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VERGIL AND THE TWO CULTURES

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This paper must begin with an *apologia pro insolentia sua*. The Vergil Society is accustomed to being addressed by Vergilian Scholars - those who are spending a lifetime studying Vergil's works and grappling with Vergilian problems. I cannot claim to be one of this distinguished fraternity. My study of Vergil began in the usual way, with Aeneid II at "O" level (School Certificate, as it was called in those days): and my response to Vergil was what I suspect is the usual schoolboy's response - I thought him very simple and greatly over-rated. But in my final year at school I had an unusual piece of good fortune. I became a part-time student at the University College (as it then was) at Exeter, and my tutor was a scholar to whom I and my generation of classicists owe a great deal - Mr. Jackson Knight. I forget exactly what he was scheduled to teach me - I think it was Greek Prose Composition - but the result was that I acquired an enthusiasm for Vergil which has never deserted me. I began to realize that there is more in Vergilian scholarship than memorizing patronymics and swotting up a crib. This awareness of my ignorance gradually became more and more acute throughout an undergraduate career at two universities, in both of which great stress was laid upon Vergil; and when I finally graduated from Cambridge, I felt that the time had come when something really ought to be done about it. But alas, practically nothing has been done. My post-graduate researches have gone in other directions: and though it is difficult to abandon Vergilian studies without regret, it is easy to console oneself (to parody the famous words of Livy) with the greatness and splendour of those by whom one would inevitably have been eclipsed.

And if, despite all this, I none the less presume to address you this afternoon, it is not with any intention of breaking the excellent tradition of the Virgil Society with regard to their choice of speakers, nor of attempting a task which should properly be left to a competent Vergilian scholar. What I wish to do is to discuss a modern educational problem, and its bearing on Vergil himself, on his works, and on our study and appreciation of those works.

We live in a divided society - a sick society; and the sickness which afflicts us constitutes, in my opinion, a serious obstacle to a complete understanding of Vergil. I refer, of course, to the Two Cultures - or rather, to the yawning chasm of ignorance, mistrust and snobbery which divides them. On one side of this chasm lies the older, the poorer but the more respectable of the Two Cultures: its devotees call it "the Humanities", intending to imply that scientists lack humanity: scientists call it "the Arts", intending to imply that it is suitable only for arty people, or artful people. Scientists use methods which they imagine to be new, and believe to be infallible: they pursue definite lines of research, and produce results which are "useful to the

community" (a gross fallacy this, which they can maintain only after making their work unintelligible to all but their immediate colleagues). The Arts Men have no method, and chase after will-o'-the-wisp notions; scientists deal with Reality and Scientific Truth. The opponents of the scientific culture say that it is not worthy to be called a culture at all; a scientific training does not enable a man to express himself intelligibly, or to deal with social, moral or political problems: and despite the vast changes which science has brought about in our lives, these still remain the most fundamental and the most important of all our problems.

How does Vergil fit into this unhappy picture? Has he any place in it at all? Does he belong to either of these cultures, or to both? Can we study him fully and satisfactorily from one side of the dividing chasm, or must we bridge it, partially at least, before we can get him into perspective? When Vergil wrote, there was only one culture: does this mean that he has nothing to say to us? Or that he has everything to say to us?

Let us begin with the easiest of these questions: has Vergil any meaning or value to a scientist today? This is surely what the grammar books call "a question expecting the answer 'no'". The subject matter of the Eclogues and Aeneid is not likely to interest anyone with a purely scientific background; and if he ever gets around to reading the Georgics, what can he do but deride Vergil's naive beliefs - for instance, in the spontaneous generation of plants and animals. In a number of passages where the source of Vergil's technical information can be traced, the scientist will generally prefer to consult that source - Cato, perhaps, or Theophrastus; Vergil's version of it may be condensed to the point of unintelligibility, (as for instance in the lines in Book II about placing stones over young vine plants to protect them from rain and heat¹) or to the point of apparent error. In fact, just as a classicist is the most severe critic of Hollywood epics about ancient Rome, and the least likely to be pleased by them, so a scientist is more likely to enjoy those parts of Vergil's work in which he avoids meddling with science, and does what he (the scientist) conceives to be the poet's job - writing pretty phrases, telling a good story. The poet should use his imagination to create a dream world and dream people, and leave observation of the real world and real people to those who are better equipped and better trained.

Just in case you should think that this is a vague generalization, let us take a particular phrase from Aeneid XII and interpret it from a scientific viewpoint. You remember how the truce between the Trojans and Latins is broken, and Aeneas gets shot at by an anonymous sniper. He is taken to the casualty clearing station, and the M.O. does his best, but to no avail; until Aeneas' mother Venus takes a hand. She fetches a herb called dictamnus from Crete, and adds two other ingredients to the lotion the M.O. is using - *spargitque salubres / ambrosiae succos et odoriferam panuceam*.² Aeneas' wound is at once miraculously cured. There are two possible attitudes towards this incident, of which a scientist might adopt either. He might think that Vergil is doing exactly what Jules Verne did - reaching out in imagination beyond the limitations and failures of contemporary science. Just as Jules Verne was fifty or a

1. II. 350-353.

2. A. XII. 418-9.

hundred years ahead of the technology and engineering of his own day. so Vergil reaches out beyond the crude and primitive medical science of the ancient world. This is a clever thing to do; but in the last analysis the most that poetic imagination can achieve is to challenge the complacent scientist, or entertain and console the frustrated scientist. The man who really matters is the one who makes these pipe-dreams into reality. Cures as miraculous as that effected on Aeneas are commonplace in hospitals today; but the credit for that belongs to the Alexander Flemings of this world, not to the Vergils.

Alternatively, the scientist may regard Aeneas' cure as extraordinary, perhaps unique, but none the less historical fact - an actual achievement of ancient medicine. *Salubres* means "health-giving". Of course, Vergil knew nothing about bacteria or viruses, but we do, and so we can interpret and understand his words better than he could himself. *Sucos* is a technical term of the apothecary; (the ancients apparently did not acquire the knack of distillation: if they had, whisky would have crossed Hadrian's wall many centuries earlier, and in the opposite direction). Their only method of making a concentrated essence was by decoction - boiling away the water - and herbal remedies were often prepared in that way. And what about *ambrosia*? Vergil probably chose this name for its poetic overtones: it was, of course, the name given to the diet of the Gods, being derived from the Greek word for immortality. The manufacturer of tinned rice puddings who named his product "Ambrosia" knew just what he was doing. But poetic overtones are of no importance to the scientific mind; all that matters is the identification of this herb *ambrosia*, and the question whether it would have been beneficial in the treatment of a flesh wound: and, fortunately, *ambrosia* can be identified with reasonable certainty. So ... Dryden translated the passage "and brews/th' extracted liquor with ambrosian dew"; modern science can give us the true meaning - "adds 1 c.c. antiseptic extract of *artemisia botrys* or Turkish Mug-wort".

It is easy to sneer at this kind of attempt to interpret poetry; a narrowly scientific discipline produces in the mind, at the best, atrophy of the poetic sense, or at the worst, aggressive philistinism: but there is another side to the question. Just consider for a moment the kind of criticism made on the Georgics by a very eminent Vergilian scholar, J.W. Mackail: here is what he says in his book "Latin Literature".¹ "Seven years following on the publication of the Eclogues were spent by Vergil on the composition of the Georgics. They were published two years after the battle of Actium, being thus the first, as they are the most splendid, literary production of the Empire. They represent the art of Vergil in its matured perfection. The subject was one in which he was thoroughly at home and completely happy. His own early years had been spent in the pastures of the Mincio, among his father's cornfields and coppices and hives; and his newer residence, by the seashore near Naples in winter, and in summer at his villa in the lovely hill-country of Campania, surrounded him with all that was most beautiful in the most beautiful of lands. His delicate health made it easier for him to give his work the slow and arduous elaboration that makes the Georgics in mere technical finish the most perfect work of Latin, or perhaps of any literature. There is no trace of impatience in the work. It was

1. John Murray, London 1902, p. 95.

in some sense a commission; but Augustus and Maecenas, if it be true that they suggested the subject, had, at all events, the sense not to hurry it. The result more than fulfilled the brilliant promise of the Eclogues. Vergil was now, without doubt or dispute, the first of contemporary poets".

Imagine a newcomer to the Classics reading this paragraph, and thinking to himself "Yes, it sounds very attractive; let's have a look at these Georgics". He opens his text at random, and what does he find? *Quod superest quaecumque preme virgulta per agros/sparge fimo pingui et multa memor occulle terra.*¹ "Whatever you plant out in the open, plaster it with rich manure and don't forget to pile the earth on top." Surely there is some mistake; this is not the poem Mackail was talking about? The Georgics are all about beautiful Italian scenery. Well, yes ... here is a bit in Book II: *hic ver adsidium atque alienis mensibus aestas/bis gravidae pecudes, bis pomis utilis arbor.*² But he goes on to speak of human achievements: *adde tot egregias urbes operumque laborem.* And though he devotes a whole line to the Adriatic and Tyrrhenian seas, he devotes four lines to the Portus Julius, a piece of marine engineering. To gaze from the terrace of one's villa across the bay of Naples is one thing; to look out over cranes and concrete - and make poetry out of them - is quite another. Mackail nowhere actually tells us that the Georgics are didactic; he gives no clear statement of the subject; one might almost think that he considered it indelicate. This is not good enough; there is more in the Georgics than pretty words and pretty scenery.

So much for the attitudes of the Arts man and the Scientist towards Vergil's works: let us now take a closer look at the works themselves; how do they stand vis à vis the Two Cultures?

Apart from a few controversial poems in the so-called Appendix Vergiliana, the earliest we have is the Eclogues: and from these poems it appears that Vergil is to be placed, firmly and without hesitation, on the Arts side. True, when the two shepherds and their lady accomplice (in Eclogue VI) tie up Silenus and make him sing, he responds with an account of the genesis of the universe; but this can scarcely be called scientific - it contains much mythology and little physics. The Eclogues are about country characters in a country setting; Vergil is, on the whole, more interested in the characters than in the setting - a symptom of humanity, and yet another string with which to tie on the Arts label. Nor is his interest in the setting that of a keen or scientific observer; in fact, if we assume that it is meant to be Italian, we must assume that his ideas on the flora and fauna of his own countryside were a bit astray. Lynxes are mentioned in Eclogue VIII, and T.E. Page points out that "lynxes do not exist in Italy". This, of course, is the old Turkish Mug-wort doctrine in another disguise.

Vergil was without doubt imbued with a deep and lasting love for the countryside. In this respect he has often been compared with Wordsworth: but my impression is that Wordsworth's descriptions of natural scenery are the work of a poet whose senses were very alert and whose emotional responses were very intense: but he was, from first to last, an observer, recording the reality of his native Cumberland. In later years, he was able to examine his experiences objectively and assess their effect on the development of his mind. But the

1. G. II. 346-7.

2. G. II. 149 ff.

countryside which forms the setting of Vergil's Eclogues is quite different from Wordsworth's Cumberland; it was the outcome, not of observation and record, but of creation.

Heaven knows, I do not understand how a poet's mind works; and I have little sympathy with those who claim to do so. But there is one process which took place in Vergil's mind which is comprehensible because it happens in a greater or lesser degree to many of us, whether poets or not. It is that process whereby a place that one has known and loved in childhood lingers in the memory, and its image undergoes a gradual change; all the unpleasant, gross or tragic elements are purged away, and there remains nothing but perfection, brilliance and beauty - in a word, Arcadia. Two conditions seem to be essential for this process - one is love, the other exile. Whether a person brought up in an ugly industrial slum ever transforms it into an Arcadia, I do not know; I hardly think so. Nor is it likely that one born among beautiful country scenery who spends all his life among the sights and sounds of his childhood ever transforms their image into something other than the reality, of which he is constantly reminded. Arcadia is always the beloved, and always the lost. (Here I should like to acknowledge much enlightenment from a profound paper given to this Society a year ago, entitled "Vergil in Exile":¹ in it, Dr. Gossage developed the thesis that Vergil always felt himself to be spiritually in exile - like Meliboeus in Eclogue I, driven out of his *patria*.) And when he created the scenery for the Eclogues, he was not, I think, recording the sights which surrounded him; he was *à la recherche du temps perdu*. As for the characters which he created to act in front of this backcloth, the shepherds, nymphs and deities, they are drawn from life, but in the special sense in which the backcloth is drawn from life. They have undergone a subtle change: they have ceased to be individuals: they have no nationality, and they belong to no point in history. (The obvious exception is Gallus, but then he is a 'felicitous anomaly'.) They resemble actual people in certain respects; this fact has furnished scholars and allegorizers with many hours of employment and frustration. But a universalized character is bound, in the nature of things, to resemble particular people; the trouble is that it usually resembles too many particular people.

In the Eclogues, then, Vergil aligns himself very firmly on the Arts side: he shows little or nothing in the way of methodical observation or scientific record of the countryside. Neither he himself nor his shepherds seem to have much interest in stock-breeding; their only practical measure is to get Tityrus to act as lamb-sitter while they are otherwise occupied. The geographer, the botanist and the sociologist can find little to praise and much to censure; but of course, Vergil did not write his Eclogues for the likes of them.

"Vergil's next work", say the potted histories of Latin literature, "was a didactic poem on agriculture - the Georgics." I have been told this many times, but I do not remember anyone ever suggesting to me that here is a startling and incredible fact; yet it is. Having created Arcadia, Vergil performed a sudden *volte-face*; he took a journey - a remarkably unsentimental journey - back to the reality from which he had started, and treated it in a completely different

1. Proceedings of the Virgil Society, 1961-2, pp. 35-45.

spirit. It is as though he had written a full and realistic account of the countryside, discarded all the ugly or painful aspects, and created Arcadia from the rest; now he suddenly up-ends the wastepaper basket, and makes another quite different poem using, among other material, the screwed-up bits. Now you may say, with some justification, that I am exaggerating the contrast: the Eclogues are not all sweetness and light; the Georgics are not all "steaming manure and slashing rain". True; but in them Vergil faces the harsh realities of a farmer's life much more squarely than Thyrsis or Corydon ever did. *Labor omnia vincit/improbis et duris urgens in rebus egestas.* "Unending toil and the urge of grinding poverty will triumph over all things." This comes from the wastepaper basket; in Arcadia, *omnia vincit Amor* - it is Cupid who triumphs over all things.

Of course, in the Georgics Vergil was not only concerned, not even primarily concerned, to present the other side of the picture - to create "Anti-Arcadia". He had taken upon himself the role of teacher: and though he no doubt remembered some snippets of agricultural lore from his childhood, he had enough intellectual humility to do what all good teachers ought to do - he swotted up the standard textbooks on the subject: some of them (Cato and Varro) in Latin, others (Theophrastus, Aratus, Nicander) in Greek. This also is usually taken for granted, as an obvious and natural thing for a poet to do: but is it? Can we honestly imagine Wordsworth, after writing his poem about the host of golden daffodils, trying his hand at a didactic poem about bulb culture, or swotting up a textbook on the subject written (let us say) in Dutch? And how practical would his poem be?

"O bulbs, whose green tips coyly show
Enfibred in an earthen pot,
When white roots burgeon from below,
Why do some sprout, while others rot?"

It is perfectly fair and legitimate to ask whether Vergil is a competent teacher; he makes the explicit claim at the beginning of the Georgics that he is going to give a course of four lectures on various branches of agriculture. And we may ask about Vergil, as about any other professed teacher, two basic questions familiar to all Headmasters and Principals of training colleges: (1) Does he know his stuff? (2) Is he good at putting it over? To answer the first question, one would require a lot of time, and an expert knowledge of agriculture in general, and in particular of farming on Italian soil and in the Italian climate. May I instead quote one simple test to which Vergil's technical knowledge can be put. In a course of lectures on the Georgics which I remember with particular pleasure, Professor Mynors quoted extensively from a pamphlet on bee-keeping issued during the war by the Ministry of Agriculture. Almost every precept in that pamphlet could be found somewhere in the fourth book of the Georgics.

Vergil's skill as an exponent is another large topic, which deserves a whole paper to itself; may I once again mention just one aspect of that skill. Some of you have probably seen, at one time or other, a lecturer subjected to what I believe to be the most gruelling and searching test of his ability. This occurs when he is giving a lecture illustrated with lantern slides, and the projector breaks down. If he can carry on and make something out of the lecture, then he is without doubt an extremely able teacher: I have seen it done

once, and have held the speaker in the deepest respect ever since. Vergil had to manage without a projector. (He had ample warning of this, unlike a former colleague of mine who was told while mounting the steps on to the platform that his slides could not be shown.) But the Georgics, none the less, are illustrated with slides - verbal pictures, painted very vividly in a few lines, which elucidate each paragraph and help to fix it in the memory. Here are just two examples, in a translation which I think is most appropriate to this occasion, that of L.A.S. Jermyn.¹ The first is from Book II, lines 410 ff.

Be late in harvesting your clusters: twice
The shade falls heavy on your vines, and twice
The thorny scrub, thick-grown, will choke your crop.
Hard is each kind of toil. Praise large estates
But cultivate a small one! Then the time
Comes, too, for cutting thorny butcher's broom
In woods, on river banks the fringing reeds,
While uncouth willows find you work to do.
Now may your well-trained vines and their supports
Dispense with pruning. The last dresser sings
Lustily over his completed rows.

And earlier on, lines 276 ff.²

Let every avenue with clear-drawn line
Tally exactly when you set your trees.
As when oft-times on some huge battlefield
The legion's lengthy column has deployed
Its cohorts, halting in the open plain
With lines all dressed for action; far and wide
Over the earth ripples the gleam of steel
From bristling spears poised for the imminent fray,
While doubtful strides the War-God in the midst -
So be your whole plantation meted out

You may call this a quasi-epic simile, if you like; I prefer to call it a "visual aid". One can, of course, multiply these examples.

You may say, perhaps, "granted - the Georgics are didactic, and granted - Vergil was a competent teacher. But what he has to teach is not science as we understand it; he has chosen a topic which is comparatively humane - a science which at times comes dangerously near to being an art. There is something in this. Gardening, after all, is agriculture on a small scale; and even the most impractical Classicist, who would never attempt to mend a fuse or put a new washer on the kitchen tap, might try his hand at growing brussels sprouts, or even a rose or two. The fact is that with gardening, as with farming, the subject itself is not the determining factor; it is the individual approach which may be scientific or otherwise. Some farmers treat their livestock as machines. I heard a poultry farmer being interviewed on television a short time ago: he measures the exact weight of the food which is

1. The Singing Farmer (Blackwell, Oxford 1947), p. 39.

2. *ibid.* p. 34.

given to each of his turkeys, and compares it with the weight of the bird when trussed ready for the oven. He boasted of having bred "a more efficient bird": to him, a turkey is a meat-producing mechanism. On the other hand, there are farmers who think of their livestock almost as human beings: like a friend of mine who used to keep pigs, and named the breeding sows after his sisters.

What is Vergil's approach to his subject? As we should expect from the Eclogues, it is humane, and personal. In Book IV, when he tells of the bees' social organization and their ideal of devotion to the community, the human analogy is there ready-made, and Vergil exploits it to the full. Nothing could be more humane than his account of the old ox who, despite years of honest toil and clean living, none the less falls victim to the terrible plague.¹ But even the plants with which he deals in Book II are "personalized" to a remarkable extent. The sucker which grows from the base of a bay tree "crouches under its mother's broad shadow": fruit on old trees deteriorates in quality, and the trees must be replaced from time to time; *pomaque degenerant sucos oblita priores* - they "forget about" their former flavour. A tree can be grafted with shoots from a different variety of the same fruit, or even from a different fruit; when the graft is successful, the tree grows enormous boughs, *miraturque novas frondes et non sua poma*. - "is astonished at its strange leaves and alien fruit";² "Well, well ... Cox's Orange pippin, and I always thought I was a Worcester Pearmain." Servius calls this *ingens phantasia* - going a bit too far.

Our imaginary objector, Mr. Quispiam, will say at this point that we have finally put paid to all that nonsense about science. Here is a clear case of Vergil presenting, not a factual account, but a lyrical caricature of physical nature; a tree expressing surprise - any moment now we shall have a lot of them gathering round and groaning, as they did in Eclogue V over the death of Daphnis. But Mr. Quispiam is mistaken. This is not Vergil the whimsical poet, it is what Mr. Douglas called Vergil the Realist: not a distorted fancy, but the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Plants are like people: they behave exactly as people do. If you feed them properly, they grow strong and healthy; if you feed them too much fertilizer, they stuff themselves and make themselves sick. If you bring them up with reasonable severity, they will fend for themselves later on; if you pamper them in the artificial air of a hothouse, you must not expect them to survive the harsh realities of the world outside. Wild trees, says Vergil, are unfruitful, but they grow rank and strong; the task of the grower is to "civilize" them - *mollite colendo*, until they lose their wild character, *exuerint silvestrem animum*. But they do so at a price; *mollite* means "make gentle", but it also means "weaken". A dog-rose in a hedge does not need sprays and powders to protect it from mildew, black spot, greenfly and a dozen other ailments to which Paul's Scarlet or Albertine fall ready victims. And civilized man, who in important respects resembles a tea-rose grafted on to a briar stock, is heir to many diseases, of the body and of the mind, which his savage ancestors never knew. So Vergil's realism embraces both the perspicacity of the scientist and the imagination of the artist: it combines strict and literal truth to nature with that power to discern analogies which is, according to Aristotle, the most valuable natural endowment a poet can possess.

1. G. III, 515-30.

2. G. II, 19, 59, 81-2.

Having maintained that Vergil is a genuinely scientific writer - and more than just that - I would admit one reservation. The science of the Georgics is almost all applied science; if Vergil had been of a truly scientific bent, we might have found some pure science in his work. He gives us a series of specific instructions to be carried out under particular circumstances. A writer of Aristotelian disposition would have made some attempt to move from the known towards the unknown - from the particular towards the universal - but Vergil rarely does so. Is this a damning criticism? It would be, if Vergil had claimed this as his objective in the first place, or if he had attempted it and failed in the attempt. But he did neither; his only claim, expressed in the exordium to Book I, was to give practical advice, and that was all he ever attempted to do. If this is borne in mind, some of the attacks on Vergil's technical errors lose much of their point: for instance, he thought, mistakenly, that the principal bee in a swarm is male. But he is giving practical advice on how to manage bees; and so far as the beekeeper is concerned, the sex of the principal bee in his hive is not a matter which concerns him intimately; it is of interest only to an academic biologist, or to another bee.

The Georgics are a skilful compound of science and art: if we fail to see the relevancy of the passage in Book II about the primeval marriage of Earth and Sky, and the birth of mankind, it is because our minds are not broad enough: if we do not enjoy the passage in Book II about empirical methods of determining soil density, and feel inclined to skip ahead to Orpheus and Eurydice, this also is because our minds are not broad enough. We may glibly say that Vergil has failed as a scientific writer, or failed as a poet; but in reality it is we ourselves who have failed as readers.

And even if we are fortunate enough to possess sufficient breadth of interest to enjoy, consistently, the whole of the Georgics, we shall find ourselves faced with another, even more baffling duality. The Georgics are a blend of art and science; they are also a blend of Romance and grim reality, of toughness and tenderness: and whereas Vergil's background, and a childhood spent on his father's farm can account quite adequately (it seems to me) for both the art and the science, it accounts for only one half of the other, more important antithesis. Farmers are on the whole conservative in their outlook and methods; but they do not allow sentiment to interfere with progress. If the horse is getting old, they send him to the knacker's yard and buy a young one; if a thatched cottage gets in the way of the combined harvester, they bulldoze it out and build an Attractive Modern Residence elsewhere. No one but an impractical sentimentalist would try to prevent them. Vergil is not impractical, nor a sentimentalist, but he does show a particular sensitivity, which I suspect would have been blunted if he had not abandoned farming for another profession. His attitude is well illustrated by a short passage in Book II of the Georgics: he speaks of the various types of land suitable for crops, with particular recommendation for virgin soil - land from which trees have recently been cleared: (207 ff.)

*Aut unde iratus silvas devexit arator
et nemora evertit multos ignava per annos ...*

"or land from which the angry ploughman has removed the trees, and overthrown

the groves which have lain idle for many a year". We start with what looks like the authentic farmer's attitude; "they bloomin' old trees - us'll root 'un out and have acre an' half o' barley". But right from the start, Vergil sets our teeth on edge; *iratus* .. why is he angry? Is it, as Conington suggested (and Servius before him) because the groves have been idle for so long? Or, as one of my Reading students suggested, because ploughmen are by temperament hard-swearing, violent men? Even if that is true (which I doubt), *iratus* is a remarkably strong word for Vergil to use; it suggests blind anger which distorts a man's judgment, and goads him into doing something which, in his calmer moments, he would recognize as wrong. Again, what about *nemora*? Is this just a poetic variant for *silvam*? Surely the word *nemus* itself had overtones of sanctity: if spelt with a capital N, it meant a particular sacred grove at Aricia. In Book III, Vergil tells how flocks should be driven into the shade at midday - "where Jove's great oak stretches out its huge boughs of ancient timber, *aut si ubi nigrum/ilicibus crebris sacra nemus accubet umbra* - or where a dark grove of close-planted ilexes reclines in a holy shade".¹ If animals are to be herded into it, presumably it is not a sacred enclosure; yet Vergil still says *sacra umbra*. So I think that when a Roman heard the words *et nemora evertit* his first immediate impression would be of a man desecrating a holy place.

Vergil continues with some even more jarring discords (209 ff.).

*antiquasque domos avium cum stirpibus imis
eruit: illae altum nidis petiere relictis.
at rudis enituit impulso vomere campus.*

He is concerned, as the farmer is not concerned, about the trees, and what happens to the birds who have built their nests in them. The satisfaction of progress shines out from the last line; but Vergil has not forgotten the cost.

Looking at this passage critically, I have found two faults in it. Vergil is supposed to be a poet of extreme condensation; not one word, we are told, can be taken away from any line without some loss of meaning. But what about *illae*? Does it add any meaning, or clarify the rest of the sentence? No, it does not. Let us then ask a different question; under what circumstances would Vergil be obliged to put in the word *illae*? Surely, if there were two lots of birds to be distinguished from each other; one group, *illae*, flies up into the sky: there should be another, *hae*, doing something different.

The second fault concerns the phrase *antiquasque domos avium*. Anyone who has read the Georgics will recognize here a favourite Vergilian trick: with a blend of irony and tenderness he speaks of the habitat of small animals in grandiose terms. The little mouse burrows under the threshing-floor and "builds his grain-silos" (*horrea fecit*); in the same place blind moles "site their boudoirs" (*posuere cubilia*);² and the Battle of the Bees in the fourth book is given the full epic treatment. It is ironical, but at the same time it gives us a "mouse's eye view" of what may be, for a mouse, a great undertaking.³ To call a bird's nest *antiqua domus*, words suggestive of a mansion in Grosvenor Square, is to be ironical, but also to remind us that there are beings to whom a

1. G. III, 332-4.

2. G.I, 181-3. cf. A. IV, 404-7.

3. Television camera techniques provide a close analogy in what is termed (I believe) a "zoom-in shot".

circular structure of twigs somewhere in a particular tree may mean a very great deal.

This I take to be the effect which Vergil intended; but he spoils it in two ways. The second line is so condensed that there is a danger of taking *antiquas domos* to mean trees (not nests) and so missing the "close-up" effect. And in the next line he gives the game away (for irony is a game) with the word *nidis*. These two faults - the superfluous *illae* and the weakening of the irony - can be explained away if we suppose that Vergil, in his characteristic fashion, is trying to suggest or adumbrate a second meaning alongside that which we have so far elicited. You remember that *illae* rather calls for a second group of birds: are we to suppose that the nests which the first group leaves behind are empty? Or are there perhaps some nestlings, too young to fly, who are killed when the trees are felled? Surely it is not by chance that *domus*, *stirps* and *nidus* are all words with extensions of meaning - *domus* and *stirps* both meaning "family" or "descendants" and *nidis* used (in Georgics IV, 17) to mean "nestlings". (Dryden goes so far as to translate *nidis* as "young ones" in this context.)¹

These lines, then, bear two related but different meanings: there is no question of deciding which Vergil "really intended" - he intended both, and the reason why he did not express one quite so well as he might have, was the need to express the other, at the same time and in the same words. There are a lot of other comments to be made on the passage - on the remarkable way in which the sound suits the sense; on the paragraph structure, with heterodyne in the first four lines and homodyne in the last; and on the queer metrical jerk in the last line, which I believe to be a short syllable *enituit* with a pause for breath before the explosive power of the second half. But there is no time to go into these points.

Indeed, you are probably thinking that I have already spent far too long on what is, after all, an unimportant bit of Georgics II. But I make no apology for this: because here, in the space of five lines, Vergil expounds a complete theme: and it is nothing less than the theme of the whole of the Aeneid - the destruction of the old in order to make way for the newer and supposedly better: the reward of great human achievement and the price which must be paid in blood and sorrow.

And when Vergil came to tell the same story on a much larger scale, he seems to have recalled this little episode. In Book II Aeneas tells how the Danaans overthrew Troy (*eruerint*): just as the clearing of this grove sweeps away something that has stood for many years, so does the sack of Troy - *urbs antiqua ruit multos dominata per annos*: when Aeneas and the other survivors arrange to rendezvous outside the city, it is near to an ancient cypress tree, *religione patrum multos servata per annos*.² Aeneas is permitted to see with his own eyes the Gods taking part in the destruction of Troy - even Jupiter himself; and Vergil effects the transition from this supernatural vision back to normality by means of a simile - the simile of a great tree being felled.³

1. My suggestion is that *domos... cum stirpibus imis* means (a) the trees, down to their lowest roots, and (b) the families, together with the last surviving generations. I hope to argue this in detail elsewhere.

2. A.II.363, 715.

3. A.II.626-31.

Aeneas then returns to the home where he has lived all his life; *atque ubi iam patriae perventum ad limina sedis / antiquasque domos*,¹: Vergil could easily have said *antiquamque locam* ... but he didn't. (Incidentally, Servius, commenting on this passage, says of the word *antiquas* "*aut re vera antiquas, aut caras*", and quotes an example from Sallust of the word *antiquitas* used to mean "affection".) Finally, the word *altum* just happens to mean "deep" as well as "high"; when Aeneas set sail with his pitiful group of exiles, he says, "*terror ersul in altum / cum sociis natoque peratibus et magnis dis*".²

Aeneas is lucky; his son and his home, in a sense, go with him. Does the parallel cease from this point? No. The role of the nestlings is filled by Astyanax: he is too helpless to escape with the rest: he dies (if you will forgive the gruesome detail) in much the same way as the nestlings, being hurled down from a high tower. And just as the nestlings (if my interpretation of this passage is right) are only alluded to in a very oblique way, so also is Astyanax. His name is mentioned in passing during the description of Priam's palace,³ and again in one of the most terribly moving passages of the Aeneid - the episode in Book III when Aeneas visits Buthrotum, to find Andromache and Helenus living in a re-created Troy. Everything is there - the river Simois, the Scaean Gate and a citadel called Ilium: yet, in a sense, nothing is there. Andromache's true allegiance is to a dead man: and whereas Aeneas takes with him hope for the future embodied in his son, Andromache has no son, and no future - only the past. Here, surely, are two cultures; on the one side the mobile, forward-looking, ambitious and unscrupulous culture - the culture that was to break Dido's heart and kill Turnus, take Evander's son from him and embroil the peace-loving, innocent Latins in a disastrous war. On the other side is the static, sentimental culture, trying to put the clock back, and live as though the Trojan War had never been. Both these groups once belonged to a single community; but the cataclysm of war has isolated the two elements in the compound that was Troy - those who turned their backs on Ilium, and sailed forth into the unknown to make a fresh start, and those who stayed where they were, surrendered to the Greeks and salvaged what they could from the ruins of their lives. Vergil also shows us the feelings of these groups towards each other. There is a bond of affection between them - they were once all Trojans together - yet there is jealousy too. Aeneas is supported and stimulated by the knowledge of his great destiny; but he envies Helenus the tranquility and calm tenor of his life - *vobis parva quies*. Aeneas' greatest trials are yet to come; Helenus has not "to plough a great expanse of sea, or seek the lands of Italy which always escape from his grasp". But Aeneas does not settle in Buthrotum, or accept Helenus' "final solution of the Trojan Problem". "*vivite felices, quibus est fortuna peracta / iam sua*" is an ambivalent phrase;⁴ it can mean "you are lucky - your trials and tribulations are all over", or it can mean "you are a lot of has-beens (or should it be "have-beens"?)

Helenus gives to Aeneas the guidance of prophecy, drawn from profound knowledge and profound inspiration - the greatest gift from the past to the future. Andromache's gift to Ascanius is simple, but touching. She sees in him the chance of realizing all that she had hoped for, in vain, from her own

1. A. II, 635

2. A. III, 11-12.

3. A. II, 457

4. A. III, 493-4.

son. *O mihi sola mei super Astyaractis imago*: his eyes, the poise of his hands, the cast of his features was the same: and he would be just about your age now. There are those who think that the teaching of Latin Grammar is too analytical and too pedantic: but if one fails to realize that *pubesceret*, the imperfect subjunctive, denotes the apodosis of an unfulfilled condition, with suppressed protasis, one is liable to overlook one of the master-strokes of Vergil's art; there are some ideas which are more eloquently expressed in silence than in words. And surely, just for the sake of understanding this one line, and nothing else, the effort of learning all about conditional clauses (Arnold-Bradley-Mountford, pp. 246-262) is well worth while.

At this point in Book III of the Aeneid Vergil shows us his two cultures side by side, but not in violent contrast. This is because the portrayal of Aeneas' character is not static, but dynamic. He begins as one of the birds who fly away when the tree comes down; and for a time - the phase is scarcely over when he reaches Buthrotum - he looks back with longing to the past, and tries unsuccessfully to re-create it. But as the story unfolds, his character turns the full circle from sentimental nostalgia to ruthless imperialism - progress at all costs and to hell with anyone who gets in the way. He ends up, *furiis accensus et ira*, hacking down someone else's tree. He has crossed the gulf - and it is a very real gulf - from one culture to the other.

I have left until last the passage near the end of Georgics II in which Vergil makes what looks like an explicit statement of his attitude towards science and the scientist.¹ He asks, above all, that he may find favour with the Muses, who will teach him all about "celestial orbits and the stars, eclipses of the sun and all the moon must suffer, whence come earthquakes and tidal waves, that burst forth and then subside again; why the sun hastens to set in winter months, and what it is that delays the tardy nights". ... The Natural Science Tripos. In the Eclogues, Vergil had spoken of his ambition to write a Roman epic; and in due course he fulfilled it. Whether, had he lived longer, he might have attempted a scientific poem on the lines laid down here, we cannot tell; all we know is that the Muses did not grant this prayer to Vergil during his lifetime. He himself envisaged a different obstacle to its fulfilment - not premature death but "refrigeration of the pericardial blood-supply" - one of the very rare touches of satire in Vergil's work, and a neat little dig at the materialistic psychologists of his own day.

He goes on to say: *felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas
atque metus omnis et inexorabile fatum
subiecit pedibus strepitumque Acherontis avari.*

I do not understand these lines as well as I should like to. In the first place, who is this chap? Is it Lucretius? What Mr. Jackson Knight calls "Vergil's negative capability" is clearly at work here. Is this man the scientist, as we know him? *rerum cognoscere causas* - able to probe the innermost secrets of the physical universe; *metus omnis subiecit pedibus* - debunked religion, with all its taboos and hobgoblins. But scientific materialism, as expounded by the Greek atomists brought with it determinism; and *inexorabile fatum* sounds to me like an allusion to fatalism or determinism. Why then does this man, whoever he is,

1. G.II. 475 ff.

"trample it underfoot"? Was it for the same reason that Epicurus introduced a suspect and very unscientific idea - the "swerve" - and so re-instated free-will - because in a context of total determinism human life has no meaning, and moral philosophy has no use? If so, was he not, to that extent, a humanist?¹

Vergil next draws a comparison between this man (whoever he is) and his "opposite number": we are conditioned to think of him as a scientist, having only one possible opposite number. "Fortunate also is he who..." Does what? Writes poetry? Composes music? No. *Fortunatus et ille deos qui novit agrestes*: the countryman. Nor is the main contrast that between science and art, as we should expect: after all, the countryman is a scientist of sorts. Vergil is weighing the humble piety of the countryman against presumptuous atheism: he is comparing the man who seeks through science to conquer and dominate the physical universe with the countryman who settles for peaceful co-existence and mutual respect. And finally, Vergil contrasts the relationships of these two men with the physical universe: to the one, the world is "it", and his attitude to it is detached and objective. To the other, the world is "thou", and his relation is intimate and personal: *deos qui novit agrestes* - "who is on familiar terms with the country gods". These main points of contrast are highlighted in a further series of comparisons between the countryman and a sort of Rogues' Gallery - the man of ambition, the man of greed, the man of violence: they each achieve great things, at a terrible cost: but none of them can ever know the peace and stability of the countryman's life:

*agricola incurvo terram dimovit aratro,
hinc anni labor, hinc patriam parvosque nepotes
sustinet ...*

Here are Vergil's two cultures - Aeneas and Helenus: Octavian and the Republican Party: the Atomic Energy Authority and the Society for the Preservation of Rural England. They were the two inseparable halves of Vergil's world, and the two halves of Vergil's own soul - Meliboeus and Tityrus in the very first Eclogue. To reconcile them, and to discover the tragic paradox of our existence - that birth can only come from death, and peace can only be won by violence - cost Vergil long and agonizing thought: it took much of the happiness out of his later years, and all the laughter out of his poetry. As for our Two Cultures, what are they but the complementary halves of the apple of knowledge, which grows on Mount Helicon and is presented, whole and undivided, to the fortunate among mankind? And the gulf between them, of which we make so much? Vergil crossed and re-crossed it, time and time again; and I doubt very much whether he even noticed it.

1. Cf. the exact Greek equivalent of *inexorable fatum*, ἀπαράτητον ἀνάγκη in a supposed quotation from Epicurus, Ritter and Preller, HPG 463, note (a) fin.