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Introduction: influence, allusion, intertextuality

What kind of poem is Virgil's *Georgics*? This question has been answered – and indeed posed – in a surprising variety of ways by scholars and critics during the course of the twentieth century. Since the 1960s, debate has revolved particularly around the poet's political stance, and the related issue of the optimism or pessimism of his outlook. Should we see the *Georgics* as offering whole-hearted support to the nascent regime of Augustus, or is the poem in some way subtly subversive? How does the poet portray the relationship between the individual and society, or between human beings, the gods and the natural world? More recently, the focus of critical attention has begun to shift towards Virgil's relationship with the didactic tradition. In what sense can we regard the *Georgics* as an *Ascraeum carmen* ('Hesiodic song', 2.176)? Is Virgil's self-proclaimed affinity with Hesiod actually a red herring, which has diverted attention from closer parallels with the self-consciously learned and elegant verse handbooks of Aratus and Nicander, or with Lucretian philosophical didactic? Is the poem 'really' about agriculture? What, if anything, is the poet trying to teach? What is the relationship between the passages of agricultural instruction and the so-called digressions? What are we to make of Virgil's (apparently) cavalier attitude to technical accuracy in his agricultural subject-matter? Does the didactic *praeceptor* contradict himself, and if so, why?

Most of these controversial questions will be addressed in the course of this study; but my principal concern will be the relationship between the *Georgics*, Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*, and the didactic tradition as a whole. In this area, above all, we can trace a surprisingly broad spectrum of opinion, from Sellar's oft-quoted remarks on the exceptional degree of 'influence' exerted by Lucretius on 'the thought, composition and even the diction of the *Georgics*', through Wilkinson's straightforwardly biographical account of Virgil's enthusiastic reaction to the publication of

the *DRN*, to Thomas' assertion that the debt of Virgil to Lucretius in the *Georgics* is 'predominantly formal, consisting of the borrowing of phrases, or occasionally the rearranging of an appealing image'.[1]

It is notable that, while all three critics frame their accounts in terms of the traditional literary-historical concept of 'influence', they evaluate the significance and extent of this influence quite differently. Wilkinson (following Sellar's 'masterly' analysis) suggests that the impact of Lucretius' poem on the young Virgil was so great as to determine not only the form of the *Georgics* but also its themes and the world-view it embodies (even where Virgil's ideas must be seen as a reaction against Lucretius). Thomas' interpretation, on the other hand, is founded upon notions of allusive artistry: Virgil employs Lucretian (and Hesiodic) echoes as a means of validating his own status as didactic poet, and is more interested in defining his own position in literary history than in responding to the ethical or philosophical concerns of his didactic predecessors. He is, so to speak, a Callimachean poet in Lucretian clothing.

The diversity of opinion exemplified by these two extreme positions can, of course, be attributed in large measure to changing critical fashions. A clear line of development can be traced from the *Quellenforschung* of the late nineteenth century (notably the work of Jahn, who devotes detailed studies to Virgil's prose and verse sources and models in each of the four books of the *Georgics*),[2] to Wilkinson's biographical approach and the allied view – developed, for example, by Farrington – that Virgil should be seen as reacting against his Lucretian model.[3] Thomas' line of approach, on the other hand, goes back ultimately to Pasquali's conception of *arte allusiva*,[4] which gained in popularity during the 70s and 80s: Augustan poetry, in particular, is increasingly read in this tradition as self-conscious and self-reflexive, as concerned above all with poetics and with its own position in the literary canon.[5] In other respects, Thomas is the heir of the

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[1] Sellar (1897), p. 199; Wilkinson (1969), pp. 63–5; Thomas (1988), vol. I, p. 4. Thomas' attempt to play down Lucretius' importance as an intertext for the *Georgics* is regarded by many scholars as misguided or at least excessive (see e.g. Nisbet (1990)); but it is worth noting that several other recent studies (Ross (1987), Perkell (1989), Farrell (1991)) allow Lucretius only a relatively restricted role in their interpretations of the poem.

[2] Jahn (1903a, 1903b, 1904, 1905).   [3] Farrington (1958, 1963); cf. Nethercut (1973).

[4] Pasquali (1951).

[5] Farrell (1991) similarly reads the *Georgics* primarily as an essay in literary history, though his discussion of the relationship between Virgil and Lucretius is more nuanced than Thomas' (Virgil's reaction to the *De Rerum Natura* is 'serious, reflective and carefully nuanced' (p. 179), and Lucretian echoes are used to register both similarities with and differences from Lucretius' world-view).

so-called Harvard school of Virgilian criticism, characterized by its em-
ployment of predominantly New Critical techniques with the fairly
explicit agenda of uncovering hidden layers of meaning which subvert the
superficially pro-Augustan surface of the poems.[6] (Critics of this school
generally have surprisingly little to say about Virgil's use of Lucretius,
although – as I argue especially in chapter 7 below – the latter can be seen as
profoundly critical of contemporary political and imperialist ideology.)
More recently still, a view has begun to emerge – again reflecting current
critical trends – that we should not attempt to read the *Georgics* as an
organically unified whole; on the contrary, the poem is characterized by
the presence of unresolved contradictions. The different 'voices' of the
text are, on this view, neither harmonized nor hierarchically organized
(that is, none is finally privileged as 'the poet's true opinion'). Following
this line of approach, it might be argued that Lucretius is of central
importance in the interpretation of Virgil's poem, but that the *Georgics* is
neither straightforwardly Lucretian ('influenced' by Lucretius, in Sellar's
or Wilkinson's terms), nor simply a reaction against Lucretius ('revers[ing]
the religious and moral content of the Lucretian world-picture while
retaining the Lucretian vocabulary', as Farrington puts it).[7]

It will become clear in subsequent chapters that I have considerable
sympathy with this last line of approach. Before embarking on yet
another 'new reading' of the poem, however, it seems desirable to
establish some theoretical preliminaries. The very diversity of previous
interpretations of the poem raises some pressing questions. How can we
decide between Sellar's view of Lucretian 'influence' on the *Georgics* as
all-pervasive, and Thomas' assertion that resemblances between the two
poems are largely confined to a superficial, formal level? How can we
determine when linguistic and other similarities between two texts are
significant and when they are not? To put it another way, how do we
know what constitutes a 'real' allusion? And, even where the presence of
an allusion is accepted, how can we decide how to evaluate it?

I have already drawn attention to the fact that – while very different in
other ways – the interpretations of Wilkinson and Thomas are united in
their reliance on the notion of 'influence'. Hence, both readings might be
termed 'author-centred', in the sense that the critics understand their own

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[6] See especially Putnam (1979) and Ross (1987).   [7] Farrington (1963), p. 91.

role as the recovery or reconstruction of the author's (more or less conscious) intentions. Within the parameters of this broad interpretative strategy, Virgil's relationship with earlier poets and their work can be understood in a number of different ways: Wilkinson sees Lucretius as a formative influence on Virgil's philosophical outlook and poetic technique; Thomas, on the other hand, reads the *Georgics* essentially as a response to Callimachean poetic ideals and to the contemporary political situation, while Lucretian echoes are self-consciously exploited to provide a generic framework; alternatively, Virgil might be seen as attempting to rival Lucretius (*aemulatio*), or as reacting against Lucretian ideas (*oppositio in imitando*).[8] This kind of approach is problematic for a number of reasons, not least of which is the difficulty of distinguishing 'genuine' allusions from casual similarities of expression, structure or technique which might be attributable merely to the authors' common cultural context or to generic propriety rather than to 'significant' influence by one author on another.[9]

One way of avoiding – or at least redefining – this problem is to regard allusion not as an indicator of the author's intention, but as something perceived and even, in a sense, created by the reader. On this view, anything perceived by a reader as an allusion would count as such. This is not to say that any text can mean absolutely anything at all, but it does entail the admission that a plurality of meanings will exist for any one text, and that there is no interpretation which will hold good for all readers at all times. On the other hand, it does seem to me that a fair degree of consensus can be reached amongst a readership which shares a common culture – that is, a readership familiar with the same range of potential intertexts and strategies of reading and interpretation.

As a general term to describe this process, I prefer 'intertextuality' to the more traditional 'allusion' or 'reference', for a number of reasons.[10]

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[8] For the terminology, see e.g. Farrell (1991), pp. 5–24; the phrase *oppositio in imitando* seems to have been coined by Giangrande (see Giangrande (1967), p. 85).

[9] Cf. Clayton and Rothstein (1991b), esp. pp. 4f.: 'Concern with influence arose in conjunction with the mid-eighteenth-century interest in originality and genius, and the concept still bears the marks of that origin . . . Scholars worried throughout the twentieth century how to discriminate genuine influences from commonplace images, techniques, or ideas that could be found in almost any writer of a given period . . .'. For an attempt to establish criteria for distinguishing between 'genuine' allusions and accidental coincidences of phrasing, see Thomas (1986).

[10] The term was originally coined by Kristeva, who defines it as follows: 'Any text is a mosaic of quotations; any text is an absorption and transformation of another. The notion of *intertextuality* replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least *double*' (Kristeva (1980), p. 66). It should be noted, however, that later theorists and critics have understood the term in rather different ways (see e.g. Worton and Still (1990), Plett (1991b), Van Erp Taalman Kip (1994)); Kristeva herself subsequently disclaimed her own coinage on

First, both 'allusion' and 'reference' presuppose the notion of authorial
control of the text and its meaning; 'intertextuality' is a more neutral
term, which avoids prejudging the question of agency. Secondly, 'inter-
textuality' suggests a broader phenomenon than the alternative terms.
Where an allusion might be interpreted as something incidental to the
meaning of a text (as – say – an acknowledgement of an earlier author's
influence, or a display of erudition), intertextuality suggests something
more fundamental.[11] The meaning of a text, on this view, is constituted
by its relationship with earlier and contemporary texts; close resemblan-
ces of phrasing, structure, prosody etc. ('allusions' in the traditional sense)
act as markers which draw the reader's attention to such relationships. In
this sense, the identification of allusions is part of a broader process of
intertextual interpretation, whereby the reader interacts with the text to
produce meaning: while allusions can be meaningfully described as
present in the text (whether or not consciously put there by the author), it
is up to the reader to activate these allusions by identifying and interpret-
ing intertextual resemblances.[12] We may, indeed, find it useful to con-

the grounds that it had been misappropriated as a synonym for source-criticism. While such
'abuse' of Kristeva's terminology is open to criticism (see e.g. Mai (1991), Laird (1999)), it
has also been pointed out that there is considerable irony in the supposition that the word
'intertextuality' is itself subject to authorial control (Friedmann (1991); cf. Clayton and
Rothstein (1991b), who point out that 'Kristeva's own development of the term "inter-
textuality" was itself a complex intertextual event, one that involved both inclusion and
selectivity . . . Her dialogue with Bakhtin . . . was mediated by the texts of Derrida and
Lacan, so that her account of Bakhtin as well as of semiotics was destabilized' (p. 18)). My use
of the term, then, is not intended to suggest close adherence to Kristeva; while I recognize
that intertextuality is inherent in all language (and still more in all texts), it seems to me that
such an observation is not particularly helpful to the critic (cf., again, Clayton and Rothstein
(1991b): 'Valuable as Barthes' account of intertextuality is for understanding the literary, it
does not provide the critic with a particularly effective tool for analyzing literary texts' (pp.
22f.)). On the other hand, I do find the *term* intertextuality useful, for reasons I have set out
above. To put it rather flippantly, I recognize that all texts are intertextual, but prefer to see
some texts as more intertextual than others.

[11] Compare D. P. Fowler (1997), esp. pp. 15–18 (an admirably clear discussion of overlaps and
distinctions between the terms 'allusion' and 'intertextuality').

[12] The process of 'activation' and interpretation is usefully discussed by Ben-Porat (1976), who
defines literary allusion as 'a device for the simultaneous activation of two texts'; cf. also
Hebel (1991) and Holthuis (1994). Conte (1986), pp. 38f. and 52–7 (cf. Barchiesi and Conte
(1989)), suggests that allusion should be regarded as a rhetorical figure analogous to
metaphor: 'The gap in figurative language that opens between letter and sense is also created
in allusion between that which is said (as it first appears), a letter, and the thought evoked,
the sense. And just as no figure exists until the reader becomes aware of figurative language,
so too allusion comes into being only when the reader grasps that there is a gap between the
immediate meaning . . . and the image that is its corollary' (p. 38). In these terms, allusion can
be seen as an invitation to the reader to interpret the text *as* intertext, to read it *against* or
through the text alluded to (cf. Worton and Still (1990), pp. 11f.).

ceptualize such resemblances in terms of an author's hypothetical inten-
tions ('Virgil is accepting/challenging/subverting Lucretius' world-
view'); but it should always be borne in mind that this is a kind of
shorthand, and that the alluding author is ultimately a figure (re)construc-
ted from the text by the reader.[13]

How, then, do we identify such allusive markers? How do we decide
what is or is not an intertext for any particular text? On one level, this is
not a meaningful question, since from the reader's point of view all texts
are, so to speak, potentially mutual intertexts. On the other hand, though
all texts are potentially interrelated, certain features (such as genre, con-
temporaneity and common themes) will tend to encourage us to compare
some texts more readily than others. It is here that the identification of
allusive markers comes into play.

A relatively obvious and unequivocal kind of allusive marker is the
direct quotation. Where two authors employ identical phrasing, it is
virtually inevitable that a reader who is sufficiently familiar with the
source-text will identify a cross-reference. As Wills has persuasively
argued in a recent study of repetition in Latin poetry, however, equally
striking effects can be produced by almost any feature of diction, prosody,
character or situation which creates a parallel between two (or more)
texts.[14] The reader is particularly likely to detect allusion where the
language is in some way 'marked': while poetic language in general is set
apart from 'ordinary' speech, allusive language is 'set apart from poetic
discourse, if only for a moment' (p. 17),[15] for example through the use of
hapax legomena or other uncharacteristic vocabulary.[16] A striking example
from the *Georgics* is Virgil's use of the adverb *divinitus* ('by divine agency')

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[13] A point well argued by Hinds (1998), pp. 47–51. For this reason (amongst others) I have not
attempted a rigorous exclusion of phrasing which might be taken to suggest authorial agency
or intention. 'Virgil says' is too useful a shorthand for 'the text says' or 'the text suggests' to
be conveniently abandoned.

[14] Wills (1996), pp. 15–41 (esp. 18–24). Unlike Wills, I have made no attempt to provide a
comprehensive typology of allusive markers; the aim of my discussion is merely to draw
attention to the range of ways in which Virgil's poem 'calls up' its Lucretian intertext.

[15] Cf. p. 41: 'allusion is the referential use of specifically marked language'.

[16] But linguistic idiosyncrasies of this kind need not be regarded as *essential* features of the
intertextual marker: Hinds (1998), pp. 25–51 argues persuasively that 'there is no discursive
element in a Roman poem, no matter how unremarkable in itself, and no matter how
frequently repeated in the tradition, that cannot in some imaginable circumstance mobilize a
specific allusion' (p. 26). Nothing *prevents* us from connecting the commonest *topos* with one
or more specific passages, and other features of the alluding text (genre, narrative situation
etc.) may actually encourage us to do so (cf. my discussion of *Geo.* 1.316–34 below).

in 1.415: the word is not only *hapax* in Virgil, but is generally rare in Latin poetry, with the exception of Lucretius, who uses it as kind of catch-word (it occurs eight times in the *DRN*).[17] A suitably qualified reader will thus immediately think of Lucretius. What happens next? On the view outlined above, the allusion acts as a marker, activating the Lucretian intertext. But it is up to the reader to decide how to interpret the relationship between the two texts. I argue in chapter 3 that the allusion can be seen as part of a 'dialogue' between different views of the relationship between gods, human beings and the natural world which runs through the whole poem, but is particularly prominent in book 1: Lucretius repeatedly uses the adverb *divinitus* in contexts where he is repudiating the idea of divine intervention in the world; but the Epicurean doctrine of divine indifference clashes with the way that the gods are depicted elsewhere in *Georgics* 1 and throughout the poem. Other readers might, of course, interpret the allusion in different ways, or even decide that it is of no significance at all; nevertheless, I would still maintain that the marker exists in the text, and has at least the potential to prompt interpretation.

Two further examples of direct quotation or close imitation, drawn from *Georgics* 3, illustrate some further ways in which allusive language may be marked. In 3.90, Virgil dignifies the mythical horses of Mars and Achilles with the phrase *quorum Grai meminere poetae* ('of whom Greek poets have told'); a little later, the gadfly is described as *asper, acerba sonans* ('fierce and angry-sounding', 149). Both phrases are connected in several ways with Lucretian intertexts. In *DRN* 5.405, the myth of Phaethon is dismissed by Lucretius with the phrase *scilicet ut veteres Graium cecinere poetae* ('so, at least, the old Greek poets sang'); and in 5.33, the phrase *asper, acerba tuens* ('fierce and angry-looking') is applied to the dragon of the Hesperides. In both cases, the Virgilian phrases echo not just Lucretius' diction, but also the metrical position in the Lucretian lines; the former is also marked (like *divinitus* in 1.415) by the fact that it is a kind of formula in Lucretius (repeated with slight variations in 2.600 and 6.754). Thirdly, the Virgilian phrases are linked to their Lucretian intertext by similarities between the contexts: Virgil is discussing the *mythical* horses of Mars and Achilles and the *monstrous* gadfly (*hoc . . . monstro*, 'this monster', 152), Lucretius is dismissing the *myth* of Phaethon and comparing Hercules' slaying of *monsters* (unfavourably) with Epicurus' victory over the

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[17] See pp. 83–6 below for further details and discussion.

passions. Once again, I see these similarities as allusive markers drawing
attention to a broader dialogue between the two texts: Virgil's use of
Lucretian phraseology can be seen here as opening up a gap between
'letter' and 'sense' (in Conte's terms)[18] which requires interpretation
(Virgil appears in these two instances to be accepting at face value stories
of metamorphosis and monstrosity, but in language which recalls Luc-
retius' rejection of just these kinds of myths).[19]

A fourth passage where intertextual interpretation is called for in a
slightly different way is the so-called 'aetiology of *labor*', 1.118–46 (dis-
cussed in detail in chapter 3). This is a notoriously difficult and controver-
sial passage: no two critics seem to agree on how positively (or negatively)
we should read the evaluation of *labor* ('work', 'toil'), human progress and
Jupiter's action in putting an end to the Golden Age. One way of
thinking through these problems is to consider how the Golden Age is
dealt with in other texts; hence, it may be that the very difficulty of
reaching a coherent interpretation of Virgil's text in its own terms leads us
beyond the words on the page to the complex series of intertexts which
underlie this passage.[20]

A further (and final) way in which allusive passages may be marked is
their position within the work. It is conventional in classical literature
for the beginnings of both poems and prose works to be densely allusive,
or, to put it another way, to establish intertextual links which will
condition our reading of the work as a whole. Other strongly marked
contexts are the middles and ends of works, and, more generally, any
passage where the writer's aims, subject-matter or poetics are under
discussion.

In the case of the *Georgics*, each of the four books begins and ends with
a clearly demarcated section in which programmatic issues come to the
fore. These proems and finales will be dealt with in detail in chapter 2.
Here, I want to comment briefly on the finale to book 2 and the proem to
book 3, which together form a central block dealing overtly with poetics
and with the relationship between tradition and originality.

In 2.475, Virgil turns emphatically from reflexions on the idyllic life of
the farmer to discuss his own poetic preferences: *me vero primum dulces ante*

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[18] See n. 12 above.   [19] See further pp. 125–7 below.
[20] Similarly, the oddity of Virgil's phrasing in 1.242f., where the south pole is said to lie
'beneath our feet', below the Styx and 'deep *Manes*', may in itself lead us to Lucretius'
cosmic vision in the proem to *DRN* 3, where nothing prevents him from observing 'beneath
[his] feet' the *non*-existence of Acheron (3.25–7).

omnia Musae . . . ('but as for me, may the Muses, sweeter than all else . . .').
He expresses the desire to write on natural-scientific themes, but reverts
to the countryside as a second best option. Then follows the famous
double *makarismos*:

> felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas
> atque metus omnis et inexorabile fatum
> subiecit pedibus strepitumque Acherontis avari:
> fortunatus et ille deos qui novit agrestis
> Panaque Silvanumque senem Nymphasque sorores.
>
> 2.490–4

Happy the man who has been able to discover the causes of things,
to trample underfoot every fear, and implacable fate, and the din of
greedy Acheron. Fortunate too is he who knows the rustic gods, Pan
and old Silvanus and the sister Nymphs.

Makarismoi of this kind need not, of course, have specific reference to a
particular individual: in fact, they are more usually applied to groups (the
language here particularly suggests the context of initiation into the
mysteries, where happiness is commonly linked with mystical knowl-
edge), and some critics have duly dismissed the idea that any specific
identification can be made here.[21] Yet in such an overtly programmatic
context, it is natural to assume that Virgil is referring to a particular poetic
predecessor, and there is one obvious candidate. The list of topics for
scientific poetry in 477–82 may already have brought Lucretius to
mind;[22] and the language in lines 490–2 is reminiscent of several more or
less programmatic passages in the *DRN*. The phrase *rerum cognoscere causas*
('to discover the causes of things') recalls two passages where Lucretius
proclaims the need for philosophical understanding to combat fear of
death and of the gods:

> hoc se quisque modo fugit, at quem scilicet, ut fit,
> effugere haud potis est, ingratis haeret et odit
> propterea, morbi quia causam non tenet aeger;
> quam bene si videat, iam rebus quisque relictis
> naturam primum studeat *cognoscere rerum*.   3.1068–72

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[21] For Virgil's use of vocabulary associated with initiation, see Buchheit (1972), pp. 72–4,
Hardie (1986), pp. 39–42, and Mynors *ad* 490. Thomas (*ad* 490) rejects the view that the lines
refer specifically to Lucretius (or to Lucretius and his Greek predecessors); for further
references, see p. 43, n. 74 below.

[22] Most of the topics are in fact covered by Lucretius: for details, see p. 42, n. 71 below.

So each man flees himself, and yet, against his will, clings to and loathes the self that, naturally, he cannot escape; because he is sick, and does not grasp the cause of his disease. If he fully understood his plight, he would at once abandon all his other business and immediately devote himself to discovering the true nature of things.

> praeterea caeli rationes ordine certo
> et varia annorum cernebant tempora verti
> nec poterant quibus id fieret *cognoscere causis*.
> ergo perfugium sibi habebant omnia divis
> tradere et illorum nutu facere omnia flecti.   5.1183–7

Besides, they observed the regular movements of the heavens and saw how the different seasons of the year came round, nor could they discover the causes that brought these things about. So they took refuge in handing everything over to the gods and attributing control of all things to their will.

Similarly, lines 491f. combine echoes of Lucretius' celebration of Epicurus' victory over superstition in the proem to *DRN* 1 and his statement of purpose in the proem to book 3:

> quare religio *pedibus subiecta* vicissim
> obteritur, nos exaequat victoria caelo.   1.78f.

So religion in turn is crushed and trampled underfoot, and his victory raises us to the heavens.

> animi natura videtur
> atque animae claranda meis iam versibus esse
> et *metus* ille foras praeceps *Acheruntis* agendus,
> funditus humanam qui vitam turbat ab imo
> omnia suffundens mortis nigrore neque ullam
> esse voluptatem liquidam puramque relinquit.   3.35–40

It seems, then, that I must make clear in my verses the nature of the mind and the soul, and drive that fear of Acheron headlong out of doors – the fear that troubles human life from its lowest depths, polluting all things with the blackness of death and leaving no pleasure clear and pure.

But if we take the first part of the *makarismos* as a reference to Lucretius and Epicurean rationalism, the second part becomes highly problematic. How can Virgil turn immediately from a declaration of his admiration for Lucretius' abolition of fear and fate to congratulate the man 'who knows