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Munera uestra cano: The Poet, the Gods, and the Thematic Unity of *Georgics* 1

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Virgil's *Georgics* is considered by many to be the most difficult poem in Latin literature. Certainly, it continues to attract intense scholarly investigation. The last twenty years have seen the publication of three major commentaries,[1] a number of important monographs,[2] and a series of surveys in handbooks and companions.[3] In an attempt to contribute to ongoing debates about certain features of this extraordinarily complex text, taking as a starting point advances in our understanding of the poem and its generic background, I intend to offer some thoughts about the structure of the first book and its thematic coherence by looking at the ways in which Virgil relates his description of the life and work of the farmer to the movement of the solar year, to Roman history, and to contemporary politics. And I hope that this study of a didactic text will be of some interest to a scholar who has taught me so much and who has always shown the way.

The poem's authorial voice immediately establishes control over its exquisitely outlined subject matter by revealing the contents of its four books in precisely four lines and by emphasizing its power over the choice of a precise beginning point: *hinc canere incipiam* ('from this point I will begin to sing', 1.5).[4] The unobtrusive adverb, often overlooked, can be interpreted on a

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[1] Thomas (1988), Mynors (1990), Erren (2003).

[2] e.g. Farrell (1991), Morgan (1999), Gale (2000), Nappa (2005).

[3] e.g. Horsfall (1995), Martindale (1997), Hardie (1998), La Penna (2005), Holzberg (2006), von Albrecht (2006).

[4] The opening sentence reveals the four main subjects to be ploughing, viticulture, herding, and bee-keeping and establishes some key words for the four books to follow: *segetes*, cf. 1.47, 54, 77, 112, 152, 212, 226, 270, 319; *sidere*, cf. 1.32, 73, 204, 311, 335; *terram uertere*, cf. 1.147; *ulmis*, cf. 2.18, 70, 72, 83, 221, 361, 367, 446, 530; *uitis*, cf. 2.63, 70, 97, 191, 221, 233, 273, 289, 299, 397, 407, 410, 416; *boum*, cf. 3.52, 211, 369, 419, 532; *pecori*, cf. 3.6, 72, 75, 125, 155, 159,

number of levels.[5] Most obviously, *hinc* has a straightforward temporal force, meaning simply 'from this point in time'. But by drawing the reader's attention to his ability to select this particular starting point for his poem, the poet underlines his control over its subject matter and provides it with a sense of a trajectory. The effect is to draw attention to the very act of 'singing' or, to put it another way, to the initiation of a didactic message and the direction or form it will take subsequently. In addition, an impression is created of dramatic immediacy, that the 'song' is actually being delivered or performed and that the information it conveys, imagined as a pre-existing body of knowledge, is being transmitted at the very moment in which it is being read.[6] In generic terms, the effect is similar to that created by the beginning of the *Theogony* of Hesiod, 'Let us begin to sing *from* the Heliconian Muses', introducing a hymn to Zeus. Closely comparable too is the opening of the *Phaenomena* of Aratus, 'Let us begin *from* Zeus'. But Virgil distances himself from his didactic predecessors by delaying the naming of a deity. Initially at least, he assumes sole responsibility for his didactic lesson and the direction it will take. In doing so, the variation on his Latin predecessor and close model, Lucretius, is particularly noteworthy.[7] The *De Rerum Natura* begins with Venus (1–49), presented as the creator of the natural world and, as a Muse-like figure, of the poem itself. Subsequently, Epicurus is revealed as the quasi-divine authority figure for the philosophical truths Lucretius is going to reveal (62–79).[8]

299, 326, 342, 419, 445, 554; *apibus*, cf. 4.8, 37, 139, 149, 177, 197, 220, 251, 285, 318, 534, 556. Unless stated otherwise, all references are to the *Georgics* and all translations are from Wilkinson (1982), sometimes slightly modified.

[5] Nappa (2005), 24 has a sense of its importance and offers insightful analysis, pointing out that the word brings up the the whole question of the poem's thematic unity, especially in inviting the reader to follow the logic of the work's structure as it unfolds from this precise point.

[6] See Volk (2002), 13–24, 124–5 on this effect of 'poetic simultaneity'. Obviously, the introduction of a named addressee in line two, Maecenas, reinforces the impression of a specific performance context for this particular poetic utterance and relates it to a very particular sociopolitical milieu (on which see Du Quesnay (1984)), even if his role as addressee is partially effaced by subsequent concentration on an audience of farmers. On addressees in didactic poetry see Schiesaro et al. (1993), esp. 129–47 on the *Georgics*.

[7] See Gale (2000), 25–31.

[8] On Lucretius' imitation of Empedocles' prologue and its hymn to Love see Sedley (1998), 1–34, Trépanier (2004), 31–107, Garani (2007), 37–43. If Empedocles fr. 112 DK, in which Empedocles actually describes himself as a god, belongs somewhere in the prologue of his *On Nature*, Virgil's opening *uariatio* on didactic's traditional expression of a close relationship with the divine is even more visible. On Empedocles and the *Georgics* see Hardie (2002), Nelis (2004).

In his opening sentence, therefore, Virgil avoids claiming for himself any external source of divine origin or authority for the body of knowledge he is about to share. But he gives his poem a strong sense of a trajectory as he articulates its precise starting point and opening movements with great precision and clarity. Each of these aspects requires more detailed analysis if we wish to answer an obvious question: given that the declared aim of the first book is to explain how to grow crops successfully, how exactly is the poet going to present the relevant information? If the work is to avoid becoming a list of dry precepts, what order or structure will he impose on his material? It is perhaps simplistic to state that Virgil gave this question a lot of thought, but the difficulties involved must not be underestimated. The experience of reading the *Georgics* is very different from that involved in perusing Cato and Varro and the poem is certainly not a practical handbook. But the information it contains is in general detailed and accurate, and the poet evidently went to great pains to get such matters right.[9]

The contents of the first book can be summarized broadly as follows:

1–42: Prologue
43–203: The farmer's work
204–350: The farmer's calendar
351–514: Weather signs

It is clear that Virgil has used Hesiod's *Works and Days* and Aratus' *Phaenomena* as key elements in working out his overall structure.[10] As a result, the information provided, while on one level quite practical and detailed, is also selective and literary, one further result of which is that the farmer's world evoked in the poem is in some ways local and realistic, but in others also anachronistic and idealistic.[11] This effect paradoxically helps to clarify the ways in which Virgil weaves religious and philosophical ideas together with historical and political concerns. The end result for the reader is an impression of a perfectly coherent and ordered progress through the book, as one section leads smoothly into another, allowing the authorial voice to shift from passages of detailed advice about ploughing and sowing to passages involving religious or political material. Much has of course been written about the relationship between what are often termed the didactic portions of the work and its frequent digressions, but there exists no full and detailed modern study of the exact ways in which Virgil constructs his poem, even if there is

[9] See Spurr (1986) = Volk (2008), 14–42 and Mynors (1990), *passim* on the accuracy of much of the poem's technical detail.
[10] See Farrell (1991), 131–68.
[11] See Perkell (1989), 28–9.

now general agreement that imposing strong division between dry didactic tuition and digressive purple passages is unhelpful.[12]

On the one hand, therefore, the authorial voice introduced by the first-person *incipiam* of line 5 launches the poem on its way from a particular point (*hinc*) and then establishes gradually its authority and relevance and a sense of control over its material through the precision and truth of its utterances. But it is also a poetic, artistic voice, which changes in interesting ways throughout the book, and of course the whole work, in constant dialogue with other literary texts. If the poem's narrating voice is at pains to establish both its didactic value and its generic identity, it is only by paying attention to sophisticated patterns of allusion and to such basic linguistic phenomena as the use of imperatives, iussive subjunctives, the expression of personal experience in the first-person singular and plural, direct address couched in the second person, direct and indirect questions, gerundives, and conjunctions that its readers can appreciate key features of the poet's modulating voice and of the poem's evolving structure and thematic unity.[13]

As if to inculcate from the very begining the importance of following closely the work's unfolding narrative or plot, the initial *canere incipiam* (5) is picked up almost immediately in line 12 by the words *munera uestra cano* ('yours are the gifts I sing'), addressed to the Fauns and Dryads. The emphasis on the first-person is strengthened, but this time it is associated with the gods. Here, as throughout the whole invocation of the deities concerned with farming (*studium quibus arua tueri*, 21; 'who love to guard the country'), the poet gives great prominence to the idea of divine help (the nymphs are described as *agrestum praesentia numina*, 10, 'the present help of farmers'), underlining all that the various gods have done for the farmer (cf. *munere*, 7, *inuentrix*, 19, *monstrator*, 19; note also the verbs, strongly evocative of divine intervention and assistance: *ducitis*, 6, *fudit*, 13, *fauens*, 18, *ferens*, 20, *alitis*, 22, *demittitis*, 23).[14] In emphasizing this aspect, Virgil establishes one of the poem's central themes, the close relationship between man and the divine and, more precisely, between himself as poet, his role highlighted by the two

[12] Cf. Horsfall (1995), 66–7.

[13] See Horsfall (1995), 66–7, Rutherford (1995) = Volk (2008), 81–93, Volk (2002), 123–4. Burck (1929) remains required reading. The discussion of the Book's structure by Otis (1964), 148–90 has not been superseded. Putnam (1979), 17–81 and Miles (1980), 64–110 offer extremely insightful readings of the book as a whole.

[14] His model is of course Varro, *RR* 1.4, who invokes the *deos Consentis . . . qui maxime agricolarum duces sunt*, 'the twelve councillor-gods . . . who are the special patrons of husbandmen' (trans. Hooper and Ash (1935)).

first-person verbs *incipiam* and *cano*, and the gods.[15] This is a crucial element in the unity of the first book. The nature of this relationship is immediately refined when, following the poem's second sentence of 18.5 lines devoted to the initial list of twelve deities, is added an equally long third sentence of 19 lines which brings the reader up to line 42 and the end of the prologue.

The figure invoked in the second half of the prologue is named 'Caesar', a kind of god-in-waiting (*quem mox quae sint habitura deorum | concilia incertum est*, 24 f., 'it is uncertain which council of the gods will soon receive you') who, it is hoped, will also be seen as actively beneficent to farmers (*auctorem frugum tempestatumque potentem*, 27, 'Author of fruits and potentate of seasons'). At issue also is the way in which the world will receive and consider him (*te maximus orbis . . . accipiat*, 26–8), and it is to him that the final lines of the proem are addressed (40–2):

> da facilem cursum atque audacibus adnue coeptis,
> ignarosque uiae mecum miseratus agrestis
> ingredere et uotis iam nunc adsuesce uocari.
>
> But smooth my path, smile on my enterprise,
> Pity with me the steps of farmers ignorant of the way,
> Come forward, and learn already to answer prayer.

The poet and the new god are here put on the same level, linked together in a highly original manner.[16] And this Caesar is a highly complex figure. On the one hand, he is the traditional figure of a thirteenth deity added to a pantheon of twelve, as Virgil adopts a standard topos of Hellenistic panegyric and the practices of Alexandrian 'court' poetry.[17] He can also be seen as a kind of replacement for Jupiter, whose omission from the whole proem is striking, particularly given Hesiodic and Aratean precedent.[18] Furthermore, the reference to his mother's myrtle in line 28 (*cingens materna tempora myrto*, your brow | Bound with a wreath ancestral, Venus' myrtle') probably hints at Lucretius' Venus. And also in Lucretian terms, he can be seen as replacing Epicurus.[19] But for the purposes of this paper, two points stand out. By creating a close connexion with the quasi-divine Caesar, the poet shows astonishing confidence and accords great authority to himself and to his

[15] Cf. Gale (2000), 31. On the relationship between knowledge, teaching, and the gods in the work as a whole see the important paper by Schiesaro (1997).

[16] See Buchheit (1972), 18–26 on the parallelism between Virgil and Octavian throughout the poem. On various aspects of this *uia*, including its relationship to didactic plots of initiation and instruction see Fowler (2000), Hardie (2002), Nelis (2008).

[17] See the survey of the prologue at Mynors (1990), 1–3.

[18] See Thomas (1988), ad 1.1–42.

[19] See Gale (2000), 25.

poem. The authorial voice now asks for help (*da facilem cursum*), but it also states the ambitious nature of his own initiatives and intentions (*audacibus . . . coeptis*). When he goes on to invite Caesar to join with him in pitying the countryfolk (*mecum,* construed with *miseratus*), he creates the impression that they share both a sense of compassion and useful and important knowledge. The countryfolk, who are the centre of attention (with *agrestis* compare *agrestum* in line 10), are 'ignorant of the way' (*ignaros uiae*), and so together, the poet and Caesar are setting out on a journey, or to be more accurate, journeys, which will help to show them the right way.[20] In fact, these lines create three trajectories, inextricably linked but necessarily identifiable as separate paths: the *cursus* begun by the poet and his poem, the *uia* of which the farmers are ignorant, and the suggestion that Caesar too must 'set out' (*ingredere*) on a journey of some kind. Each of these three strands requires some comment.

CURSUS

On one level, the *cursus* is the particular course the poem itself will take as it unfolds in the act of reading it through from beginning to end. It involves therefore both writer and reader in a specifically didactic tradition which can be traced back to Parmenides' famous 'way'. At the same time, when he asks Caesar to oversee its launch and facilitate its progress, Virgil relates his poem to the contemporary political scene.[21] In doing so, he has in mind specifically the imagery of the Roman circus. His opening invocation of the gods must be seen in terms of the *pompa circensis*, the grand procession of deities which opened the races in the Circus Maximus, a combination of religious ritual and sporting contest which was reorganized by Octavian and Agrippa as a massive spectacle in the late 30s and early 20s BC.[22] At key moments, and most strikingly at the end of Book 1, in the simile of the chariot out of control (1.512–14), and in the prologue to Book 3, where he announces plans for the celebration of triumphal games (3.17–20), Virgil will use descriptions of chariots and the *ludi circenses* to extend this pattern of imagery throughout the poem in a coherent manner. Within this overall thematic pattern, one

[20] This point is further supported by the frequently noticed allusion to *uiam . . . quaerere* at Lucr. 2.10; see Hardie (1986), 158.

[21] See Horsfall (1995), 93 for a useful and enlightening list of the references to contemporary history in the poem.

[22] See Nelis (2008) for a full presentation of this argument.

aspect is of essential importance here. By invoking Caesar as he does and demanding that his poem be read in the light of contemporary history, Virgil is in fact relating the *cursus* of his poem to the course of both world and Roman history.[23] This link becomes obvious in the simile which ends Book 1, where the chariot can be linked to the image of the chariot of state. In recent scholarship, this point has been made again and again.[24] But it is worth looking carefully at the way in which Virgil creates the necessary setting for this connexion. As we shall see, the final simile must be seen in the light of the thematic coherence of the whole book, and that coherence is grounded in the opening section, to which we must now return.

VIA

As well as being asked to grant a favourable start to the course this poem seeks to follow, Caesar is also asked, as we have already seen, to join the poet in pity of the countryfolk who are 'ignorant of the way' (1.41):

ignarosque uiae mecum miseratus agrestis

The phrase *ignarosque uiae . . . agrestis* implies the ellipse of something akin to 'of agriculture'.[25] More generally, there may be a hint at the idea of the 'path of life'. But there is definitely a connexion between this 'way' and the poem itself. By paying attention to the poem's didactic message, the farmers, like any reader of the poem, can learn the right way. We will soon learn, however, that this way is not easy (1.121–4):

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

The Father himself
Willed that the path of tillage be not smooth,
And first ordained that skill should cultivate
The land, by care sharpening the wits of mortals,
Nor let his kingdom laze in torpid sloth.

[23] See Hardie (2005), 23–6.
[24] Cf. Jenkyns (1998), 299, 'a world out of control'.
[25] See Page (1898), ad loc.

Jupiter's dispensation has made life difficult in order to force mankind to work hard. And we soon learn that his world is one in which there is a need for teaching (*prima Ceres ferro mortalis uertere terram* | *instituit*, 147 f., 'First Ceres taught men how to turn the earth | With iron') and learning (*ut uarias usus meditando extunderet artis* | *paulatim*, 133 f., 'that step by step practice and taking thought | Should hammer out the crafts'). Ceres here prefigures the poet, since she it was, under the new dispensation imposed by Jupiter, who first taught mankind to plough, teaching to which man responded well, in an image of the ideal reception of a didactic message.[26] The same developmental process must be imagined in line 41. There the *uia* reflects content of the poem as a whole, since it is the text which, with Caesar's help, will show the way to the ignorant. It is vital, therefore, to appreciate the connexion between the use of *uia* and that of the *cursus* mentioned in the preceding line. As the poem follows its trajectory (*cursus*), it will guide its intended audience of countryfolk, who are ignorant of the way (*uia*). The prologue thus constructs a model of its ideal readership and its ideal reception in a perfect example of didactic communication between teacher and pupil. And it is Caesar who is asked to grant the poem its safe course and, having pitied the countryfolk, to begin: *ingredere* (42).[27]

INGREDERE

Many commentators and translators take this verb, which has no complement, to have the sense of 'enter into a sphere of activity', and there can be no doubt that the poet is here putting an end to the issue of which divine sphere Caesar will occupy, by suggesting that he accept his divine status (*uotis iam nunc adsuesce uocari*) and assume responsibility for the earth and so for farmers. But given the presence of *uia* and *cursus* there is also a hint of another meaning: 'begin your own course or way'. The verb *ingredior* is often used with *uia* and one of the most frequent senses of the verb is 'take the first steps on a path or journey'.[28] Caesar is here being invited to set out on

[26] *uertere terram* in line 146 recalls *terram* | *uertere* of the poem's opening and facilitates the parallel between the instruction of Ceres to that offered by the poet. Cf. Hardie (2004), 89

[27] On Caesar, the poet, and patterns of knowledge and instruction in the poem see Schiesaro (1997), *passim*, and esp. 80 on this passage.

[28] See *OLD*, s.v. 2. Gale (2000), 25 n. 15, 26 n. 24, compares Lucr. 1.80–2: *Illud in his rebus uereor, ne forte rearis* | *impia te rationis inire elementa uiamque* | *indugredi sceleris*. 'One thing I fear in this matter, that in this your apprenticeship to philosophy you may perhaps see impiety, and the entering on a path of crime' (trans. M. F. Smith (1992)).

a path or journey of his own, one which parallels that of the poet. Their activities are thus inextricably linked from the very beginning, and will remain so until the poem's end.[29]

This reading of lines 40–2 suggests that Virgil brings his prologue to a close by presenting the poem which is about to begin in terms of interconnected ways or paths involving the poet, Caesar, and the countryfolk. Ultimately, of course, the reader is also involved, since the act of reading the text implies the working-out of the poem's didactic course. It is instructive, therefore, to appreciate just how Virgil operates in the opening didactic sequence. Following the *mecum* of line 41, the *mihi* of line 45 (*depresso incipiat iam tum mihi taurus aratro | ingemere*, 'Then it's high time for my bull at the deep-driven plough | To groan') links the poet closely to the ploughman. Furthermore, the *incipiat* picks up the *incipiam* of line 5, suggesting a possible parallel between composing and ploughing. On the one hand, this idea looks back to the very first line, *Quid faciat laetas segetes, quo sidere terram | uertere*, where the enjambed *uertere* surely plays on *uersus*, equating turning the earth and turning from one verse to the next.[30] On the other, it looks forward immediately to the use of *scindimus* in line 50, which is remarkable on two counts. Not only does this word create an image of poet and farmer ploughing together ('we cleave the earth'), it has also been suggested that it may also permit a metapoetic reading, with *ferro* as the stylus and *aequor* the flat surface about to be written on.[31] Then, suddenly moving away from the assimilation of poet and farmer, the poet addresses each individual farmer directly in the second person with *nonne uides* (56) and *ergo age* (63). Subtle shifts of this kind are in operation consistently throughout the work, providing vital transitions and bringing variety to the expository mode. But beyond such formal requirements imposed by the poet's chosen didactic form,[32] Virgil creates overarching structures providing thematic coherence. In order to try to see how Virgil's use of the imagery of the way or path plays out in practice as the work unfolds, we will attempt to follow three of the plots or narratives running through Book 1, and all ultimately interconnected: the movement of the solar year, the course of Roman history, and the journey of Caesar towards apotheosis.[33]

[29] It is very tempting to take *mecum* with *ingredior* as well as with *miseratus*, as does for example Volk (2002), 133 n. 22.

[30] For the etymological link between *uertere* and *uersus* see Maltby (1991), 638 s.v. *uersus* (1).

[31] See Harrison (2007b).

[32] On which see Volk (2002), 34–43.

[33] Cf. Gale (2004) for a narratological approach to Lucretius; Trépanier (2007) outlines Lucretius' debt to Empedoclean precedent in terms of didactic plot.

VERE NOVO

At the end of the prologue, as we have seen, the poem continues with the words *Vere nouo*. This opening picks up the words *quo sidere* of line 1 in the first line by suggesting that the movement of the year will be a central structuring element in the book. By line 68 we have already encountered summer (*aestas*, 66) and looked forward to September (*sub ipsum Arcturum*, 67 f.). In line 100 we find both summer and winter (*umida solstitia atque hiemes orate serenas*). In the famous passage at lines 231–58 describing the earth's five zones, one temperate and two each of fierce cold and heat, we also find the four seasons. There is a clear physical, scientific connexion between the former (*certis dimensum partibus orbem*, 'The fixed measures of the orbit-course', the first line of this section) and the latter (*temporibus parem diuersis quattuor annum*, 'The fourfold seasons of the balanced year', the section's closing line).[34] Subsequently, the reader encounters winter (*hiems ignaua*, 299) and autumn (*tempestates autumni*, 311) and once again spring (*imbriferum uer*, 313). In the whole closing movement of the book (starting from line 351), as Virgil provides his own Hesiodic 'works and days' and engages also in detailed *imitatio* of Aratus, the issue of weather signs dominates and the advice to the farmer to study the information and warnings provided by the sun and moon keeps the turning year in the reader's mind. When we find the sun and the moon together at line 424, the poet is preparing the brilliant transition which will enable him to switch from weather signs to prodigies announcing civil war after the assassination of Julius Caesar (*extincto . . . Caesare*, 466), as we move from the endlessly repeating farmer's working year which has dominated the poem so far to one particular day in a very important year, the Ides of March 44 BC.

In order to appreciate what Virgil achieves here, it is necessary to recall that the first deities invoked in his prologue were the sun and the moon (5–6): *uos, o clarissima mundi | lumina, labentem caelo qui ducitis annum*, 'You brightest lamps | That lead the year's procession across the sky'. The cosmic year and a key event in Roman history unite in the figure of the sun, when in mid-verse, the poet moves from signs about rain the sun will (always) provide (*sol tibi signa dabit*, 463) to signs it has (already) given to Romans (*signa dabant*, 471). This sudden shift from the eternally recurring year to a specific year leads

[34] Cf. Putnam (1979), 44.

into the closing section with both its ghastly vision of civil war and Philippi (489–97) and a prayer for help (500-1):[35]

> hunc saltem euerso iuuenem succurrere saeclo
> ne prohibete.
>
> Do not at least prevent this youthful prince
> From saving a world in ruins:

That this *iuuenis* is indeed Octavian is confirmed almost immediately in line 503:

> iam pridem nobis caeli te regia, Caesar,
> inuidet . . .
>
> The courts of heaven,
> Caesar, have long begrudged your presence here.

Here too the passing of time is a key theme, because only thirty-seven lines earlier, as we have just seen, the same name had been used to refer to Julius Caesar. And the relationship between 'Caesar' and the farmer's year of the rest of Book 1 becomes even more complex when we appreciate the further levels on which the Book's close is related to its opening.

CAESAR

The name 'Caesar' appears three times in *Georgics* 1, in lines 25, 466, and 503. On the first and last occasion it refers to Octavian, in the second to Julius Caesar. As we have just seen, the close proximity of the final two occurrences locates the book's closing sequence in a precise period in Roman history. It also suggests that the poet wishes to draw attention to the essential continuity between the two men. Modern usage of course easily makes the distinction between Julius Caesar and Octavian, but it is vital to appreciate that in the late 30s and early 20s BC the latter's full official name was 'Imperator Caesar Diui filius'.[36] Recollection of this point helps to bring into focus a further aspect of the relationship between the Book's opening and its close: it is as the son of a god that the Caesar of line 25 is assured divine status. Virgil alludes to the

[35] On the interpretation of the prayer and its relation to the closing lines of the book see the important contribution of Kaster (2002).

[36] On the importance of this name and its evolution see the pertinent remarks of Millar (2000). For discussion of the handling by Octavian/Augustus of the figure of Julius Caesar see Kienast (2001). On the ambiguity surrounding the identity of the Caesar described at *Aen.* 1.286–90, see O'Hara (1994).

family connexion in line 28 in the words *materna tempora myrto*. As Mynors notes, 'Octavian, as Julius Caesar's adopted son, was *diui filius*, and inherited the descent from Venus or Dione . . . , to whom the myrtle was sacred'.[37] Further details are also relevant. At 1.41 the word *miseratus* is used of the pity Caesar and the poet share for the farmers. At 1.466 the same word reappears, this time to refer to the sun's pity for Rome at Caesar's death: *ille etiam exstincto miseratus Caesare Romam*, 'He too, when Caesar fell, showed pity for Rome'. Neither the repetition of the verb nor its collocation with Caesar is otiose. It is worth quoting here Oliver Lyne, in a paper first published in a landmark collection of essays edited by Tony Woodman and David West, in 1974:[38]

> This Sun and Caesar are so to speak of the same stature—a feeling which emerges from the balance and phrasing of 466. There, while the Sun displays human emotion (*miseratus*), Caesar's dying (*exstincto*), given the context, manifestly magnifies in significance to suggest the extinction of a cosmic body . . . The world, it seems, had in Caesar a 'Sun' capable of preventing the covert darkness of civil war. At his eclipse, the heavenly Sun correspondingly reacts, removing his light.

Appreciation of the connexion between Caesar and Sol gives added force to the simile which brings the book to a close (509–14):

> hinc mouet Euphrates, illinc Germania bellum;
> uicinae ruptis inter se legibus urbes
> arma ferunt; saeuit toto Mars impius orbe,
> ut cum carceribus sese effudere quadrigae,
> addunt in spatia, et frustra retinacula tendens
> fertur equis auriga neque audit currus habenas.
>
> Euphrates here,
> There Germany is in arms, and neighbour cities
> Break covenants and fight; throughout the world
> Impious War is raging. As on a racecourse,
> The barriers down, out pour the chariots,
> Gathering speed from lap to lap, and a driver
> Tugging in vain at the reins is swept along
> By his horses and heedless uncontrollable car.

Here, in the figure of the charioteer, we see the son takes over the reins of the chariot. In doing so, we glimpse a hint of Phaethon: the son of the Sun is in a chariot running out of control.[39] The book ends in stark contrast to the

[37] Mynors (1990), on 1.28.
[38] Lyne (1974), 51–2 = Hardie (1999), 166 = Lyne (2007), 43.
[39] See Gale (2000), 36–7.

regular movement of the sun described earlier (231–2), where its fixed course was a symbol of the divinely structured cosmos and therefore a source of reliable signs for mankind:[40]

> Idcirco certis dimensum partibus orbem
> per duodena regit mundi sol aureus astra.
>
> This is the reason why the golden Sun
> Marks through the twelve Signs of the Zodiac
> Fixed measure of the orbit-course he steers.

There is also a further parallel between the two occurrences of *miseratus*, as has been well explained by Alessandro Schiesaro:[41]

> The sun 'takes pity' on Rome not just by hiding the shameful sight she offers, but by sending a clear, if unheeded, sign of the impending catastrophe of civil war. Virgil and Octavian will 'take pity' on their Roman readers by a similar act of instruction.

This parallel between the sun and Caesar/Octavian is implicated in part in the thematic link between Caesar/Julius and the solar year,[42] but it also introduces another element, that of the poet and the act of instruction. When we put together the insights of Lyne and Schiesaro, the crucial point is this: at this dangerous time of civil war, when one Caesar is eclipsed and the regular motions of the solar year are disturbed, both the poet and a new Caesar have important lessons to communicate concerning the possibility of a return to order and peace. Furthermore, their knowledge and its power are inextricably associated with the issue of the divine, i.e. of Caesar's divinity and Virgil's relationship with this new god. And this brings us on to a third plot in Book 1: the history of Rome.

[40] For the chariot of the sun see line 250 in the same passage, *nosque ubi primus equis Oriens adflavit anhelis*, 'And when the Orient sun with panting horses'.

[41] Schiesaro (1997), 80.

[42] Feeney (2007), 207 is right to note that Virgil works with a calendar which is based on meteorological patterns and lunar parapegmata, and that despite the fact that the *Georgics* is published some fifteen years after the Julian reform of the calendar his days 'are not Caesar's solar days, but Greek lunar days'. But at the close of Book 1, following assimilation of Caesar and Sol, when the assassination of Caesar leads to bizarre solar phenomena which announce civil war and the destruction of the georgic world as depicted thus far, we can see that Virgil does parallel the farmer's year and the ordered movement of the solar year at the very point at which both collapse into chaos. Not only is there not a single date in the poem, as Feeney notes, at the close of Book 1 we are threatened with the elision of all temporal distinctions in eternal night (*impiaque aeternam timuerunt saecula noctem*, 468, 'a guilty age feared everlasting night'). For a slightly different interpretation see Nappa (2005), 54–5.

SCILICET ET RERUM FACTA EST PULCHERRIMA ROMA (2.534)

We have seen that the initially independent first-person voice which opened the poem without any kind of request for or declaration of divine authority or assistance subsequently aligned itself with Caesar, an authority figure of exemplary status. One available 'way' established in the prologue, therefore, is a path of successful instruction strongly associated with someone who is soon to become a god (23–42). By the end of this poem, Maecenas, the farmers, and all readers should have acquired a body of knowledge which is expounded in close relation to a narrative trajectory related to the preservation of the Roman state at a time of crisis. For the reader, following this particular trajectory involves the process of reading the text, and this is a text which will end with Caesar.[43] His journey in the poem, beginning from the injunction to 'set out' at 1.42 (*ingredere*), culminates in his path towards Olympus (4.559–62):

> Haec super aruorum cultu pecorumque canebam
> et super arboribus, Caesar dum magnus ad altum
> fulminat Euphraten bello uictorque uolentes
> per populos dat iura **uiamque adfectat Olympo**.
>
> This song of the husbandry of crops and beasts
> And fruit-trees I was singing while great Caesar
> Was thundering beside the great Euphrates
> In war, victoriously for grateful peoples
> Appointing laws and setting his course for Heaven.

At the beginning of the poem we are told that he will soon become a god; at the end, military victories pave his way to immortality. The *Georgics* thus comes to an end with Caesarian triumph and immortality, and the poem's historical 'plot' here finds satisfying closure. And Virgil explicitly relates the composition of the poem to this historical situation, *illo Vergilium me tempore dulcis alebat* | *Parthenope* . . . , 4.563, 'I, Virgil, at that time lay in the lap | Of sweet Parthenopê . . . '. But within this overarching thematic structure embracing the work as a whole, it is important also to appreciate the slow

[43] It is not by accident that so much criticism of the *Georgics* has been based on a linear book-by-book approach, e.g. the monographs of Putnam, Miles, Ross, Farrell, Cramer, and Nappa. Many readers have obviously felt the need to follow faithfully the *cursus* the poem lays out for them in an effort to get some kind of grip on the poem's complexities and apparent contradictions.

unfolding of the narrative dynamic which is played out on a book-by-book basis.

Looking back from the poem's final lines, the actual victories of Caesar are outlined in the prologue to Book 3 (especially lines 26–33), where again his achievements are inextricably related to the ambition of the poet to celebrate them. Looking further back, however, Book 1 ends not with Caesar flying towards Olympus in a triumphal chariot but instead with the image of a charioteer who is unable to control a chariot which seems to be heading for imminent destruction amidst worldwide strife. The striking difference between the end of Book 1 and both the opening of Book 3 and the end of Book 4 suggests that as readers we must be prepared to think carefully about the historical dynamic which underpins the unfolding of the poem's didactic message. To read the *Georgics* is to experience the unfolding history of Rome as one moves through the poem. The reading of the work creates a strong sense of historical process and of the place of Rome and Italy in world affairs, both historically and geographically. As if to inculcate this approach, right from the beginning Virgil helps his readers to appreciate the importance of time itself as a central element in the poem.[44] As we have seen, the poem begins with the year's annual turn from winter to spring: as soon as the thaw comes, the farmer must set to the hard work of ploughing the earth. But almost immediately, we find ourselves going back in time (50–2):

> ac prius ignotum ferro quam scindimus aequor
> uentos et uarium caeli praediscere morem
> cura sit . . .
>
> But with untried land, before we cleave it with iron,
> We must con its varying moods of wind and sky
> With care . . .

And then at once we are taken right back to the beginning of human life on earth (60–3):

> continuo has leges aeternaque foedera certis
> imposuit natura locis, quo tempore primum
> Deucalion uacuum lapides iactauit in orbem,
> unde homines nati, durum genus.
>
> Nature imposed these everlasting covenants
> From the first on certain regions, right from the time
> When Deucalion over the empty spaces of the earth
> Cast those stones that produced the race of men –
> A hard race.

[44] What follows owes much to Hardie (2005).

The image of this 'hard race' is picked up soon after in lines 145–9, where, given the harsh nature of human life, the poet emphasizes the necessity of both hard work and instruction:

> labor omnia uicit
> improbus et duris urgens in rebus egestas.
> prima Ceres ferro mortalis uertere terram
> instituit, cum iam glandes atque arbuta sacrae
> deficerent siluae et uictum Dodona negaret.
>
> Toil mastered everything, relentless toil
> And the pressure of pinching poverty.
> First Ceres taught men how to turn the earth
> With iron, when acorns now and arbute-berries
> In the sacred wood were failing and Dodona
> Scanted her sustenance.

Here, as we have already seen, the poet relegates his own instruction to a secondary position, after that achieved by the goddess Ceres. In order to underline this idea, lines 147–8 recall closely the prologue, with (as already noted) *uertere terram* echoing *terram* | *uertere*.[45] The very act of instruction is inextricably linked to the divine throughout the poem, with the poet acting as a kind of demiurge, his teaching being secondary to divine authority and his ability to pass on knowledge being dependent on his insight into the structures underpinning the divinely ordered cosmos in which humans must live their lives.[46] And in these lines, the poem also traces an evolution from one dispensation to another, from the Golden Age of Saturn to the Iron Age of Jupiter. But as well as working itself out on the cosmic level, this theme unfolds on a specifically historical and political level. It is not difficult to see the connexion with the Book's close, when one world ends with Caesar's death and a new and terrible age of civil war begins. But in the midst of chaos, eventually, a glimpse of hope appears. As Philip Hardie has written:[47]

> At the end of *Georgics* 1 the chariot of history is out of control, but the image allows, at least, for the possibility of reaching the finishing line, the end of the poem, of instruction, of history.

Another end is indeed foreseen within the poem, when the victories of Octavian as outlined in the prologue to Book 3 (*uictorisque arma Quirini*, 3.27) will put an end to civil strife and bring closure to the chaotic wars described at the end of Book 1 (*saeuit toto Mars impius orbe*, 1.511)

[45] Cf. also *Chaoniam . . . glandem* (8) and *glandes . . . Dodona* (148–9).
[46] Again, see Schiesaro (1997).
[47] Hardie (2005), 27.

and hinted at indirectly at the close of Book 2 (*necdum etiam audierant inflari classica* . . . , 2.539). Little wonder that this poem has inspired so much debate about whether it offers an optimistic or a pessimistic vision.[48] In fact, the poem offers visions of Roman history from both pre- and post-Actium perspectives, the former necessarily pessimistic, the latter inevitably more optimistic, even if not totally sanguine. The reader who follows carefully the complex ways in which Virgil works with time throughout the poem is in a position to appreciate this crucial point. The *Georgics* is a profoundly historical work. Its viewpoint embraces both all world history and within it the history of Rome. The latter is envisaged in terms of its past, present, and future as the act of reading the work draws the reader into following the actual processes of Rome's unfolding history. When at the close of Book 1 we see the city caught up in civil war, presented as a crucial turning point in the implicit image of the *meta* the charioteer must negotiate, the reader comes to appreciate the absolute central importance of Caesar for both the coherence of the book and the future of the Roman state.

Virgil's seamless combination of the literary and the historical may perhaps be best illustrated by drawing on a quotation from a recent study of the relationship between two of his key models, Empedocles and Lucretius. Simon Trépanier has summed up thus the deep underlying parallels between the two *On Natures*:[49]

> In both epics (assuming again the single-work hypothesis for Empedocles), the overall rhetorical structure was the same: attention-grabbing criticism of traditional religion, made in the opening sections, which then required, as the vindication and explanation for right religion, a true account of the nature of the universe. In both cases, the approach presents an analogous solution to the same problem, that of having to invoke a divinity at the opening of a didactic epic (more conventionally so in the case of Lucretius) for the sake of generic convention, even as the ultimate aim of the epic is to undermine belief in such divinities as traditionally understood. Both also generate dramatic interest through a vivid example of wrong religion, although the Lucretian example of the sacrifice of Iphigeneia is rather forced, perhaps so for the sake of alluding to the model. Lastly, the proem is also the obvious place to establish the authority for the doctrines to come, and here as well there are similarities. In Empedocles' own case, if I am right, the authority was himself, as a god; in Lucretius, the poem's authority is the *Graius homo*, Greek man, who first broke the bonds of

[48] See the fine survey of the issues by Cramer (1998); unfortunately, his proposed solution to the question is flawed because of his bizarre attitude to the state of the text, which he considers to be heavily interpolated. Morgan (1999), against the trend established by Putnam (1979), Ross (1987), and Thomas (1988), offers an optimistic reading.

[49] Trépanier (2007), 280.

superstition and explored by superhuman flight of the mind the boundaries of the universe.

It is fascinating to imagine Virgil reading his predecessors along similar lines. Like his predecessors, Virgil's didactic text directs its focus towards religion, the gods, and the issue of knowledge and divine authority. But it is obvious that he disagrees with his models even as their presence provides the context within which the reader is able to appreciate the power of a new vision. Virgil's aim is to explore the appearance of a new deity, one who offers hope of peace and the return of established religious norms and practices to a people caught up in an apparently endless series of disasters. The presence of Caesar is presented as capable of ushering in a new cosmic dispensation, of producing a new natural as well as political order in a new Roman cosmos. It is Caesar who is the divine figure who offers a vision of hope at a crucial moment in Rome's history and indeed of the history of the whole world. As a god, he is like Empedocles and Epicurus, a new saviour. And it was in the study of his didactic models that Virgil found a way of reflecting on the state of contemporary Rome and Italy and their relationship with the wider world. As Virgil writes himself into the didactic tradition, Caesar is integrated into the structure of the cosmic order. Study of the poem's intertextuality helps to demonstrate Virgil's engagement with the ways in which Romans thought about contemporary strife, moral decline, and their idealized past in an ideological nexus involving farming; to write about agriculture in the late 30s and early 20s BC meant inevitably to write about Roman history and identity, just as it inevitably led to reflection on the human condition and man's place and function in the natural order. It also involved, inevitably, writing about the divine Caesar and the Roman revolution.