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The Virgilian intertext

The fact that Virgil's poetry exhibits many points of contact with the literature of the past is beyond dispute. What to make of this fact is much less certain. The view taken here is that the poetics of intertextuality is one of Virgil's most powerfully evocative tools for communicating ideas, for establishing his place in the literary canon, and for eliciting the reader's active collaboration in making meaning. In this essay I shall try to suggest something of what attention to the intertext can do to enhance the appreciation of Virgil's poetry.[1]

The phenomenon of 'intertextuality' (or 'allusion', 'imitation', 'reference', etc.) is present in all poetry and, to some extent, in all language. Some poets deliberately cultivate an allusive style, and thus encourage their readers' expectation of seeing through one text to its source or model. Virgil alludes constantly to a wide range of authors, and we are fortunate in possessing complete texts of many of his favourite works, both Greek and Latin. In the case of works now lost, we rely on ancient summaries and modern collections of fragments.[2] In fact much of our knowledge about early Latin poetry derives from ancient students of Virgilian intertextuality, who quote many of the fragments we now possess to illustrate their influence on Virgil.[3]

Thus we probably know more about Virgil's sources and models than about those of any other ancient author. I would also argue that it is probably unwise to assume that the phenomena that we can clearly observe at work in Virgil would be visible in others too, if only we had more evidence.

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[1] This essay is intended to complement rather than to repeat or replace what I have written in Farrell (1991) ch. 1 'Introduction: on Vergilian intertextuality', pp. 3–25.

[2] One of the first studies of Virgilian intertextuality was Perellius Faustus' uncharitably entitled 'Thefts' (*Furta*). Octavius Avitus' Ὁμοιότητες filled some eight books (*Vita Donati* 44–5). The fullest surviving example of this scholarly tradition is found in Books 5 and 6 of Macrobius' *Saturnalia*.

[3] On this aspect of the relationship between Virgil, his models, and ancient scholarship see Wigodsky (1972) and Jocelyn (1964–5).

Nor would it be fair to conclude that Virgil's extensive cultivation of inter-textual resources marks him as less 'original' than other poets. The truth, I believe, lies between these facile notions and points us towards an entirely different understanding: namely that Virgilian intertextuality shows every sign of being the distinct creation and in many ways the artistic signature of classical antiquity's greatest poetic craftsman.

This is not to say that Virgil invented his style out of nothing. Archaic and classical Greek poets certainly alluded in various ways to one another and especially to Homer. Indeed, most surviving Greek poetry can hardly be read without calling to mind some passage or situation in Homer; and the great masters of Greek tragedy, for example, composed for an audi-ence familiar with Homer and a good deal of other poetry both from formal schooling and from attending frequent public performances, pri-vate symposia, and so forth. So the tradition of allusive poetry is very old. But in the Hellenistic kingdoms of Pergamum and Alexandria, close study of earlier literature increased the capacity of poetry to analyse, comment upon, interpret, and even to correct the poetry of the past.[4] In Pergamum scholarly energy was focused on the interpretation of Homer as a philo-sopher through allegory, symbolic etymology, and similar means. Unfortu-nately little of the poetry that may have reflected this intellectual milieu survives; but enough is known to guarantee that Virgil understood the pro-cedures of interpreting Homer through physical, historical, and moral alle-goresis, and that he followed these procedures in his own adaptations of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.[5] In Alexandria an equal amount of energy was focused on the word and on mastery of Greek culture through the mastery of language. The methods by which this mastery was displayed – if 'displayed' is the right word – were often rather cryptic, and at times downright furtive. Poets like Callimachus refused to write in an obviously Homeric style, but loved using specimens of rare Homeric diction: words that occur only once in all of Homer, or once in Homer even if commonly afterwards, or once in the *Iliad* even if several times in the *Odyssey*; or else unusual variants of dialect, preferred manuscript readings, and other rarities. We need not understand these phenomena as allusions to the Homeric context in which such words occur; often enough the relevant context is the reference works in which the words were listed. But stylistically and intellectually, their presence in a poetic text suggests the author's close familiarity with and worshipful respect for the text that he imitates as well as the high stand-ards of literary and scholarly connoisseurship that he requires of his reader.

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[4] See in general Pfeiffer (1968); for further and more detailed discussion cf. Porter (1992).
[5] Hardie (1986); cf. Farrell (1991) 253–72.

Virgil's poetry has affinities with both styles of allusion. On the one hand, the reader who knows Virgil's favourite authors even casually will not fail to catch their voices in Virgil's words, or to recognise his imitations of famous Homeric or Sophoclean scenes. On the other hand, those who prize Virgil's ability to arrest their attention with a single word and who savour his sheer command of the Latin language, eventually discover that behind many individual words there is a history, a history that is written in the texts of other authors. The two styles are sometimes thought to be at odds, the former representing a perspective on the literary past as the common property of a cultivated readership, the latter marking out a kind of *pomerium philologiae* to which only initiates can gain access. But the difference between the two styles should not be exaggerated. Both types of allusion serve similar rhetorical ends, drawing the reader into a dialogue that transcends the limits of the individual text and establishing continuity between Virgil's poetry and the work of his great predecessors.

One finds the art of intertextuality at work in almost every syllable Virgil wrote, so that analysis might begin almost anywhere. Book 8 of the *Aeneid* ends with one of Virgil's most obvious allusions: the description of a shield fashioned for Aeneas by Vulcan, which is clearly modelled on Achilles' shield in *Iliad* 18. Any reader who is at all familiar with Homer would recognise the reference. Some would stop there, regarding the allusion as generic in character, i.e. as a mark of the poem's participation in the epic genre. It is possible to stop interpreting at this point, of course, and still to enjoy the passage. By the same token, it is not necessary to understand every facet of fire imagery in the *Aeneid* to be moved by Dido's love, Turnus' lust for battle, and the omens that convince Anchises to leave his conquered city. But as in the case of other poetic effects, Virgilian allusion is never one-dimensional or unrelated to other thematic devices.

Virgil's shield, like Homer's, is on the one hand merely an epic shield; but in earlier antiquity, Homer's shield had been read as something more.[6] Because it is encircled by the stream of Ocean and depicts the sun, moon, and constellations, Homer's shield was interpreted as an emblem of the cosmos, and Virgil's shield may well be informed by this exegetical tradition. Thus the two shields are not only generic markers, but also signifiers of the genre's status as a vehicle of cosmological truth. The differences between the shields support this idea as well. Homer's shield depicts two cities, one at war, one at peace, along with the various activities that take place in each, and for this reason was read in Hellenistic times as an image of the poem. Virgil's shield depicts famous events in Roman history, culminating

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[6] Hardie (1986) ch. 8, 'The shield of Aeneas: the cosmic icon', 336–76, with further references.

in Augustus' victory at Actium, and thus, like Homer's shield, 'stands for' the poem in which it occurs, while the allegorical nature of the comparison is more pronounced. Again ancient interpretation of Homer seems to have guided Virgil's imagination. Finally, note that these shields involve a double comparison, one between the shield and the subject of the poem in which it appears, and another between the shield (and thus the poem for which it stands) and the cosmos. In the case of the *Aeneid* this double comparison can be read as an interpretation of contemporary political arrangements as reflected both in the events of the mythic past and in the permanent structure of the cosmos. This happens to be one of the most notable characteristics of surviving Pergamene art; and since Pergamum was, as I have noted, a centre of Homeric scholarship in the allegorical tradition, it seems certain that Virgil's dialogue with Homer was moderated by commentary of just this type.

An understanding of ancient scholarship thus expands our understanding of the intertextual relationship in at least one direction; but this example still involves treating the shield episode more or less as a single point of contact between the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*. Allusion to the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* normally invites the reader to compare the structures of the relevant Virgilian and Homeric narratives. Any reader taking this approach to the shield in Book 8 would correctly interpret it as a sign that Aeneas is becoming another Achilles – a reversal of what the Sibyl's prophecy about 'another Achilles come to light in Latium, himself goddess-born' (6.89–90) seems to mean and of Turnus' contention that he himself is that other Achilles; but the reversal is borne out in the poem's final scene when Aeneas forces Turnus into the role of Hector, taking upon himself the mantle of Achilles.

In the immediate context of *Aeneid* 8, how far does this analogy hold? Few readers bother to trace the earlier episodes of the book to a specific prototype. Nevertheless, there are good reasons to regard Aeneas' visit to Pallanteum as a reworking of several Homeric episodes.[7] Aeneas, absent from the battles taking place around the Trojan encampment, resembles Achilles in this way as well – even if formal similarity emphasises the diference in character between a hero who leaves the fray out of concern for his slighted honour and one who carries out an important diplomatic mission on his people's behalf.[8] But Achilles is not the only model. Aeneas is also a type of Telemachus here, visiting the court of a friendly king; and if Evander's tale about Hercules and Cacus (*Aen.* 8.184–279) stands in for Menelaus' story about Proteus (*Od.* 4.332–592), the Laurentian king's

[7] Knauer (1964a) 239–66; cf. Knauer (1964b) 76–8. See also Wimmel (1973) 50–73.
[8] Anderson (1957) 25; Gransden (1984) 97–8.

advanced age marks him as a type of Nestor, who also hosted Telemachus (*Od.* 3).

These parallels are well supported by analysis of the relevant Virgilian and Homeric narratives; nevertheless, they are far less obvious than the allusion that closes the book and may thus be felt to be unimportant or even illusory. It is unwise, however, especially in Virgil, to measure importance in terms of obvious effect. The most certain allusion in Book 8 besides the description of the shield is perhaps the least obvious. It consists of a single word, *scyphus* (8.278), a word that Virgil uses only here.[9] Why is this significant? Because it is a ἅπαξ λεγόμενον, a word used only once by Homer as well. As I noted above, Alexandrian poets consulted special glossaries of such words and used them to suggest their close, scholarly familiarity with the text of Homer, and this surely explains an aspect of its appearance in the *Aeneid*. But if this is really an allusion, and not just a piece of lexicographical bravado, the Homeric context in which the word appears ought to be relevant too. And so it is: in the *Odyssey* it is Eumaeus the swineherd who receives the hero with hospitality into his humble dwelling and hands him a σκύφος (14.112), just as Evander does here. Thus Evander in this scene 'is' Eumaeus (as well as Nestor), while Aeneas plays the role of Odysseus (as well as those of Telemachus and Achilles).

Before we turn to the meaning of this characterisation, there is more to say about the word itself. Virgil may have got the Homeric ἅπαξ from some Hellenistic word list, but it is equally likely that he became aware of it while involved in an earlier intertextual project. In Eclogue 3, two shepherds compete in a singing contest. They agree to a wager: Menalcas stakes a pair of beautifully carved beechwood cups (*pocula*, 36–43). His loving description of them is clearly borrowed from Theocritus' First Idyll. There the goatherd promises Thyrsis all manner of rustic gifts if he will sing the Daphnis song; among them is an embossed cup, which the goatherd calls by the Homeric word σκύφος – a word that Theocritus uses only here (143). So it seems quite likely that Virgil became aware of Theocritus' learned allusion in his own imitation of a passage from Idyll 1 in Eclogue 3.

Returning to *Aeneid* 8, what sense can we make of what we have learned? How is an obvious allusion to a famous passage from the *Iliad* related to the all-but-undetectable borrowing of a rare word from the *Odyssey* by way of Theocritus? To answer this question, one has to be aware of two facts. First, the description of the cup in Idyll 1 is hardly unrelated to the description of the shield in *Iliad* 18. Second, the rustic setting in which Aeneas receives his divine shield is hardly unrelated either

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[9] On what follows see Wills (1987).

to the heroic deeds that shield will allow him to perform or to the glorious martial future that the scenes embossed on it predict.

First, the cup. On the one hand, Theocritus' cup 'is' the σκύφος with which Eumaeus entertained Odysseus. But it is well known that Theocritus' description of this consummately bucolic artifact alludes carefully to Homer's description of Achilles' shield.[10] Theocritus' fashioning of a symbol for the world of pastoral poetry out of a weapon carried by the greatest of all epic heroes (and the words of the greatest of all epic poets) is typical of the way in which Alexandrian poets imitated Homer – by reducing Homeric grandeur to a more human level in a way that almost disguises the source, all the while leaving unmistakable (if well hidden) traces that a relationship does in fact exist. Theocritus' calling his pastoral cup a Homeric σκύφος is just such a trace. It is also something more. By borrowing the rare word from a passage in which a Homeric hero is entertained by a humble herdsman in rustic surroundings, Theocritus implicitly claims a distinguished poetic heritage and thus legitimacy for his own world of humble herdsmen in rustic surroundings and for the genre that, with his description of this cup, he in effect invents.

Second, the rustic setting of Pallanteum. Italy in Virgil is on the one hand a place very much like the bucolic world described by Theocritus, even like the earth as it was during the Golden Age: a place of natural abundance, clemency, and peaceful living.[11] But it is simultaneously a breeding-ground of strife and warfare. In Pallanteum these contradictions are at their most intense.[12] When Aeneas arrives there, he finds a peaceful, pastoral community where libations are poured from a Theocritean cup. But the hero has come seeking a military alliance, and he is not disappointed; for the libation poured from that cup is in honour of Hercules, who once pacified the district in anger and by main force. In fact, it is a Homeric cup after all, just as the shield Aeneas receives at Pallanteum is a Homeric shield, and the deeds he will perform with it Homeric deeds.

Like Theocritus, Virgil is playing a game that involves both the theory of genres and the history of literature: just as Theocritus had claimed descent from Homer, so Virgil is justifying the course that his career has taken from the *Eclogues* to the *Aeneid*. But he is doing more. By bringing pastoral and martial themes into such intimate proximity – finding them, in fact, within one another – he raises questions that outline several of the major themes that preoccupied him throughout his career. Can humankind

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[10] On this relationship see Ott (1969) 99–105; Halperin (1983) 176–81.
[11] On the relationship between the bucolic world and the Golden Age myth in Virgil see Johnston (1980) 41–61.
[12] See Putnam (1965) ch. 3 'History's dream', 105–50 and Wimmel (1973) 43–73.

live in peace? Can that peace be achieved through force? Is any and every peace fated to erupt into violence? By raising such questions he comes close to suggesting that the worlds of the shepherd and of the soldier are in fact one – that for all their apparent differences, the shepherd and the soldier differ very little. One can certainly read Virgil's interpretation of Achilles' shield in just this way; but one sees it no less convincingly and much more succinctly in the quiet but definite gesture embodied in the single word *scyphus*, simultaneously pastoral and heroic, Theocritean and Homeric.

This is the essence of Virgilian intertextuality, in which the covert does not contradict, but greatly enriches (and often complicates) the overt. It is a rhetorical device that encourages close scrutiny not only of Virgil's text, but of the many intertexts with which that text becomes enmeshed. And while an analysis like the one above may seem to proceed on a rather *ad hoc* basis, it actually assumes that the Virgilian intertext works in a few quite definite and systematic ways. The main points to keep in mind about Virgil's intertextual practice are the following.

(1) *It is pervasive.* Understanding this point follows on taking seriously what every beginner knows: that the *Aeneid* 'is' the entire *Iliad* and *Odyssey* rolled into one. Taking this proposition seriously means assuming that every line of the poem potentially alludes to something in Homer, either by direct quotation or by virtue of occurring within an episode 'borrowed' from Homer.

(2) *It is analytical.* Allusions to Homer in the *Aeneid* do not occur at random; rather, they are based on careful analysis and comparison of both Homeric poems. The events of Book 8, in which Aeneas receives his divine armour, presage his entry into battle, just like Achilles' acceptance of divine weapons in *Iliad* 18. But *Aeneid* 8 also gives us the hero as Odysseus in Eumaeus' hut and as Telemachus on his visit to Pylos and Sparta – the episodes during which father and son are both absent from their palace, but are about to return to fight the suitors together. Such coincidences can hardly be due to anything other than careful analysis of the sources involved and the development of an allusive programme on that basis.

(3) *It is thematically motivated.* The previous example illustrates this point as well. That Aeneas on his visit to Pallanteum should 'be' both Odysseus and Telemachus, father and son, demands interpretation. The fact that on this visit Evander recognises Virgil's hero as the son of his friend Anchises, and that Aeneas forms a powerful bond with Evander's young son Pallas, will obviously come into play. Similarly, the modelling of commemorative games for Anchises (*Aen.* 5) on the most cheerful aspects

of the funeral games for Patroclus (*Il.* 23) is systematically and themat-
ically related to the imitation of the rest of Patroclus' funeral – down to
the shocking detail of immolating prisoners of war as offerings to the shade
of the deceased (*Il.* 23.175–6) – in the funeral of Pallas, the 'real' Patroclus
of the *Aeneid* (11.81–2).

(4) *It is not limited to any single source or model.* This is crucially
important. Of course Homer in some sense provides the chief intertext for
the *Aeneid*. But to define the poem's intertextual programme as 'Homer
with occasional reference to others' is to misconstrue the three previous
points and to set up unnecessary obstacles to interpreting the *Eclogues* and
Georgics as well. We understand the Homeric element in Virgil's programme
especially well because it has been since antiquity the most intensively
studied aspect. But the relationship between Virgil and Homer is not unique,
and an understanding of Virgilian intertextuality that does not go beyond
Homer is far from sufficient.

To demonstrate these points, let us begin with the traditional view that
Virgil's epic divides into 'Odyssean' and 'Iliadic' halves. Merely accepting
this idea at face value is to mistake for a destination what Virgil clearly
offered as the starting-point of a long and wondrous journey. The argu-
ment I have just presented about Iliadic *and* Odyssean models in Book 8
suggests that the *Aeneid* does not divide so easily into Iliadic and Odyssean
halves. Turning back to the first six books of the poem, we find that the
alleged correspondence between *Aeneid* 1–6 and the Homeric *Odyssey*
invites the reader to pose and to meditate on a number of simple but
urgent questions:

(1) What does it mean for Virgil to have 'shrunk' his Odyssey from
     twenty-four to only six books?
(2) How can he have done this when at least one of these six books
     (5) includes a major episode representing an entire book not of the
     Odyssey, but of the *Iliad*?
(3) What must we make of Servius' remark about Book 4 – he exagger-
     ates here but is not essentially incorrect – that 'this entire book is
     taken over from Book 3 of Apollonius'?[13]
(4) The fall of Troy in *Aeneid* 2 is a story that Homer did not tell in any
     detail; that was left to the poets of the epic cycle and of tragedy. Why
     then does Virgil devote to it an entire book of what we think of as
     his Odyssey?

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[13] *Apollonius Argonautica scripsit ubi inducit amantem Medeam; inde totus hic liber translatus
est, de tertio Apollonii* (*praef. in Aen.* 4, 247. 1–4 Harv.).

(5) If Virgil means to imitate Homer entirely, why does his Odyssey begin with a storm at sea (i.e. in Book 5 of the Homeric *Odyssey*) and end with a trip to the Underworld (i.e. in Homer's Book 11)?

Such questions by their very specificity strike some readers as out of place; for them the general similarity is enough. But Virgil's style is all about specificity in the service of enriching the reader's experience, and not just where allusion is concerned. The questions I have posed can all be answered in various ways, and the answers that we suggest reveal almost everything about what kind of poem we think the *Aeneid* is, representing what kind of values, proposing what model of heroism, offering what kind of insight into the human condition. And as we have seen, it is characteristic of Virgil to provoke meditation upon the most profound questions by dwelling on what might seem the most insignificant of details.

I have so far focused on the *Aeneid* because it is, in this respect at least, the best understood of Virgil's works. The question remains, how far these lessons apply to the earlier works as well. There is no easy answer. The *Eclogues*, like the *Aeneid*, in their relationship to one model in particular, offer a potential organising principle. Unlike the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, however, we do not know in what form Virgil read Theocritus; whatever structural relationship may have existed between the Eclogue book and its putative Theocritean model can only remain hypothetical. As for the *Georgics*, we know that direct imitation of its acknowledged model, Hesiod's *Works* and *Days*, is confined to Book 1; the rest of the poem works through a progression of themes that involve substantial interaction with (*inter alios*) first Lucretius, then Homer.[14] Thus in respect of their general intertextual frameworks, both the *Eclogues* (possibly) and the *Georgics* (certainly) differ from the *Aeneid*.

On the other hand, the allusive texture of both earlier works is not essentially different from what we find in the *Aeneid*. Virgil's means of creating intertextual dialogue in the *Georgics* seem to me identical with what one finds in the *Aeneid*. The even earlier Sixth Eclogue already presents the reader with such a dazzlingly elaborate and densely woven intertextual fabric that it is still only partly understood.[15] Imitation in the *Eclogues* is generally more concentrated on Theocritus alone; but even those poems that draw on Theocritus exclusively, or nearly so, show the same kinds of technical and thematic sophistication that one finds in the *Aeneid*.

[14] For details see Farrell 1991.
[15] See Farrell (1991) 291–314 and especially Ross (1975) 18–38, with further references.

The Third Eclogue depicts a singing match, a motif found in several Theocritean Idylls.[16] More broadly, the poem is thematically unified by the motif of exchange, and it alludes to a number of different Idylls that deal with this theme in various forms. One is Idyll 4, with whose opening words Eclogue 3 begins:

MENALCAS	Dic mihi, Damoeta, cuium pecus? an Meliboei?
DAMOETAS	Non, vero Aegonis; nuper mihi tradidit Aegon.
M.	infelix o semper, oves, pecus! ipse Neaeram
	dum fovet ac ne me sibi praeferat illa veretur,
	hic alienus ovis custos bis mulget in hora,
	et sucus pecori et lac subducitur agnis!

MENALCAS	Tell me, Damoetas, whose flock? Are they Meliboeus'?
DAMOETAS	No, Aegon's; Aegon just turned them over to me.
M.	Oh, sheep, you're a sad lot! While your master nuzzles Neaera
	and worries she likes me better, this surrogate shepherd milks
	you twice an hour, drying out the flock and cheating the lambs!

<div align="right">(Ecl. 3.1–6)</div>

Βάττος	Εἰπέ μοι, ὦ Κορύδων, τίνος αἱ βόες; ἦ ῥα Φιλώνδα;
Κορύδων	οὔκ, ἀλλ' Αἴγωνος· βόσκειν δέ μοι αὐτὰς ἔδωκεν.
Β.	ἦ πᾷ ψε κρύβδαν τὰ ποθέσπερα πάσας ἀμέλγες;

<div align="center">* * *</div>

δείλαιαί γ' αὖται, τὸν βούκολον ὡς κακὸν εὗρον.

BATTUS	Tell me, Corydon, whose cattle? Are they Philondas'?
CORYDON	No, Aegon's; he gave them to me to watch.
B.	And are you milking them all towards evening on the sly?

<div align="center">* * *</div>

Poor things, what a bad herdsman they've got!

<div align="right">(Idylls 4.1–3, 13)</div>

These openings not only dramatise an exchange of banter, however; they concern a material exchange, the exchange of sheep and cattle, or the animals' exchange of one herdsman for another. It is no great stretch to see in the image of this transference a special relevance to Virgil's project of imitating Theocritus, and to find in Menalcas' acid remark a sardonic commentary on the suspect position of the imitative poet who, as if by definition, stands accused of living off another's property. Menalcas' taunt provokes recrimination and a quarrel, which may be anticipated in the name of Aegon – the only name in the Theocritean passage that Virgil

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[16] On what follows see Farrell (1992).

leaves unaltered (and actually utters twice) – where we catch a hint of both the rightful owner's (viz. the earlier poet's) and the exploited animals' (who are δείλαιαί) aggrievement (by a pun with the Latin *aeger*) and of the contest (via the Greek ἀγών) that this eclogue will become.

After such an ominous prelude, the contest itself ends in a draw. The eclogue can thus be read metapoetically as at least a moral victory for the imitative poet. The proemium of *Georgics* 3 is even more self-assertive. Having begun with a definitive expression of literary belatedness (*omnia iam uulgata*, 4), Virgil goes on to assert hegemony over his poetic forebears: he will lead the Muses from Greece to Mantua and build a temple to Caesar on the banks of the Mincius. Far from original, this fantasy owes a great deal to the earlier epinician poetry of Pindar and Callimachus;[17] but here belatedness is transvalued into masterly, victorious appropriation, an all-but-literal triumph over the past. And Virgil was willing to go still further. The memorial games for Anchises in *Aeneid* 5 are, as noted above, a redrafting of Homer's funeral games for Patroclus in *Iliad* 23.[18] The episode on the whole is, as a piece of literary imitation and emulation, one of Virgil's most decisive 'victories' over Homer. Not surprisingly, then, it contains what may be his most prideful vaunt. Virgil's first contest, the boat race, is modelled on Homer's first event, a chariot race. The *Aeneid* passage contains a fascinating simile that looks very much like a metaliterary comment on its relationship with its Homeric model:[19]

> non tam praecipites biiugo certamine campum
> corripuere ruuntque effusi carcere currus,
> nec sic immissis aurigae undantia lora
> concussere iugis pronique in verbera pendent.

Not so swift are chariots that have seized the plain in a contest of yoked teams and rush in a flood from their starting-cage, nor do the drivers so shake their waving thongs at the headlong chargers and hang prone over their blows. *(Aen. 5.144–7)*

If we read this simile with reference to Homer, we are reminded of Virgil's decision to alter a chariot race into a regatta; and if we read with reference to the intertextual relationship (for chariots and boats, like the sheep of Eclogue 4, are generically appropriate symbols for the poetry in which they appear), we catch Virgil's boast that Homer's race is bested in competition with his own.

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[17] Pindar: Wilkinson (1970); Callimachus: Thomas (1983b).
[18] The classic pages of Heinze (1915) 145–70, recently translated into English (1993) 121–41, are still worth studying.
[19] Nugent (1992).

But Virgilian contests do not always bear a message that is so comforting to the belated challenger. Eclogue 7 contains an amoebaean contest similar to that of Eclogue 3; but this time Corydon, who sings first, defeats Thyrsis, who follows. The contestants are described as equals (4–5), so that it is merely the order in which they sing that assigns Corydon the role of model, Thyrsis that of the imitator who strives in vain to surpass or at least match his predecessor. Returning to the games of *Aeneid* 5 we find a contest that reverses the outcome of an earlier one. In the boxing match themes of age and priority take prominence as the elder contestant, Entellus, bests Dares, his younger opponent. It is tempting to read this athletic contest as an allegorical poetics of belatedness. Certainly Virgil understood all too well when he wrote this episode that not only Homer, but Apollonius and Theocritus had been there before him.[20] And this is to speak only of the Greeks; for when Entellus sacrifices his prize bull to Hercules in thanksgiving for his victory, the narrator speaks in Ennian tones:[21]

sternitur exanimisque tremens procumbit humi bos

The steer is felled and lies lifeless, trembling on the ground. (*Aen.* 5.481)

It seems impossible for Virgil to tell this tale except in words borrowed from the poets of the past, and irresistible for the reader to view such tokens of belatedness as anything but evidence of the modern poet's anxiety that he will never measure up. Dares' failure to overcome his ancient rival, like Aeneas' unsuccessful attempt by means of these games finally to lay the ghost of his dead father, can easily be taken to reflect the poet's anxiety about his own Homeric *agon* and, more generally, the ever-present theme of Rome's deeply ambivalent relationship with Greek culture.

It is often possible to view intertextuality in this way; but it is not the only useful approach, and the notion of rivalry sometimes seems hopelessly inadequate to explain Virgil's work with the literary past. Consider the passage of *Aeneid* 9 in which Nisus and Euryalus propose their ill-starred mission to the Trojan chiefs. The escapade is modelled mainly on two Iliadic episodes. Aeneas in Book 9 (as noted above apropos of Book 8) is still absent from the scene of battle, and his troops are having the worst of it. The proposed mission of Nisus and Euryalus corresponds in purpose to the embassy of *Iliad* 9: the hero must be brought back to the aid of his comrades. But the mission fails because the two adventurers become enmeshed in the plot of *Iliad* 10, the Doloneia, slaughtering drunk

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[20] Poliakoff (1985).
[21] On this phenomenon see Thomas (1986b) 180–1; cf. Farrell (1991) 228–9.

and sleepy Rutulians in their beds – but, unlike Diomedes and Odysseus in the *Iliad*, Virgil's pair are surprised by dawn and the arrival of the enemy captain Messapus, and meet their doom.

Virgil's redrafting of Homer's plot says a lot about the heroic values that his epic celebrates. Aeneas, dutiful and energetic, is far different from the selfish Achilles. Not only Nisus and Euryalus, though, but the Trojan leaders as well behave in a way that draws upon and debases the typical desire of Homeric heroes to measure their stature in material possessions. The bribes that Agamemnon offers Achilles if he will return to battle – bribes that Achilles pointedly and contemptuously rejects (*Il.* 9.378–87), – become rewards that Iulus offers Nisus and Euryalus if their mission succeeds (*Aen.* 9.257–80). And when the fatal morning comes, Euryalus is betrayed by a shaft of light glinting off the helmet that he has just taken as booty from the body of a man killed by stealth in his sleep, not in open, heroic combat (*Aen.* 9.359–77). Thus if Aeneas at this point surpasses in moral stature his Homeric prototype, the people on whose behalf he labours – not excluding his son – exhibit some of the worst excesses of the older heroic code.

The Homeric plot of the *Aeneid* is not, however, an isolated or self-sufficient element of the poem's meaning, but is set in a broader philosophical context. In proposing his plan to Euryalus, Nisus first asks the astonishing question:

> dine hunc ardorem mentibus addunt,
> Euryale, an sua cuique deus fit dira cupido?

> Do gods apply this burning to our minds,
> Euryalus, or does each man's dread desire become his god?
>
> (*Aen.* 9.184–5)

If this hermeneutical conundrum sounds odd in the mouth of a military watchman, it serves to introduce a more specific set of references. Euryalus has been introduced to the reader as one of the 'sons of Aeneas' (*Aeneadum*, 9.180); and Nisus will later address Iulus and the other Trojan captains in the same way (235). Virgil uses the word fairly frequently, and in the fragmentary state of our knowledge about earlier Latin literature, it is difficult to know how common the use of this patronymic was. We actually know of only one occurrence before the *Aeneid*, and in a highly marked context indeed: it is the first word of Lucretius' *De rerum natura*. More Lucretian language attends the introduction of the Trojan war council:

> cetera per terras omnis animalia somno
> laxabant curas et corda oblita laborum:

> ductores Teucrum primi, *delecta* iuventus
> consilium summis regni de rebus habebant,
> quid facerent quisve Aeneae iam nuntius esset.

All other animals throughout all lands were relaxing in sleep their cares and
hearts forgetful of toil; but the foremost leaders of the Trojans, select youth,
were holding council over the highest affairs of state: what action to take,
or who might take a message to Aeneas.   (*Aen.* 9.224–8)

The reference is to a passage in which Lucretius expresses a very dim view
of statesmen and the values they stand for:

> Illud in his rebus vereor, ne forte rearis
> impia te rationis inire elementa viamque
> indugredi sceleris; quod contra saepius illa
> religio peperit scelerosa atque impia facta.
> Aulide quo pacto Triviai virginis aram
> Iphianassai turparunt sanguine foede
> ductores Danaum *delecti*, prima virorum

What I fear in all this is that you may happen to think you are entering
wicked lessons in reason and walking a road of crime; whereas in fact, it is
religion that has more frequently given birth to wicked, criminal deeds. As
for instance at Aulis the select leaders of the Greeks, first of heroes, foully
polluted the altar of the chaste Trivia with the blood of Iphianassa.
                                                        (*DRN* 1.80–6)

If we probe these verbal parallels for thematic significance, we quickly see
that Virgil's 'sons of Aeneas' are in Lucretian terms blinded by their desire
for material gain and worldly power, subject to the superstition that is the
Roman state religion, and badly in need of the cure that comes only with a
bracing draught of Epicurean *ratio*. And the Virgilian context actually sup-
ports this interpretation. Nisus proposes action because his mind is not at
rest (*mens agitat mihi nec placida contenta quiete est*, 9.187); likewise the
Trojan leaders, in contrast to all other living creatures, are beset by cares.
This is as if to say that the 'sons of Aeneas' are suffering from ταραχός,
disturbance of the soul, the opposite of ἀταραξία, the spiritual tranquillity
produced by Epicurean *sapientia*. Thus the revisions of Homeric plot in
this episode are supported by reference to a moral code far removed from
that of the archaic warrior, but not so far from that of the contemporary
politician.[22]

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[22] The fact that Virgil's Trojans at this point are living out the experiences of Homer's
Greeks is reflected linguistically in the change of Lucretius' *ductores Danaum* to Virgil's
ductores Teucrum.

The intertextuality of a passage like this supports a crucial element of the poem's rhetorical structure as expressed in terms of time. Virgil's narration of events in the distant past has direct relevance for the cultural milieu of contemporary Rome. Voicing a speculative philosophical problem through the persona of an archaic warrior and voicing it as a question that has far-reaching implications for contemporary religious attitudes (as well as for the interpretation of the 'divine machinery' of the epic genre which the *Aeneid* constantly employs), is one of the ways in which Virgil links the two most important time-frames in which the poem operates. It also establishes an important link between the genres of epic and philosophy. Both of these points are made in other ways as well; but the reference to Lucretius in this famously Homeric context greatly intensifies the delicious sensation of temporal convergence that permeates the poem, while accessing a rich vein of Homeric criticism in the service of addressing the ills of contemporary society.

What this example illustrates is Virgil's ability to make his text part of something greater than itself, as if it were merely an episode within a greater, continuous text of almost unimaginable scope. This tendency is most clearly visible in the presence of a strong narrative current within a highly traditional genre, as in the *Aeneid*, a poem that uses time as a raw material to tremendous literary effect. Here, I believe, there is much work to be done. Existing scholarship has tended to see Virgil as a tyro anxious about meeting the standard set by his teachers, or else as a kind of masterly editor, rewriting the poetic past by the light of his own superior discrimination and scholarship. I have tried to suggest that there is also a Virgil who is sure of his right to stand alongside the greatest poets of the past, yet too worshipful of their achievements to molest them with wilful revisionism. The aim of this poet is to create a text that will knit together any number of cherished 'pre-texts' into a vast, continuous intertext – a project that Virgil did not begin or complete, but that he did much to advance.

This Virgil appears wherever the intertext calls attention to itself as such. When Hercules sheds tears over the impending death of young Pallas (*Aen.* 10.464–5), Jupiter consoles Hercules by 'reminding' him of his own tears over the death of Sarpedon. Jupiter thus establishes both that Pallas 'is' Sarpedon and that the circular movement of epic time that allows for such repetitions also moves on a linear axis: Pallas' death does not merely repeat that of Sarpedon, it succeeds it as well. The *Iliad* is pointedly *not* being rewritten here; it stands emphatically unaltered as a model by which to understand this subsequent event. Jupiter's act of remembrance guarantees that the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid* are related not merely as might be any

two epic poems on similar themes representing similar events, but also as 'episodes' within a much greater, continuous epic intertext; and it guarantees further that the relationship between them does not depend exclusively on the perception of the reader, but is actually presupposed within the narrative itself. Indeed, the allusion releases still more metapoetic force. The event that Jupiter recalls stands for the immutability of fate: Homer's Zeus could not save Sarpedon from his fate, nor can Virgil's Jupiter or Hercules save Pallas from his. In a context that recalls a Homeric episode so precisely, and an episode that deals with such a theme, it seems again but a small step to infer a comment on the sanctity and inviolability of the literary past. True, Virgil is not always unwilling to summon forth the past in unfamiliar forms. But a passage such as this may remind us that all is not mere putty in his hands; that the past was, to some extent, simply the given with which he had to work, and to which he willingly adapted himself.

This example gives only an idea of the scope and character of the great intertext within which Virgil's poetry inscribes itself. If passages like this, which assume an Olympian perspective, afford the clearest views, the intertext is nevertheless visible everywhere in the *Eclogues*, *Georgics*, and *Aeneid*. Nor is the interpretation of this intertext a mechanistic process. The conflict between heroic and Epicurean values in the episode of Nisus and Euryalus is not resolved one way or the other by the chronological relationship between Homer and Lucretius. But through such passages the dimensions of the reader's experience expand immeasurably. Rather than a skeleton key that opens up the secrets of the poem, the intertext presents vistas and possibilities that would otherwise remain unglimpsed and inaccessible.

FURTHER READING

Literature on the general theory of intertextuality is vast and complex. Exploration might begin with two articles in A. Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan, eds., *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton, 1993) s.vv. 'Allusion' and 'Intertextuality' and continue with the bibliographical material cited there. Of the many studies that focus on Greek and especially Latin poetry, see especially D. West and T. Woodman, eds., *Creative Imitation and Latin Literature* (Cambridge, 1979); G. B. Conte, *The Rhetoric of Imitation: Genre and Poetic Memory in Virgil and Other Latin Poets* (Ithaca and London, 1986); P. R. Hardie, *The Epic Successors of Virgil: A Study in the Dynamics of a Tradition* (Cambridge, 1993); and J. Wills, *Repetition in Latin Poetry: Figures of Allusion* (Oxford, 1997). S. E. Hinds' forthcoming monograph, *Allusion and Intertext: Dynamics of Appropriation in Roman Poetry*, promises to advance the discussion considerably.

For Virgil no satisfactory general study exists, but the individual works are more or less well served. For the *Eclogues* Sebastian Posch (1969), *Beobachtungen zur*

Theokritnachwirkung bei Vergil, Commentationes Aenipontanae 19, provides a reasonably full collection of parallel passages. D. O. Ross, *Backgrounds to Augustan Poetry: Gallus, Elegy, and Rome* (Cambridge, 1975) subtly analyses Virgil's earliest work in relation to the Neoteric movement. Farrell, 'Literary allusion and cultural poetics in Vergil's *Third Eclogue*', *Vergilius* 38 (1992) 64–71 argues that the allusive style of the *Eclogues* is determined by social and historical as much as by literary relations. For the *Georgics* R. F. Thomas, 'Virgil's *Georgics* and the art of reference', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 90 (1986) 171–98 is particularly good on the various forms of poetic intertextuality, while Thomas, 'Prose into poetry: tradition and meaning in Virgil's *Georgics*', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 91 (1987) 229–60 illuminates Virgil's transformation of apparently unpoetic material. See also Thomas' commentary on the poem, *Virgil, Georgics,* 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1988). For an attempt to discern a pervasive intertextual design in the *Georgics* see J. Farrell, *Vergil's Georgics and the Traditions of Ancient Epic: The Art of Allusion in Literary History* (New York and Oxford, 1991). For the *Aeneid* R. Heinze, *Vergils Epische Technik*, 3rd edn (Leipzig and Berlin, 1915), tr. H. and D. Harvey and F. Robertson as *Vergil's Epic Technique* (Bristol, 1993) remains basic, as does W. S. Anderson, 'Virgil's second *Iliad*', reprinted in S. J. Harrison, ed., *Oxford Readings in Vergil's Aeneid* (Oxford and New York, 1990) 239–52; but for the general shape of Virgil's Homeric programme in the poem as for many points of detail, G. N. Knauer, *Die Aeneis und Homer* (Göttingen, 1964) is the *sine qua non*, featuring detailed discussion (in German) and full comparison of parallel passages in tabular form – his results are conveniently if briefly summarised (in English) by Knauer, 'Vergil's *Aeneid* and Homer', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 5 (1964) 61–84. It is true that Knauer approaches his material somewhat mechanistically; but more recent work, especially A. Barchiesi, *La traccia del modello: effetti omerici nella narrazione virgiliana* (Pisa, 1984) treats Virgil's engagement with the literary past in a much more suggestive fashion. For Virgil's relationship to Hellenistic and especially Alexandrian authors, see W. V. Clausen, *Virgil's Aeneid and the Tradition of Hellenistic Poetry* (Berkeley, 1987).