From Didactic to Epic: Georgics 2.458-3.48

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There seems to be a consensus that Virgil, in the famous lines which close book 2 and open book 3 of the 
*Georgics*, has important things to say about the poem as a whole and poetry in general. The purpose of this chapter 
is to argue that this view is essentially correct and to offer some further arguments in its support. The importance of the whole passage for attempts to understand the development of Virgil's literary career and his views on literary history can hardly be overestimated, and its central position underlines the key role it plays. In fact, its centrality is double: not only do these lines stand at the centre of the four books of the *Georgics*, they also stand at the middle of Virgil's tripartite oeuvre, in which the *Georgics* represent the central work flanked by the *Eclogues* and the *Aeneid*. I hope to demonstrate that Virgil uses this mid-point to offer his readers a highly complex and detailed meditation concerning the position occupied by his own oeuvre within the whole tradition of Greek and Roman epic. I believe that he does so exactly as he is embarking on the writing of his most ambitious project, the composition of a Roman epic poem to rival Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. It is of course well known that the prologue to *Georgics* 3 looks forward to a future epic composition, and given that Virgil went on to write the *Aeneid*, the nature of the relationship between *Georgics* 3.1–48 and the epic poem Virgil actually composed has given rise to a vast bibliography. But the fact that the mid-point as a whole (i.e. both the close of book 2 and the opening of book 3) as well as looking forward to a new work, also looks back to the *Eclogues*, and very specifically to the mid-point of that collection, has attracted less critical attention. It will be necessary, therefore, before looking forward to the *Aeneid*, to look back from the middle of the *Georgics* to the *Eclogues*.

The connections and similarities between *Georgics* 2.458–3.48 and *Eclogue* 6 are so numerous that there can be little doubt that the two texts are in meaningful dialogue. It may be helpful to set out these links in
Each text deals with the Muses and patronage, Greek models and literary hierarchy. Each creates a dialogue between poetry about the countryside and/or georgic and epic. Already within the Eclogues, of course, the sixth poem is in dialogue with the fourth similar topics, so it comes as no surprise that the mid-point of the Georgics looks back to Eclogue 4 also. Once again, the verbal echoes are strikingly exact:

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>2.460 fundit tellus</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.474 Iustitia excedens</td>
<td>6 redit Virgo</td>
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<td>2.475 Musae</td>
<td>11 Musae</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.477–82 cosmology</td>
<td>1 maiora</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.486 silvas, inglorius</td>
<td>2 arbusta humilesque myricae, 3 silvas, silvae</td>
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<td>2.538 aureus Saturnus</td>
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<td>3.1 canemus</td>
<td>1 canamus, 3 caninus</td>
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<td>3.2 silvae</td>
<td>3 silvas, silvae</td>
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<td>3.6 Hylas</td>
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<td>3.9 tollere, volitare</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.10 modo vita supersit</td>
<td>53 o mihi tum longae maneant pars ultima vitae</td>
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<td>3.11 Musas</td>
<td>1 Musae</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.40 silvas</td>
<td>2 arbusta humilesque myricae, 3 silvas, silvae</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.42 altum</td>
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Each text deals with the Muses and patronage, Greek models and literary hierarchy. Each creates a dialogue between poetry about war, between pastoral and/or georgic and epic. Already within the Eclogues, of course, the sixth poem is in dialogue with the fourth similar topics, so it comes as no surprise that the mid-point of the Georgics looks back to Eclogue 4 also. Once again, the verbal echoes are strikingly exact:

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<td>2.475 Musae</td>
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<td>2f. dignata, silvas, erubuit</td>
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<td>3 canemem</td>
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<td>3.11 Aonio</td>
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<td>3.11 deducere</td>
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<td>3.11 Musas</td>
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<td>3.15 tenera harundine</td>
<td>8 tenui harundine</td>
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<td>3.20 Graecia</td>
<td>1 Syracosio</td>
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<td>3.28 bello</td>
<td>7 bella</td>
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<td>3.36 Cynthius</td>
<td>3 Cynthia</td>
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<td>3.41 hau mollia iussa</td>
<td>9 non iussa</td>
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<td>3.46f. pugnas Caesaris</td>
<td>3 reges et proelia</td>
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<td>3.48 origine</td>
<td>72 origo</td>
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From these links it is an easy jump to the mid-point proem of the Aeneid, where, at 7.44f., the words maius rerum mihi nascitur ordo, maius opus movere ('Greater is the story that opens before me; greater is the task I essay.') Trans. Fairclough-Goold) take the reader back to Eclogue 4.1–5, paula maiora canamus... magnus ab integro saeculorum nascitur ordo ('Sicilian Muses, let us sing a somewhat loftier strain...the great line of the centuries begins anew.' Trans. Fairclough-Goold). Virgin's sense of the importance of structure and proportion, both in small details and in grand architectural designs of this kind, is obvious and well known. It has often been noted, for example, that in the last line of the Georgics (4.566, Tityre, te patulae cecini sub tegmine fagi; 'I...sang of you, Tityrus, under the canopy of a spreading beech.' Trans. Fairclough-Goold) he quotes the opening line of the Eclogues (1.1, Tityre, tu patulae recubans sub tegmine fagi; 'You, Tityrus, lie under the canopy of a spreading beech.' Trans. Fairclough-Goold). Similarly, although less immediately obviously, the last word of the Aeneid (12.951, umbras) has been seen to recall the last word of Eclogue 1 (umbrae). In Aeneid 7, therefore, the way in which the maius opus of the mid-point looks back to thoughts about generic hierarchies in Eclogue 4 serves to take us back to our beginning and to underline the pivotal position of Georgics 2.458–3.48 as the mid-point proem of Virgil's complete tripartite oeuvre. A close reading of the passage as a whole will help to elucidate the progression of Virgil's thought and the logic underpinning the complex and obscure series of transitions which unfolds as the argument develops. We will look first at the close of book 2, next at the opening of book 3, and then at the two passages together as a unity, before going on to see how some of the issues there raised concerning epic poetry and the epic tradition are handled in Aeneid 1.


O farmers, happy beyond measure, could they but know their blessings! For them, far from the clash of arms, most righteous Earth, unbidden, pours forth from her soil an easy sustenance. (Trans. Fairclough-Goold)

This exclamation leads into praise of country life in contrast to urban society (461–74). The whole passage is set up from the point of view of someone viewing the countryside from the outside, looking at its advantages with an envious eye, and on the city with a satirical slant. The speaker is obviously not a farmer, and she/he does not have the good luck to live
far from war and to be able to enjoy the gifts of the fertile earth. Mynors notes acutely that 'the advantages of country life here recounted are such as would strike the eye or the ear of a visitor from the big city.' In other words, these lines are focalized from the point of view of a city-dweller. This is a key point, for two reasons. First, because the differences between city and country reappear in lines 493–540, a passage whose relationship to lines 458–74 has provoked much discussion. Second, because the fact that in lines 458–74 we see the country from the point of view of the city helps to explain the exact nature of the transition to the next section, which begins at line 475:

Me vero primum dulces ante omnia Musae,
quarum sacra fero ingenti percussus amore,    
accipiant caelique vias et sidera monstrenst, 
defectus solis varias lunaque labores.

But as for me — first may the Muses, sweet beyond compare, whose holy emblems, under the spell of a mighty love, I bear, take me to themselves, and show me heaven's pathways, the stars, the sun's many eclipses, the moon's many labours. (Trans. Fairclough–Goold)

In response to the idealized depiction of country life given by the imaginary city-dweller, the poet emphatically expresses his desire to transcend any division between urban and rural by achieving understanding of *natura* (483). The striking and surprising transition to *me vero* ('But as for me...') points up the fact that the previous sentence did not express the poet's viewpoint. The dramatic image of *Iustitia* ascending from amidst the *agricolae* towards the heavens leads the poet to raise his eyes skyward in the hope of achieving the insight which will enable him to grasp the workings of nature as a whole. He desires the vision and knowledge which will embrace both heaven and earth (*caeli, 477; terris, 479; note also maria, 479* giving the tripartite division of the universe), and so both city and country.

Scholars regularly note that the lines in which Virgil expresses this prayer allude to Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* 6.24–8, a passage in praise of Epicurus:

veridisca igni purgavit pecora dictis
et inen statuit cuppedinis atque timorris
exposuisset summum bonum quo tendimus omnes
quid forer, atque viam monstravit, tranimpar
qua possemus ad id recto contendere cursu,

Therefore with words of truth he purged people's minds by laying down limits to desire and fear; he explained the nature of the supreme good that is our universal goal, and indicated the way, the short and straight path, by which we reach it. (Trans. Smith.)

Virgil's *vias...monstrent* picks up Lucretius' *viam monstravit*. One particular detail of these lines needs to be emphasized. For Lucretius, Epicurus 'explained the nature of the supreme good', and how to reach it. Virgil's allusion suggests, therefore, that the knowledge of nature he desires represents his *summum bonum*. The detail is important because it provides a second indication to the reader of the logic behind the transition from lines 458–74 (*o fortunatos...vestigia fecit*) to the following section (475–94, *me vero...Nymphasque sorores*). That transition may be expressed as follows: in the eyes of the city-dweller the *agricolae* enjoy certain *bona* (458), but do not have a full understanding of their good fortune (*o fortunatos nimium sua si bona norint*). The poet seeks true knowledge of their real situation, of the true character of the advantages they enjoy, and this knowledge represents for him the *summum bonum*, since it implies true insight into the workings of nature and of the place of mankind within it. If the Muses grant him this knowledge, he will surpass both the farmers' grasp of their own good fortune and the city-dweller's understanding of their way of life. The striking transition marked by the words *me vero* at line 475, therefore, not only sets up a distinction between poet and farmer, but also introduces a distinction between a certain vision of the countryside as expounded in lines 458–74 and the complete understanding of nature which the poet seeks in lines 475–8.

The matter does not end there, however, because the poet cannot be fully confident of acquiring the *summum bonum* he desires (2.483–6):

sin has ne possim naturae accedere partis
frigidus obstiterit circum praecordia sanguis,
rura mihi et rigui placeant in vallibus amnes,
flumina amem silvasque inglorius.

But if the chill blood about my heart bar me from reaching those realms of nature, let my delight be the country, and the running streams amid the dells — may I love the waters and the woods though I be unknown to fame. (Trans. Fairclough–Goold)

The alternative to love of the Muses and insight into the secrets of nature is love of the countryside and its streams and woods. The *silvae* here obviously must primarily evoke the subject matter of the *Georgics* as poetry about country matters, but they also tug the reader back towards the *Eclogues*. The choice is between an attraction towards *natura* in a wide sense, that of cosmology and natural philosophy as subject matter for a new and more ambitious kind of poetry, and *naturae* in a more restricted sense, that of the
love of the countryside and its landscapes, as reflected in the poet's output to date. The poet then goes on, however, to balance both eventualities in the famous double makarismos of lines 490–4, stating that both knowledge of nature as a whole and the more limited knowledge and love of country life and rural deities can provide happiness:

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

Blessed is he who has succeeded in learning the laws of nature's workings, has cast beneath his feet all fear and fate's implacable decree, and the howl of insatiable Death. But happy, too, is he who knows the rural gods, Pan and aged Silvanus and the sisterhood of the Nymphs. (Trans. Fairclough-Goold)

There are, it would seem, two ways to happiness, to the summum bonum: by means of scientific knowledge (transmitted by the Muses, 2.475), or via adherence to traditional Roman values and rustic piety (associated with the Nymphs, 2.494), mystic revelation or 'natural' revelation, Reason or Faith, Epicurean otium or labor. These oppositions outline contrasting ways of life and are closely related to the purpose of the Georgics as a whole, a didactic poem which formulates both agricultural teaching and a moral vision for mankind. But given that the poet expresses his love of the countryside (495–540), between urban discord and rural peace. The first section runs from line 495 to 512. It begins by picking up fortunatus et ille:

Him no honours the people give can move, no purple worn by despots, no strife which leads brother to betray brother. (Trans. Fairclough-Goold)

The person here referred to knows the country gods and has achieved felicitas, untroubled by discord. There is an obvious glance back to the farmers of line 459, living procul discordibus armis ('far from the clash of arms'). But unlike them, who were ignorant of their true bona, this person has achieved the summum bonum, and an ideal way of life which can be likened to that of the Golden Age:

quos rami fructus, quos ipsa volentia rura
sponde tulere sua, carpisit, nec ferrea iura
insanumque forum aut populi tabularia vidit.

He plucks the fruits which his boughs, which his willing fields, have freely borne; nor has he beheld the iron rigours of the law, the Forum's madness, or the public archives. (Trans. Fairclough-Goold)

Only at line 513 do we return to the farmer:

agricola incurvo terram dimovit aratro:
hibi anni labor, hinc patriam parvosque nepotes
sustinet, hinc armenta boum meritosque iuvencos.

Meanwhile the husbandman has been clearing the soil with crooked plough; hence comes his year's work, hence comes sustenance for his country and his little grandsons, hence for his herds of cows and faithful bullocks. (Trans. Fairclough-Goold)

In the lines which follow, the poet, in contrast to the city-dweller earlier, gives a more realistic depiction of the farmer's life and the labor it imposes. This whole section culminates in a memorable celebration of rustic life and a picture of the timeless morality and simple probity which reigned at the time of the foundation of Rome (532–8). It is in this image of hard work and piety that the poet, again correcting the idealized impressions of the city-dweller, sees the true presence of the Saturnian Golden Age:

hanc olim veteres vitam coluere Sabini,
banc Remus et frater; sic foris Eturia crevit
scilicet et rerum facta est pulcherrima Roma,
septemque una sibi muro circumdedit arces.

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banc et ilium non populi fasces, non purpura regum
flexit et infidos agitans discordia fratres.

Him no honours the people give can move, no purple worn by despots, no strife which leads brother to betray brother. (Trans. Fairclough-Goold)
Such were the conditions in Italy, among the Sabines and Etrurians as well as the first Romans. From the origins of the world to the foundation of the city of Rome and its growth, shifts in focus, as we move, to borrow from cosmogony to one of the key unifying threads linking the close of book on display are the close of book offer a way of transcending the dichotomies and uncertain ambitions put on display at the close of book 2, and in so doing outlines the limits of the poetry of the countryside, bucolic and didactic, as he considers how to write an epic about the history of Rome.

II. Georgics 3.1–48

Book 3 opens with a series of first-person verbs in the future tense. The first of these (canemus, 3.1) picks up the desiderative subjunctive amem of 2.486. There the poet had love of the countryside come second best to his desire to understand the workings of nature, in lines (483–6) which deserve to be quoted once again:

sin has ne possum naturae accelerare partis
frigidus obstiterit circum praecordia sanguis,
rura mihi et rigui placent in vallibus amnem,
flumina amem silvasque inglorius.

But if the chill blood about my heart bar me from reaching those realms of nature, let my delight be the country, and the running streams amid the dells—may I love the waters and the woods though I be unknown to fame. (Trans. Fairclough–Goold)

By the opening of book three he seems to have settled for second best:

Te quoque, magna Pales, et te memorande canemus
pastor ab Amphyro, vos, silvae amnemque Lycae.
cetera, quae vacus tenuissent carmine mentes,
onnia iam vulgata.

You, too, great Pales, we will sing, and you, famed shepherd of Amphrysus, and you, woods and streams of Lycaeus. Other themes, which else had charmed with song some idle fancy, are now all trite. (Trans. Fairclough–Goold)

The words silvae amnemque thus look back to book 2, but the silvae also recall Eclogues 4 and 6: si canimus silvas, silvae sint consule dignae (4.3, 'if our song is of the woodland, let the woods be worthy of a consul') and Prima Syracosio dignata est ludere versu | nostra neque erubuit silvas habitare Thalea (6.1 f., 'my Muse first deigned to sport in Sicilian strains, and blushed not to dwell in the woods'). Georgics and Eclogues are thus united as the poetry of the woods. At the same time, Pales, Apollo (pastor ab Amphryso; cf. Ecl. 5.35), Pan and the mountains of Arcadia (Lycaei; cf. Geo. 1.16, 3.314, 4.539 and Ecl. 10.15) summarize the subject matter of book 3, horses, cattle, sheep and goats and their pastures, and so once more bring together Eclogues and Georgics as poetry of the countryside. All other themes of any value and interest, e.g. Eurytheus, Busiris, Hylas, Delos, and Pelops and Hippodamia, are hackneyed. He then goes on (7 f.):

tempanda via est, qua me quoque possum
tollere humo victorque virum volitare per ora.

I must essay a path whereby I, too, may rise from earth and fly victorious on the lips of men. (Trans. Fairclough–Goold)

The ambition (possum) to find a way (via) towards new poetic themes initially seems to resume the topics of 3.1 f., silvae amnemque: 'at first sight this path to glory might be the successful completion of the present poem.' The poet certainly harks back to the lines in which he expressed his possible failure to achieve his ambition (cf. possum, 2.483) of acquiring knowledge of nature and specifically of the caeli vias (2.477). But even as they look back and seem to confirm the poet's intention to stick to the countryside, these two lines also hint at another way. The words virum volitare per ora recall Ennius' epitaph, solito vivus per ora virum (Varia 17 f. Vahlen). Further Ennian associations may also be present (10 f.):

primus ego in patriam mecum, modo vita supersit,
Aonio rediens deducam vertice Musas.

I, first, if life but remain, will return to my country, bringing the Muses with me in triumph from the Aonian peak. (Trans. Fairclough–Goold)

These lines resemble Lucretius' praise of Ennius at 1.117–19:

Ennius ut noster cecinit, qui primus ameno
deturit ex Helicone perenni fronde coronam
per gentis Italas hominum quae clara clueret.
It is very likely, therefore, that both Virgil and Lucretius look back to performances which will accompany its foundation, as well as its doors and pediment (12–39). It becomes clear that the temptanda via is no longer that of the countryside and the silvae amnesiaque, but rather that of historical epic about recent and contemporary Roman politics, about reges et proelia, to use the terminology of Eclogue 6. This point becomes explicit at the climax of the prologue (3.40–8):

interea Dryadum silus salusque sequamur
intactos, tua, Maecenas, hau mollia iussa:
te sine nil altum mens incognot. en age segnis
rumpe moras, vocat ingenti clamore Cithaeron
Taygetique canes domirrixque Epidaurus equorum,
et vox adsensu nemorum ingenimata remugit.

Meanwhile, haste we to the Dryads' woodlands and untridden glades, no easy task, Maecenas, that you have laid upon me. Without your inspiration my mind can essay no lofty theme; arise then, break with slow delay! With mighty clamour Cithaeron calls, and Taygetus' hounds and Epidaurus, tamer of horses; and the cry, doubled by the applauding groves, rings back. Yet anon I will gird me to sing Caesar's fiery fights, and bear his name in story through as many years as Caesar is distant from the far-off birth of Tithonus. (Trans. Fairclough–Goold)

Virgil here looks forward to the writing of an epic about Caesar. As a result, much of the scholarship devoted to this passage has dealt with the relationship between the epic poem Virgil seems to look forward to and the Aeneid we actually have. But, as already stated, there is no reason why the via of Georgics 3.8 could not initially refer back to the subject matter discussed in lines 1–2. On a first reading, therefore, Virgil appears to pick up the themes mentioned in the opening lines, Pales, Apollo and the silvae amnesiaque Lycae. And this is particularly so since the amnes and silvae recall 2.485f. where silvae and amnes characterize a choice of poetic direction, an alternative to natural philosophy. While it becomes clear gradually that the new way, the temptanda via, is not that of rural subjects but that of martial epic, there are some grounds for seeing a deliberate blurring of generic distinctions in the opening lines of book 3 and, as a result, in contrast to the dichotomies of the close of book 2, a possible assimilation of bucolic, didactic and epic into a unified tradition of hexameter epos capable of assuming the grandest themes of natural history and political power.

A number of pointers suggest a deliberate strategy to create overlap between the countryside and the world of Roman epic. It is striking that Caesar's temple will be built not in Rome, by the Tiber, but viri ind campo, by the Mincius. The use of altum at 42 must recall tollere at 9, but poetic sublimititas is now certainly related to the poem about the woods (silvas salutisque, 3.40), i.e. the Georgics, in contrast to the humilitas in relation to country matters at 2.483–6. Virgil in fact seems to go out of his way to keep in mind possible connections between the temptanda via he will soon (mox, 46) attempt and the rest of the Georgics he will now (interea, 40) go on to complete. Scholars have often pointed out that even as readers encounter the words in medio mihi Caesar they may recall that this is the very middle of the Georgics. Possible ambiguity between the via of epic and that of didactic is also clearly related to J. Farrell's demonstration that patterns of allusion to hexameter poetry throughout the Georgics show Virgil building up to full-scale Homeric imitation in the Orpheus/Aristaeus episode of book 4. Furthermore, L. Morgan has convincingly argued that the triumphal imagery of the prologue to book 3 is indissociable from the story of Aristaeus and Orpheus, which may be read allegorically as a tale of the destruction of civil war leading to post-Actian triumph and restoration. Already within the Georgics, many will have seen panegyric of Caesar in Homeric and Enninian mode and a fulfilment of the praise promised at Georgics 3.1–48.

It seems possible, therefore, to relate the temptanda via of Georgics 3.8 both to a future epic and to the themes of the second half of the Georgics. What we have in fact is deliberate ambiguity about the relationship between the current project and the future poem. At the same time, when Virgil's reader has actually read the Aeneid, the flagrant differences between it and the projected epic outlined in the prologue to Georgics 3 cannot fail to intrigue. Why then does Virgil seem to blur the divisions between the completion of the Georgics and the composition of a future epic? And why does he outline the plot of an epic about Caesar (16–33; 46–8) in which his Trojan ancestry would play a supporting role (34–6, 48), but then go on to write the story of Trojan Aeneas, in which Caesar's name would appear on only a small number of occasions? Since the prologue to Georgics 3 seems to evoke the consecration of the Palatine Temple of...
Apollo and Octavian’s triple triumph of 29, it was almost certainly one of the last sections of the poem to be written.\(^{35}\) It is therefore impossible to believe that the differences between the projected epic and the Aeneid can be put down to a change of mind about the kind of poem he wanted to write. Instead, the similarities and differences between the Aeneid and the poem adumbrated at Georgics 3.1–48 are meaningful, and by probing them we can gain insight into Virgil’s ideas about the relationship between the didactic Georgics and the epic Aeneid, and also about the place of both of these hexameter poems in the epic tradition.\(^{36}\)

At the end of Georgics 2 Virgil expresses his desire to write about natural philosophy, but fears that he may be unequal to this high calling and foresees the possibility of continuing to sing about the countryside. At the beginning of book 3, as we have just seen, he confirms that he will indeed go on to sing about the countryside. But before long, the expression of the desire to find a new poetic way (\textit{tempitanda via est}), allied to the Ennius allusions of 3.8–11 and the prominence given to Caesar’s wars and victories (\textit{pugnam, victorisque arma Quirini, bello, triumphatas, pugnas}) in the prologue as a whole, suggests the composition of a historical epic of a particularly Roman kind and, initially at least, some connection between that project and the completion of the Georgics. In the end, however, it becomes clear that Virgil is indeed looking forward to a poem which will look in many ways like a resumption of Ennius’ Annales for recent history down to the early twenties.\(^{37}\) Instead, he turns this plan inside out and goes on to write an epic about a character from the contemporary world of the reader who will soon be twenty-five, \textit{facile victus iustissima tellus}.\(^{38}\) Instead of a poem about recent history we get a poem about the di riant past which recounts Roman history \textit{facile victum iustissima tellus}.\(^{38}\) This momentous break from the heroic past is a key word here: it evokes cosmogony and the beginnings of time. Next, the reader is taken from the peaceful, leisurely quality of country life \textit{facile victum iustissima tellus} (460, ‘earth, unbidden, pours forth from her soil an easy sustenance’), to the \textit{sumnum bonum}, unlike the agricola who would be happy if they knew the full extent of their \textit{bona}. When the poet returns to the agricola at 513, he once again seems to correct the earlier passage by underlining the harsher realities of country life. Instead of spontaneous production, \textit{fundi bioc facilem victum iustissima tellus} (460, ‘earth, unbidden, pours forth from her soil an easy sustenance’), we get \textit{biv anni labor... nec requies} (514–17, ‘hence comes his year’s work... no respite is there’) and a picture closer to that of book 1.121–46: \textit{pater ipse colendi | hand facilem esse viam voluit | labor omnia victis improbus} (‘the great Father himself has willed that the path of husbandry should not run smooth... toil triumphed over every obstacle, unremitting toil’...). Finally, almost exactly as before, when he moves from observation (\textit{monstrent}) of regular natural phenomena \textit{caeli vites} to the ability to explain them (\textit{rerum causae}), the poet again deducit makes a temporal slip in order to go back in time. The lines in question have already been quoted, but they merit a second reading (2.532–40):

\begin{verbatim}
    hanc olim vetere vitam coluere Sabini,
    hanc Remus et frater; sic fortis Etruria crevit
    scilicet et rerum facuta est pulcherrima Roma,
    septemque una sibi muro circumdedit arces.
    ante etiam sceptrum Dictaei regis et ante
\end{verbatim}

III. Didactic middles

In the closing section of Georgics 2 the reader is taken from the peaceful, leisurely quality of country life \textit{procul discordibus armis | iustissima tellus, quies, oitia, molles somni}, as seen from the busy, competitive city (\textit{mane... vomit, inhiant, veneno, corrupit}, 461–6) to the timeless verities of celestial phenomena \textit{caeli vites} (477 f.), and finally back to the countryside \textit{rura, amnes, flumina, silvaseque labores}, 485 f.). Subsequently, when the poet returns to scientific themes at line 490, he looks back in time: \textit{felic qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas} (‘blessed is he who has succeeded in learning the laws of nature’s working’). \textit{Causa} is a key word here; it evokes cosmogony and the beginnings of time. Next, we return to the country: \textit{fortunatus et ille deos qui novit agrestis} (493, ‘but happy, too, is he who knows the rural gods’), alluding back to 458 f., \textit{o fortunatos nimium, sua si bona norint, agricolas} (‘O farmers, happy beyond measure, could they but know their blessings’). This second passage corrects the earlier one in which was presented a typical city-dweller’s idealized view of country life. Here, the person who knows the country gods, \textit{deos qui novit agrestis}, has achieved knowledge of the \textit{sumnum bonum}, unlike the agricola who would be happy if they knew the full extent of their \textit{bona}. When the poet returns to the \textit{agricola} at 513, he once again seems to correct the earlier passage by underlining the harsher realities of country life. Instead of spontaneous production, \textit{fundi bioc facilem victum iustissima tellus} (460, ‘earth, unbidden, pours forth from her soil an easy sustenance’), we get \textit{biv anni labor... nec requies} (514–17, ‘hence comes his year’s work... no respite is there’) and a picture closer to that of book 1.121–46: \textit{pater ipse colendi | hand facilem esse viam voluit | labor omnia victis improbus} (‘the great Father himself has willed that the path of husbandry should not run smooth... toil triumphed over every obstacle, unremitting toil’...). Finally, almost exactly as before, when he moves from observation (\textit{monstrent}) of regular natural phenomena \textit{caeli vites} to the ability to explain them (\textit{rerum causae}), the poet again deducit makes a temporal slip in order to go back in time. The lines in question have already been quoted, but they merit a second reading (2.532–40):

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    septemque una sibi muro circumdedit arces.
    ante etiam sceptrum Dictaei regis et ante
\end{verbatim}
Time and tenses are crucial here. In the lines preceding this passage all the verbs are in the present tense (agitat, coronat, ponit, nudat, 527–31). The emphasis is on the recurring cycle of the seasons and the apparently timeless past, in turn to the foundation of Rome itself, to the beginning of Jupiter’s reign and to the Saturnian Golden Age which preceded it. Then, immediately, comes the most important difference between that past Golden Age and the violent present: the absence of war, particularly civil war. The repetition of neodum in 539 both opening and closing the hexameter (cf. ante in 536), with the pluperfect audierant implies of course that even as earlier generations (the veteres Sabini etc., 532 f.) had no experience of war, the poet and his readers have suffered, or are suffering, exactly that. The Golden Age belongs to the past, and the whole passage culminates in war, exactly as at the end of the first book.

When we turn to book 3, the emphasis is at first entirely on future time, as we have already seen. A long series of future verbs (canemus, deducam, referam, ponam, feram, erit, tenebit, agitabo, decernet, feram) gives way to the striking iam nunc only in line 22, when the poet suddenly imagines as actually taking place the celebrations he was previously looking forward to conducting. Faciam of line 27 brings us back to the future. Future tenses continue until interea silvas sequamur at line 40. Present tenses then fill lines 40–5. Finally, we have mox tamen accingar dicere... et... ferre. Throughout, the emphasis on time must be placed in the context of the historical survey offered at the end of book 2. When read in that light, the obvious point is that while the poet looks forward to future compositions, his readers have already moved on in time. Now, the wars alluded to at the end of book 2 have been brought to an end by Caesar (victorisque arma Quirini, 28). His achievement will be recorded in gold (ex auro, 3.26) on the doors of the great temple which the poet will build (i.e. the epic poem he will compose) in honour of his triumph. Have we here the possible return of the lost Golden Age and a solution to the decline of the end of book 2? Possibly; indeed, very probably.8 But more interesting is the way in which Virgil continues to give central importance to time and history in his presentation of his projected creation. For as well as depictions of Caesar’s victories, images of his Trojan ancestors will also adorn this temple. The way in which Virgil refers to the Trojans at 3.34–6 merits careful scrutiny:

*stabant et Parii lapides, spirantia signa, Assaraci proles demissa que ab iuvenci nomine, Troque parentes et Troiae Cynthius auctor.*

Here in Parian marble shall stand statues breathing life, the lineage of Assaracus and the glorious names of Jupiter’s race, Tros, our ancestor, and Cynthia Apollo, architect of Troy. (Trans. Fairclough–Goold)

Assaracus was the father of Capys, and so grandfather of Anchises. Tros was the great-grandson via Erichthonius and Dardanus of Jupiter, and he was the father of Iulus and Assaracus.44 We have here the whole Trojan line from which Julius Caesar and Octavian could trace their descent. With such words as proles, nomina and parens, we see that genealogy will be an important feature of the projected temple/poem. And with the words *Troiae Cynthius auctor* we see that the story will be traced right back to the foundation of Troy. Lines 35–6 thus give us genealogy and *ktisis* as key themes in Virgil’s conception of epic.45 The key word *auctor* picks up an earlier allusion to the same motif in the use of the word *Quirinus* at 27. Quirinus here refers to Augustus, but the word strictly identifies the deified Romulus, and the point of its use here is that it suggests Augustus’ presentation of himself as a second Romulus in his role as a new founder of Rome.46 This emphasis on the foundation of Rome and of Troy at the start of book 3 recalls the mention of the foundation of Rome at the end of book 2 (532–5). In turn, the theme of city-foundation is closely related to the theme of *rerum causae* at the close of book 2, where the poet set in parallel *rerum causas* and *rerum pulcherrima Roma*.49 In this context, the words *causa* and *auctor* are key terms. Knowledge of the *rerum causae* enables all history to be traced back to the beginnings of the cosmos, while identification of the city founder marks the origin of a city and its civilization, in this case Rome and Roman history; an individual foundation story can be subsumed into universal history. The final three lines of the prologue, 46–8, introduce a third, closely related term, *origo*, and bring these themes of beginnings, time and history, of past, present and future, to a climax:

*mox tamen ardentis accingar dicere... et... ferre.
Caesaris et nomen fama tot ferre per annos
Tithoni prima quot ab origine Caesar.*
Yet anon I will gird me to sing Caesar's fiery fights, and bear his name in story through as many years as Caesar is distant from the far-off birth of Tithonus.  
(Trans. Fairclough–Goold)

The poet says that soon he will gird himself like a warrior to sing the wars of Caesar and to carry his name as many years into the future as is the number of years between Caesar's time and the 'far-off birth of Tithonus'. These three lines require careful unravelling. As the poet prepares to arm himself to sing the battles of Caesar we are reminded that he too, like Caesar (victor... Quirini, 27), is a victor (victor, 9 and 17); as at the close of book 2, we are dealing with ways of life as well as with poems. The words ardentis... dicere pugnas Caesaris recall both line 27, victorisque arma Quirini, and 16, in medio mihi Caesar erit, and bring the prologue to a close with a statement of the content of the epic poem soon to be composed. In doing so they decisively move us beyond the recusatio of Eclogue 6, where the desire to sing of kings and battles (cum canerem reges et proelia, 'when I was fain to sing of kings and battles', Ecl. 6.3) yielded to Apollo's advice, oportet... deductum dicere carmen (5, 'a shepherd... should... sing a lay fine-spun'), and the earlier ambiguity between the completion of the Georgies and the future poem. The words Caesaris et nomen fama... ferre recall demissaque ab amore gentis nominia (35) and link these lines with the earlier evocation of Trojan origins. At the same time, they underline the encomiastic quality of the planned epic. This poem will immortalize Caesar by making his name famous for many years to come. But the poet does not offer here a vague expanse of future time. In keeping with the care he has lavished on tense and time in the passage so far, he defines precisely the period of time during which Caesar's name will be known: per annos, | Tithoni prima quot abest ab origine Caesar ('through as many years as Caesar is distant from the far-off birth of Tithonus'). Two questions arise: what exactly is the Tithoni prima origo, and why does the poet mention the origo of Tithonus in particular? The easiest answer to the second question is that Tithonus is a Trojan and a key figure in the line of descent from Jupiter outlined in lines 35 f. Hence Mynors says that he 'stands in general for the Trojan royal house.' Servius explains: id est tua facta tot annis celebrabuntur, quot annis sunt a te usque ad mundi principium ('that is, your deeds will be sung for as many years as there are from you to the creation of the world'). DServius adds, ab infinito infinitum, guia Tithoni origo non potest comprehendiri ('throughout infinity, because the origin of Tithonus cannot be grasped'). Tithonus is a figure of hoary antiquity, cursed in fact with a disastrous gift of immortality, and he is named here in order to underline the fact that Caesar's name, thanks to the poet's song, will endure through all future time. Word order seems to reinforce this idea, the line opening with Tithonus and ending with Caesar, the former marking the beginning of time, and the latter's fame enduring till its close. If we take the poet literally when he says that he will carry the name of Caesar as many years into the future as there are between Tithonus and Caesar, the time-line can also be taken in another way. On this reading, time runs for x years from Tithonus to Caesar and from then on for another period of x years. Viewed thus, Caesar is located, for the second time in this passage, in medio. Another word pattern embracing the final two lines gives Caesar-Tithonus-Caesar, putting Tithonus in medio. This pattern suggests that Caesar is both a beginning and an end, both the beginning of a new era and a telos towards which all history has been moving, and even that in some sense he transcends time. That some such ideas are relevant is confirmed by the final words of the passage: ab origine Caesar. Word order throws together the origo and Caesar.

Why is this combination so important? For Llewelyn Morgan this question is answered within the Georgics, when in the Aristaeus episode both Homer and Proteus represent in different ways the origo and there is a pervasive Caesar allegory. There is certainly much truth in this view. But in these final lines of the prologue Virgil is also looking forward to a new poem entirely, his projected epic. These two words must also be read with reference to the Aeneid.

It is the differences between the Aeneid and the poem outlined in the prologue to Georgics 3 which help us to see the full significance of the fact that the final two words of the passage are origine and Caesar. As we have seen, Virgil expresses his ambition to comprehend the causes of things (rerum cognoscere causas) before going on to promise his readers an epic which will deal with events as distant in time as the foundation of Troy (Troiae Cynthius auctor, 3.36) and Caesar (3.16, 47 f.). Eventually, of course, he went on to write a poem which relates, in differing ways, the destruction of Troy and the foundations of Laviniun, Alba Longa and Rome. He hints at a poem about natural philosophy and an epic about the present with backward glances to Trojan origins, but ends up by writing a poem about the origins of Rome which includes prophecies about Caesar. By doing so he succeeds in dramatizing the poetic choices facing him as he embarks on a great epic poem which will trace the history of the Roman people from its origins to Actium and the triple triumph of 298. Virgil never seriously envisaged composing a historical epic about Caesar. Rather, he airs the possibility of such a poem and confronts the origo and Caesar in order to set out a poetics of Roman epic. Around 298 BC Virgil was beginning the planning and the composition of a great epic poem, one which would stand comparison with the Iliad and the Odyssey, replace Ennius' Annales and
make him the new Homerus Romanus. But many, Aristotle and Callimachus very prominently among them, had warned of the dangers of attempting to imitate Homer and of the risks of falling into the trap of churning out second rate Cyclic, or in Roman terms annalistic, narrative. The composition of a long epic narrative poem was clearly not to be undertaken lightly, but equally clearly the events of recent history, decades of civil war, Actium and Octavianic victory demanded memorialization of the grandest kind. Apart from the obvious and no doubt pressing political issues (how to write second rate Cyclic, or in Roman terms annalistic, narrative. The composition of a long epic narrative poem was clearly not to be undertaken lightly, but equally clearly the events of recent history, decades of civil war, Actium and Octavianic victory demanded memorialization of the grandest kind. Apart from the obvious and no doubt pressing political issues (how to write the history of recent violent and bloody civil wars when no one could be entirely sure that the terrible and destructive cycle was at an end? what exactly would a poem about the 'wars of Caesar' contain?); artistic issues must have weighed heavily: how could a poem about recent history be given credible and meaningful artistic unity?53 Where should its narrative begin, and how could it end? Virgil's solution to these problems was to conceive of a Homeric narrative which would counter both Aristotelian and Callimachean scruples by embracing beginnings and endings of different kinds. Instead of writing about Caesar and the present he chose to write about Aeneas and the past. He did so in an intensely aetiological narrative which includes Iopas' song of cosmogony and the origins of human life on earth as well as the visionary prophecies or prophetic images of Jupiter, Anchises and Vulcan, which relate the foundations of cities, the structure of the cosmos and the great cycles of human life and death, and Augustan triumph presented as both the end of history and a new beginning. Two words, origo and Caesar, evoke the vastly complex problem of confronting Homer, Aristotle, Callimachus and Octavian/Augustus in an encomiastic epic embracing the history of the world and of Rome and the entire Greco-Roman epic tradition. That concerns such as these exercised Virgil as he faced up to the challenge of beginning his epic seems clear from the ways in which the theoretical positioning of the Georgics outlined here is soon reflected in the Aeneid.55

IV. Epic openings

Early in Aeneid 1, having begun his epic narrative with the Trojans sailing away from the shore of Sicily, thereby leaping very much in medias res,54 Virgil soon has Jupiter offer the poem's first prophetic vision of the Roman future. Unrolling the scrolls of fate, he begins at the beginning (1.262) and relates Aeneas' victory in Latium, the foundation of Lavinium, Ascanius' succession, the foundation of Alba Longa, the birth of Romulus and Remus and the foundation of Rome. Subsequently (Aen. 1.283–8, 292–4):

veniet lustris labentibus aetas,

cum domus Assaraci Phthiam clarasque Mycenas

 servicio premet ac victis dominabitur Argis.
nascer pulchra Troiani origine Caesar

imperium Oceano, fiam qui terminet astris,

Iulius, a magno demisum nomen Iulo.

...cana Fides et Vesta, Renio cum fratre Quirinus

iura dabunt; dirae ferro et compagibus artis

claudentur Belli portae.

There shall come a day, as the sacred seasons glide past, when the house of Assaracus shall bring into bondage Phthia and famed Mycenae, and hold lordship over vanquished Argos. From this noble line shall be born the Trojan Caesar, who shall extend his empire to the ocean, his glory to the stars, a Julius, name descended from great Iulus!...hoary Faith and Vesta, Quirinus with his brother Remus, shall give laws. The gates of war, grim with iron and close-fitting bars, shall be closed. (Trans. Fairclough–Goold)

We have not had to wait long for the line-ending origine Caesar (here and Georgics 3.48 are its only two occurrences in Virgil) and reminiscences of Georgics 3. Jupiter's speech takes us from the Trojan origins to Caesar in a straightforward chronological account. His speech counters Juno's Iliadic opening (men(e) incepto...desistere, 1.37; 'What! I resign my purpose...!'; cf. μήπω (anger), II. 1.1) by confirming that this will be no Iliad, no disastrous nostos, but a kletic epic and a story of Greek defeat and Trojan and Roman victory. In a speech which is a response to the question quem das finem, rex magne, laborum?, he repeatedly emphasises beginnings (volvens...movebo,55 the foundations of three cities, origine), the passing of time (ternaque hiberna, triginta magnos volvendis mensibus orbis, ter centum totos annos, lustris labentibus), endings (Caesar...terminet, claudentur), and the impossibility of closure (1.278–9):

his ego nec metas rerum nec tempora pono;
imperium sine fine dedi.

For these I set no bounds in space or time; but we have given empire without end. (Trans. Fairclough–Goold)

Jupiter's story is in some ways like the poem promised in the prologue to Georgics 3.56 It is a straightforward chronological narrative, about reges et proelia, and at least partly Ennian in style and content,57 embracing the story of Rome from its Trojan origins down to contemporary history.

In book 6, the speech of Anchises resembles on a number of levels that of Jupiter. He begins with cosmology and goes on to offer a survey of future Roman history. We are told that he reveals one thing after another in order, ordine singula pandit (6.723, 'reveals each truth in order'), beginning
from the beginning (principio, 6.724). The first part of his speech over (6.724–51), he leads Aeneas and the Sibyl to a vantage point from which to view Aeneas' descendants: unde omnis longo ordine posset | adversos legere... (6.754 f., 'whence he might scan face to face the whole long procession'). The repetition of the word ordine (6.723 and 754) strongly suggests that Anchises, like Jupiter, will tell his story in chronological order. He begins with Silvius, Aeneas' son, and takes the story down, via a number of city foundations, to Romulus and Rome. But from there, he takes the story straight on to Julius Caesar (6.789) and Augustus Caesar (6.792). Here again the end of Georgics 2 and the opening of Georgics 3 come to mind. We see Caesar and his Trojan ancestry, including Assaracus (Aen. 6.778, Geo. 3.35). We also have a whole line repeated, with only a change of tense (cf. 2.535 and 6.783: septemque una sibi muro circumsidentur habitare arcas; and embraced/shall embrace seven hills with a single wall'). And here too Enniian influence is strong. But moving on from Caesar, Anchises jumps back in time to Numa (6.809). In the middle of the speech, chronological order, despite the repetition of the word ordine earlier, is strikingly broken as we go from Romulus, to Julius Caesar and Augustus, to Numa. The immediate effect is to confront Romulus and Augustus, the original founder of the city and its refounder. A further point also results: the reader is led to expect a chronological account, but gets a rather different narrative in which Augustus is both the climax of Roman history and in the middle, very much as at the opening of Georgics 3.

A third and final version of Roman history appears on the shield of Aeneas (8.625–728). Vulcan depicts in ordine (629) a history of Rome's wars from its foundation to Actium, followed by the subsequent triple triumph. At the centre of the shield stands Caesar (8.675–9):

in medio classis aeratas, Actia bella, cernere erat, totumque instructo Marte videres ferveere Leucaten auroque effulgere fluctus. hinc Augustus agens Italos in proelia Caesar...

In the centre could be seen bronze ships - the battle of Actium; you could see all Leucate aglow with War's array, and the waves ablaze with gold. On the one side Augustus Caesar stands on the lofty stern, leading Italians to strife... (Trans. Fairclough–Goold)

Again, we are close to the spirit of the poem outlined in the prologue to Georgics 3. Again too, we are close to Ennius. Vulcan's story embraces the foundation of the city, and Caesar, i.e. the beginning and the telos of Rome's history, but it also has Caesar in medii. Furthermore, it actually depicts, in gold, Caesar's victory at Actium, fulfilling the plans expressed in the words pugnam ex auro... faciam victorisque arma Quirini (3.26 f., 'on temple doors I will sculpture in solid gold and ivory the battle...and the arms of conquering Quirinus'). Vulcan may fairly be said to provide us with the 'Caesareid' of the prologue to Georgics 3, an interpretation which would explain why there are so many verbal parallels between the two passages.

Jupiter, Anchises and Vulcan may all be compared to writers of Roman historical epic, e.g. Naevius and Ennius, and to historians or antiquarians in general, e.g. Cato, Varro and Livy. They begin at the beginning and tell their story, for the most part, in chronological order, in ordine. Virgil's triad all deal with both beginnings, in the form of both cosmogony and kinesis, and Caesar. As a result, each offers a miniature historical epic as an alternative to the story of the Aeneid which, as already noted, begins by leaping in medias res. The use of Horace's formulation is of course not innocent here. A glimpse at the relevant passage of the Ars Poetica reveals why (146–52):

nec reditum Diomedis ab interitu Meleagri nec gemino bellum Trojanum orditur ab ovo. semper ad eventum festinat et in medias res non secus ac notas auditorem rapit, et quae desperat tractata nitescere posse relinquit, atque ita mentitur, sic veris falsa remiscet primo me medio, medio me discrepit imum.

He doesn't start the Return of Diomedes from the death of Meleager, nor begin the Trojan war from the twin egg; he is always making good speed towards the end of the story, and carries his hearer right into the thick of it as though it were already known. He leaves out anything which he thinks cannot be polished up satisfactorily by treatment, and tells his fables and mixes truth with falsehood in such a way that the middle squares with the beginning and the end with the middle. (Trans. Russell)

In his commentary on these lines, Brink notes that Horace is here clearly influenced by Aristotelian theory (Poetics 59a17–59b2):

As for the art of imitation in narrative verse, it is clear that plots ought (as in tragedy) to be constructed dramatically; that is, they should be concerned with a unified action, whole and complete, possessing a beginning, middle parts and an end, so that (like a living organism) the unified whole can effect its characteristic pleasure. They should not be organized in the same way as histories, in which one has to describe not a single action, but a single period of time, i.e. all the events that occurred during that period involving one or more people, each of which has an arbitrary relation to the others... But perhaps the majority of poets compose in this way. So (as we have already
This criticism of the Epic Cycle is echoed by Callimachus in a famous epigram (Ep. 28P; AP 12.43):

I hate recycled poetry, and get no pleasure
from a road crowded with travellers this way and that.
I can't stand a boy who sleeps around, don't drink
at public fountains, and loathe everything vulgar.

(Trans. Nisetich)

In turn, this poem clearly picks up the imagery of the *Aetia* prologue:

The Telchines, who know nothing
of poetry and hate the Muses, often
snipe at me, because it's not a monotonous
uninterrupted poem featuring kings
and heroes in thousands of verses
that I've produced, driving my song instead
for little stretches, like a child,
though the tale of my years
is not brief.

(Trans. Nisetich)

In Callimachean terms, therefore, the 'poems' of Jupiter, Anchises and Vulcan could on one level be described as 'a monotonous uninterrupted poem featuring kings and heroes'. Jupiter's history certainly unfolds in straight chronological order. As we have seen, however, the versions of Anchises are slightly more complex, offering chronological exposition (ordine) while at the same time breaking the sequence to insert Caesar at or near the middle. In any case, the key words which we have seen link the prologue to *Georgics* 3, the speeches of Jupiter and Anchises, and the artwork of Vulcan (origo, in medio, finis, Caesar, ordo) must obviously be seen in the light of these passages of Aristotle, Callimachus and Horace and the mid-point proem of the *Georgics*. They raise the whole issue of poetic unity, the problem of beginning an epic, and giving it a suitable middle and end. This issue of beginning is one Virgil emphasizes throughout *Aeneid* 1. In addition to all those beginnings already mentioned, the following are worthy of note.

1.8 Musa, mihi causas memora: the poem opens, like the *Iliad*, with a seven-line sentence which begins with a man who came from the shores of Troy (*Troiae ab oris*) to Italy, and goes on to bring his story forward in time all the way to Rome (*altae moenia Romae*). There follows in lines 8–11 a request for an explanation of the reasons (*causes*) for Juno's hatred of Aeneas. A detailed response is provided in lines 12–33, taking the reader back into the past in search of the causes of her anger. The narrative proper then finally begins in line 34, *vix e conspectu Siculae tellarum in altum*. The reader is here brought forward in time again to a point somewhere in between the departure from Troy and the arrival on the Lavinian shore. It is at this point that the Trojans set sail into the high sea, and the reader sets out into the high sea of epic (*in altum*). Almost immediately, however, at 1.37, Juno intervenes. Her complaint is that she has not been able to destroy the Trojans, as Athena destroyed Ajax. She still hopes to prevent them from reaching their destination, however, and so to align the action of this poem with the disastrous returns of other heroes after the defeat of Troy. Her first words, as we have already seen, *men(e) incepto* also link her ambition with Homer's *Iliad* and its opening μίας. In doing so they offer a challenge to the narrator's opening.

1.119: *arma virum tabulaeque*: this curious echo of the opening words of the epic (with genitive plural *virum* for accusative singular), if it is at all meaningful, could hint that, as Aeneas watches Orotetes' ship sink, the epic about *arma virumque* and arrival on the Lavinian shore is in danger of coming to a premature end, successfully supplanted by Juno's alternative version, that of Trojan defeat and a failed voyage to Italy.67

1.372–4: *odea, si prima tepetens ab origine pergam
et vacet annalis nostrorum audire laborum,
antid clauso componet Vesper Olympo.*

O goddess, should I, tracing back from the first beginning, go on to tell, and you have the leisure to hear the story of our woes, sooner would heaven close and evening lay the day to rest. (Trans. Fairclough–Goold)

It seems obvious that the word *annalis* here must have some generic force.68 One can add only that the curious expression *diem componere* helps draw attention to the verb and allows the reader to pick out the words *prima ab origine annalis componere*, and one response to the problem of how to begin an epic about Roman history.76

1.456–8: *videt Iliacas ex ordine pugnas
bellaque iam fama totum vulgata per orbem,
Atridas Priamumque et saevum ambobus Achillem.*

...he sees in due order the battles of Ilium, the warfare now known in fame throughout the world, the sons of Acreus, and Priam, and Achilles, fierce in his wrath against both. (Trans. Fairclough–Goold)
Alessandro Barchiesi has found in these lines an evocation of the Epic Cycle, from which many of the scenes depicted in Dido’s temple are drawn. He argues that the words vulgata per orbem refer to “[w]ars spread throughout the entire world”, from Aeneas’ perspective – but also “vulgarized, rendered hackneyed by the Cycle” according to the poet’s self-awareness: vulgatus carries programmatic (post-Callimachean) implications as in Georgics 3.4 omnia iam volgata...; orbis indicates the hackneyed rotation of the epic Kyklos as in the Ars Poetica of Horace; publica materies privati iuris erit si non circa vilem patulunque moraberis orbem...; nec sic incipies ut scriptor cyclicus olim: “fortunam Priami cantabo et nobile bellum” [‘In ground open to all you will win private rights, if you do not linger along the easy and open pathway... And you are not to begin as the Cyclic poet of old: “Of Priam’s fate and famous war I’ll sing’”, 131–2, 136–7]. It is unlikely to be coincidental, therefore, that line 458 reworks closely a line from the opening sentence of the Iliad, Αργείδας θ᾽ ἕνας ἄρδον καὶ δῖος Χυλλέας (Il. 1.7). Virgil here confronts, therefore, two ways of beginning, the Homeric and the Cyclic.

1.641 f.: caelataque in auro
fortia facta patrum, series longissima rerum
per tot ducta viros antiqua ab origine gentis.

...and in gold are graven the doctly deeds of her sires, a long, long course of exploits traced through many a hero from the early dawn of the race. (Trans. Fairclough–Goold)

This is one of the many minor, undeveloped ecphrases of the Aeneid. Silver ware, embossed in gold, sits on the table during the banquet in Dido’s palace. The scenes there depicted represent the history of Dido’s people and must be compared to the Trojan history of Aeneas’ shield. Here too we find the presentation of epic matter in chronological order from the very origins of a race. And it is during this banquet that Iopas sings of the original origo (1.742–6):

hic canit errantem lunam solisque labores,
unde hominum genus et pecudes, unde imber et ignes,
Arcturum pluviasque Hydas gemonisque Triones,
quid tantum Oceano propter se tingere solis
hiberni, vel quae tardi mora noctibus obstet.

He sings of the wandering of the moon and the sun’s toils; whence sprang man and beast, whence rain and fire; of Arcturus, the rainy Hyades and the twin Bears; why wintry suns make such haste to dip themselves in ocean, or what delay stays the slowly passing nights. (Trans. Fairclough–Goold)

Philip Hardie has demonstrated how these lines provide the cosmic setting for the whole poem. They provide the most drastic solution to the dilemma of where to begin an epic story by going back to cosmogony and embracing all world history.73

1.753–6: ‘immo age et a prima die, hospes, origine nobis insidias’ inquit ‘Danaum casusque tuorum erroresque tuos; nam te iam septima portat omnibus errantem terris et fluctibus aetasia.’

Nay, more, she cries, tell us, my guest, from the first beginning the treachery of the Greeks, the sad fate of your people, and your own wanderings; for already a seventh summer bears you a wanderer over every land and sea. (Trans. Fairclough–Goold)

The beginning sung by Iopas is not the last in the book. It is Dido who in the last lines of Aeneid 1 asks Aeneas to tell ‘from the first beginning’ the story of Troy’s end. Her words echo those addressed by Aeneas to Venus at 1.372–4. Aeneas responds at book 2.10–13, promising to tell the story in few words:

sed si tantes amor casus cognoscere nostros
et breviar Troiae supremum audire laborem,
quamquam animus meninisse horret luctuque refugit,
incipiam.

Yet if such is your desire to learn of our disasters, and in few words to hear of Troy’s last agony, though my mind shudders to remember and has recoiled in pain, I will begin. (Trans. Fairclough–Goold)

These lines bring to mind historiographical technique and look back to the allusion to the Epic Cycle at 1.457 (vulgata per orbem), since the fall of Troy was both a key event in the chronological schemes adopted by historians and the subject matter of the Cyclic Ilissipis and Little Iliad. For Troy, and for this paper, we have here the beginning of the end.

When Virgil was planning his epic he had, like Horace, to discover a ‘grammar of panegyric’. The care and attention he lavished on working out his approach to doing so are clearly visible to readers of Georgics 2.458–3.48. To recount Caesar’s triumphs and Roman history inext ordine, moving from the origo to Caesar, in Cyclic and annalistic fashion, was not an attractive proposition. Aristotle and Callimachus had ridiculed post-Homeric epic, and Rome already had Naevius and Ennius. So, in order to praise Caesar and emulate Homer, Virgil followed Aristotelian precepts and adapted Hellenistic narrative technique in the writing of an
epic which would not begin at the beginning, which would end its story hundreds of years before Caesar, long before the foundation of Rome, even before the foundation of Lavinium, which would succeed in containing all Roman history, from its *origo* to Caesar, from Romulus/Quirinus to Caesar/Quirinus, and all world history, from the creation of the cosmos sung by Iopas to triumph and *imperium* after Actium as depicted by Vulcan on Aeneas’ cosmic shield. By doing so he answered the questions raised at *Georgics* 2.458–3.48.

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**Notes**


3. For ‘mid-point proems’ see Conte 1992. Strictly speaking our passage as a whole cannot be described as a proem, but the complex pattern of connections between the close of book 2 and the opening of book 3 clearly sets up the two passages as the ‘two halves of a grand structure straddling the central divide of the *Georgics*’ (P. Hardie 1986, 33), and there can be no doubt that our text must be interpreted in the light of Conte’s suggestion that intensely programmatic passages often occur at central points in the works of Roman poets.


6. If Woodman 1997 is correct in arguing that lines 64–73 of *Eclogue* 6 should be transposed to follow 81, it is noteworthy that both our prologue and the song of Silenus would then end with mention of a poem concerning an *origo*.

7. Cf., for example, 6.1 ff. *Syracosi, Thalea* and 4.1, *Sicelides Musae*; 6.2 *silvas* and 4.3 *silvas, silvae*; 6.5 *reges et proelia* and 4.1 *maiores*; 6.6 *tihi dicere laudes* and 4.54 *tua dicere facta*; 6.7 *Vare* and 4.12 *Pollia*; 6.10 *myricae* and 4.2 *myricae*; 6.30 *Orpheus* and 4.55–7 *Orpheus, Orphei*; 6.41 *Saturnia regna* and 4.6 *Saturnia regna*; see Van Sickle 1980, 584–95, Farrell 1991, 291–3.

8. Horsfall 2000, ad loc. notes the historiographical flavour, but finds the echo ‘non-significant’.


12. Note *ille* (471) and *per illos* (473), and note also the curious *inbient* at line 463; who is gap ing, i.e. focalizing? On this question see Mynors 1990.


15. Mynors 1990 ad loc. describes the effect as ‘startling’.


22. See Gale 2000, 42. Much recent scholarship has of course been dedicated to showing the ways in which the different strands of *epos* can be both differentiated and conflated, and particularly to the ways in which the world of martial epic is often subsumed into cosmic history and didactic; Hardie 1986; Farrell 1991; Gale 1994; 2000; Morgan 1999. Virgil can at will emphasize either differences or similarities, depending on the development of his argument. For the wider background see now Haubold 2002.


24. P. Hardie 1986, 33–51; also A. Hardie 2002, 200: ‘...the poetry of imperium subsumes the poetry of *cosmos* in a central reconciliation’.


27. See Gale 2000, 12 f.


29. I believe, with Grimal and Gros, that Virgil is here describing pedimental sculptures; see Gros 1993, 156. Kraggerud 1998, 13 disagrees.
here and the triumph of M. Fulvius Nobilior, on which see most recently A. Hardie
surprising location of the temple by the Mincius (on which see Kraggerud 1998, 9)
in mind in an extremely precise manner the topography of Rome and the Tiber and
is all the more arresting given the connection between Virgil's triumphal imagery
2002, 196-200. I believe that despite naming Mantua and the Mincius Virgil has
that these lines contain important ideas about the recent history of Italy as distinct
from the city of Rome and that the interplay between the Tiber and the Mincius
must be interpreted in the light of Callimachean water imagery applied to poetics;
see Morgan 1999, 17-40. I will discuss this material elsewhere.

32 See Farrell 1991. Note also Geo. 1.41, where the farmers are ignorant viae,
ignorance the poem as a whole will attempt to put right. Here too the via and the
Georgics are closely related.


There is a further hint that Virgil does indeed have the close of Georgics 4 in
mind at the opening of book 3 and that he is, at least initially, deliberately creating
ambiguity between epic and didactic as complementary ways of achieving poetic
heights. When Virgil writes, et te memorande canemus | pastor ab Amphryso, the pastor
from the Amphyrysus is indeed Apollo, as the commentators note, but Virgil will
in fact go on to write in the Georgics about another pastor from Thessaly, Aristaeus.
Apollo in his role as keeper of animals is linked to the subject matter of book 3, but
the hint at Aristaeus looks forward to book 4 as well. There is surely initial ambiguity
at 3.1 f. given that Aristaeus Nomios was closely related to Apollo Nomios (Pindar
Pythian 9.65, Apollonius Rhodius Arg. 2.507). Cf. also 4.317, pastor Aristaeus
fugiens Penea Tempae. With silvae amnesque Lycaei at 3.2 cf. 1.16f. salusque Lycaei
| Pan, coming immediately after mention in line 14 of the cultor memorum, i.e.
Aristaeus. There may be another connection: Mynors 1990, on 3.1-2, shows that
Apollo stands here for horses and cattle. Cattle become vitally important later, with
the story of bugonia, and the word Lycaei reappears at the line-end at 4.539, when
Cyrene tells Aristaeus that it is there where he will find the cattle he must sacrifice.
For cattle and the sacrifice of cattle in our passage see 2.515 meritosque iuvencis, 2.538
caesis...iuvencis, 3.23 caesque...iuvencis, on which see most recently Morgan

35 Drew 1924.

36 Farrell 1991 is the fundamental discussion of the issues.

37 It is the Ennian allusions which make it unlikely that we should think of the
via temptanda as referring to Pindaric epinician alone. There are undoubted
Pindaric elements present (see Balot 1998, though Thomas is right to emphasize
the importance of the Callimachean reception of Pindar), but the point is surely
that epinician (both Pindaric and Callimachean) can be subsumed into epic in
a hexameter poem in praise of the victories of Caesar. See Boyle 1979, 75; contra
see Volk 2002, 150 n. 41.

38 Hardie 1986 is the fundamental discussion of the issues.

and its opening ὑποκομπη, see Levan 1993, Fowler 1997, 259 f. Note that the Iliadic reference encoded in Juno's opening, *men(e) incepto distire victam | nec posse . . .*, may be decry by Aeneas' very similar words at 1.97, *men(n) Ilias occumere campis | non potuisse . . .*, as he regrets not having died in the Iliad.

55 Cf. Ennius 403 Sk, quiqpe vetustia virum non est satis bella moveri; see Austin 1971, on 1.262. Allusion to the Enniian line is entirely apposite since it formed part of the proem to book 15; see Skutsch 1985, ad loc. Horace also has it in mind at *Od. 4.1.1 f. intermissa, Venus, dixi | versus bella moveri?* See Hills 2001. All three poets may have in mind Callimachus restating the *Aetia*, if he wrote it as at line 5 (on the text see Stephens and Acosta-Hughes 2001), of which *moveo* would be an exact translation in the sense of 'I set in motion'.

56 A series of verbal parallels seems to support the connection: *Asaracei, 3.35 and 1.284; origine Caesar, 3.48 and 1.286; fama, 3.47 and famam, 1.287; demissaque ab Iove gentis | nomina, 3.35, and a magno demissum nomen Iulo, 1.288; Quirini, 3.27, and Quirinus, 1.292.*

57 Feeney 1991, 137-41.

58 Presumably Aeneas' descendants are in line waiting to be born each in turn, in chronological order as it were. On *ordo* here see Fowler 1996, 64 f.

59 See Hardie 1986, 76-83. It is hard not to see in the words *omnis longo ordine legere*, given the context of the long history of the Italy and Rome which these people represent and which Anchises is going to go on to relate, a hint at the reading of annalistic narrative, and perhaps even of Ennius' annalistic narrative in particular.

60 On all three passages see Grimal 1989.

61 On Virgil as a historian here see Woodman 1989. What does *in ordine* mean? Did Vulcan create the scenes in the order in which they are described, i.e. in chronological order? Or is the narrator imposing order on Vulcan's arrangement, i.e. taking a spatial non-chronological representation and making it chronological? How does *in ordine* fit with *in medio?* Why is the whole a *non enarrabile textum?* Virgil here poses the question of how we construct and make sense of the past; he offers also (see Hardie 1986, ch. 8, Barchiesi 1997, Putnam 1998, 119-88) a profound meditation on narrative and focalization, textual production and reception, poetics and literary history. On our interpretation, he is doing very much the same in the middle of the *Georgics.*


63 See Buchheiser 1997, 39; Kraggerud 1998, 10 f., 13 f.; Morgan 1999, 57 n. 29. Lines 8.714-28 describe exactly the same scenes of world conquest, triumph and celebration as at 3.16-33 (cf. esp. 8.719, caesae iuvenci, and 3.23, caesae iuvencos); in both cases Caesar is *in medio* and in a temple. The main change is that we are no longer by the banks of the Mincius, but in Rome and on the Palatine, no longer in the country but in the city, no longer in the *Elegques* or *Georgics*, but in the *Aeneid.*


65 It would of course be nice to know more about the reference to Chaos at *Aetia* fr. 4.3 (Massimilla). As well as Aristotle, Callimachus and Horace see on Philodemus Oberhelman and Armstrong 1995, 249-51 for very relevant considerations on beginnings and unity.

66 For the motif of the epic poem as sea voyage see Dougherty 2001, 19-37. For Apollonius' exploitation of the idea see Albis 1996, 43-66, Clare 2002.

67 The fact that *tabulae* = 'planks' (OLD s.v. 1), but also 'a writing tables' (OLD s.v. 6) may support this interpretation.


69 Austin 1971 ad loc. and *TLL s.v.* cite as parallels only Seneca *Phaedra* 839 and Pliny *Ep.* 2.17.2.


71 Barchiesi 1999, 334.

72 Cf. esp. 8.624, auroque; 628 f., illic genu omne futuros | stirps ab Ascario pugnataque in ordine bella. Cf. also Latinus' palace at 7.177-81, quin etiam veterum effigies ex ordine avorum . . . Saturnusque senex lianique bifrontis imago | vestibulo astabat, alique ab origine reges.

73 1986, 52-66.

74 See Horsfall 1991, 105 on *septima aestas* as a possible allusion to annalistic composition.

75 See Feeney 1991, 256 f.; on Aeneas' speech as a kind of epic see Deremetz 2001.

76 West 1995, 15.

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