

VIRGIL
GEORGICS

VOLUME 1: BOOKS I-II

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INTRODUCTION

1. THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Though the date of composition is still somewhat in dispute, from external and internal evidence it is likely that the *Georgics* occupied Virgil for seven years and was completed in 29 B.C., in August of which year it was read to Octavian by Virgil and Maecenas.¹ In other words the poem was begun, and much of it was written, in a time of the utmost political uncertainty, when 'it was more easy to witness and affirm the passing of the old order than to discern the manner and fashion of the new'.² This uncertainty, a fact of life for Virgil since childhood, pervades the poem. Even with the support and patronage of Maecenas,³ and therefore ultimately of Octavian, his hopes for the relative security which the next decade was to provide can have been no more than that; the prayer towards the end of Book 1 (500-1 *hunc saltem euerso iuuenem succurrere saeclo | ne prohibete*) is soon succeeded by a simile revealing the realities of national existence (513-14 *frustra retinacula tendens | fertur equis auriga neque audit currus habenas*). Times changed after Actium, and the closing lines of the poem (4.559-62) reflect that fact (though see 4.560-11n.), but those lines have little to do with the central themes and concerns of the *Georgics* or with the dark visions of Virgil, which were not dispersed by political settlements, and which continued to find expression throughout his poetry (see below sect. 7).

2. THE *GEORGICS* AND VIRGIL'S POETIC CAREER

The *Georgics* is a middle poem in spirit as well as in time. As Virgil's poetic career developed, at least by the time the *Georgics* was nearing completion, and as the *Aeneid* began to take shape in his mind, the poet came to see and to present this poem as one of transition. At the beginning of the second half of the *Eclogues* his adherence to the poetics of Callimachus had been stated without qualification, as is clear from

¹ So *Vita Donati* 25, 27; *Vita Servii* 25; and there is no good reason to suspect the details.

² Syme (1939) 255.

³ Cf. 3.41n. on the question of Maecenas' involvement in the poem.

the virtual translation of *Aet.* 1, fr. 1.21-4:⁴

cum canerem reges et proelia, Cynthus aurem
uellit et admonuit: 'pastorem, Tityre, pinguis
pascere oportet ouis, deductum dicere carmen.'
nunc ego (namque super tibi erunt qui dicere laudes,
Vare, tuas cupiant et tristia condere bella)
agrestem tenui meditabor harundine Musam:
non iniussa cano. (*E.* 6.3-9)

And in the same relative position of the *Aeneid*, in the delayed proem of Book 7, with what looks like a recantation, Virgil refers to his earlier stance:

dicam horrida bella,
dicam acies actosque animis in funera reges,
Tyrrhenamque manum totamque sub arma coactam
Hesperiam. maior rerum mihi nascitur ordo,
maius opus moueo. (*A.* 7.41-5)

Between the refusal and the commitment, at the beginning of the second half of the *Georgics*,⁵ Virgil occupies middle ground:

interea Dryadum siluas saltusque sequamur
intactos, tua, Maecenas, haud mollia iussa.

mox tamen ardentis accingar dicere pugnas
Caesaris . . . (3.40-1, 46-7)

Were it not for the existence of the *Aeneid* this last statement might be seen merely as a variation on the *recusatio*, carrying no implication of a commitment to a future large-scale poetic enterprise.⁶ But the fact is that in every programmatic utterance of the poem Virgil characterizes his position as transitional: at 2.39-46 he invokes the support of Maecenas in such a way as to suggest a poem of epic proportions (41 *pelagoque uolans da uela patenti*), only to recover his Callimachean position (44 *ades*

⁴On this see Clausen (1982) 21-3.

⁵In a passage which was clearly composed not long before the completion of the poem; cf. 3.1-48n.

⁶*mox*, which can mean 'in due course', 'when the time comes', contributes to the ambiguity.

et primi lege litoris oram; see 41–5n.); at 3.290–4 he speaks of the need to treat in high style (*magno nunc ore sonandum*) themes of a lowly nature (*angustis . . . rebus*), an antithesis which will be varied at the beginning of the fourth book (4–6 *duces . . . et proelia dicam*. | *in tenui labor*; see 4.6n.); and throughout the poem of the third book, the most extensive poetic manifesto in the corpus, he justifies the departure from his earlier attenuated mode (3.1–48n.).⁷

In manner and composition the *Georgics* is deeply indebted to Callimachus. The four books find their closest analogy in the four books of the *Aetia*, and Virgil indicates the structural dependence at various points (e.g. 1.32; 3.19–20; 4.559–66 and nn.); and if one word best describes Virgil's manner of reference to his literary tradition that word is 'Callimachean' (see below sect. 4). But as the preceding passages show, this affiliation was tempered by a sense that the literary climate, and Virgil's own genius, had developed to a point where such poetics were no longer the main issue: 3.3–9 *cetera, quae uacuas tenuissent carmine mentes*, | *omnia iam uulgata . . . temptanda uia est, qua me quoque possim* | *tollere humo uictorque uirum uolitare per ora*.

3. GENERIC AFFILIATIONS

Vergilius in operibus suis diuersos secutus est poetas: . . . Hesiodum in his libris, quem penitus reliquit (Serv. ad *G.* 1 *prooem.*). The mind of the critic, ancient or modern, tends to strive for neatness, encouraged by the need to systematize. Servius is not alone in regarding the *Georgics* as a didactic poem, in the mould of Hesiod's *Works and Days* or Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*;⁸ and Virgil himself invites the characterization (2.176 *Ascræumque cano Romana per oppida carmen*), just as Horace seemed to restrict his claims for the *Odes* to his formal achievement: 3.30.10–14 *dicar . . . | princeps Aeolium carmen ad Italos* | *deduxisse modos*. But it is one of the marks of Roman poetry that generic appearance need not imply the same generic intent. The real concerns of Horace in the *Odes* are directed more

⁷ For a more detailed study of this subject cf. Thomas (1985).

⁸ In the most recent general study of Roman literature, Wilkinson (1982) 25, who is by no means unrepresentative, says of Virgil and the poem 'He next aspired to be the Roman Hesiod [having established himself as the Roman Theocritus] . . . Lucretius would show him how a didactic poem could be moving by its descriptive power and its moral-philosophic fervour.'

towards Hellenistic poetry than archaic lyric,⁹ and Hesiod is far from being the most important influence on Virgil in the *Georgics* – certainly outside the first book (see sect. 4).

As for Lucretius, his linguistic influence upon the *Georgics* is pervasive, but it is chiefly so in a particular way: Virgil draws from him to create a didactic appearance for his poem. So he is at his most Lucretian on a very small scale, for instance with transitional or other phrases whose function is to provide a flavour (e.g. 1.56 *nonne uides*; 1.187 *contemplator item, cum*; 2.177 *nunc locus*; 2.346; 4.51 *quod superest*; 4.149–50 *nunc age . . . expeditam*; see nn.). With one notable exception,¹⁰ 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 (cf. 2.279–83n.);¹¹ see also 2.475–94n.

Furthermore, a poem which is to be truly didactic in content as well as form (such as the *De Rerum Natura*) implies the existence of an audience which is to be instructed, and in spite of the long-held view that the function of the *Georgics* was to restore an interest in Italian agriculture, the fact is that no Roman farmer would have read the poem for practical instruction when Varro's *Res Rusticae* was available; had he done so, moreover, his success would have been limited, for Virgil is extremely selective with his precepts.¹²

4. THE MODELS FOR THE *GEORGICS*

There is no single model, surviving or lost, for the *Georgics*. The title, but little else, was taken from a work of Nicander (probably second century B.C.), now largely lost, the technical details are taken predominantly from Theophrastus (c. 370–288/5 B.C.) and Varro (116–27 B.C.), but they are transformed to suit their new setting, and for the rest Virgil

⁹ Cf. the observation of L. P. Wilkinson (1946) 118, n. 2: 'it is noteworthy that 140 pages of Pasquali [*Orazio Lirico* (Florence 1920)] suffice for Aeolic influence and 68 for Roman, while no fewer than 500 are required for Hellenistic'.

¹⁰ The description of the plague – which is without any didactic rationale (3.478–566n.).

¹¹ This fact emerges clearly from the compendium of parallels gathered by Merrill (1916).

¹² Ovid, as elsewhere, was to expose the generic fiction with the *Ars Amatoria*, which had little intention, but all the formal appearances, of teaching its audience.

drew from the whole range of Greek and Roman literature. Few Latin poems draw so extensively, or so creatively, from their inherited tradition. Virgil's models in the *Georgics* extend in time from Homer to the *Eclogues*, in their disparate nature from Aristotle to Catullus. His manner of reference to the tradition is also extremely complex, ranging from casual reminiscence, to correction, apparent reference, self-reference and, the most complex and typically Virgilian type, conflation or multiple reference.¹³ Some distinction may be made between the more literary and the technical models, though it needs to be said that Virgil is often equally allusive and constructive with both; and it is often neither easy nor desirable completely to separate the two.¹⁴

a. *Poetic models*

In genre the *Georgics* may look chiefly to Hesiod, but *Homer* was the poet with whom Virgil was most familiar, in this poem as in the *Aeneid*. His method of reference to Homer, as to other predecessors, varies. The manner may be intended simply to give a flash of Homeric colour, as at 1.383, where overall adaptation of Aratus is interrupted by reference to a Homeric context (see n.). Homeric reference may be combined with reference to another author, for instance Callimachus, as at 1.138 (see n.). Virgil corrects Homeric detail, as when he reverses the order in which the Giants piled up Olympus, Pelion and Ossa in their attack on Jupiter (cf. 1.281–2n.). In one instance a Homeric simile is converted into Virgilian reality (in the description of the irrigator at 1.104–10); in this case Virgil expects the reader to recall both the original simile and its outer context which silently informs the adaptation (see n.).¹⁵ At

¹³For a typology of reference in the poem, see Thomas (1986b). By 'model' is meant the demonstrable use of a predecessor, seldom casual, generally employed with the intention that the reader bring the context of the model to the new setting.

¹⁴Wilkinson (1969) 56–68 offers a useful study of some of Virgil's literary predecessors.

¹⁵Virgil treats his own earlier poetry in a similar way in the *Aeneid*, when for instance, at *A.* 8.449–53, in describing the work of the Cyclopes, he repeats with minimal changes the simile of *G.* 4.170–5 (where the Cyclopes represent the toil of the bees). He also reverses the process when, for instance, the snake to which Neoptolemus is compared at *A.* 2.471–5 is described in terms almost identical to those used of the real snake at *G.* 3.437–9.

4.334–48, in the middle of an intensely Homeric context, Virgil produces a catalogue of nymphs apparently reminiscent of the catalogue at *Il.* 18.39–49, which on closer examination is thoroughly non-Homeric (see n.). And finally Homer provides an extensive continuous model for the poem: *Od.* 4.351–570 is closely adapted, with the characters and details altered but clearly recognizable, at 4.387–452 (387–414n.).

In spite of Virgil's designation of the poem as an *Ascraeum carmen* (cf. 2.176 and n.), explicit reference to *Hesiod* is limited, much more so than reference to Theocritus in the *Eclogues*, or to Homer in the *Aeneid*. For Virgil as for Callimachus (who also knew Homer better than he knew Hesiod) Hesiod is more of a notional model, important for Virgil because of his importance to the Alexandrians.¹⁶ Hesiodic reference is to be found in the poem, for instance in the notorious prescription at 1.299 *nudus ara, sere nudus*, or in the description of the drones at 4.244 (see nn.), but it is in general limited to such minor reminiscence, to the structural appearance of the first book (which treats first 'works' then 'days'),¹⁷ to the lines on the plough (1.160–75; but see n.) and to a single extended reference (1.276–86) which, though Hesiodic in appearance, is non-Hesiodic in content and contains a central panel which is a close imitation and correction of Homer, rather than of Hesiod (see n.); to this extent the lines are another instance of apparent, rather than real, reference. On the view of the *Georgics* as a poem celebrating the Hesiodic notion of the moral value of toil, see sect. 7.

The chief areas of Greek influence on Virgil, and not just in the *Georgics*, are either archaic or Hellenistic;¹⁸ he seems to have found little active use for the literature of the classical period.¹⁹ In this poem, at least in thematic terms, he is particularly indebted to *Aratus* (c. 315–240/39 B.C.). Indeed most of the second half of the first book (351–463), at times with great exactitude, looks to that poet's treatment

¹⁶ Cf. Hardie (1971) 8 'Hesiod is seen through the eyes of Callimachus.'

¹⁷ There are indications that Virgil at the outset of the poem viewed Hesiod as the primary model, but came to see the poem as having other concerns as it progressed.

¹⁸ There are references in the *Georgics* to Apollonius of Rhodes and Theocritus, but they are not extensive; the latter had already dominated the *Eclogues*, as the former was to serve as one of the prime models for the *Aeneid*.

¹⁹ Though the situation changes somewhat in the *Aeneid*, where the speeches have a natural affinity with those of tragedy. And in *A.* 4 there is a more profound debt to tragedy.

of weather-signs (*Phaen.* 733–1154). The highly technical nature of Aratus' poem often seems unpalatable to the modern reader, but it is in many ways the quintessentially Alexandrian production, and holds obvious appeal to the scholar-poet; Callimachus admired it (*Epigr.* 27 Pf.), it was translated by Cicero and Varro of Atax before Virgil, by Germanicus and Avienus after him, and 27 commentaries are known. Virgil the poet, however, was careful in his use of the work; he compresses, conflates references to it with those to Homer, Varro of Atax and others, and varies the technical material with poetic colour (e.g. 1.404–9 and n.). His use of Aratus is also in part structural: the first book shows the influence of archaic Greek (Hesiod) in the first part, Hellenistic (Aratus) in the later portions. Though the influence of Aratus' poem is elsewhere visible in the *Georgics* (e.g. 2.473–4, 537), it is chiefly influential only in the first book.

The influence of *Callimachus* (c. 300–240 B.C.) is of a special type. Virgil refers to him directly at certain points in the poem (e.g. 1.138, 509; 3.1–2, 19–20, 36; 4.341–2; see nn.), and there is little doubt that such references would be seen to be more numerous if more of Callimachus had survived (cf. 4.333–86n.). But the importance of Callimachus lies in two less obvious features of the *Georgics*. Virgil's decision to structure his poem in four books (for which there is no known agronomical model) is in part an acknowledgement of the appearance of Callimachus' best-known work, the four books of the *Aetia*. It is now clear that Virgilian references to the *Victoria Berenices* (Callim. *Aet.* 3, *SH* fr. 254–68) are precisely where they belong, in the same relative position in the *Georgics* (3.1–48n.); and the excesses of the prayer to Octavian at 1.24–42 may owe something to the attitude of Callimachus to Berenice (see n.). The second mark of Callimachus' influence, though more nebulous, is at the very basis of the poem; the fact that it is an agricultural poem, didactic in appearance but without the intention of teaching its apparent subject, the learning and interest in recondite matters of scholarly concern which it shows throughout, and the polemical attitudes which it demonstrates towards the entire tradition which informs it – these are the hallmarks of Callimacheanism.

At 1.231–58 Virgil's discussion of the terrestrial and celestial zones is based fairly exactly on some lines from the *Hermes* of *Eratosthenes* (c. 275–194 B.C.), but this poet does not otherwise seem to have served as a model for the *Georgics* – though Virgil may well have been familiar

with his geographical and ethnographical works. And finally, from *Nicander* Virgil took first his title and secondly the Alexandrian notion that the traditional or classical restrictions on what is or is not 'poetical' are not necessarily valid. Otherwise the influence of this poet is chiefly limited to an – admittedly careful and close – adaptation from the *Theriaca* (3.414–39n.).²⁰

It is difficult fully to appreciate the degree to which Virgil drew from the Latin tradition. The influence of *Lucretius* (?94–51 B.C.), both in details and as a generic model, has already been noted.²¹ But there is perhaps an equal debt to neoteric poetry, and to the poetry, almost completely lost, of the two decades between the death of Catullus and the mid-thirties. Virgil drew from *Catullus* himself (?84–54 B.C.) in a fairly restricted manner, for the most part adapting phrasing and stylistic features (e.g. 1.206; 2.352–3 and nn.); and sometimes the context of Catullus informs the Virgilian setting (e.g. 1.50 and n.). It is, however, when he is at his most elevated that he is most affected by his neoteric predecessor; as has been demonstrated,²² the song of Proteus (4.453–527), which tells the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, and which may justly be seen as an attempt to incorporate the epyllion into a larger context, is indebted in style and diction to Cat. 64 (4.466, 490–1, 504–5, 507, 515nn.). The theme, that of an ill-starred or unrequited love, is common to both poets and is a hallmark of the genre. It is also common to the epyllia of Catullus' friends and fellow neoterics, *Cinna* (the *Zmyrna*) and *Calvus* (the *Io*), and the influence of these two is doubtless greater than can now be ascertained. A fragment of the former may be visible at 4.465–6 (see n.), and it is almost certain that Virgil elsewhere drew from Calvus, in his treatment of the gadfly (3.152–3n.).

Varro of Atax (82 B.C.–?) exerted a special influence on the poem. Servius preserves seven lines of his (?) *Epimenis*, a work which draws from Aratus' *Phaenomena*, and to which Virgil referred more explicitly (while generally adapting Aratus himself) than he did to any other extant Latin poetry, anywhere in his corpus (1.374–87n.); there is a briefer

²⁰ Little of *Nicander's Georgica* survives, so that it is impossible to be sure; however, it was in two books (Athen. 3.126b5–7), none of the surviving fragments has any sure connection with Virgil's poem, and a sentence in Quintilian (10.1.56 *Nicandrum frustra secuti Macer atque Vergilius?*) proves nothing specific.

²¹ See above, pp. 3–4.

²² Cf. Crabbe (1977).

reference to the work at 1.397 (see n.). In light of the precision with which Virgil adapted Varro, and given that Servius' preservation of the lines is doubtless for the most part a fortunate accident, it is safe to assume that the influence of the *Epimenis*, at least on the first book of the *Georgics*, was reasonably extensive. Virgil treated Varro's *Chorographia* in the same fashion, conflating references to it with his overall adaptation of his, and Varro's, ultimate source, the *Hermes* of Eratosthenes (1.237-8n.). Virgil was also acquainted with Varro's *Argonautica*, a Latin version of Apollonius' poem (1.14-15; 2.404nn.).²³

The works of three friends, *Cornelius Gallus*, *Varius Rufus* and *Horace*, are referred to in brief but significant ways. Gallus poses a special problem, and will be treated below (sect. 6). The influence of the *De Morte* of Varius is apparent at 2.506-7, 3.116-17 and 253-4 (see nn.) - these have ensured the survival of three of the five extant fragments of this poet.²⁴ The question of the direction of influence between Virgil and Horace is in general not an easy one, but there is no doubt that at 3.537-8 Virgil, while suggesting that the effects of the plague constitute a grim return to the golden age, refers to Horace's golden-age setting in the Sixteenth Epode, a poem which Virgil must have read well before the publication of the book of *Epodes*. Other possible references (e.g. 4.289n.) are of a more casual nature.

Finally there are the *Eclogues*, to which Virgil refers precisely as he does to other works in his tradition. The theme of *amor*, prominent in the pastoral collection, continues into the *Georgics*, its destructive powers no longer merely private and personal (as in *E.* 2 and 10 - though the figure of Orpheus owes much to that of Gallus), but now developed on a larger scale in the first half of *Georgics* 3. And the dictum *omnia uincit Amor* (*E.* 10.69) is replaced by the overriding theme of the new poem - *labor omnia uicit* (1.145). In more detailed ways Virgil also uses the *Eclogues* to inform and impart meaning to the *Georgics* (e.g. 2.32-4, 155-7nn.; above, sect. 2).

²³ Only three fragments (two of them preserved for purely grammatical reasons) survive from the third book, and given Varro's status as an amatory poet (*Prop.* 2.34.85-6) the loss is considerable. It is difficult to imagine that Virgil's extensive references to Ap. Rhod. *Arg.* 3 in *Aeneid* 1 and 4 were not tempered by reference to the intervening Roman version.

²⁴ See 3.253-4n. for the view of Richter that Varius is in fact referring to the *Georgics*, a view which is difficult to support.

b. Prose models

There is a qualitative distinction between Virgil's use of poetic and of prose models. While his use of the poetic tradition has various functions ranging from poetic embellishment to correction to conflation, his primary interest in prose authors is in the technical material they provide. While it is doubtless true that Virgil had a familiarity with, and a deep attachment to, the Italian countryside, he was no agronomist, and he depended throughout on the works of the agricultural writers, Greek and Roman. This dependence created, moreover, a special problem for the poet; he had to compress and enliven a body of literature which in his own day as now can (with some exceptions) scarcely have been regarded as having any great literary merit. The success with which he responded to this challenge is testimony to his genius. In the process of compressing and transforming this material, he often produces a version which is of little practical use to the farmer (particularly when compared with the thoroughness of the model) – further evidence that instructional motives did not greatly concern him (see above, sect. 3).

At *R.R.* 1.1.1–11 Varro refers to the more than 50 agricultural prose treatises in Greek, and he names 47 of the authors. He names no Latin authors, but we have fragments of more than a dozen who wrote before his own time.²⁵ Virgil was highly selective, drawing for the most part from Theophrastus among the Greeks, and from Varro himself in the Roman tradition.²⁶

The details of Virgil's debt to *Theophrastus* have long been recognized.²⁷ The second book of the poem is replete with references chiefly to the *Historia Plantarum*, and to a lesser extent to the *De Causis Plantarum*. Virgil's division of trees according to the manner of their propagation (natural vs. cultivated), together with his subdivisions within these

²⁵ Most conveniently collected in the edition of Speranza (1974). Figures like Licinius Stolo and Tremelius Scrofa, interlocutors in Varro's treatise, may well have had some influence.

²⁶ Aristotle exerted some influence, but with one exception (cf. 3.280–3 and n.) was of rather superficial interest to Virgil. Much, however, of the information on bees in the fourth book is Aristotelian.

²⁷ Cf. Jahn (1903); Mitsdörffer (1938).

areas (from seed, from the root, etc.) is taken directly from Theophrastus (cf. 2.9–34n.); his treatment of the variety of the earth's trees (2.109–35), together with the ethnographical colour which enlivens those lines, is an adaptation of a much fuller account by Theophrastus,²⁸ and his instructions on manuring and protection of young trees (2.346–53) show a debt to *C.P.* 3.4.3 and 3.6.1–2. Virgil, then, used Theophrastus' works ostensibly as a technical model, drawing from them as convenient sources of information, compressing and varying, developing colourful digressions, and occasionally misunderstanding (2.350–2n.); this information he then diverted to accommodate his own poetic purposes.

The attitude towards *Varro* is comparable, though here Virgil's debt is greater; indeed, it is fair to say that the *Georgics* would have looked very different had *Varro* not published his treatise shortly before Virgil began work on his poem.²⁹ Virgil used it as a source of information on a number of subjects: in the treatment of soil types, on livestock, and particularly on the bees. And the prayer which opens the poem, parallel to, although very different from, *Varro*'s own opening prayer, partly functions as an acknowledgement of Virgil's debt (1.1–42n.). None of this is to suggest that the *Georgics* is in any way an imitation of *Varro*'s work. When *Varro* referred to the bees' society *haec ut hominum civitates* (*R.R.* 3.16.6; the observation is not original with him), Virgil doubtless noticed, but the vision of the bees' world that he presents in the fourth book is his own. Nor was Virgil a slavish imitator, even on technical details; he pointedly disagrees with *Varro* not only on matters of vital importance to the poem (4.92n.), but even on such apparently tangential details as the size of the ideal cow's hoof – in doing so he has good agrarian authority outside *Varro* (cf. 3.54–5). Such polemic is the mark of the scholar-poet intellectually rooted in Alexandria.

²⁸ Virgil even preserves, in translation, a false MS variant from the *H.P.*, otherwise found only in *Athenaeus* (2.131n.).

²⁹ The date of publication is not absolutely fixed, but it seems that *Varro*'s work was available to Virgil while he was still writing the *Eclagues*; see *Ross* (1980). It should be noted, however, that the influence of the *Res Rusticae* is not much in evidence in *Georgics* 1 (the opening prayer is a major exception, but that was probably not composed early), which may suggest that the poem was actually under way before Virgil began to make use of it.

5. STRUCTURE

The structural complexities of the *Georgics* are great, and the student of the poem has a daunting array of schemes from which to choose. Following the sense and restraint of Wilkinson³⁰ ('tabular schemes are useful but unreadable'), and with a further, more practical, motive (*spatiis exclusus iniquis*), this writer has avoided postulating a section-by-section diagram of the poem's structure, preferring to note correspondences in the body of the commentary, and briefly to treat such details in discussing the poem in general (see below, sect. 7).³¹

Some general observations will suffice here: Virgil is attuned, on every level, to the potential of structural arrangement for the imparting of meaning.³² So the recurrence of the same word in a parallel line of a different book may be intentional and meaningful (1.509n.), or the parallel placement of entire sections may be similarly intended (as occurs, for instance, in the placement of 1.125-49 and 4.125-48; see nn.). Often structural relationships are merely a mark of artistic virtuosity. The pattern of the four appearances of Maecenas' name (1.2; 2.41; 3.41; 4.2), while structurally appealing, has little to do with meaning. Or, on a larger level, the opening pattern of *Georgics* 2 (8 + 26 + 12 + 26 + 10 + 26 + 26) seems to show a pattern beyond the bounds of coincidence, but perhaps does little more than suggest Virgil's concern for structural symmetry.³³

As between individual sections so among the four books various connections have been suggested. The result is often confusing and of limited help: 'Books III and IV agree in their essential plan of arrangement (*vis-à-vis* I and II) ... There is also a designed correspondence

³⁰ Wilkinson (1969) 75.

³¹ The issue is in any case a subjective one, which necessarily involves the forcing of details to fit the desired scheme; for instance, although the schemes of Richter – which occupies 36 pages – and Otis (1963) are in many respects similar, and are both in essence acceptable, there are sufficient divergences (for instance one sees the second book as falling into three sections, the other, four) to create the impression that there is indeed no single, necessary structure to the poem.

³² Recent work on numerical patterns in Augustan poetry, particularly that of O. Skutsch, has created a climate of acceptance for such ordering, so alien to the romanticist view of poetry. Critical subjectivity, however, is always a danger, as is clear from the several numerological schemes proposed for the *Eclogues*, for instance; where the will exists, numbers can be made to work out.

³³ Though cf. 2.9-34n.

between I and III and II and IV . . . there are four main *contrasts* in the poem: that between I and II; that between III and IV; that between I-III and II-IV; and that between I-II and III-IV.³⁴ It will be useful to state a general correspondence, on which all critics are agreed: the strongest links, in tone as in structure, appear between *Georgics* 1 and 3 on the one hand, and 2 and 4 on the other. The first book is marked by two failures, the storm which destroys the crops (1.311-34) and the civil war which comes in spite of the *signa* which precede it (1.464-514); in the third book there is a parallel movement between the account of the disastrous effects of uncontrollable *amor* on livestock (3.242-83) and that of the catastrophe of plague (3.440-566). Books 2 and 4, on the other hand, treat the relationship between man and nature in different ways; they are distinct from 1 and 3 in structure and tone, and are tied to each other in the greater complexity with which they present man and his works (see sect. 7).

6. THE *LAVDES GALLI*

hic [Gallus] primo in amicitiiis Augusti Caesaris fuit; postea cum uenisset in suspicionem, quod contra eum coniuraret, occisus est. fuit autem amicus Vergilii adeo, ut quartus georgicorum a medio usque ad finem eius laudes teneret: quas postea iubente Augusto in Aristaei fabulam commutavit. (Servius *ad E.* 10.1)

sane sciendum, ut supra diximus, ultimam partem huius libri esse mutatam: nam laudes Galli habuit locus ille, qui nunc Orphei continet fabulam, quae inserta est postquam irato Augusto Gallus occisus est. (Servius *ad G.* 4.1)

There is much of value in the Servian commentaries, many observations without which our understanding of Virgil would be severely impaired. There is also much in the way of jejune interpretation, poor philology, extrapolation for the purpose of creating biographical details, and downright nonsense – much that we could well have done without. Included in this second category are the above passages which, more than any other detail, have diverted the energies of Virgilian critics.

³⁴ Otis (1963) 151-2; the overall impression from all this, a correct one, is that no book is unconnected from any other.

Servius invites us to believe that the entire second half of the fourth book (*a medio usque ad finem*) contained the praises of Cornelius Gallus, the elegiac poet and prefect of Egypt who was compelled to commit suicide in 27, or possibly 26, B.C.; further, that Virgil under orders from Augustus removed the *laudes* and replaced them with the epyllion which is now found in their place;³⁵ and finally that no trace of the original lines, written by Rome's greatest poet and in publication for at least two years, survived from the first edition. That a steady stream of critics has actually believed this is testimony to the complexity of the poem, particularly of the second half of the fourth book – in a sense Servius' claim permits the reader to avoid the issue of interpretation altogether.

This is not the place for a full-scale elaboration of the arguments against the details of the Servian passages,³⁶ but two questions need to be addressed: why are the details untenable, ³⁷ and what gave rise to them?³⁸ The most serious objection (i) has to do with unity and the shape and movement of the poem: it is quite simply inconceivable to imagine the possibility that the second half of *Georgics* 4 was occupied by praises of any contemporary figure; such a sequence could have no reference to the poem as a whole.³⁹ Related to this is the fact (ii) that Virgil shows great restraint in the degree to which he admits encomium of contemporaries. The prayer to Octavian has a special literary func-

³⁵ The *Georgics* was written at an average rate of one line per day; but those who believe Servius' statements must assume that Virgil produced 250 of his most careful and allusive lines in a very short time.

³⁶ They are easily accessible, as are the arguments in favour, in a number of studies. For bibliography see the most recent (Jacobson (1984)), a piece which in effect proposes to redate (to 27) and rewrite the poem; it originally ended happily, with a successful Orpheus retrieving Eurydice, but 'Gallus' death changed all that. It impressed on Vergil, as probably nothing else could have, the folly of believing that death was avoidable or revocable' (p. 292). Such a view does no justice to Virgil, and suggests an unawareness of the darkness of vision behind such lines as 3.66–8.

³⁷ Cf. Griffin (1979) 75–6 for a good summary of the objections.

³⁸ This second does not in fact require an answer, for the answer may simply lie beyond our reach, in the mind of Servius or his source.

³⁹ No argument satisfactorily resolves this issue. Indeed those who support the validity of Servius' comments do not confront the poem as a whole; notably Jacobson (1984) makes no mention of any line of the poem before 4.287. Nor is it plausible to claim that these *laudes* need not have been extensive; *a medio usque ad finem* can only mean what it says, and *ultimam partem* in the second Servian passage means the same thing, since Servius refers the reader to the first notice (*ut supra diximus*).

tion (1.24–42n.), as does the poem of the third book (3.1–48n.), and otherwise such references are strictly limited: Octavian is placed in the *sphragis* at 4.559–62, and in a passing reference, integrated into its context, in the *laudes Italiae* (2.170–2), while Maecenas is mentioned once in each book; his appearance has no impact on the progression of the poem. And would Virgil conceivably have included extensive praises of Gallus side by side with abbreviated references to Octavian and Maecenas? (iii) Some fragment of the first version, or at the very least some reference to it other than the comments in Servius, would certainly have survived. (iv) That Augustus ‘ordered’ Virgil to write or delete anything is in any case highly improbable, and is not supported by phrases such as *tua . . . haud mollia iussa* (3.41), which are merely part of the dramatization of the patron-poet relationship (see n.). If Hor. *Epist.* 2.1.1–4 is really in part a response to a playful complaint from Augustus that the poet has not mentioned his ruler’s name sufficiently often (see Suet. *Vit. Horat.*), then it is quite clear that nothing in the way of real pressure was ever brought to bear on the favoured Augustan poets. (v) Finally, if Octavian could have expunged the name of Gallus from the *Georgics* after their publication, why not from the *Eclogues* as well? *E.* 10.72–4, in particular, could have been easily removed.

As for an explanation for the basis of Servius’ misunderstanding, either of two possibilities, both entirely plausible, may be adduced. The first is that Servius or his source confused a notice that the praises of Gallus are to be found at the end of the *Eclogues*, where Gallus indeed does occupy centre stage (*E.* 10). Once *georgicorum* had supplanted *bucolicorum* an explanation for the absence of Gallus from the end of the *Georgics* had to be constructed.⁴⁰ Another possible, and attractive, explanation is that Gallus was always to be found, and still is, at the end of the *Georgics*; specifically that the song of Proteus may to a large extent be viewed as Virgil’s acknowledgement of the style and content of the poetry of Gallus. The theme of Orpheus’ tragic and unsuccessful love for Eurydice is precisely the type of mythological *exemplum* which must have concerned Gallus in his *Amores*,⁴¹ while the style and manner of the story is that of epyllion, and, as far as we can tell, of the elegy of Gallus

⁴⁰ So Anderson (1933); he has been followed in this view by several influential scholars, including Norden in the following year. The objections of Jacobson (1984) 275–6 do no damage to the theory.

⁴¹ Cf. the *exempla* of Parthenius’ *Erotica Pathemata*, purportedly intended as raw material for the poetry of Gallus.

(4.453–527n.). A subsequent reader, with the information that Virgil acknowledged Gallus at the end of the *Georgics*, but with no awareness of the lines of poetic influence between Gallus and Virgil, invented the rest.⁴²

7. THE POEM

The *Georgics* is perhaps the most difficult, certainly the most controversial, poem in Roman literature, and any attempt to explain it as a *single, unified poem* must begin with the discarding of central assumptions and generalizations which have filled the handbooks, commentaries and critical works in general since antiquity. Some recent scholars, at least in practice more free of preconceptions, and perhaps more attuned to the complexities of the Virgilian outlook, provide a more rational basis for judging the intent of the poem.

In the nineteenth century in particular the *Georgics* was seen as having a single, overriding theme: 'a strong sense of the necessity and dignity of labour breathes throughout the poem from beginning to end'.⁴³ And the view persists: 'In the shameful darkness of contemporary Rome and Italy it shines a ray of hope and pride.'⁴⁴ That man's pursuit of toil, *labor*, is the chief theme of the poem is clear; an evaluation of the poem necessarily involves examining the nature of such toil, and the results of man's relationship with it.

The *Georgics* is a remarkably realistic poem, particularly when set beside the works of Virgil's contemporaries. While Horace, after the public poetry of some of the *Epodes*, largely retreated to the more private worlds of *convivia*, the idealized harmony of his Sabine farm, and the generalities of ethical philosophy, and while the elegists explored themes which for the most part by definition excluded the problems of nation and civilization, Virgil in the *Georgics* squarely confronted the issues of real existence. By the mid-thirties, the fantastic solutions of the fourth

⁴² This is a modification of the view of Coleman (1962), who believes that the ending as we have it is a second edition, but that it refers in a number of ways to Gallus. This seems to complicate things even further, and the first of his assumptions is unnecessary. If Virgil is referring to the *poetry*, not the life or exploits, of Gallus, there is no need to assume the poet was himself dead at the time.

⁴³ The view of Page (xxix) is representative of the critical attitude.

⁴⁴ Wilkinson (1982) 27.

Eclogue, with its promise of a tranquil golden age, were exposed as such; the premise of the *Georgics* is that the spontaneity of that age no longer exists, as Virgil states early in the poem:

pater ipse colendi
 haud facilem esse uiam uoluit, primusque per artem
 mouit agros, curis acuens mortalia corda
 nec torpere graui passus sua regna ueterno.

labor omnia uicit
 improbus et duris urgens in rebus egestas. (1.121-4, 145-6)

In between come the well-known details of the transition from the age of Saturn to that of Jupiter: spontaneous growth and productivity end, the wolf begins to prowl, the snake is given venom, navigation is invented. The passage places the cultural setting of the *Georgics* after the Fall, and it is a passage which Virgil intends the reader to apply throughout the poem; where the language of the golden age is found, it either creates a conflict with the realities of the poem (2.136-76, 458-540nn.), or it is applied with irony (3.537-45n.). The agents of Jupiter are toil and want, toil which is insatiable and pervasive, and want which presses when times are hard.⁴⁵ How does Virgil judge the relationship between man and these forces? That is, what effect does man have on them, and they on him? These are the issues around which the poem moves.

a. Books 1 and 3

The first book, reflecting Virgil's early attention to the Hesiodic model, treats the farmer's operations (43-203) and then his calendar (204-463) - what to do and when to do it.⁴⁶ In the first part he treats the actual work, ploughing, treatment of the soil (rotation, fallowing, stubble-burning, etc.), irrigation and drainage (43-117), then, after the interruption of 118-46, proceeds to describe the manner of man's work: the need for constant toil, and account of the agricultural *arma*, the need for vigilance against deterioration: *pestes* endanger the threshing-floor,

⁴⁵ Cf. 1.145-6n. on the lines which all critics see as crucial to the poem, and whose sense most, until Altevogt (1952), tried to mitigate.

⁴⁶ This second part may be seen as falling into two sections (204-350 and 351-514), so that the book as a whole really consists of three parts.

and seeds, without careful selection, fall naturally into degeneration (147–203). The second part of the book treats the best time for sowing (204–30), tasks for the winter and holy days (259–75), and for night-time (287–310). And finally Virgil treats signs of bad and fair weather (350–423), and signs provided by the moon and the sun (424–63).

Within this technical scheme Virgil inserts three progressive crescendos, expressing his judgement of the success which may be expected. The first is ominous in a general way; degeneration is a natural law:

sic omnia fatis
in peius ruere ac retro sublapsa referri,
non aliter quam qui aduerso uix flumine lembum
remigiis subigit, si bracchia forte remisit,
atque illum in praeceps prono rapit alueus amni. (199–203)

This generalization finds specific expression first at 311–34, where the storms of autumn and spring descend with complete destruction on the very crops whose preparation Virgil has so carefully prescribed.⁴⁷ Natural violence finds its responson in civic violence at the end of the book (463–514), where Virgil gives a compelling picture of the strife which followed the death of Julius Caesar, strife which was attended by celestial *signa* (the theme of the preceding technical sections), but which, again, came in spite of those *signa* and man's knowledge of them. The closing simile, likening the world out of control to a charioteer who has lost control of his team (512–14), resumes and extends the simile of 199–203.

The application of *labor* is no more successful in Book 3, where the resurgence of nature follows a parallel movement. Didactic material on the selection, care and training of cattle and horses (49–208) is followed by an overriding injunction: the prime concern must be to combat a different manifestation of nature's resurgence, the threat posed by sexual passion (209–10 *sed non ulla magis uiris industria firmat | quam Venerem et caeci stimulos auertere amoris*). The injunction has a place in the agromonical rule-book, but that does not justify the focus it here receives; as the simply didactic mode retreats, the primary issue of the poem, *labor omnia uincit*, is reinforced by the theme of the *Eclogues*: *omnia uincit amor*. And at 242–83 the threat becomes reality, as all the creatures of

⁴⁷ Some see in the words *in primis uenerare deos* (338) mitigation of, or at least possible salvation from, the effects of the storm, but there is nothing to suggest that such actions in any way divert the violence of nature (1.335–50n.).