

VIRGIL'S PLAGUE: A NEW VIEW OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN  
THE GEORGICS AND THE AENEID

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by

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The lecture dealt with three problems: (1) Is Virgil's plague-description at the end of *Georgics Three* concerned with a historical event? (2) According to his account was it cured in the end or not? And (3) What does Virgil say about the cause of the outbreak? Consideration of the second and third questions led to the suggestion that the end of *Georgics Three* may perhaps have anticipated the religious elements of the *Aeneid* rather more specifically than has hitherto been acknowledged.<sup>1</sup>

With regard to question (1), the obvious similarities between Virgil's account and Lucretius' description of the plague at Athens (which itself follows Thucydides closely) led Servius to conclude that the Noric plague did really occur, and was simply a local manifestation of that widespread fifth century scourge. In modern times however the tendency among commentators (beginning with Heyne) has been to accept that the account is historical, but to refer the plague it describes to the more recent past. And W. Richter in his commentary on the *Georgics* (1957) in endorsing this view emphasizes the uniqueness of Virgil's concentration on animals in such a context (p.318), and concludes that, quite apart from its merits as poetry, his account represents a remarkable contribution to the records of veterinary medicine (p.320). It is difficult however to accept either his views or those of his predecessors. For as Richter himself concedes (p.318) Virgil's concentration on animals is only to be expected, since animals not humans are his theme in the *Georgics*. Moreover, as he also concedes (p.319) a disease of such complexity as Virgil describes is unknown to modern medical science. And the reason for this is not far to seek: for Virgil's plague-description is the creation of a poet composing with his eye not on some mysteriously preserved record of a distant animal-plague, but on his own work elsewhere in the *Georgics*, and on Lucretius. Hence the result is what Wilkinson has called 'a plague that never was on land or sea'.<sup>2</sup>

This emerges clearly enough if one examines the two central passages in which Virgil deals with the effects of the plague on the two principal animals in *Georgics Three*, the horse and the bull (498-514 and 515-530). Initially it is a question of the poet's echoing his own earlier treatment, *victor equus* (499) taking us back at a stroke to the young horse at the start of the book and to the various chariot-races it was hoped he would one day help his owner to win (49f., 103ff., 180f., 202ff.). And the pathetic contrast Virgil then proceeds to create is achieved by his use of a characteristic device, as he deliberately inverts motifs taken from those earlier lines. The very first thing we were told there about the thoroughbred was: *Altius ingreditur* (76). Now the first thing the once triumphant horse does is to sink to the ground, and the effect is enhanced by the emphatic positioning of *labitur* at the start of one line, with its subject held over till the start of the next (498f.). Again, in that same line 76 Virgil's young horse landed on its feet as lightly as a bird (*mollia crura reponit* according to Servius *ad loc.* echoes Ennius' description of cranes): but now this dying horse can only beat the ground ponderously with its hoof (499f.). There, in the following line (77) the young horse at once displayed its mettle by braving a threatening river: now the dying horse recoils even from a stream (499). And finally, whereas at line 84 the young horse pricked up its ears at the sound of battle, now the ears are down-*demissae aures* (500). So far, then, we have had a *retractio* by Virgil of his own earlier lines based on the principle of inversion. But at this point his method changes: now he uses Lucretius as his model. And although his predecessor's account was concerned with human symptoms, Virgil does not hesitate to transfer a long series of these to his own dying horse. The cold sweat (501 *cf.* Lucr. 6. 1187) the hard skin (502 *cf.* 1194f.), the blazing eyes (505 *cf.* 1146), the deep breathing (505f. *cf.* 1186), the groaning (506 *cf.* 1159), the retching (507 *cf.* 1160), the dark blood from the nose (507f. *cf.* 1203), and the roughened, swollen tongue (508 *cf.* 1150) – all these clearly echo the Lucretian description. There is however one omission that is of particular interest: Lucretius (1262ff.) follows Thucydides closely in his emphasis of the thirst that

drove the plague-victims to throw themselves into the public fountains. Virgil could scarcely employ such an idea now, however, since his earlier *modus operandi* had produced aversion to water as one of this sick horse's symptoms. And finally we have the actual death of the horse (509ff.), which again echoes Lucretius in the way it is introduced, as the language shows. Following Thucydides, he had observed that there was no general remedy for the Athenian plague; what cured one person proved fatal for another (1229). Virgil however expresses this idea of ambivalence differently. Instead of generalising, as his predecessors did, he concentrates on a single remedy: and he lets the ambivalence take the form of apparent success in the early stages that soon turns to failure as the medicinal wine induces madness and self-laceration in the dying horse. Thus Lucretius' *hoc aliis erat exitio* (1229) now finds an echo in Virgil's *mox erat hoc ipsum exitio* (511).

The second passage, on the death of the bull (515ff.), is clearly designed to accompany the preceding one. Each consists of sixteen lines if one disregards the parenthesis at line 513: and formally the arrangement is chiasmic, with the Lucretian imitation now preceding Virgil's echoing of his own work. A remarkable feature here is Virgil's abandonment of Lucretius' plague-description. For there is comparatively little cataloguing of symptoms in the account of the bull's death, and when Virgil does echo Lucretius in this context he in fact goes to two earlier passages. His main inspiration comes from 2.352ff., where Lucretius describes the sacrifice of a calf and the grief of the surviving mother as she searches in vain for her missing offspring. Like the calf (2.353), Virgil's bull collapses (3.516: *concidit*), and both bleed profusely, the sacrificial victim from the wound in its chest (2.354), the diseased bull from the mouth (3.516). And the negative pattern that is developed by Virgil in order to portray the inconsolable grief of the surviving bull (520ff.), along with the general tone of what follows, are both clearly based on Lucretius' subsequent description of the surviving but equally disconsolate cow (2.361ff.). The other Lucretian passage (3.487ff.) is closer in character to Virgil's immediate theme, describing as it does the symptoms of an epileptic seizure. And he fuses elements of the earlier passage (2.352ff. *concidit . . . sanguinis exspirans calidum de pectore flumen*) with elements of the later one (3.489 *concidit et spumas agit, ingemit et tremit artus*) to produce: *ecce autem duro fumans sub vomere taurus/concidit et mixtum spumis vomit ore cruorem/extremosque ciet gemitus* (515ff.)

The echoes of Virgil's own earlier work in the last six lines (525-30) are now general rather than specific, and are devoid of inversion. The indignant rhetorical questions (525f. *quid labor aut benefacta iuvant? quid vomere terras/invertisse gravis?*) look back briefly at the many places in Books One and Three that refer to the hard work of the bull at the plough: and then the simple innocence of the beast is evoked in terms reminiscent of earlier passages, especially in Book Two, in which a similar innocence is attributed to the Italian farmer. 2.458ff., for example, is very like these lines, as the poet skilfully mingles positive and negative forms to indicate, on the one hand the extravagant luxuries that have no part in the life of the simple farmer, and on the other his carefree enjoyment of such natural blessings as we find here – fresh spring water to drink, and quiet, undisturbed sleep.

In short, then, consideration of these two key passages indicates that Virgil's plague description is not a basically historical account given a suitably poetical wrapping, but rather a poetic creation throughout. We can thus leave to one side the problem of his mysterious source for any such account in an age when the few records there were gave details, not of a plague's symptoms, but of the religious measures taken to end it.<sup>3</sup> Nor need we concern ourselves with the supposed location of the outbreak, except to observe that although some scholars find Virgil's explanation of this point incomprehensible, while others have no difficulty in locating the relevant area, here too the essentially poetic quality of the description is unmistakable, as the poet passes in two picturesque lines (474-5) from Alpine heights to Noric foothills and the Timavus valley.

The answer to the second question (Was the plague cured in the end?) depends on our interpretation of three lines in Virgil's account. (As we shall see, this is the case with regard to the third question also.) Towards the end of that account we are told:

*iamque catervatim dat stragem atque aggerat ipsis  
in stabulis turpi dilapsa cadavera tabo,  
donec humo tegere ac foveis abscondere discunt.* (556-8)

The problem here is how far back does the reference of the *donec* clause extend? Does it include in its scope the opening *dat stragem*? Or should it be referred narrowly to *atque aggerat . . . tabo*? In other words,



does Virgil mean that, once men began to bury the victims of the plague, Tisiphone stopped spreading slaughter and the plague was thereby cured, or simply that the nuisance of those nasty heaps was ended, although the plague itself continued to rage? Commentators presumably find the second alternative too lame even to consider, preferring to accept the first along with the irony it involves, whereby what begins as a mere last resort proves in the end to be a source of deliverance. But in spite of their consensus this view seems untenable for two reasons. In the first place Virgil makes it abundantly clear that the plague was a total disaster that stripped the entire area involved of its livestock (474-477). Any notion that burial of the animals' carcasses came as a kind of breakthrough that brought sudden salvation is completely ruled out, and far from 'overcoming even this condition' (as Buchner puts it)<sup>4</sup> the inhabitants were compelled in the end to quit the area, and never went back:

*nec singula morbi  
corpora corripunt, sed tota aestiva repente,  
spemque gregemque simul cunctamque ab origine gentem.  
tum sciat, aeras Alpīs et Norica si quis  
castella in tumulis et Iapydis arva Timavi  
nunc quoque post tanto videat, desertaque regna  
pastorum et longe saltus lateque vacantis.* (471-7)

This statement, set as it is at the beginning of the episode, makes its point with such emphasis and clarity that the traditional interpretation of 556ff. surely ought to be questioned.

The second reason for questioning it arises from a totally different consideration, I refer to the religious issue involved, which will concern us more especially when we turn to the last of our three problems. At 486ff. Virgil emphasizes that victims about to be sacrificed collapse before the blow is struck, or, if they are successfully despatched, the sacrifice proves defective in some other respect – the *exta* fail to burn, no blood is split, and so on. Such incidents are familiar from the pages of Livy and Julius Obsequens, and their message is unmistakable: they indicate a breakdown in the relationship between a community and its gods, and unless the people concerned appease the divine anger they have somehow incurred, the community they form is doomed. In these prodigious happenings, then, placed as they are so prominently at the very start of Virgil's plague-account, we must surely recognize something more than mere detail about the progress of the outbreak: for they are also (and indeed more especially) a demonstration by the poet of the logic that is fundamental to Roman ideas about plagues. The people portrayed here have, at some point, gone astray in their religious behaviour: and because they never find their way back again, the district they once called their *patria* becomes a wasteland, and they have no alternative but to abandon it. In his comment on 556ff. Klingner observes 'Only burial brought peace and the end of the plague'. But 'peace' in a plague context has a special connotation for a Roman: it refers, not just to undisturbed quiet, but to *pax deum* – that condition of heavenly support and favour without which no community can hope to survive. And the notion that this community, having once lost the *pax deum*, were able to regain it by digging pits and disposing of a public nuisance is so utterly alien to Roman ideas that it is, I believe, inconceivable that Virgil ever propounded it.

I would suggest, then, that in this episode Virgil portrays what can become of a community that has lost the *pax deum* and fails to regain it. And in the manner of Socrates in the *Republic* he points the lesson by juxtaposing in the matching digressions of Books Three and Four the supremely wretched case and the supremely happy. It is thus above all the logic of contrast that produces in Virgil's poetic imagination the Alpine wilderness of *Georgics Three* balanced against the story of Aristaeus in *Georgics Four*. For when Aristaeus is afflicted by a morbus that wipes out his bees, he proceeds in the orthodox manner illustrated so abundantly in the pages of Livy and seeks oracular guidance as to the cause of the *ira deum* he has provoked and the appropriate *piaculum* that will appease it:

*'deum praecepta secuti/venimus hinc lassis quaesitum oracula rebus'* (4.448f.)

Proteus' reply (453) incorporates orthodox Roman doctrine: '*non te nullius exercent numinis irae*'. Aristaeus has indeed provoked divine anger, and it must be appeased.<sup>5</sup> Proteus then tells the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, and it is in fact left to Aristaeus' mother Cyrene to instruct her son on the measures needed to achieve this end (534ff.) The offended nymphs will relent and grant *pax* and *venia* provided Aristaeus makes due expiation, of which she then supplies the details. And those same details are then repeated in the narrative

and Aristaeus obeys, not (surely) as 'an obvious piece of Homeric repetition'. (Conington), but rather to emphasize the ritual correctness of Aristaeus' behaviour, a correctness that has in fact characterized his action throughout. And it comes as no surprise when, unlike Book Three, Book Four does indeed end with the curing of Aristaeus' plague, in the sense that his stock of bees is immediately renewed.

Aristaeus, then, behaves in the manner prescribed by Roman religion and prospers accordingly: the community described in *Georgics Three*, on the other hand, fail to repair their broken lines of communication with the gods and stumble on blindly to disaster. Thus each episode provides a working model of how Roman religion operates; and it is difficult to accept the notion, reiterated by commentators in so many different ways, that in the presentation of the Noric Plague the Virgilian scheme of things suddenly breaks up. Wilkinson for example refers to Tacitean irony, and asks 'Where is the *pius poeta* now?',<sup>6</sup> citing with approval the view of Liebeschutz that in this episode the belief in divine providence is in temporary abeyance;<sup>7</sup> and Otis comments: 'There is no theodicy here'.<sup>8</sup> But the implications of lines 486ff. are clear enough, pointing as they do to that *ira deum* which in Roman religion is the conventional source of plagues, and is itself the inevitable outcome of defective behaviour towards the gods. When the Trojans in the *Aeneid* suffer an affliction in Crete that is comparable to this one (*Aen.* 3.135f.), Anchises, like Aristaeus, is anxious to establish the source of the trouble and win back the favour of the gods (143ff.). But what so concerned him in such a situation is neglected by the Noric farmers, and they pay the penalty. And if this analogy seems outlandish in the context of the *Georgics*, then Varro provides another that is much closer: for at the start of his treatise on agriculture he stresses that he and his readers for many years now have had recourse to the Sibylline Books for guidance whenever some portentous incident has occurred (1.1.3). And the pages of Livy abound in relevant examples of such portents followed by consultation of the Sibylline Books and appropriate acts of expiation.

There is one aspect of the contrast between *Georgics Three* and *Four* that is worth further brief consideration because of its implications. At the end of Book Four the carcasses of bulls that have been duly sacrificed in order to terminate the *ira deum* are left above ground, and later, in a typical piece of dramatic economy, not only is this primary aim achieved, but they actually supply Aristaeus with his lost source of honey (4.554ff.). At the end of Book Three on the other hand the carcasses of sheep that have perished because of the continuing *ira deum* are hidden away below ground, and later garments made from their fleeces unexpectedly prove a source of torment to the Noric farmers (3.558ff.). Now it is surely clear that one of these conclusions was designed as a foil to the other rather than for its own sake: and it is also clear, I submit, which came first. For the detail at the end of Book Four forms an integral part of Virgil's version of the Bougonia myth, and is indispensable to it, whereas the end of Book Three contains elements which, far from being indispensable, in fact seems to betray their secondary character. For in the first place, in order to provide Aristaeus' honey with its antithetical counterpart, Virgil seems to deviate at the very last moment from an otherwise consistent policy of presenting the plague as one to which the farmers themselves were immune, in spite of their close association with the affected animals. Moreover there is the odd notion in line 558 that burying unpleasant refuse in the ground is something farmers need to learn: an idea that becomes more understandable, I would suggest, if we see it as the counterpart of the Bougonia, a device about which Aristaeus did indeed require expert instruction (4.537ff.). And finally there is the ambiguity of the *donec* clause (3.558) which we have already discussed in this section: for that too becomes more comprehensible if we accept that the end of Book Three was the result, not so much of internal and independent design, but rather of gradual extension undertaken with one eye on the end of Book Four.

The implications of this argument will be obvious: it suggests that the end of Book Four was composed before the end of Book Three, and, if valid, throws further doubt on Servius' testimony regarding the *laudes Galli*, which still finds its supporters among present-day scholars.

I come finally to the third question, what Virgil has to say about the cause of the outbreak. And here it is helpful to bear in mind that *Georgics Three*, besides being set in antithesis to Book Four, is also designed as a companion piece to Book One:<sup>9</sup> a point that is especially clear when we consider the concluding episodes. Both depict the disastrous consequences of incurring the anger of the gods, and both do so in a disguised transition. In Book One the sun is at one moment simply the last in a series of weather – signs (438ff.), at the next, as a result of a skilfully placed rhetorical question (463f.), it ushers in a terrifying series of prodigies, with *importunae volucres* (470) now replacing the earlier *ovantes corvi* (423), and *importunae* (like *obscae*



in the same line) marking the transition by virtue of its role as a technical term in such a context.<sup>10</sup> Similarly in Book Three Virgil at one moment is dealing with the mundane treatment of an ailing sheep, and at the next has plunged us into a raging plague, with prodigious happenings placed prominently at the beginning of his account (486-493): and in retrospect we realise that the transition was foreshadowed by the earlier use of the (by now unmistakable) technical term<sup>11</sup> *dirus* (469:cf. 1.488 *diri cometae*, and note Servius *ad Aen.* 2.519 *dira est deorum ira*). Moreover the parallelism continues with regard to several other features. As Nonius saw,<sup>12</sup> prodigies can be equated in the logic of Roman religion with the divine anger they indicate, and can therefore be thought of as themselves producing the subsequent disaster. That is why in *Georgics One* the prodigy-list leads directly on to

*ergo inter sese paribus concurrere telis  
Romanas acies iterum videre Philippi . . .* (498f.)

And the prodigies of *Georgics Three* are similarly followed by four lines that give a preliminary survey of the plague in general terms, traced emphatically to their source:

*hinc laetis vituli vulgo moriuntur in herbis  
et dulcis animas plena ad praesepia reddunt;  
hinc canibus blandis rabies venit et quatit aegros  
tussis amhela sues ac faucibus angit obesis* (494ff.)

— where *hinc . . . hinc . . .* does not, I would suggest, indicate a pointless chronological sequence scarcely deserving such emphasis, but rather plays the same role as *ergo*, tracing the plague to the prodigies just described.<sup>13</sup> Again, in Book One the poet in his despair assumes the role of priestly mediator and cries out to heaven for help:

*di patrii Indigetes et Romule Vestaque mater,  
quae Tuscum Tiberim et Romana Palatia servas,  
hunc saltem everso iuvenem succurrere saeclo  
ne prohibete . . .* (498ff.)

In Book Three an invocation of such dimensions would of course be inappropriate and indeed pointless, since the Noric Plague belongs to the past. Nevertheless as Rome's priest-poet Virgil can still invoke the gods, this time begging them to spare his people (*piis*) such a disaster, and to inflict it on Rome's enemies instead:

*di meliora piis, erroremque hostibus illum!* (513)

Here, surely, the generally accepted equation of *error* with the frenzied self-laceration of the horse verges on the ludicrous: *error* is rather the blunder that produced the *ira deum* and the plague, just as it does for the Trojans in *Aeneid Three* when they try to settle in Crete contrary to fate and divine instructions (137ff. and cf. *error* 181). Finally *Georgics One* ends with the vivid picture of Mars running amok: *saevit toto Mars impius orbe* (511). And this is carefully matched by the corresponding figure of Tisiphone in the closing scene of *Georgics Three*:

*saevit et in lucem Stygiis emissa tenebris  
pallida Tisiphone . . .* (551f.)

The pattern, I think, is clear: there is a consciously developed parallelism between the various religious elements of the two closing episodes. This brings me to the second of the three-line passages already mentioned, to which we need to add the following three for the purposes of our discussion:

*tempore non alio dicunt regionibus illis  
quaesitas ad sacra boves Iunonis et uris  
imparibus ductos alta ad donaria currus.  
ergo aegre rastris terram rimantur et ipsis  
unguibus infodiunt fruges, montisque per altos  
contenta cervice trahunt stridentia plaustra.* (531ff.)

According to the accepted view of these lines all we have here is further illustration of the effects of the plague. But if that is so, why the sudden adoption of the striking *dicunt* form? And is it not somewhat illogical to say that men were reduced to scratching at the ground with their hands because of a shortage of sacrificial beasts, rather than because there was a shortage of beasts in general? (For these six lines dealing with humans are clearly carefully arranged into two halves: 'There was a shortage of beasts suitable for the cult of Juno: that is why men had to work the land without them'.) Moreover if buffalos still survived to pull Juno's carriage, why could not they be used for farm-work in the emergency? And why indeed did they survive when other beasts did not?<sup>14</sup>

I should like to suggest a fresh approach to these lines. We have already seen a number of parallels between the religious elements of this episode and that of *Georgics One*. There, at the corresponding point in that passage we read:

*satis iam pridem sanguine nostro*  
*Laomedontearum huius periuria Troiae* (1.501f.)

Virgil in this retrospective parenthesis traces the trouble with which the episode is concerned to its religious source — Laomedon's cheating of his divine assistants after Troy's walls had been successfully completed. In *Epode Seven* Horace had made Romulus' fratricide the source, leaving Rome trapped in a vicious circle of recurring civil strife: but now that this strife is reinterpreted as divine punishment, Rome's priest-poet can cry out in supplication 'Enough!'. Unfortunately for the Noric community visualised in *Georgics Three*, however, it is too late for such an appeal. Instead we find, on the one hand, the brief prayer on behalf of the Roman people that we have noted (513), and on the other, three lines in parenthesis which once more provide a retrospective religious explanation of the trouble with which the episode is concerned. For why should we not take lines 531-3 thus? It is always assumed that the initial quest for sacrificial victims was abandoned because by now they had all perished. But could it not have been abandoned through half-heartedness on the part of the searchers, and that is why (*ergo*) they suffer as they now do? It is true that *tempore non alio*<sup>15</sup> gives us no inkling of any retrospective reference here: but the same cannot be said of Virgil's switch to an oblique form (*dicunt* . . .). For this is precisely the device he employs in narrative when he wishes to interpose a retrospective explanation of what he is currently describing: so that not only does the parenthesis begin with 'in that same period', but it continues with the implication that what it now refers to came before everything else within that period. After that, *ergo* and the switch back to direct narration (*rimantur*, *trahunt*) are clearly in a different category, and should be construed accordingly. In *Aeneid Nine*, for example, to explain how the Trojan ships are saved from fire when Turnus attacks, Virgil reveals in a parenthesis that Cybele and Jupiter had earlier made arrangements to cover such a contingency. And this is introduced by *ipsa deum fertur genetrix Berecynthia magnum/vocibus his adfata Iovem* . . . (9.82f.), followed later by *ergo* . . . (106) introducing the consequence of all that in the present. Of course the event in the narrative may have already been fully covered before the retrospective parenthesis is introduced to explain it: in which case the causal connection may be indicated by *namque*, but the characteristic oblique form still marks out the device. For example when Virbius appears in the catalogue of Italian forces a retrospective parenthesis beginning with *namque ferunt* explains how he got that name (7.761ff.); and another, similarly introduced, explains the swan-feathers on Cupavo's helmet during the corresponding Trojan catalogue (10.189ff.). And there are comparable examples not only elsewhere in the *Aeneid*, but in other poets' work as well.<sup>16</sup>

I have suggested that the *quaestio* referred to in 532 is to be placed immediately prior to the events currently being described, and that the guilty Noric farmers did not persist in it, but used inferior beasts that did not even match. Certainly Virgil seems hereabouts to move gradually away from the sympathetic picture of the *tristis arator* (517) and pave the way for such attribution of guilt<sup>17</sup> by emphasizing the innocence of the bulls in an antithesis that implies that their human masters both drank and ate to excess (526ff.). If such men could be thought of as belonging to what Horace humorously labelled 'Epicurus' herd' (*Epistles* 1.4.16), they could also be associated with that half-hearted approach to cult attributed to Epicureans in one of his *Odes* (c.1.34.1f. *parcus deorum cultor*). And that would not only lead on naturally to 531ff. as a description of their offence, but it would produce in 536 (*contenta cervice trahunt stridentia plaustra*) the kind of punning that Virgil practised, and the kind of irony that is typical of his treatment of Lucretius both in this episode and elsewhere.<sup>18</sup> Moreover if 531ff. are taken to refer to the hitherto missing offence that provoked the *ira deum*, certain formal features emerge which appear to be entirely Virgilian. At present when we read *quaesitas ad sacra boves Iunonis*



(532) followed a mere seventeen lines later by *quaesitaeque nocent artes* (549), we take that to be a pointless repetition, in spite of the emphatic positioning in each case of a form found only once in the rest of the *Georgics*. If 531ff. describes an offence against Juno, on the other hand, the two occurrences belong together as cause and effect: the carelessness of the first *quaestio* ensures the failure of the second. Similarly there would emerge what seems a typical Virgilian frame enclosing the concluding section (531-66): for not only is *tempore* placed at the start of the opening and closing lines, but in each case a simple positive<sup>19</sup> is replaced by a negated periphrasis (*tempore non alio, nec longo . . . moranti tempore*). And this frame draws attention to a further striking feature. In Lucretius *sacer ignis*, a technical term for erysipelas, is used not to denote one of the plague's effects, but in a simile to illustrate one of its symptoms (6.1117): and for him of course it is devoid of any religious significance. But Virgil brings it into his plague account to denote the one and only form in which the plague finally struck at man himself. And just as *sacer cruor* at the end of Horace's *Seventh Epode* points back to the sin that caused Rome's troubles (*scelusque fraternae necis*), so now, I suggest, *sacer ignis* at the end of this concluding section and of the poem points back to the opening frame and to the sin against Juno that brought about the Noric Plague. And here a word might be added about foreshadowing. I have suggested that *errorem . . . illum* (513) refers, not to self-laceration, but to the Noric farmers' offence which was never expiated. If that is correct, the mystery involved in that allusion is clarified in the following section. But foreshadowing of a much more striking nature occurs at the start of the book (146ff.). For there we meet the only other reference to Juno in all four *Georgics*: and hitherto that reference (linked to Virgil's treatment of the gadfly hereabouts) has been regarded as mere mythological ornament. I would suggest however that in fact we have there what will also prove to be a foreshadowing of the concluding episode, and one whose phrasing (note especially the use of *pestem*) has been introduced with that in view:

*hoc quondam monstros horribilis exercuit iras  
Inachiae Iuno pestem meditata iuvencae.* (152f.)

I come finally to the relevant of the above interpretation to Virgil's work in general. I have suggested that this most religious of poets does after all depict the Noric plague in the orthodox manner, as the manifestation of divine anger provoked by that most common of its causes, neglect in the matter of cult.<sup>20</sup> On such a view it would obviously follow that when we read

*saevit et in lucem Stygiis emissa tenebris  
pallida Tisiphone Morbos agit ante Metumque  
inque dies avidum surgens caput altius effert* (551ff.)

we could then assume that here the Fury has been despatched from Hell in response to Juno's orders, and is the first in that series of agents to which later Aeolus, Allecto, Iris and Iuturna will be added. But in particular there now seems to be a striking anticipation of Juno's subsequent summoning of Allecto. And the curt *Stygiis emissa tenebris* referring to one Fury will be transformed in the *Aeneid* into that magnificent episode involving another, where Allecto's exploits on Juno's behalf are framed by the two confrontations between the goddess and her formidable agent (7.323ff. 540ff.). Moreover the religious pattern of the *Georgics* would then have a more basic correspondence with that of the *Aeneid* than is generally recognised. For not only is there the obvious one between Jupiter's plan to test on the one hand the farmer, and on the other Aeneas, with appropriate divine guidance helping each to achieve his goal: but in each case there is also hostile activity originating from Juno. But here a fundamental distinction should be made between the two cases. For in the *Georgics* Juno's hostile action is wholly in the spirit of Roman religion, and Tisiphone as her agent retains the old function of the Fury as the upholder of the social order, in this case, punishing man, through his beasts, for his failure in the religious sphere. That is why Juno's revenge is allowed to take its course without let or hindrance from Jupiter or any other power. But in the *Aeneid* her anger has no religious justification: indeed, it is directed against *insignem pietate virum* (1.10). Hence her recourse, not to Tisiphone, who in the Underworld of *Aeneid Six* retains her orthodox role as harrier of sinners (6.570ff), but to Allecto, a monster stripped of any association with the archaic concept of the Fury, but simply and solely a purveyor of discord (7.323ff.). And this time Juno's efforts, however successful they may seem initially, are inevitably doomed to failure.<sup>21</sup> This time the targets of her anger will not succumb and abandon their *patria*.

## NOTES

1. A more detailed discussion of this topic, with a fuller account of previous treatment and with bibliography, will appear in a forthcoming issue of the *Papers of the Liverpool Latin Seminar (Vol 2)*, edited by Francis Cairns. Previous airing of the ideas in it produced helpful criticism from several scholars, especially Francis Cairns, Jonathan Foster, Niall Rudd and David West, to whom I am grateful, though I should add that they do not necessarily agree with them: a point that applies especially to the suggested answer to the third question.
2. L.P. Wilkinson, *The Georgics of Virgil*, Cambridge 1969, 207.
3. Cf. John Scarborough, *Roman Medicine*, London 1969, 16.
4. *RE Sonderdruck*, 280.
5. Brooks Otis, *Virgil*, Oxford 1964, 197 misconstrues 4.453 when he paraphrases it with 'Aristaeus is not the object of some divine hatred'.
6. *Op. cit.* 207, note.
7. W. Liebeschuetz, *G & R* 1965 76f.
8. *Op. cit.* 179.
9. Cf. Otis *op. cit.* 151f.
10. Cf. B. Grassmann-Fischer, *Die Prodigien in Vergils Aeneis*, Munich 1966, 41 note 20, and 103.
11. Grassman-Fischer 104.
12. '*Prodigia, deorum minae vel irae*'.
13. For a parallel to the variation between 'because of this (cattle died)' and 'from this source (came the madness)' cf. *Aen.* 2.97f. *hinc mihi prima mali labes, hinc semper Ulixes/criminibus terrere novis*.
14. It is perhaps worth adding here that although Conington in his edition seems happy enough with the traditional view of these lines, in his translation he breaks off in the middle of line 531: 'Then and then only in that country –' leaving *Georgics Three* incomplete.
15. It should be stressed here that this phrase should be seen as the equivalent of a strong positive (*i.e. tempore eodem*), rather than dissected to produce renderings such as that cited in the previous note, or 'then and only then' (Conington, commentary *ad loc.*). Virgil seems especially prone to such negative periphrases in religious contexts. Cf. *G.* 1.483ff., where he begins by actually using the phrase *tempore eodem*, but linked to *nec . . . cessavit*, and continues with *non alias* (487) and *nec fuit indignum* (491). Cf. also *nec longo . . . tempore* (3.565f.) and *non te nullius exercent numinis irae* (4.453).
16. Cf. e.g. Apollonius, *Argonautica* 2.500ff., where a parenthesis explaining the origin of the Etesian winds begins 'A certain Cyrene is said to have tended her sheep . . .', and the poet returns to his narrative later with 'Because of this the Etesian winds refresh the land . . .' (524ff.) Cf. also Catullus . 64.212ff., where *namque ferunt* introduces a retrospective parenthesis to explain the death of Aegaeus.
17. W. Hübner, *Dirae im römischen Epos*, Hildesheim 1970, 54 ascribes the guilt in question to the beasts, referring back to *G.* 3.209ff, but there is no mistaking the sympathetic tone of 525ff.
18. Cf. how he not only implicitly rejects Lucretius' view that there are no Furies in Hell (Lucr. 3.1011) but actually echoes his attack on *religio* (Lucr. 1.64) to describe a Fury's activities after she has emerged from there (*G.* 3.553). Note also (for example) the ironical echoing of Lucr. 3.1ff. at *G.* 1.158.
19. Cf. note 15.



20. It should be noted that the earlier reference to unfavourable climatic conditions (478ff.) and the later reference to the air-pollution that kills off birds (546) in no way conflict with such a view of 531ff. Here, as in the psychological sphere, the divine is supplemented by the rational explanation: cf. for example *Aen.* 3.137ff. and 161ff. and Ovid *Met.* 5.477ff. Indeed, in his imitation of *G.* 3.478ff. Ovid also combines the anger of Juno and oppressive climatic conditions to explain his plague (*Met.* 7.522ff.). Of course the case is different with Lucretius, who on the one hand emphasizes the physical explanation. (6.1092ff., 1117ff.) and on the other not only excludes any notion of divine anger, but, just before his plague-description, goes out of his way to reject such an idea in a comparable context (6.750ff.).
21. Because their association with Rome's origins was legendary rather than historical, the Trojans naturally left no mark on such basic features as the dress and the language of the Romans, and Virgil is thus able to produce a dramatically acceptable dénouement in which Juno's face is saved by letting her insist on these historical facts. Nevertheless she fails to bring to an end the detested Trojan line and in particular that of Aeneas, and she fails to avert the eventual destruction of her beloved Carthage: that surely is the crux of the matter as far as her role in the *Aeneid* is concerned.