Bestial Imagery in Bacchylides' *Ode 11*

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THE ELEVENTH ODE of Bacchylides narrates, in honor of Alexi-
damos of Metapontion, the myth of the Proetides, who were
driven mad by the goddess Hera because they dared to boast
that their father was richer than she.[1] Throughout this narration there
is discernible a primary image concerned with animals, by means of
which the Proetides' madness is shown to be a type of bestiality capable
of being tamed and cured only by a special civilizing force. This verbal
image, which is basic to the poetic conception, first becomes obvious
in the structure of the ode at lines 37–39:

> νῦν δ' "Αρτεμις ἀγροτέρα
> χρυσαλάκατος λιπαράν
> ἡμ]έρα τοξόκλυτος νίκαν ἔδωκε.

The critics have been most severe over this passage: Farnell's
"grotesque accumulation of epithets," is typical; "no poet who had
any sense of the real significance of divine epithets could have written
these lines."[2] Smyth is kinder: "the passage is an extreme case of the
poet's fondness for *epitheta ornantia*."[3]

That the lines are peculiar cannot be denied, but the poet has a
triple purpose in mind: first, to pivot as swiftly and as obviously as
possible away from the introductory section of the ode concerned only
with the victor; secondly, to establish what is to be the major image of
the ode; and finally, to suggest with purposely ambivalent language
what might be called the double function of that image, which is to
illustrate the bestiality of the Proetides in their madness and also to
show the process of their cure as a taming and cultivation. Thus
τοξόκλυτος and ἡμέρα are set in antithesis. The former refers to Artemis

[2] L. R. Farnell, *CR* 12 (1898) 345–6.
[3] H. W. Smyth, *Greek Melic Poets* (London 1904) 420.

the goddess of the hunt, she who is to play a special rôle with regard to the wild and, as we shall learn, animal-like daughters of Proetus; the latter, without departing from the association of animalism, suggests Artemis' secondary position as the goddess who tames and makes gentle, under whose power Alexidamos has been granted his victory and the Proetides are to gain their release from the madness imposed upon them by Hera.[4]

As we shall see later, Artemis' act is exactly a taming of girls who by the power of a hostile divinity have been turned—at least meta-phorically—into animals. Yet before they can be released from their madness, the girls must momentarily be put in the position of the hunted animal. This two-stage process is suggested also by the single epithet ἀγροτέρα, which is ambiguous in meaning: Artemis is the goddess associated with ἄγρα, the hunting of wild animals, and also with the ἀγρός, the settled life of the farm.[5] The significance of this particular contrast will be explained more fully below; for the moment it is sufficient to mention that in Bacchylides' ode bestiality, or being hunted, is associated with flight and unsettled living, whereas the cure eventually achieved will depend in great part on the station-ary quality of the characters' lives.

It is in the fourth epithet, χρυσαλάκατος, however, that the ambiva-lence in Artemis' rôle is best epitomized. The commentators do not agree: Smyth takes the word in connection with τοξόκλυτος as "of the golden bow"; Jebb, following Hesychius,[6] translates "with the golden shaft," noting that the sense is not incompatible with that of τοξόκλυτος; and, while Macurdy translates "golden spindle," *LSJ* only emphasize the difficulty when, *s.v.* ἠλακάτη, they follow Hesychius: "... in Compds. (e.g. χρυσηλάκατος), arrow," whereas in their article under χρυσηλάκατος they write "with distaff of gold, not ... with arrow of gold."[7] The word seems in essence to have a meaning of golden

[4] In the terms of O. Hense, "Zu Bakchylides XI," *RhM* 53 (1898) 321, Artemis becomes the ode's "kräftige Fundament." See also F. Blass, "Nachlese zu Bakchylides," *Hermes* 36 (1901) 281.

[5] Bacchylides, *The Poems and Fragments*, ed. R. C. Jebb (Cambridge 1905) 211, n.1.

[6] *Hesychii Alexandrini Lexicon* IV, ed. M. Schmidt (Jena 1862) 299.

[7] Smyth, *loc.cit.* (*supra*, n.3); Jebb, *ad loc.*; G. H. Macurdy, *TAPA* 44 (1913) xxxvii; also W. Christ, *Hermes* 36 (1901) 108: "goldene Spindel." It is probable that the editors of the Homeric Hymns are correct to insist on "arrows" in the Hymns, while they admit that "other poets, Pindar ... Nonnus ... understood it to refer to the distaff: so Bacchyl. himself." The question is whether they could have "understood" this, and still have chosen to work with the archaic meaning; *The Homeric Hymns*, ed. T. W. Allen, W. R. Halliday, E. E. Sikes (Oxford 1936) 353.

"stalk" (Hesychius' κάλαμος), but quite early to have taken on two basic meanings. Bacchylides, whose propensity for literal and even etymological meanings this paper hopes to establish, is not beyond playing against both of them. To him at least the word is not merely a "klangvolles Beiwort":[8] to call it such in the face of a meaningful poetic association is unreasonable. The ambiguity of this word is perfect for the context, for essential to the meaning of the poem is the contrast between cultivated society, as aptly represented by "spindle," which is the proper "emblem of women,"[9] and which ought to be the normal concern of the Proetides and Artemis ἡμέρα; and wildness and hunting, as seen in the notion of the arrow, which recalls Artemis τοξόκλυτος, and the abnormal state of the young girls who can only be cured of their bestial madness by a goddess who later functions as θηροσκόπος (107).[10]

It is then in these ambivalent epithets of Artemis that a contrast basic to the whole ode is initially suggested. It is a contrast which the poet will work into the structure of his ode in a somewhat loose, but nevertheless demonstrable, fashion. As it continues to develop we shall see it in a variety of forms; the life of the city will be set against that of the forest, stationary living will be opposed to the wildness of flight, taming of the bestial to uncontrolled animalism.

As this pattern unfolds we shall find associated with it also a particular verbal technique: Bacchylides often relies on traditional, hackneyed epithets from lyric and epic poetry; but consistently he recalls to us the literal, even etymological meaning of these adjectives. Through a series of conceits he revitalizes the old epithets, which had by time and over-use lost their original force, and through this revitalization emerges a consistent image pattern which reinforces the thematic material.

Of this type of etymologizing we have already seen examples in ἀγροτέρα and χρυσαλάκατος. We now must trace the pattern farther: at line 84 of the ode the young daughters of Proetus are found, recently inflicted with their strange malady, running wildly from the city, ἄδματοι: "jungfraulich, unverheiratet," says Buchholz, and Jebb agrees

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[8] So U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Griechische Verskunst* (Berlin 1921) 531, referring to the use of the word at Sophocles, *Trachiniae* 636.

[9] Macurdy, *loc.cit.* (*supra*, n.7).

[10] χρυσαλάκατος is used with a similar double implication at *Trachiniae* 636: the chorus uses the traditional adjective with reference both to the θὴρ Κένταυρος (680) shot by the "bitter barb" (681) of Heracles, and the famous πέπλος by which the hero dies.

with "maidens."[11] Yet the virginity of the girls is not here apropos; what is important is that they are "nicht bezwungen."[12] Snell points out that the word refers primarily to animals, which may be called "untamed" or "unyoked"; it is by metaphor that the word is extended to virgins. Yet the context in Bacchylides demands that we leap over the traditional metaphor back to the original, literal nuance. The daughters are mad and roaming in the woods, σμερδαλέαν φωνὰν ἱεῖσαι (56); to restore their senses it takes a sacrifice of βοῦς ἄζυγας (105) to a goddess, ἀγροτέρα, who hears in her special capacity as θηροσκόπος (107); it is only by "looking out for wild beasts" that Artemis can function in this context.[13]

The connection between madness and bestiality in this ode is most carefully developed by the metaphor hinted at in the adjective ἄδματος: the poet centers specifically on the act of "yoking" (ζεύγ-),[14] which becomes in the poem's view an image for the exercizing of control—originally over animals, but metaphorically also over men. This idea is initially introduced by the Iliadic epithet ὑψίζυγος (3): Jebb's "throned on high" does not do the term complete justice but is adequate at least on one ground. The listener would not, so early in the poem, have any reason to think that the word was to be taken in anything but its traditional sense: "sitting on the highest bench of the ship."[15] But the sequel makes clear that Bacchylides again intends for the epithet to have a precisely etymological significance: ὁ ὑφ' ἑαυτῷ ὑπεζευχὼς πάντα.[16] It is Zeus' ability to yoke the wild beast and impose order, not his position as helmsman, which is here in point. Later in the poem, for instance, Hera, insulted by the Proetides, will exercize over them a similar control: φρένας ζεύξασ' (46). Her control is specifically that she "yoked" them in their malady, and this malady is exactly their lack of control over themselves. In the poet's metaphor, therefore, they become ἄδματοι in contrast to Zeus and Hera, who

[11] *Anthologie aus den Lyrikern der Griechen* III, ed. E. Buchholz (Leipzig 1898) 153, referring to the use of the word at 5.167.

[12] B. Snell and H. J. Mette, *Lex. des frühgriechischen Epos* (Göttingen 1955) s.v. ἄδματος.

[13] In his note on Ode 5.167 Jebb explains the ambiguity in ἄδματος which is here suggested.

[14] In his note on 10(11).30 Jebb speculates that Bacchylides in his choice of the epithet πορτιτρόφον might have been influenced by the etymology which derived *Italia* from *vitulus*, "calf"; it seems not beyond possibility that the whole image of yoking is influenced by this traditional derivation, for though it is a slim thread of connection from the myth to the Metapontine victor, it might still have been in the poet's mind.

[15] Hesychius, *op.cit.* (*supra*, n.6) 223, s.v. ὑψίζυγος; cf. *Et. Gudianum*, ed. F. Sturz (Leipzig 1818) 546.

[16] *Et. Magnum*, ed. F. Sylburgius (Leipzig 1816) 712.

exercize their power by yoking. Soon Proetus, lamenting his daughters' uncontrollable madness,[17] promises to Artemis as payment for curing them cattle which are ἄζυγας. The sacrifice of cows "pure from the goad" is traditional and proper,[18] but here is given a particular vitality: the cure is made to fit the malady. It is not sufficient in this context to understand βοῦς ἄζυγας in the merely traditional sense. Hera has seized Proetus' daughters and metaphorically turned them into uncontrollable cows; Proetus must then promise the same βοῦς ἄζυγας in order to get his daughters back; the god cannot be cheated.[19]

The imagery of the ode is not, however, limited to the metaphor of the yoke: a secondary pattern of words exists by means of which the contrast between bestiality and cultivation, the cure for the malady, is emphasized. This secondary pattern will be most apparent if, momentarily, we approach the ode in a new way. Within his telling of the story of the Proetides Bacchylides digresses for more than twenty lines to narrate the feud between Proetus and Acrisius and Proetus' flight with his warriors from Argos to Tiryns. The narrative arrangement, which is thought to give "mythical depth," is a clear example of the epic loquacity so typical of Bacchylides.[20] But thematically also, as the ring-composition makes clear, the digression has importance (57–62):

> Τιρύνθιον ἄστυ λιποῦσαι
> καὶ θεοδμάτους ἀγυιάς,

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[17] Bacchylides' word for the madness is λύσσα (102) which apparently derives from λύκος (I am indebted here to the assistance of Professor Louis Heller); however, Et. Magnum 572 reads λύσσα· παρὰ τὸ λύειν τὸν νοῦν. If we could think that Bacchylides had this etymology in mind, the meaning would be clear: the specific malady of girls who are ἄδματοι, unyoked, is that they suffer from λύσσα, being loosened from control. Some support is given to the theory by the short poem which Vitruvius (8.3.21) quotes as being written on the spring Louson, where the Proetides were freed from their madness. Melampus, the poem says, "loosened their looseness:" λυσάμενος λύσσης. The play on words was perhaps traditional, and the spring Louson, though clearly derived from the verb "to bathe," may have played a role by its mere sound.

[18] Recall Homer's recurrent ἧνις ἠκέστας ἱερευσέμεν, Il. 6.94, 275, 309 etc., and especially 10.292–94.

[19] The play on ἄζυξ is, of course, the same as that described earlier in ἄδματος; see O. Crusius, "Aus den Dichtungen des Bakchylides," Philologus 57 (1898) 170, referring to 16.20: "Bei ἄζυγα kann man zweiflen ob es ἀτριβὴς ζεύγλης oder ἄπειρος γάμου bedeutet." So also H. van Herwerden, "Adnotationes ad Bacchylidem," Mnemosyne 27 (1899) 27.

[20] F. Blass, "Bacchylides Gedicht auf Pytheas von Aigina," RhM 53 (1898) 298, discusses the flashback in Bacchylides' poetry; the phrase "mythical depth" comes from A. Parry, Bacchylides Complete Poems, trans. R. Fagles with notes and introduction by A. Parry (New Haven 1961) 113.

ἤδη γὰρ ἔτος δέκατον
θεοφιλὲς λιπόντες Ἄργος
ναῖον ἀδεισιβόαι
χαλκάσπιδες ἡμίθεοι . . .

A play on the participles of λείπω in the two genders introduces the interlude, and so also effects the exit from the digression and the return to the story of the Proetides (79–81):

ἵν' ἀντίθεοι
ναῖον κλυτὸν ἱππόβοτον
Ἄργος ἥρωες περικλειτοὶ λιπόντες.

The purpose of this digression is to emphasize the theme of flight, which is made clear by the echoes: as the Proetides flee from Tiryns and Proetus himself rushes forth madly (85f) from his city in search of his daughters, so also the notion is introduced in the flight of the heroes from Argos. Flight in the case of both Proetus and his daughters is away from civilization to the wildness of the forest—the δάσκιον ὑλάν (93); but the case of the heroes who join Proetus in his flight from Argos presents the theme in the opposite order: they move from oppressive war to the civilization of Tiryns, built at the will of Zeus and with the aid of the Cyclopes. The basic contrast is between flight and settled living: the former is associated with some sort of madness and in the case of the Proetides with animalism. But city-dwelling too has its unique verbal association: Metapontion, the city of Alexidamos, is πορτιτρόφον (30); the territory of the sons of Abas is πολύκριθον (70); Argos is ἱππόβοτον (80); Arcadia μηλοτρόφον (95); and again Metapontion is described as ἱπποτρόφον (114). It is in the idea of taming and raising domestic animals—in this ode introduced by epithets which have suffixes in -βοτος and -τρόφος—that we find the primary contrast to the ἄδματοι Proetides, and the βοῦς ἄζυγας which must be sacrificed for them. The equation is consistent: animalism is associated with flight to the wilderness, whereas the ability to raise domestic animals or tame wild beasts is the prerogative of cities and settled living. The contrast is the same which we found summarized early in the poem in the character of Artemis, at one and the same time τοξόκλυτος, "huntress," and ἡμέρα, "tamer"; the goddess who is warden of the spindle, the emblem of cultivated women, and whom the poet can also name with the traditional epithet of Hera, βοῶπις (99). In so

summarizing both aspects of the imagery, Artemis becomes truly the
"kräftige Fundament" of the poem.

What is the source, it may be asked, of this bestial—or specifically
bovine—imagery in the myth of the Proetides? Two answers are at
hand. For the first we may refer to Vergil, *Eclogue* 6.48ff:

> *Proetides inplerunt falsis mugitibus agros,*
>
> *at non tam turpes pecudum tamen ulla secuta est*
>
> *concubitus, quamvis collo timuisset aratrum,*
>
> *et saepe in levi quaesisset cornua fronte.*

According to the most common version of the myth, the young girls
are driven mad by Hera because they attacked her *xoanon*, or her
temple, or claimed that they were richer or more beautiful than she.[21]
Servius and Probus comment that the girls[22] "*se putantes vaccas in saltus
abirent . . . crederent se boves factas . . .*" The subtlety that while mad
they believed themselves changed into cows is not so specifically
stated by the Greek narrators of the myth,[23] though it is believed to
be at least as old as Hesiod.[24] The bestial imagery could therefore have
developed from the connection of Hera to cows,[25] though a separate
source for the myth suggests another possible explanation:[26] αὗται
δέ...ἐμάνησαν, ὡς μὲν Ἡσίοδός φησιν, ὅτι τὰς Διονύσου τελετὰς οὐ
κατεδέχοντο. That Apollodorus here represents a true account of the
narrative of Hesiod has, however, been called into doubt,[27] in light of
the contradictory evidence of Probus:[28] *Hesiodus docet . . . has, quod*

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[21] For the insult to the *xoanon* see Acusilaus in Apollodorus 2.2.2; for the attack on Hera's
temple, Pherecydes, schol. o.225, *Scholia Graeca in Homeri Odysseam* II, ed. W. Dindorf
(Oxford 1855) 611; for the Proetides' boast that they were more beautiful or richer than the
wife of Zeus, see Servius, ed. G. Thilo and H. Hagen III (Leipzig 1927) 75, and, of course,
Bacchylides. By an obvious confusion the agent in the last of these versions became Aphro-
dite in Aelian, *VH* 3.42; see M. P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion* I (München
1955) 613 n.2.

[22] Servius, *loc.cit.* (*supra*, n.21); for Probus see *Appendix Serviana* III, fasc. 2, ed. H. Hagen
(Leipzig 1902) 345.

[23] Most Greek narrators refer to an unqualified νόσος or μανία, though there may be some
hint of the animalistic in Callimachus, *Ad Dian.* 236: θυμὸν . . . ἄγριον.

[24] G. Radke, *RE* XXIII[1] (1957) 119, *s.v.* PROETIDES; A. B. Cook, *Zeus* I (Cambridge 1914)
453, asserts that the animal-metamorphosis implies "an animal-priesthood, in which the
priest or priestess is supposed to be the animal specially connected with his or her divinity."

[25] See Radke, *loc.cit.* (*supra*, n.24) and A. Rapp, Roscher, *Lex.* III[2] (1902–09) 3006, *s.v.*
PROETIDES: "Wenn sie in ihrer Raserei wie Kühe brüllten, so bekundeten sie damit ihre
Zugehörigkeit zu der argivischen Hera."

[26] Apollodorus, *loc.cit.* (*supra*, n.21); *cf.* Diod. 4.68.

[27] The suggestion that Apollodorus simply erred here seems to have been made first by
M. P. Nilsson, *loc.cit.* (*supra*, n.21) and is accepted by Radke, *loc.cit.* (*supra*, n.24).

[28] Probus, *loc.cit.* (*supra*, n.22).

Iunonis contempserant numen, insania exterritas ... patriam Argos re-liquisse. In addition, of course, the version with Dionysus is not employed by Bacchylides. But it is worth noting that whether we take Hera or Dionysus as the original offended divinity, we arrive at a mythological explanation for the image used by Bacchylides: Meiser remarks, "Die Beziehungen zu dem ταυροκέρως, βουκέρως θεός, βουκόλος, und wie Dionysos sonst noch genannt wurde zur Erinnerung an seine frühere theriomorphe Gestalt und Verehrung sind hier deutlich erkennbar."[29]

Bacchylides comes at the end of a long epic and lyric tradition, and at least one of the unique aspects of his style is influenced by this fact. For at times he took upon himself the task not of striking out in new directions, but of revitalizing the old somewhat hackneyed modes of expression. His propensity for traditional *epitheta ornantia* has been often noted and often criticized, but what he intends has not been sufficiently realized. He is a poet working from the end of a tradition to give new meaning to the usual expressions of that tradition. In *Ode 11* many of the epithets are commonplace: with the *Iliad* in mind a listener could hardly think striking the βοῶπις goddess, ἀγροτέρα Artemis, ἱππόβοτον Argos, or ἄδματοι cattle; ὑψίζυγος Zeus has its parallel in the epic, and the adjective χρυσαλάκατος is known from Homer, the *Hymns*, and Pindar; so also the metaphor in βοῦς ἀζυγας is hackneyed. But the point to appreciate is not merely the age of these epithets, but the new strength with which Bacchylides invests them. By an insistence on the literal, even etymological meaning of these individual terms—literal meanings which might easily have been forgotten in the long tradition—Bacchylides refurbishes the old epithets, and frames them into a new and consistent verbal pattern. His is a mind which works rather with single words than large concepts: his delight is in a literal association, a pun or conceit, in the telling of a traditional tale with new twists of language.

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[29] O. Meiser, *Mythologische Untersuchungen zu Bakchylides* (München 1904) 11; Meiser, Rapp (*op.cit.* [*supra*, n.25] 3003) and E. Rohde (*Psyche* II [Tübingen 1907] 50–51 n.4) seem to feel that the telling with Dionysus is older than that with Hera.