring epic-Augustan poet, or a sensitive and autonomous Orpheus figure? Is his audience interested in agriculture, war, or art? And are his bees hardworking, violent, or lazy by nature? There are numerous such tensions in the first half of Book 4, and by identifying, classifying, and interpreting them, this study offers an alternative to ascribing Vergil's inconsistencies to tradition, error or carelessness.

I will examine these competing threads as (1) georgic-didactic, (2) military-political, and (3) diversionary-poetic. This framework is vulnerable to overlap or exception, but will nonetheless be useful for finding order in Book 4's disrupted reading experience. The dominant thread throughout much of the poem is, of course, georgic: a georgic narrator (didactic poet) offering georgic advice (farming *praecepta*) to a georgic listener (*agricola*). At any given point, however—particularly but by no means exclusively in Book 4—any one of these elements might be transmuted. Thus, we see co-existing in Book 4 the various manifestations of these elements. There is (1) the didactic poet, but also (2) the epic-imperial poet of the book's proem and (3) the sympathetic poet of the epyllion. These are not distinct narrators—except when speakers are introduced during the *Aristaeus*—but rather a single narrator with varying interests, sensibilities, and advice. There is the ostensible addressee of (1) the hard-working farmer/beekeeper, but also (2) the audience of the Roman *Quiris*—emperor, patron, or citizen—or (3) of the sympathetic reader-poet, agriculturally ignorant and politically disinterested. Finally, there are (1) the productive worker bee laboring *munere suo*, (2) the kings and leaders watching over their

swarms *vere suo*, and (3) the drone or other bees luxuriating *more suo*, with the leisure and fancies of the poet in the sphragis.³ These themes will be developed further in the following section.

Careful study of how Vergil uses language to mix competing perspectives in his bee passages reveals ways in which Vergil invites readers to approach his narrator with skepticism and to grapple—as Vergil himself did—with the didactic, political, and poetic features of the narrative. After surveying the *Georgics*' thematic antecedents in my next section, in sections 3-6 I will identify markers of thematic change and inconsistency in the narrator's description of bee society. Sections 7-9 will focus on specific blocks of text that demonstrate patterns of what I call “thematic trumping.” I will conclude by considering ways in which the speakers of the *Aristaeus* in the second half of Book 4, particularly Proteus, adapt the narrative models of the bee passages. The end of the *Georgics*, I argue, should be read with the same sensitivity to the limitations of the narrator that I encourage elsewhere in Book 4.

II. The context of the *Georgics*

This changeable narrator, audience, and subject matter are Vergil's own. That is, their particularities and interrelationships do not trace closely to any one source material (or historical event). Particularly in Book 4, when Vergil borrows from his sources, he usually borrows from short phrases rather than full ideas.⁴ This is not the place for a thorough examination of

³ *Georgics*, Book 4, lines 178, 66 and 22 respectively.

⁴ Whitfield, p. 100.

intertextuality or Roman politics circa 30 BC, but I will now survey the didactic, political, and poetic context within which the poet wrote as a prologue to my definition of three corresponding Vergilian threads.

A great number of Vergil's literary sources fall under the category of (1) georgic-didactic. Proper—usually individual—behavior is their shared concern, from prescriptive accounts of agricultural techniques to direct commands of a practical or philosophical nature. They emphasize duty, self-control, productivity, knowledge, and science. Lucretius' didactic poem *De rerum natura* is widely considered the primary Roman source for at least the first three books of the *Georgics*. Hesiod's *Works and Days* from the eighth or seventh century BC, with its focus on labor after the fall of the Golden Age, is Vergil's chief example of Greek didactic poetry. Aratus' scientific-philosophical *Phaenomena*, and other lost works of prose of the third century BC, figure in Vergil's text as well. Varro's *De re rustica*, which appeared shortly before Vergil began work on the *Georgics*, is an agricultural manual presented through dialogues and an important source in Book 4. Another major source for Book 4, Aristotle's fourth-century *De historia animalium*, pays considerable attention to common beekeeping practice and empirical observations of bees. Vergil would have had available detailed, contemporary agricultural handbooks and other didactic sources that do not survive.

No doubt, the *Georgics* are “too incomplete as a systematic manual,” whether for beekeeping or for life.⁵ Nonetheless, Vergil owes a clear debt to these sources, from which he crafts a “georgic-didactic” narrator who is concerned with the procedure and the exigencies of the farm, “productive” bees who apply themselves thanklessly to their work, and an audience

⁵ Hardie, p. 29. See discussion of didacticism in his section “The Teacher and His Pupils. The Didactic Tradition,” pp. 28-33.

(unrepresentative of Vergil's actual readership) that is interested in instructions—perhaps to the exclusion of glory and emotion.

Vergil also writes within (2) an inescapable political context. His interest in the epic tradition and contemporary politics culminates in the *Aeneid*, but it is prominent in the *Georgics* as well. Homeric similes, images, and language have an undeniable influence on the poem.⁶ Octavian, who sought to connect his new political order to the heroic tradition after the battle of Actium, exerted influence on Vergil as well, either directly or through his close friend Maecenas, the poet's sponsor and poem's dedicatee. The emperor had, if nothing else, the ultimate power to "unwrite" Vergil's poetry.⁷ Thus, Vergil breathed the political atmosphere of Rome, whether his attitude toward it has a positive or negative valence. Vergil therefore was motivated to create a narrator and audience that are—though at times compared to the farmer in his fight for order—preoccupied with violence, glory, leadership, immortality, and patriotism in ways that the farmer is not.

Finally, (3) Vergil wrote within a poetic context. He would have been familiar with the work of Roman elegists and lyric poets who wrote before him and concurrently—including Catullus, Gallus, and Horace. For these poets, agriculture is typically a sideshow put on for artistic effect rather than for the celebration or description of farm labor. When they confront war and other public affairs, these poets generally do so with ambivalence or resistance. The *Georgics* are not love poetry, but military and agricultural austerity gives way to moments of sympathy and sensuality throughout the poem. An anti-political, anti-georgic narrative style surfaces at the points of both greatest *pathos* and greatest levity. At these moments, Vergil's audience must forget the poem's precepts and propaganda and assume a sensitivity to love,

⁶ See especially discussion in Farrell.

⁷ Nappa, p. 7.

leisure, suffering, and death. Servius' dubious claim that the second half of Book 4 was originally a eulogy to Gallus at least recognizes the interest in lyric-elegiac concerns that runs through the poem. Vergil's narrator thus at times resembles these poets in his attention to the diversionary, sensual, and indolent aspects of life, in his expression of pity and sadness,⁸ and in his (sometimes plaintive, sometimes disingenuous) expression of poetry's futility.

III. Competing conceptions: Hive, home, and citadel

Book 4 begins with political and military grandiosity in the first seven lines and moves quickly to didacticism in line 8,⁹ as the beekeeping audience enters the poem to receive instructions on the establishment of a hive. Despite this shift to a new audience and topic, Vergil's narrator lingers on language of the empire, referring in line 8 to the beehive as *sedes* and *statio*. Vergil's usage of these words to first describe the home of the bees is original to Vergil. The original usage exemplifies the tension between his political and didactic purposes. Furthermore, it reveals the need for further examination of the various other words used to label the hive, and of the ways in which these conform to the themes I have set out above.

Sedes and *statio* do not occur in relation to the homes of animals in books 1-3, or for that matter, at all in the *Eclogues* or elsewhere in the *Georgics*. In the *Aeneid*, they combine for 71 appearances,¹⁰ generally to represent the seats or outposts of political power. Absent is the

⁸ Perkell (1989); see especially pp. 25-67 on pity.

⁹ Line 8 suggests a new audience to replace Maecenas in 1-7. For a more detailed elaboration of shifts of audience and theme between passages, see p. 26.

¹⁰ In the *Aeneid*, *statio* appears five times (5.128, 2.23, 9.183, 9.222, 10.297) and *sedes* appears 66 times as a noun, though sometimes it describes an individual's seat, rather than a place of power or protection.

language of Varro, who uses *mellaria*, *melitrophia*, and *melitrophos*.¹¹ *Alvarium* and *apiarium*, also passed over by the narrator, would have been obvious choices as well. *Sedes* and *statio* each make a second and final appearance in the *Georgics*. *Sedes* is applied to the hive which the farmer must infiltrate to perform his unwelcome harvest (4.228). *Statio* describes Proteus' haven outside of which Book 4's mythical farmer prepares his ambush (4.221). Within their militarily evocative "strongholds," the bees and Proteus defend themselves unsuccessfully against agricultural figures: the beekeeper and Aristaeus respectively. Vergil thereby sets agriculture's needs at odds with the political security implied by *sedes* and *statio*.

As discussed later in this chapter, the word *domus* (10) two lines below *sedes* and *statio* will acquire and combine georgic, political, and poetic meanings as Book 4 progresses. For now, however, we may continue to consider the stark opposition of georgic and political hive nomenclature. *Stabula* (usually "stall" or "stopping place") is applied to a beehive at lines 14, 191, and possibly by Aristaeus at 330, though his reference may be to the stalls of his flocks rather than his bees.¹² The word is variously used in the poem as the abode of cattle (1.355, 1.483, 3.228, and 3.352), horses (3.184), sheep (3.295, 4.433), and goats (3.302). It is never applied to human dwellings. By contrast, Vergil's narrator also appropriates *patria* ("homeland"), *urbs* ("city"), *tectum* ("house") and *penates* ("household [gods]") as a part of his apian vocabulary to distinguish his political bees from the other animals of his didactic passages:

solae communis natos, consortia tecta
urbis habent, magnisque agitant sub legibus aevum,
 et patriam solae et certos novere penatis... (*Georgics* 4.153-5)

¹¹ Var. *DRR* 3.16; *favus*, or "honeycomb," is a Varronian word used often by Vergil (22, 104, 141, 161, 179, 214, and 242). In the plural, it can at times substitute for "hive," but is more properly read as a component of the hive than the hive itself.

¹² *fer stabulis inimicum ignem* ("bring hateful fire to the stalls/hives"); the possibility that this is a beehive is supported by its proximity to the first *bugonia* and the possible aversion of bees to smoke and fire discussed elsewhere in Book 4. See p. 35.

They alone have children in common, hold the dwellings of their city jointly, and pass their life under the majesty of law. They alone know a fatherland and a fixed home...¹³

In addition to georgic-didactic and military-political *alvaria*, a sense of the hive as a poetic entity emerges from the words *cunabula*, *cubilia*, and especially *thalamus*.¹⁴ Suggestions of beauty, sex, luxury, and laziness in the hive will be more thoroughly laid out later, but the surprising deployment of these terms at 66, 45/243, and 189 precludes any view of beehives as merely political or agricultural apparatuses. Thus, Vergil's *patria*, *stabula*, and *thalamus* represent the distinct perspectives of narrator-citizen, narrator-farmer, and narrator-poet in Book 4. Proceeding from fatherland to stables to beds, they may also represent the increasing magnification of focus across these narrative perspectives, an idea to which I return at the conclusion of this study.

Vergil allows georgic, didactic, and poetic threads to battle for possession of his two most neutral words for beehives: *tectum* and *domus*. Usually applied to human dwellings, they are nonetheless used numerous times in referring to animals in books 1-4. There is nothing particularly human—or especially political—about smearing wax on homes (*tecta*),¹⁵ or about fighting gusts of wind to bring forage (*pabula*) back to a home (*domus*).¹⁶ As I mentioned above, however, *tecta* almost certainly has an epic-political meaning in a different context. So, too, can *domus*: *at genus immortale manet, multosque per annos / stat fortuna domus* (“the race abides

¹³ All translations, unless noted, belong to Fairclough (1916), ed. Goold (1986). I have substituted my own words where archaisms were distracting. Though *tectum* and *patria* will take on more layered meanings over the course of Book 4, Vergil has shown his ability to use hive vocabulary as an signpost of narrative voice.

¹⁴ The last word can mean “bedroom” or “marriage bed” and frequently carries sexual connotations. This is Latin’s “only non-human (or non-divine) application of the word” (Thomas 1988, p. 182).

¹⁵ *in tectis certatim tenuia cera / spiramenta linunt*, 4.38-9. The audience of book 4 is, however, advised to perform similar tasks to assist the hive.

¹⁶ *nam pabula venti / ferre domum prohibent*, 4.9-10. It should be noted, however, that the old man of Tarentum also brings home food to a *domum* at 4.133. Thus, these usages of *tecta* and *domum* are georgic both in the evocation of farm animals and farmers.

immortal, for many a year stands firm the fortune of the house,” 4.208-9). Finally, the two words encompass the romantic and sympathetic. Servius is right to point out the poetic in how the “tears of narcissus” (*narcissi lacrimam*) are set down in the homes (*domorum*) of the bees,¹⁷ and the *domus* of Lethe participates in perhaps the most poetic moment of the *Georgics* (4.481-83).¹⁸ The bees return to their *tecta* just before they enter their marriage chambers (4.187), and solemnly lead their dead out of homes (*tectis*) just before the first *bugonia* (4.256). In these four passages, then, the two words arise in poetic moments of sadness, art, love, and death. Appropriately, the site of the bees’ rebirth—at the culmination of georgic, political, and poetic in the *bugonia*— will be confined by a *tectum* (4.296).

IV. Shade and drinking

Vergil also drew extensively from Varro’s *De re rustica* in his passages about the apiary’s structure and surrounding area. The hive’s orientation, nearby flowers, building materials, location, entrance size, and other characteristics resemble the lengthy description provided by Merula, the agricultural expert in Varro’s dialogue.¹⁹ Vergil makes—at three separate points—the same important addition to Varro’s template. He associates the shadow (*umbra*) of tree-cover with the bees. Shade, an anti-political and often anti-georgic force throughout the poem with strong positive and negative undertones, plays a similar role with the

¹⁷ Serv. G. 4.160; I will return to this passage in Section 10.

¹⁸ They wonder (*stupere*) at the song of Orpheus: *quin ipsae stupere domus atque intima Leti / tartara caeruleosque implexae crinibus angues / Eumenides...* (“Indeed, the very halls of Hell were spell-bound, and inmost Tartarus, and the Furies with livid snakes entwined in their locks...”)

¹⁹ Var. *DRR*, 3.16.12-17.

bees. When the bees appear in the shade, they invite comparison to the leisurely, the poetic, and even to the poet himself.

Early in the poem, shadows attend the rest hour of the farmer, along with sweet sleep, wine, and honey:

tum pingues agni et tum mollissima uina,
tum somni dulces densaeque in montibus umbrae.
cuncta tibi Cererem pubes agrestis adoret:
cui tu lacte fauos et miti dilue Baccho...(Geo. 1.341-44)

Then are the lambs fat and wine is most mellow; then sweet is sleep, and thick are the shadows on the hills. Then let all your country folks worship Ceres; for her wash the honeycomb with milk and soft wine...

A brief aside in Book 2 mentions the usefulness of trees in providing shady comfort for the shepherds and honey-precursor for the bees:

salices humilesque genistae,
aut illae pecori frondem aut pastoribus umbram
sufficiunt saepemque satis et pabula melli. (Geo. 2.434-46)

The willows and lowly broom—they either yield leafage for the sheep or shade for the shepherd, a fence for the crops and food for honey.

In a first-person interjection, the poet expresses his own desire to experience such shady tranquility (though bees are absent): “O for one to set me in the cool glens of Haemus and shield me under the branches’ mighty shade” (*o qui me gelidis convallibus Haemi / sistat et ingenti ramorum protegat umbra*, Geo. 2.488-89). All three passages may refer to two passages in *Eclogue* 1. In the first, Meliboeus laments his departure from the land while Tityrus reclines under his “spreading beech’s cover” (*recubans sub tegmine fagi*).²⁰ In the second, Meliboeus tells Tityrus that he will fall asleep in the shade to the sound of bees buzzing.

fortunate senex, hic inter flumina nota
et fontis sacros frigus captabis opacum;
hinc tibi, quae semper, vicino ab limite saepes

²⁰ *Ecl.* 1.1.

Hyblaeis apibus florem depasta salicti
 saepe levi somnum suadebit inire susurro. (*Eclogues* 1.51-55)

Happy old man! Here, amid familiar streams and sacred springs, you shall court the cooling shade. On this side, as aforetime, on your neighbour's border, the hedge whose willow blossoms are sipped by Hybla's bees shall often with its gentle hum soothe you to slumber.

In the first *Eclogue* and in the three *Georgics* passages, the narrator uses shade to compose images of human serenity. As discussed later, the poet will call more directly on the *Eclogues* in the final lines of the *Georgics* when he mentions Tityrus by name and remembers his own leisure under the shade of a beech-tree. Now, however, we will consider the ways in which bees and other animals of the *Georgics* enjoy a human kind of shady leisure rather than merely serving as scenery to the indolence of singing shepherds.

One of the narrator's first instructions for the beekeeper is to "let a palm or huge wild olive shade the porch" (*palmaque vestibulum aut ingens oleaster inumbret*, 4.20) so that bees will abandon their political nature and their kings, and seek the hospitable cover of a tree (4.24). The bees are described as "delaying" (*morantes*), a word whose suggestions of sloth and political subversion will be explored later.²¹ As in the passage from *Eclogue* 1 (with *flumina* and *fontis*), the recreation of bees under the shade of trees coincides with several mentions of pools, streams, springs, and drinking.²² In similar fashion, the georgic poet has previously excused animals from their *labor* to describe the idyllic scenes of flocks—rather than producing milk—cooling off, grazing, and drinking stream water in a shadowy valley under the cover of enormous oaks and elms (3.329-38) and pregnant cows—rather than working under the yoke—drinking from streams in the shade (3.139-42). For the flocks and heifers, shade and leisure at least carry the

²¹ See Section 6.

²² *liquidi fontes et stagna virentia musco* (18); *rivus* (19); *vicina...rupa* (23); *umor* (25); *immersit* (29) *inriguum fontem* (32).

desired effects of improved fattening, lactation, and reproduction. Not so for the bees, however, whose only productivity depends on their work.²³

It is difficult to read these lines as belonging to a narrator with a coherent outlook toward the usefulness of shade. So effective, it seems, were the beekeeper's attempts to offer the bees a means of recreation and leisure that he must now override his previous work to return the bees to their hive and to his—as well as the narrator's—task of producing honey. According to the narrator, the bees are *always* engaged in the sort of unproductive behavior the narrator elsewhere suggests they rarely engage in.²⁴ “They are ever in quest of sweet waters and leafy shelters” (*aquas dulcis et frondea semper / tecta petunt*, 4.61-62). The description of the old man of Tarentum, which interrupts the description of the bees, also combines bees, shade, and drinking in a picturesque scene of fertility and Golden Age abundance:

ergo apibus fetis idem atque examine multo
 primus abundare et spumantia cogere pressis
mella favis; illi tiliae atque uberrima pinus,
 quotque in flore novo pomis se fertilis arbor
 induerat, totidem autumnno matura tenebat.
 Ille etiam seras in versum distulit ulmos
 eduramque pirum et spinos iam pruna ferentes
 iamque ministrantem platanum potantibus umbras. (*Geo.* 4.139-48)

So he, too, was first to be enriched with mother-bees and a plenteous swarm, the first to gather frothing honey from the squeezed comb. Luxuriant were his limes and wild laurels; and all the fruits his bounteous tree donned in its early bloom, full as many it kept in the ripeness of autumn. He, too, planted out in rows elms far-grown, pear-trees when quite hard, thorns even now bearing plums, and the plane already yielding to drinkers the service of its shade.

Potantibus in line 148, without a clear antecedent, suggests the possibility that plants, animals, humans, and bees alike are the “drinkers” underneath the shade of the plane-tree.

²³ The only negative effect of heat in Book 4 is that it makes the honey inside the hive too runny (4.36). Providing tree-shade for bees outside the hive, if it is offered as a solution to this problem, would be a very poor solution indeed.

²⁴ See, for example, the work ethic and division of labor of the bees at 4.158-88.

Thus, each of the three times the bees appear in connection with shade, they also appear in connection with drinking. While it would be unreasonable to declare evidence of apian alcoholism in Book 4, the association of bee society with wine is not unprecedented.²⁵ *Potare* certainly has a more indulgent sense than the more neutral *bibere*,²⁶ which is assigned to violets (4.32) and never to the bees. *Lympha* does not appear in Book 4, and *aqua* is used in connection with bee consumption only once, modified by a peculiar usage of *dulcis*. Though streams and pools may suggest water, the *Georgics* has already allowed its readers to imagine streams of wine (1.132). Moreover, *umor* at 25 stands in for an entirely different liquid during the *bugonia*.²⁷ Nor is the consumption of wine by animals unheard of in the poem (3.509-10), or by the bees themselves in Book 4 (4.270-280).²⁸ Whether it was admired or ridiculed, abstinence appears at least to have been recognized as a practice in the ancient world.²⁹ My observation that bees may not be a perfect model of a self-denying society in other respects may hold true even with respect to drinking.

Even if the bees' parallels with drinking humans are tenuous,³⁰ there is little question that *umbra* in Book 4 connects the leisure of bees to the leisure of animals and humans elsewhere in the poem. Shade and leisure can be a part of a pleasant distraction from the more serious tasks of

²⁵ Varro believes that bees can drink themselves into a stupor with mead. Vergil is much less explicit and (erroneously) scientific (Var. *DRR*, 3.16.35).

²⁶ Both words can be used to signify the consumption of alcohol, but *bibere* is applied to all kinds of drinking, while *potare* usually implies drinking excessively or "convivially." See entries in *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, ed. P.G.W. Glare, Oxford, 2012.

²⁷ i.e., the warm pus of the decomposing ox at 4.308.

²⁸ Horses are made to drink a wine-juice (*latices...Lenaeos*, 3.509-10) as a cure for disease, and wine is used in producing a cure for bees as well.

²⁹ Cf. the reference to Callimachus as a water-drinker, in contrast to wine-drinkers Homer and Archilochus, in an epigram of Augustan date by Antipater of Thessalonica, A.P. 11.20 = XX G-P. See Knox, pp. 107-119, who argues that the idea of Callimachus as a water-drinker did not predate Antipater.

³⁰ See, e.g., farmers at 3.379-80.

politics and farming, as it is for Tityrus, the old man of Tarentum and—finally—the poet under the shade of the beech-tree:

illo Vergilium me tempore dulcis alebat
 Parthenope studiis florentem ignobilis oti,
 carmina qui lusi pastorum audaxque iuventa,
 Tityre, te patulae cecini sub tegmine fagi. (*Geo.* 4.563-66)

In those days, I, Vergil, was nursed of sweet Parthenope, and rejoiced in the arts of inglorious ease—I who dallied with shepherds' songs, and in youth's boldness, sang, Tityrus, of you under your spreading beech's cover.

But the humility of the poet and the supposed shallowness of his enterprise cannot be taken at face value here.³¹ Likewise, tree-shade has ambiguous associations for the bees. Is their recreation in it a necessary and harmless distraction from productive society, as it was for the farmers of books 1 and 2? Or are the leisurely bees a surmountable obstacle to be overcome by the farmer, who fights shade elsewhere in the poem?³² Or are they a flock whose occasional lethargy suggests their impending death, as with the sheep of Book 3 (3.364-65)? And with this death, might the bees evoke some of the sympathy of Orpheus—the *Georgics*' most pathetic figure—and the nightingale to whom he is compared, “mourning beneath the poplar's shade” (*populea maerens philomela sub umbra*, 4.511)? As the poetic-sympathetic tenor of Book 4 builds, there is strong reason to read the bees as contributing to this crescendo rather than—as a strictly georgic and political society—at variance with it.

³¹ Griffin, p. 72.

³² e.g., 1.120-1 and 1.157; See also *Ec.* 10.76: “Hurtful to the corn, too, is the shade” (*nocent et frugibus umbrae*).

V. Different seasons, different bees

In addition to hives and hive sites, Vergil uses seasons as thematic markers in Book 4. The season in which the bees are envisioned turns out to be a strong predictor of the bees' behavior at that moment in the text—or at least of the lens through which Vergil's narrator will view it. Homer provided the model for assigning seasonal behavior to bees. In the first major simile of the *Iliad*, he compares the Achaeans preparing for battle to bees swarming about in the spring. The decision to use the springtime—specifically, “spring flowers” (*ἀνθεσιω εἰαρινοῖσιω*)³³—was the poet's choice, as bees are prone to swarming in at least three seasons of the year.

Vergil will follow Homer in the *Aeneid*, comparing Dido's industrious Carthaginians to bees. Season and flowers (*florea rura*, “flowery fields”) once again share a line, but Vergil sets the scene in the “early summer” (*aestate nova*) rather than spring.³⁴ The distinction is easily overlooked because of the similarities that exist between the two passages, but the spring and summer bees may reflect a more readily noticeable difference between the passages: the military context of Homer as opposed to the peaceful and productive image of Vergil. In his second bee simile in the *Aeneid*, Vergil compares the people from the “peaceful abodes” (*domos placidas*) by the river Lethe to bees buzzing about flowers on a “tranquil summer's day” (*aestate serena*).³⁵

In Book 4 of the *Georgics*, the narrator uses spring and summer to distinguish military bees from peaceful, georgic bees. Vergil follows previous apian writers and poets—Varro, Aristotle, Apollonius, Xenophon, and others—in omitting autumn from his apian passages

³³ Homer, *Iliad* 2.89.

³⁴ Verg. *Aen.* 1.430.

³⁵ *Aen.* 6.707.

entirely.³⁶ Finally, Vergil breaks sharply from tradition in an unprecedented (and certainly unrepresentative) description of the winter plague of the bees. The plague thus recalls the leisure, sloth, pleasure, and destruction that accompany winter elsewhere in the poem.³⁷

Before they are tempted by trees and water to break rank and open up their wings to the summer sun (4.28),³⁸ young bees come out in swarms in the springtime (*vere*). The kings who lead them suggest that a miniature military operation is underway (*ducent examina reges*, 4.21-22). Later, after a dispute between their leaders, they rally around a king again and pick a “clear spring day” on which to engage in battle:

et circa regem atque ipsa ad praetoria densae
miscentur magnisque vocant clamoribus hostem.
Ergo ubi ver nactae sudum camposque patentes,
erumpunt portis...(Geo. 4.75-78)

Round their king, and even by his royal tent, they swarm in throngs, and with loud cries challenge the foe. Therefore, when they have found a clear spring day and open field, they burst forth from the gates...

An exception to this pattern would appear to exist in the first *bugonia* of Book 4, where the regenerated bees are compared to rain from *summer* clouds (a rare climatic event in the Mediterranean), arrows, and Parthians joining battle. These military bees are not summer bees, however, despite the comparison to summer clouds. The *bugonia* scene is set—predictably and appropriately—in the early springtime:

hoc geritur Zephyris primum impellentibus undas,
ante novis rubeant quam prata coloribus, ante

³⁶ With the possible exception of the November rainy season suggested as a time for the second harvest. See Thomas’ note at *Geo.* 4.234.

³⁷ See, e.g. 1.299-301; 1.335-50; 2.314-18; 2.373; 2.519-32; 3.318-21; 3.349-83; 3.441-3. See also Stehle, 348ff.

³⁸ The shift from spring to summer is so swift that it seems to occur within the same scene. The transition evidences the consistent thematic trumping taking place in these early passages. See discussion beginning at p. 28.

*garrula quam tignis nidum suspendat hirundo (Geo. 4.305-307)*³⁹

This is done when the zephyrs begin to stir the waves, before the meadows blush with their fresh hues, before the chattering swallow hangs her nest from the rafters.

Just as Homer does, Vergil's narrator chooses to assign springtime to the epic-military activity of the bees. He is not constrained to do so by any real-world hive tendencies. Furthermore, assigning seasons to the bees contributes to a jumbled seasonal order in Book 4 that could easily have been avoided. By contrast, the seasons in the passage on the old man of Tarentum are relatively chronological.⁴⁰

As explained above, mentions of summer are interspersed with these three examples of bees in the spring. The narrator reminds his audience of the *aestas* three times in lines 28-59. In the summertime, the bees' *reges* are gone and they set themselves to their work: "hence they deftly mould fresh wax and fashion the gluey honey" (*hinc arte recentis / excudunt ceras et mella tenacia fingunt*, 4.56-57). The farmer, who suppresses the skirmishes of the spring, is instructed to be an assistant in these georgic tasks. Exactly 100 lines later, the summer bees are compared to humans directly, and by implication to the farmers who prepare winter stores elsewhere in the poem: "in summer, mindful of the winter to come, [the bees] spend toilsome days and garner their gains into a common store" (*venturaeque hiemis memores aestate laborem / experiuntur et in medium quaesita reponunt*, 4.156-57). Finally, immediately after mentioning the georgic bees' willingness to die for their love of flowers and honey, the poet counts their maximum individual lifespan by summers, saying they can never live past the "seventh summer"

³⁹ The westerly winds, brightening meadows, and nesting swallows indicate that the regeneration of these military bees occurs in the spring.

⁴⁰ The seasons run from autumn to summer in 4.134-8. The poet suggests spring's arrival with the end of winter, but does not explicitly mention *ver*.

(*septima aestas*, 4.207). This is the sixth mention of summer in Book 4; the seventh and final appearance occurs as the hive is regenerated and described with the simile discussed above.

Passing over autumn, Book 4 moves to bees in winter. The change of season marks a transition away from military and georgic concerns to poetic—especially sympathetic—matters. Like the beekeeper (and farmers of earlier books), the bees have amassed a great store for the winter. It is their time for enjoying leisure and their “teeming produce” (*gravidos fetus*), as the farmer does in the two passages of greatest human self-indulgence in the poem, both of which come during winter.⁴¹ As elsewhere,⁴² however, the narrator neglects to describe or imagine the interior of the hive, and the beekeeper-*agricola* prevents any sort of leisure or hedonism in the bees, forcing them instead to resume their military tendencies and take up their javelins (*spicula*) as the beekeeper-*agricola* follows his georgic purpose:

siquando sedem angustam servataque mella
 thesauris relines, prius haustu sparsus aquarum
 ora fove fumosque manu praetende sequaces.
 Bis gravidos cogunt fetus, duo tempora messis,
 Taygete simul os terris ostendit honestum
 Pleas et Oceani spretos pede reppulit amnes,
 aut eadem sidus fugiens ubi Piscis aquosi
 tristior hibernas caelo descendit in undas.
 Illis ira modum supra est, laesaeque venenum
 morsibus inspirant et spicula caeca relinquunt
 adfixae venis animasque in vulnere ponunt. (*Geo.* 4.228-38)

Whenever you would break into the stately dwelling and the honey hoarded in their treasure-houses, first with a draught of water sprinkle and rinse your mouth, and in your hand hold forth searching smoke. Twice they gather the teeming produce; two seasons are there for the harvest—first, so soon as Taygete the Pleiad has shown her comely face to the earth, and spurned with scornful foot the streams of Ocean, and when that same star, fleeing before the sign of the watery Fish, sinks sadly from heaven into the wintery waves. Their rage is beyond measure; when hurt, they breathe poison into their bites, and fastening on the veins leave there their unseen javelins and lay down their lives in the wound.

⁴¹ 1.287-304, including *hiems ignava colono* (“winter is the farmer’s lazy time”) and 2.519-31.

⁴² See p. 13 and p. 24.

It is winter (*hibernas...undas*, 235), and what could be a winter scene of luxury and leisure is here at odds with military and georgic themes. Perhaps the harvesting beekeeper simulates—or attempts to simulate—such a scene in his efforts to quell the bees with smoke. Fire (*ignis*), after all, figures prominently in both scenes of the farmer’s wintry leisure in the passages of books 1 and 2 noted above.⁴³

In the lines that follow this forceful honey harvest, it remains winter for the bees, but the narrator and his addressee shift quickly from callous pragmatism to sympathy. The poet advises the use of fire during “cruel winter” once again, this time out of pity for the bees’ “broken spirits.” Presumably, these are the same spirits that the farmer himself has just broken during the harvest.⁴⁴ A plague follows for the bees, the produce (*fetus*) of the beekeeper becomes irrelevant, and the first half of Book 4 comes to its poetic and emotional climax. The season, the poet implies, does not change. The winter bees are lazy (*pigrae*), not from winter’s luxury, but from winter’s “pinching cold” (*contracto frigore*, 4.259). The cold South Wind strengthens the seasonal association (*frigidus...Auster*, 4.261). If spring is the season of the martial hive and summer the season of productive vigor, winter’s hive is equally anthropomorphic, strikingly lazy, and powerfully sympathetic.

⁴³ *ignes*, 1.291; *ignis*, 2.528.

⁴⁴ *sin duram metues hiemem parcesque futuro / contusosque animos et res miserabere fractas, / at suffire thymo cerasque recidere inanis / quis dubitet*, 4.239-43; cf. *animas* at 4.238.

VI. Military, productive, and lazy bees

As I have attempted to show, the reader of Book 4 must confront differing—sometimes conflicting—beekeeping instructions and descriptions of apian behavior. Vergil marks these inconsistencies with corresponding changes in the various aspects of the bees' environment as presented by his narrator. So far, I have followed the example of Book 4's political and georgic narratives in focusing on large groups or entire hives of bees. As I will now show, tensions within the hive between three individual bees (or types of bees) mirror the thematic tensions already observed using a wider scope.

Aristotle separates bees into three types: bee (μέλιττα), king bee (βασιλεύς), and drone (κηφήν).⁴⁵ In Book 4, Vergil incorporates this division with some important changes. The worker bees—who perform both productive and military tasks—and the king bees⁴⁶—who direct the workers in the manner of a farmer or (more often) a general—align closely with the georgic and political themes of Book 4. In the *Georgics*, however, there is also a disunity to bee society which the narrator of Book 4 attempts unsuccessfully to suppress. The drones (*fuci*) and the bees who resemble them provide a largely unnoticed glimpse of the lazy and subversive. They represent an exception to the idea of “one labor for all” (*labor omnibus unus*, 4.184) that the myopic georgic narrator and his narrative (purely textual or implied) audience may at times ignore, but that Vergil and his actual reader cannot.

The poet mentions drones twice, each time as an unwelcome nuisance in the hive—first a political obstacle, then a georgic one. Drones are warded off by worker bees as part of the

⁴⁵ Aristotle, *HA*, IX.XL(623b-624a).

⁴⁶ Vergil is uninterested in or unaware of the possibility that the kings might be female. See Thomas' note at 4.21. I will retain Vergil's language, referring to these bees, who in fact are female, as “kings.”

workers' duties in the hive: "in martial array [the workers] drive the drones, a lazy herd, from the folds" (*agmine facto / ignavum fucos pecus a praesepibus arcent*, 4.168). With *agmine*, the workers assume a military quality to which the drones are anathema. Later, as if part of a separate species altogether, the drone is part of a long list of freeloaders and pests that includes newts, beetles, hornets, spiders, and moths: "the unhelpful drone seating himself at another's board" (*immunisque sedens aliena ad pabula fucus*, 4.244). The passage is reminiscent of the list of pests that threaten the farmer's threshing floor in Book 1 (1.178-86).⁴⁷

Vergil had several literary examples of drones to draw from, both technical and metaphorical. Aristotle calls drones (κηφήνες) lazy (νωθρός) and notes that worker bees will kill them for damaging the hive or simply for taking up too much space.⁴⁸ He also mentions that bee-keepers remove "drone-cells" from the hive and strip drones of their wings. In distinguishing the two types of king-bees, Aristotle compares the superior red king-bee to the inferior, larger, black king-bee, who gives rise to inferior kings and drones.⁴⁹ Varro adds the striped king-bee as a third category, but agrees that black king-bees and black worker-bees are inferior to bees of different appearances. The drone, too, is black, with a "wide stomach" (*lato ventre*).⁵⁰ Like Aristotle, Varro describes the drones' expulsion from the hive by other bees:

neque ipsae sunt inficientes nec non oderunt inertes. Itaque insectantes ab se eiciunt fucos, quod hi neque adiuvant et mel consumunt, quos vocificantes plures persecuntur etiam paucae.

They are themselves not idle, and detest the lazy; and so they attack and drive out from them the drones, as these give no help and eat the honey, and even a few bees chase larger numbers of drones in spite of their cries.

⁴⁷ With the exception of ants, the pests listed here (mice, moles, toads, and weevils) are a larger group on the whole than the insects that plague the bees.

⁴⁸ Aristotle, *HA*, IX.XL(624b).

⁴⁹ *HA*, V.XXI(553a).

⁵⁰ Varro *DRR*, 4.16.18-19.

Whereas these “technical” writers see drones as a hindrance to the practical function of hive and beekeeper, other sources invoke them in simile. In Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus*, Isomachus incites a strong dislike of weeds in Socrates by comparing weeds to drones robbing the hive of their hard-earned food.⁵¹ Hesiod, in *Works and Days*, is equally harsh:

τῷ δὲ θεοὶ νεμεσῶσι καὶ ἀνέρες, ὅς κεν ἀεργὸς
ζῶη, κηφήνεςσι κοθούροις εἵκελος ὀργήν,
οἳ τε μελισσάων κάματον τρύχουσιν ἀεργοὶ
ἔσθοντες.⁵²

Both gods and men are angry with a man who lives idle, for in nature he is like the stingless drones who waste the labor of the bees, eating without working.

He returns to the image in the *Theogony*, with still more vitriol:

ὥς δ’ ὀπὸτ’ ἐν σμήνεσσι κατηρεφέεσσι μέλισσαι
κηφήνας βόσκωσι, κακῶν ξυνήονας ἔργων—
αἱ μὲν τε πρόπαν ἡμᾶρ ἐς ἥλιον καταδύντα
ἡμάτια σπεύδουσι τιθεῖσί τε κηρία λευκά,
οἱ δ’ ἔντοσθε μένοντες ἐπηρεφέας κατὰ σίμβλους
ἀλλότριον κάματον σφετέρην ἐς γαστέρ’ ἀμῶνται—
600ὼς δ’ αὐτως ἀνδρεςσι κακὸν θνητοῖσι γυναίκας
Ζεὺς ὑψιβρεμέτης θήκεν, ξυνήονας ἔργων
ἀργαλέων.⁵³

And as in thatched hives bees feed the drones whose nature is to do mischief—by day and throughout the day until the sun goes down the bees are busy and lay the white combs, while the drones stay at home in the covered hives and reap the toil of others into their own bellies—even so Zeus who thunders on high made women to be an evil to mortal men, with a nature to do evil.

Xenophon and Hesiod, whose literary inclinations are more philosophical and political than technical, are not concerned with physical appearances or practical solutions pertaining to drones. Instead, by seeing the qualities of drones in humans, they also suggest that a human quality exists in the behavior of these slothful insects.

⁵¹ Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 17.17.

⁵² Hesiod *WD*, 303-6, trans. Evelyn-White.

⁵³ Hesiod, *Theogony*, 594-602.

The parasitic and lazy (νωθρός, ἀεργός, *inertes*) drones of these apian sources are likely models for Vergil's parasitic and lazy (*ignavum*) drones. For a reader well-acquainted with them, they enrich the rather toneless two lines of attention given to drones by Vergil. Vergil's drone, for instance, need only sit "at another's board" to recall the extreme human laziness condemned in Xenophon and Hesiod. Furthermore, as I will now consider, the appearance and behavior of these ancient drones may be echoed elsewhere in Vergil's bees, even if the name *fucus* is not applied to them.

In a passage that follows the civil war of the bees, the poet instructs the beekeeper to judge the superior of the two leaders (*ductores*) by their appearance and to kill the less attractive one, "that he prove no wasteful burden" (*ne prodigus obsit*, 4.89). This Vergilian king-bee is politically and agriculturally useless, much like the drones who are killed or expelled in Aristotle and Varro. If the connection is tenuous here, a description of rulers later in the passage further amplifies and confirms it. Vergil's superior (*melior*) king is bright (*ardens*), while the other is "squalid from sloth, and trailing ignobly a broad paunch" (*ille horridus alter / desidia latamque trahens inglorious alvum*, 4.93-94). Thus, this inferior king-bee closely resembles the drone that Aristotle mentions as the offspring of large, black, inferior kings. Vergil's kings, like Aristotle's drones, have their wings pulled off by farmers to curb their "idle play" (*ludo...inani*, 4.105). They also may come from flowers, as Aristotle suggests drones do.⁵⁴ Likewise, Vergil's king could be Varro's drone. The large stomach of Vergil's inferior king (*latam...alvum*) "is transferred" from Varro's *lato ventre*.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ *DH*, V.XXI-XXII; it is unclear whether (as the drones are in Aristotle) the leaders are the *only* members of the hive born from flowers, but the activities of selecting young from flowers and choosing leaders follow one another and share a line at 4.201.

⁵⁵ Whitfield, 111; *DRR* 3.16.19; see footnotes above.

The effect of drones and—perhaps especially—drone-like leaders strengthens suggestions of disharmony in Vergilian bee society and of a pronounced divide between loiterers and workers. The *ignavus pecus* is, at a minimum, an obstacle (*mora*)⁵⁶ to productive prosperity that the agriculturally focused narrator is moderately successful in subduing. At most, it is a force potent enough to incite warfare in the hive and the interference of the farmer to ensure that it is the *parces apes* who prevail. As the plague suggests,⁵⁷ even a vigilant *agricola* is perhaps not enough to hold off the danger of sloth.

VII. Thematic trumping: lines 1-115

As earlier sections have shown, Book 4's bee society is an arena for the struggle for supremacy among the georgic and productive, the military and political, and the sympathetic and diversionary themes of the poem. Similarly, the narrator of Book 4 is marked by thematic inconsistency—or by the desire to appeal to an inconsistent audience—to the point of outright contradiction and frequent confusion for a reader endeavoring to read the apian passages as a perfectly unified and coherent section. Where thematic inconsistency occurs in a clear sequence from one passage to another, I will refer to the phenomenon as “thematic trumping.” Tracing shifts and dissonance in narrator and audience, my reading points to Vergil's divergent aspirations, and to the irresolvable tensions that challenged the poet and with which he challenges his readers.

⁵⁶ Delaying (*morari*) and hesitating (*cunctari*) occur frequently in Book 4, generally when bees are hesitant to partake in the activities of the hive. Cf. *morari* at 28 and 70 (and *nusquam mora* of the other “type” of bees at 185); and *cunctare* at 107 and 258.

⁵⁷ See p. 36.

The opening seven lines of Book 4 identify their reader, or addressee, explicitly:

protinus aërii mellis caelestia dona
 exsequar: hanc etiam, Maecenas, adspice partem.
 Admiranda tibi levium spectacula rerum
 magnanimosque duces totiusque ordine gentis
 mores et studia et populos et dicam.
 In tenui labor; at tenuis non gloria, si quem
 numina laeva sinunt auditque vocatus Apollo. (*Geo.* 4.1-7)

Next I will lay out Heaven's gift, the honey from the skies. On this part, too, of my task, Maecenas, look with favor. The wondrous pageant of a tiny world—chiefs great-hearted, a whole nation's character and tastes and tribes and battles—I will in due order unfold to you. Slight is the field of toil; but not slight the glory, if adverse powers leave one free, and Apollo hearkens unto prayer.

Maecenas, an influential supporter of both the emperor and the arts, is asked to “watch over” (*aspice*) this new “section” (*partem*) of Vergil's poem. “Section” presumably refers to the entirety of the book, since Maecenas's name appears once and only once in each of the preceding three books as well (1.2, 2.41, and 3.41). The preview of Book 4 that the narrator offers Maecenas is strikingly incomplete, however, ignoring the poetic and agricultural themes of the book and the content of the second half altogether. Far from Appius' introductory promise to tell of the art of bees and beekeeping in Varro's *De Re Rustica*,⁵⁸ Vergil's vocabulary in these lines is strongly epic and political.⁵⁹ When this language recurs at several points later in Book 4, it calls the Maecenas figure—or a narrator and audience with similarly political and Augustan sensibilities—back into the poem. Much of the rest of Book 4, however, implies the presence of a narrator and audience that are either agriculturally focused or sensitive to the drawbacks and casualties of both politics and farming.

⁵⁸ *DRR* 4.16.3.

⁵⁹ *admiranda...spectacula* (3); *magnanimosque duces totiusque ordine gentis* (4); *proelia* (5); *gloria* (6); and *numina* (7). *Labor* is perhaps the only exception (6), though it too can have a military-political function. Also see Mynors, pp. 258-9.

The putative agent of the passive periphrastic (*petenda*) at line 8, searching for a protected site for his apiary, could hardly mark a more dramatic shift in audience. In the ten lines that follow, there is not a shred of political allegory to be found: the farmer is told of the dangers from which he must protect his bees, three of which are (if he is the farmer of Book 3) occupants of his own farm.⁶⁰ The farmer appears to be completely responsible for the protection of the hive against other animals, and the narrator makes no mention of battles (the *proelia* of line 5), or even of the bees' ability to protect themselves from such intruders.

This passage in turn yields to a didactic passage of 16 lines that at first appears to maintain its agrarian audience, but undercuts this initial impression in at least three important ways. First, the narrator instructs the farmer to set up his hive in the sort of place where earlier in the poem farmers are told to graze their herds and flocks (4.18-32).⁶¹ He therefore appears to have forgotten the instruction given just a few lines earlier to protect the bees from the harm of livestock. Second, he gives instructions on how to provide for the bees' rest and recreation, both of which he will later instruct the farmer to discourage in his bees.⁶² Finally, in discussing the hive's surroundings he focuses on the provision of sensual pleasures and human identification with the bees. The surrounding flowers seem to be chosen for their smell rather than as a source of material for the hive.⁶³ The use of *grandia*, as Thomas ad loc. notes, "creates empathy... by presenting the detail from the bees' perspective" and the image of bees spreading their wings on

⁶⁰ Goats, sheep, and cattle, that is. See 4.8-17.

⁶¹ These lines, as I discuss on p. 13 are especially similar in language and effect to the description of cattle pastures at 3.139-42.

⁶² See later discussion on 62-66 and 103-108 at pp. 30 and 34.

⁶³ See *olentia* (30) and *spirantis* (31); the erroneous suggestion that bees can smell further anthropomorphizes them.

bridges (*pontibus*) makes Vergil's "poetic reshaping" of Varro's apiary more beautiful and "more human."⁶⁴

We must therefore conclude that we have in this passage a forgetful but still authoritative narrator, a different audience than in the political and didactic passages preceding it, or a narrator whose point of view has changed dramatically and without warning. This third possibility—that Vergil occasionally divorces the speaker from the perceiver, or "focalizer"—is the most compelling. Fowler, following de Jong and others, has demonstrated this effect in the *Aeneid*, making an observation that holds for the *Georgics* as well: "Virgil reintroduces multiple points of view so that the text becomes polycentric, and thus shatters the pretence of the epic norm to natural authority."⁶⁵ Lines 1-32 thus constitute the first of example of what might be called thematic trumping, in which political, georgic, and poetic themes seize rotational control of focalization—narrative perspective, as I will term it—and audience.

Another, longer cycle of thematic trumping spans lines 33-87 and follows a succession from didactic, to poetic, to political, and back to didactic. The narrator returns to practical advice with specific directions on how to take care of "the hive itself" (*ipsa autem*, 4.33). Bark or osier are recommended and narrow entrances prescribed with no mention of aesthetic considerations or the perspective of the bees. At first, the beekeeper's dispassionate handiwork appears crucial, as the narrator mentions that both heat and cold are to be feared (*metuenda*) for the bees (4.37).

By the end of the passage, however, the narrator loses confidence once again in the ability of utilitarian measures to satisfy the sensual inclinations of the hive. The bees are said to be able already to perform the tasks of hive-sealing (*linunt* and *explent*) that the beekeeper is

⁶⁴ Cf. Varro *DRR* 3.16.27.

⁶⁵ Fowler, p. 56.

later told to do (*ungue*); furthermore, they are said to be capable of keeping themselves warm (*fovere*) on their own—underground, under a rock, or inside a tree:

saepe etiam effossis, si vera est fama, latebris
 Sub terra fovere larem, penitusque repertae
 pumicibusque cavis exesaeque arboris antro. (*Geo.* 4.42-44)

Often, too, if report be true, they have made a snug home in tunneled hiding places underground, and are found deep in the hollows of pumice rock, or the cavern of a decayed tree.

Tu tamen in the following line gives the impression that the narrator is struggling to establish the usefulness of the beekeeper. His suggestion that the beekeeper warm the hive (*fovens*) with mud (*limo*) and leaves (*frondes*) may represent a human attempt to simulate the subterranean or arboreal dwellings that the bees construct themselves.⁶⁶

Just before bees threaten to abandon the hive by swarming, the narrator continues to abandon his technical advice and fall back on the aesthetic, superstitious, and sensual. After a mysterious injunction against burning crabs, the narrator drifts back toward a humanized but nevertheless apian perspective, warning of the bad smell of mud (*odor caeni gravis*) and obnoxious noise (and sight?): *vocisque offensa resultat imago* (“The echoed voice rebounds from the shock,” 4.47-50). The identification of narrator and narratee with the bees continues, as the narrator recognizes emotion in the bees, “glad with some strange joy” (*nescio qua dulcedine laetae*, 55), for the first time, and the narratee looks in wonder (*mirabere*, 60) at the rising swarm.⁶⁷ The narrator advises the beekeeper to call back his bees—whose sensitivity to taste and temperature lead them to “sweet waters and leafy shelters” (*aquas dulcis et frondea...tectae*, 60-61)⁶⁸—by appealing to their senses of smell and hearing:

⁶⁶ The didactic passage, including the undercutting described above, runs from line 33 to 46.

⁶⁷ *Nescio qua* limits the identification somewhat, but this is very far from the narrator’s ascetic portrayal of bees elsewhere in the poem.

⁶⁸ See discussion of shade in Section 4.

huc tu iussos adsperge sapores,
trita melisphylla et cerinthaë ignobile gramen,
tinnitusque cie et Matris quate cymbala circum. (*Geo.* 4.62-65)

Here scatter the scents I prescribe—bruised balm, and the honeywort’s lowly herb; raise a tinkling sound, and shake the Mighty Mother’s cymbals round about.

Thus, the strict didacticism from earlier in the passage has given way to the narrator’s call for artistry and ritual.

There appears to be little continuity—whether in the mentality of the narrator, narratee, or bee society—between this passage, which concludes with the bees settling into their cradles of their own accord (*more suo*), and the following one, which has them heading off for battle (*ad pugnam exierint*, 4.65-66). Here, all of a sudden, are the battle, leaders (*regibus*, 68), and hearts (*animos*, 69) advertised in lines 1-7.⁶⁹ The magnifying effect of words such as *magnisque*, *magnum*, and *ingentis* also recall the language of the proem and elevate the bees from insect to human status. The narrator’s language and simile connect them with epic warriors, and they are heroes from a “Homeric mold.”⁷⁰ They are also, perhaps, the military heroes of Vergil’s world. If it does not actually stand for the warring factions of Octavian and Mark Antony,⁷¹ the *discordia* of the bees is certainly broadly evocative of Roman civil war and of particular interest to readers such as Maecenas.

The passage provides nothing of didactic importance. The beekeeper re-enters abruptly to put 19 lines of battle imagery and political allegory to an end with a sprinkle of dust: *Hi motus animorum atque haec certamina tanta / pulveris exigui iactu compressa quiescent* (“These storms of passion, these conflicts so fierce, by the tossing of a little dust are quelled and laid to rest,” 4.86-87). The cycle is thus complete. Vergil’s narrator has asked his educated Roman

⁶⁹ See also *animos* at 83 and *animorum* at 86.

⁷⁰ Farrell, 241.

⁷¹ Hardie, 38, citing Nadeau, pp. 59-82.

readers to follow technical instructions to ensure the proper functioning of a hive; to identify with and seduce the sensual bees with sights, sounds, and smells; to behold them as a mock-epic microcosm of military and political society; and to return once again to the function of the hive and overcome its disturbance with an unremarkable trick of the trade.

The subsequent passage, lines 88-115, affirms human dominance of the hive. Yet, the hierarchy of agrarian, political, and aesthetic considerations remains unsettled for the addressee. The true farmer might be interested in the genetic superiority (*potior suboles*) of the leader and offspring he selects, from which he may gather sweet honey in the proper season (*caeli tempore certo / dulcia mella premes*, 4.100-101). To this end, he “harden[s] his hand with stern toil” (*ipse labore manum duro terat*) and plants “fruitful slips” (*feracis plantas*, 4.114-15) for the bees.⁷²

On the other hand, the Roman *Quiris*, or perhaps *imperator*, might be more interested in the (at least allegorical) repression of other leaders (*regibus*) than the selection of a more agriculturally productive species. Far from hand-hardening work, it is “no hard task to check” these opponents (*nec magnus prohibere labor*) and to prevent them from removing the battle standards (*castris...vellere signa*, 4.106-108).⁷³

Finally, a reader is invoked who knows little about bees or politics. He determines the inferior stock of bees based on whether they are ugly (*turpes*) by comparing them to a ragged traveler. He recognizes their frolicking (*ludunt; ludo*), looks to a god, Priapus, for their protection, and his reward is honey-wine (4.111; 102). The three perspectives that succeed one another in the previous 87 lines intermingle in these 29 lines. Perhaps a single sympathetic and

⁷² The emphasis of *feracis* is on the productivity that the plants will bring about, rather than the *odor* of the earlier plants. The beekeeper of 112-113 resembles the herdsman of 3.395 (see Thomas’ note), but further evidence of the agrarian components of this passage hardly needs to be summoned.

⁷³ Thomas notes the similarity of the metaphor at 116-117 to the one in which Maecenas appears at 2.39-45. Vergil may thus be recalling his political audience in the transition from this passage to the story of the old Corycian.

aesthetically-minded reader ignores the manifold—at times conflicting—information from the narrator in these lines and subsumes the practicality of the farmer and the civic awareness of the *Quiris*. Or, perhaps we may conceive of these three identities as distinct creations of Vergil’s inconsistent narrator, each one a credulous audience to his whims.

VIII. Thematic trumping: lines 197-294

Thematic trumping resumes at line 197, following the longest absence of an addressee in the *Georgics* from line 116 through line 196.⁷⁴ The first 25 of these intervening lines, in which the first-person reigns, are both programmatic and personal. The poet discusses his desire and inability to write about botany (116-124), tells the story of a solitary old farmer with just a brief mention of beekeeping (125-146), and then announces that he must leave the topic of gardens behind (147-8). Subsequently, the opinion and color of the narrator fall away as well.

Lines 149 through 196 do not, however, lack significance or narrative bias. The seasons, hives, and behaviors of the bees still undergo some variation as georgic, political, and poetic motifs vie for prominence in the text.⁷⁵ Thematic trumping, however, does not occur from section to section or with any discernible chronology. Rather, it resumes at 197 with *mirabere* (“you will wonder”), which invites the reader to participate once again in the narrative, much as the verb did earlier in Book 4 (*obscuramque trahi vento mirabere nubem*, 4.60). The nature of

⁷⁴ Imperative, second-person, and jussive subjunctive verbs fall out of the poem altogether.

⁷⁵ See earlier sections 3, 5, and 6.

bee death, rather than bee desertion,⁷⁶ is the primary point of inconsistency for the narrator of 197-294.

Mirabere is followed not by death, but by birth. Vergil's narrator explains the practice of gathering young bees from flowers as a substitute for sexual reproduction (4.197-202). The statement, which recalls Aristotle's theory for the birth of drones,⁷⁷ raises possible inconsistency with the narrator's description of bees as "pregnant" (*fetis*, 4.139) and the grandfathers of grandfathers (*avi...avorum*, 209) mentioned below. The narrator then proceeds immediately to their death:

saepe etiam duris errando in cotibus alas
 attrivere utroque animam sub fasce dedere:
 tantus amor florum et generandi gloria mellis.
 Ergo ipsas quamvis angusti terminus aevi
 excipiat, neque enim plus septima ducitur aestas,
 at genus immortale manet multosque per annos
 stat fortuna domus et avi numerantur avorum. (*Geo.* 4.203-209)

Often, too, as they wander among rugged rocks they bruise their wings, and freely yield their lives under their load—so deep is their love of flowers and their glory in begetting honey. Therefore, though the limit of a narrow span awaits the bees themselves—for it never stretches beyond the seventh summer—still the race abides immortal, for many a year stands firm the fortune of the house.

Fasce and *gloria* add a political dimension to the passage, but the tell-tale markers of military bees—soldiers, weapons, leaders, enemies, and battles—are absent. Furthermore, these bees willingly (*utroque*) make the ultimate georgic sacrifice: death in the name of production (*generandi*).

The bees of the next passage also die willingly and achieve immortality. Their commitment to production, however, is thrown into question, and their death is epic, military, and political. This politically-minded narrator contradicts his previous georgic-didactic advice,

⁷⁶ See p. 29.

⁷⁷ See p. 29.

that incapacitating or killing a leader can benefit the hive.⁷⁸ With their leader dead, the narrator says, the bees will destroy the fruits of their labor (4.213-14). All for their leader, they “expose their bodies to battle, and seek amid wounds a glorious death” (*corpora bello / obiectant pulchramque petunt per vulnera mortem*, 217-18). Their origins and immortality are also added to or amended by this narrator. These bees—and all creatures, the narrator notes—originate in heaven and ascend to heaven (*caelo*; 219-27).

The narrator is quick to adduce an example of these military bees, who attack the beekeeper during his semi-annual honey harvest. Unlike the bees who gave up their life (*animam*) for production (4.204), these furiously give up their lives (*animas*) with their sting:

illis ira modum supra est, laesaeque venenum
morsibus inspirant, et spicula caeca relinquunt
adfixae venis, animasque in volnere ponunt. (*Geo.* 236-38)

Their rage is beyond measure; when hurt, they breathe poison into their bites, and fastening on the veins leave there their unseen stings and lay down their lives in the wound.

The military language, particularly *spicula...relinquunt*, completes the meaning of *corpora bello obiectant* above. The javelins they leave, in other words, *are* the bodies they have hurled.

It should also be noted that the violent military deaths of these bees represent an entirely different approach to death than that provided by the narrator of 203-9 and are not simply another manifestation of georgic labor and apian productive impulse. This impulse reappears in the bees’ response to an almost identical threat in the second thematic trumping, as the georgic-minded narrator reclaims his dominance. Here, the bees’ lives are threatened not by the invasive farmer (4.245-47), but by the “fierce” hornet (*asper crabro*), “pestilent” species of moths (*dirum tiniae genus*), and trap-bearing spider. According to the narrator, the response of the bees is anything but violent, and focuses on their constant desire to renew and produce:

⁷⁸ *dede neci* (4.88-90) and *alas...eripe* (4.103-108).

quo magis exhaustae fuerint, hoc acrius omnes
 incumbent generis lapsi sarcire ruinas
 complebuntque foros et floribus horrea textent. (*Geo.* 4.248-50)

The more their hoards are drained, the more eagerly they will press on to repair the ruin of their fallen race, filling up their cell-galleries and weaving their granaries with flower-gum.

Thus, a struggle for survival described in military and epic terms is framed—trumped—by two georgic struggles to produce. The militarily inclined narrator takes the reader from passive listener to active invader and enemy of the beehive. His weapon is smoke (*fumos*, 230); theirs are javelins (*spicula*, 237). The narrator moves to a georgic perspective, taking the reader from observer of productive sacrifice to ally in the hive’s productivity. He aligns the success of the hive with the success of the reader, advising the reader to smoke intruders away from the hive; for this opposite purpose, he too uses smoke (*suffire thymo*, 241).

A different sort of death then descends on the bees, one whose cause is neither food production nor war, but disease (*morbo*, 252; 318). One by one, the narrator refutes his previous georgic and political claims about apian death. The so-called “immortal race” (208) is completely destroyed (*proles subito defecerit omnis*, 4.281). Rather than “glorious death” (218), the bees conduct miserable funerals (*tristia funera*, 256). Rather than pouring out their spirits while fixed to a vein (238), they linger spiritless by the entrances (*ad limina pendent...pigrae*, 257-59). Rather than vigorously repairing what is ruined (249), they lie sluggishly (*languiebunt*, 252). The cause of the plague remains unclear, though it certainly appears to be a fatal amplification of the lazy tendencies of bees suggested throughout Book 4. Excess, whether of leisure or otherwise, is often a dangerous force in the *Georgics*.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Stehle, 355.

The narrator, whose language creates the most pathetic scene since the plague of Book 3, recommends an appeal to the senses of the bees.⁸⁰ It is highly reminiscent of the advice of the “aesthetically-minded” narrator near the beginning of Book 4, used to tempt the bees back to their hive.⁸¹ This sudden, utter, and pitiable demise—and the proposed remedy, though it is ultimately ineffective—overshadows the less grave deaths set by the narrator in georgic and political terms. The various portrayals of mortality in lines 197 through 394 will connect to and shed light on the deaths in the latter half of the book.⁸²

IX. Thematic tension in the first *bugonia*: lines 281-314

Though I resist reading Book 4 as chronological or allegorically chronological, if the *Georgics* has a temporal endpoint, it must come with the conclusion of the first *bugonia* in line 314. At any rate, there is no doubt that this re-genesis of the bees from an ox carcass in the present time is posterior to the “second” *bugonia* at the end of the poem, where the poet presents the ritual’s origin in lines 531-58.⁸³ The story of Orpheus and Aristaeus exists, ostensibly, to answer the question: “whence did man’s strange adventuring [i.e., the “first” *bugonia*] take its rise?” (*unde nova ingressus hominum experientia cepit?* 4.316). Vergil thus invites two readings of the first *bugonia*, one that conforms to the sequence of the text itself, and another that is

⁸⁰ *odores* (264), *saporem* (267), *olentia* (270), and *odorato* (279); many of these remedies, while imitated by Columella (9.13.7, see Thomas’ note), do not seem to be attested to by Vergil’s apian sources.

⁸¹ See p. 31.

⁸² Gale, p. 78.

⁸³ The two *bugoniae* are substantially different. See T. Habinek, p. 210, with references to Anderson and Wilkinson.

informed by comparison with the second *bugonia* and the 200-some lines of mythical tragedy that occasioned it.

This second reading will emerge later after discussion of the epyllion, but it will be useful here to consider the extent to which the perspective of narrator and audience fit into the preceding pattern of thematic trumping described above. The stated re-entry of the narrator (in the first-person) is striking after a 135-line absence,⁸⁴ but does not provide strong clues as to what perspective he will bring. His use of *expediam* (“I will unfold”) recalls the use of the same word to introduce a relatively inexpressive factual account of the bees’ industrious nature (4.149-96). It also, however, recalls his use of *exsequar* in his promise to Maecenas to lay out the political nature of the bees (4.1-7) and *memini* to initiate the personal and poetic account of the old Corycian (4.125). The narrative identity is further confused by his use of *nobis*, with which he makes himself part of the audience: *quis deus hanc, Musae, quis nobis extudit artem?* (“what god, Muses, forged for us this device?” 4.315).⁸⁵

Still, the themes to which the narrator calls his audience’s attention are easily identifiable within the framework I have established. The blood, or “gore” (*cruor*, 285), that generates the bees stands in stark contrast to the flowers that gave rise to them earlier; it invokes the epic, military, and political threads of Book 4.⁸⁶ The narrator invites his audience to imagine the rebirth of bees in martial terms:

miscentur tenuemque magis magis aëra carpunt,
donec, ut aestivis effusus nubibus imber,
erupere aut ut nervo pulsante sagittae,
prima leves ineunt si quando proelia Parthi. (*Geo.* 4.311-14)⁸⁷

⁸⁴ From 4.151 through 4.285.

⁸⁵ The sentence acts as a transition between passages (and narrative styles), so the problem may be resolvable.

⁸⁶ Compare *e foliis natos...legunt* at 4.200 and see p. 33.

⁸⁷ The Parthian comparison echoes the earlier antagonism of bees and reader.

[They] swarm together, and more and more essay the light air, until like a shower pouring from summer clouds, they burst forth, or like arrows from the string's rebound, when the light-armed Parthians first enter battle.

“Essay” in Fairclough’s translation does not do justice to the military force of *carpunt*. The first simile, though it likens the bees to a natural phenomenon, recalls apian war. It resembles an earlier comparison of warring bees to hail: “no thicker is hail from the sky” (*non densior aere grando*, 4.480).⁸⁸ The second simile’s *proelia* and Parthian arrows speak for themselves. Finally, the *bugonia* takes place in the springtime (4.305-307), Book 4’s usual season for politics and war.⁸⁹

The georgic voice in this passage is at least equally strong. On its face, of course, this passage is the last of the apian *experientia*—which the poet promised in the opening lines of Book 1—to be laid out. Though its verbs are not imperative, its didactic pretext is clear enough. The narrator provides details as to the purpose (restoration of one’s stock of bees), location (a closed room with four walls and four windows), preparation (the selection of the bullock), execution (beating the animal to a pulp), time of year (with the coming of the first zephyrs), and result (an abundance of bees) of a proper *bugonia* (4.295-310). The narrator, however, does not mention that the usefulness and viability of the *bugonia* were as widely doubted as the ritual was widely known.⁹⁰ It seems unlikely that even the most credulous agricultural audience (*ignarosque...agrestis*, 1.41) of the poem would be blind to the dissonance between this protocol and scientific reality:

The *bugonia* is thus something of a paradox, or even a contradiction, because...it is a *fama* totally without any basis in scientific agriculture, a story beyond belief; and yet it is given an explanation by Vergil that uses the terms of science, an explanation so clearly intended to be rationalizing, even in the choice of the locale.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Thomas notes this similarity, as well as Vergil’s use of a similar battle image in *Aen.* 5.317.

⁸⁹ See discussion of seasons in Section 5.

⁹⁰ Whitfield, 116-117.

⁹¹ Ross, 218.

Whether the narrator of this passage is more agriculturally or politically oriented is thus a difficult question. What is clear, however, is that he is both inconsistent and temporarily unconcerned with the fanciful, lyrical, sympathetic—in short, poetic—aspects of the *bugonia*. Those aspects, which have been suggested again and again in the first half of Book 4, will grow and interact with georgic and political ones, culminating in a second *bugonia* whose mythological context is more poetic than that of the first *bugonia*.⁹² Indeed, Vergil will devote almost the entire second half of Book 4 to the story (*famam*, 4.286)⁹³ through which the self-assertion of the poetic occurs against a background of agriculture and politics.

X. Echoes of the apian passages in the *Aristaeus*

In the second half of Book 4, Vergil's narrator introduces several speakers—Aristaeus, Cyrene, Arethusa, Proteus, Eurydice, and Orpheus—and attempts to incorporate their voices into his narrative. Just as in the apian passages of Book 4, however, the extent of the narrator's understanding is limited. He refers to *bugonia* as the memorable invention of Aristaeus, the Arcadian teacher (*Arcadii memoranda inventa magistri*, 4.283). If not incorrect, this is at least an overly favorable view of Aristaeus, who neither conceives nor teaches the technique in the passages that follow. On the other hand, it is not surprising that an agriculturally focused narrator would give undue credit to the poem's farmer archetype. As I discuss later, if the *bugonia* that

⁹² Habinek p. 219, citing Putnam.

⁹³ This is a preview offered by the narrator of 281-314. Importantly, the mythical background, *not* the process (in which the *narrator*, though not necessarily Vergil, is confident) is here depicted as “rumor” or “story.”

concludes the myth is a limited and unsatisfying success,⁹⁴ ambivalence toward it may result as much from the narrator's narrow and limited perspective as it does from Aristaeus'.

In between *bugoniae*, however—specifically in lines 321-547, where the narrator's insertions are generally descriptive rather than assertive—a deeply poetic world unfolds in which Proteus is the omniscient narrator-poet. These lines and speakers frequently recall the bees, but grant the reader greater penetration into the domiciles and feelings of individuals. In a sense, I will argue, the hive of lines 1-280 is transfigured and magnified to the extent that its political and georgic qualities blur and yield the focus to its (previously suggested) sympathetic qualities.

The subaqueous and subterranean settings of the *Aristaeus* have much in common with the secluded and exclusive quarters of the bees in the first half of the book. After prescribing narrow entrances and carefully sealed hives, the narrator lays out the natural habitats of the bees as well:

saepe etiam effossis, si vera est fama, latebris
sub terra fovere larem, penitusque repertae
pumicibusque cavis exesaeque arboris antro. (*Geo.* 4.42-44)

Often, too, if report be true, they have made a snug home in tunneled hiding places underground, and are found deep in the hollows of pumice rock, or the cavern of a decayed tree.

When the beekeeper “break[s] into the stately dwelling,”⁹⁵ the bees are incensed and attack. A strong sense of liminality thus runs through the apian passages, with outsiders clearly demarcated and the narrator generally limited to observations outside or at the *limina* (thresholds) of the hive.⁹⁶ The most extended glimpses into the cloisters of the bees occur “within their walls” (*sub*

⁹⁴ See discussion of lines 548-58 in Section 11.

⁹⁵ 228ff.; *Si quando sedem augustam servataque mella / thesauris relines...*

⁹⁶ See, e.g., bees rushing from their hollows (*cavis*, 58) and gates (*portis*, 78 and 185); guarding the gates (165); buzzing around the entrances and thresholds (*oras et limina circum*, 188); and lying lazily on their thresholds (*limina*, 257).

moenibus) at 194 and during a rainstorm at 159-64, where the narrator describes a few groups conducting affairs “in the confines of their homes” (*intra saepta domorum*).

The home of Cyrene and the nymphs is Aristaeus’ first destination. The entrances are ultimately opened for him, but not until Aristaeus is twice heard lamenting and Arethusa surfaces to find the source. Cyrene then invites Aristaeus’ passage into the sheltered realm:

huic percussa nova mentem formidine mater,
 'duc, age, duc ad nos; fas illi limina divum
 tangere,' ait. Simul alta iubet discedere late
 flumina, qua iuvenis gressus inferret. At illum
 curvata in montis faciem circumstetit unda
 accepitque sinu vasto misitque sub amnem.
 Iamque domum mirans genetricis et umida regna
 speluncisque lacus clausos lucosque sonantes
 ibat et ingenti motu stupefactus aquarum
 omnia sub magna labentia flumina terra
 spectabat diversa locis... (*Geo.* 357-67)

To her the mother, her soul struck by strange dread, cries: “O bring him, bring him to us; it is lawful for him to tread the divine threshold. And then, she ordered the deep streams to part widely, so that the youth might enter in. And lo, the wave, arched mountain-like, stood around him, and welcoming him within the vast recess, ushered him beneath the stream. And now, marveling at his mother’s home, a realm of waters, at the lakes locked in caverns, and the echoing groves, he went on his way, and dazed by the mighty rush of waters, he gazed on all the rivers, as each in his own place, they glide under the great earth.

Limina, speluncis, clausos, inferret, sub...amnem and *sub...terra* recall the entrances and dugouts of the bees, and *regna* their sovereignty. The nymphs, like the bees of lines 159-64, are busy at work in their common space, and Arethusa acts as a gatekeeper of sorts for the group. Proteus’ refuge is even more private: like the bees in the passage above, he has “hiding places” (*latebris*) in the rocky safety of a cavern (*specus* and *saxi* for Proteus, *pumicibus...cavis* for the bees, 4.418-23), to which he retires after a long day of work.⁹⁷ As mentioned earlier, Aristaeus’

⁹⁷ See also the pronounced similarities between the bees returning exhausted to sleep at 186-90 Proteus returning from work and going to sleep at 434-8.

approach and ambush are necessarily invasive, and Proteus does not neglect to point this out angrily to him (4.446).⁹⁸

Parallels between the nymphs and Proteus, and the bees—and Aristaeus' status as an outsider, like a beekeeper (or even a *pestis*)—therefore seem to be suggested by the text. Proteus maintains a sanctum of knowledge to which Aristaeus—and Vergil's audience—gradually gains admittance. Relegating Book 4's narrator to spectator, Cyrene performs the task of introducing, praising, and locating Proteus in the poem. In her words, “the seer has knowledge of all things” (*novit namque omnia vates*, 392), and, as I will argue, bridges the various narrative perspectives discussed thus far. Without being contradictory, he is at once an epic-political, georgic, and poetic figure. His audience, Aristaeus, must engage with each of these themes.

In a certain sense, Proteus is an epic and political narrator. Vergil's model for the Proteus of the *Georgics* is undoubtedly the *Odyssey*. The structure, phrasing, and events of Vergil's account align closely with the dialogue between the seer and King Menelaus, in which Proteus advises Menelaus on his journey, instructs him in seeking the gods' blessing, and tells him the fates and whereabouts of Aias, Agamemnon, and Odysseus.⁹⁹ As Morgan argues, Vergil's Proteus, a master of creative and destructive elements, may also resemble the greatest hero of the poet's time, who sought mastery over the same elements Proteus manipulates. “Through Proteus... Virgil relates Octavian's acquisition of power in Rome to the creation of the universe...”¹⁰⁰

The narrative Proteus provides to Aristaeus illustrates the sensitivity to power and piety that these references suggest. He begins with the “divine anger” (*numinis irae*) brought about by Aristaeus' transgressions against Orpheus and Eurydice and the penalty (*poenas*) Aristaeus is

⁹⁸ See p. 7.

⁹⁹ *Od.* 4.462-570; see especially Farrell and notes from Thomas and Mynors on the topic.

¹⁰⁰ Morgan, p. 105, referring to earlier discussion beginning at 92.

paying as a result (453-56). Orpheus, too, runs afoul of the gods in Proteus' account. Twice, though never by name, Proteus mentions the king of the underworld, as the "king of terrors" (*regem tremendum*, 469) and as the "cruel tyrant" (*immitis...tyranni*, 492). The god-king shows no sympathy for Orpheus after the violation of their pact leads to the loss of Eurydice. Having touched on mortal debt to the divine and described an underworld closely resembling a worldly kingdom, Proteus relates how the violent death of Orpheus confers glory and immortality to his mournful song.¹⁰¹ The implications of Proteus' story for Aristaeus' course of action should be obvious. Still, Cyrene lays out in political terms the necessary peace offering to the divine: "Offer a suppliant's gifts, craving grace, and do homage to the gentle maidens of the woods" (*tu munera supplex / tende petens pacem et faciles venerare Napaeas*, 534-35).

Proteus is also a farmer-narrator of sorts. He "pastures" (*pascit*) the great herds and seals of Neptune (534-35). Sitting among his sheep, he is compared to a bucolic image of a farmer:

ipse, velut stabuli custos in montibus olim,
vesper ubi e pastu vitulos ad tecta reducit,
auditisque lupos acuunt balatibus agni,
considit scopulo medius numerumque recenset. (*Geo.* 433-36)

He himself—even as at times the warder of a sheepfold on the hills, when Vesper brings the steers home from pasture, and the cry of bleating lambs whets the wolf's hunger—sits down on a rock and counts his flock.

It must be noted, however, that these are the observations of the main narrator, not one of the speakers of the *Aristaeus*. The strongest evidence in Proteus' words for his georgic awareness is in the simile he uses to describe Orpheus after the loss of Eurydice:

qualis populea maerens philomela sub umbra
amissos queritur fetus, quos durus arator
observans nido implumes detraxit. (*Geo.* 511-13)

Even as the nightingale, mourning beneath the poplar's shade, laments the loss of her brood, that a churlish ploughman has seen and torn unfledged from the nest.

¹⁰¹ Gale, 53.

Proteus also uses the language of sowing to describe Orpheus' limbs being "scattered through the fields" (*sparsere per agros*, 522). Whether the content and tone of Proteus' poem qualifies as didactic is subject to debate (Cyrene certainly anticipates it to be, saying he can be forced into giving "instructions," *praecepta*, in 398), but at the very least, he shares the agricultural language and lifestyle associated with Vergil's narrator at certain points during the poem.

Most of all, Proteus is a sympathetic narrator.¹⁰² This is not entirely surprising, if my argument that Book 4 has anticipated and offered glimpses of such a narrator is accepted. Still, Proteus penetrates the world of Orpheus and Eurydice to a degree that the apian narrator—imagining the wedding-beds or funerals of the bees from the threshold of the hive¹⁰³—cannot. Proteus subjects Aristaeus, who has already ventured beneath the waves and then into the cave of Proteus, to an imaginative and emotional experience of liminality beyond "the jaws of Tartarus, the lofty portals of Dis, and the grove that is murky with black terror" (*Taenarias etiam fauces, alta ostia Ditis, / et caligantem nigra formidine lucum*, 4.467-68).

Proteus builds on his above description of the privacy of the underworld's interior. In 480-1, he refers to the "halls of Hell...and inmost Tartarus" (*domus atque intima Leti / Tartara*), similar to the *domus* of the bees at several points and especially to their "inmost chambers" (*intima...cunabula*) at 66. Rather than placing himself above the scene, Proteus focalizes around the perspective of Orpheus, describing the underworld and the lovers making their way out of Hades to the "upper world" or "aethers" (*superas...auras*, 486). After Eurydice is lost, Charon forbids the re-entry of Orpheus, narrator, and audience into the underworld. Proteus speaks as Orpheus in free indirect discourse at the *Georgics*' moment of most heightened narratorial identification:

¹⁰² See sections 7-9.

¹⁰³ See bees observed around their *limina* at 188 and 257.

nec portitor Orci
 amplius obiectam passus transire paludem.
 Quid faceret? Quo se rapta bis coniuge ferret?
 Quo fletu Manis, quae numina voce moveret? (*Geo.* 4.502-505)

Nor did the warden of Orcus suffer him again to pass that barrier of the marsh. What could he do? Where to turn himself, twice robbed of his wife? With what tears move Hell, with what prayers its powers?

Proteus' next image of Orpheus has him weeping "deep in icy caverns" (*gelidis...sub antris*, 509).¹⁰⁴ His lament occupies the remaining 18 lines of Proteus' speech, forms the poetic climax of the *Georgics*, and may even serve as a "lesson of poetry" for Aristaeus, who previously appeared to be a character guided by material and practical self-interest.¹⁰⁵

The suffering of Orpheus is thus experienced intimately and deeply in the lines spoken by Proteus. The *vates* also integrates sympathy into his political and georgic statements in a manner that the apian narrator of Book 4 could not. The keeper of Eurydice, the king of the underworld, corresponds to the contradictory beekeeper-narrator of Book 4, who first encourages and then discourages the departure of bees from the hive.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, the exclusion of Orpheus by Charon may echo the exclusion of drones from the hive.¹⁰⁷ Each injustice gives Proteus the opportunity to mention or intimate the pitilessness of the "ruthless tyrant" or the hearts of his subjects that "knew not how to soften at human prayers" (*nesciaque humanis precibus mansuescere corda*, 470). Orpheus' mistake would be forgivable, Proteus says, if Hell were capable of such pity (489). Proteus' nightingale simile also refers to an unsympathetic figure with power over the hive: the *durus arator* at 512. Thus, rather than celebrating political and

¹⁰⁴ It is perhaps a different sort of *antrum*, but nonetheless evocative of the sheltered caverns and abodes of the tree-dwelling bees, the Dictean bees (152), Cyrene, and Proteus.

¹⁰⁵ Stehle, 367 (citing Parry).

¹⁰⁶ See my discussion of this contradiction at p. 13.

¹⁰⁷ and on the exclusion of drones at p. 22.

georgic figures, Proteus takes up the existing ambiguity of the king's and farmer's usefulness¹⁰⁸ from a markedly anti-political and anti-georgic perspective.

XI. The second *bugonia* and the end of the *Georgics*: Lines 531-66

The extent to which Proteus' account of the heart-wrenching death of Orpheus overshadows Aristaeus' successful *bugonia* at the end of the poem has been the subject of much debate.¹⁰⁹ I propose that this ambivalence results from Vergil's dramatization of the narrator's inability to incorporate the *Aristaeus* into, and gain control of, the conclusion. Proteus—and to a lesser degree Cyrene, who interprets Proteus' speech for Aristaeus in lines 531-47—upstages the *Georgics*' narrator. This narrator fails to create a strong sense of Aristaeus' success as a georgic, political, or poetic triumph. He manages an ambiguous “wondrous to tell” (*dictu mirabile*, 4.554), but otherwise does not interpret or react to the events he describes. The reader is left still pitying Orpheus, longing to know more about Aristaeus and his newly spawned bees, and questioning whether the “Vergil” of the last eight lines has read any of the previous 200.

The thematic markers that I have identified throughout Book 4 are notoriously absent from the narrator's image of the second *bugonia*. He provides no season, no dwelling place, no natural surroundings, and no distinction between the different types of bees.¹¹⁰ The narrator's first line after Cyrene's speech recalls the bees bustling “without delay” at 185 and the narrator's

¹⁰⁸ I discuss this contradiction on p. 20.

¹⁰⁹ A thorough, but somewhat outdated overview of the dispute can be found on Griffin p. 61.

¹¹⁰ This was not true of his modern-day *bugonia*, which he lays out in greater detail earlier in Book 4. See p. 39.

praecepta throughout the *Georgics*; it suggests that the passage will have a didactic tone: *haud mora; continuo matris praecepta facessit* (“No delay, he straightway does his mother’s bidding,” 4.548). Mostly, though, the narrator presents what could have been a resounding georgic success as a didactic failure. It is largely imitated (from Cyrene’s spoken instructions, which Aristaeus is carrying out), glaringly incomplete (the narrator never accounts for the puzzling omission of the sacrifice to Eurydice required in 547), partially ineffective (up in a tree, the swarming bees are of no use to Aristaeus),¹¹¹ and impossible.

The presentation of the *bugonia* is also unsatisfying from an epic-political standpoint. Just as the bees do not appear to be engaged in production, so they do not seem to be political or politically allegorical, except by strained inference from much earlier comparisons between human societies and the bees. In the first *bugonia*, they are compared to arrows and Parthians at 313-14. Here there is no language of weapons or soldiers, nor is there mention of leaders and citizens. If there is anything epic at all about the passage, it is in the Homeric technique with which the narrator repeats Cyrene’s instructions in Aristaeus’ performance of the ritual.¹¹² If there is anything Roman about the passage, it lies in the possible similarities to Greco-Roman religious sacrifice.¹¹³ In all, however, I cannot but conclude that Vergil in lines 548-68 deliberately withholds a narrator with the military vocabulary and political awareness that has been pointed out in the first half of Book 4.

¹¹¹ The beekeeper is told at several points to prevent his bees from swarming and escaping. See p. 30.

¹¹² See Thomas’ note at 549-53.

¹¹³ See Habinek (see especially 211-13) and opposition to the idea in Thomas (1991), pp. 211-218.

The poetic qualities of the *bugonia* remain to be considered. Lines 548-68, after all, are the climactic end result of Aristaeus' sorrow,¹¹⁴ Cyrene's sympathy, and Proteus' sensitivity. The preceding passages have created the expectation that, if one of the speakers of the *Aristaeus* were the narrator of the *bugonia*, there would be evidence of an emotional response on the part of Aristaeus: his previous ignorance turned by Proteus to remorse, his intense bitterness turned by Cyrene to gratitude, or his utter despair turned to joy by divine restitution of his bees. Instead every verb in the passage reflects little more than the narrator's attention to Aristaeus' fulfillment of duty: *facessit* ("does"), *venit* ("comes"), *excitat* ("rears"), *ducit* ("leads"), *mittit* (sends), *revisit* (revisits), and *aspiciunt* ("see"). The bees, too, appear senseless and emotionless in the narrator's account. Had the bees been—as they are elsewhere¹¹⁵—glad at their freedom, playful, or even merely sentient, the *bugonia* would be something other than a matter-of-fact description of a strange ritual and a swarm of insects.¹¹⁶

Vergil has Book 4's narrator undercut himself in the first half of the book and introduces speakers in the second half of the book who achieve a much greater depth of perspective. I encourage, as I believe Vergil to have done, a reading that sees past the limitations of Book 4's narrator. By the time of the closing *bugonia*, no narrator is needed to make emotional connections between the narrator's largely expressionless Aristaeus and the Aristaeus that may be anticipated by the preceding speakers to have learned to pity. Similarly, Vergil leaves unanswered the question of whether to connect emotionally with the bees themselves, whom his narrator has variously asked his audience to farm, preside over, and identify with. For the reader

¹¹⁴ I will not undertake a proof of the depth of Aristaeus' character, but his lament to Cyrene at lines 321-32 show that he is not unfeeling. Nor, as Thomas suggests (1991, p. 218), is Aristaeus ("in fear," *timentem* at 530) unaffected by the words of Proteus.

¹¹⁵ See e.g. *laetae* at 4.55 and my discussion of apian sentience in Section 7.

¹¹⁶ Griffin, 71.

tracing liminality, this marks the first significant activity of both the entire hive¹¹⁷ and of Aristaeus outside of an enclosed or sequestered space. Quite literally—and ironically, given the pretty but rather fleeting analysis by the narrator—both are brought out into the open. This emergence also constitutes an important departure from the modern-day *bugonia* earlier in Book 4, which is clearly an indoor scene.¹¹⁸

I do not purport to settle how much the imagination of the reader fills in the emotional details of the *bugonia* to contribute to an optimistic reading of Aristaeus' expiation of Orpheus' tragedy. As far as it is disappointing or unsettling, the *bugonia* is the crisis of thematic tension in Book 4; as far as it is a success, it is a testament to the interdependency of these same themes and purposes. The ambiguity continues straight through the sphragis, where the narrator refers to himself as "Vergil" for the first and only time (563). When he says that he has sung *haec super arborum cultum pecorumque...et super arboribus*, it is unclear whether he means "things concerning fields, cattle, and trees" or "things beyond fields, cattle, and trees."¹¹⁹ When he says he sat in idleness while "great Caesar" achieved victory and dominance (*Caesar...magnus*, 561-2), it is hard not to detect some poetic pride and irony in the ostensibly propagandistic phrase. The farmer Aristaeus is happily enjoying his new bees, famous and victorious Caesar is on his way to Heaven, the poet is comfortably under the shade of his beech-tree, and the reader of the *Georgics* is left paging back through a book of riddles with a wavering mind and a conflicted heart.

¹¹⁷ True swarming, the risk of which seems to be suggested briefly at 103-4 and 58-62, involves the departure of the entire swarm from the hive. The rest of the "extra-liminal" activities of the bees as described in Book 4 occur with the vast majority of the colony still within the hive itself.

¹¹⁸ 4.295-8; it is worth noting that the "omen" (*omine*) observed by Aristaeus and Cyrene at 4.384-86 may look forward to this difference. A sprinkling of nectar (which may be no coincidence) causes fire to rise up to the "roof-top" (*summum tecti*) like the bees of the outdoor *bugonia* rising to the tree-top (*arbore summa*) at 557.

¹¹⁹ See Thomas' note at 559-60.

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