

ARISTAEUS, PINDAR AND LUCRETIUS

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by

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The object of this paper is to suggest that to some extent Pindaric motivation (from Pythian 9) lies behind the Aristaeus episode in Georgics 4, and then to consider the episode and its place in the economy of the four books constituting the poem in the light of Lucretius, a poet to whom Virgil was peculiarly indebted, not least in the Georgics. I am assuming without argument or discussion that the Aristaeus epyllion is integral to the work. It is possible that the considerations I put forward in this contribution could strengthen the assumption¹.

Amongst the ancient sources for Aristaeus is the ninth Pythian ode, a poem in which Aristaeus' birth is prophesied. For Pindaric influence upon Virgil in the Georgics we can consider the proem to the third book (10-39) where the imagery of the chariot of song and of the temple and its adornment is of Pindaric origin. The passage has been well discussed by L.P. Wilkinson² who stresses, while others (for example, Jackson Knight, Büchner, Fleischer) have simply noted, the influence of Pindar on Virgil's lines. To emphasise the literary relationship here is right; the Virgil passage in fact is the first evidence for Pindar's 'arrival' in Rome. Soon Horace was to display interest in him, as we see from Odes 1.12 (Quem uirum aut heroa.....?), 3.4 (Descende caelo et dic age tibia), and later 4.2 (Pindarum quisquis studet aemulari.....) and 4.4 (Qualem ministrum fulminis alitem). It is not hard to imagine Virgil and Horace reading and discussing Pindar together.

In the ninth Pythian ode, written in honour of Telesicrates of Cyrene, the subject of the main myth is Apollo's first love. The god Apollo, having seen the nymph Cyrene wrestling with a 'monstrous lion', is deeply attracted to her and seeks advice from his old teacher, the Centaur Cheiron, as to how to proceed.

The mythological tradition represents Apollo in one of his aspects as a vigorous amorist. Pindar's approach in Pythian 9 is delicate - for a careful and excellent study of the scene in it (26ff.) between Apollo and Cheiron see Leonard Woodbury's article, 'Apollo's First Love'³ - but no matter how the ode is interpreted with regard to details, Apollo's amatory eagerness in it is unmistakable. Cheiron foretells that Aristaeus will be the result of the union of Apollo and Cyrene.

Aristaeus, mythologically, was a god or hero who, as protector of cattle and fruit-trees, had a cult which, originating in Thessaly, was found in various other

areas as well (for example, Boeotia, Ceos, Sicily). He was too the patron deity of apiculture, having been responsible for its introduction (Ap. Rhod., 4. 1132 ff. Diod., 4.81; Ovid, Ex Ponto 4.2.9.). The Aristaeus-episode occurs in Georgics 4 to provide an αἴτιον for βουγούλα ('spontaneous generation' of a new hive of bees from the carcase of an ox). Whether such an αἴτιον already existed in the tradition or not, we do not know. It was quite easy for Virgil to supply one, basing it upon Aristaeus whose connection with bees was well established.

The epyllion with which Georgics 4 concludes follows the common pattern with an outer and an inner narrative. In the outer one Aristaeus, sad and mystified by the loss of his bees, goes to his mother, the nymph Cyrene who lives beneath the source of the river Peneus in Thessaly; as the son of Apollo he is allowed by his mother to enter miraculously those underwater regions (fas illi limina diuum / tangere, 358-359). Instead of explaining the situation herself, however, Cyrene directs him to Proteus. This wise figure says that the nymphs are angry: in fleeing from the improper advances of Aristaeus, Eurydice, wife of Orpheus, trod on a snake from whose bite she died - as a result of which expiation has become necessary. Proteus next goes on to recount the beautiful and sad story of how the living Orpheus attempted - in vain - to regain his lost Eurydice. We then are taken back to Cyrene and Aristaeus who have been listening to Proteus, and the book ends with the portent, sudden and remarkable, of the spontaneously generated bees, and a brief epilogue to the Georgics as a whole by the poet.

A happy ending to the Orpheus-Eurydice story was known: Euripides (Alcestis, 357ff.) alludes to it through the words of Admetus who says to the devoted wife he hardly deserves that if he were as good a singer as Orpheus he would have descended to Hades to bring her back. But the unhappy Eurydice does not seem in general to have touched the classical Greek imagination; it was rather Orpheus' singing which was emphasised where there was mention of him at all; he is entirely absent from Homer and Hesiod, the first literary reference to him being in Ibycus⁴. The Orpheus-Eurydice story with its pathetic quality is something that the Alexandrian writers are likely to have taken up and developed. There is plenty of pathos in Virgil's handling of the theme, but whether Orpheus' final loss of his wife through his inability to refrain, because of love, from looking back was his own invention or came from a Hellenistic source we cannot be sure⁵.

Between Aristaeus and the Orpheus-Eurydice tale there is no known connection. The snake-bite was probably part of the established tradition⁶, but that it took place when Eurydice was fleeing from Aristaeus' lustful advances (dum te fugeret, 457) is apparently Virgil's own addition designed to link the two narratives of the epyllion: she was so anxious to escape from the unwelcome attentions of Aristaeus that she did not notice the snake in the grass.

And so one whom tradition represented as a keeper of bees and the protector of cattle appears in Georgics 4 as the unwitting worker of evil through yielding to lascivious desire. There is something horrifying about the words dum te fugeret; they are chilling because they are so unexpected when read for the first time - an experience we no doubt share with the ancient Roman reader, for Virgil deliberately intended the effect when he gave, as seems to be the case, this new shape to the myth of Aristaeus.

In his actual handling of the story Virgil drew quite extensively on Homer. The list of nymphs comes, with elaboration, from Iliad 18. 35ff., while the scene of welcome was suggested by Odyssey 1. 144ff. and 4. 39ff. But the poet's greatest debt to Homer consists in his use of the Proteus story of Menelaus in Odyssey 4. 351ff. In it Proteus, having come with his seals to his cave at noon, counts them and then goes to sleep (400, 403, 450-451, 453); Menelaus with his three companions attacks him (454), and he changes successively into various creatures (456-458; Eidothea in her account mentions other kinds of metamorphosis including fire, 417-418); he resumes his old form (460) and affects not to know why Menelaus has come (462-463) even though Menelaus is convinced that he does not really need to be told (465). Eventually he discloses that Menelaus must make a substantial sacrifice to the offended gods before he can reach his home. He also reveals the fate of Menelaus' comrades, Ajax, Agamemnon and Odysseus. Verbal correspondences occur: Odyssey 4.465, οἴσθα, γέρον, τὸ με ταῦτα παρατροπέων ἀγορεύεις; is paralleled by 447, 'scis, Proteu, scis ipse, neque est te fallere quicquam', and Odyssey 4.417, πάντα δὲ γυγνόμενος περῆσεται, ὅσσ' ἐπὶ γαῖαν . . . by 441, omnia transformat sese in miracula rerum. Similarly the reference to Calchas at Iliad 1.70, ὅς ἤδη τά τ' ἐσσόμενα πρό τ' ἐόντα finds a counterpart in Cyrene's description of Proteus (392-393):

nouit namque omnia uates,

quae sint, quae fuerint, quae mox uentura trahantur.

Further, Achilles' complaining recourse to his mother Thetis (Iliad 1. 348ff., and 18. 35ff.) provided the pattern for Aristaeus' visit to his mother. But Homer was probably not Virgil's only source at this point, for the reception of Aristaeus by Cyrene beneath the waves could well have been inspired by Theseus' visit to his stepmother Amphitrite, an incident described by Bacchylides (16.97ff.) and depicted upon vases.

But Virgil is not wholly dependent upon Homer; there are differences of treatment. Homer merely mentions the cave, while Virgil gives more space to it, starting off with est specus ingens (418) which is later picked up in epic manner with hic. in latebris (423)⁷. Menelaus, too, has companions, but Aristaeus is alone (though he has had the benefit of having had ambrosia shed over him by his mother).

But along with Homer Pindar, I suggest, had a share in the genesis of the Aristaeus-episode. Aristaeus is perhaps to be seen in Virgil as a real 'chip off the old block'. Even as his father Apollo had conceived an amorous fancy for Cyrene (but Pindar's Cheiron argues for marriage), so Aristaeus went in pursuit of Eurydice (seemingly an invention by Virgil). And both father and son had recourse to a wise personage for advice - Apollo to Cheiron, Aristaeus to Proteus. Schematically put these are the parallel situations:

Apollo (passionate youth)	Cheiron (wise personage)	Cyrene (object of passion)	PINDAR
Aristaeus (passionate youth)	Proteus (wise personage)	Eurydice (object of passion)	VIRGIL

The ninth Pythian is the most romantic of all the odes of Pindar; its four myths deal with love and marriage, and the poet (98-100) says that young women witnessing Telesicrates' athletic Prowess at festivals have silently prayed that they might have such a husband or son. And the erotic theme seems further to be sustained by the rich imagery of vegetation running through the piece, and in particular by the reference to a picked flower (37) and to culled fruit (110)⁸.

The ode shows some traces of Homeric influence - 43ff.: κύριον ὄς πάντων τέλος οἴσθα ... χῶ τὸ μέλλει, χῶπόθεν ἔσσεται, εὔ καθορᾶς. contains a reminiscence of Odyssey 4. 465: οἴσθα, γέρον, τί με ταῦτα παρατροπέων ἀγορεύεις (with which there has already been compared Georgics 4.447, 'scis, Proteu,.....')⁹. In setting out to describe the interview between Apollo and Cheiron Pindar would seem to have had Homer's Menelaus-Proteus scene in mind to some extent. And Pindar, as well as Homer, played a part in the creation of Virgil's Aristaeus-episode.

Poetic integration of all kinds of elements (archaic, middle, late) is a fully recognised part of Virgil's art. In a well known work of literary detection¹⁰, John Livingston Lowes has analysed with great care Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' and 'Kubla Khan', detailing the very diverse constituents of these two poems. In a footnote (p. 35) Lowes observes: '....Coleridge, like Chaucer, had the trick of recollecting a number of things at a time (which forthwith proceeded to combine).....'. This remark could equally well be applied to Virgil. No doubt a great deal of the process of integration was subconscious - and probably always is in the minds of creative artists; reminiscences from different sources coalesce to produce original manifestations, mosaic patterns of new significance.

Faced with the vast amount of exegetical literature on the problem of the Aristaeus-episode a man hesitates before adding anything of his own in the way of opinion. However, let me briefly indicate how I am inclined to think Aristaeus,

Orpheus and Eurydice are connected with bugonia.

1. I suggest that Aristaeus is intended to reflect lust, Orpheus true and abiding love. I detect a Lucretian theme at work: in the proem to his first book Lucretius hymns Venus as the power of love which is the origin of all life. The domain of alma Venus is wide, extending from the procreation of the humblest things right up through irresponsible passion to deep love.
2. et mentem Venus ipsa dedit (Georgics 3.267). The third book contains a very memorable passage (209-283) on the power of sexual attraction amongst animals; cattle and horses have their efficiency marred by sexual longing; bulls must be kept apart from cows till the right time. The poet is concerned with the caeci stimulos amoris (210) and their baneful effects - unrestrained lust can cause great havoc. In language reminiscent of love-elegy (urit, dulcibus inlecebris, amantis) Virgil describes the sexual attraction which a cow has for a bull (214 ff.), and in writing of the frenzy which seizes animals - and men (amor omnibus idem, 244) - he moves into a passage of Lucretian fervour which recalls that poet's fourth book with its long concluding section (1037ff.) denouncing the emotion of love and all its works. It was this emotion which made Leander swim the Hellespont to visit Hero, until at last he met his death and was the cause of hers (258ff.)
3. If we read, or at least think of, the books of the Georgics as separate entities we shall fail to appreciate the essential continuity of the whole work. In the third book a dominant theme is reproduction and animal sexuality - see 49-122 (selection of parents for horses and cattle), 125-256 (mating and pregnancy) and 209-283 (the sexual instinct). The theme of reproduction is taken up again in the fourth book with the bugonia, while the third book's treatment of the power of sexual feeling in animals is answered by the fourth's treatment of the same phenomenon in Aristaeus and Orpheus. Of the first book the subject is the tillage of the earth and the seasons of the year, and of the second it is the vine, the olive and other trees which grow on the earth. Thus, the general environment or scene is set for the cyclic drama of 'birth, copulation and death' (to use T.S. Eliot's phrase in another context) with which the third and fourth books are broadly concerned.
4. The reality of spontaneous generation was a common belief amongst the ancients from early times, and bugonia is attested by all ancient authorities (with the exception of Aristotle, De gen. 3.10, where he observes that the facts concerning the generation of bees have not been properly established). Varro begins his account of bees with a reference to it (3. 16. 4; cp. 2. 5. 5), and Lucretius, one of Virgil's favourite poets, alludes to it at 2.871ff. and 897ff., and 3.713ff.
5. Another of Virgil's favourite poets was Catullus whose work clearly made a

deep impression on his imagination, not least the Alexandrian epyllion, 'The Marriage of Peleus and Thetis' (poem 64): from the fourth Eclogue onwards echoes of it continue to reverberate in his work. It was customary for such a composition to show some kind of contrast or variation between its outer and inner part. In conformity with this, Catullus' epyllion exhibits a contrast between the happy love of Peleus and Thetis and the unhappy love of the deserted Ariadne. The two narratives of Virgil's epyllion present, it seems to me a similar neoteric interplay of moods and atmosphere. In his Orpheus we have a highly sympathetic depiction of true and faithful marital love - his disobedience in looking round is the very measure and sign of his devotion to Eurydice. This love stands in sharp contrast to the selfish recklessness of Aristaeus who with his whining petulance as he has recourse to his mother for comfort recalls that other childish and immature figure, Homer's Achilles. And yet ultimately the driving force behind Orpheus as lover and Aristaeus as would-be seducer is that same Venus whose power is also to be seen operating, in another mode and at another level, in the bugonia.

W.Y. Sellar ('The Roman Poets of the Augustan Age', Oxford, 1908, p. 198; cp. W.A. Merrill, 'Parallels and Coincidences in Lucretius and Virgil' in Univ. of California Publications in Classical Philology III (1918), pp. 135-247) remarked that the influence, direct and indirect, exercised by Lucretius on the thought, composition and even diction of the Georgics was perhaps stronger than that ever exercised before or since by one great poet on the work of another. The Aristaeus-episode owes a very large amount to Lucretius and Catullus, I believe, while for the irresponsible lust of Aristaeus we may look to Pindar's presentation of his father, the amorous Apollo, in Pythian 9.

Within the terms of a contractual, non-ethical religion, Aristaeus shows compliance and by seeking a 'right relationship' with the gods is thus officially meritorious, but Orpheus fails to show full compliance and is thus officially a sinner. However, judged by other standards, Aristaeus is, to put it bluntly, a 'cad' - he has not even any recollection of his lecherous attempt upon Eurydice; and Orpheus is an example of enduring faithfulness in love¹¹.

Notes

- 1 In a recent article, 'The Fourth Georgic, Virgil and Rome' (Greece and Rome, Second Series, vol. 26, no. 1 (April, 1979), 61-80), Jasper Griffin gives a useful survey of modern views on the Aristaeus episode. For contributions up to 1968 see L.P. Wilkinson, The Georgics of Virgil, Cambridge, 1969, Appendix 4, 325-326. To Griffin's bibliography add C.G. Perkell, 'A Reading of Virgil's Fourth Georgic', Phoenix vol. 32, no. 3 (Autumn, 1978), 211-221. Griffin strengthens the arguments of Norden, W.B. Anderson and Wilkinson refuting the alleged change to the end of the fourth Georgic.
- 2 L.P. Wilkinson, op.cit., 166-171.
- 3 T.A.P.A. 103 (1972), 561-573. See, too, E. Robbins, 'Cyrene and Cheiron: the Myth of Pindar's Ninth Pythian', Phoenix vol. 32, no. 2 (Summer, 1978), 91-104.
- 4 See the remarks of G.S. Kirk, 'The Nature of Greek Myths', Harmondsworth, 1974, 170-171, and 208.
- 5 C.M. Bowra, C.Q. 46 (1952), 113-126, suggests that Virgil was not inventing but following a Hellenistic version which he attempts to reconstruct by analysing the story as we find it in Virgil and in Ovid (Met. 10).
- 6 E. Norden, 'Orpheus und Eurydice' in Sitz. Berlin. Akad. 73 (1934), 626-683 = Kleine Schriften zum klassischen Altertum. (1966), 468-532.
- 7 For the mannerism see R.G. Austin on Aeneid 2.21.
- 8 Woodbury, op. cit., 561.
- 9 Compare, too, Iliad 1.365, where Achilles replies to Thetis:
οἴσθα' τίη τοι ταῦτα ἰδούη πάντ' ἀγορεύω
- 10 'The Road to Xanadu', Boston, 1927.
- 11 I have had the benefit of criticism from Sir Roger Mynors, but there are still things in this paper with which he would not agree.