

VIRGIL ON
THE NATURE OF
THINGS

The *Georgics*, Lucretius and
the Didactic Tradition

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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

¹ Sellar (1897), p. 199; Wilkinson (1969), pp. 63–5; Thomas (1988), vol. 1, 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 employment 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

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

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, ‘intertextuality’ 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 resemblances 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 interpreting 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 “intertextuality” 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 intentions ('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)constructed 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, contemporaneity 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')

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

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 Lucretius' 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 (discussed in detail in chapter 3). This is a notoriously difficult and controversial 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*

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.

*Makarismo*i 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 knowledge), 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

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 perflugium 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* I 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

the rustic gods'? There is a very obvious contradiction here. Not only does Lucretius pour scorn on religion in general, but he specifically dismisses Pan and the nymphs as creations of rustic superstition (4.580–94). The passage as a whole seems to declare a dual allegiance to two incompatible world-views: Lucretian rationalism is juxtaposed with a nostalgic longing for simple rustic piety, more reminiscent of Hesiod.²³ The poet seems to identify himself more closely with the second option – not least because the *deos agrestis* ('rustic gods') are reminiscent of the *dique deaeque . . . studium quibus arva tueri* ('gods and goddesses whose pleasure is to watch over the fields') to whom Virgil appeals in the proem to book 1 – but this apparent preference must be balanced against the explicit characterization of rustic subjects as a second-best option in the preceding lines. Here, then, intertextuality leads us into a dilemma which lies at the heart of the poem in both a literal and a figurative sense. The two extremes of the didactic tradition (archaic, Hesiodic piety and Lucretian science) are brought together in such a way that the conflict between them is brought to the fore, not resolved. I will argue that this central, programmatic passage is emblematic of the poem as a whole: Virgil's problematic juxtaposition here of two incompatible world-views suggests a way of reading the *Georgics*, as a polyphonic text in which the different 'voices' of the didactic tradition are brought together but not harmonized into a seamless whole.

The proem to book 3 calls on a still broader range of intertexts, but here the effect is quite different. Virgil depicts himself in this passage as triumphing over earlier (specifically Greek) poetry, and bringing the Muses from Helicon to his native Mantua. The lines simultaneously proclaim and illustrate the poet's mastery of tradition: Virgil paradoxically celebrates his originality in language appropriated from Pindar, Callimachus, Ennius and – again – Lucretius.²⁴

The central position of the passage is again important here. *Georgics* 3.1–48 is an example of what Conte has called the 'proem in the middle'.²⁵ Conte draws attention to a tradition in Latin poetry – exemplified both by this passage and by the proem to *DRN* 4 – where-

²³ Cf. especially Hesiod's closing *makarismos* in *Op.* 826f.: τάων εὐδαίμων τε καὶ ὄλβιος ὃς τάδε πάντα | εἰδὼς ἐργάζεται ἀναίτιος ἀθανάτοισιν ('Happy and blessed is the man who, knowing all these things, labours blamelessly in the sight of the immortal gods'). Again, the parallel position of the two passages at the end of Hesiod's poem and at the end of the first half of the *Georgics* suggests a link between them.

²⁴ On this 'very Roman paradox', cf. Hinds (1998), pp. 52–5. ²⁵ Conte (1992).

by the central position in a work or poetic book is reserved for discussion of poetics. He argues that this tradition goes back – via Ennius' *Annales* – to Callimachus' *Victoria Berenices*, which stood as a kind of dedication at the central point of the *Aetia* (the beginning of book 3, as in the *Georgics*). Formally, the Callimachean passage is an epinician, celebrating a victory of the Alexandrian queen Berenice II in the Nemean Games; but post-Callimachean poets, responding perhaps to programmatic motifs implicit in Callimachus' language, assign the equivalent location in their poems or books of poems to more or less explicit poetic programmes.²⁶ Virgil's proem, then, directs us to Callimachus both by means of its position and through verbal and thematic allusion.²⁷ The hackneyed subjects rejected in the opening lines seem to be mainly Callimachean, and the metaphors of chariot and temple in lines 10–39 refer us back in turn to Callimachus' Pindaric models.²⁸ But Virgil, ironically, will attain the Callimachean ideal of originality by turning his back on Callimachean mythological themes, and writing instead a Lucretian philosophical epic (the *Georgics* itself) or an Ennian celebration of Octavian's *res gestae* (the future project embodied here in the temple metaphor). Thus, echoes of (Pindar and) Callimachus are combined with allusions to Ennius and Lucretius.²⁹ In a passage where Virgil is celebrating both his own and Octavian's triumphs, it is appropriate that the Ennian and Lucretian intertexts are also encomiastic and/or involve discussion of poetics. Lines 8–12 recall Ennius' self-celebration in his 'epitaph' and Lucretius' praise of both Ennius³⁰ and his philosophical 'hero' Epicurus:

²⁶ For possible programmatic elements in the *Victoria Berenices*, see Thomas (1983), who also discusses links with Propertius 3.1 and Statius 3.1.

²⁷ Cf. esp. *pastor ab Amphryso* ('shepherd by the Amphrysus') with Call. *Hymn* 2.47–9 (as Thomas notes, the river is only mentioned in connexion with Apollo in these two passages); the reference to Molorchus (19) also looks to Callimachus. In more general terms, Virgil's rejection of hackneyed themes and the imagery of the proem as a whole resonate with the much-imitated programmatic passages *Aet.* fr. 1, *Ep.* 28 and *Hymn* 2.105–12. For further detail on all these points, see Thomas *ad loc.*

²⁸ The chariot-journey and the temple are common Pindaric metaphors for poetic composition: see Wilkinson (1970), Buchheit (1972), pp. 148–59, Lundström (1976). Thomas (1983) argues that the temple metaphor also occurred in Callimachus, who should therefore be regarded as Virgil's 'model'; but it is hard to see what *prevents* the reader from thinking of Pindar as well as Callimachus. (In Thomas' own terms (cf. Thomas (1986), pp. 188f.), we could identify this passage as an example of 'window reference', in which close imitation of a model is interrupted by a reference to the model's source.)

²⁹ Cf. Buchheit (1972), pp. 99–103; Hardie (1986), pp. 48–50; Hinds (1998), pp. 52–5.

³⁰ The Lucretian lines probably also contain Ennian echoes: see Skutsch (1985), p. 167.

temptanda via est, qua me quoque possim
 tollere humo victorque virum volitare per ora.³¹
 primus ego in patriam mecum, modo vita supersit,
 Aonio rediens deducam vertice Musas;
 primus Idumaeas referam tibi, Mantua, palmas . . .

Geo. 3.8–12

I too must find a way to rise from the earth and fly victoriously over the lips of men. I will be the first, if my life lasts, to return to my homeland, leading the Muses down from the peak of Helicon; I will be the first to bring Idumaeian palms to you, Mantua . . .

nemo me lacrimis decoret nec funera fletu
 faxit. cur? volito vivos per ora virum.

Ennius Ep. 18V

Let no one honour me with tears nor celebrate my funeral with weeping. Why? Because I fly, still living, over the lips of men.

Ennius . . . noster . . . qui primus amoeno
 detulit ex Helicone perenni fronde coronam,³²
 per gentis Italas hominum quae clara clueret.

DRN 1.117–19

Our own Ennius, who first brought down from lovely Helicon a garland of evergreen leaves, to win him bright renown amongst the tribes of Italy.

primum Graius³³ homo mortalis tollere contra
 est oculos ausus primusque obsistere contra
 . . .
 ergo vivida vis animi pervicit, et extra
 processit longe flammantia moenia mundi
 atque omne immensum peragravit mente animoque,
 unde refert nobis victor quid possit oriri,
 quid nequeat . . .

DRN 1.66f., 72–6

³¹ The strong alliteration connects this line with both the Ennian epigram and Lucretius 1.72.

³² Cf. Virgil's *palmae* ('palms', 12), and his olive garland in 21.

³³ The Greek/Roman theme which runs through Lucretius' proem (cf. the Roman opening – *Aeneadum genetrix* ('Mother of Aeneas' sons', 1), picked up by *Romanis* ('Romans') in 40 – and the poet's remarks on the problems of translating Greek philosophy into Latin poetry in 136–45) is highly relevant here: Virgil similarly emphasizes his appropriation of Greek tradition in 10–12 and 19f.

A man of Greece was first who dared to lift his mortal gaze, and first to stand against it [religion] . . . So his vigorous mind was victorious, and ranged far beyond the flaming ramparts of the world, roaming in thought through the boundless universe; from there he brought back to us, victoriously, knowledge of what can come to be and what cannot . . .

The position of the proem also connects it, as already noted, with Lucretius' similar reflexions on the originality of his poem in the corresponding location, *DRN* 4.1–25;³⁴ and the triumphal imagery suggests a further allusion to the triumph of Ennius' patron, M. Fulvius Nobilior, who literally 'brought the Muses to Italy', by importing their statues as war-spoils from Ambracia and setting them up in the temple (cf. *Geo.* 3.16) of Hercules Musarum.³⁵

Whereas at the end of book 2 conflicting intertexts are called upon in such a way as to emphasize irreconcilable differences between them, here the Pindaric, Callimachean, Ennian and Lucretian echoes are formed into a harmonious whole.³⁶ The triumphal and epinician imagery serves as a unifying force, and, while there is undoubtedly a paradox in the way that Virgil appropriates earlier poets' voices to stake his own claim to originality, the rhetoric of the passage is supremely confident. By expressing his 'anxiety of influence', the poet has neutralized it: the proem indicates both a sense of 'belatedness' and a triumphant consciousness of having mastered the tradition. In order to live up to Callimachus' poetic ideals, it is necessary to be paradoxically unCallimachean – but in this passage, at least, the paradox is presented as a solution rather than a problem.

I have concentrated at some length on this central programmatic diptych, because it seems to me to suggest two quite different ways of reading the poem. The double *makarismos* at the end of book 2 suggests an untidy, open text, which we might characterize as a kind of forum for dialogue

³⁴ Note especially the 'untouched woods' of *Geo.* 3.40f., which look back through Lucretius' *integros fontis* ('untouched springs', *DRN* 4.2) to the Callimachean image of the untrodden path (*Aet. fr.* 1.27f. Pf.) or untouched spring (*Hymn* 2.111f.). *iuvat* ('it pleases me') in 23 also recalls the repeated *iuvat* of *DRN* 4.2f.

³⁵ Cf. Hardie (1986), p. 49, n. 39; Hinds (1998), pp. 54f.

³⁶ This is not to suggest that the proem is unproblematic, however. In particular, there is some equivocation as to the reference of the triumphal metaphor: is Virgil's poetic 'victory' to be seen as something already achieved (in the *Georgics* itself), or do the future tenses point to a newly-conceived but not-yet-executed project (the future *Aeneid*)? Cf. Wilkinson (1969), pp. 323f.; Kraggerud (1998).

between various intertexts.³⁷ On this reading, there is no strongly marked authorial voice within the text pushing the reader in one particular direction. As will become clear in subsequent chapters, I read the *Georgics* as challenging Lucretius' world-view (in particular) by bringing it into conflict with those of other didactic intertexts, but not as finally rejecting it or substituting a preferred alternative.

The proem to book 3, on the other hand, presents us with an authorial figure who is much more firmly in control of his material.³⁸ The emphasis here is on poetic artistry and the pursuit of originality for its own sake; the allusions to earlier texts in this passage suggest not so much a dialogue between intertexts as a self-conscious and self-reflexive meditation on the relationship between tradition and innovation.

The reading strategies prompted by these two passages could be extended to the poem as a whole, and seem to me to be complementary rather than mutually exclusive. One possible strategy is to read for rough edges, clashes between intertexts, questions rather than answers, conflict rather than resolution. This approach seems to me to work particularly well if we want to get at the ideas and world-view embodied in the *Georgics*, and the ways in which it responds to the ideas put forward by earlier poets in the didactic tradition. The sheer difficulty of the poem (suggested by the diversity of reactions it has evoked amongst critics) is particularly striking in a genre which overtly claims to *teach* its reader: we might expect Virgil to offer us answers rather than problems and unanswered questions. On the other hand, it is also possible to read the poem (as Farrell, notably, does) as a self-reflexive, erudite work in the Callimachean tradition. While this aspect of the poem will be of less concern to me in the present study, I see no reason to attempt to rule it out of court. Indeed, since it is my contention that the *Georgics* is a profoundly open text, it follows that it will support a number of different readings, none of which need be seen as finally 'right'.

Up to this point, I have focussed mainly on passages which would certainly pass muster as allusive according to conventional philological criteria. I have already hinted, however, that such traditional criteria need not always be brought to bear. Once the reader has, so to speak,

³⁷ On 'open' and 'closed' texts, see e.g. Eco (1981), pp. 3–43, and cf. Fowler (1989b) for some different senses of the term 'closure'.

³⁸ But see pp. 44–5 below for some qualifications: the confident tone of this passage is to some extent undermined or at least problematized elsewhere in the poem.

been sensitized to the importance of a particular intertext, apparently casual similarities will often be enough to ‘reactivate’ that intertext.³⁹ My argument is, then, essentially cumulative: the greater the number of close echoes of the *DRN*, the more likely we are to have Lucretius in the forefront of our minds and so to perceive less specific resemblances as allusions. *Georgics* 1.316–34, for example, is a set piece description of a storm, which suddenly descends on the farmer’s ripening crops. The ecphrasis is punctuated by military metaphors: *ventorum . . . proelia* (‘battles of the winds’, 318), *agmen aquarum* (‘a flood/army of water’, 322), the thunderbolt as Jupiter’s weapon (329). The passage is discussed in detail in chapter 3, where I point out that much of the vocabulary here is Lucretian; nevertheless, it might be objected that comparisons between battles and storms are such a common epic *topos* that we should not posit a specific allusion here. But my hypothetical objector has failed to take account of the context. The earlier part of book 1 has been pervaded by a series of unmistakable Lucretian allusions, which are particularly prominent in generalizing passages where the poet pauses to reflect on the relationship between human beings, the gods and the natural world. The language becomes strikingly Lucretian in 50–63 (the division of the world into different regions, suited to different crops, after the Flood), 118–46 (the ‘aetiology of *labor*’), 193–203 (reflexions on the degeneration of nature) and 231–51 (the five celestial and terrestrial zones).⁴⁰ So when this passage implicitly raises the problem of theodicy yet again (why does Jupiter seem so vindictive towards the apparently innocent farmer?), we do not need much prompting to think again of Lucretius (who would of course argue that the indifference of nature towards human concerns proves that the world is not under divine control).

Each of my last three chapters deals with a concept (*labor* and *curae*; the marvels of nature) or complex of imagery (military metaphors) common to the two poems. Here again my argument does not necessarily rely on the identification of specific allusions, although numerous verbal parallels can in fact be traced between the relevant passages. The cumulative effect of the allusive markers which do, indubitably, punctuate the poem gives the reader sufficient encouragement to treat these more general parallels as significant. Once we have been alerted to Virgil’s engagement with the

³⁹ A similar process of ‘reactivation’ (in Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past*) is analysed by Riffaterre (1990), pp. 98–104.

⁴⁰ For detailed discussion of all these passages, see pp. 60–86 below.

Lucretian world-view, dialogue between the texts can be seen to continue even where it is not strongly marked as such.

The line of interpretation adopted in this study, then, takes the detection of allusions (in more or less the conventional sense) as its starting point. Close verbal and other parallels will be treated as allusive markers, which open up an intertextual dialogue between the *Georgics*, the *DRN* and other works within (and beyond) the didactic tradition. Once this dialogue has been established, it can be reopened at any time, wherever coincidences of language, theme or imagery can be perceived between texts, even if these are not close enough to count as allusions according to traditional criteria. I will argue – to return to one of the questions with which I began – that Lucretius is the most important participant in this intertextual dialogue, in the sense that the *DRN* is the text most frequently evoked and subjected to the closest scrutiny throughout the poem; but this emphasis should not be taken as excluding the possibility of other readings. Virgil also engages with Hesiod, Aratus, Callimachus, Homer and others; and – while it seems to me perverse to ignore the pervasive presence of Lucretian (and anti-Lucretian) voices within the poem – I am not suggesting that we should regard the *DRN* as Virgil's sole 'model'. Ultimately, as I have already suggested, any reading of a text will be the product as much of the reader's own preoccupations as of the objective 'reality' of the words on the page; as a late twentieth-century reader, I am concerned to keep Virgil's text as open and pluralistic as possible, and to see it as questioning (as opposed to either accepting or rejecting) tradition. I hope that such an interpretation will help to make sense of Virgil's poem for my own readers, at the turn of the twentieth century and the twenty-first.