

Tempered Wine:
The Invocation of Bacchus and Virgil's Poetic Control

The invocation of Bacchus in *Georgics 2* seems intrusive, especially in the light of Mark Antony's reclamation of the deity at the beginning of the first century AD, which poisoned Rome's image of the god (Mac Gorain Fiachra 2014). Virgil, however, refashions the darker aspects of Bacchus that Mark Antony capitalized on, and he presents an Augustan deflection of the god from irrational behavior to a largely positive deity that encapsulates fertility and the bounty of cultivation. This "rehabilitation of Bacchus," allows the god to take on a more settling role, presenting the benefits of civilized life over the Bacchic capacity for destruction and violent passion (Riggs Alden Smith 2007). Book 2 of the *Georgics* represents a high note in the greater work, and it is widely regarded as one of the most optimistic passages in the *Georgics* (Eleanor Windsor Leach 1981). Beginning with book 2, Bacchus illustrates humanity's role in the landscape, and he—linked explicitly to Augustus himself—is set to usher in a new golden age (J.L.L. Smolenaars 1987). This Augustan Golden Age seeks to replicate life as it was in the tenuous crux at the beginning of civilization, where the peace of the agricultural golden age exists in tandem with the excitement of the post-Jupiterian innovations but before urbanization takes hold of man. Virgil celebrates the rustic life, but in book 2, beginning with the invocation of Bacchus, he observes an extra layer of the 'good life,' shifting the focus to human partnership with nature specifically through viticulture and arboriculture, which Virgil provides as examples in which man copes with the oncoming rule of Jupiter, civilization, and the inception of joyful toil (Richard F. Thomas 1987). The fulcrum on which the balance of human nature and human civilization rests belongs to two of Bacchus' domains—wine and poetic composition. In this exploration of the first lines of *Georgics 2*, I seek to elucidate Bacchus' relationship to Virgil's

poetic vision and his inclusion in the production of the “new must” of the Georgic age and how Virgil controls the tragic identity of Bacchus and his inseparable “unroman” attributes as a literary character (Fiachra 2014). This article will undergo discussion of the Roman apprehension of Greek gods as well as their modification tactics for specific Greek gods such as Bacchus into the Roman pantheon. Furthermore, this article will include close readings of Virgil’s *Georgics*, understanding how Virgil modifies Bacchus to better represent the new Augustan empire metapoetically.

Bibliography

- Endsjø, Dag Øistein. "To Lock up Eleusis: A Question of Liminal Space." *Numen* 47, no. 4 (2000): 351–86.
- Gildenhard, Ingo, and Andrew Zissos. "The Bacchanalia and Roman Culture." In *Ovid, Metamorphoses, 3.511-733: Latin Text with Introduction, Commentary, Glossary of Terms, Vocabulary Aid and Study Questions*, 1st ed., 5:65–68. Open Book Publishers, 2016.
- Fiachra Mac Góráin, "The Mixed Blessings of Bacchus in Virgil's *Georgics*," *Dictynna* [En ligne], 11 | 2014, mis en ligne le 18 décembre 2014, consulté le 03 novembre 2023.
- Gale, Monica. "Poetry and the Backward Glance in Virgil's *Georgics* and *Aeneid*." *TAPA* 133 (2003): 323-52.
- Henkel, John. "VERGIL TALKS TECHNIQUE: METAPOETIC ARBORICULTURE IN 'GEORGICS' 2." *Vergilius (1959-)* 60 (2014): 33–66.
- LEACH, ELEANOR WINSOR. "'GEORGICS' 2 AND THE POEM." *Arethusa* 14, no. 1 (1981): 35–48.
- Liebeschuetz, W. "Beast and Man in the Third Book of Virgil's 'Georgics.'" *Greece & Rome* 12, no. 1 (1965): 64–77.
- Livy, *The History of Rome*, Book 39.
- LOWE, DUNSTAN. "The Symbolic Value of Grafting in Ancient Rome." *Transactions of the American Philological Association (1974-)* 140, no. 2 (2010): 461–88.
- Scarborough, Julia. "SILVA SONANS: THE METAPOETIC PASTORAL LANDSCAPE IN VERGIL'S *GEORGICS*." *Vergilius (1959-)* 66 (2020): 3–34.
- SMITH, R. ALDEN. "'IN VINO CIVITAS': THE REHABILITATION OF BACCHUS IN

VERGIL'S 'GEORGICS.'" *Vergilius* (1959-) 53 (2007): 52–86.

Smolenaars, J. J. L. "Labour in the Golden Age a Unifying Theme in Vergil's Poems."

Mnemosyne 40, no. 3/4 (1987): 391–405.

Thomas, Richard F. "Prose into Poetry: Tradition and Meaning in Virgil's Georgics." *Harvard*

Studies in Classical Philology 91 (1987): 229–60.

Virgil, *Georgics*.