

University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

UTC Scholar

Honors Theses

Student Research, Creative Works, and
Publications

5-2022

Bee pluribus unum: Vergil as an imperial advisor

Ollyvir Reagan

University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, fyr373@mocs.utc.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.utc.edu/honors-theses>



Part of the [Classical Literature and Philology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Reagan, Ollyvir, "Bee pluribus unum: Vergil as an imperial advisor" (2022). *Honors Theses*.

This Theses is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Research, Creative Works, and Publications at UTC Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of UTC Scholar. For more information, please contact scholar@utc.edu.

Bee Pluribus Unum:
Vergil as an Imperial Educator

Ollyvir Reagan

Departmental Honors Thesis
The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga
Modern and Classical Languages and Literatures

Examination Date: October 15, 2021

Revision Date: November 3, 2021

Carl P.E. Springer
Professor of Classics
Thesis Director

Joshua Davies
Associate Professor of Classics
Department Examiner

Table of Contents

A Note of Thanks	1
Abstract	2
An Introduction	4
Interpretatio Vergilii	9
I. The Infrastructure of Imperium	11
II. Military Culture	14
III. Qualities of a Leader	17
IV. Ingenium Apium... Romanorumque	22
V. The Inglorious Aspects of Leadership	26
Discussion & Concluding Thoughts	28
Suggestions for Further Reading	31
Works Cited	32

A Note of Thanks

Though I will soon be a teacher myself, I was a student first. As such, I owe a great deal of thanks to the teachers who guided me, inspired me, and molded me into the curious and driven student who wrote this thesis.

Dr. Carl Springer, thank you for your patience, guidance, and compassion throughout this grueling but rewarding process. I would also like to extend a thanks to Dir. Sherese Williams and Dir. Leslie Pusey for being my ferocious defenders since I began my undergraduate experience. To Lauren McCarty, I owe so much more than thanks for providing me with a solid background in Latin and for becoming a mentor to whom I can always return. This process has been made not only bearable but even enjoyable by the support of my grandmother, my aunts, my mother, my sisters, my partners, and my friends. You carry my heart with you.

Gratias vobis ago.

*“For so work the honeybees, / creatures that by a rule in nature teach / the act of order to a
peopled kingdom.”*

-- William Shakespeare, Henry V, 1.2

Abstract

All three of Vergil’s major works received patronage, although somewhat indirectly, by Augustus, the first Roman emperor, and they have been an integral aspect of education since they were given to the public. Research going back hundreds of years, from John Wesley of the late 1700s to the contemporary Peter White, has sought to address the finer details of the relationship between Augustus and Vergil, focusing heavily on Vergil’s attitude towards Augustus and the new imperial rule.

In this paper, I will add to this controversy-steeped conversation from the perspective of an educator, highlighting the possibility that Vergil was a kind of teacher to Augustus, delivering instruction to him by means of his poetry. I do so by primarily addressing the *Georgics*, Vergil’s second work. In this work, Vergil passes on subtle lessons to Augustus on how to handle his newfound power. In doing so, Vergil acts simultaneously as an entertainer and an educator, poet and imperial advisor. He uses descriptions of bees, bee colonies, and the care of both as his primary delivery method for his lessons. Vergil dedicates an entire book of verse to bees, and this fact is not insignificant. As he writes in *Georgics IV*, “labor on little things; but there is no little glory.”¹ I will set out to show that Vergil deliberately personalizes and personifies bees in an attempt to serve as an indirect imperial advisor.

This paper highlights both the complexity of literary analysis as well as the beauty of Vergil’s original Latin text. It asks its audience to evaluate materials through several lenses, or a

¹ *Georgics IV*, l. 6: “

unique intersection. At this incredibly rare intersection of insects, education, and imperial rule rests one man, one student, and very many bees.

An Introduction

At the heart of a good educator must always lie a good storyteller, someone capable of crafting lessons into consumable works of art. Truly, none perfected the art of storytelling like the Classical World, in particular the Roman and Greek poets. Through oral and written histories, these poets not only preserved an anthology of natural science and cultural history but also shared it with their audience in a way not dissimilar to a teacher sharing lessons in a classroom.² Of all the great poets of Classics, by far the greatest poet-teacher among them was Vergil. Vergil is not a poet who invites conventional definitions of “teacher” or “educational,” but his works of pastoral imagery undoubtedly disguise a didactic message for his audience.

Publius Vergilius Maro, more commonly known as Vergil, was a Roman poet, responsible for three of the most famous works in the body of Latin literature. He is the author behind *Eclogues*, *Georgics*, and *Aeneid*, favoring the Greek dactylic hexameter and epic-length poetry for his craft. Vergil had a distinct love for nature and fully embraced the traditional Roman identity of farmer. In fact, two of his three major works focus on pastoral imagery and the complexities of the natural world, the *Eclogues* (*Eclogae*) and the *Georgics* (*Georgica*).

Following the Roman civil wars from 49 BCE - 45 BCE, the Roman government saw a shift from *res publica* to *imperium*. During this transitional period and for the rest of his life, Vergil found himself writing in the service of the first Roman emperor, Augustus Caesar. Vergil and Augustus Caesar have survived to posterity as inseparable topics for a multitude of reasons, not least because of the strange relationship they enjoyed which was ultimately too ambiguous for the simple terms we are accustomed to using in these situations, such as “patron” and “client.” No, those terms invite too much suspicion of simplicity, too much speculation about

² Though I acknowledge that the body of mythology, even that of the Classical World, is far too vast to categorize into a single method of interpretation, it would appear that the majority of myths perpetuated orally in Ancient Greece were largely interpretations of natural experiences or were distorted histories.

emotion and metaphor to be truly cut to the mold of any one relationship archetype for which we may instinctively reach. Even despite this complexity and ambiguity, there are some who would seek to define their relationship in terms of Vergil's works. Most commonly, authors and researchers claim that an excerpt from *The Aeneid* gives valuable insight to the true nature of Vergil's feelings on Augustus. They cite the scene in which Aeneas, the great hero of *The Aeneid* and the supposed ancestor of Augustus, exits Hades through the Gate of Ivory. This scene is notable because the Gate of Ivory is one of false dreams or lies. Vergil's most immediate patron, Maecenas, commissioned several works from Vergil intended to venerate the emperor, including the *Aeneid*, so by having Aeneas exit through a gate indicating falsehood, these authors argue, Vergil is undercutting Augustus's rule. Other authors, such as Jorge Luis Borges, write that Vergil was actually employing a kind of Platonic ideal,³ claiming that what we perceive as reality is not, in fact, reality and is only a diluted ideal. Even yet, some authors, such as John Wesley, argue that neither of the other stances is accurate and the truth is that Vergil is warning the audience that what he has said and what he will say are not true.⁴ Of all of these readings, I am most inclined to agree with Wesley's assessment. Contemporary research tends to be a bit more diverse, examining Vergil's work beyond the Gate of Ivory. As such, there is much more nuance in contemporary discussion of Vergil and Augustus. Peter White, for example, takes issue with any assessment of Vergil's writing as propagandistic. Instead, White argues that the poetry created by Augustan poets was independent and inventive, ultimately unimpaired by the emperor's involvement in its creation.⁵ In undertaking this research and writing this work, it is

³ Borges, Jorge Luis (2010). *Everything and Nothing*. p. 83, as translated by Donald A. Yates: "Aeneas returns through the gate of ivory and not through the gate of horn. Why? The anonymous commentator tells us: because we are not in reality. For Virgil, the real world was possibly the Platonic world, the world of archetypes."

⁴ *Sermons of John Wesley*, Sermon 122 "On Faith": "And, in the conclusion, lest anyone should imagine he believed any of these accounts, he sends the relater of them out of hades by the ivory gate, through which, he had just informed us, that only dreams and shadows pass, -- a very plain intimation, that all which has gone before, is to be looked upon as a dream!"

⁵ White, Peter. *Promised Verse: Poets in the Society of Augustan Rome*. Harvard University Press, 1993.

my goal to add to the larger conversation of Vergilian scholarship regarding Vergil's relationship with Augustus. Though there is no true way to discern Vergil's true role in the life of Augustus, there are some clear patterns in the relationship between the two men, and one such pattern is the dynamic of teacher and student.

Vergil was never formally a *magister* to Augustus, but his works display a dedication to the education of his audience, including and perhaps most importantly Augustus, doing so through subtleties rather than explicit lessons. Poetry is perhaps the most accountability-free method for delivering lessons to a young emperor. A manual, for example, would lay out clear advice which could be referenced in discussions of right and wrong decisions. A manual is a poor choice for an individual who may desire to express political opinions or to straddle the fence on certain issues, so to speak. A poem, however, can always fall back on the conventions of poetry, such as hidden meanings, metaphors, and even the excuse of artistic license with fact. I believe that the best example of Vergil's poetry as educational material is his second major work, *Georgics*, especially Book IV. The transition from understanding *Georgics IV* as a poem to understanding it as educational material must begin with an examination of metaphors and imagery, while not neglecting the cultural context of the work in question.

When examining the mythology and, indeed, the culture of Roman Antiquity, it becomes clear that the honey bee holds a place of high cultural significance. The honey bee appears as a feature in several famous myths, including the Greek story of Zeus's infancy. In some accounts of his infancy, the god was sheltered on an island and cared for by a nymph and her goat. The nymph nursed Zeus using the goat's milk and soothed him using honey. Zeus would later reward

her service by turning her into a bee.⁶ In fact, Vergil makes direct reference to this form of the myth in the Fourth book of his *Georgics*:

Nunc age, naturas apibus quas Iuppiter ipse
addidit, expediam, pro qua mercede canoros
Curetum sonitus crepitantiaque aera secutae
Dictaeo caeli regem pavere sub antro.⁷

Other notable contributions of the bee to Greek and Roman mythology include the fact that, thanks to bees, Hermes is capable of divination. According to Homer's *Hymn 4 to Hermes*, Hermes wanted to share in Apollo's manticism, but Apollo denied this request. Instead of an outright refusal, however, Apollo offers three Bee Maidens as a consolation to his half-brother. These maidens taught Hermes cleromancy, or divination by casting lots.⁸ The close proximity found between gods and bees in these cultural beliefs points directly to the divinity, or at the very least high significance, of bees in Greek and Roman cultures.

Vergil's work is, perhaps, the nail in the proverbial coffin of the idea that bees are culturally significant to the Romans, as the aforementioned myths were primarily Greek in origin. Vergil adopted the sacred bee and used it as a metaphor for the discussion of another sacred figure, Rome. Specifically, Vergil uses honeybees to discuss concepts of Roman identity and the governance of Rome in a series of metaphors. These metaphors primarily appear in the *Georgics IV*, but Vergil makes reference to these same ideas across all three of his major works. In *Georgics IV*, Vergil passes on subtle lessons to Augustus on how to handle his newfound power using bees, bee colonies, and the care of both as the primary vessels for those lessons. In many ways, Vergil differs from other pastoral authors of his age, but the most notable is that he

⁶ The story of the nymph Melissa.

Evslin, Bernard (2007). *Gods, Demigods and Demons: A Handbook of Greek Mythology*. I. B. Tauris. p. 127

⁷ *Georgics IV*, ll. 149-152

⁸ Homer, *Hymn 4 to Hermes*. Translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White. ll. 550-580.

<http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0013.tlg004.perseus-eng1:1-29>

dedicates an entire book to bees when other authors spare only a few lines despite the public perception of bees as the ideal for Roman life. His unusual focus on bees, his intended audience, and his ties to the emperor Augustus make it clear that there is a new significance to Vergil's work, not shown in the work of other Roman authors. I intend to demonstrate as much by highlighting and explicating the ways in which Vergil deliberately personalizes and personifies bees in his attempt to serve as an indirect imperial advisor.⁹

⁹ This project has undergone many changes since its original proposal in 2020, as I am sure many things did in the course of that most unprecedented year. The original direction for this project was to analyze the motif of bees across all three of Vergil's major works, rather than to focus on *Georgics IV* with support from both the *Aeneid* and *Eclogues IV*. The decision to focus primarily on *Georgics IV* was one of many factors, of course. The most direct influence on this decision was that *Georgics IV* focuses exclusively on bees while the other two have complicating factors that proved to be distractions from my core analysis of the teachings Vergil delivers through bees. It is my intention to return to *Eclogues IV* and the *Aeneid* at a later date with the same research question and the same zeal.

Interpretatio Vergilii

The fourth book of the *Georgics* begins, like most major works of Latin poetry, with an invocation:

Protinus aërii mellis caelestia dona
exsequar: hanc etiam, Maecenas, adspice partem.
Admiranda tibi levium spectacula rerum
magnanimosque duces totiusque ordine gentis
mores et studia et populos et proelia dicam.
In tenui labor; at tenuis non gloria, si quem
numina laeva sinunt auditque vocatus Apollo.¹⁰

In this invocation, we find our first indication that this poem has a secondary meaning, hidden below the initial impression. Vergil declares that he will write about a whole nation's customs, efforts, people, and battles ("*totiusque ordine gentis mores et studia et populos et proelia dicam*"). This declaration, on the surface, appears to be a reference to the structure and complexity of bee communities. However, upon second glance, these lines seem to refer to a nation proper, more specifically Rome. Vergil deliberately uses the word people (*populos*), not citizens (*cives*) or even bees (*apes*), which would be more accurate to a poem simply about bee communities. He also chooses to mention customs (*mores*) rather than behavior patterns, the more expected term for the ways of animals. Though distinctly subtle, these key word choices indicate that Vergil is, in fact, using bees as an allegory for men. Moreover, it would follow that, in a poem about the customs, efforts, families, and battles of men, Vergil would write about Rome and the Roman people, for two reasons. First, and perhaps most obvious, the *Georgics* was commissioned by a Roman with the new emperor of Rome as the intended audience. Second,

¹⁰ Throughout this work, I will provide my own stylized translations for the Latin text where absolutely necessary. However, I will do so in footnotes to keep my arguments grounded in the original work.

Georgics IV, ll. 1-7: "Next, I will speak about the celestial gift of honey, from the air: Maecenas, look at this part. I will tell you, in proper order, about the greatest spectacle of the smallest things, and of brave leaders and a whole nation's customs, studies, families, and battles. Labor on little things; but there is no little glory, if it is divinely allowed and Apollo hears my prayer."

Vergil was a Roman himself, so knowledge of Rome, its people, and their needs was likely readily available to him.

I. The Infrastructure of *Imperium*

Considerations of infrastructure are integral to the establishment of a secure and enduring empire, according to Vergil. In lines 8-66 of *Georgics IV*, Vergil's central argument is that all eventualities must be accounted for in order to preserve a hive or an empire. This section of the poem begins with a command: "*Principio sedes apibus statioque petenda.*"¹¹ The command, to find a suitable place for the apiary, sets the tone for the entire section as one that is didactic and about settlement and structures. Throughout this section of the poem, Vergil stresses the importance of a detailed approach to infrastructure and a leader's attention to detail when making decisions regarding infrastructure. He begins, of course, with the appropriate location of the settlement.

What, then, does Vergil consider is a suitable location for an apiary, and therefore an empire? He first declares that the settlement should be located such that adverse weather conditions are not a constant threat to the citizens and does not prevent their coming and going from the settlement ("*quo neque sit ventis aditus*").¹² This location should also be free from any predators or careless cohabitants who might cause damage to the structural integrity of the settlement and its trade routes ("*neque oves haedique petulci / floribus insultent aut errans bucula campo / decutiat rorem et surgentes atterat herbas*").¹³ In these lines, the sheep, butting kids, and cows ("*oves haedique petulci ... errands bucula*") serve as careless neighbors to the hive, or the city of Rome, because they damage the natural resources and would make existing in the area difficult for the bees ("*floribus insultent aut ... decutiat rorem et surgentes atterat herbas*"). Likewise, predators or other similarly deadly inhabitants must be avoided, as they

¹¹ *Georgics IV*, l. 8: "First, seek a place and position for the bees."

¹² *Georgics IV*, l. 9: "where no wind may be admitted."

¹³ *Georgics IV*, ll. 10-12: "where no sheep nor butting kid (young goat) leap in the flowers or wandering cows brush dew from the field and wear down the growing grass."

would kill the bees and make a hive unsustainable in such a location.¹⁴ Finally, the ideal location for a settlement must have access to natural amenities, such as fresh water, abundant food, and places to rest.

At the time of Vergil's writing, however, Rome had already been an established nation for over 700 years. Why would it be profitable to include instructions for the establishment of a nation when the emperor rules an established nation already? Vergil is observing a tradition and setting an example with these lessons. First, he is observing the tradition of paying homage to history and acknowledging the work which has already been done to make Rome an ideal settlement. Next, Vergil is utilizing that work as an example for Augustus. The founders of Rome chose a place most ideal for settlement, meeting specific parameters and future needs for their people. Therefore, Augustus should take these same parameters into consideration when expanding the empire or establishing infrastructure in the provinces. His first lesson on infrastructure, then, is the makings of an appropriate settlement.

Vergil's next infrastructure lesson pertains to structures and proper maintenance. He advocates for a narrow entrance to the hive, or a designated point of entry into Rome, such as the gate of a wall.¹⁵ The benefit of a designated entrance is that it manages access to the citizens of that community, allowing an additional degree of safety within the walls. However, walls and gates erode over time, so maintenance is a necessary addition to these rules. Vergil uses the hive as a metaphor for such maintenance: "*Tu tamen et levi rimosa cubilia limo / ungue fovens circum et raras superinice frondes.*"¹⁶ In this example, the beekeeper stands in for Augustus and smooths clay over cracks in the hive, adding leaves on top for good measure. The lesson, then, is that

¹⁴ *Georgics IV*, ll. 13-17

¹⁵ *Georgics IV*, ll. 33-34: "*Ipsa autem, seu corticibus tibi suta cavatis, / seu lento fuerint alvaria vimine texta*"

¹⁶ *Georgics IV*, ll. 45-46: "You warm them, too, using clay smoothed by your hands, / around the cracks in the hives, and scatter a few leaves on top for good measure."

leaders must also keep a watchful eye on failures of infrastructure and assign maintenance to repair those failures and prevent future failures. The question of sourcing labor for maintenance might then arise. Vergil provides an additional mini-lesson for this question, too: “*hinc nescio qua dulcedine laetae / progeniem nidosque foveant, hinc arte recentes / excidunt ceras et mella tenacia fingunt.*”¹⁷ The bees, and therefore the Romans, cherish their hive and their young (“*progeniem nidosque foveant*”). The Roman people cherish their nation as an artifact for their children, in this example, and it is to their advantage to maintain the integrity of their walls and streets. Therefore, they should willingly serve as agents of the maintenance of infrastructure.

¹⁷ *Georgics IV*, ll. 55-57

II. Military Culture

The Romans were remarkable for a great many things, including their military prowess. In fact, the Roman military was an integral aspect of Rome's imperial expansion. Naturally, Vergil dedicates a section of his pseudo-textbook to discussing military culture and strategy in lines 67-102. His overarching lesson, supplemented by several smaller lessons, is that an understanding of military life and the fundamentals of strategy are necessary aspects of ruling Rome.

The necessity of such an understanding is not only due to its centrality in Roman imperialism but also in its centrality to the Roman identity. For his first lesson, Vergil writes, "*continuoque animos vulgi et trepidantia bello / corda licet longe praesciscere*"¹⁸ Indeed, the first lesson Augustus must learn about the Romans is that they, like the bees, are a glory-loving people. War is the path by which their nation may gain glory, so the will of the masses (*animos vulgi*) is often stirred by war for its promise of glory. This idea is related to an earlier line, in which Vergil declares that bees cherish their hive and their young. Because Rome will be an artifact for their children, Romans are quick to better the nation through participation in maintaining infrastructure and in career military service.

Next, Vergil approaches the subject of battle. He begins by explaining the power dynamic of the bees: "*et circa regem atque ipsa ad praetoria densae / miscentur magnisque vocant clamoribus hostem.*"¹⁹ Like the men of the Roman army, bees follow a single leader when in battle. Similarly, under Augustus, the people of Rome would follow a single leader when not at war. Vergil also makes clear that there is defined structure to the ways in which bees, and therefore Romans, conduct battle. First, they must wait for suitable weather and find a suitable

¹⁸ *Georgics IV*, ll. 69-70: "and may you know beforehand the spirit of the common mass and, / from far away, how their hearts are stirred by war."

¹⁹ *Georgics IV*, ll. 75-76

location, like an open field. Then, the army attacks as one entity, not as individuals.²⁰ Within this one entity, the leader of the army should be actively involved: “*ipsi per medias acies insignibus alis / ingentes animos angusto in pectore versant.*”²¹ Vergil advocates for accountability in leadership and takes issue with leaders who would wage war using anonymous lives. In this way, Augustus is already a good leader by Vergilian standards. During his life, Augustus was wise enough to understand his own limitations on the battlefield and instead appointed Agrippa as his most trusted military leader.²² Interestingly, Augustus’s predecessor, Julius Caesar, fit this quality exactly. Julius Caesar was frequently involved in battles, especially during his conquest of Gaul. Vergil’s inclusion of this line may, in fact, pay homage to Augustus’s predecessor more so than Augustus himself. Regarding the involvement of the leaders, Vergil adds: “*usque adeo obnixi non cedere, dum gravis aut hos / aut hos versa fuga victor dare terga subegit.*”²³ The leaders must not withdraw until there is a decisive winner whose strength overwhelms the loser. In the case of the Roman army, Vergil is here advocating for a total dedication to victory before the battle even starts, as a leader and his soldiers must be completely devoted to the cause or they will retreat at the first bad sign.

Before ending this section, Vergil makes an interesting comment on what should be done with the losing queen.²⁴ He writes that, once the generals have been recalled, the beekeeper must kill the losing bee as it is weaker and, thus, its offspring are weaker (“*verum ubi ductores acie revocaveris ambo, / deterior qui visus, eum, ne prodigus obsit, / dede neci; melior vacua sine regnet in aula*”).²⁵ From that point on, the winning bee will rule alone. This comment seems to be

²⁰ *Georgics IV*, ll. 77-81

²¹ *Georgics IV*, ll. 82-83: “the leaders themselves in the middle, differentiated by their wings, / have great spirits in their tiny breasts.”

²² Here referring to Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa, 63 BCE – 12 BCE

²³ *Georgics IV*, ll. 84-85

²⁴ Vergil does not refer to the leaders as queens, but kings. I use queen here instead of king because it is more colloquially accurate for most English audiences.

²⁵ *Georgics IV*, ll. 88-90

a metaphor for the Battle of Actium in 31 BCE, at which Marc Antony was defeated by Augustus's (at the time Octavian) forces. Later, Marc Antony committed suicide rather than be put to death by Augustus.²⁶ The inclusion of such a lesson is useful for both validating the previous actions of Augustus while also encouraging him and future leaders to continue taking such a black-and-white approach to victory.

In another reading, this lesson could refer more broadly to Rome's transition from *res publica* to *imperium*. Through this lens, the losing queen and its weak offspring are the Roman Republic. This reasoning could be rooted in the belief that the Republic was a system of government seemingly responsible for Rome's civil wars, as it proved to be too weak to prevent or end the conflicts and too weak to survive them. The winning queen, then, would be the Roman Empire. The Empire would, theoretically, be the superior choice when observing the Republic because the Empire would not be predisposed to power discrepancies like the Republic was because, unlike the Republic but much like the beehive, an Empire has only one leader.

²⁶ Barbara Kellum, "Representations and Re-presentations of the Battle of Actium" in *Citizens of Discord: Rome and Its Civil Wars*, 2010

III. Qualities of a Leader

Regardless of society or period in time, there are a set of culturally-defined qualities of an ideal leader. Naturally, Rome is no exception. Vergil dedicates lines 103-148 of his *Georgics IV* to discussing what he believes to be the ideal qualities of a leader in bee communities, as well as Rome. The larger lesson to be learned from this section of the poem is that the leader is to his community what a shepherd should be to his sheep: a guardian and a guide.

A key facet of Vergil's ideal qualities for a leader is leading by example. The leader must rule with an established set of morals and guide both his own life as well as the lives of his people by those morals. Regarding bad or immoral behavior, Vergil has this to say:

At cum incerta volant caeloque examina ludunt
contemnuntque favos et frigida tecta relinquunt,
instabiles animos ludo prohibebis inani.
Nec magnus prohibere labor: tu regibus alas
eripe; non illis quisquam cunctantibus altum
ire iter aut castris audebit vellere signa.²⁷

When the bees, or people, are led astray, Vergil calls for the easiest fix, which is removing the wings of their leader (*tu regibus alas / eripe*). This action literally grounds the lead bee, as he cannot fly without wings. Metaphorically, this action may also refer to grounding a leader in a set of morals which will prevent his people from straying in the future. Alternatively, removing the wings of the leader could be a punishment for the bad influence and violation of public morality law. Removing his wings removes his ability to influence and lead bees astray. Indeed, it would be impossible to lead the other bees anywhere if he is unable to fly himself. This punishment, translated to people, could be as simple as jailing the offender for his crimes. Vergil does allow for some temptation, however, as it is a natural aspect of life. In lines 109-111, he writes that,

²⁷ *Georgics IV*, ll. 103-108

should saffron gardens tempt the bees, let their guardian guide them back to the path of morality like a shepherd guides his sheep.²⁸

Vergil's ideal leader must also be willing to sacrifice time and labor in order to benefit his people because a leader cannot benefit from a people he has not benefited. He writes, "*ipse labore manum duro terat, ipse feraces / figat humo plantas et amicos inriget imbres.*"²⁹ Here, he commands that the beekeeper, or Augustus, must callous his own hands with hard labor ("*ipse labore manum duro terat*"). In the situation of a beekeeper, this hard labor could include the construction of a hive box, the maintenance of the hive itself, and even cultivating the land with plants that the bees will enjoy. For Augustus, this labor more likely refers to taking care of infrastructure, maintaining the movement of supplies and trade in and out of Rome, and adhering to a strict set of morals. These labors create an environment in which the bees, or citizens, will prosper because they have all of the tools they need to be productive. Of course, the leader benefits from their prosperity because their productivity provides him with food, transportation, resources, and a workforce from which he can pull soldiers and public servants. Vergil uses the story of a Corycian man to reinforce this lesson, emphasizing its importance. In lines 125-145, Vergil writes about a man who owned a field in which no food crops could grow. Nevertheless, the man planted flowers and shade-giving trees. He attracted bees, who later produced honey for him. In these lines, Vergil once again highlights the importance of a transactional beginning to the relationship between beekeeper and bees, leader and led. Because the Corycian man created an environment conducive to the bees' success, he had no problem gathering plenty of honey later. The Corycian man embodies these ideal leadership characteristics, and he may even represent Augustus allegorically.

²⁸ *Georgics IV*, ll 109-111: "*invitent croceis halantes floribus horti / et custos furum atque avium cum falce saligna/ Hellespontiaci servet tutela Priapi.*"

²⁹ *Georgics IV*, ll. 114-115

Vergil takes the opportunity to readdress the qualities of a leader in his later work, the *Aeneid* with a similar lesson: in order to promote the long-term success of a nation, the ruler must be objective, and he must establish clear systems of organization which may temporarily function without the direct supervision or presence of the leader. Because this is a poem and not a prose manual, however, Vergil takes a much more fine-lined approach to the actual communication of this wisdom. The lesson is demonstrated first using the active metaphor of bees in descriptions of the Carthaginians:

Instant ardentem Tyrii pars ducere muros,
 moliri que arcem et manibus subvolvere saxa,
 pars optare locum tecto et concludere sulco.
 [Iura magistratusque legunt sanctumque senatum;]
 hic portus alii effodiunt; hic alta theatris
 fundamenta locant alii, immanisque columnas
 rupibus excidunt, scaenis decora alta futuris.
 Qualis apes aestate nova per florea rura
 exercet sub sole labor, cum gentis adultos
 educunt fetus, aut cum liquentia mella
 stipant et dulci distendunt nectare cellas,
 aut onera accipiunt venientum, aut agmine facto
 ignavom fucos pecus a praesepibus arcent:
 fervet opus, redolentque thymo fragrantia mella³⁰

In this description of the Carthaginians, Vergil compares them to bees (*Qualis apes...*) in order to accomplish two things. His first accomplishment is highlighting the organization and devotion of the Carthaginians. Highlighting desirable qualities in the Carthaginians serves as an early justification for Aeneas's awe and wonder at their civilization and the power of their queen. His second accomplishment is a striking juxtaposition between this first image of the Carthaginians and Aeneas's final impressions of them. Indeed, in this introductory scene to Carthage, they are "busy bees," on track to become a fearsome and great nation at an impressive pace because the

³⁰ *Aeneid I*, ll. 423-426

building of the settlement is well-organized and well-directed. At this point, one question must be answered, then: why *didn't* Carthage become a great nation in the *Aeneid*?

The progress of Carthage was entirely halted, in short, by inferior leadership. Vergil asks his readers, his students, to understand that leadership must be selfless. He does so by using Queen Dido as an example of improper leadership. By intervention of the gods, she becomes utterly infatuated with Aeneas, and her supervision of her subjects suffers for it. Aeneas piously heeds the commands of the gods, leaving Carthage when he is told to do so. Dido's response is catatonic, and she commits suicide, an action which almost, if not entirely, causes the downfall of her nation's progress. In the mind of Vergil, Dido's response is a horrific neglect of her position and therefore an excellent example for his lesson because her actions directly contradict the first essential aspect of his lesson regarding leadership. That first aspect of Vergil's lesson is that the leader must be objective and also that he must think first about his people before his own interests. This itself is in line with the order of priorities in the Roman imagination, placing Rome and one's family even before one's own interests. Dido fails at this, prioritizing her infatuation and her emotions above the needs of her community. Aeneas, on the other hand, stands out in this comparison because he abandons his lover, Dido, in order to fulfill his destiny and establish a settlement for his descendants.

Though Vergil spends less than 100 lines in total to cover the qualities of a leader, they are no doubt of great importance, especially in navigating the uncharted territory of *imperium*. The use of repetition creates emphasis, even across multiple works. By reusing the motif of a model leader, first established in the *Georgics* and revisited in the *Aeneid*, Vergil places great weight and importance on a leader's predispositions, skills, and actions. To be succinct, any leader who either cannot or will not lead by example, sacrifice his time, or create systems for

success within his populace is not an effective or ideal leader according to the lessons laid out by Vergil across both the *Georgics* and *Aeneid*.

IV. **Ingenium Apium... Romanorumque**

Having discussed the qualities of a leader, Vergil's next task in lines 149-227 is to establish the qualities of the governed people. Vergil makes one point abundantly clear in this section: the strength of the hive is directly related to the willingness of the bees to work towards a common goal. The drive of the bees to work towards their common goal comes from three key traits: respect for their social order, love for the hive's glory, and true devotion to their leader. These were the traits which would create a strong nation, and these were the traits Vergil, through his bee allegory, ascribed to the Roman people.

Vergil begins his lesson on the qualities of Roman citizens by laying the groundwork for his argument. His first task is to discuss a degree of shared responsibility among bees in a hive:

Solae communes natos, consortia tecta
urbis habent magnisque agitant sub legibus aevum,
et patriam solae et certos novere penates,
venturaeque hiemis memores aestate laborem
experiuntur et in medium quaesita reponunt.³¹

This passage serves two rhetorical functions. First, it establishes that bees are unique ("*solae*") in that they are a people united in several interests, ranging from legal to spiritual. Second, and consequently, it introduces the concept of societal harmony as a trait of the bees. The social harmony of bees is accomplished partially by their agreement to live in accordance with shared laws (*urbis habent magnisque agitant sub legibus aevum*). A standardized set of laws and expectations is often accompanied by a social order, be it implied or explicit, that must be respected by the citizens in order for the society to function appropriately. The social order, in the case of bees and Romans, is created by the division of labor within the society:

Namque aliae victu invigilant et foedere pacto
exercentur agris; pars intra saepta domorum

³¹ *Georgics IV*, ll. 153-157

Narcissi lacrimam et lentum de cortice gluten
 prima favis ponunt fundamina, deinde tenaces
 suspendunt ceras: aliae spem gentis adultos
 educunt fetus, aliae purissima mella
 stipant et liquido distendunt nectare cellas.
 Sunt quibus ad portas cecidit custodia sorti,
 inque vicem speculantur aquas et nubila caeli
 aut onera accipiunt venientum aut agmine facto
 ignavum fucos pecus a praesepibus arcent.³²

In these lines, it becomes clear that bees participate in a number of jobs, such as field worker or supervisor (*namque aliae victu invigilant et foedere pacto / exercentur agris*), honeycomb crafter (*pars intra saepta domorum ... suspendunt ceras*), child rearer (*aliae spem gentis adultos / educunt fetus*), and guard of the hive (*Sunt quibus ad portas cecidit custodia sorti*). Interestingly, the jobs described here as the natural order of bees fit nicely with some of the primary occupations of the Roman people. Though it is quite obvious that the Romans, too, had field workers and guards, there are less obvious similarities in the list, as well. For example, the honeycomb crafter could be analogous to a weaver, who would sit in her home (*intra saepta domorum*) and weave together fabric to be draped over her own family or else other Roman citizens (*deinde tenaces / suspendunt ceras*). Child rearers and guards have more direct parallels to a human city, such as parents or nursing maids and soldiers.

Sustaining multiple fields of work across a single system can be difficult, but the task becomes much more manageable when the workers of that system are united in a single goal. For bees, that goal is the creation of honey. So great is their love of honey, that they would endure extreme conditions and grave injuries, even to the point of death.³³ For the Romans, the uniting goal is similar, although perhaps a bit more complex due to the essential differences between

³² *Georgics IV*, ll. 158-164

³³ *Georgics IV*, ll. 203-205: “*saepe etiam duris errando in cotibus alas / attrivere ultroque animam sub fasce dedere: / tantus amor florum et generandi gloria mellis.*”

“Often, too, while wandering among harsh whetstones, they bruised their wings and gave their life away under the burden; so great is their love of the flower and the glory of creating honey.”

bees and humans, and that goal is enhancing and advancing the glory of Rome. When reading the works of Roman authors, it becomes evident that glory is a fairly central theme across the Roman identity. Livy, for example, remarks on Roman military glory in the first book of his *Ab Urbe Condita Libri* and makes frequent mention of the glory and greatness of Rome throughout the rest of the writing.³⁴ In their quest for the greater glory of Rome, Romans assume a degree of selfless patriotism that is often foreign to modernity in which they prioritize the interests of their *patria* even above those of their family or even themselves. This kind of patriotism becomes possible when selfishness is removed from the equation and posterity is added: “*Ergo ipsas quamvis angusti terminus aevi / excipiat, neque enim plus septima ducitur aetas, / at genus immortale manet multosque per annos / stat fortuna domus et avi numerantur avorum.*”³⁵ Just as a single bee may die in its work but remain immortal through the collective’s prosperity, so too may a Roman be kept alive through the memory of Rome’s glory. Ultimately, this selfless devotion to *Roma* and her glory is what allowed Rome to maintain its identity as a hard-working people in much the same way that bees are still acknowledged as harmonious and laboring creatures.

Though ideal citizens, like bees, create a harmonious environment through their united labors, this harmony is not entirely self-sustaining. It is subject to influence from factors outside the control of the working bees. Ultimately, the responsibility for preserving the peace of a hive must fall to its leader, the protector of the hive’s labors (“*Ille operum custos*”), without whom there would exist only the chaos of an ungoverned populace.³⁶ Because of this role, the queen bee exists in such a way that she is representative of the hive’s health and wellbeing, as both a figurehead as well as a literal guardian and governor. In Rome, a similar transference of meaning

³⁴ Livy. and De Sincourt, A., 2006. *The Early History of Rome*. London: The Folio Society.

³⁵ *Georgics IV*, ll. 206-209

³⁶ *Georgics IV*, l. 215

took place with Emperor Augustus, and he was the subject of much public affection as a bringer of peace following a period of instability in Roman history. Vergil adds a stirring image of bees' adoration for their queen that is worth noting, if not for its rhetorical relevance then for its humble beauty: "*illum admiruntur et omnes / circumstant fremitu denso stipantque frequentes / et saepe attollunt umeris et corpora bello / obiectant pulchramque petunt per vulnera mortem.*"³⁷

The bees hold such a devotion to their leader as the guardian of their hard work that they are willing to celebrate him and die for him. This, too, is true of the ideal citizens, the Romans, who would willingly die on the battlefield in the stead of their leader.

³⁷ *Georgics IV*, ll. 215-218: "They pay reverence to that one and all surround him in great numbers and lift him onto their shoulders and expose their bodies in war and, among the wounds, seek a glorious death."

V. The Inglorious Aspects of Leadership

Thus far in Vergil's poem, leadership has been a largely positive position, with an array of topics to study and a variety of qualities one must embody. However, in lines 228-280, his final sections focused on bees, Vergil shifts to the somewhat inglorious aspects of leadership: acting as the collector and the physician. These two responsibilities are necessary for a hive's success, but they are far from what might be perceived as glorious or worthy of envy because they are more like chores than privileges.

When times of scarcity approach, such as war or winter, a leader must prepare his community for success. According to Vergil, a vital aspect of a beekeeper's winter preparation is to remove excess comb from the hives and burn thyme:

Sin duram metues hiemem parcesque futuro
 contunsosque animos et res miserabere fractas,
 at suffire thymo cerasque recidere inanes
 quis dubitet? nam saepe favos ignotus adedit
 stellio et lucifugis congesta cubilia blattis
 immunisque sedens aliena ad pabula fucus
 aut asper crabro imparibus se immiscuit armis,
 aut dirum tiniae genus, aut invisae Minervae
 laxos in foribus suspendit aranea casset.³⁸

One of the primary advantages of removing the excess comb is to prevent the colonization of the hive by other insects. These insects at best may eat the unused comb and grow their numbers (*nam saepe favos ignotus adedit / stellio et lucifugis congesta cubilia blattis / immunisque sedens aliena ad pabula fucus*), but at worst they can prove deadly to the bees using foreign weapons or traps (*aut asper crabro imparibus se immiscuit armis, / ... aut invisae Minervae / laxos in foribus suspendit aranea casset*). Burning thyme to fumigate the hive of invading insects strengthens the effect of removing the excess comb, as well.

³⁸ *Georgics IV*, ll. 239-247

When the comb is removed, the bees are driven to focus on regrowing their numbers in preparation for their next season of pollinating. Indeed, they may even be driven to work harder to replace the comb that was removed. However, the amount that is taken from the bees must be calculated, as too little can leave the hive exposed to dangers while too much can negatively impact their ability to repair their populace, as they would be unable to expand beyond what they have already filled. A leader, like a beekeeper, must also remove excess from his population as a necessary aspect of his care for them. Vergil does not define exactly what these taxes may be, though they would likely include more traditional payments, such as wheat, oils, or even the labor of slaves. An ideal leader must be as steady and conscientious as the beekeeper, removing excess only as needed and without harm to himself or his subjects.

The final duty of the beekeeper is to address disease in his hives, as Vergil discusses in lines 251-280. In these lines, Vergil describes ways to recognize various illnesses that might affect the hives, such as discoloration or changes in behavior, and also describes the funerary customs of the bees.³⁹ His advice is to treat the illness immediately and offers a variety of methods for treatment. These lines serve to address a similar topic as the last section on collecting comb: a leader must take whatever measurements necessary to address sources of harm in his community. Though he may cull excess comb or treat the hive with unpleasant medicine, his intent is never to cause lasting harm. Ultimately, it is a gracious caretaker who is willing to take on such roles, be they a beekeeper or Emperor Augustus himself.

³⁹ *Georgics IV*, ll. 251-259: “*Si vero, quoniam casus apibus quoque nostros / vita tulit, tristi languebunt corpora morbo— / quod iam non dubiis poteris cognoscere signis: / continuo est aegris alius color, horrida vultum / deformat macies, tum corpora luce carentum / exportant tectis et tristia funera ducunt; / aut illae pedibus conexae ad limina pendent, / aut intus clausis cunctantur in aedibus, omnes / ignavaeque fame et contracto frigore pigrae.*”

Discussion & Concluding Thoughts

A question which haunted me during this research was why poetry was the format Vergil chose to pass on these lessons to Augustus. I eventually came to two conclusions: accessibility for the audience and engagement of the student. Poetry as a tool of communicating lessons is a tradition based historically in accessibility. In many cases, lengthy works would be spread orally from performer to performer. Epic poetry was the primary vessel for such works because the identical constructions, as well as the short episodes of equal length and importance, facilitate memorization and information retention, as stated by the Oral-Formulaic Composition theory of epic poetry analysis.⁴⁰ This format allowed performers not only to memorize an incredible amount of poetry but also to improvise certain portions based on the formula of an epic poem. By ancient standards, the merit of poetry as the format for the *Georgics IV* as an educational tool is that it is a familiar format that allows performers and audiences alike to comfortably and readily engage with the media.

In contemporary pedagogy, one of the most compelling arguments for the inclusion of poetry in the classroom is that it is an excellent opportunity for student engagement. According to the 2010 research of Dr. Angela Wiseman, when poetry is properly implemented in the classroom setting, it can facilitate learning by “attending to students’ emotions and background knowledge, encouraging social collaboration, and providing an authentic purpose for students to communicate through their writing.”⁴¹ Just as honey can disguise the taste of foul medicine, poetry can disguise a lesson and allow students to engage with literacy without realizing they are learning. Though Vergil would not have had access to this research when making the decision to

⁴⁰ Parry, Milman, et al. “L’Épithète Traditionnelle Dans Homère: Essai Sur Un Problème De Style Homérique.” The Center for Hellenic Studies.

⁴¹ Wiseman, A. M. (2010). “Now I Believe if I Write I Can Do Anything”: Using Poetry to Create Opportunities for Engagement and Learning in the Language Arts Classroom.

write these lessons in the form of poetry, I find that it would be unreasonable for him to believe this format would not be engaging for his audience. Epic poetry is a style with which Augustus would no doubt have been familiar, meaning it would appeal to the student's background knowledge. Given that these lessons relate to Augustus's newfound role as *imperator*, this poem would also give a purpose of communication to both writer and reader. By modern standards, the merit of poetry as the format for the *Georgics IV* as an educational tool is that it is a rich and engaging text for the student audience.

Of course, in any discussion of Vergil's relationship with Augustus and the imperial family, there is dissent to be found. Research from earlier authors such as John Wesley argues that Vergil had a low opinion of Augustus, typically citing the scene from the *Aeneid* in which Aeneas exits through a gate indicating falsehood. Since the *Aeneid* was commissioned with the sole intent of validating Augustus's right to rule, authors like Wesley argue that Vergil was warning his audience that the venerations of August are falsehoods. Undeniably, this scene from the *Aeneid* raises some questions about Vergil's own thoughts about Augustus's past and imperial rule. It goes without saying that modernity will never definitively know the true feelings Vergil had regarding Emperor Augustus. More recent research, such as that of Peter White, suggests that the relationship of patron and client had little influence on the final product.

However, I believe that the scene in Wesley's consideration is, at worst, a gentle critique of the grandeur of the emperor rather than a deliberate undercut to his authority. Either way, these differences of opinion do little to negate my larger argument. Given the structure and content of *Georgics IV*, it becomes obvious that their relationship transcends the traditional bonds of patron and client, extending even into the realm of student and teacher. In fact, this very scene is evidence of a positive student-teacher relationship between Augustus and Vergil. A

teacher can, and should, take a critical approach to his student's actions and still be that student's teacher. Moreover, a teacher's criticism is often the sign of a good relationship between student and teacher because the teacher cares for the student enough to willingly be honest about the student's actions or beliefs. As for White's assessment, I believe that his argument, as well as mine, can stand independently of one another, neither negating nor proving each other.

What, then, are the implications of Virgil as a teacher, based on his *Georgics IV*? First, and most obvious, understanding Virgil as an imperial advisor, a teacher to the first emperor of Rome, gives us cause to more closely examine his rich works with yet another lens. Such examinations allow us to keep the practice of Classics alive through reconfigurations of thought and challenges to commonly held beliefs. In the viewpoint I have presented here, not only are his poems beautiful pastorals or works of imperial propaganda, but they are also intricately shaped lessons on leadership and the burden of power. For these reasons, I imagine that the *Eclogues*, *Aeneid*, and *Georgics* will maintain their role as teaching materials for the Classics, just as they have since their initial publication, now with a revitalized view on their importance to history and culture.

A second, and perhaps more historically interesting, effect of this stance is that there is now cause to examine with greater scrutiny the archetypes ascribed to prominent historical figures. As I have said on several occasions, "patron" and "client" are too widely-applied and broadly-defined to truly and holistically represent the relationship between Emperor Augustus and Vergil. This viewpoint challenges modernity to reevaluate the tropes that it assigns to history in the context of a rich and beautiful body of literature.

Suggestions for Further Reading

General History

Beard, Mary. *SPQR: a History of Ancient Rome* First edition. New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, a Division of W.W. Norton & Company, 2015.

Kellum, Barbara. "Representations and Re-presentations of the Battle of Actium" in *Citizens of Discord: Rome and Its Civil Wars*, 2010.

Winspear, Alban Dewes, and Lenore Kramp Geweke. *Augustus and the Reconstruction of Roman Government and Society* New York: Russell & Russell, 1970.

Bees, Vergil, and Poetry

Cooper, Andrew. "The Apian Way: Virgil's Bees and Keats's Honeyed Verse." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 33, no. 2 (1991): 160-81.

Whitfield, B.G. "Virgil and the Bees: A Study in Ancient Apicultural Lore." *Greece and Rome* 3, no. 2 (October 1, 1956): 99–117.

Augustus and Vergil

Nappa, Christopher. *Reading After Actium Vergil's Georgics, Octavian, and Rome* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005.

Parry, Adam. "The Two Voices of Virgil's 'Aeneid.'" *Arion (Boston)* 2, no. 4 (December 1, 1963): 66-80.

Borges, Jorge Luis. *Everything and Nothing*. Translated by Donald A. Yates, James East Irby, John M. Fein, and Eliot Weinberger. New York, NY: New Directions Publishing, 2010.

Works Cited

- Borges, Jorge Luis. *Everything and Nothing*. Translated by Donald A. Yates, James East Irby, John M. Fein, and Eliot Weinberger. New York, NY: New Directions Publishing, 2010.
- Breed, Brian W., Cynthia Damon, Andreola Rossi, and Barbara Kellum. "Representations and Re-Presentations of the Battle of Actium." Essay. In *Citizens of Discord Rome and Its Civil Wars*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Eck, Werner, and Takács Sarolta. In *The Age of Augustus*, pp. 412-413. Translated by Deborah Schneider. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2005.
- Evslin, Bernard. Essay. In *Gods, Demigods and Demons: A Handbook of Greek Mythology*, p. 127. London: I.B. Tauris, 2007.
- Homer. In *Hymn 4 to Hermes*, ll. 550-580. Translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White.
<http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0013.tlg004.perseus-eng1:1-29>
- Livy. *The Early History of Rome; Book I-V of the History of Rome from Its Foundation*. Translated by Sélincourt De Aubrey. New York: Heritage Press, 1972.
- Parry, Milman, et al. "L'Épithète Traditionnelle Dans Homère: Essai Sur Un Problème De Style Homérique." *The Center for Hellenic Studies*, 4 June 2021,
http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.ebook:CHS_Parry.LEpithete_Traditionnelle_dans_Home_re.1928.
- Virgil, and R.D. Williams. *Aeneid*. London: Bristol Classical Press, 1996.

Virgil. *Georgicon*. Perseus Digital Library.

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0059%3Abook>.

Wesley, John. *Wesley Center Online*. "The Wesley Center Online: Sermon 122 - On Faith."

<http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-122-on-faith/>.

Wiseman, Angela M. "'Now I Believe If I Write I Can Do Anything': Using Poetry to Create

Opportunities for Engagement and Learning in the Language Arts Classroom." *Journal of Language & Literacy Education* 6, no. 2 (2010): 22–33.

White, Peter. *Promised Verse: Poets in the Society of Augustan Rome*. Harvard University Press, 1993.