Interpreting Sacrificial Ritual in Roman Poetry: Disciplines and their Models[1]

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The interpretation of sacrificial ritual in Roman poetry is a more pressing and rewarding issue than it might have seemed even twenty years ago, when many would have regarded both Roman ritual and Roman literature as equally formalist and arid. We may now be more prepared to entertain the possibility that Roman poetry and Roman ritual are both capable of doing important cultural work, and to accept that the interaction between the two, in the form of poetic engagement with ritual, might likewise be doing important cultural work. It remains, however, very difficult to analyse this interaction between what we call literature and what we call ritual, just as it remains very difficult to analyse any case of interaction between what we call text and what we call context.

1 Disciplines and models

1.1 The need for models

It will be helpful to begin by being as explicit as we can about our models, of ritual, and of literature. I take it that we are always using models of one kind or another, whether we acknowledge it consciously or not. More importantly, we always need models of one kind or another because the mass of data will defeat us otherwise. The lack of explicit models means that we just flounder in the sea of evidence—to prove the point, you have only to read the old Pauly-Wissowa entry under ‹Opfer (Sinn)›. And to see that genuine advances have been made since then thanks to the self-conscious importing of models into Classics from other disciplines, principally anthropology, you have only to read ANDREAS BENDLIN's entries in *Der Neue Pauly* under ‹Opfer: Theorien› and ‹Ausblick›. The challenge is to try and clarify what is at stake in the choice of models, and especially what is at stake in the interchange of

1 I thank the company at the Stanford conference for their extremely helpful responses: I am grateful especially to ALESSANDRO BARCHIESI and SUSAN STEPHENS. Other versions of this paper were given in Leeds, Oxford, Rutgers, and at Damien Nelis's conference on Ovid in Dublin in March 2002; numerous people gave me plenty to think about, but for their highly helpful remarks I must thank above all MONICA GALE and ANN KUTTNER. ANN KUTTNER generously read a first draft, and made me wish that I knew enough about art history to do justice to her suggestions. MIRA SEO also read a first draft, and I owe a great deal to her incisive comments.

models from one discipline to another. We are often told that the boundaries between disciplines are falling away, and that history, anthropology, literary criticism and political science are coalescing. However welcome and exciting such developments may be, there is a risk that we will end up in a position analogous to that adopted by people who deny that the distinctions between genres are relevant to the study of Ovid's *Fasti* or *Metamorphoses*. As a number of recent studies have taught us, the creative transgression of boundaries does not annul the categories, but redefines them.[2]

I take the problem of sacrifice as a test case partly by way of *recantatio* for not having talked about sacrifice as an issue in FEENEY 1998; I gestured towards the problem in the chapter on ‹Ritual› (‹To moderns, sacrifice is a vital aspect of ritual›, 119), and then went on to say nothing specifically about it. Mainly, however, sacrifice appeals as a test case because the role of sacrifice in literature, specifically in Virgil's *Georgics*, has recently occasioned a debate that is highly illuminating for the current enquiry. HABINEK 1990 and THOMAS 1991, followed in particular by MORGAN 1999, have turned a searchlight onto the problem of the sacrificial dimension to the *bugonia* at the climax of the *Georgics*. I advance no new reading of *Georgics* 4, and make no claim to solve any of the issues of interpretation. I choose this starting point because the debate illuminates with particular clarity what is at stake in the confrontation between disciplines and their models. I shall then take up the lead provided by FANTHAM 1992, and follow the theme of sacrifice from Virgil's *Georgics* into Ovid's *Fasti*, in order to provide another test case of the interaction between ritual and literature.

1.2 Models of sacrifice

Before turning directly to Virgil and Ovid I should give an account of the models and working hypotheses I am using in the case of sacrifice and of literature, although I remain aware that the motivations for an individual's preferences and practices in this regard must, at some level, remain opaque to him or her. Some first principles, then, so far as I have access to them, brusquely presented.[3]

The meaning of sacrifice is not a question of origin. In the debate over this question in HAMERTON-KELLY's *Violent Origins* between WALTER BURKERT, RENÉ GIRARD and JONATHAN Z. SMITH, it is SMITH who clearly emerges triumphant. The meaning of ritual is not to be found in the survival of some prehistoric trace, whether it be neolithic hunting guilt (BURKERT) or a Remus/Abel human scapegoat sacrifice (GIRARD); the meaning of ritual is not, as SMITH puts it, ‹somehow grounded in «brute fact»›, but instead in what he calls ‹the work and imagination and intellection of culture.›[4] It is always the current work of ritual that matters, not where it might once have come from. This may appear to be a hard perspective for students of the ancient world to work with, since the antiquarian religious work of the ancients is so

2 CONTE 1986, 100–29; HINDS 1987 and 2000; BARCHIESI 2001a.
3 For a fuller discussion and documentation of a number of these issues, see FEENEY 1998.
4 SMITH in HAMERTON-KELLY 1987, 198.

overwhelmingly aetiological. The methodology of the ancients, however, gives no ground for modern foundationalist theories of explanation by historical origin, since, as we shall see in this paper, ancient aetiological methods are so often intent on ‹muddying the waters of the source› and making the origin of sacrifice a problem.[5]

For all his scepticism about origins, SMITH does offer, more or less as a *jeu d'esprit*, an aetiological myth for the origin of animal sacrifice which is far more historically plausible than BURKERT's or GIRARD's, namely, the selective culling of domesticated animals in breeding. The Roman literary evidence certainly fits SMITH's myth, as we shall see, linking sacrifice always with the world of the agriculturalist and his domesticated animals, not with hunting wild animals. It is salutary to read the work of JARED DIAMOND, and to learn how bizarre domestication is, how recent it is as part of our species' history, and how few animal species have ever successfully undergone it.[6] We may think of the wild animal as the numinous and uncanny, but from an evolutionary point of view the really weird freaks are all around us, in the shape of the domesticated animals.

Still, SMITH affects not to care if his origin myth is true or not, because for him the meaning and work of ritual are contemporary and ongoing, however apparently fossilised the forms. According to him, and to CATHERINE BELL, whose work develops his in many respects, ritual is not precultural, nor is it foundational. This anti-foundational way of looking at ritual is rather at odds with the traditional assumptions of structuralism or symbolic anthropology, as represented in Classics particularly by such figures as VERNANT, VIDAL-NAQUET, DETIENNE, and, in his rather different way, BURKERT.[7]

Now, the impact of structuralism and of symbolic anthropology on the study of ancient religion has been extremely valuable, and will certainly leave its traces in any imaginable future synthesis, but its main drawback is the way that it posits an overarching holistic and unifying thought-world for any given society, a *mentalité*. Such an approach almost inevitably ends up seeing ritual as an expression of this overarching *mentalité*, and especially as underpinning it in a foundational sense. But such a supposition is very dubious, and MAURICE BLOCH in particular has exposed its weaknesses, above all its tendency to obscure the fact that ritual is only one of many *mentalités* or knowledge-systems in any society, and by no means *the* foundational knowledge-system; ritual is, or can be, extremely self-contained, so that it cannot readily be ‹read off› as a metaphor for other knowledge-systems or power-structures in the society.[8] WILKINS has recently explored this question in connection with the language of the Iguvine Tablets: ‹ritual language inhabits a specialised domain even within the subject culture and within the whole context of the practice and evolution of the social uses of language. Ritual language ... can be seen to have its own domain, and within that domain, its own rules.›[9] According to

5 To borrow the phrase used of Ovid by BARCHIESI 1997, 218.
6 DIAMOND 1997, 157–75, showing that only five species are really significant in the history of domestication (sheep, goat, cow, pig and horse).
7 An overview of the French school in Buxton 1981.
8 BLOCH 1989, esp. Ch. 1.
9 WILKINS 1994, 164; my thanks to ANN KUTTNER for this reference.

these approaches, there is no one *mentalité* that fits a whole society, whether that *mentalité* is identified with ritual or anything else.[10] Although BLOCH has his eye on anthropology and does not explicitly take account of New Historicism or Cultural Poetics, his criticisms could clearly be extended by analogy to take in these other varieties of anthropologically-derived holism; I shall return to these questions at the end of the paper.

A corollary to this scepticism about one great overarching system is that one must expect to find a multiplicity of interpretations of ritual activity.[11] *The* Roman attitude to sacrifice is not a recoverable entity; indeed, sacrifice at Rome is described by RICHARD GORDON as being ‹to a degree a vacant sign.›[12] At this point we must also remind ourselves that ritual is not a discrete category in ancient thought, and nor is sacrifice exactly a discrete subcategory of it.[13] In Rome there is no Platonic form or idea of sacrifice ‹out there›, which is then represented or captured more or less imperfectly by an artist. When we conduct a quasi-anthropological search for the meaning of ritual or of sacrifice in ancient texts, our object of enquiry is very much a modern construct, for ancient authors have extremely little in the way of explicit theorising about sacrifice: ‹Although modern scholars may construct an explanation of Roman sacrifice by putting into modern words themes and associations which were almost entirely implicit and unspoken for the actors, the system itself produced no theological account of the meaning and purpose of sacrifice.›[14] In fact, as I tried to show earlier in the case of divinity, and as I shall try to argue here in the case of sacrifice, at Rome, just as in Greece, it was primarily what we call literature that did the job of exploring what GORDON calls the ‹meaning and purpose› of divinity or sacrifice.

1.3 Models of literature

The engagement with sacrifice in literary texts adds more layers of complication to this already complicated picture. No literary text offers us a *representation*, in the strict sense, of anything, let alone sacrifice. In making this claim I am of course employing a model from literary criticism or hermeneutics, or, rather, signalling a shared concern from a number of different literary critical or hermeneutic models, whether the Contean generic approach, deconstruction, or even the old New Criticism. The idea that literary texts represent or reflect reality is having an odd comeback, but I think we have to take very seriously the objections to this idea which are posed by such literary-critical or hermeneutic models. At the most basic level, any text or genre has its own priorities, traditions, methodologies. Further, Roman literature is very self-conscious about its own distinctive way of engaging

10 See also LLOYD 1990 for a trenchant criticism of the *mentalité* mentalité.
11 FEENEY 1998, 127–9.
12 GORDON 1990, 206; cf. *Der Neue Pauly*, 8.1250: ‹Da die röm. Rel. ein offenes, fließendes system war, bleibt die Suche nach *einer* «Bed.» wohl fruchtlos.›
13 FEENEY 1998, 117–18. Arguably, ritual is not a discrete category of inquiry at any time or place: such is the main argument of BELL 1997.
14 GORDON 1990, 206.

with ritual.[15] Roman authors know perfectly well that ritual in their texts is not a facsimile of ritual in other contexts, just as they know that anything in their texts is not a facsimile of anything in other contexts. The apparently real and concrete and grounded nature of sacrificial ritual is so strongly present to us that we can fall into making assumptions about the transparency of literature's engagement with sacrifice that would arouse scepticism or derision if we entertained them in the case of, for example, love elegy's engagement with biography or carnality.[16] Again, I return to these issues of representation and textuality at the end of the paper.

2 Virgil's *Georgics*

2.1 Walter Burkert in the *Georgics*

Many of the issues I have been discussing so far are visible, or just beneath the surface, in the starkly differing papers on the *bugonia* in the *Georgics* by THOMAS HABINEK and then, in response, by RICHARD THOMAS. It is clear that THOMAS's fundamental objection to HABINEK's method is that he sees HABINEK as importing from Greek studies a structuralist anthropological model whose modern themes and associations, according to THOMAS, may conceivably have something to do with the Greek world but have nothing to do with the Roman world.[17]

In some respects THOMAS's criticisms are cogent, especially when he objects to HABINEK's use of the standard Greek sacrificial model to dictate a necessarily ameliorative interpretation of the resurrection of the bee community: as HABINEK puts it: ‹Social interaction and human culture come to be seen in a positive light, and, with them, the institution of sacrifice that makes their existence possible.›[18] THOMAS is right to say that this is an overly procrustean imposition of a particular model, in which the model is driving the interpretation, and he makes some telling points in detail, but his fundamental methodological reservation about HABINEK's methodology is ill-founded. In trying to locate the sacral or quasi-sacral passages of the *Georgics* explicitly within some larger interpretative context, HABINEK may be on the wrong train but he is on the right track.[19] The friction between the sacrificial patterns inside and outside the poem demands interpretation. To THOMAS, however, the very use of an extra-literary sacrificial model is illicit, as becomes clear in a series of rhetorical questions towards the end of his article, in the course of which he quotes HABINEK's characterisation of sacrifice: ‹Can we ever say of «the Romans» (or even «the Greeks» for that matter) that for them «sacrifice is a means of establishing the relationship between human and divine, of defining the order of society and the universe, and of restoring that order when it has been disrupted»

15 FEENEY 1998, 32–8; BARCHIESI 2000 and 2002.
16 See, e. g., WYKE 2002 for a discussion of the related issues in elegy.
17 THOMAS 1991, 216f.
18 HABINEK 1990, 216.
19 A line I stole, with full apparel, from Professor JOSEPH FARRELL—whom it is a pleasure to thank for his characteristically generous and helpful correspondence on these problems.

(p. 212)—even if we add footnotes referring to Burkerts theories on Greek religion? Would not some Romans find such a proposition as ridiculous and trite as we do? Would not some be as horrified and repulsed at witnessing the slaughter of oxen as we would? Or would they feel that they had thereby affirmed correct relations with the gods—whoever they were?›[20]

There were indeed various views on the merits of animal sacrifice both in the Roman and Greek worlds, and we shall be seeing some horror and revulsion expressed by Virgil and especially by Ovid later in the paper. Nonetheless, a good deal of Roman state cult is underpinned precisely by some such view of ritual and sacrifice as maintaining order between the state and its gods, the *pax deorum*, and restoring that order when it has been disrupted.[21] HABINEK's Burkertian formulae are too vague to serve as determinative guides for the exegesis of an immensely complicated literary text, as THOMAS quite rightly points out, but the model itself may have something to offer a literary reading, so long as it is not regarded as homogeneous and unitary, or prescriptive in terms of the literary readings it can enable or disable, but instead as an initial set of intellectual or imaginative possibilities. The ritual and sacrifical underpinning of the *pax deorum* is the view presupposed by many Roman observers of Roman state cult, and it is the view presupposed by Virgil in the *Georgics*: as may be seen in particular, when Cyrene tells Aristaeus to supplicate the nymphs and seek *pacem*, so that they will in return grant pardon in response to his prayers, and cease their anger.[22] Virgil does not take over such a view casually or by default because that is how his society as a whole just naturally saw things, but for his particular purposes: he takes this selective point of view as his starting point not in order to replicate it, but in order to give power to his own departures.

Before investigating these departures of Virgil, we need to consider another important methodological point highlighted by THOMAS's criticisms of HABINEK. As we have seen, THOMAS objects in principle to the application of a Burkertian Greek sacrificial model to a Latin literary text, largely on the grounds that the model is not framed in terms that would have been accessible to the original participants: Greeks did not think in these terms about sacrifice, and nor did Romans. This is what GORDON describes, in the words already quoted,[23] as ‹constructing an explanation of Roman sacrifice by putting into modern words themes and associations which were almost entirely implicit and unspoken for the actors.› The difference, of course, is that GORDON sees this hermeneutic conundrum as inevitable, whereas THOMAS sees it as illicit and anachronistic. But GORDON is right. Any historical or anthropological project is going to need models or frames of analysis that are incongruent with the experience of the participants. We cannot *be*

20 THOMAS 1991, 217.
21 RÜPKE 2001.
22 4.534–6: *namque dabunt ueniam uotis, irasque remittent.* On the linking of *pax* and *uenia*, see WISSOWA 1912, 390–1, and on the remission of divine *ira* in response to human *uota* when the *pax deorum* is breached, see RÜPKE 2001, 21. It is interesting that MYNORS 1990 ad loc. comments on the traditional language of *pax* and *uenia*, while THOMAS 1988 does not.
23 See p. 4.

them, and we must process the data into some kind of shape for it to make any sense to us.[24]

The challenge for the historian or anthropologist is to be aware of this inevitable incongruity or disparity between the observer's and participant's experience, and so to avoid two opposite errors: one is to project the model onto the participants, and claim that they really knew this structure, though maybe only subconsciously—GORDON is in fact rather close to this position; the other is to say that the facts speak for themselves and do not need ordering in a structure for an outsider to get a grasp on them. For the purposes of analysis, the participants' perspective is regularly unsatisfying. DIRK OBBINK puts the point very well in his discussion of ancient and modern theories of sacrifice: ‹I do not want to suggest that ancient theories in the matter have necessarily any greater chance than modern theories of being right. They are often demonstrably wrong: paradoxically, their very proximity in time and cultural context to the phenomena in question puts them at a distinct heuristic disadvantage.›[25]

2.2 Patterns of sacrifice in the *Georgics*

As a result of his hostility to what he sees as a New-Historicist imposition of non-literary models, THOMAS virtually ends up implying that sacrifice is not important or interesting to Virgil. He points to the catastrophic failure of the one real sacrifice narrated in the poem, during the Noric plague in Book 3 (486–493), as if to suggest that the quest for a meaning to sacrifice in the *Georgics* is pointless.[26] It is certainly true that the catastrophic failure of the recognisably Roman and ritually correct performance of sacrifice in Book 3 highlights the absence of regular and successful sacrificial practice elsewhere in the poem. There is indeed very little reference to normative Roman sacrificial practice in the *Georgics*. In Book 1 Virgil glances at the *felix hostia* of the *Cerealia*, but does not describe its sacrifice—and his offering of honey, milk, and wine together has no Roman parallel (1.343–350); at 2.192–4 he evokes a sacrifice complete with wine and ‹steaming entrails› (*fumantia exta*, 194); at 2.380 he gives an aetiology for the sacrifice of the goat to Bacchus (not actually part of Roman cult at all), and follows it up with an evocation of of the sacrifice of the goat (2.393–6); at 2.536–8 he alludes to the impious feasting on plough-oxen that marks the end of the golden age, in a manner that is ultimately inextricable from a sacrificial reference, however deliberately inexplicit it remains;[27] and at 2.146–8 and 3.23 he alludes to, without narrating, the slaughter of oxen at the Roman triumph.[28]

We never, then, actually see a regular Roman sacrifice in the *Georgics;* if modern students of sacrifice are frustrated by this state of affairs, they should reflect that

24 The first chapter of KENNEDY 1993 is indispensable on this topic.
25 OBBINK 1993, 80. For further discussion of this interpretative paradox, see FEENEY 1995, 311f.
26 THOMAS 1991, 215–16.
27 So, rightly, DYSON 1996, 278f. and GALE 2000, 107 n. 161.
28 Cf. 3.160, where sacrifice is one of the reasons for rearing oxen.

Virgil is not interested in documentary realism or helpful proleptic collaboration. His interest in sacrifice runs deeper, in fact, than one might gather from the list in the previous paragraph. MONICA GALE has made the best and most sustained case for Virgil's ability to use sacrifice as a systematic way of thinking about human beings' relationship with animals, and, by extension, with the natural world as a whole.[29] She traces a developing process of disenchantment or reorientation through the poem, with the institution being apparently taken for granted in the first book, and then gradually denaturalised, as empathy for the sacrificial victim increases and the freakish nature of human interaction with the rest of the natural world is systematically unlayered.

In his wish to argue against HABINEK's use of external models, THOMAS comes very close to saying that we may only read with an eye to sacrificial connotation if the text enacts a sacrifice with punctilious correctness. As I suggested above, however, we should expect that literature will not represent—*re*-present—patterns of action from other spheres. That is not where the *techne* of the poet resides, as Aristotle taught us. We should not be surprised by the fact that Virgil's most sustained engagements with sacrificial patterns come at two highly anomalous moments—the Noric plague and the *bugonia*.

The final book of the poem ends, before the *sphragis*, with the ritual action performed by Aristaeus to placate the nymphs and the shades of Orpheus and Eurydice, a ritual action which results in the completely unexpected emergence of the bees, nine days later, from the rotting carcasses of the slaughtered oxen (4.534–558).[30] In many respects HARRISON is basically right to say that ‹the Aristaeus epyllion is above all an illustration in mythological form of orthodox Roman procedure in a plague context›.[31] But it is a strange fantasy, with a strangely refracted relation to the supposedly actual Egyptian practice of *bugonia*, let alone to contemporary Roman practice.[32] Virgil tells us what Egyptian *bugonia* is like earlier in Book 4, and it is not at all like what Aristaeus does.[33]

At this point I must mention the Stanford connection. SUSAN STEPHENS and ALESSANDRO BARCHIESI are both independently working on *bugonia* and sacrifice in Callimachus' Egypt and Virgil's Italy, and they have both been extremely generous in helping me see the larger parameters for the ritual Virgil narrates at the end of his poem. It is clear from their work that the end of the *Georgics* is part of a Virgilian and Augustan debate with a Callimachean and Ptolemaic debate over

29 GALE 2000, esp. 101–112.

30 MYNORS 1990, 321, following Servius *ad* 4.553, rightly stresses that the resurrection of the bees from the carcasses is not forseen by Cyrene.

31 HARRISON 1979, 52 n. 6.

32 The ritual of leaving sacrificial victims unburnt and unconsumed is actually not as unheard-of as is often claimed: see MYNORS 1990, 321 for the *animalis hostia* or *animale sacrificium*, in which only the victim's life (*anima*) was offered to the deity (his reference to Macrobius' *Saturnalia* should be 3.5. 1–5). LATTE 1960, 379 is no doubt correct to say that this category is a piece of antiquarian casuistry with no consequence for cult practice, but the presence of the category in the tradition offers Virgil enough purchase.

33 THOMAS 1988, on 538–58. STEPHEN HINDS (*apud* MYERS 1994, 155 n. 86) points out how the fantastic nature of Virgil's *bugonia* is picked up in the wonderful joke of Ovid's Pythagoras, who refers to *bugonia* as *cognita res usu*, when *libro* would be nearer the mark (*Met.* 15.365).

cultural norms and centres of gravity. Callimachus had appropriated Greek norms to an Egyptian context (so STEPHENS and see commentary, pp. 157 ff.); the Aristaeus epyllion in particular combats Callimachus' appropriation of Greek norms to Egypt by appropriating them back to Hellas, and to Italy (so BARCHIESI); the Egyptian practice of *bugonia* is barbarised and distanced and made groundless as a base for Greco-Roman sacrificial practice (so STEPHENS and BARCHIESI combined). These are very rich projects, and when they are published they will make a big difference to our readings of Callimachus and Virgil.

For my present purposes, what is most fruitful about these projects is how much light they shed on the long-standing problem of the bizarre nature of the aetiology at this climactic moment of the poem. The very nature of aetiology is called into question here, even at the level of the bad casting as *protos heuretes* of Aristaeus, who has to be told *everything*.[34] What exactly is being explained by its origin in the fourth *Georgic*? *Bugonia*, strictly speaking, but that is really a blind. HARRISON and HABINEK are right to suggest that the propitiatory practice of Aristaeus adumbrates contemporary Roman practice, but the links between that past moment and current practice are tenuous, to say the least. Virgil keeps going back and back to ‹explain› the present, but there is no ultimate grounding for his explanation. Sacrifice is inextricably enmeshed in contemporary society, but it cannot be given a deep foundation in some determining earlier, extra-cultural moment.[35]

How such a reading meshes with the contemporary self-representation of the Princeps is an open question. Each reader must still interpret the consequences of the sacrificial possibilities at the climax of the poem being treated in this grotesque and self-consciously fantastic way at a time when the princeps himself is already well embarked on his career-long practice of making sacrifice and its representation central to the new Rome and the role of its new leader.[36] BARCHIESI well brings out how crucial the power of origins was to the image of the Princeps as sacrificer: ‹One of the reasons for the great importance and diffusion of this visual representation of the sacrifice is that this rite is repeated in time and guarantees its own origins.›[37]

THOMAS, in other words, could have made his own ‹pessimistic› reading of the end of the *Georgics* more convincing by taking the sacrificial models more seriously. But then so could HABINEK have made his own ‹optimistic› reading more convincing by looking more carefully at what sacrifice might be represented as doing in Caesar's Rome rather than in archaic Greek texts. Virgil's text needs to be historically contextualised, but not in a way that implies that there is *a* reading of sacrifice ‹itself› out there in the world, one unifying interpretation, that will effect closure: ELSNER's paper on the Ara Pacis, a powerful exposition of the polysemic resonances of sacrifice in Virgil's society, makes it plain how hard it is to enlist the

34 PUTNAM 1979, 314 n. 61: ‹He seems throughout the episode to have little or no self-reliance or insight of his own. He does what he is told, not what he himself determines.› My thanks to MIRA SEO for pointing this out to me.

35 My debt to SMITH in HAMERTON-KELLY 1987 is obvious, and I must also acknowledge my debt to a conversation on this point with DAVID LEITAO at the Stanford conference.

36 GORDON 1990.

37 BARCHIESI 1997, 219.

institution as a closural device.[38] Our reading of sacrifice, in other words, is part of a loop that leads into our reading of the poem and back out again. DON FOWLER has acutely shown that what is at stake between HABINEK and THOMAS is a mutually self-reinforcing attitude towards closure inside and outside the text: the issue of whether sacrifice is more open or more closed as an institution folds back into the issue of whether *Georgics* 4 is read as a text with more or less closure.[39]

The same issue is fundamental to LLEWELYN MORGAN's reading of the *bugonia*.[40] He argues, rather as HABINEK does, that the ritual at the end of the poem is redemptive, optimistically looking forward to a regeneration, and that it is a model for a redemptive social regeneration out of the impious sacrifices of the civil wars, under the new reign of Caesar Octavian. He acknowledges the transgressive and anomalous dimensions to the sacrificial actions at the end of the poem, but he sees them as part of a virtuous circle—the more impious and bloody the sacrifice, the more powerful and creative the redemption. MORGAN uses his reading of sacrifice to elucidate vividly some of the poem's main sources of power, showing in particular how the Virgilian fascination with the creativity of violence and the violence of creativity is illuminated by the generation of life from sacrificial death. Yet, as in the argument of HABINEK, there is an instinct to close down the open problems of the text by referring them to a supposedly stable external referent.[41] MORGAN, again rather like HABINEK, sees the institution of sacrifice as grounded in paradox, but as still bearing a unified (if paradoxical) meaning.[42] Another difficulty with his overall argument is that it cannot pass the KARL POPPER test: it is unfalsifiable. The more impiety and horror an opponent adduces against the argument for the redemptive power of sacrifice, the more powerful the argument becomes—the more grotesque and appalling the sacrifice, the more paradoxically powerful the redemption. Some Roman readers may well have read the *bugonia* in this way, but I cannot believe that the poem makes such a reading inevitable.

MORGAN's argument also bestows a moral justification on a pattern that Virgil may be representing as merely inevitable. Is all this killing, in sacrifice or in civil war, genuinely redemptive and constructive, or is it only a pattern of action that Romans are locked into?[43] If there is no way in to sacrifice, no validating ground of origin, then it appears that there is no way out either, no way of getting off the treadmill. A main source of the power of the Romulus and Remus myth, newly significant in the civil wars, is its circularity, most memorably evoked in Horace's *Epode* 7.[44] The killings of the civil war are not necessarily the prologue to a

38 ELSNER 1991. The general point about the illusory power of extra-textual referents to establish closure is eloquently made by FOWLER 2000, 173–4, 192.

39 FOWLER 2000, 286–7.

40 MORGAN 1999.

41 FELDHERR 2002, 70–1, makes a very powerful case against a similar appeal to sacrifice in MORGAN 1998; I have found his whole argument very helpful.

42 MORGAN 1999, esp. 113–16.

43 PUTNAM 2000, 159 well points out that ‹as in the case of Remus' death, the negative energy associated with bugonia begets not some idealizing higher ethical scheme but another set of bees and presumably a renewal of their inherently martial identities›. Cf. PERKELL 1989, 76, on how for the ancients ‹*bougonia* apparently signified an exchange of death for life rather than rebirth or resurrection›.

44 Compare the hideous repetitious force of *iterum* and *bis* in the description of the civil war battlefields at the end of *Georgics* 1 (490–1).

definitive settlement, but may be only a replaying of a prototypical pattern of events. The institution of sacrifice would corroborate the claustrophobic power of this approach, since one of the keys to sacrifice is its repetitiveness: the same thing happens again and again, at the same time, in the same place.[45] If we are looking for redemption, circularity may be counterproductive.

Sacrifice emerges as GORDON's ‹vacant sign› indeed. As CATHERINE BELL puts it, ‹the strategies of ritual may well generate the sense of a basic and compelling conflict or opposition in light of which other contrasts are orchestrated›.[46] In Virgil's case, the most important of these contrasts would be between order and entropy, the life of the individual and of society, and between the life of the Golden and the Iron Age. Is sacrifice a normative way of keeping the world going round, a sacred act, or is it itself a symptom, a trace of humanity's denatured state, a sign of impiety, the definitive mark of the civilised imperial power?

3 Ovid's *Fasti*

3.1 The two faces of Ceres

In following the theme of sacrifice from the *Georgics* to the *Fasti*, my starting point is ELAINE FANTHAM's important article on Ovid and the *Georgics*, in which she makes an entirely convincing case for Ovid responding thoughtfully and systematically to the *Georgics* throughout the *Fasti* in his treatment of sacrifice and the life of agriculture.[47] FANTHAM begins by examining Ovid's two principal passages about the goddess Ceres, and gives a detailed account of the evident contradictions between them.

The first passage offers an image of Ceres as the emblem of the Iron Age, as the Agonalia of January 9th give Ovid the opportunity for his first and programmatic account of animal sacrifice (1.335–456). It is important for Ovid to have animal sacrifice early on, not just because he is a Hesiodic poet, but because he is a good neoteric, and he follows the neoteric pattern isolated by J. E. G. ZETZEL in an important article: Ovid likes to start where Virgil ends.[48] Before navigation and commerce there was simple non-animal sacrifice (337–8), but the goddess of agriculture, once we move into the Iron Age of ploughing and sailing, was the first to demand animal sacrifice in the form of a sow (349); and Ovid goes on to describe how the gods demand and receive animal sacrifice of every kind, cutting a swathe through the animal kingdom. He tells us of the goat (354) and the innocent ox and sheep (362)—and with the ox he introduces his own version of the Aristaeus story (362–380), thereby capitalising on the sleight of hand by which Virgil was able to associate animal sacrifice within the aetiological penumbra of the *bugonia*.[49] The

45 My thanks to NICHOLAS PURCELL for stressing to me the importance of the repetitiveness of ritual.

46 BELL 1992, 37.

47 Cf. GALE 2000, 107–9.

48 ZETZEL 1983.

49 GALE 2000, 111 remarks that Ovid's move offers a perceptive commentary on Virgil.

killing of the ploughing ox is the climax of this section (383f.), and the killing of the ploughing ox, regularly, but not invariably, associated with its sacrifice, is the definitive mark of the end of the Golden Age and of man's estrangement from nature in Aratus, the end of *Georgics* 2, and in Pythagoras' speech in *Metamorphoses* 15.[50] After the ox there follow the horse (385), deer (389), dog (390), and ass (391). Later, in Book 4 (681–712), we learn that Ceres also likes burning foxes, and at the end of that same book (941f.) we are told that a dog is sacrificed on April 25th for the purely contingent reason that he shares a name with the dog star. In the Book 1 programmatic passage, after the aetiology of ass-sacrifice, with the story of Priapus and Lotis (391–440), Ovid returns to the catalogue of victims, listing all the birds that are killed (441–456), because they are too communicative, revealing to human diviners what the gods are thinking.

The cruel impiety of life in the post-golden age appears to be radical, with greedy, ruthless and competitive gods enforcing upon humans the requirement of treating animals, even their workmates, as helpless and terrified agents in the game of communication played out before the altars. The gods make us treat animals as enemies: Ovid derives the name for sacrificial victim, *hostia*, from conquered enemies;[51] and he does not mean just the human enemies whose defeat is marked by sacrifice to the gods. And at the very beginning of this long programmatic section we are told that one of the etymologies for *Agonalia*, the first sacrifice, is *agonia*, the agony, *metus* of the sacrificial victims as they see the knives in the waterbowls (1.327f.).[52] This stark picture of current life is corroborated by a glimpse of the Arcadian Golden Age, before the birth of Jupiter (2.289–298); here there is no ploughing, no imperial domination of the land through agriculture, no *usus* made of other animals, the horse or the sheep.

To cap this programmatic section on animal sacrifice, animal sacrifice closes the first book, with pregnant sows being sacrificed to Ceres and Tellus (1.671f.) and oxen at the altar of Pax (720); the so-called Italia relief of the Ara Pacis is therefore presumably identified by Ovid with Ceres, or Tellus, or both (1.709–722).[53] The Ara Pacis, with its *bucrania* over scenes of animal and vegetable fertility and abundance, is one of the monuments in Ovid's Rome which shows the highest degree of self-consciousness about how much killing has to go on in order to maintain the cycles, as the important article of ELSNER 1991 demonstrates.[54]

LEFÈVRE 1976, 46 and PORTE 1985, 45, 444–5 see that Ovid's story of Aristaeus is taken over from Virgil and is not itself an aition for ox-sacrifice, but do not observe that Ovid is cashing in a Virgilian trick in this feint.

50 Aratus *Phaen.* 132; Virg. *Georg.* 2.536–8; Ov. *Met.* 15.120–1; GALE 2000, 107f. Note how, as soon as the old man Hyrieus in *Fasti* 5 recognises the disguised Jupiter, the presiding deity of the Iron Age, he sacrifices his plough-ox to him (*cultorem pauperis agni*, 515).

51 Ov. 1.336: *hostibus a domitis.*

52 Cf. FANTHAM 1992, 47: I am indebted throughout to her analysis.

53 See GALINSKY 1996, 148–9 for the various identifications of the Italia relief.

54 It is important to realise, as ANN KUTTNER points out to me, that the *bucrania* on the Ara Pacis are a continuation of a sacrificial and sculptural programme common in the post-Classical Greek world, and in Italy as well: NILSSON 1955, 1.88.

The next Ceres passage comes in Book 4 (393–620). When Ovid discusses the sacrifices appropriate to the *Cerealia*, we see a completely different emphasis, as FANTHAM shows in detail. Especially, here we are enjoined to perform bloodless sacrifice, of spelt, salt and incense, and to shun the ox as a sacrificial victim, so as to avoid the impiety of killing our fellow-worker (4.413–416):

A boue succincti cultros remouete ministri:
bos aret; ignauam sacrificate suem.
apta iugo ceruix non est ferienda securi:
uiuat et in dura saepe laboret humo.

Attendants, with your tucked-up clothing, remove your sacrificial knives from the ox: let the ox plough; sacrifice the slothful sow. The neck fitted for the yoke should not be struck by the ax; let the ox live and often toil in the hard soil.

These lines are only the most dramatic case of a systematic contrast with the atmosphere of the *Agonalia* in Book 1.[55] In Book 4 we do not see the bloodthirsty Ceres of Book 1; she is *prima Ceres* in 4.401 as the first deity to boost human diet up the food chain from acorns to corn, not the *prima Ceres* of 1.349, the first deity to demand animal sacrifice as revenge on the animal kingdom. Further, Ovid hides the iron of the Iron Age (405f.), apparently mitigating Ceres' reign. Finally, the just quoted prayer that the plough ox should be spared the sacrificial axe is a hoped-for Golden Age survival into the present age, rather reminiscent of the strange chronological disturbances one so regularly encounters in the *Georgics*.

3.2 The one face of Ceres

In terms of ritual and aetiology, however, the whole passage in Book 4 is not, in the end, as divergent as it may seem from the devastating view taken of animal sacrifice in the *Agonalia* section of Book 1. FANTHAM argues that the first passage is so bitter and so different from the second one that the difference has to be explained biographically as the result of Ovid's disillusionment with his society and its religion in exile. If the inconsistencies are not so radical, we may be less inclined to fall back on a biographical explanation. To begin with, Ceres is not disassociated from sacrifice even in Book 4. Just as in Book 1, Ceres here continues to receive her proper sacrifice of the sow (4.414). And, as we know from the end of Book 1, the peace she delights in is guaranteed by the sacrifices of the white ox at the Ara Pacis of the pacific leader (4.407f.). Above all, it is very important to keep reading from the end of this ritual prescription section into the immediately following myth of the rape of Proserpina, especially since Ovid himself says that it is very apposite to do so: ‹The [common-]place itself [in my poem/in the calendar] demands that I make public the rape of the virgin.›[56]

We are not disappointed. When Ceres misses Proserpina and goes searching for her, she is immediately compared to the mother cow in Lucretius who has lost her calf to the operators of the sacrifice mill (Lucr. 2.352–9):

55 Again, see FANTHAM 1992 for a full analysis and discussion.

56 4.417: *exigit ipse locus raptus ut uirginis edam.* On the manifold wit of this line, see BARCHIESI 1997, 75f.

nam saepe ante deum uitulus delubra decora
turicremas propter mactatus concidit aras,
sanguinis expirans calidum de pectore flumen;
at mater uiridis saltus orbata peragrans
quaerit humi pedibus uestigia pressa bisulcis,
omnia conuisens oculis loca si queat usquam
conspicere amissum fetum, completque querelis
frondiferum nemus adsistens ...

For often before the fine shrines of the gods a calf falls, sacrificed beside the incense-burning altars, breathing out a warm stream of blood from its chest; but the mother, bereaved, wanders through the green glades and looks on the ground for the tracks made by the cloven hoofs, looking over all the places to see if she may anywhere catch a glimpse of her lost offspring, and stops and fills the leafy grove with her laments ...

And here is Ceres (*Fast.* 4.459–62):

ut uitulo mugit sua mater ab ubere rapto
et quaerit fetus per nemus omne suos:
sic dea nec retinet gemitus et concita cursu
fertur et a campis incipit, Henna, tuis.

As a mother moos when her calf has been snatched from her udder and looks for her offspring through every grove, so the goddess does not hold back her groans and is carried along at a run, and starts, Henna, from your plains.

Although in the didactic section before the myth Ceres is not associated with ox-sacrifice, in the myth she is associated by simile with one of the animals who will make the Iron Age work, by working, and by providing fodder for sacrifice. Strictly, Ovid keeps up even here the erasure of explicit mention of sacrifice, since he does not explicitly say, as does his model Lucretius, that the calf has been taken for the purposes of sacrifice; yet the pressure to read this dimension in to Ovid's simile and to forge a link with the programmatic *Agonalia* passage is irresistible, since the sacrificial motivation for the taking of the calf is so powerful a part of the Lucretian model, which itself is designed to cast a pall over the institution of animal sacrifice.[57] In the *Georgics* Virgil had already used significant diction from the Lucretian simile to colour his presentation of the devastation visited on the nightingale/Philomela when the *durus arator* steals her young, to reinforce his theme of the random cruelty that human intervention can inflict on the animal world (4.511–515).[58] Only twenty lines after the simile of Ceres and the mother cow, Ovid acknowledges Virgil's use of the Lucretian simile by himself alluding to Virgil's allusion, comparing Ceres' laments to the lament of Philomela for Itys, using language that recalls both Lucretius' cow simile and Virgil's adaptation of it for his own *philomela* simile.[59] The compulsion to see the goddess Ceres enmeshed in the dynamics of sacrifice is reinforced even before the Itys simile, immediately after the Lucretian cow simile, when we see a hint at the enmity of Ceres towards her typical sacrificial offering, the

57 GALE 2000, 105 on how in Lucretius the simile works to establish animal sacrifice as wantonly cruel and pointless.

58 Ibid., 135f., on the debt of Virgil's *amissos fetus* and *questibus implet* (4.512, 515) to Lucretius' *amissum fetum, completque querelis* (2.358).

59 Cf. Ovid's *querelis / implet, ut amissum* (4.481f.); see FANTHAM 1998, 47 on the links between this Ovidian passage and the Virgilian one, and on 481f. for the links with the Lucretian simile.

pig; here we are told that she would have tracked down her daughter's path there and then if pigs had not disturbed the tracks (463–6). In the *Agonalia* passage Ovid informs us that Ceres started the pattern of animal sacrifice by taking revenge on the pig for rooting up the new crops (1.349–352). Ceres has got more than one reason for not liking pigs.

If these glances at the issue of sacrifice at the beginning of Ceres' search for Proserpina incline one to look for a prototypical Ceres of the Iron Age in Book 4 as well as in Book 1, then there is further confirmation later in the story, when Ceres, after much wandering in search of her daughter, comes to Eleusis, and is interrupted by Triptolemus' mother as she is giving the boy immortality (549–556). Ceres informs the mother that the gift of agriculture will be a recompense for Triptolemus' mortality (559f.):

iste quidem mortalis erit: sed primus arabit
et seret et culta praemia tollet humo.

He *will* be mortal; yet he will be the first to plough and sow and take up rewards from the cultivated earth.

This strong marking of Triptolemus as the first agriculturalist is at odds with other touches in the telling of the Ceres myth in *Fasti* 4, especially the presence of someone already cultivating the fields in Sicily when Ceres initially goes searching for her daughter (*arua colentem*, 487), and the reference at the end of the story, when Ceres is reconciled, to the way the fields gave a huge harvest after their period of being neglected and uncultivated.[60] Still, especially in comparison with the version of the Ceres story in *Metamorphoses* 5, where there is no suggestion whatever of Ceres' bereavement being a rupture between life before and after agriculture, we must be struck by the very different emphasis in the *Fasti* on the aetiological dimension of the Ceres myth. The gift of agriculture is linked with mortality, both of humans and of the animals humans live and work with.

In the Ceres episode in Book 4, then, the indirect mythic explanation supplements and corrects the more overt didacticism of the exegesis section, and the overall impression is less at variance with the Ceres we see in Book 1 than we might initially think. In Book 1 the shocking nature of sacrifice is overt, and fully stressed, as Ovid concentrates all his efforts on denaturalising his audience's familiarity with the institution, rather as Virgil activates a latent sense of disgust at the sacrificial evisceration of animals the humans care for.[61] In Book 4 Ovid affects to ignore this perspective and to give another, more ameliorative view of the patron goddess of modern life, exempt from the nexus of killing, but the sacrificial imperative behind the life of civilization keeps breaking through. It breaks through in the form of the myth, with the Lucretian sacrificial simile for Ceres' bereavement, with the reminder of her hatred of pigs, and with the treatment of the Triptolemus story as an aetiology of agriculture. It also breaks through more explicitly immediately after the

60 *Fast.* 4.617: *largaque prouenit cessatis messis in aruis.* See FANTHAM 1998, on 4.559f.

61 GALE 2000, 105f. on *Georgics* 2.194–6; cf. Ovid's own evocation of this disgust in *Fasti* 4.936, *turpiaque obscenae (uidimus) exta canis.* ANN KUTTNER made me aware of the importance of the potential impact of this dimension of sacrifice.

end of the section on the *Cerealia*, when Ovid returns to the association of Ceres with animal sacrifice. Two short interludes totalling eight lines follow the *Cerealia* before Ovid gives us the Fordicidia of April 15 (4.629–672), when a pregnant cow is sacrificed, ultimately a rite that started when Ceres failed (645). The sacrifice is to Tellus, so regularly linked with Ceres (634, 665). Two lines after the Fordicidia we encounter the final day of the *Cerealia*, April 19 (679–712), where Ovid tells us of how Ceres is honoured by the burning of foxes.

Using the more open-ended *Georgics* as his point of departure, Ovid accentuates one of Virgil's range of possibilities.[62] In the *Georgics*, animal sacrifice is open to multiple interpretation, but Ovid concentrates, directly or obliquely, on one powerful Virgilian possibility: he represents sacrifice as a token of the loss of the Golden Age, as the life of agriculture involves humans in endlessly dominating the land and the animals that share it with us, and endlessly placating uncertain deities by giving them many varieties of that animal life. Human life is denaturalised, and sacrifice must be endlessly repeated in order to stave off the everpresent threat of having to pay the full consequences of that denaturalisation.

3.3 The specificities of generic preference

The analysis of the two Ceres passages would obviously only be a beginning for a thorough-going study of sacrifice in the *Fasti*. One would need to follow up JOHN SCHEID's fascinating study of the dialogues between the different kinds of sacrificial offerings in the cult of the Fratres Arvales (animals, plants, incense): the standard models are obsessed with animal sacrifice, and in English it sounds more than a little ridiculous to speak of ‹sacrificing› cakes or vegetables, but Roman cult, and the *Fasti*, have a high degree of interest in non-animal sacrifice as well. One would also need to follow up ANDREW FELDHERR's eye-opening discussion of how Ovid in the *Metamorphoses* treats the reader/citizen's identification with the sacrificial victim, and see how his important findings work in the context of the *Fasti*.[63] Nor have I touched on one of the most important aspects of sacrifice for Ovid, namely, as the arena for communication between humans and gods.[64]

Ovid casts his net very wide, but we need to remind ourselves how selectively this poem, or any other poem, treats or can treat the full range of the possible meanings of sacrifice. RICHARD THOMAS, for example, makes much of the fact that we never see in the *Georgics* the full Burkertian sacrificial model of sacrifice followed by feasting. Yet different poetic and iconographic traditions vary greatly as to which elements of the full ritual they will represent, and each tradition is itself susceptible to evolution: the plastic arts, for example, show a dramatic change in their selection of the key moment of sacrifice in precisely the Augustan period, choosing the instant before the actual killing in preference to the procession.[65] As far as sacrificial

62 GALE 2000, 108: ‹Ovid can be seen as making more explicit the tensions which I have been tracing in Virgil›.
63 FELDHERR 1997.
64 Again, RÜPKE 2001 for the general issues.
65 KUTTNER 1995, 131–5. See VAN STRATEN 1995 for Greek evidence.

feasting itself is concerned, GORDON points out that representations of feasting are non-existent in public sacrificial sculpture of the Imperial period.[66]

Poetry, likewise, has its own variable preferences and emphases. Whatever they may do in the *Aeneid* and the *Metamorphoses*, where the sacrificial feasting of epic is quite common, Virgil in the *Georgics* and Ovid in the *Fasti* practically never link animal sacrifice and feasting explicitly. In the mention of goat sacrifice in *Georgics* 2 we have a description of the animal standing at the altar (*et ductus cornu stabit sacer hircus ad aram*, 395), and then of its *exta* being roasted on spits of hazel (*pinguiaque in ueribus torrebimus exta colurnis*, 396); but the actual killing is not mentioned, and the entire ritual is evoked in the future tense. As for Ovid in the *Fasti*, he does have one set-piece description of the full length of a sacrificial ritual, right down to the feast after sacrificial killing, when he describes the festival of the Terminalia in *Fasti* 2 (643–58).[67] I take the point here to be related to the important fact that, according to the best ancient sources, originally this festival did not have blood sacrifice at all.[68] Ancient authorities have it that Numa set up the institution of the Terminalia, like most of his other cults, as bloodless sacrifices.[69] It is just possible that the Numa of the *Metamorphoses* returns from his lessons with Pythagoras to teach the Romans *sacrificos ritus* (15.483) that are bloodless, even though I prefer the more ironic reading whereby Numa hears the learned speech of Pythagoras but does not believe it.[70] In the *Fasti*, however, there is no doubt that Numa is a man of blood, who regularly performs blood-sacrifice, and is never seen performing bloodless sacrifice, even if he once averts human sacrifice by substituting an onion (3.339f.).[71] By contradicting a dominant tradition in this way, Ovid reinforces his theme that Roman civilization was normatively bound into Iron Age patterns of behaviour from the start. Or else, if he is suggesting that contemporary practice in the Terminalia is totally different from the original rites ordained by Numa, then we have another example of the disruptions in the continuity of this rite so finely elucidated by BARCHIESI.[72] After all, the entire point of Terminus is now moot both in place and time. The whole of the globe is now without bounds under Roman rule, as Ovid tells us (2.683–4), so that Terminus no longer marks boundaries in space. And in terms of time, the terminal function of the

66 GORDON 1990, 204; we may in fact have one depiction of feasting, in an image of the Vestal Virgins: BEARD-NORTH-PRICE 1998, 2.150. ANN KUTTNER draws my attention to the painting of a sacrificial banquet commissioned by Ti. Sempronius Gracchus to commemorate the victory of his slave army at Beneventum in 214 B. C.: on this painting, see now KOORTBOJIAN 2002.
67 Cf. MILLER 1991, 120 for the unusual fullness of this description. Note the exceptionally full, practically Burkertian, description of sacrifice offered by Pythagoras in his didactic denunciation of the institution in *Metamorphoses* 15 (127–39), and the comical disruption of the sacrificial pattern in *Fasti* 2, when Romulus and Remus are called away to fight robbers while they are waiting for their sacrificial meat to cook, and Remus comes back first to finish the barbecue without Romulus (359–76).
68 My thanks to MARTIN SIROIS for drawing this to my attention.
69 Plut. *Quaest. Rom.* 267 C, *Numa* 8.8; 16.1.
70 15.73f.: *ora docta ... sed non et credita.* See HARDIE 1997, 185 n. 14 for the first possibility; BARCHIESI 2001b, 65–8 for the ironic reading.
71 For Numa's blood sacrifice in the *Fasti*, see 3.300, 4.652, 671; cf. BARCHIESI 2001b, 66.
72 BARCHIESI 1997, 215–18.

Terminalia is a dead letter under the reformed Julian calendar. In the Republican calendar the Terminalia marked a cut-off point in February, after which the intercalary month was inserted; in the Julian calendar, the Terminalia no longer terminate anything.[73]

A final example of sacrificial feasting in the *Fasti* is, once again, highly anomalous, and that is the Ourion myth in Book 5, where Jupiter, Poseidon and Mercury feast with a poor old man, and finally all stand together and urinate on the hide of the plough-ox that has just been sacrificed to them and that they have just consumed (495–536). Note that Ovid, as a poet of *Fasti*, who is only allowed to say *quae licet et fas est*, finds urinating gods unsayable and leaves out the precise details.[74] And even the emphasis on the feasting in this tale is to be explained as a result of its nature as a Callimachean Molorchus or Hecale story, where hospitality is vital.

4 Resisting holism

A weak way of dealing with the problems I have been sketching would be to say that different genres (epic, elegy, didactic, sculpture, and the different genres of ritual in their own right) have distinctive ways of doing things that refract their objects—in our case, sacrifice—in different ways. But this approach would immediately lay itself open to the criticism that it leaves unexamined the idea that there is an object out there to be refracted in the first place, when in fact mediation and representation and encoding are operative all the way down, on both sides of what we represent as the fence between ‹life› and ‹literature›.[75] This approach would also lay itself open to another criticism, namely, that it leaves unexamined a much larger historicising assumption, the assumption that when literature engages with ritual or anything else it is participating in an identifiable larger system of meaning in which the terms are always set in advance by conditions which are more primary or authentic or real.

Here I return to the problems I noted at the beginning of this paper. As I remarked there, historicising approaches—and this is more true the more they are informed by structuralism and symbolic anthropology—almost inevitably posit a holistic *mentalité*, a global system of meaning in which literature participates. At their most extreme, such historicising approaches will have it that literature expresses the circumstances of its social production. Even when the issue of the cause and effect relationship is finessed, as it regularly is in New Historicism or Cultural Poetics, with their metaphors of ‹circulation› or ‹negotation›, we are still left with a model which posits a totalising synchronic structure. This is why the governing trope of

73 No coincidence, then, that the next festival Ovid treats after the Terminalia is the Regifugia, which likewise used to mark the end of something, the monarchy, but has now also become a dead letter. Ovid marks the point at the end of the Regifugia, where the last line of the episode, *dies regnis illa suprema fuit*, is immediately followed by *fallimur* (2.852–3): on the importance of reading straight on from line 852 to *fallimur* in line 853, see REEVE 1995, 507..

74 5.532: *pudor est ulteriora loqui*.

75 So CONTE 1994, 105–28.

New Historicism is synecdoche. The power of synecdoche comes through very powerfully in GALLAGHER and GREENBLATT's introductory essay to *Practicing New Historicism*. They give, in effect, a charter for synecdoche, with such telling phrases as these: ‹If every trace of a culture is part of a massive text ...›; ‹if an entire culture is regarded as a text ...›.[76] Later, when discussing the impact of CLIFFORD GEERTZ, in an overt acknowledgment of the power of symbolic anthropology, they show how GEERTZ works out from a fragment to reveal the ramifications throughout the social system of thought: ‹Part of Geertz's power was his ability to suggest that the multilayered cultural meanings by which he was fascinated were present in the fragments themselves.›[77] The part stands for the whole, which is always somehow there, and primary.

Our use of the terms ‹text› and ‹context› can pitch us into similar holistic traps. The language of ‹text› and ‹context› can help guard against mere formalism and aestheticism, but it can also keep us thinking of texts as parasitic upon something quintessentially more substantial and really there, and recoverable in that substantiality and reality, while likewise keeping alive the illusion that there is a recoverable cause and effect relationship between the context and the text it is often seen as producing.[78] I am not denying that there is a cause and effect relationship between texts and the conditions of their social production, only that this relationship is recoverable. As DAVID PERKINS has shown in his profoundly unsettling book, any act of contextualising is inevitably partial and arbitrary.[79]

Still, we cannot read without contextualising, and the two poems I have been discussing here must be read by us, as by their original audiences, in a series of contexts before they can be interpreted. In their very different ways, the *Georgics* and the *Fasti* give Roman readers tools for thinking about patterns of action that otherwise for the most part they may well have taken for granted. If a Roman did want to speculate on the nature and meaning of sacrifice, these texts would have been indispensable. Romans would have encountered in these poems ways of thinking that would not map directly onto their usual experience of ritual; but I hope I have made a case for suggesting that this is the usual state of affairs for the investigation of ritual. Different experiences and different analytical frames are bound to be incommensurable, to some degree.

And we, too, have lessons to learn from the challenge of reading these poems through the spectacles of a ritualist. If we come to the poems with no model of sacrifice in our minds at all, we will find it very difficult to see the religious or cultural work they are doing. But if we come to these poems with a full-blown model of sacrifice in our minds, determined to see it exemplified, and convinced that the relationship between the literature and the ‹real› category of ritual must be one of synecdoche, we will be disappointed, or, more probably, we will do violence to the poems' specific strategies. We need to acknowledge not only that we cannot read without some kind of contextualising model, but also that the imposition of such a

76 GALLAGHER, GREENBLATT 2000, 14f.

77 Ibid., 26.

78 Cf. FOWLER 2000, 129.

79 PERKINS 1992, 121–52.

model from another discipline can only be a preliminary heuristic step, for direct imposition of the model will fail to do justice to the way any given text may be working. It is not only literary critics who will be badly served if we jettison the category of the literary.

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