77. ibid., 3, 830.

V.S. Lectures, No. 87

SOMETHING ODD ABOUT VIRGIL

A lecture delivered to the Virgil Society
16th March 1968

by J. R. T. Pollard, T.D., M.A., B.Litt.

The recent revised edition of the late W. F. Jackson Knight's Virgil's Troy and Cumaean Gates under the comprehensive title of Vergil, Epic and Anthropology (1967) has been to me not only a sad reminder that fugit interea fugit inreparabile tempus, but of a time when I was much influenced by the exciting parallels observed between the religious beliefs of non-European cultures and the events of the second and sixth books of the Aeneid. Temes Savsap, the Malekulan underworld daemon appeared to have much in common with the Sibyl, while the journey of Aeneas had marked affinities with the Sumerian saga of Gilgamish, or so it seemed to me. Later I was saddened to learn that not everyone was as sanguine as Jackson Knight, and that few scholars were prepared to set much store even by the revelations of Frazer's Golden Bough or the learned excursuses of A. B. Cook on such fascinating topics as oak-kings and woodpeckers. When I put it to someone whose opinion I valued that there must be good reason why people were for ever prying into Virgil's psychic and religious background he said that he suspected that there was something odd about him. Well, is there anything odd about Virgil's poetry? And if there is, and of course not everyone would agree that there is, in what particular facet or feature does it lie? What in fact does one mean by venturing to call Virgil odd? What indeed would one mean by calling any poet odd, much less an epic poet of Virgil's stature? Few, I imagine, would wish to claim that there was anything particularly odd about Homer, apart, that is, from the Homeric question. Neither is there anything particularly queer about Hesiod, although Mr. West has drawn attention to some curious ellipses in the Theogony (M. L. West, Hesiod Theogony, 1966, 161-2) or in fact any of the major epic poets right down to Apollonius, and of course it would be odd if there were, for epic leans by definition towards orthodoxy and tradition. The Greek dramatists, it is true, may on occasion have treated odd themes, but this is not the same thing as claiming that there was anything odd about them, at least in the sense in which I intend to employ the term. The sole exception, of course, is Pindar whose curious mingling of sublimity with obliquity is at times reminiscent of Virgil. Coming down to Roman times no-one I suppose would be prepared to maintain that there was anything odd about Virgil's friend and contemporary Horace. Lucretius again may have been driven to despair and finally committed suicide, but there is singularly little that one would describe as odd about the De Rerum Natura. It is true that the end of the fourth book is sometimes regarded as unduly salacious, but hardly in any way strange. To go further back, Ennius is usually straightforward enough,

and although the Attis is admittedly a very odd poem Catullus, for all his temperament, seems otherwise perfectly normal. The same can hardly be said of Propertius whose realistically vivid imagination sometimes strains the Latin language to a degree that obscures the sense. In this he contrasts so sharply with Ovid whose thoughts ran on more traditional lines. Lucan, I suppose, it could be argued, with his partiality for the gruesome and obscure turns of phrase was somewhat peculiar. But similar arguments could be applied to Juvenal and in prose to Tacitus, who despite his excessive compression and stylistic idiosyncrasies was above all things eminently sane. Tacitus was, of course, much influenced by Virgil, and it is in fact the poet's very mastery of compression that was responsible indirectly for much of the historian's obscurity. Nevertheless Virgil's more conscious imitators like Silius, Valerius Flaccus and Statius, with their rhetorical flights and love of realism are not particularly unorthodox or odd.

At first sight it might appear perverse to describe the greatest Latin poet of all, the model indeed of so many who came after, as odd. How could he be odd, and yet be universally acclaimed, even in his own day, as the great poet he was? Surely oddity and genius are mutually exclusive terms and could not be fairly applied to one and the same poet at one and the same time? All this, of course, is perfectly true. But it is not the oddity of Virgil which is in question, but the claim that there was something odd about him. The presence of hidden depths in Virgil has long been recognised. Dryden referred to 'the sober retrenchments of his sense which always leaves somewhat to gratify our imagination, on what it may enlarge at leisure.' (Works of Virgil II, 282), while Henry observed more pointedly that 'It would not be Virgil's thought or picture if there was not a difficulty somewhere in the expression.' (Aeneidea III, 579). Conway again described the opening words of the Aeneid as 'typical of Virgil's habit of impressing manifold meaning upon a particular word by the position and association in which he set it.' (P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Primus, 1935). More recently Jackson Knight stated that 'Compression into density of meaning is the main principle of Vergil's expression. To achieve it he exploits as far as ever he can the nature of Latin speech and thought' (RV[2], 239). Contemporary critics have remarked on the ambiguity of many of Virgil's phrases, but none, to my knowledge, has employed the term 'odd'. Nevertheless many of Virgil's expressions are of a penumbral character which contrasts sharply with the definition and clarity of most classical works. It is true that depth and allusiveness are somehow inherent in the structure of the Latin language, and it is from these typical features that Horace derives many of his best effects. But in Virgil ambiguity and evasiveness seem part and parcel of his own temperament so that we are conscious of a kind of wilful obliquity in his attitude to truth. This is somehow exemplified by his curious half-way syntax, whimsical renderings of Theocritus in the Eclogues or the invention of a glotta like Oaxen for a river that never was. Well, happily we are not here primarily concerned with Virgilian psychology, but only to decide whether in comparison with other classical poets Virgil is unusually oblique or odd, whether in fact as Professor Quinn has recently stated 'Virgil's purpose is partly to emphasize the elusiveness of truth.' (Virgil's Aeneid. A critical description, 1968).

To quote a familiar, but untranslateable line. Sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt, which expands and generalises the previous half-line Sunt hic etiam sua praemia laudi (Aen I, 461). 'Here too we find virtue somehow rewarded', as the new Poet Laureate translates it. Taken at its face value the line means something like 'history can move tears and human affairs strike an answering chord

in our hearts.' But there is more in res than historical events. Res suggests reor, and it is of course the philosophic contemplation of history as portrayed on the walls of Dido's temple that moves Aeneas and Achates on one level and Virgil and his readers on another, for Virgil feels through his characters and makes his readers feel in turn. (Cf. Serv. ad Aen IX, 424; Brooks Otis, Virgil: A Study in civilized Poetry, 1963). Rerum again is ambiguous. It could be either objective or subjective genitive. We weep for the events, or the events make us weep. In effect it is both. It is a signal example of Virgil's ability to make us regard something from two aspects at the same time. Mortalia again is penumbral and allusive. Mors is always uppermost. Men are mortal. Death faces all. Men's deeds are like the wars of the bees which can be settled by a handful of dust. It is this latent awareness that gives the phrase its poignancy. Then there is mens. Mens is the thinking, imaginative heart, and tangunt can mean 'strike' in the musical sense. It is therefore 'sad mortality', in this case the deaths of heroes generalized, which strikes chords in the heart, or so Virgil seems to imply. But there is more, much more, a whole philosophy of life contained in a sentence which constitutes in effect a splendid hendiadys. In full it seems to mean something like Jackson Knight claimed. 'There is no denying that even in this far land honour gets its due, and they can weep at human tragedy; the world has tears as a constituent part of it, and so have our own lives, hopeless and weary; and the thought how things have always their own death in them breaks our hearts and will and clouds our vision.' (RV[2], 240). The line, like all great maxims, is impersonal, but its very impersonality seems illogically to render it more personal in a manner perhaps uniquely characteristic of Virgil.

A similar subjective impersonality, if you will excuse the oxymoron, coupled with a vague obliquity is detectable in what are commonly regarded as being among Virgil's most emotive lines.

> Ibant obscuri sola sub nocte per umbram
> Perque domos Ditis vacuas et inania regna
> Quale per incertam lunam sub luce maligna
> Est iter in silvis, ubi caelum condidit umbra
> Iuppiter, et rebus nox abstulit atra colorem.

so admirably rendered by Professor C. Day Lewis

> Dimly through the shadows and dark solitudes they wended,
> Through the void domiciles of Dis, the bodiless regions:
> Just as, through fitful moonbeams, under the moon's thin light,
> A path lies in a forest, when Jove has palled the sky
> With gloom, and the night's blackness has bled the world of colour.

But ibant is untranslatable in English. The imperfect indicative active of eo has in Latin a solemn and often near ritual significance as e.g. when Aristaeus sets out for his mother's watery realm (Geo. IV, 365) when the shades move in Erebus (ibidem, 472) or Aeneas visits his father's tomb (Aen. V, 75) while in the passage under discussion Aeneas is entering the portals of death, the profoundest religious rite of all. Obscuri again implies more than that Aeneas and the Sibyl are 'dimly visible' as Professor Quinn explains the word. They not only look like shadows, they have suddenly become real shadows in the shadow world of the shades. After all Dido in the underworld is also described as obscuram (Aen VI, 453) which, according to Professor Quinn, suggests 'a sort of pale glow which makes one

feel the moon is about to rise through cloud.' So far there is nothing expressly odd, except in so far as entering the underworld is odd for persons who are still alive. It is all highly penumbral and appropriate to the context. But what about sola sub nocte? Is it a case of pure empathy, of transferring our own feelings to the night as most have taken it or does sola emphasize the quality of the darkness and really mean, as Professor Quinn suggests, 'only the gloom of night'? I should have thought it meant both.

Whatever our view of the two opening lines there are certainly disturbing features in the simile which follows. Once again it is described, like sunt lacrimae rerum, in impersonal terms which are oddly evocative. Virgil is attempting the difficult and well nigh impossible task of describing the journey to the next world in terms of this. After all it is the best a mere mortal can hope to do and he does it more successfully than most. Even so there are some odd and unexpected features which it is hard to explain. The first scandal, if you will forgive the philosophical catch-word, is incerta luna. What in fact was the precise quality of the moonlight? It is usually regarded as fitful, the moon being alternately obscured by the cloud wrack or revealed through it. Professor Quinn, however, seems to dispute this view. 'Aeneas and the Sibyl are dimly visible as on a night in which there are no stars and no moon, only the gloom of night.' (Op.cit. 165). But it seems impossible to dispense with the moonlight, whatever its quality, in view of incerta luna. The second scandal is maligna. The word has sinister connotations because it is in origin a syncopated form of maligenus which may be interpreted actively as 'producing evil' or passively as 'begotten of evil'. The neutral significance 'niggardly' or 'sparing' is familiar in Plautus and common in classical times. Virgil himself employs malignus in this sense (Geo. II, 179; Aen. XI, 525), but also in the other in Aeneid V, 654, where it is used to describe oculi, so that it is hard to believe that the word's basic meaning is not latent in the moon passage too. The moon deliberately, as it were, witholds her light from the traveller with malice prepense. This, at least, is the ordinary man's impression when called upon to make a journey by night, and this is the highly subjective impression which Virgil succeeds in conveying through the medium of a highly objective and impersonal simile.

The third scandal is the iter. Is it a real path that one can visualise, or the abstract notion of a journey? The answer, of course, depends in part on one's particular point of view. For the unsophisticated reader it would undoubtedly be the first. But the deeper significance of the second meaning cannot be ruled out. The introduction of Juppiter is odd and unexpected. The god seems in this passage to have made a compact with the moon to render travel more difficult by night, and the direct result of his intervention is that rebus nox abstulit atra colorem i.e. that 'the black night stole all colour from the seen world' as Jackson Knight renders it (RV^2, 241), emphasizing again the philosophic content in res. Of course living persons, as has been suggested, have no business in the underworld, so the hostile attitude of the two deities is at least partially intelligible and justified.

Or is there something more? Or less? Does in fact our familiarity with modern poetry and modern imagery or the kind of ambiguities analysed by Professor Empson (Seven Types of Ambiguity[2], 1947) result in our tending to read too much into Virgil? Inevitably it does, and we have to be constantly on our guard particularly because Virgil, unlike for example Homer, is for ever practising distancing both in space and time. This was perhaps only to be expected as the purpose of the Aeneid was to show how the greatness of Rome was a product of its divine history,

in fact the opposite of Troy which was doomed from the first. Aeneas could only see the future in a vision, but at the end of Aeneid VIII the vision of future history revealed in Aeneid VI is now for the first time given real and visible expression. The result nevertheless is odd and striking when we suddenly become conscious of what it all amounts to.

> Talia per clipeum Volcani, dona parentis,
> miratur rerumque ignarus imagine gaudet
> attollens umero famamque et fata nepotum

rendered by Professor C. Day Lewis

> Such were the scenes that Aeneas admired on the shield of Vulcan
> His mother gave him. Elated by its portrayal of things
> Beyond his ken, he shouldered his people's glorious future.

Like some human Atlas the hero takes the whole weight of unborn history on his shoulders, and of course he is ignorant of what the burden amounts to in its fullest sense. As Professor Quinn says there is inevitably ambiguity here. On the obvious level the phrase means 'in his ignorance he takes pleasure in the representation of things'. But at a deeper level it means 'he delights in the pictures ignorant of the reality.' The shield has been made by Vulcan in order to protect Aeneas in war, just as Hephaestus made a shield for Achilles, so heaving it on his shoulder he goes forth to meet his fate. But, and here again I quote Professor Quinn 'the gesture of raising the shield on to his shoulder is therefore symbolic; the act represents acceptance of responsibility for what is to come.' But did it strike Virgil's contemporaries as symbolic in the same way as it strikes us? Presumably not. But wherein lay the difference? I would suggest that it lay in the Roman consciousness of their destiny and their sense of helping to shoulder Aeneas' burden themselves. To the modern reader the appeal of the passage is mainly literary. The sense of distancing is less real. Imagine is, of course, the key-word. Professor Quinn claims that Virgil is playing a trick on his readers, viz. 'that of making the events of recent history the culmination of a historical process.' In effect Virgil is playing no tricks. He is a poet inspired by a mighty vision, a vision which transcended not only the story of Rome but history itself and the effect upon the reader is inevitably disturbing.

Not infrequently, as many critics have observed, Virgil strains Latin almost to breaking point. Certainly his masterly compressions influenced later writers with the paradoxical result that the greatest poet of the Golden Age could be held in great measure responsible for many of the stylistic characteristics of the ensuing Silver Age. It is not always easy, however, to decide in Virgil just what is normal and what is compressed. There is a brilliance and originality about a half-line like celsis caput urbibus exit (Aen. VIII, 65) 'my source emerges among tall cities' (CDL), but what precisely does it mean? Normally one does not associate sources with cities. 'I come from haunts of coot and hern,' sang Tennyson's brook, but its source was in England, not in Italy. In Italy rivers often rise up in the mountains and descend in torrents towards the rarely distant sea. They rise high up - celsis in fact is the right word, indeed it is actually used of the Apennines by Horace (Ep. XVI, 29). But what of urbibus? You have, of course, only to cross the Apennines to realise that, as in many other mountainous countries, towns are built on hills. The Tiber rises four thousand feet up in the Tuscan Apennines, and it was the vision of the great river threading the towns and villages perched high on the hill-tops overlooking its valley tot congesta manu praeruptis

oppida saxis 'the towns piled up on tottering cliffs' (Geo. II, 156. CDL) that the poet has passed on to us. The first half of the sentence hic mihi magna domus 'here's my broad home' (CDL) has caused, in my view, unnecessary difficulty. The two halves of the line are distinct. Tiber's home is where Aeneas sees him, or dreams he sees him, not at his source. Presumably it is deep down in a pool, as the hero himself suggests.

> Quo te cumque lacus miserantem incommoda nostra
> fonte tenet, quocumque solo pulcherrimus exis (74-5)
>
> Wherever the sevret springs of your being, and wherever
> you issue forth in majesty (CDL)

Unfortunately Aeneas is no more explicit than Tiber himself respecting the precise nature of his home or source. But it seems at least clear that Henry was at fault in suggesting that the river was equating his home with Hesperia. Those who take caput in apposition to domus have to explain the former as referring to the river's mouth, despite Virgil's own employment of the word in the fourth Georgic, and in association with the Tiber in the normal sense.

> et caput unde altus primum se erumpit Enipeus
> unde pater Tiberimus et unde Aniena fluenta (368-9)
>
> The spring from which the deep Enipeus first leaps forth,
> The source of father Tiber and the flowing Anio.

To amend the difficulty away with Bentley and others is merely to destroy the poetry. It is better to retain the music and the magic even when we do not fully understand.

I have sometimes felt that there is something odd about Virgil's plough. How abruptly he introduces it! All Hesiod says is

> πόλλ' ἐπικαμπύλα κᾶλα· φέρειν δὲ γύην, ὅτ' ἂν εὕρῃς,
> ἐς οἶκον κατ' ὄρος διζήμενος ἢ κατ' ἄρουραν
> πρίνινον.
>
> (427-9)

'Hew also many bent timbers, and bring home a plough-tree when you have found it, and look out on the mountain or in the field for one of holm-oak' (SW)

Virgil, by contrast, seems to be in a curious hurry.

> Continuo in silvis magna vi flexa domatur
> In burim et curvi formam accipit ulmus aratri (Geo. I, 169 f)
>
> Early in woods the elm, by main force mastered, is bent
> Into a share-beam and takes the shape of the curving plough'
> (CDL)

The key word, of course, is continuo. In his note to Geo. I, 60 T. E. Page (Virgil, Bucolics and Georgics, 16, 1957) analyses its meanings. It indicates, in

his view, 'that one event follows another 'without any break' ... Virgil, however, is also fond of placing it as first word in a sentence and defining the time to which it refers afterwards! In the sentence describing the husbandman's action 'in silvis defines the force of continuo,' straightway while yet in the woods, 'i.e. even before the tree is cut down', and so I understand it. Does Virgil mean that being in green sap the elm is then more pliable than it would be after it had been cut and dried? If so how did one keep it bent? Was it tied down or weighted? All this the poet keeps obscure. Possibly and even probably the description is compressed and all Virgil means is that the husbandmen should bend a suitable elm while it is standing in the wood and while the sap is still in it, and later mould it into a plough back. Certainly all the necessary timber was subsequently dried and seasoned by being slung over the hearth et suspensa focis explorat robora fumus 'and the wood is hung up in chimneys where smoke will season it' (CDL). Possibly Virgil had talked to plough-wrights and learned something of the art of plough-making at first hand. Yet the suspicion still lingers that he is urging the reader through the husbandman not to waste time. All the same the scene conjured up verges on the grotesque. The husbandman arriving in the forest and lighting on a suitable elm must assail it forthwith, wrestling it into shape like some rustic Hercules struggling with a Hydra. Possibly Virgil even intended the description to sound whimsical like the grafted tree marvelling at its novel fruit and foliage (Geo. II, 80 f). There the speed of growth is exaggerated like the speed required to attack the elm. But in the context of the plough it strikes me as a little odd.

Helenus' reply to Aeneas' inquiry about his future fate and travels is couched in enigmatic terms

> principio Italiam quam tu iam rere propinquam
> vicinosque, ignare, paras invadere portus,
> longa procul longis via dividit invia terris (Aen. III, 381 f)
>
> First then, the Italy you imagine so close that you're ready
> Mistakenly, to enter her ports any day now, in fact is
> A very long way from here, and the way is far from easy (CDL)

The last line is a jingle reminiscent of Delphic and other prophetic utterances designed to confuse and appal. It is undoubtedly in character with the pronouncements of a seer and is intended to convey more than it seems. Once again there is a way, a journey to be faced, like the path in the wood in Aeneid VI, and once again a parallel is drawn between the here and now and the as yet uncharted track of destiny still to be traversed. It is likewise described in an impersonal manner the better to generalise and universalise the description. But what is the construction of longis terris? Do the words qualify invia 'trackless because the lands that have to be visited are so remote and far away'? Or do they qualify dividit 'separates by means of remote lands'? Or are they quasi-absolute 'a far and trackless way avoids because the country in between is so remote?' The nature of Latin is such that we are unable absolutely to decide. What Virgil is saying is that Aeneas' fated voyage lies off the broken track. But the effect of the line on the reader is to make him pause and reflect on the purpose of life itself and the 'doubtful doom of humankind'. It is an odd line which achieves its effect, like the path in the wood, through the impersonal mode of the maxim. But it is time perhaps to look for evidence of oddity in broader themes.

The significance of the Daedalus story portrayed on the door of the temple at Cumae has been widely discussed. Heinze regarded it merely as a piece of Hellenistic affectation whose sole purpose was to give a potted history of the temple and incidentally to reveal an interesting episode in Italy's prehistoric past (Virgils Epische Technik[3] 1928, 398 f). Pöschl, on the other hand, sees a parallel between Aeneas and Daedalus, both exiles from a hostile shore, and between Ariadne and Dido, both of whom were deserted by their lovers, while Daedalus' affection for Icarus reflects that of Anchises for his son (The Art of Virgil, 1962, 150). Jackson Knight went further. The crucial feature was, in his view, the labyrinth.

Hic labor ille domus et inextricabilis error

'and all the old wandering ways of the house that was there, weariness of work inextricable' (Vergil, Epic and Anthropology, 141 f).

Now the labyrinth was a maze, and mazes, as anthropology has shown, bar the progress of the improperly initiated and condition in particular the entry of the dead. Aeneas is on the point of entering the underworld and the maze is therefore symbolic of the difficulties which he will have to encounter there. Norden was puzzled by the association of Daedalus with Cumae (P. Vergilius Maro, Aeneis Buch VI[3] (1957) 120) which does not occur in any tradition we know, although the circumstances that Cumae was a Euboean colony and the craftsman had connections with Chalcis (J. Toepffer, Attische Genealogie (1889) 168) may have contributed to the legend. The acropolis of Cumae is an impressive place, but we cannot be sure that the vast series of underground galleries revealed by Maiuri represent the archaeological reality behind Virgil's description of the Sibyl's cave. Neither is there any guarantee that Mr. R. F. Paget's survey of the tunnels at Baiae (In the Footsteps of Orpheus, 1967) has thrown much light on Virgil's Underworld. Mackail's suggestion (The Aeneid of Virgil (1930) Appx. C) that it might have been based on the interior of a Minoan palace would carry more conviction if there was any evidence, apart from maze sketches on coins from Cnossus and Pompeian graffiti, that Virgil or his authorities could have seen a Minoan palace, or indeed that such remains were extant for observation by anyone in classical times, apart that is from the Egyptian maze observed by Herodotus. Virgil's underworld appears to have been entirely imaginary, a vision rather than a real work of art. Doubtless the poet moulded whatever material he happened to have to his own purposes, yet an aura of mystery remains.

magnum reginae sed enim miseratus amorem
Daedalus ipse dolos tecti ambagesque resolvit,
caeca regens filo vestigia. (Aen VI, 28 ff.)

Yet, sympathising with Ariadne in her great passion,
He gives her himself the clue to the maze's deceptive windings,
And guides with a thread the blind steps of Thesus.

So Professor C. Day Lewis renders the passage, only Virgil mentions neither Ariadne nor Theseus by name. Once again it is all very impersonal and ambiguous, reminiscent in fact of the maze itself where people get lost and, in a sense, lose their identity. There is something odd again in the following lines

tu quoque magnam
partem opere in tanto, sineret dolor, Icare haberes.
bis conatus erat casus effingere in auro,

bis patriae cecidere manus.

In the artifact
Icarus too would have had a prominent place, if his father's
Grief had allowed: but twice, trying to work the boy's fall
In gold, did Daedalus hands fail him. (CDL)

How, one might ask, could anyone know how many times Daedalus had tried to portray Icarus' fate or indeed that he had attemtped to do so at all if there was nothing there to show? Or are we to suppose that Aeneas observed tentative cartoons as it were, for a full-scale work? Virgil is not explicit. He is content to make us feel through his characters (cf. Norden op.cit.122) and sympathize with Daedalus for his irreparable loss. But we are still expected on the face of it to see with Daedalus' eyes, not with Aeneas', which I find womewhat odd.

The Laocoon episode in Aeneid II is very curious. To what extent Virgil innovated on his sources cannot now be determined (cf. Jackson Knight op.cit. 85 f.) though it is clear that he abandoned the original association with Apollo as for him it had no relevance. According to Virgil Laocoon was punished for insulting Athena by hurling his spear at the wooden horse, and it is she, not Apollo, as in the original version, who was responsible for sending the serpents. Even in the older authorities the occasion of Laocoon's guilt is not made entirely clear, while in Virgil it is all but ignored. All that Laocoon had done was to interfere, albeit unwittingly, in the divine plan for Troy's destruction, and so was guilty of technical hybris which in effect was no hybris at all. Possibly the poet wished to emphasize the god's cynicism towards men, and there is certainly an atmosphere of 'ungeheuer' about the episode in detail. I was interested incidentally to discover that Friedrich Klinger uses the same word to describe the scene in his recent work (Virgil 1967, 411). Neptune remains aloof, though Laocoon has been elected his priest by lot. Both sons are involved in the cataclysm, presumably to increase the horror and drama, although they were guiltless of the crime of having been sacrilegiously begotten in Virgil's version of the story. 'The very ambiguity of the snakes' to quote Brooks Otis (op.cit.248) - 'the lack of clarity as to Laocoon's guilt - is an indication of the more general ambiguity - the deceptive and serpentine ambiguity in which Troy's fall is involved.' Bernard Knox (AJPhil, 1950, 383 f) had also felt this. 'This terrifying picture,' he wrote, 'as verbal echo and parallel even and situation recall it to the memory throughout the rest of the book, is seen in retrospect to contain all the violence of the sack of Troy. These lines foreshadow not only the arrival of the Greek fleet, but the attack, the Trojan resistance, the deaths of Polites and Priam, and the flames which tower over the burning city. They present the fall of Troy as the action of the serpent.' Well, however that may be, the entire episode appears very odd.

The ambiguity surrounding Aristaeus' guilt in the fourth Georgic is of a similar nature. When the hero lost his bees 'morboque fameque' (318) 'through disease and hunger' (CDL) he appeals for help to his mother, the water nymph Cyrene, visits her in the river depths, is advised to see Nereus and learns that he is being punished because he has been the unwitting cause of Eurydice's death.

Illa quidem, dum te fugeret per flumina praeceps,
immanem ante pedes hydrum moritura puella
servantem ripas alta non vidit in herba. (457 f)

Headlong beside the river she fled you. She never saw,
Poor girl, her death there, deep in the grass before her feet -
The watcher on the river-bank, the savage watersnake. (CDL)

That Aristaeus had pursued Eurydice with rape in view is neatly glossed over, and only the melancholy circumstances of her death are emphasized. That Aristaeus' bees should die seems light punishment indeed for so heinous a deed, yet no-one, least of all his mother and her attendant nymphs even mention it.

Nate, licet tristis animo deponere curas.
Haec omnis morbi causa, hinc miserabile Nymphae,
cum quibus illa choros lucis agitabat in altis,
exitium misere apibus. Tu munera supplex
tende petens pacem, et facilis venerare Napaeas. (531 f).

'You may cast your cares away,'
She said, 'for here is the whole truth of your bees' sickness
And the death they were dealt by the nymphs with whom Eurydice
Danced in the deep woods. So offer them gifts and make your
Peace with them, and pray to the gracious ones of the grove
(CDL)

One can but conclude that the proper business of young gods or heroes was to chase nymphs and if the nymphs were so unfortunate as to suffer snake-bite in consequence then it was just one of those things. But this is in the Greek rather than in the Virgilian manner. Where, one might ask, is empathy here? Presumably in the story of Orpheus' futile journey, but it is not quite the same thing, for there we feel sorry for Orpheus, not for Eurydice. It all strikes me as somewhat callous and odd.

Most would agree that there is something odd about the Eclogues, since they are in every way the most oblique and tantalising of Virgil's poems. Brooks Otis finds their lack of contimuity 'peculiar', while Mr. R. D. Williams has referred in a stimulating study (Virgil, Greece and Rome. New Surveys in the Classics No. I, 1967) to the 'strange and bewildering mixture of the artificial and real.' Leaving aside for the moment the whole question of the fourth Eclogue there is the problem of the fifth. That Daphnis was in some sense Julius Caesar few have firmly denied, or that his deification reflects that of Octavian foretold in Eclogue I. But there is the highly awkward difficulty of Daphnis in Eclogue nine regarding Caesar's star rising as something extraneous to himself. Did Virgil mock him, do so merely to involve the identity of Daphnis in further ambiguity consequent on the events of 43 and 42 B.C. and the beginning of 41 when he almost lost his farm? That something happened between 43 and 42 and the beginning of 41 to account for the difference between Eclogue 9 and Eclogue 1 seems, as Brooks Otis observes, virtually certain. Whether H. J. Rose (The Eclogues of Virgil, 1942) was right in suggesting that 9 was composed earlier than 1 there seems little doubt, as J. R. Hanslik has shown (Wien.St. 1955, 5 ff.), that the interval between them was slight. It seems clear that the young Virgil plunged into a sinister world of power politics and private feud was anxious at all costs not to alienate influential friends. Nevertheless his deliberate obliquity is decidely odd. In his paper entitled Allegorical Interpretations of Virgil (Proc.Virg.Soc. 1967). Mr. F. Robertson advances persuasive reasons against Daphnis being Caesar. But I am not entirely convinced by his final argument that 'if Virgil had wanted to paint Caesar he could surely outline his characteristic features for all the

world to recognise', for this is just what Virgil never seems to do either here or elsewhere in the Eclogues, of indeed, on a different and more universal scale in the Georgics and the Aeneid. There are so many false trails. Mr. Williams again is right in maintaining that whereas Daphnis is 'much else beside Caesar ... it is impossible to believe that the death and deification of Caesar had no relevance for Virgil's presentation of the pastoral myth.'(op.cit., 10). At the same time one cannot help feeling disturbed by the curious oblique equation of the gentle shepherds of pastoral poetry with the harsh men of action of contemporary Rome. There is certainly nothing like it in Theocritus, for though he too was a court poet the circumstances were different. It is true that Theocritus (Id.VII, 48) and even Pindar (Ol.II, 87 f; Nem. III, 82) occasionally resort to the subterfuge of referring to rivals indirectly, but Theocritus never baffles or teases to the degree that Virgil sometimes does. There appears to have been no cogent reason why Virgil should have composed as he did, unless, of course, he was influenced by Pollio. Presumably it was just Virgil's habit so to write and withal extremely odd.

The fourth Eclogue is addressed to Pollio, so it would be natural to assume that the child mentioned at the end was his. Besides it is hard to understand pacatumque reget patriis virtutibus orbem 'and shall rule the world to which his father gallantly gave peace' (CDL) as referring to any event other than the treaty of Brundisium between Octavian and Antony which was negotiated by Pollio. There is again the tradition that C. Asinius Gallus, Pollio's son, informed the grammarian Ascanius Pedanius that he was the child referred to in the Eclogue. But Gallus was not the most modest of men (cf. e.g. Tacitus, Ann. I, 12) and on other grounds too his claim must be treated with reserve. All, however, is put in doubt by the virtual deification of the future child.

ipsa tibi blandos fundent cunabula flores

'your very cradle shall blow with lovely flowers' (CDL)

His birth, moreover, shall restore the Golden Age, and he is actually addressed as cara deum soboles, magni Iovis incrementum, which I interpret in the traditional manner as 'progeny' and not 'thou hast in thee the making of a Juppiter' with Munro and Page. Virgil, it is argued, would never have dared to describe Pollio's child in such terms for Octavian to read. On the other hand he does dare to say that the Golden Age, whose advent he further confuses with the return of the Magnus Annus, will return during Pollio's consulship, which seems just as well calculated to have excited Octavian's jealousy. Probably modern readers are disposed to interpret the poem too personally. Jean-Paul Brisson comes nearer the truth in emphasizing the powerful impact that the potentialities of the treaty of Brundisium could have had on a poet of Virgil's sensibility (Virgile: son temps et le nôtre, 1966, 80 ff.). His spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling found expression in a phantasy of peace which contrasted so forcibly with the gloom of Horace's XVIth Epode. Then, of course, there is the extraordinary, the almost flippant, ending which seems so out of keeping with prophetic language of the whole. There is a sublimity about

O mihi tum longae maneat pars ultima vitae
spiritus et quantum sat erit tua dicere facta

If but the closing days of a long life were prolonged
For me, and I with breath enough to tell your story (CDL)

which is entirely lacking in

> incipe, parve puer, risu cognoscere matrem
> (matri longa decem tulerunt fastidia menses)
> incipe, parve puer: qui non risere parenti (or whatever one reads)
> nec deus hunc mensa, dea nec dignata cubili est
>
> Begin, dear babe, and smile at your mother to show you know her
> This is the tenth month now, and she is sick of waiting.
> Begin, dear babe. The boy who does not smile at his mother
> Will never deserve to sup with a god or sleep with a goddess
> (CDL)

It is all so intimate, suggesting that Virgil knew the parents well, and the time when the baby was expected. If the child was not his the references would sound very strange to Pollio. I suspect that it was, but that Virgil used it as a symbol of the hoped for millenium, as Brooks Otis maintains (op.cit., 135). Pierre Boyancé also feels that the question of the child's identity is secondary to the main issue. (La Religion de Virgile, 1963, p.131).

Had the poem not been addressed to Pollio some of the difficulties would doubtless vanish. It is the curious ambiguity between the intimate world of a child in the cradle and the prophetic tone of the rest that is so disconcerting, with the glances back as well as forward which become such a feature of the Aeneid. There is no consensus of opinion about the fourth Eclogue. It is a great poem, and yet very odd.

I was encouraged in my search for oddity in Virgil to read in Mr. Colin Hardie's paper ("The Tenth Eclogue", Proc.Virg.Soc., 1967) that Mr. Peter Levi had referred in a recent number of Hermes (1966, 73 ff.) to the 'extreme oddity' of lines 6-13 in the eighth Eclogue, inserted as they are between the introduction and the singing contest.

> tu mihi seu magni superas iam saxa Timavi
> sive oram Illyrici legis aequoris, en erit unquam
> ille dies, mihi cum liceat tua dicere facta?
> sola Sophocleo tua carmina digna coturno?
> a te principium, tibi desinam: accipe iussis
> carmina coepta tuis, atque hanc sine tempora circum
> inter victrices hederam tibi serpere lauros
>
> But Pollio (we don't know that it is Pollio, of course),
> where are you now?
> shooting Timavus' rapids?
> Coasting the shores of Illyria? Will ever the day come
> When I shall be allowed to write about your exploits?
> (the hope expressed here, incidentally, is curiously reminiscent of that in the fourth Eclogue)
> Ah when will come the day when I may publish abroad
> The worth of your plays, that alone can challenge Sophocles'?
> You, my poetry's source, shall be its bourne. Accept
> This poem - you bade me write it - and let the poet's ivy
> Be threaded with the victor's laurels to crown your head (CDL)

Well, who is 'you'? It is generally assumed to be Pollio on the occasion of his victory over the Parthini in Illyria, to which Horace refers (Od. II, 1,15). Horace also tells us in the same poem that Pollio wrote tragedies, and I do not myself see anything odd in Virgil's offer to lend his fame to assist a friend. I would, however, agree that the position of the dedication is odd, and not perhaps entirely explained by Mr. Hardie's suggestion that it may have been 'the débris, or a first draft, of a rejected dedication to Pollio' because we are still left with the problem as to why the lines were not used at the beginning of the Eclogue. Part of the enigma both in this and the fourth Eclogue is perhaps bound up with the subject as Pollio was an enigmatic man. A soldier and politician with literary ambitions who could afford to sneer at Livy's accent he hardly commends himself at first sight as worthy of the flattery of the greatest Latin poet. But he had saved Virgil's farm, and Virgil's sense of gratitude was overwhelming. He had also encouraged him to write the Eclogues.

We have covered much ground, yet I am conscious of many omissions. I have said nothing for example about Virgil's religion, in which he seems to have preserved the same kind of ambivalent attitude that characterises the profounder passages in his poetry, or of the morality of the Aeneid and all the difficulties inherent in the choice of a statesman hero. I have done nothing again to resolve the mystery of the Golden Bough or of Aeneas' exit from the Underworld via the Ivory Gate. Some difficulties can doubtless be explained away. Perhaps Aeneas' shield is not so odd after all. Probably his plough could be shown to be perfectly normal. Possibly even the fourth Eclogue is not so strange as it seems. Even so I am still, I must confess, just a little bit worried lest I lose my way in the forest following a dim track on a cloudcast moonlight night because I am not quite sure whether it is a real track or only a figment of my imagination. In fact I am still inclined to feel that when all is said and done there is something odd about Virgil.

A Note on the Trochaic Caesura in the third Foot.

Many lines with the trochaic caesura seem to stand out as particularly beautiful - in Ec. I for instance:

56. hinc alta sub rupe canet frondator ad auras ..
76. dumosa pendere procul de rupe videbo ..

The lines in Theocritus which stay in the mind often have this construction; and of course such lines are very much more numerous in Theocritus, and in Homer, than they are in Virgil's Latin. Virgil does it very well:

Geo. II 493. Fortunatus et ille, deos qui novit agrestis
Panaque Silvanumque senem Nymphasque sorores.

I suppose Virgil preferred the usual caesura as more natural to the solidity of Latin. Very few such lines occur in the magnificent close of Aen. VI:

878. heu pietas, heu prisca fides, invictaque bello/dextera.

I find one passage, Aen. VI 322, where Virgil uses the trochaic caesura in four consecutive lines:

Anchisa generate, deum certissima proles,
Cocyti stagna alta vides Stygiamque paludem