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Insects As Metaphors For Post-Civil War Reconstruction Of The Civic Body In Augustan Age Rome

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INSECTS AS METAPHORS FOR POST-CIVIL WAR RECONSTRUCTION OF THE
CIVIC BODY IN AUGUSTAN AGE ROME

by

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DEDICATION

For Bobbe, whose boundless love has always been an unending fount of support and motivation in all of my pursuits, scholarly and otherwise.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With my time at USC coming to an end, it is fortunate that I have the great pleasure of acknowledging the help of many supportive professors, colleagues, and friends.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to Professor Hunter Gardner for her invaluable, and unending, guidance over the years. It was her words of encouragement which led me to discover the world of classical scholarship, and it was as her research assistant that I first developed an interest in dialogues of plague, civil war, and reconstruction in the Augustan principate. She read this work in its many draft forms, and her objections and suggestions have made this work less flawed in every way. I will not soon forget her continued encouragement in my scholarly endeavors, stimulating instruction in both Latin and Greek, and thoughtful criticisms upon this work. Thanks are also owed to Professor Mark Beck, who read a draft of this manuscript and offered thoughtful suggestions for its revision.

I owe my greatest and most immutable debt of gratitude to my family for their continued support over the years. Special thanks are due to my husband, Bobbe, who has listened to and soothed my anxieties about this work, as well as learned quite a bit more than is necessary about Ovid's *Myrmidons*; special thanks are also due to his parents, Cindy and Allen, for their constant intervention in affairs which would have dragged me away from scholarly pursuits.

ABSTRACT

Early Augustan Age literature saw a focus on recovery from a period steeped in the tragic losses of civil war; Vergil, in his *Georgics*, and Ovid, in his *Metamorphoses*, employed insects likened to, or transformed into, humans as a way to suggest possible models for recovery. While these models have been studied throughout classical scholarship for their value in proposing a new Roman Golden Age and its tenability, scholars have long overlooked the importance of the insects used in such models, and the ways in which they can substantially alter our understanding of these metaphors. As structures for cultural understanding rarely arise *de novo*, I discuss the most significant associations found in Greek and Latin literature which color the connotations of both bees and ants in these literary invocations. Following this exploration, I discuss the ways in which Vergil's bees in *Georgics* four allow the poet to establish a binary opposition between civically oriented art and personally oriented art. Then, I discuss Ovid's origins of the Myrmidons *fabula*, in which I present an analysis of the episode that highlights the negative aspects of this reconstitution of the civic body. Ultimately, my study seeks to evidence the ways in which both poets grapple with the shifting roles of art in the rising principate—and to connect these metaphors of civic body reconstitution with the larger frameworks of political commentary present in their works.

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NOTE ABOUT TRANSLATIONS

All translations included in this manuscript are drawn from the Loeb editions of the Latin or Greek text referenced. In rare occasions, and where no Loeb edition was available, translations from other sources have been substituted. When this occurs, the translation is marked by a note which identifies the alternate translation source. Full citations of each edition employed in providing translations can be found in the “References” section of this manuscript.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Classical scholarship has promoted insects as possible parallels for a Golden Age race following the inception of the Augustan principate. Particularly, scholars have focused on the bees in book four of Vergil's *Georgics*, and, to a lesser extent, the ants in book seven of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Johnston, for example, argued that the agricultural Golden Age ushered in by Vergil's bees in his fourth *Georgic* was an extension, and culmination, of an ideal Golden Age race that he had begun writing about in his *Eclogues*.¹ Recently, Gardner interpreted the metaphorical connection between plague and civil war as imperative to an understanding of the unsustainable nature of these two potential Golden Age races born from insects.² My own explorations of these two texts have been significantly influenced by Gardner's argument, and one of my main goals here is to extend the insect born Golden Age races to include the ants in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* book seven. I shall here attempt to deepen understanding of these two

¹ See Patricia A. Johnston, *Vergil's Agricultural Golden Age: A Study of the Georgics* (The Netherlands: E. J. Brill). Johnston attempts, through a thorough examination of Vergil's *Eclogues* and *Georgics*, to answer the question "What exactly does Vergil envision when he alludes to a Golden Age?"

² See Hunter Gardner, "Bees, Ants, and the Body Politic: Vergil's Noric Plague and Ovid's Origin of the Myrmidons," *Vergilius* 60 (2014). Gardner writes that the language used in *Georgics* 4 is evident of Golden Age reconstruction, and shows that the same language is used in *Metamorphoses* 7 to describe the origins of the Myrmidons *fabula*. Ultimately, these two races provided untenable models for recovery.

metaphors for post-civil war reconstruction as unsustainable based upon the rich cultural accretions which color Roman understanding and thought concerning ants and bees.

Concerning insects, Berenbaum writes the following:

To remove all references to insects from English Literature would be to gut the works of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Tennyson, and Keats, and to expunge all insect images rendered by artists would be to tamper with the genius of Van Gogh and Dali... Insects are a part of where we have come from, what we are now, and what we will be. It seems to me that's a pretty good reason for getting acquainted with them.³

Likewise, metaphorical uses of insects, and references to the insect kind, abound in classical literature. Insects were the main actors within the *fabulae* of Aesopus, which foregrounded initial understandings of the behaviors of animals, and their characteristics, beginning from the sixth century B.C.E. Insects even appeared in some philosophical texts, such as the *Phaedo*, in which being reincarnated as a bee was considered a blessed status and reward for previous good deeds,⁴ and were frequently mentioned in the comedies of Aristophanes.⁵ Hellenized Romans, such as Babrius and Plutarch, saw fit to include retellings of *fabulae* and anecdotal evidence surrounding insects in their works. The ancients also made insects the subjects of frequent biologic study, and Aristotle alone produced three voluminous works concerning the behaviors, reproductive styles, and

³ May R. Berenbaum, *Bugs in the System: Insects and Their Impact on Human Affairs* (Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1995), xiii.

⁴ See Plato, *Euthyphro. Apology. Crito. Phaedo. Phaedrus*, Trans. by Harold North Fowler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), 284. Speaking of souls born again, Plato wrote "Don't you see? Is it not likely that they pass again into some such social and gentle species as that of bees or of wasps or ants, or into the human race again, and that worthy men spring from them?"

⁵ See Malcolm Davies and Jeyaraney Kathirithamby, *Greek Insects* (New York: Oxford University Press: 1986), 9-11. These pages feature a discussion of insects in the lost plays of Aeschylus and the extant and lost comedies of Aristophanes.

observable labors of insects.⁶ Later, the investigative study of insects continued at Rome, culminating in volumes by Pliny the Elder and Aelian.⁷

Although modern society is much indebted to the scientific investigations of the ancient world, it cannot be ignored that such research was conducted at a time when science was more of a subjective pursuit than a rigidly structured code of experimentation and reporting. Barnes, in his 1982 *Past Masters* series text entitled *Aristotle*,⁸ observes that “His greatest single achievement was surely his biology.” From a modern scientific perspective, Aristotle’s biology is riddled with errors that cannot be explained by lack of scientific instruments; absent from his studies are some of the finer details about how certain, smaller, insects reproduce (such as ants).⁹ Nevertheless, his observations ushered in an unquenchable curiosity for a deeper understanding of the ever present insect kind, and gave shape to subsequent investigations of, and publications concerning, insects in the ancient world. Indeed, in my own study, admittance of some mythological *fabulae*,

⁶ Aristotle’s observations are collected in his *Historia animalium*, *De Partibus Animalium*, and *De Generatione Animalium*. All of these texts are available through the Loeb Classical Library, which offers a very literal translation.

⁷ Pliny’s *Naturalis Historia* offered valuable observations about natural phenomena and insects. It was comprised of new observations concerning these matters and material previously communicated in the texts of Aristotle. The text of Aelian’s *De Natura Animalium* was described by A. F. Scholfield as “an appealing collection of facts and fables about the animal kingdom that invites the reader to ponder contrasts between human and animal behavior.” Both texts are available through the Loeb Classical Library, which offers a very literal translation.

⁸ Jonathan Barnes, *Aristotle* for the *Past Masters* series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 87.

⁹ See Davies and Kathirithamby, *Greek Insects*, 19-21. These pages feature a discussion of various errors in Aristotle’s works, including a breakdown of some errors that needed scientific implements to be corrected, and some which were merely observational errors; also discussed in this section is the limit imposed upon scientific discovery by a teleological mindset.

anecdotes, and rumors only serve to strengthen modern understanding of these insects and the roles which they held in ancient society. Aristotle, then, can be upheld as something of a scientific purist, in regards to the material he admitted into his encyclopedic works. Pliny and Aelian, although setting forth a text which purports to be a compilation of knowledge observed, admit a great deal of hearsay into their texts.

The vast, and rich, literary past of the insect kind cannot, in good conscience, be ignored when discussing metaphors in which they are the primary vehicles. Accordingly, I undertake an exploration of the most notable appearances of bees and ants in ancient fictive and encyclopedic literature. A full exploration of both insects in literature, art, ritual, and scientific works can be found in the volume entitled *Greek Insects*, published by Davies and Kathirithamby, cited above. It is not my goal to explore these insects *in toto*, but only to present and comment upon the most significant associations found in Greek and Latin literature; their work should be consulted if a more complete discussion of these insects is desired. As will be seen, invocation of each insect in fictive literature hinted at characteristics which were later corroborated by observations recorded in encyclopedic literature. These connotations subsequently shaped invocations of these insects in later literature, particularly literature produced in the Augustan Age.

Scholars, such as Johnston, assert that there is an overwhelmingly optimistic sentiment communicated by Vergil in the formation of his Golden Age race of bees. Ovid's ants, however, cannot be said to express the same optimistic hopes for any reconstitution of a Golden Age race, and in many way his ants act as a negative response to the positivity of his predecessor. That is to say that both Vergil's bees and Ovid's ants comment upon particular aspects of artistic production and their potential place in the

developing principate; Vergil's bees express an embrace of the new political landscape, and even suggest a desire to shape the political and moral consciousness functioning within the regime, as Conte and Nadeau have pointed out.¹⁰ Ovid's ants, on the other hand, express a clear criticism of Vergil's embrace—displaying a disapproval, and perhaps anxiety, about the roles of art within the principate. As such, the particular criticisms inherent in his use of ant born men to represent what Aeacus deems a positive outcome to so devastating a sequence of events is somewhat indebted to the work of Vergil.

Conte has noted that, within the *Georgics*, the characters of Aristaeus and Orpheus function as civilizing forces.¹¹ Aristaeus appears as an outstanding farmer, and although he is not shown to function within a community, he acts as a civilizing force by establishing and practicing numerous agricultural arts. His appeal to divinity concerning how to properly restore the bees in his care sets Orpheus, and by extension his passionate and personal artistic pursuits, as a negative exemplar to the artistic productivity which Aristaeus displays. It is through this appeal to divinity that the reader comes to understand the binary opposition between the civically oriented art of Aristaeus and the passionate and personal art, the personally oriented art, of Orpheus which is a central tenet underpinning the critical tone of Ovid's own insects.

¹⁰ See Gian Biago Conte, "Aristaeus, Orpheus, and the *Georgics*: Once Again," in *Poets and Critics Read Vergil*, ed. Sarah Spence (Michigan: Sheridan Books, 2001), 62. See also Yvan Nadeau, "The Lover and the Statesman," in *Poetry and Politics in the Age of Augustus*, ed. Tony Woodman and David West (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 79.

¹¹ Conte, "Aristaeus, Orpheus, and the *Georgics*," 51.

Therefore, as a precursor to my discussion of the ways in which Ovid's retelling of the origin of the Myrmidons *fabula* is enriched by an understanding of Roman cultural knowledge concerning insects, I first discuss the ways in which Vergil's bees of book four of the *Georgics* allow the poet to establish a binary opposition between civically oriented art and personally oriented art. I shall then proceed to a discussion of Ovid's origins of the Myrmidons *fabula*, in which I present an analysis of the episode that highlights the negative aspects of this reconstitution of the civic body—a critical tone which is substantially enriched by Ovid's manipulations of the traditional *fabulae* set forth by Hesiod and Apollodorus.

How does examination of Greek and Roman cultural structures for understanding insects enrich the bougonia episode in book four of the *Georgics* or the origin of the Myrmidons episode in book seven of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*? How does Ovid employ Vergil's opposition between civically oriented art and personally oriented art in his own creation of a Golden Age race from the wasted remains of Aegina's populace? My study seeks to answer these questions; I endeavor to shed new light on the rarely acknowledged significance of Ovid's ants *per se*, and connect this episode to the larger framework of Ovid's commentary in the *Metamorphoses* about the role of art in the Augustan Principate.

CHAPTER 2

INSECTS AS METAPHOR

“τῶν δ’ ἐντόμων ζῴων ἐργατικώτατα σχεδόν ἐστι καὶ πρὸς τᾶλλα πάντα συγκρίνεσθαι, τό τε τῶν μυρμηκῶν γένος καὶ τὸ τῶν μελιττῶν...”¹²

Classicist Neville Morley rightly commented on the Romans’ penchant for reading their own political and philosophical preoccupations in the behaviors of bees, particularly as those preoccupations related to governmental succession.¹³ However, such infrastructures for cultural understanding are hardly constructed *de novo*; the penchant to read human concerns back onto insects is unique neither to the Romans, nor to the particular insect genus of bees. The Roman fascination with the insect kind, and their seemingly political lifestyle, should be thought of as part of a well-established tradition originally founded in Greek society, and built upon by centuries of cultural accretion. Within the world of the ancient Greeks, the insect kind appeared frequently in myth and artistic depictions; some insects even served as vehicles in the metaphors put forth by Greek playwrights and philosophers.¹⁴ In the 4th century BCE, ancient knowledge

¹² Aristotle, *Historia Animalium* 4.622B. Translation: “Among the insected animals about the most industrious, and to be compared with all the other animals, are the ant kind and the bee kind...”

¹³ Neville Morley, “Civil War and Succession Crisis in Roman Beekeeping,” *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 56, no. 4 (2007): 463.

¹⁴ See Malcolm Davies and Jeyaraney Kathirithamby, *Greek Insects* (New York: Oxford University Press: 1986), 9-11. These pages feature a discussion of insects in the lost plays of Aeschylus and the extant and lost comedies of Aristophanes. Other mention of insect metaphors are also discussed in brief here.

concerning insects was greatly enhanced by the rigorous study of Aristotle, and his eventual compilation of his observations into the compendious work *Historia Animalium*. Yet, even Aristotle’s work was somewhat colored by preexisting social thought regarding insects—connotations of insects in social thought which seem to have originated in the early seventh and sixth century BCE, when the *Homeric Hymns* and the *fabulae* of Aesopus first appeared in circulation.

2.1 INSECTS IN FICTIVE LITERATURE

ANTS

The *fabulae* of Aesopus constituted a collection of moral and social *exempla*, focalized primarily through the adventures of animals, with brief and sparse appearance by man or the gods. It was in these *fabulae* that ants became allied with champions of industry, even receiving divine punishment for their incredible thrift.¹⁵ A *fabula* of particular interest to my argument is entitled “Μύρμηξ καὶ κάνθαρος,” and concerns an ant and his interactions with a hungry dungbeetle:

Ἔρρα θέρους μύρμηξ περιῶν κατὰ τινα ἄρουραν πυρούς καὶ κριθᾶς συνέλεγεν ἀποθησαυρίζομενος ἑαυτῷ τροφήν εἰς τὸν χειμῶνα. Κάνθαρος δὲ τοῦτον θεασάμενος ἐταλάνιζεν ὡς ἐπιπονώτατον, εἶγε παρ' ὄλον τὸν καιρὸν μοχθεῖ παρὰ πάντα τὰ ζῶα. Ὁ δὲ μύρμηξ τότε μὲν ἠσυχάσας ὑπήνεγκεν. Χειμῶνος δὲ γενομένου καὶ τῆς κόπρου ὑπὸ τῶν ὑδάτων κατακλυσθείσης, ὁ κάνθαρος λιμώτων ἦκε πρὸς τὸν μύρμηκα τροφῆς μεταλαβεῖν δεόμενος. Ὁ δὲ ἔφη πρὸς αὐτόν· Ἔ κάνθαρε, ἀλλ' εἰ τότε ἐπόνεις ὅτε με μοχθοῦντα ὠνειδίζεις, οὐκ ἂν νῦν

¹⁵ For the Greek text of this fable, see Chambry, Émile. *Ésope Fables* (Paris: SOCIÉTÉ D'ÉDITION, 1927), 105. A summary translation of this fable is provided in the index of the Loeb edition of the fables of Babrius and Phaedrus: “The ant of today was once a man devoted to agriculture, but being dissatisfied with the results of his own labours and looking with envy upon the possessions of his neighbours, he was forever stealing their fruits. Zeus became angry with him because of his greed and transformed him into the creature that we call ant. But though he has changed his form, he has not changed his original disposition; hence he still goes about the fields collecting the wheat and barley of others and storing it up for himself.”

τροφῆς ἐπεδέου.

Ὁ μῦθος διδάσκει μὴ ἀμελεῖν ἡμᾶς ἐπὶ τῇ τῶν ἀναγκαίων φροντίδι, ἀλλὰ καιρῶ
εὐθέτω τὰ πρὸς σωτηρίαν μεριμνᾶν.¹⁶

Here, the ant first emerged as a thrifty and hardworking individual—and seemingly one devoid of leisure time enjoyment, as his industrious character led him to work all through summer and into winter. In suggesting that there is a proper time for work, the moralizing statement with which the *fabula* ends also suggests that there is a proper time for leisure; the reader may be left wondering just when the time is appropriate for leisure though, as the ant seems to benefit only by ceaseless toil through the seasons. As with many extant classical texts, variants of this *fabula* have come down to modern readers, although the characters, the setting, and the essential “message” of the *fabula* are unchanged—these variant texts present but slight grammatical alterations.

An adaptation of this *fabula* appeared in circulation at Rome sometime around the first century C.E., attributed to the fabulist Babrius. Although little is known in particular about Babrius himself, speculation suggests that he may have been a Hellenized Roman living in Asia Minor during this time. His *fabulae* represent a versified collection of many of the *fabulae* originally attributed to Aesopus, with little change otherwise. This

¹⁶ Chambry, Émile. *Ésope Fables* (Paris: SOCIÉTÉ D'ÉDITION, 1927), 106. Translation: “In winter time, an Ant was dragging forth from her hole, and drying, the grains which, in her foresight, she had collected during the summer. A dung beetle, being hungry, begged her to give him something: The Ant replied: ‘What were you doing in summer?’ The other said: ‘I had not leisure to think of the future: I was wandering through hedges and meadows, singing away.’ The Ant laughing, and carrying back the grains, said: ‘Very well, you who were singing away in the summer, dance in the winter.’ Let the sluggard always labor at the proper time, lest when he has nothing, he begs in vain.”

fabula, entitled “Μύρμηξ καὶ τέττιξ,” demonstrates the ancients’ continued interaction with, and importance granted to, *fabulae* and the *exempla* therein:

“Χειμῶνος ὥρη σῖτον ἐκ μυχοῦ σύρων
ἔψυχε μύρμηξ, ὃν θέρους σεσωρεύκει
τέττιξ δὲ τοῦτον ἰκέτευε λιμώττων
δοῦναί τι καὐτῷ τῆς τροφῆς, ὅπως ζήση.
‘τί οὖν ἐποίεις’ φησί ‘τῷ θέρει τούτῳ;
οὐκ ἐσχόλαζον, ἀλλὰ διετέλουν ἄδων.’
γέλασας δ’ ὁ μύρμηξ τόν τε πυρὸν ἐγκλείων
‘χειμῶνος ὀρχοῦ’ φησὶν ‘εἰ θέρους ἠϋλεις.’”¹⁷

Circulation of this adaptation of the *fabulae* of Aesopus clearly establishes that the *fabulae* were part of a larger, well-read, literary tradition which was present even throughout the Augustan Age. It follows that this *fabula* reflects Roman thought and can provide valuable insight into Roman conceptions of ants.

The ant reprises his role as an industrious individual who is unfailing in his efforts in Babrius’ adaptation. The dung beetle, however, has been replaced with a grasshopper, resulting in a slightly altered overall message for the *fabula*. Following an inherited tradition, ants may have been chosen to fulfill the role of the assiduous laborer due to their behavior previously observed in the natural world. Likewise, it is easy to understand why the grasshopper, whose chirping and jumping could be likened to singing and dancing, would fulfill the role of one who indulges in leisure excessively. Babrius dispenses with explicit moral judgements at the conclusion of each *fabula*; nevertheless,

¹⁷ Babrius, 140. Translation: “An ant in the winter-time was dragging out of his hole some grain which he had stored up in the summer, in order to air it. A cicada, dying of starvation, begged him to give him some of his food, to keep him alive. ‘What were you doing last summer?’ asked the ant. ‘I was not loafing,’ said the cicada, ‘I was busy singing all the time.’ The ant laughed and barred up his grain, saying: ‘Dance in the winter, since you piped during the summer.’”

one is clear to the reader: excessive leisure, perhaps even excessive art, will have negative consequences for the one who would indulge.¹⁸

BEES

For the ancients, bees held a position balanced between labor and artistic creation. In fictive literature, it is hard to determine which side of this dual nature was more valued as emphasis generally favored one over the other, but depictions of both aspects are frequent. The alliance of bees with artistic pursuits seems to have originated in the tradition of the *Homeric Hymns*. A mysterious triad of maidens, scarcely seen elsewhere in extant mythological texts, is said to have helped the raising of Apollo in his art of prophecy. As Apollo tells Hermes, who desires to share in the former's prophetic arts:

γάρ τινές εἰσι κασίγνηται γεγαυῖαι
παρθένοι, ὠκείησιν ἀγαλλόμεναι πτερύγεσσιν,
τρεῖς· κατὰ δὲ κρατὸς πεπαλαγμένα ἄλφιτα λευκά
οἰκία ναιετάουσιν ὑπὸ πτυχί Παρνησσοῖο,
μαντεῖης ἀπάνευθε διδάσκαλοι, ἦν ἐπὶ βουσίην
παῖς ἔτ' ἐὼν μελέτησα· πατὴρ δ' ἐμὸς οὐκ ἀλέγιζεν.
ἐντεῦθεν δῆπειτα ποτώμεναι ἄλλοτε ἄλλη
κηρία βόσκονται καὶ τε κραίνουσιν ἕκαστα·
αἱ δ' ὅτε μὲν θύϊωσιν ἐδηδυῖαι μέλι χλωρόν,
προφρονέως ἐθέλουσιν ἀληθείην ἀγορεύειν.¹⁹

¹⁸ A modern retelling of this myth can be seen in the Disney movie *A Bug's Life* (1998). In this film, grasshoppers are shown to be more physically inclined than the ants, and to present a threat to their livelihood and well-built structures. It is revealed in the movie that the grasshoppers spend much of their time in a sort of bar and club, where they take in shows of other bugs dancing and singing, rather than work.

¹⁹ *Homeric Hymns*, 4.552-561. Translation: "... there are certain august maidens, sisters, adorned with swift wings; they are three in number, their heads are dusted with white barley meal, and they dwell down in a hollow of Parnassus. They are sources of separate prophecy, which I practised when still a child tending my cattle, but my father was not interested. From there they go flying now this way, now that, to feed on honeycombs, and make their authoritative pronouncements."

Here, the maidens are said to be adorned with wings, flit back and forth, and speak true prophecy when they become intoxicated with honey. Although they are surely not wholly bees, they certainly share characteristics with the insect, and so establish a connection between bees and the prophetic arts—and art, itself, through the triad’s association with Apollo. The associations established herein are later picked up by Pliny, who shares several anecdotes in his *Naturalis Historia* about the good signs provided by bees landing on a person.²⁰ Scheinberg, in an attempt to identify this triad of women and assign to them specific powers, ultimately concludes:

Because the social organization, industriousness, and purity of the life of bees, as well as their ability to sting while providing men with the sweetness of honey, made them fascinating to the ancients - witness, for example, Virgil's description of the activities of the hive in *Georgics* 4.149-227 - it would be foolhardy to seek a single formulation that could explain all the bee symbolism of antiquity. What seems clear is that one set of motifs linked honey with prophecy and bees with oracles and seers; it is within such a framework that the bee maidens, like the Pythia's epithet "Delphic bee," are best understood.²¹

Subsequently, bees appeared in the *Fabulae* of Aesopus as both hardworking individuals who had a somewhat combatant nature, and as symbols of the divine. In a *fabula* attributed to Babrius, understood as an adaptation of Aesopus, bees are seen to request from Zeus an offensive weapon to help them defend their honey against any who would forcefully take it. Zeus meets this request, but adds death as a consequence to using the weapon (sting) as a way to check the combatant nature displayed by the request:

²⁰ See Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* 11.18 regarding the implications of good fortune and bees.

²¹ Susan Scheinberg, “The Bee Maidens of the Homeric Hymn to Hermes,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 83 (1979): 20-21.

Μέλισσαι φθονήσασαι ἀνθρώποις τοῦ ἰδίου μέλιτος ἤκον πρὸς τὸν Δία καὶ τούτου ἐδέοντο ὅπως αὐταῖς ἰσχὺν παράσχηται παιούσαις τοῖς κέντροις τοὺς προσιόντας τοῖς κηρίοις ἀναιρεῖν. Καὶ ὁ Ζεὺς ἀγανακτήσας κατ' αὐτῶν διὰ τὴν βασκανίαν παρεσκεύασεν αὐτάς, ἡνίκα ἂν τύπτωσί τινα, τὸ κέντρον ἀποβαλεῖν, μετὰ δὲ τοῦτο καὶ τῆς σωτηρίας στερίσκεσθαι. Οὗτος ὁ λόγος ἀρμόσειεν ἂν πρὸς ἄνδρας βασκάνους οἱ καὶ αὐτοὶ βλάπτεσθαι ὑπομένουσιν.²²

Although the abovementioned fable hints at the penchant for bees to exist as a militant populace, they were also depicted as something to be cherished, and even a sign of the divine. In a fable entitled “Γεωργὸς καὶ φυτὸν,” that aspect of their nature is made clear:

Φυτὸν ἦν εἰς γεωργοῦ χώραν, καρπὸν μὴ φέρον, ἀλλὰ μόνον στρουθῶν καὶ τεττίγων κελαδούντων ἦν καταφυγή. Ὁ δὲ γεωργὸς ὡς ἄκαρπον ἐκτεμεῖν ἤμελλεν. Καὶ δὴ τὸν πέλεκυν λαβὼν ἐπέφερε τὴν πλήγην. Οἱ δὲ τέττιγες καὶ οἱ στρουθοὶ ἰκέτευον τὴν καταφυγὴν αὐτῶν μὴ ἐκκόψαι, ἀλλ' ἐᾶσαι, ὥστε ἄδειν ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ σὲ τὸν γεωργὸν τέρπειν. Ὁ δὲ μηδὲν αὐτῶν φροντίσας, καὶ δευτέραν πληγὴν καὶ τρίτην ἐπέφερε. Ὡς δὲ ἐκοίλανε τὸ δένδρον, σμῆνος μελισσῶν καὶ μέλι εὔρε. Γευσάμενος δὲ τὸν πέλεκυν ἔρριψε καὶ τὸ φυτὸν ἐτίμα ὡς ἱερὸν καὶ ἐπεμελεῖτο. Ὅτι οὐ τοσοῦτον οἱ ἄνθρωποι φύσει τὸ δίκαιον ἀγαπῶσι καὶ τιμῶσιν ὅσον τὸ κερδαλέον ἐπιδιώκουσι.²³

²² Chambry, *Ésope Fables*, 103. Translation: “The bees, resenting the fact that men appropriated their honey, came to Zeus with the request that he would empower them, by means of their stings, to kill those who approached their combs. This aroused the anger of Zeus against them, on account of their envious spirit, and he decreed that thereafter, whenever they struck anyone, they should lose their stinger and die themselves.”

²³ Ibid. 40. Translation provided by Laura Gibbs: “A farmer had a tree on his land that did not yield any sort of fruit whatsoever. Instead, it was a home to the sparrows and the cicadas who chirped and sang. The farmer, however, thought that the tree was useless and decided he would cut it down. He grabbed an axe and prepared to start chopping, but the cicadas and the sparrows all began to wail, shouting these words at the man, 'Listen to us, O master of the tree: we implore you to be more generous. Please do not cut down this reverend dwelling! If indeed you are resolved to do such a thing, what benefit can you possibly hope for?' The man felt no pity for the creatures and showed them no mercy as he struck the tree three times with the axe's blade. But no sooner had the man made a crack in the tree when he found there a hive of bees and honey. He took a taste and immediately dropped his axe, vowing to cherish this tree even more than his fruit-bearing trees.”

The farmer's decision to forego cutting down the fruitless tree because of the discovery of a beehive and honey may communicate simply how valuable of a commodity honey was to the ancients. However, such an action taken amidst the begging of all local creatures could also suggest that bees have a sort of elevated importance—which is ultimately strengthened by the farmer's statement that he will cherish the tree beyond his other, fruit giving (and therefore economically valuable), trees. Bees, then, seemed to blend the characteristics of a militant populace, ability to produce divinely desired products (honey), and an industrious nature. Other fables attest their hard working nature, and even show them as able to submit to higher authority in disputes concerning what is rightfully theirs; their association with the art of divination and the gods which practice divination, especially Apollo, strongly allies bees with art and leisure.²⁴

2.2 INSECTS IN ENCYCLOPEDIA LITERATURE

Although *fabulae* provide great insight into the conception of ants and bees in Roman thought, empirical observations concerning the behaviors of insects also contribute to the social construct of the “ant” and the “bee.” Mentioned briefly above, Aristotle greatly advanced biological investigations with the publication of his compendious work entitled *Historia Animalium*. His text, which appeared in circulation around the fourth century B.C.E., catalogued the observable behaviors and characteristics of a great many insects and animals, ranging from the ant to the elephant. Although his account of ants is somewhat truncated by an inability to investigate the physiology of a creature so minute, his observations on the political and thrifty nature of ants guided later writers in their own *compendia* of encyclopedic knowledge on the natural world and its

²⁴ See Phaedrus 3.13.

inhabitants. Pliny, who wrote his *Naturalis Historia* sometime during the first century C.E., and Aelian, who wrote his *de natura animalium* sometime in the second century C.E., imported Aristotle's general observations and expanded upon them--ultimately dedicating several chapters to advancing knowledge of ants and bees. Even Plutarch, in his *de sollertia animalium* of the *Moralia*, published in the first century C.E., commented upon elements of insect behavior, although his focus was more on the fantastic than the observable.²⁵

ANTS

Aristotle's recorded observations of ants represent their first portrayal as political entities, with a society likened to that of humans. Bees, too, fit within the qualifications of "political animals" which Aristotle employs. Accordingly, he wrote:

Πολιτικά δ' ἐστὶν ὧν ἓν τι καὶ κοινὸν γίγνεται πάντων τὸ ἔργον, ὅπερ οὐ πάντα ποιεῖ τὰ ἀγελαῖα. ἔστι δὲ τοιοῦτον ἄνθρωπος, μέλιττα, σφήξ, μύρμηξ γέρανος.²⁶

In likening the behavior of ants to a "political" existence shared by both these insects and man, Aristotle foregrounds later literary presentations of ants and bees which exploit this link to explore political and social problems evident in their own societies. Aristotle also comments on the wondrous industry of such insects:

²⁵ See Plutarch, *Moralia* 967. See also Herodotus 3.102-105. Brief descriptions of particular ants and their fantastic stories can also be found in Herodotus, which features in particular a story of Persian ants which dig up gold.

²⁶ Aristotle, *Historia Animalium* 1.488A. Translation: "The social animals are those which have some one common activity; and this is not true of all the gregarious animals. Examples of social animals are man, bees, wasps, ants, cranes."

τῶν δ' ἐντόμων ζώων ἐργατικώτατα σχεδόν ἐστὶ καὶ πρὸς τᾶλλα
πάντα συγκρίνεσθαι, τό τε τῶν μυρμηκῶν γένος καὶ τὸ τῶν μελιττῶν...²⁷

Pliny's encyclopedia, *Naturalis Historia*, not only catalogued the characteristics and behaviors of many animals, but also information regarding elements, the weather, and other natural phenomena. As primarily a compilation of pre-existing knowledge, it can be expected that many Romans had heard of, or themselves observed, some of the material which it recorded. Pliny gives only one chapter of his work to recording the behaviors of ants, but there is much to be learned from this brief report. His very detailed work covers many aspects of the life of an ant, ranging from community to customs: “*et his rei publicae ratio, memoria, cura,*”²⁸ “*operantur et noctu plena luna, eadem interlunio cessant. iam in opere qui labor, quae sedulitas!*,”²⁹ “*sepeliunt inter se viventium solae praeter hominem.*”³⁰ The text of Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* does not present to the reader an inherently negative or positive reflection on the nature of ants. Despite this, it should be noted that many of the qualities which Pliny recorded as observable in ants were much desired in a civic body; Pliny indicated a propensity for the traditional ideal of piety among ants, for instance, in his statement regarding their ritual

²⁷ Aristotle, *Historia Animalium* 1.622B. Translation: “Among the insected animals about the most industrious, and to be compared with all the other animals, are the ant kind and the bee kind...”

²⁸ Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* 11.36. Translation: “Ants also have a system of government, and possess memory and diligence.”

²⁹ Ibid. Translation: “They even work at night when there is a full moon, although when there is no moon they stop. Again what industry and what diligence is displayed in their work!”

³⁰ Ibid. Translation: “They are the only living creatures beside man that bury their dead.”

burial of dead. In an expansion on the existing tradition in which ants were aligned with industry, Pliny marveled at the work ethic of ants, noting that they work unceasingly—even when there is no light to guide their efforts.

Pliny’s observation regarding the tendencies of ants to labor unceasingly reinforces the rift between industry and the creation of art hinted at in the *fabulae* of Aesopus and Babrius. Truly, the diligent reader of *fabulae* may yet be wondering what time is appropriate for leisure. Each subsequent investigation into the behaviors of insects seems to further narrow the scope of “leisure time;” at first only inappropriate in the summer, and laughable in the winter, now leisure time has been eroded completely by the more favorable behaviors associated with labor. Leisure time was acknowledged as necessary to the production of certain arts, the non-agrarian arts, reflected in the nature of the *patronus-cliens* relationship which allowed Roman writers the resources and leisure time to produce their great works.³¹ If ants work unceasingly regardless of their environment, it follows that ants never engage in the leisure needed to create art.

Plutarch, a Hellenized Roman writing in the first century C.E., reported a somewhat emotional statement of admiration regarding the qualities of ants in his *de sollertia animalium*:

“Τὰς δὲ μυρμηκῶν οἰκονομίας καὶ παρασκευὰς ἐκφράσαι μὲν ἀκριβῶς ἀμήχανον, ὑπερβῆναι δὲ παντελῶς ὀλίγων· οὐδὲν γὰρ οὔτω μικρὸν ἢ φύσις ἔχει μειζόνων καὶ καλλιόνων κάτοπτρον, ἀλλ’ ὥσπερ ἐν σταγόνι καθαρᾷ πάσης ἔνεστιν ἀρετῆς ἔμφασις, “ἔνθ’ ἐνὶ μὲν φιλότις”

³¹ The necessity of leisure time is directly commented upon by Catullus in poem 50 of his corpus. See also Horace, *Ars Poetica* 391-407 and *Carmina* 1.32, 3.13, and 3.19, among others; in these poems, the concept is broadly asserted by Horace as he speaks at length about enjoying the estate granted to him by his patron, Maecenas, and much of his poetry details his languid days spent at this estate, and even that the poetic life of leisure is the appropriate way to live.

τὸ κοινωνικόν, ἔνι δ' ἀνδρείας εἰκὼν τὸ φιλόπονον· ἔνεστι δὲ πολλὰ μὲν ἐγκρατείας σπέρματα, πολλὰ δὲ φρονήσεως Ἐκαὶ δικαιοσύνης.”³²

He further recounts a second-hand story, presented to him by a Cleisthenes, about members of one community of ants ransoming a dead ant from a neighboring community. Following this perhaps fantastical story, Plutarch establishes the evidentiary basis for his emotional statement of admiration; he writes at length about the penchant of ants to break down obstacles for each other, share burdens, and fastidiously inventory stored grain, taking preventative measures against it spoiling if necessary.

BEES

Much of Roman thought on bees seems to be communicated through Pliny's chapters dedicated to them in *Naturalis Historia*, although we learn about them from Aristotle's *History of Animals* and Vergil's *Georgics* as well. Pliny dedicates much of book eleven of his work, the catalogue of insects, to descriptions of bees, their behaviors, and the types of flowers and honey they use and make; his observations on bees continue through chapter eighteen of his work. Descriptions in many of these chapters describe how bees exist as part of an organized community, wholly given over to group thought. They have even been observed to have their own political systems and systems of morals. While he certainly describes them as champions of industry, much like ants, he notes that bees have been observed to cease working and rest—regardless of their environments.³³

³² Plutarch, *Moralia* 967D. Translation: “It is impossible to relate in full detail all the methods of production and storage practised by ants, but it would be careless to omit them entirely. Nature has, in fact, nowhere else so small a mirror of greater and nobler enterprises. Just as you may see greater things reflected in a drop of clear water, so among ants there exists the delineation of every virtue. Love and affection are found, namely their social life. You may see, too, the reflection of courage in their persistence in hard labor. There are many seeds of temperance and many of prudence and justice.”

³³ See Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* 11.18.

Perhaps the most defining characteristic of bees though is that they use wax and produce honey, as he dedicates several chapters to the mechanics of this usage and production. At the introduction to his observations regarding bees, Pliny reports:

*Sed inter omnia ea principatus apibus et iure praecipua admiratio, solis ex eo genere hominum causa genitis. mella contrahunt sucumque dulcissimum atque subtilissimum ac saluberrimum; favos confingunt et ceras mille ad usus vitae, laborem tolerant, opera conficiunt, rempublicam habent, consilia privatim ac duces gregatim, et quod maxime mirum sit, mores habent praeter cetera, cum sint neque mansueti generis neque feri.*³⁴

On their feeding habits, Pliny records that bees are associated only with organic matter in the bloom of life:

*fructibus nullis nocetur. mortuis ne floribus quidem, non modo corporibus, insidunt.*³⁵

The idea that bees shirk anything putrefying is corroborated by Aristotle's account of bees in his *Historia Animalium*. In explaining how different animals prefer to feed upon different things, he writes “οἶον ἢ μέλιττα πρὸς οὐδὲν προσιζάνει σαπρὸν ἀλλὰ πρὸς τὰ γλυκέα.”³⁶ Ultimately, the industry of bees is shown to have some limit, a limit which collides with art.

³⁴ Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, 11.4. Translation: “But among all of these species the chief place belongs to the bees, and this rightly is the species chiefly admired, because they alone of this genus have been created for the sake of man. They collect honey, that sweetest and most refined and most health-giving of juices, they model combs and wax that serves a thousand practical purposes, they endure toil, they construct works, they have a government and individual enterprises and collective leaders, and, a thing that must occasion most surprise, they have a system of manners that outstrips that of all the other animals, although they belong neither to the domesticated nor to the wild class.”

³⁵ Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, 11.18. Translation: “No harm is done to any kind of fruit. They do not settle even on dead flowers, let alone dead bodies.”

³⁶ Aristotle, *History of Animals*, Book 4.535A. Translation: “Thus the bee will never settle on anything that has gone bad, but only on sweet things...”

If an argument cannot be made that bees, themselves, are artists, there is certainly grounds for the idea that bees are closely related to art as they use wax, an implement of the artist, and they produce honey from their own use and enjoyment of beautiful flowers. Aside from these more positive aspects of bees which create their tentative alliance with art, bees were thought to be a good omen. Pliny wrote:

*Tunc ostenta faciunt privata ac publica uva dependente in domibus templisque, saepe expiata magnis eventibus. sedere in ore infantis tum etiam Platonis, suavitatem illam praedulcis eloquii portendentes...*³⁷

2.3 CONCLUSIONS

Ants and bees, then, have been the subject of numerous literary publications, and have enjoyed the elevation of their status from simple insect to emblematic of particular societal ideals. Ants have long been associated with a particular thriftiness and hardworking spirit that admits no possibility to rest and leisure. At times, their thriftiness has been the subject of divine punishment, but their overall dedication to labor has resulted in their use in parables which admonish laziness. This fascination with their character and behavior was thoroughly fleshed out in encyclopedic texts and scientific studies performed by both Greeks and Romans, which only seemed to corroborate the more fictive aspects of the insects. Bees, on the other hand, have long been associated with artistic production and labor. Their invocations in *fabulae* and myth suggested a relation to divine beauty accompanied their incredible thrift and propensity for hard work. Although they are known to have suffered divine retribution for their more

³⁷ Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, 11.18. Translation: “Moreover they supply private and public portents when a cluster of them hangs suspended in portents given by bees. Houses and temples, portents that have often been expiated by great events. They alighted on the mouth of Plato even when he was still an infant, portending the charm of that matchless eloquence...”

combatant nature, they blend civic dedication and artistic production in a way that is absent from ants.

These cultural accretions concerning perceptions of ants and bees provide the background informing their representation in Greco-Roman literature. These texts, and the interaction of the ancients with them over time, suggest that the colorful literary life of ants and bees was a popular fascination. In chapters three and four, I seek to show just how these pre-existing structures of cultural understanding deepen the metaphors of civic reconstruction in Vergil's and Ovid's texts. Through their relationships to art, these insects serve to express an embrace, or hesitancy, on the part of the poet for any society which would employ such models of reconstitution.

CHAPTER 3

VERGIL'S BEES AND CIVIC DUTY

Out of the harsh condition which results from such deterioration, however, develops another hardy race of mortals which, given the proper circumstances and leader, has the possibility of building a new state of felicity, a new Golden Age.³⁸

Book four of Vergil's *Georgics* is rich with the imagery of apiculture, which is focalized through the character of an outstanding farmer, Aristaeus. After a detailed explication of the art of apiculture, Vergil recounts the fantastic *aition* of bougonia—spontaneous generation of bees from the thoroughly beaten corpse of a bullock—through the actions of Aristaeus. For many Vergil scholars, as the above quote implies, this act of restoration of a populace offers a solution to the destruction wrought by plague in book three. Aristaeus and his hive, however, are struck by their own misfortune: the decimation of his beehive. It is this misfortune that prompts Aristaeus to appeal to divinity, Proteus, for a solution to the loss. Yet, the “solution” provided him is not really a solution at all, but more of a story about the casualties of his prosperity: Orpheus and his Eurydice. For Eurydice, fleeing a pursuing Aristaeus, suffered the fatal bite of a serpent; Orpheus had since lost his purpose and lamented her loss continually. In offering this story to Aristaeus as a means of finding a solution to the loss of his beehive, Vergil, through the words of Proteus, suggests a clear dichotomy between the personages of

³⁸ Johnston, *Vergil's Agricultural Golden Age*, 9.

Aristaeus and Orpheus. I propose that this dichotomy is best understood as the opposition between two forms of art: civically oriented art and personally oriented art.

Vergil presents Aristaeus as a dutiful and dedicated farmer, although his character is not free from blemishes—as is seen by his reckless pursuit of Eurydice. Despite this failure in character, Aristaeus is, otherwise, quite the paragon of civic duty. Prior to his appearance in Vergil’s text, Orpheus was already revered as the divine poet; his reprisal of that role in book four of the *Georgics* primes the reader to see the division between the parallel, and yet opposed, lifestyles of Aristaeus and Orpheus. Conte first outlined the manner in which these “particularly excellent heroes” embark upon parallel journeys through loss, appeal to divinity, remediation, and subsequent success or failure.³⁹ Rightly, he remarked that “In this way the two heroes are linked in the end by a contextual opposition which conveys a profound significance.”⁴⁰ Vergil subtly enforces this opposition between the two when he carefully relates Orpheus to birds,⁴¹ which prove to be victims of the farmer, and threats to the wellbeing of bee colonies. Additionally, Aristaeus’ own laments of his piety and dedication summarize the life of a farmer outlined by Vergil in books one and two of the *Georgics*, and provide a stark contrast to the sorrowful and wandering existence of Orpheus. Finally, Aristaeus’ zeal for carrying out the mandates of his divine mother strengthens this contrast when held against Orpheus’ inability to respect the mandates of Proserpina.

³⁹ Conte, “Aristaeus, Orpheus, and the *Georgics*,” 51.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Johnston, *Vergil’s Argicultural Golden Age*, 113.

This opposition deepens the relationship between Aristaeus and traditional Roman ideals, such as *fides*, *pietas*, *religio*, *gravitas*, and *virtus*, upholding his character as a model for right actions, it also suggests the most appropriate form of artistic practice: civically oriented art. The character of Orpheus is diminished in light of this, and appears as one with no place in any Golden Age reconstitution championed by Vergil's bees. It is true that Orpheus and his particular type of artistic production is not found within Vergil's Golden Age race of bees—yet they are a populace rich in art. Not only does the use of Aristaeus as farmer, with his connections to shepherding and singing, suggest this, but, as discussed in the preceding chapter, bees have long been considered in fictive and encyclopedic literature to be related to artists through their production of honey and use of wax, which are often the implements of artists.

The mythological exemplum of Aristaeus and Orpheus, and the sorrow which surrounds it, has caused some scholars to conclude that “The transition at the end [of the *Georgics*] from animals to men makes explicit the symbolic purpose of the whole book. All existence, including human, is doomed, despite even our best labors, to annihilation.”⁴² I propose that the message communicated by the reformation of a colony of bees after devastating events sets up a society that engages in a wholly productive art: civically oriented art, and is quite successful. I find that the mythological exemplum of Aristaeus and Orpheus is a *mythos* that completes this *logos*. Thus, before I discuss descriptions of apiculture and bee behavior in book four of the *Georgics*, which ally

⁴² Adam Parry, "The Idea of Art in Virgil's *Georgics*," *Arethusa* 5, no. 1 (1972), 42.

Roman society to the society of bees and suggest a positive reconstitution of the civic body, I discuss the Aristaeus and Orpheus myth with which the book culminates.

3.1 ARISTAEUS AND ORPHEUS

Aristaeus, prior to his appearance as *pastor Aristaeus* in book four of the *Georgics*, was a shepherd. However, his responsibilities receive a substantial expansion when he appears in the role of farmer, and what is lost in the change is access to a particular type of art which is often created by shepherds in their work and leisure. Johnston communicates this clearly when she writes:

Unlike the shepherds of the *Eclogues*, to whom freedom from toil allows the leisure to cultivate their poetic muse and to strive even to contend with Orpheus, Aristaeus in his role as farmer must find contentment in the fruits of his labors.⁴³

Seemingly, this expansion of roles grants to Aristaeus a consuming focus on the artistry of agriculture—but fragments of the shepherd Aristaeus remain at the forefront of the reader’s mind. While Aristaeus is consumed with agricultural labors, which he details in his lament to his divine mother, his character is never fully removed from the persona of artist; the type of art which he practices is just refined into a more civically oriented art. Vergil’s cycle of the ages in book one detailed the invention of agriculture, which he deemed an art form:

*tum ferri rigor atque argutae lammina serrae
(nam primi cuneis scindebant fissile lignum),
tum variae venere artes...*⁴⁴

⁴³ Johnston, *Vergil’s Agricultural Golden Age*, 106.

⁴⁴ Vergil, *Georgics* 1.143-145. Translation: “Then came unyielding iron and the blade of the rasping saw (for primitive man used wedges to cleave wood until it split), and art followed hard on art.”

Thus, Aristaeus is a practitioner of the arts, and even the inventor of particular forms of agricultural artistry—as Vergil makes clear when he begins his *aition* concerning the bougonia with the rhetorical question “*Quis deus hanc, Musae, quis nobis extudit artem?*”⁴⁵ only to answer such a question with the story of Aristaeus and his lost beehive. The influence of a more elegiac passion, a connection to the poetic muses to which Orpheus swears credence, is even visible in Aristaeus’ mad passion that causes him to pursue Eurydice.

For Vergil, Orpheus, on the other hand, is associated strongly with the more irrational and emotional aspects of artistic creation, personally oriented art. Although Vergil’s and Ovid’s version of the Orpheus myth, in which he is featured primarily as a lover, are now the dominant mythic tradition, this was not so at the time in which Vergil wrote his *Georgics*. Now, the myth features a refusal to remarry after the loss of Eurydice, and a mournful Orpheus who continues to love her hopelessly throughout his life. Ovid even charged him with the rise of pederasty, as his distaste for relationships led him to pursue satisfaction from those with whom he was incapable of participating in romantic relationships.⁴⁶ However, Segal notes that the Orpheus myth in ancient tradition prior to the versions produced by Vergil and Ovid was much more variegated: Orpheus at times appeared as the son of a distant king, as a cult hero who invented agriculture,

⁴⁵ Ibid. 4.315. Translation: “Muses, what god produced this art for us?”

⁴⁶ See Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 10.83-85. See also Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica* 1.23-34 for a description of Orpheus as a divinely skilled artist.

poetry, and theology, and even as one associated with magical incantations.⁴⁷ But, when selecting the stories and aspects of the mythic tradition to use for his Orpheus, Conte notes that Vergil acted like someone at a buffet—that is to say that Vergil “...necessarily reduced the significant features of the myth of Orpheus, or, rather, has activated some at the expense of others and adapted them to fit his own text.”⁴⁸

The preceding chapter established the ways in which bees connoted a strong community and reliance on group work, as well an appreciation for artistic production and beauty; Aristaeus, as one lamenting the loss of his own bees, is already tied to the industry of beekeeping and the connotations therein. These connotations are strengthened when Aristaeus is devastated by the loss of his bees and invokes divinity to help him come to terms with the loss. It is while he is invoking his divine mother that the reader learns the extent of Aristaeus’ industrious behavior. He cries out:

*En etiam hunc ipsum vitae mortalis honorem,
quem mihi vix frugum et pecudum custodia sollers
omnia temptanti extuderat, te matre relinquo.
Quin age et ipsa manu felices erue silvas,
fer stabulis inimicum ignem atque interfice messes,
ure sata et validam in vites molire bipennem*⁴⁹

⁴⁷ See Charles Segal, *Orpheus: the Myth of the Poet* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press: 1989), 10-13 for a more detailed discussion of Orpheus in ancient mythic tradition prior to his appearances in Vergil and Ovid.

⁴⁸ Conte, “Aristaeus, Orpheus, and the *Georgics*,” 52.

⁴⁹ Vergil, *Georgics* 4.326-332. Translation: “Lo! even this very crown of my mortal life, which the skillful tending of crops and cattle had scarce wrought out for me all of my endeavor—though thou art my mother, I resign. Nay, come, and with thine own hand tear up my fruitful woods; lay the hostile flame to my stalls, destroy my crops, burn my seedlings, and swing the stout axe against my vines...”

Here we see that Aristaeus has been busy with more than bees, he also manages to maintain a thriving homestead, with crops and vines. This image of Aristaeus fits well with Apollonius of Rhodes' account of Aristaeus in *Argonautica*,⁵⁰ Apollonius describes Aristaeus as being called "shepherd" and "hunter" by the Haemonians, as well as learned in the arts of prophecy and healing. Vergil's spectacular farmer occupies himself with a (mostly) pious lifestyle, and recognizes the importance of not only labor, but respect of divinity.

Vergil introduces Aristaeus into this preexisting dichotomy between civically oriented artistic production and the more passionate, personal artistic production evidenced by Orpheus. Aristaeus' appeal to his divine mother, Cyrene, and subsequent appeal to Proteus on behalf of his lost bees introduce the nested narrative of Orpheus and Eurydice; the story told by Proteus of Orpheus includes his quest to Tartarus to win back his lost love, Eurydice. The speech of Orpheus, accompanied by the dulcet tones of the lyre, is so entrancing that he manages not only to convince Hades to allow him to bring Eurydice back to life, but also to incite wonderment in the Eumenides, stop the spinning of the wheel of Ixion, and leave Cerberus slack-jawed. Although close to regaining his Eurydice, he ultimately fails at this attempt and spends the rest of his time producing art which tames tigers and draws together trees in happiness. His artistic pursuits are forever touched by his loss of Eurydice:

*Solus Hyperboreas glacies Tanaimque nivalem
arvaeque Rhipaeis numquam viduata pruinis
lustrabat raptam Eurydicen atque inrita Ditis*

⁵⁰ See Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica* 2.498-ff. for a full description of Aristaeus in Libya.

*dona querens...*⁵¹

The passionate and personal artist then, is one capable of making creations so beautiful that they defy the logic of the world, throwing even the gods into confusion. This artist is also one who is alone, perhaps not merely in a physical sense, but in a mental sense—he is an individual. He shows none of the concern for the betterment of society, evidenced by the pursuits of Aristaeus and his lament for his lost colony of bees.

Proteus' recounting of the story of Orpheus and Eurydice conveys this ability, and is rich with mention of avian life—it is through the descriptions of birds that the opposition between two types of art, civically oriented and personally oriented, and their associated lifestyles is further strengthened. Johnston embarks upon a discussion of these aviary images and their purpose and should be referred to for further detail on this element of the text in book four;⁵² I draw attention here to only one of the several avian similes which color the oracular speech of Proteus: As he concludes his sorrowful story, Proteus describes the seven months Orpheus spent in lament with his lyre and ultimately likens Orpheus to a nightingale forced to sadness by the loss of her young at the hands of a farmer:

*qualis populea maerens philomela sub umbra
amissos queritur fetus, quos durus arator
observans nido implumes detraxit; at illa
flet noctem ramoque sedens miserabile carmen
integrat et maestis late loca questibus implet.*⁵³

⁵¹ Vergil, *Georgics* 4.517-520. Translation: “Alone he would roam the northern ice, the snowy Tanais, and the field ever wedded to Rhipaeian frost, wailing Eurydice lost and the gifts of Dice annulled.”

⁵² Johnston, *Vergil's Agricultural Golden Age*, 112-113.

⁵³ Vergil, *Georgics* 4.510-515. Translation: “... even as the nightingale, mourning beneath the poplar's shade, bewails the loss of her brood that a churlish ploughman hath

The *durus arator* mentioned by Proteus is undoubtedly a reference to Aristaeus, whose reckless pursuit of Eurydice has caused the sadness of Orpheus. The *arator* and *pastor* are those to whom Vergil addresses the *praecepta* held within the *Georgics*, and whom Vergil has warned about the danger birds pose to bees before divulging the fantastic origins of the practice of bougonia. Concerning protection of bees, Vergil writes:

*Absint et picti squalentia terga lacerti
pinguibus a stabulis meropesque aliaequae volucres
et manibus Procne pectus signata cruentis;
omnia nam late vastant ipsasque volantes
ore ferunt dulcem nidis immitibus escam.*⁵⁴

The appearance of birds in both contexts serves to strengthen the division Vergil develops between the production of civically oriented art, as championed by Aristaeus, and the life of passionate and personal artistic pursuit, personally oriented art, as evidenced by Orpheus.

While the above simile in the speech of Proteus may portray Orpheus in a more sympathetic light, and his passionate and personal art may be powerful in its ability to confound, there is also a glaring shortcoming of this more passionate and personal artist: he fails to obey the strictures of the gods. Through the parallel journeys of Aristaeus and Orpheus, the reader sees both success and failure. The character of Aristaeus, having caused the death of Eurydice, is not particularly sympathetic—yet it is he who emerges

espied and torn unfledged from the nest: but she weeps all night long, and, perched on a spray, renews her piteous strain, filling the region round with sad laments.”

⁵⁴ Vergil, *Georgics* 4.13-17. Translation: “Let the spangled lizard with his scaly back be also a stranger to the rich stalls, and the bee-eater and other birds, and Procne, with breast marked by her blood stained hands. For these spread havoc far and near, and, while the bees are on the wing, carry them off in their mouths, a sweet morsel for their cruel nestings.”

victorious with his loss annulled. The differentiation between the two journeys is found in the way that the two characters handle divine mandate. Aristaeus quickly moves to rectify his wrongdoing according to the process handed out by Cyrene, and sets about the process of the bougonia with alacrity. Orpheus, however, is unable to follow the divine mandate of Proserpina, and loses Eurydice once more. Seeing this gap between the practices of both characters, Conte notes that Orpheus “provides a model mediated by the enchantment of poetry which is heart-rending and passionate, but unproductive, unable to prevail in practice.”⁵⁵ Hence, Orpheus is able to confound the shades, mythical sinners, and gods of the underworld, but ultimately unable to obey the simple command that would annul his loss.

3.2 VERGIL’S BEES

Vergil’s careful optimism about the reconstitution of a lost populace in a Golden Age race cannot be communicated in terms as simple as the dichotomy between Aristaeus and Orpheus, between civically oriented art and personally oriented art. Through the use of descriptions of apiculture and observed behaviors of bees, Vergil shifts what seems to be subtle criticism of a certain artistic life, and its undesired aspects, to suggest that the spontaneous generation of bees offers a positive metaphor for the reconstitution of the civic body. This reconstitution is not without sacrifice, and Vergil is quite aware of what must be lost in such a transition—as Nadeau makes clear in his suggestion that Aeneas represents a crystallization of this opposition, and his adventures

⁵⁵ Conte, “Aristaeus, Orpheus, and the *Georgics*,” 61.

stage a battle between the two natures which is ultimately lost by the “lover.”⁵⁶ Yet, this reconstitution of the civic body through bees ultimately communicates that the appropriate form of art, that is civically oriented art, is maintained in this new Golden Age society.

The previous chapter established the ways in which the ancients perceived bees to be creatures that seamlessly incorporated the aspects of a productive society with the glimmers of artistic existence. Bees were incredibly industrious and community minded, and capable even of advanced operations such as governance of a populace. Bees also were associated with art not only in ancient literary tradition, but in observances of their daily life—for bees created wax and honey; one the implement of the artist, the other the product of enjoyment of beautiful flowers. It is true that descriptions of bees in the fourth *Georgic* lack explicit connection with art; Vergil writes that the war time cries of the bees are merely voices “*imitata tubarum*,”⁵⁷ and elsewhere that collectively they “*fit sonitus, mussantque oras et limina circum*.”⁵⁸ This apparent silence on the cultural structures for understanding the lives of bees has prompted scholars, such as Griffin, to conclude that Vergil, here, consciously chooses to suppress the connection—thereby prompting the reader to realize that the society represented by bees is one from which the arts are

⁵⁶ See Yvan Nadeau, “The Lover and the Statesman,” in *Poetry and Politics in the Age of Augustus*, ed. Tony Woodman and David West (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 68. Neadeau argues that in the *Aeneid*, Vergil has fleshed out these two characters as the dual nature of one man (Aeneas) and stages their battle, and the eventual win of the Statesman, through the love of Dido and Aeneas and his subsequent journey to Latium according to his *fata*.

⁵⁷ Vergil, *Georgics* 4.72. Translation: “...like broken trumpet blasts.”

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 4.188. Translation: “A sound is heard, as they hum about the entrances and on the thresholds.”

excluded.⁵⁹ While Griffin's argument is, in many other places, valid, I offer that Vergil has no such purpose in describing the noises of his bees. Rather, I propose that the connection between bees, industry, and artistic production was so well established within the literature and art of the ancient world that Vergil did not need to comment upon it explicitly for such an understanding to be present in the text.

Vergil, expanding upon these well-established structures for cultural understanding of bees, further aligns their society with that of humans, specifically Romans, in book four of the *Georgics*. Griffin summarizes these connections quite succinctly when he writes:

Vergil treats his bees in the fourth Georgic as if they formed a sort of human society. They have *domus, lars, sedes, statio, tectum; fores, liminia, portae; aula, oppidum, patria, penates, sedes augusta, urbs*. They have divine reason and practice high minded communism. Their patriotism is absolute. They will work themselves to death (204) or give their lives in battle (218). Their devotion to their ruler is incomparable (210). They are thrifty (156,157), orderly (158), and indefatigable (185); they all move and rest as one (184). At 201, Vergil calls them Romans, *Quirites*, and scholars have pointed out that the characteristic Roman virtues of *labor* and *fortitudo*, also *concordia*, are their leading qualities.⁶⁰

Vergil further strengthens this connection when he attempts to explain how to quell a civil conflict between members of a beehive that has developed a rogue second king:

*Sin autem ad pugnam exierint, nam saepe duobus
regibus incessit magno discordia motu,
continuoque animos vulgi et trepidantia bello
corda licet longe praesciscere...
... Hi motus animorum atque haec certamina tanta*

⁵⁹ See Jasper Griffin, "The Fourth 'Georgic', Virgil, and Rome." *Greece & Rome* 26, no. 1 (1979): 64. Griffin proposes that the silence of Vergil on the relationship between bees and artistic creation is of ultimate significance in understanding the programmatic aim of the fourth *Georgic*, and suggests bees are a societal parallel for a society that is efficient and admirable, but dispassionate and lacks art.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 63-64.

*pulveris exigui iactu compressa quiescent.*⁶¹

Nadeau argues that a strengthening of the association between human civil conflict and the civil conflict of members of Vergil's beehive occurs in these lines, as both types of civil conflict end with the sprinkling of a little dust.⁶² The very anthropomorphized battle between the two "kings" of the hive need not find its parallel to human society in literary allusions, though; Vergil's combatant bees sound war trumpets and subsequently "flash their wings" as if they were military standards, carrying out warfare in a uniquely human manner. Furthermore, the notion that both "kings" derive from one hive and must battle to decide upon supremacy evokes the recent civil conflict at Rome between Augustus and Marc Antony.

Although Vergil teaches that one should permit bees a well-deserved rest after their work is done,⁶³ he suggests the farmer be vigilant and suppress excessive leisure:

*At cum incerta volant caeloque examina ludunt
contemnuntque favos et frigida tecta relinquunt,
instabiles animos ludo prohibebis inani.*⁶⁴

The primary pursuits of this anthropomorphic hive, then, should be those which produce the definitive products of wax and honey; leisure and rest are appropriate only after such

⁶¹ Vergil, *Georgics* 4.67-87. Translation: "But, if haply for battle they have gone forth, for oft times strife with terrible turmoil hath fallen on two kings; and straightaway you may presage from afar the fury of the crowd, and how their hearts thrill with war.... These storms of passion, these conflicts so fierce, by the tossing of a little dust are quelled and laid to rest."

⁶² Nadeau, "The Lover and the Statesman," 77.

⁶³ See Vergil, *Georgics* 4.187-190.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 4.103-105. Translation: "But when the swarms flit aimlessly and sport in the air, scorning their cells and leaving their hives chill, you must check their fickle spirit from such idle play."

work is done. Accordingly, Vergil seems to admonish the excessive period of mourning, not quite *otium* yet an absence of productive labor, in which Orpheus indulged following his failed attempt to recover Eurydice from the Tartarus:

*Septem illum totos perhibent ex ordine menses
rupe sub aeria deserti ad Strymonis undam
flesse sibi et gelidis haec evolvisse sub antris
mulcentem tigres et agentem carmine quercus.*⁶⁵

Vergil appropriates this same language of excessive leisure, reframing it in the context of production of civically oriented art, when he concludes book four:

*Haec super arborum cultu pecorumque canebam
et super arboribus, Caesar dum magnus ad altum
fulminat Euphraten bello victorque volentes
per populos dat iura viamque adfectat Olympo.
Illo Vergilium me tempore dulcis alebat
Parthenope studiis florentem ignobilis oti,
carmina qui lusi pastorum audaxque iuventa,
Tityre, te patulae cecini sub tegmine fagi.*⁶⁶

Vergil, nestled amongst the flowery walks of peace in the shade of a tree, sings to a nursling—thus inverting the barren landscape of the wintery cave in which Orpheus sings and reclaiming the leisurely identity of the *Eclogues* singer for the productive future promised under Augustus. Ultimately, this passage also reaffirms the prosperity of Aristaeus and his bees which culminates in the reconstitution of a Golden Age race.

⁶⁵ Vergil, *Georgics* 4.507-510. Translation: “Of him they tell that for seven whole months day after day beneath a lofty crag beside lonely Strymon’s stream he wept, and in the shelter of cool dales unfolded this his tale, charming tigers and drawing oaks with his song.”

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 4.559-ff. Translation: “So much I sang in addition to the care of fields, of cattle, and of trees, while great Caesar thundered in war by deep Euphrates and bestowed a victor’s laws on willing nations, and essayed the path to Heaven. In those days I, Virgil, was nursed by sweet Parthenope, and rejoiced in the arts of inglorious ease—I who toyed with shepherds’ songs, and, in youth’s boldness, sang of you, Tityrus, under the canopy of a spreading beech.”

3.3 CONCLUSIONS

Book four of Vergil's *Georgics* presents the parallel journeys of loss, appeal to divinity, and possible remediation undertaken by Aristaeus and Orpheus. These parallel journeys intertwine the characters of both men in a way that compares the positive aspects of Aristaeus' character and agricultural production to the negative aspects of Orpheus' solitary passion and personal artistic production—ultimately advancing Aristaeus' efforts as successful and appropriate. These journeys are coupled with the stunning imagery of apiculture and the behaviors of bees; through continual likening of bees to human populations, specifically Romans, Vergil champions their industrious nature, their dedication to agricultural labor, and even their combatant nature apparent in civil conflicts. While he does not explicitly speak on his bees' connection to an artistic life, their well-established cultural connotations support understanding them as a blend of industrious and artistic. Ultimately, Aristaeus and his bees evidence a support for civically oriented art, and their triumph over Orpheus suggests a disapproval of personally oriented art.

Writing about Vergil's great didactic work in comparison to its Hesiodic model, Parry says "Vergil's whole poem, in contrast to that of Hesiod, stresses the beauty and variety of human experience, raised to the level of art. *Ars*, art, is at once an intellectual and an aesthetic achievement."⁶⁷ Aristaeus, as *arator*, practices the agrarian arts with skill and dedication; Orpheus, as divine poet, practices arts with less civic value. The mythological *exemplum* in which both men feature, and the bees described throughout book four, convey a lack of appropriateness in Orpheus' particular style of artistic

⁶⁷ Parry, "Art in Vergil's *Georgics*," 50.

production. Vergil's reconstituted populace is still steeped in art, however, and thus evidences a positive view of how art will be included in the emerging principate. While engaging in personally oriented art is no longer an appropriate option, art still has much value—and Vergil here has intimated his willingness to adopt the mantle of the poet who produces civically oriented art, who shapes political and moral consciousness. Contrary to Segal's sentiment that "All is not confidence in Augustan renaissance,"⁶⁸ Vergil looks forward to the newly constituted role for art in the rising principate with a positive attitude.

⁶⁸ Segal, *The Myth of the Poet*, 53.

CHAPTER 4

OVID'S ANTS AND AN ARTLESS WORLD

There can hardly be another major work of antiquity, having exercised such an enormous influence on the literature and art of later ages, which has remained such a mystery, so misunderstood, so difficult to comprehend, as Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. No one has yet been able to solve with any degree of acceptance by others the enduring and fascinating question of just what the *Metamorphoses* is all about.⁶⁹

Ovid's seminal epic, *Metamorphoses*, has often been assessed for messages of dissent against the Augustan principate. As Curran wrote, scholars continue to disagree about the particular essence of the epic, and whether the material therein, although at times subversive, is wholly anti-Augustan in nature. Recent scholarship by Gardner champions the argument that Ovid's retelling of the origin of the Myrmidons *fabula* in book seven of his *Metamorphoses* is a critical response to Vergil's bees in book four of the *Georgics*, and that these episodes provide a commentary on the social and political environment created by the formation of the Augustan principate.⁷⁰ I am wholly in agreement with this sentiment, and I propose additionally that the complexities surrounding the characterization of ants in ancient literature significantly enrich Ovid's

⁶⁹ Leo C. Curran, "Transformation and Anti-Augustanism in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*," *Arethusa* 5, no. 1 (1972): 71.

⁷⁰ See Hunter Gardner, "Bees, Ants, and the Body Politic: Vergil's Noric Plague and Ovid's Origin of the Myrmidons," *Vergilius* 60 (2014).

response. Through the ant-born men newly formed on Aegina, Ovid is able to invoke concern in the careful reader, ultimately asking them to consider the question continually posed throughout the *Metamorphoses*: what is the role of art, if there is any, in the Augustan principate?

In this chapter, I intend to demonstrate the ways in which Ovid's Myrmidons act as a negative response to Vergil's bees by evaluating and extending the latter's metaphor of reconstitution of the civic body under the rule of Augustus. Within the relevant passages of each author's text, no explicit "Golden" terms appear to link these insect communities to the hope vested in them as a means of reconstitution. Yet, descriptions of conventional Golden Age features such as communal property and existence, simplicity and harmony with nature, and a lack of excess are intermingled with the more belligerent and ambitious qualities of both insect communities. The Golden Age qualities of Vergil's bees are quite evident from his descriptions of their characteristics: the bees hold nothing privately, their homes and even their children are communal,⁷¹ they work together as a community without issue,⁷² they work and live in harmony with the natural world,⁷³ and they do not participate in love affairs--a traditional sign of excess.⁷⁴ The Golden Age qualities of Ovid's ants are less evident from the brief description of their characteristics in which Aeacus indulges. Nevertheless, their nature is able to be discerned following a thorough investigation of the literary existence of ants such as the one provided in chapter

⁷¹ See Vergil, *Georgics* 4.153-154.

⁷² See *Ibid.* 4.158-168.

⁷³ See *Ibid.* 4.181-183 and 4.191-194.

⁷⁴ See *Ibid.* 4.197-199.

two of this manuscript. Aeacus simply says “*corpora vidisti; mores, quos ante gerebant, / nunc quoque habent.*”⁷⁵ Thus, it is from ancillary texts that the character of Ovid’s ant-born men is drawn: a sense of community among ants is attested by numerous encyclopedic authors, such as Aristotle when he identifies ants as “political animals”⁷⁶ and Pliny, when he wrote about ants’ propensity to bury their dead—suggesting a strong community among them.⁷⁷ Ants are often associated with plentitude, as is evidenced by their appearance in the *fabulae* of Babrius and Phaedrus previously cited in this manuscript;⁷⁸ ants forgo dancing, singing, and other forms of relaxation so that they can store up plenty of grain for the winter. It is clear from these variant *fabulae* that ants also do not indulge in excessive leisure.

The new Golden Age that either of these insect communities could usher in is cloaked in ambiguity. For while each insect community can easily be related, by their characteristics and behaviors, to a Golden Age race, they can also easily be linked to lesser age conduct. Vergil’s description of the apiary arts is not complete without the much-anthropomorphized civil war between two bee “kings.”⁷⁹ Perkell, in discussing

⁷⁵ Ibid. 7.655-656. Translation: “You have seen their bodies; the habits which they had before they still keep...”

⁷⁶ See Aristotle, *Historia Animalium* 1.488A. See also discussion of this statement on page 15 of this manuscript.

⁷⁷ See Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* 11.36. See also discussion of this statement on page 16 of this manuscript.

⁷⁸ See pages 8-10 of this manuscript for the texts of these fables and discussion regarding the characteristics imparted upon ants therein.

⁷⁹ See Vergil, *Georgics* 4.67-85.

such ambiguities of character, mentions also the bees' ambition and love of gain.⁸⁰ Beyond the world which Vergil creates in his *Georgics*, other literary invocations of bees relay their combative nature; a *fabula* of Babrius relates the story of how the bee received his stinger: upset that humans often took its honey and it was defenseless to stop this from happening, a bee appealed to Jove for a weapon. Jove granted that request by issuing the bee a stinger but punished it for its vindictive nature by making use of the stinger fatal to the bee.⁸¹ Ants, too, enjoy this sort of "double" image in their literary invocations. While encyclopedic literature reports that ants are highly developed insects capable of living in communities with advanced forms of "government," and that ants are perfect examples of diligent, hardworking, and socially oriented beings, fictive literature has not portrayed ants in the same positive light: One *fabula* recalls that the ant used to be a man, but was made into an insect by Jove as punishment for its inability to be satisfied with the fruits of its own labor, and its subsequent compulsion to take from others.⁸² Another *fabula*, that of the ant and the grasshopper/dung beetle, inadvertently displays the caustic way in which the ant treats others through its comments when refusing to share any of the grain it has stored for the winter.⁸³

⁸⁰ See Christine Perkell, "The Golden Age and Its Contradictions in the Poetry of Vergil," *Vergilius* 48 (2002): 27. "However, it is to be noted that while there are no explicitly golden terms here, on the other hand, in their passion for gain—*amor habendi*—bees are strongly marked as Iron Age figures."

⁸¹ See Chambray 103. See also page 12 of this manuscript for the text of this fable, translation, and discussion.

⁸² See Chambray 105. See also page 8 of this manuscript for the text of this fable, translation, and discussion.

⁸³ See Chambray 106 and Babrius 140. See also pages 8-10 of this manuscript for the text of these fables, translation, and discussion.

This ambiguity in imagery is crucial to understanding how Ovid inserts his Myrmidons into the ongoing dialogue surrounding the moral and legal rejuvenation of the Augustan project. Ovid's *fabula* surrounding the origin of the Myrmidons offers the equal and completing act of creation that counterbalances the destruction of humanity undertaken by Jove in book one of the *Metamorphoses*. Throughout the epic, Ovid likens Jove to Augustus, priming the careful reader to find allusions to Augustus' policies that seek to reconstitute the civic body of Rome as a body of loyalists in Jove's creation of a stalwart and industrious populace for Aeacus. Further, Ovid advances his ant-born men as parallel to a Golden Age race by intertwining the story of their origin with two trees which featured prominently in his earlier descriptions of Golden Age plentitude: the *ilex* and the *quercus*. Additionally, Ovid's significant and careful innovations to the *fabula originis* first recorded by Hesiod imbue his Myrmidons with the stains of lesser age conduct. Speaking of a similar ambiguity of imagery in Vergil's poetry, Perkell wrote that:

As a poet he [Vergil] may not have felt called upon to offer sustained philosophical or political positions on matters critical to his contemporaries, but, in his poems' central images he surely circled around urgent questions. For some readers of his poems this implied questioning likely served to interrogate the character of contemporary values and the nature of the Augustan project.⁸⁴

For Ovid, these ambiguities create a sort of negotiable space in which readers can ruminate upon the major innovations of the Augustan principate and their effects. While the fluidity with which Ovid moves between imagery of a Golden Age and that of lesser ages pose no significant changes to the negotiable space created by Vergil's *Georgics* four, the Myrmidons and the complicated literary history of ants, as well as the previous

⁸⁴ Perkell, "The Golden Age," 27.

mythical existence imparted to these ant-born men, add further questions to this space which are overwhelmingly negative in their implications.

4.1 ORIGINS OF THE MYRMIDONS IN LITERARY TRADITION

Prior to undertaking any analysis of the origin of the Myrmidons episode found within Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, it is necessary to clarify Ovid's manipulations and expansions of a story that existed in the Greco-Roman literary tradition. Certainly, Ovid's retelling of the story surrounding the origin of the Myrmidons constitutes a significant expansion upon the well-established mythical tradition founded by the text of Hesiod, although an alternative myth is offered by Hyginus, who was roughly a contemporary of Ovid.

Ovid's *fabula* regarding the origin of the Myrmidons was restrained by the mythical tradition inherited from his Greek literary predecessors. Hesiod had, in his *Catalogue of Women*, put *stylus to papyrus* and recorded the dominant narrative of oral tradition surrounding this mythical race: sprung from a desire for peoples with which to share life, Aeacus asked his divine father to create men and women from a local ant population. The *Catalogue of Women* exists only as it has been retold by other authors, and classicists cannot say with certainty that this *fabula* is transmitted to modern audiences in full. However, the extant fragment(s) provided by *scholia* on Pindar's *Odes* sketch a sensible, albeit skeletal, narrative:

περὶ τῶν Μυρμιδόνων Ἡσίοδος μὲν οὕτω φησὶν·
ἦ δ' ὑποκουσαμένη τέκεν Αἰακὸν ἵππιόχαρμην ...
αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ ῥ' ἦβης πολυηράτου ἴκετο μέτρον,
μοῦνος ἐὼν ἤσχαλλε· πατήρ δ' ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε,
ὄσσοι ἔσαν μύρμηκες ἐπηράτου ἔνδοθι νήσου,
τοὺς ἀνδρας ποίησε βαθυζώνους τε γυναῖκας.

οἱ δὴ τοι πρῶτοι ζεῦξαν νέας ἀμφιελίσσας,
πρῶτοι δ' ἰστί' ἔθεν νηὸς πτερὰ ποντοπόροιο.⁸⁵

Aside from their creation, Hesiod provides his readers with only two details about this race—they are composed both of men and women, and they were the first to embark on the seas. While Ovid includes neither of these details in his own *fabula originis*, it is difficult to resist reading his story against the background of Hesiod's story. This results in a reading that brings the absence of these details to the foreground and raises the question as to how Ovid interacts with this previous *fabula originis*, and why he failed to include these details.

One subtle, yet striking, variance in Ovid's own Myrmidons is found in the fact that they seem only to be composed of stalwart young men. The language which Aeacus uses to recount his experiences leading up to, and including, the reconstitution of his populace is carefully crafted in a way that artfully avoids gender specific pronouns and adjectives; thus, the appearance of the noun *viros* at line 650 of Aeacus' account comes as somewhat of a shock considering the divergence from the men and “deep-girdled” women of Hesiod's *fabula*. The significance of Ovid's choice to exclude women from his reconstituted populace of loyalists has larger implications within the fabric of Augustan criticism that Ovid is weaving throughout the expanded origin of the Myrmidons episode.

⁸⁵ 1-6: Scholium on Pindar's, *Nemean*; 6-7: Scholium on Pindar's *Olympians*. Translation: “About the Myrmidons Hesiod says the following: She became pregnant and bore Aeacus who delighted in the battle-chariot. . . But when he reached the full measure of lovely puberty, he was distressed at being alone; so the father of men and of gods turned all the ants that were within the lovely island into men and deep-girdled women. These were the first to fasten together swaying ships, and the first to set up sails, the sea-crossing boat's wings.”

When Aeacus appeals to Jupiter for restitution of his people, he says “*tu mihi da cives et inania moenia supple.*”⁸⁶ Aeacus’ use of *cives* suggests very little about the sexes of the population which he wishes to be restored; Romans of both sexes enjoyed citizenship, although women did not enjoy a full citizenship as they lacked a variety of rights permitted to Roman males, such as *suffragium* and *commercium*. Again, in his description of the intense dream that looks forward to the restitution of his populace, Aeacus tells Cephalus:

*ac se tollere humo rectoque adsistere trunco
et maciem numerumque pedum nigrumque colorem
ponere et humanam membris inducere formam.*⁸⁷

Se, again is ambiguous here as this form of the reflexive pronoun is fit for masculine and feminine bodies. When Aeacus awakes and finds that his dream has come to fruition, he describes the actions of his new populace as such:

*...Egredior, qualesque in imagine somni
visus eram vidisse viros, ex ordine tales
adspicio noscoque. adeunt regemque salutant.*⁸⁸

The appearance of *viros* here is quite shocking: Thus far, Ovid’s artful use of gender neutral pronouns and adjectives has not signaled an exclusion of one sex. The devastation of Juno’s plague has fallen upon both sexes alike, and many have perished; surely the

⁸⁶ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 7.628. Translation: “O most excellent father, grant thou me just as many citizens, and fill my empty walls.”

⁸⁷ Ibid. 7.640-642. Translation: “These seemed suddenly to grow larger and ever larger, to raise themselves from the ground and stand with form erect, to throw off their leanness, their many feet, their black color, and to take on human limbs and a human form.”

⁸⁸ Ibid. 7.649-651. Translation: “I went without and there just such mean as I had seen in my dream I now saw and recognized with my waking eyes. They approached and greeted me as king.”

population of both the men and women of Aegina need to be restored for the island to once again be fruitful. Yet the appearance of *viros* suggests that Aeacus sees only one sex when looking out at his new race of ant-born men. However, the context which necessitates Aeacus' recounting of his experiences leading up to, and including, the reconstitution of his populace is one of war—and it is this context that lends reason to Ovid's decision to exclude the female sex from his ant-born populace. Once Aeacus has fully recounted his experiences to Cephalus, he gleefully asserts that his new race of stalwart and industrious men are well suited to assist Cephalus in Athens' war against Minos:

*Hi te ad bella pares annis animisque sequentur,
cum primum qui te feliciter attulit, eurus
....fuerit mutatus in austros.*⁸⁹

The pride of Aeacus in assigning his men as human capital fit for waging a war suggests that Ovid's Myrmidons are formed without the female sex because they are formed to meet the aims of the Augustan principate, which sought to create a crop of loyalists to carry on the territorial expansion that was foundational to the Roman way of life.

Another striking variance in Ovid's own Myrmidons is found in their relationship to sailing: truly, the only mention of the Myrmidons sailing in the *fabula* is casual: in lines 656-659 of book seven, Aeacus assures Cephalus that the Myrmidons will follow him to war as soon as the East wind which carried him to Aegina returns from the South.

⁸⁹ Ibid. 7.656-659. Translation: "These men will follow you to the wars well matched in years and courage, as soon as the east wind which brought you so fortunately hither...shall have changed to the south."

This statement, although short, is quite significant; the second detail regarding the Myrmidons given by Hesiod is their attainment of the fantastical role of “first sailors.” Within Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, this role is deepened by its resonance with a passage in book one, situated within the cycle of the ages, that cites sailing as a sort of wickedness. In his descriptions of the Golden Age, an age of unbounded plentitude and probity, Ovid distinguishes it not only by the earth’s production of all the resources necessary to life through its own will, but also by a lack of certain characteristics and faults of man—specifically sailing. Of the Golden Age, Ovid writes:

*Nondum caesa suis, peregrinum ut viseret orbem,
montibus in liquidas pinus descenderat undas,
nullaque mortales praeter sua litora norant*⁹⁰.

The careful reader of the *Metamorphoses* is then primed to question whether the true nature of Ovid’s Myrmidons is found in Aeacus’ gleeful assertions that his new race of stalwart and industrious men are suited well to assist Cephalus in Athens’ war against Minos, or if the ant-born men communicate a subtle criticism about the kind of supporters which Augustus seeks for his new Golden Age.⁹¹ For now the Myrmidons

⁹⁰ Ibid. 1.94-96. Translation: “Not yet had the pine-tree, felled on its native mountains, descended thence into the watery plain to visit other lands; men knew no shores except their own.”

⁹¹ The new Golden Age was hailed as upcoming in literature by Vergil in his *Eclogues* 4.9, and as specifically accomplished by Augustus in his *Aeneid* 6.913-920. Horace, too, contributed to the literary embrace of Augustus’ Golden Age in his *Carmina*: at 1.37, he praises the actions of Augustus at Actium; 3.1-6 each praise one of the major virtues that was the subject of Augustus’ campaign for moral rejuvenation, and each features an invocation to the Romans the Augustus to uphold these virtues; at 4.2.37-40 he claims that the gods grant nothing greater to the world than Augustus, even if there was a return to the original Golden Age. See Karl Galinsky, *Augustan Culture* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), 93-121 for a detailed explanation of the Augustan principate as hailing a new Golden Age, especially with regards to the *Ara Pacis* or actions of Augustus and Agrippa. See also Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in*

appear to be associated with two aspects of the Iron Age (sailing and combat) which are specifically reported by Ovid in his cycle of the ages in book one:

*Vela dabant ventis (nec adhuc bene noverat illos)
navita; quaeque diu steterant in montibus altis,
fluctibus ignotis insultavere carinae.*⁹²

Sailing, mentioned previously in the cycle of the ages as a sort of wickedness, is here explicitly cited as one of the activities characteristic of the Iron Age. In the same description, Ovid mentions also the bane of combat:

*Iamque nocens ferrum ferroque nocentius aurum
prodierat: prodit bellum, quod pugnat utroque,
sanguineaque manu crepitantia concutit arma.*⁹³

Thus, the text has led me to ask this question: how can these Myrmidons truly fit the role of a Golden Age race if one of their ancient mythological achievements, and even their purpose, was explicitly held up as a negative exemplar of lesser age conduct?

A contemporary of Ovid, Hyginus, also breathes new life into the mythical story of the origins of the Myrmidons. In his *Fabulae*, Hyginus sets forth the following story:

*Iuppiter cum Aeginam Asopi filiam uellet comprimere et Iuno-
nem uereretur, detulit eam in insulam Oenonen et grauidam fecit,
unde natus est Aeacus. hoc Iuno cum rescisset, serpentem in
aquam misit qui eam uenenauit, ex qua qui biberet, debitum na-
turae soluebat. Quod cum amissis sociis Aeacus prae paucitate
hominum morari non posset, formicas intuens petiit ab Ioue ut*

the Age of Augustus (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 167-210 for details about Golden Age imagery on coinage minted by Augustus. See also Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Augustan Rome* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1993), 43-62.

⁹² Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1.132-134. Translation: “Men now spread sails to the winds, though the sailor as yet scarce knew them; and keels of pine which long had stood upon high mountain-sides, now leaped insolently over unknown waves.”

⁹³ *Ibid.* 1.141-143. Translation: “And now baneful iron had come, and gold more baneful than iron; war came, which fights with both, and brandished in its bloody hands the clashing arms.”

*[tot] homines in praesidio sibi daret. tunc Iuppiter formicas in homines transfiguravit, qui Myrmidones sunt appellati quod Graece formicae myrmeces dicuntur; insula autem Aeginae nomen possedit.*⁹⁴

Hyginus links the origin of the Myrmidons to sickness and death caused by a snake of Juno, which poisons the water of Aegina. Aeacus, missing the companions he once had, spies a group of ants and asks from Jove that he give men “for protection for himself.” From this request, Jove creates the Myrmidon population for Aeacus. This variant version of the origin of the Myrmidons *fabula*, although quite brief, is strikingly similar to the version which Ovid puts forth in his *Metamorphoses*: both texts link the origin of the Myrmidons to the wrath of Juno, punishment meted out by her through use of snakes, a sickness which destroys Aegina’s native population, and the creation of the population of Myrmidons closely allied with combat purposes.

The text of Hyginus’ *Fabulae*, and his *fabula* concerning the mythical origins of the Myrmidons, cannot be considered to stand before the episode in book seven of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. As contemporaries, it is quite possible that Hyginus’ variant text was partially inspired by Ovid’s manipulated and expanded episode. It is worth noting, however, that Hyginus preserved the militant characteristics of the Myrmidon population hinted at by Ovid. For Ovid, the *fabula originis* is a part of a larger dialogue between Aeacus and Cephalus in which Cephalus is requesting military aid for an eminent conflict

⁹⁴ Hyginus, *Fabulae* 52. Translation provided by R. Scott Smith and Stephen M. Trzaskoma: “Jupiter wanted to ravish Aegina, Asopus’ daughter, but was afraid of Juno, so he brought her to the island of Oenone and got her pregnant. From this, Aeacus was born. When Juno found this out, she sent a serpent into the water there, which poisoned it all. All who drank from it paid their debt to nature. Soon Aeacus lost most of his men. When he could no longer hold out because of how few men he had left, he begged Jupiter to give him men for protection while watching some ants. Jupiter turned the ants into men, and these are called Myrmidons because the Greek word for “ants” is *myrmices*. The island took the name Aegina.”

with king Minos. Aeacus, in his recounting of the story of the origin of the Myrmidons, asserts that his new stalwart and industrious populace is well-suited for war, and the reconstitution of his populace is, in this way, a fortuitous event. Hyginus, in a compressed format, implies that these ant-born men are well-suited for war when he states Aeacus' request of Jove: "...petiit ab Ioue ut /tot/ homines in praesidio sibi daret."⁹⁵ *Praesidium* has a range of meanings, all militant in essence, ranging from guard to assistance, and use of it in the context of this story champions the militant nature of the populace of ant-born men.

4.2 OVID'S ANTS

Aeacus recounts to Cephalus that it is Jove to whom he prays for divine intervention to end the destruction of plague and restore his populace. When Jove meets this request and contributes his power to the creation of the Myrmidons, echoes of Jove's actions in other contexts within the *corpus* of the *Metamorphoses* arise. As creation exists in a binary opposition to destruction, the creation of the Myrmidons seems to offer an equivalent act to complete an earlier act of destruction by Jove. Book one features a substantial act of destruction, as Jove destroys all of the human populace, except Deucalion and Pyrrha, in response to the ill-natured actions of one man. After returning from the houses of Lycaon, at which place he was treated in a manner unbecoming to a god, Jove decides to unleash a catastrophic flood upon the earth. Prior to unleashing the flood and relating the acts of Lycaon to his fellow gods, Jove sits in counsel with them on Mount Olympus—which is compared to the royal abodes of Rome:

hic locus est quem, si verbis audacia detur

*haud timeam magni dixisse Palatia caeli.*⁹⁶

Jove, as the god preeminent over all the other inhabitants of Mount Olympus, is likened to Augustus, the preeminent Roman figure who dwells on the Palatine Hill. Augustus is even mentioned by name within this description of Mount Olympus and the gods therein:

*Nec tibi grata minus pietas, Auguste, tuorum
quam fuit illa Iovi. Qui postquam voce manuque
murmura conpressit, tenuere silentia cuncti.*⁹⁷

Jove's actions in destroying a dangerous and impious race of humans to allow an appropriately reverent race to flourish in its place is reversed in the origin of the Myrmidons; Jove creates an appropriately reverent and industrious population from ants, following the destruction wrought by the plague.

While Jove as the creator is an obvious positive counterpart to Jove as destroyer, whether Aegina's previous population was equally dangerous seems up for debate: Aeacus relays no issues with his previous populace, even mentioning their piety.⁹⁸ Other details about their behavior and appearance are gleaned from a comment made by Cephalus:

*"Immo ita sit," Cephalus, "crescat tua civibus opto
urbs!" ait. "Adveniens equidem modo gaudia cepi,
cum tam pulchra mihi, tam par aetate iuventus*

⁹⁶ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1.75-76. Translation: "This is the place which, if I may make bold to say it, I would not fear to call the Palatine hill of high heaven."

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 1.205-207. Translation: "Nor is the loyalty of thy subjects, Augustus, less pleasing to thee than that was to Jove. After he, by word and gesture, had checked their outcry, all held their peace."

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 7.561-592. At the appearance of the plague, citizens minister to their sick—despite suffering the effects of the plague for administering such care. Parents also pray at altars for the safety of their children.

*obvia processit. Multos tamen inde requiro,
quos quondam vidi vestra prius urbe receptus.*”⁹⁹

Cephalus describes a beautiful population of fresh-faced youth, all exactly alike, upon which he congratulates Aeacus. At the same time though, he laments that he did not see many of Aeacus’ people whom he had seen on a previous visit. This comment does suggest that the new populace differs from the old—who were recognizable separately. Herein is found the ideal populace of appropriately reverent humans—the new Aeginetans, with their “fair and equal age” are all perfectly alike. They were born from a colony of ants, and have retained the qualities of their former insect lives, chief among which is a communal existence wholly dedicated to a queen (or in this case, a king).

Cephalus’ brief comment, and its hint at the homogeneity of the new Aeginetans, is successively bolstered by Aeacus’ speech: in recounting the plague, he mentions in detail the progression and symptomology of the plague. This progression follows the traditional plague *topos* in Latin literature, and echoes the language of Vergil’s *Georgics* three, as well as other historical and literary accounts of plague.¹⁰⁰ As Aeacus makes clear in his speech, the spread of an epidemic disease is not conscious to political or familial systems, nor is it conscious of systems of affluence and prestige. Epidemic disease, once it appeared in a population, served as a way to break down these boundaries, rendering all citizens simply as infected bodies. Writing on plague discourse,

⁹⁹ Ibid. 7.512-516. Translation: “In truth, as I came hither, I was rejoiced to meet youth so fair, so matched in age. Yet I miss many among them whom I saw before when visiting your city.”

¹⁰⁰ The language of Ovid’s plague episode closely echoes that of Thucydides’ record of the plague at Athens in *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 2.47-55; the language also echoes Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura*, 6.1158-ff.

Girard refers to plague's manifestation as "a process of undifferentiation, a destruction of specificities..."¹⁰¹ Thus, the individuality of the former populace of Aegina is somewhat a subject of direct report in Ovid's *fabula*. However, he draws upon the well-established plague *topos* to suggest the former Aeginetans progress through a spectrum from individuality to heaps of bodies with no individual identities attached. Ultimately, progress along this spectrum results in the creation of a new populace from an identical group of ants.

Further, in engaging with this previous *fabula* from book one, one may be prompted to remember the actions of Lycaon—although they certainly evidence a sort of depravity, they also evidence a very individualistic nature. At Jove's arrival to the houses of Lycaon, Jove gives signal that he is a god and should be treated accordingly:

*Signa dedi venisse deum, vulgusque precari
cooperat: inridet primo pia vota Lycaon,
mox ait 'experiar deus hic, discrimine aperto,
an sit mortalis. Nec erit dubitabile verum.*

Lycaon displays arrogance in his behaviors of mocking the common people for their pious behavior, and his statement that he will investigate further the status of this visitor (god or mortal) may seem unconventional considering the obvious declarations of divinity by Jove—but it also hints at a highly individualistic nature. Rather than align himself with the crowd, Lycaon wishes to set himself apart in his actions. While Lycaon's subsequent actions deepen the depravity of his character, it should not be forgotten that this depravity is nestled in a seed of individuality—which Jove sees as threatening enough to warrant the destruction of the entire human populace.

¹⁰¹ Rene Girard, "The Plague in Literature and Myth," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 15, no. 5 (1974): 833.

The way in which Ovid's *fabula originis* alludes to an earlier *fabula* within the *Metamorphoses* which suggests the threat of individuality and Ovid's careful use of the existing plague *topos* in Latin literature to bolster the homogeneity of the Aeginetans, when taken together, problematize the fantastical resolution of the Aeginian plague. Ovid further highlights the disparity between the joy which Aeacus communicates to Cephalus and the harsh, Iron Age, reality of an ant-born population: his *fabula* is interwoven with assiduous references to the *quercus* and *ilex*, trees which have Golden Age connotations. The *quercus*, a tree sacred to Jove and apparent at many locations dedicated to him, is mentioned in Ovid's cycle of ages as a Golden Age tree from which humans take sustenance:

*contentique cibis nullo cogente creatis
arbuteos fetus montanaeque fraga legebant
cornaque et in duris haerentia mora rubetis
et quae deciderant patula Iovis arbore glandes.*¹⁰²

Although the term *quercus* is absent from the above passage, Ovid's description of the above mentioned tree as "of Jove" makes clear the specific tree to the reader. It should not be taken lightly that a tree which provides sustenance for humans of its own accord in the Golden Age is present in a story which purports the creation of another (quasi) Golden Age race. In book seven, the *quercus* is mentioned specifically as the tree to which Aeacus appeals for aid:

*Forte fuit iuxta patulis rarissima ramis
sacra Iovi quercus de semine Dodonaeo:*¹⁰³

¹⁰² Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1.101-103. Translation: "And men, content with food which came with no one's seeking, gathered the arbuté fruit, strawberries from the mountainsides, cornel-cherries, and acorns fallen from the spreading tree of Jove."

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* 7.621-622. Translation: "It chanced there was an oak nearby with branches unusually widespread, sacred to Jove and of Dodona's stock."

In both instances, Ovid allies the tree with Jove and mentions specifically that the tree has widespread branches (*patula, patulis ramis*). The *ilex* also features prominently in both the descriptions of the Golden Age and the story of the origins of the Myrmidons. In his description of the Golden Age, Ovid refers to the *ilex*, in the same passage as the above mentioned *quercus*, as follows:

*flumina iam lactis, iam flumina nectaris ibant,
flavaque de viridi stillabant ilice mella.*¹⁰⁴

Again, the *ilex* is associated with Golden Age plenitude and nourishment for humankind. Perhaps also worth noting, the verdant *ilex* here gives forth golden honey, a product which is somewhat associated with art.

These Golden Age trees, at their first appearance within the origin of the Myrmidons *fabula*, are commingled with rotten fruit. This language of putrefaction resonates with each subsequent mention of these trees, and serves to darken the Golden Age imagery presented by the appearance of these particular trees. As Aeacus begins to recount his unsuccessful attempts at sacrifice, he says that his now dead citizens lie strewn about as rotten apples:

*‘Quid mihi tunc animi fuit? an, quod debuit esse,
ut vitam odissem et cuperem pars esse meorum?
quo se cumque acies oculorum flexerat, illic
vulgus erat stratum, veluti cum putria motis
poma cadunt ramis agitataque ilice glandes.’*¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 1.111-112. Translation: “Streams of milk and streams of sweet nectar flowed, and yellow honey was distilled from the verdant oak.”

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 7.582-586. Translation: “What were my feelings then? What could they be, but to hate life, and to wish to be with my people? Wherever I looked as I turned my gaze, there were layers of dead, like rotten apples fallen from shaken branches, or acorns from a windblown ilex...”

The language of putrefaction, and the likening of his deceased populace to rotten apples, is fitting for bodies left unburied—but I propose that it serves another purpose. Aeacus here mentions the shaken or windblown *ilex* (*agitata ilice*), a detail which situationally links both trees with every mention of the origin of the Myrmidons. Following his botched attempts at sacrifice, Aeacus looks upon a sacred oak tree and first sees the ants which would become the Myrmidons:

*forte fuit iuxta patulis rarissima ramis
sacra Iovi quercus de semine Dodonaeo;
hic nos frugilegas adspeximus agmine longo
grande onus exiguo formicas ore gerentes
rugosoque suum servantes cortice callem;
dum numerum miror, "totidem, pater optime," dixi,
"tu mihi da cives et inania moenia supple!"
intremuit ramisque sonum sine flamine motis
alta dedit quercus..."¹⁰⁶*

It is this oak tree that appears to Aeacus in his dream that night:

*ante oculos eadem mihi quercus adesse
et ramos totidem totidemque animalia ramis
ferre suis visa est pariterque tremescere motu
graniferumque agmen subiectis spargere in arvis..."¹⁰⁷*

This similar motion to which Aeacus refers is the motion of an oak tree shaken by a non-existent wind. The same insects are, of course, the ants which he looked upon earlier crawling across the trunk of the sacred oak tree. In his dream, they scatter to the ground

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 7.621-630. Translation: "Nearby, a sacred oak tree grown from seed brought thither from Dodona, spread abroad its branches thinly covered with green leaves; and creeping as an army, on the tree we saw a train of ants that carried grain, half-hidden in the deep and wrinkled bark. And while I wondered at the endless line I said, 'Good father, give me citizens of equal number for my empty walls.' Soon as I said those words, though not a wind was moving nor a breeze, —the lofty tree began to tremble, and I heard a sound of motion in its branches."

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 7.637-638. Translation: "The same oak-tree was there before my eyes, with the same branches, and the same insects on its branches, and it shook with a similar motion, and seemed to scatter its column of grain-bearers onto the ground below."

below, just as the *putria poma*, the unburied populace of Aegina. This conflation of similes in lines 585-586 suggests a critical tone, which undermines the seemingly positive solution of the Myrmidon's creation reconstituting the civic body of Aegina and providing men for war and minimizes focus on the level of destruction truly needed to create a race *de novo*.

As Aeacus jovially assures Cephalus that he will contribute many men to the war effort, he again mentions wind—providing a final reference to the non-existent wind which shook the *putria poma* from the *ilex*:

*'hi te ad bella pares annis animisque sequentur,
cum primum qui te feliciter attulit eurus'
(eurus enim attulerat) 'fuerit mutatus in austrum.'*¹⁰⁸

With his repeated allusions to the *putria poma*, the plague ravaged bodies of his former populace, Ovid prompts the reader to give further consideration to the transformation of the Myrmidons and the reconstitution of the civic body of Aegina. The mingling of something putrefying with such a fortuitous event suggests that there are deeper negative aspects which accompany this transformation.

4.3 CONCLUSIONS

Gardner, commenting upon the untenable solutions to post civil war recovery offered by Ovid, remarks that:

...the solution to Aeacus' problem cannot, outside the world of the *Metamorphoses*, serve as an answer to the question of a war depleted population or fill the desire for a collectively loyal citizen body. People are constituted by the histories that shape them and grant them unique identities, no matter how uniform a governing power wishes them to be.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 7.658-660. Translation: "These men will follow you to war, as soon as that favorable east wind that brought you here (it was indeed an easterly that has brought him) has swung around to the south."

¹⁰⁹ Gardner, "Bees, Ants, and the Body Politic," *Vergilius* 60 (2014), 23.

Gardner's comment clearly relates the way in which thoughtless homogeneity fails as a solution to the complicated political and social problems suggested by continual civil conflicts. Through meticulous allusion to the binary opposition between creation and destruction and assiduous flirtations with Golden Age imagery and Iron Age conduct, Ovid's vivid retelling of the *fabula originis* of the Myrmidons prompts reconsideration of the major innovations of the Augustan principate and their effects. Perkell posits that Vergil, likewise, is guiding his readers to the same thoughtful consideration regarding the sustainability of the Augustan principate.¹¹⁰ Whereas a Golden Age race of bees suggests a sort of embracing of Augustan renaissance and the new possibilities it presents for artistic production, Ovid's ants imply a tone that is overwhelmingly critical of the political and social changes required for such an embrace, and even question entirely the possibility of a newly created Golden Age race.

While Ovid does not explicitly speak on his ants' connection to artistic life, their well-established cultural connotations support understanding them as primarily industrious, with no ability to create or appreciate art. As established in chapter two of this manuscript, ants have long been associated with a certain thrift and hardworking spirit that admits no time for leisure. The ant, in his continuous dedication to his labors, admonishes those around him for passing time with the leisurely activity of singing. Its sarcastic remark that the one who sings in the summer can dance (from hunger pains) in the winter communicates not only a belief that leisure, and its artistic products, are wanton, but also that these activities are wholly unnecessary to the dedicated existence

¹¹⁰ See Perkell, "The Golden Age," 3-39.

which the ant lives. Furthermore, the extreme thrift with which the ant lives its life has cultivated in it a covetousness that makes it desirous of the fruits of others' labors—a desire well suited for, and employed in, successive campaigns for territorial expansion. The cultural accretions which grant the ants these undesirable qualities are ever present in the concept of the insect, and cannot be ignored in Ovid's *fabula*; hence, Aeacus' assertion that he did not cheat his new race by obscuring their origins with the name which he decided upon for them:

*Myrmidonasque voco nec origine nomina fraudo.
corpora vidisti; mores, quos ante gerebant,
nunc quoque habent: parcum genus est patiensque
laborumquaesitique tenax et quod quaesita reservet.*¹¹¹

The post-Actian Roman world was heavily shaped by the innovations of Augustus, and many of the ants' more "Iron Age" behaviors map directly onto elements in the principate he sought to eliminate. As a professional fighting force, the Roman army could indeed be bolstered by a stalwart group of men who were loyal only to their leader—and so one application of Ovid's new race is immediately apparent and in agreement with the circumstances which led to their creation within the context of the *fabula*. Truly, the homogeneity of the Myrmidons would make them quite skilled on the battlefield, and even minimize civil conflicts. As Augustus sought to end a period fraught by civil war, it was his wish to quell the sort of extreme schisms in belief systems which had fueled previous civil conflicts, such as the one between himself and Marc Antony. Rather than being a positive aspect of their creation carried over from their insect lives

¹¹¹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 7.654-657. Translation: "I called them Myrmidons, nor did I cheat the name of its origin. You have seen their bodies; the habits which they had before they still keep, a thrifty race, inured to toil, keen in pursuit of gain and keeping what they get."

though, the homogeneity of the Myrmidons is quite a threat to the cultural advance of Rome.

Augustus sought to enforce moral rejuvenation through codification, and it is in answer to these legal maneuvers that the Golden Age race of the Myrmidons stand. Over the course of twenty-seven years, Augustus passed three severely limiting pieces of moral legislation which progressively transitioned private lives into the public and governable sphere. These laws—the *Lex Julia de Maritandis Ordinibus*, *Lex Julia de Adulteriis Coercendis*, and the *Lex Papia Poppea*—introduced provisions which attempted to bolster marriage among “suitable matches” by limiting marriage across social classes, provisions which required widowed women to continually seek remarriage while they were within childbearing years, provisions which made adultery a public crime, and provisions which discriminated against celibacy by providing considerable incentives in career progression to men with children.¹¹² The codification of morals significantly cut short the expected time of licentious and explorative youth to which Roman men were accustomed. For Augustus had already declared that the new age at which one could obtain the office of Praetor was a mere twenty-five years old, some fourteen years younger than was traditional. Men with children were eligible to hold such office at an even younger age under the moral legislation.

The period of life which was the subject of significant contraction as a result of Augustus’ moral rejuvenation project is the time of life in which individuals develop their

¹¹² See Thomas A. J. McGinn, *Prostitution, Sexuality, and the Law in Ancient Rome* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 70-147 for a more in-depth exploration of these laws and their provisions. See Suetonius, *DA* 34 and Dio 54.16-56.7 for descriptions of these laws and attempts to subvert them in ancient literature.

understanding of self, explore their own interests, and embark upon travels. In other words, this was the disappearance of a period of leisure—one of the defining ingredients needed to allow the creation of art. Ovid's ants help to frame the question of to what extent individuality and art can flourish in a society which sets forth increasingly rigid codes for the transition from private citizen to publically active citizen—especially if what is lost in this transition is leisure time, meditative time, exploratory time? The Myrmidons are a powerful answer to that question—to the extent that individuality is lost. Every aspect of the individual is lost, and what remains is but a thoughtless homogeneity in service to the state.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Ovid, who came of age long after the dust at Actium had settled and experienced more of the Augustan reconstruction, emphatically demonstrates that the *bougonia*, as a model for recovery from civil war, will not work: the thoughtless homogeneity of the new hive requires people to be something that they are not—beings without prior histories, loyalties, and family entanglements that complicate, but ultimately enrich the human experience.¹¹³

In this manuscript, I have attempted to deepen understanding of Vergil's bees and Ovid's ants as metaphors for post-civil war recovery which are unsustainable given the rich literary history that colors the authors' use of insects. Neville Morley commented upon the penchant of Romans to read their own political preoccupations onto insect communities, but his comment fails to articulate that the penchant to read our political preoccupations onto the insect kind began much before the intricate insect metaphors of Roman authors were circulated. Ants and bees, especially, have long been the subject of fantastic tales which illustrate their habits in various ways: ants are thrifty and hardworking, although their parsimony has been the subject of divine punishment in the past; bees are associated with the divine, able to entrust their disputes to judge and jury, and even associated with the production of beautiful art. The *Fabulae* of Aesopus, which first appeared in circulation around the seventh or sixth century BCE, inspired a

¹¹³ Gardner, "Bees, Ants, and the Body Politic," 4.

fascination with both insects that charged philosophers to report their behaviors throughout the centuries: ants are indeed hardworking, and they live in communities so advanced that they ransom captured ants and bury their dead; bees are hardworking and dedicated to their community, they partake in no illicit behaviors except battle, and they enjoy leisure when earned. Continual adaptation of the *Fabulae* of Aesopus by authors such as Babrius and Phaedrus, and frequent additions to the encyclopedic volumes of Aristotle by philosophers and biographers such as Pliny the Elder, Plutarch, and Aelian, clearly establish that these insects were a part of a literary tradition well-known to Romans.

It is these cultural accretions that provide the background against which every text which features these insects must be read, and it is through these insects' relationship to art that Vergil and Ovid are able to convey an embrace, or a hesitancy, toward a society which would employ such models of reconstitution. While it is clear that both authors are, in some way, commenting upon the idea that Augustus would bring about a return to, or renewal of, a Golden Age society, the position which either author takes cannot be so easily defined as "for" or "against" the Augustan project. The Golden Ages which appear in Vergil's various poems have been the subject of numerous studies by classicists; Johnston believes that they are a way of embracing a new Golden Age ideal, grounded in agriculture. Perkell states that the Golden Age imagery, and its ambiguities, are a way for Vergil to open up a negotiable space in which his reader could work out their own questions about the nature of the Augustan project. I have shown that one of the central questions which filled this negotiable space concerned the role of art in the principate. For Vergil, the positivity with which he concludes his *Georgics* suggest that he had found

a role for art within the principate and had adopted some amount of confidence in Augustan renaissance. The warm and flourishing landscape from which the *Georgics*' singer concludes his song presents a substantial inversion of the cold and barren landscape in which Orpheus sang. However, the parallel journeys of Aristaeus and Orpheus within *Georgics* four present a dichotomy between the lifestyles and practices of the two, between civically oriented and personally oriented art. Offered as the *mythos* which would complete the *logos* of the bees, Vergil communicates, through their stories of loss and redemption, that something must be forgone in the transition to this new regime: personally oriented art. The bees, while allied to art, lead a Roman life based around traditional values and institutions—and live that life as a community, free of the fiery passion of the individual. It is the fiery passion of the individual that aided Orpheus in compelling the gods of the underworld to release his Eurydice, but also caused him to spend seven years of his life in mourning when his rescue mission failed. And so, Vergil takes up a position of support for Augustus' new Golden Age as he sits and sings from a prosperous landscape—yet, his farmer's warning to curb excessive leisure amongst bees and the sacrifice required by his embrace cannot be forgotten.

Thus, Ovid's episode concerning the origin of the Myrmidons stands in response to Vergil's bees. From a critical position much later in the Augustan principate, Ovid adds to the negotiable space Vergil created, and calls upon his readers to again consider the role of art within the principate. His metaphor, through use of ants, takes up many of the same Golden Age race qualities seen amongst the bees in the *Georgics*: communal existence, harmony with nature, and no illicit desires. But, the Golden Age imagery which Ovid presents is much more heavily shrouded in ambiguity—and such ambiguity

is crucial to understanding how Ovid inserts his Myrmidons into this ongoing dialogue surrounding the moral and legal rejuvenation of the Augustan project. Formed to meet the aims of the Augustan principate, Ovid's new race of ant-born men are composed only of men, and are quickly ready for a war. They share a close relationship with the first sailors, and they are born from a plague and descriptions of gathering rotten apples fallen from Golden Age trees. This curious interweaving of Golden Age imagery with Iron Age conduct, the vocabulary of putrefaction, and the way in which Ovid closely aligns Jove and Augustus, suggest an exceedingly negative response to the Augustan principate, and the role which it allows for art: ants as insects participate in no leisure time, and they also exercise a thoughtless obedience to their king which is, in part, strengthened by their homogeneity.

Ovid's fantastical retelling of the ant-born men, when set beside Vergil's farmer's instructions on apiculture and the nature of bees, highlight the threat which underpins a minimization of the role of art in the Augustan principate: a loss of individuality. Vergil's Aristaeus is held up as a paragon of civically oriented art and piety; He embarks upon only one activity which could benefit solely himself—pursuit of Eurydice. Truly, his efforts, enumerated to his divine mother as he seeks to bolster the strength of his beehives, benefit the community. Orpheus, the perpetual lover, is shown to care only for himself and his Eurydice. His divine pleas seek only a personal restitution, and his willingness to withdraw from the world and lament solitarily show an incongruity to the efforts of Vergil's champion. Ovid enlarges and highlights the loss of individuality in his episode concerning the origin of the Myrmidons. Jove, who lends his power to the creation of Aegina's ant-born men, offers the balancing act to the destruction of the

human race undertaken in book one. The ant-born men offer a solution to the problem Jove faced which caused him to feel the need to punish all humans: the individuality of Lycaon. Furthermore, Ovid uses a compressed plague episode to amplify the loss of individuality among the population of Aegina: as the plague progresses through the populace, the citizens of Aegina move along a spectrum from individuals to plague ridden heaps of bodies compared to rotten apples fallen from the *quercus*. It is in columns gathering these fruits that Aeacus first spots the ants which would become the Myrmidons, and it is from these ants that the new populace is formed. And so, individuality is fully subsumed by a population of stalwart, fresh-faced youths ready to accompany their leader into war.

Ovid inserts a question about the role of art in the principate into the dialogue, but in a way that rejects the conclusion of Vergil. For personally oriented art is integral to the cultural advancement of Roman society, and Augustus' wide reaching moral and legal rejuvenation has substantially minimized the individuality which leads to artistic production like that of Orpheus. Galinsky writes that the thrust of Augustus' new legislation was "that the private life of virtually every Roman now became a matter of the state's concern and regulation."¹¹⁴ In addition to a deletion of the prolonged time of leisure and exploration typical to Roman youth, the formal codification brought private life into the public sphere and forced all citizens toward the same progression through the *cursus honorum*. The thoughtless homogeneity encouraged by such far-reaching and invasive structural changes to Roman society certainly was well-suited to create a crop of loyalists to aid Augustus in his efforts for territorial expansion and reinvigoration of the

¹¹⁴ Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 128.

Roman people, but necessitated a great sacrifice. So, Ovid's ants frame the question of to what extent individuality can flourish in a society that rigidly enforces the transition from private to public citizen and lessens the time of leisure and self-discovery. Ultimately, they compel the reader to consider the aims of the Augustan project and whether such aims justify the casualty of personally oriented art.

Ultimately, Vergil and Ovid were able to employ insects to create such challenging and vivid metaphors for the resolution of a crisis because of the rich and colorful literary history these insects have within the classical literary *corpus*. The distance from the Roman imaginary admitted to these insects as models of Roman recovery helped Roman authors to navigate through difficult political issues, and negotiate the place which their talents and products would occupy in such models. Invocation of the insect kind was especially prominent in the Augustan Age, and both Vergil and Ovid chose to employ insects to help them work through the shifting political landscape that was the constitution and inception of the Augustan principate. While my explorations by no means offer a definitive "demystification" of the overall message held in these insect bound metaphors, it is my hope that by deepening modern understanding of the cultural connotations of bees and ants, I have shed new light on the complicated messages communicated by use of these insects *per se*.

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