

Name Puns and Acrostics in Didactic Poetry: Reading the Universe

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It is increasingly well recognized that Greek and Roman poets made a practice of inserting acrostic ‘signatures’, or acrostics formed on other thematically important words, at key points in their work, and indeed that ancient readers were attentive to this technique.¹ Probably most familiar are the acrostic *argumenta* of Plautine comedy (dating from perhaps the second century AD);² but examples have been detected across a range of genres and periods, from the 4th century BC to late antiquity. Many of these are of course controversial, but this is not the place for a full discussion of the thorny issue of intentionality: suffice it to say that in my view any acrostic once observed by a reader is objectively ‘there’, and it then falls to that reader to persuade others that the pattern is susceptible of interpretation and not, therefore, to be dismissed as the product of pure contingency.³ It is notable, in any case, that a significant majority of the most widely accepted instances – at least amongst those appearing in literary contexts⁴ – are found in the work of didactic poets.⁵

Etymological paronomasia is similarly widespread in ancient literature of all kinds, as the 320 pages of Jim O’Hara’s *True Names* amply demonstrate, and writers across a range of genres play in various ways on their own names.⁶ Again, however, it is striking that this kind of word-play seems particularly characteristic of didactic poetry, perhaps even as early as Hesiod, the ‘founding father’ of the genre.⁷ As we shall see, instances can be found in the poems of Empedocles, Aratus, Nicander, Lucretius, Virgil and Grattius; equally, acrostics have been detected in all but the first of these poets, and we can add Ennius and Manilius to the list. Thus, all the major surviving didactic poets from the fifth century BC to the beginning of the first century AD can be plausibly argued to have engaged in one or other form of word-play, or in most cases both.

This remarkable concentration demands some kind of explanation. We might perhaps satisfy ourselves with the observation that after Aratus (whose play on his own name and acrostic on the key word *λεπτή* are apparently already recognized by contemporary epigrammatists)⁸ the inclusion of the two features simply becomes *de rigueur* as a kind of nod to an important didactic predecessor. It is striking, though, that both name-puns and acrostics are apt to occur in contexts concerned either with literary filiation or with signification and the interpretation of natural ‘signs’. I will argue that this is not coincidental, and that there is more to the two verbal techniques than the playful display of literary artistry. I suggest that both may be understood as contributing in subtle ways to the establishment of the poets’

didactic authority, their assertion of mastery over their subject-matter and of their ability to communicate it to the reader-as-pupil.

Didactic poetry must, in its nature, deal with a subject which is inherently ‘teachable’. Indeed, this quality of ‘communicability’, together with the construction of the didactic *praeceptor* as an authoritative teacher, may be identified as two of the genre’s most fundamental constitutive features. Both are evident already in Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, where the poem’s autobiographical element, as well as the reference to the Muses, and to previous poetic successes in the excursus on seafaring (*Op.* 617–93), may be understood as authorizing strategies: both Hesiod and his addressee Perses are represented as personally engaged in farming (though rather reluctantly so in Perses’ case), and Hesiod’s teaching is thus founded, within the poem’s didactic fiction, on experience as well as the divine inspiration offered by the Muses.⁹ Empedocles, similarly, represents himself as one of the fallen *daimones* who has already been through the cycle of reincarnations which his poem describes.¹⁰ Again, both Hesiod and Empedocles emphasize the benefit to be derived from their teaching;¹¹ particularly noteworthy in this connection are the closing lines of Hesiod’s *Days* (*Op.* 822–5), where he draws a distinction between days which are ‘mothers’ and those that are ‘stepmothers’ – those, that is, that can be relied on to bring predictable outcomes, and those that are ‘changeable, luckless and unprofitable’ (μετάδουποι, ἀκήριοι, οὐ τι φέρουσai, *Op.* 823).¹² Few, Hesiod says, are those in the know (ἄλλος δ’ ἄλλοίην αἰνεῖ, παῦροι δ’ ἴσασιν, ‘people praise different days, and few have full knowledge’, *Op.* 824); the lines make it clear that this is a matter that *can* reliably be learnt and taught, and that he is one of the ‘few’ qualified to teach it.

The subsequent didactic tradition develops more complex and subtle strategies of authorization. Particularly noteworthy here is Aratus’ construction of his poem as a close equivalent or icon of the phenomena he describes: the stars and weather signs are represented as a kind of script to be deciphered, while the poet’s role in defining the constellations resembles both that of the *prôtos heuretês* who first distinguished and named them (367–85), and ultimately that of Zeus himself, who placed the stars in the sky and displays the weather signs for the benefit of mortals (*Ph.* 10–13; cf. 771–2). Richard Hunter and Emma Gee, in particular, have sought to relate this aspect of the poem to the Stoic conception of the universe as the manifestation of divine *logos*: on this view, the stars and the world in general are as orderly and meaningful as a written text.¹³ Crucial in this context is the famous craftsman simile at *Ph.* 529–33, where the arrangement of the celestial equator, the tropics and the ecliptic is compared to the construction of an armillary sphere. The craftsman can be interpreted as a figure for the poet: if the heavens are like a work of art, created by a man who

is ‘trained in the craftsmanship of Athena’ (‘Αθηναίης χειρῶν δεδιδαγμένος, *Ph.* 529), much the same goes for the relationship between world and poem. As the namer ‘distinguished’ and ‘shaped’ the constellations (374 ἐφράσατ’, 375 μορφώσας) and called them by name, so Aratus will distinguish their shapes and name them for the reader; Zeus is similarly said in the proem to have ‘distinguished’ them (11 διακρίνας) and determined what they would mean (12 σημαίνοιεν), like a writer himself. Finally, as Emma Gee and Katharina Volk point out, Aratus involves the reader too in the process of decipherment: the poem’s final word, τεκμήραιο (1154), echoes the poet’s request to the Muses at the end of the proem, to ‘signpost’ (18 τεκμήρατε) his composition of the poem.¹⁴ Both poet and reader are engaged in a process of ‘reading’ and deciphering the skies, and the composition of the poem is implicitly likened to the interpretation of the cosmic ‘text’.

In this connection, Aratus’ acrostic and play in the proem on his own name bear considerable thematic weight.¹⁵

Λεπτὴ μὲν καθαρὴ τε περὶ τρίτον ἡμᾶρ ἐοῦσα
 Εὐδίδος κ’ εἴη, λεπτή δὲ καὶ εὖ μάλ’ ἐρευθῆς
 Πνεθματῆ, παχίων δὲ καὶ ἀμβλείησι κερααῖαις
 Τέτρατον ἐκ τριτάτοιο φώως ἀμενηνὸν ἔχουσα
 Ἡ νότῳ ἄμβλυνηται ἢ ὕδατος ἐγγὺς ἐόντος.

Arat. Ph. 783–7

If slender and clear around the third day, [the moon] forecasts fine weather; if slender and very red, wind; if rather thick with blunted horns and giving a feeble fourth light after the third day, she is dulled either by a south wind or by imminent rain.

Ἐκ Διὸς ἀρχώμεσθα, τὸν οὐδέποτε ἄνδρες ἐῷμεν
 ἄρρητον.

Arat. Ph. 1–2

Let us begin from Zeus, whom we men never leave unspoken.

The acrostic is itself a ‘subtle’ (λεπτός) sign, like the weather signs that are the subject of this part of the poem: it cries out for interpretation, challenging the reader’s ingenuity at the same time that it displays the poet’s. Most often, the acrostic has been read metapoetically, as an indicator of Aratus’ stylistic affiliation to the principles of his contemporary Callimachus,¹⁶ even as it demonstrates the poet’s *doctrina* through its echo of the probably fortuitous Homeric acrostic ΛΕΥΚΗ at *Il.* 24.1–5.¹⁷ Scholars have noted that the Aratean acrostic is equivalent in length and similar in shape to its Homeric model, and that Callimachus himself and Leonidas of Tarentum duly hail Aratus’ *leptotês* in encomiastic epigrams.¹⁸ But the

thematic importance of the acrostic in reinforcing the analogy between poem and world has also been noted: Levitan, for example, in pointing to two further acrostics (ΠΑΣΑ at 803–6 and the imperfect ΣΕΜΕΙΗ – for σημεῖα? – at 808–12), argues that Aratus plays here on concepts central to the poem’s world-view (subtlety, plenitude, signification), and that the challenge to interpretation of ‘signs’ placed in the text by the poet mirrors the invitation to observe and interpret the heavenly signs placed in the sky by Zeus which is the central theme of the work.¹⁹

The implicit analogy between Zeus and the poet as literal and figurative demiurges is also in play in the name-pun in the opening lines, where Aratus promises Zeus that he will never be left unspoken, ἄρρητον. The pun, like the acrostic, seems to have been noted by contemporary readers: thus, Callimachus hails Aratus (spelt, unusually, in the Ionic form Ἄρητος) for his λεπταὶ ῥήσεις, the ‘subtle utterance’ of Aratus the ‘unspoken’.²⁰ At the same time, the word establishes a link with the proem of Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, where the earlier poet proclaims Zeus’ might (with a pun, 2–3, on the preposition διὰ and the oblique cases of the god’s name):

Μοῦσαι Πιερίθεν ἀοιδῇσι κλείουσαι,
 δεῦτε Δί’ ἐννέπετε, σφέτερον πατέρ’ ὑμνείουσαι.
 ὅν τε διὰ βροτοὶ ἄνδρες ὁμῶς ἄφατοί τε φατοί τε,
 ῥητοὶ τ’ ἄρρητοί τε Διὸς μέγαλοιο ἔκητι.
 ῥέα μὲν γὰρ βριάει, ῥεα δὲ βριάοντα χαλέπτει,
 ῥεῖα δ’ ἀρίζηλον μινύθει καὶ ἀγήνορα κάρφει
 Ζεὺς ὑψιβρεμέτης, ὃς ὑπέρτατα δώματα ναίει.

Hes. *Op.* 1–8

Muses of Pieria who give glory through song, come hither and tell of Zeus, hymning your father, through whom mortal men are without fame or famous, spoken of or unspoken, by the will of great Zeus. Easily he gives strength and crushes the strong, easily diminishes the exalted and raises the obscure, easily straightens the crooked and withers the proud, high-thundering Zeus who dwells on high.

Hesiod hails Zeus as the one who renders mortals ‘celebrated or obscure’, ῥητοὶ τ’ ἄρρητοί τε (*Op.* 4); this is neatly inverted by Aratus, for whom it is mortals that will not allow Zeus to be ἄρρητος. In this sense, the Aratean paronomasia may be understood as a threefold assertion of poetic authority, which accrues to the *praeceptor* as the mortal equivalent of Zeus the creator-god; as the poetic heir of Hesiod; and as wielder of the power of poetry itself, which is seen here to *underpin* Zeus’ authority, rather than rely upon Zeus’ favour for success, as in the Hesiodic model.

Aratus' didactic successor Nicander incorporates acrostics on his own name into each of his two surviving works, the *Theriaca* (345–53) and the *Alexipharmaca* (266–74).²¹ Both are perceptively discussed in a stimulating article by Michael Sullivan (Sullivan 2013), who points out that the *Theriaca* acrostic occurs in the context of an *ainos* or fable – a context, that is, that paradigmatically calls for interpretation on the reader's part. Again, processes of reading and signification are foregrounded, and Nicander inscribes his own name just at the point in the poem where an invitation to *decipher* the text is most apparent.²² Moreover, the fable in question revolves by a kind of inversion around the idea of thoughtlessness, playing perhaps on the Hesiodic contrast between Prometheus and Epimetheus, 'Forethought' and 'Afterthought'.²³ In explaining why the bite of the *dipsas* snake causes insatiable thirst, Nicander recounts how mortals were given the gift of immortality by Zeus as a reward for reprimanding Prometheus; but in their thoughtlessness (348 ἄφρονες), humans gave the weighty gift to an ass to carry. The ass, being likewise thoughtless (354 ἄφρονα), gave it away to the *dipsas* – which was thus enabled to renew its youth through the shedding of its skin – in exchange for a drink of water; the snake received the donkey's thirst too as part of the bargain, and so inflicts it upon whomever it bites. Sullivan connects this with the *Alexipharmaca* acrostic, which comes in the context of a remedy against a poisonous plant significantly known as the *ephemeron*, the 'one-day plant'. By inscribing his name here, Nicander creates a link between the two passages, in the first of which humans become 'creatures of a day' (*Ther.* 346 ἡμερόιοις) by foolishly surrendering their immortality, while in the second the poet offers a cure for the effects of the similarly-named plant. Sullivan further suggests that the paired acrostics point to alternative interpretations of the poet's name, which could be construed either as 'victory *over* man', or as 'victory *of* man'. Again, then, the poet writes himself – so to speak – into the world which he is uniquely qualified to read and interpret for his didactic pupil: some compensation for humans' thoughtless surrender of their immortality is offered by the poet, whose 'victories' over the poisonous animals and plants described in the two poems consist in knowledge which can be 'easily' mastered by the attentive reader: ῥεῖα, significantly, is the first word of the *Theriaca* (*Ther.* 1–4 ῥεῖα ... φωνήσας, 'with ease I will tell...') and recurs in the proem to the *Alexipharmaca* (*Alex.* 4–5 ῥεῖα ... αὐδήσας, 'with ease I will proclaim...'). And, once again, the acrostic and the accompanying name pun are connected with an intertextual pointer to the proem of Hesiod's *Works and Days*: for Hesiod, it is Zeus who 'easily' puts down the mighty from their seat (*Op.* 5–8, quoted above), while Nicander, like Aratus, inverts the relationship, arrogating to himself the role of transforming agency.²⁴ The connection here is strengthened by the reference in the *dipsas* episode to Prometheus' theft of fire – the root cause, according to the archaic poet, of the miserable condition of present-day humanity,

against which hard toil is the only remedy. Through this series of word-plays and allusive echoes, Nicander not only promises a partial restoration of the easy life (ῥηδίδως ... ἐργάσσοιο, *Op.* 43) enjoyed by pre-Promethean man, but strikingly asserts his own authority to do so; the ingenuity with which he stamps his own name upon the text symbolically inverts the carelessness of the humans in the fable, illustrating his mastery of poetic form and at the same time guaranteeing his own (literary) immortality.²⁵

The tradition of the acrostic signature seems to have made an early transition from Greek to Roman didactic poetry: though we can say little about Ennius' acrostic Q. ENNIVS FECIT, which is mentioned very much in passing by Cicero in a discussion of the Sibylline oracles (*Div.* 2.111),²⁶ we can be reasonably confident at least that it occurred in the didactic *Epicharmus*. The exiguous remains of this poem leave us little to go on, but it is surely decisive that Epicharmus himself is said to have signed his writings (*hypomnemata*, Diogenes Laertius 8.78) with acrostics.²⁷

We are on much firmer ground with Ennius' self-proclaimed successor, Lucretius. I have argued elsewhere that Lucretius follows Aratus' lead in constructing his poem as a cosmic icon, or what John Henderson (in a brilliant discussion of Pliny's *Natural History*) terms a 'cosmogram'.²⁸ This is most apparent in the recurring analogy sketched by the poet between the atoms and the letters of the alphabet – or, more specifically, the letters that make up the words and lines of the *De Rerum Natura* itself (1.823–9, 2.688–99, 2.1013–22). In some sense, the poem *is* the *rerum natura*, or at least, Lucretius implies, there is a near-perfect match between word and world. Of course, the analogy is far more problematic for Lucretius than for the Stoicizing Aratus: the Lucretian 'Book of Nature' is one that, paradoxically, had no author, and ultimately has no meaning.²⁹ Moreover, the poet has to face the intractable problem of representing an infinite universe within the limited confines of the literary text. Nevertheless, the notion that the world is legible by those who know its language remains a productive one, even for the Epicurean with his non-teleological and anti-creationist world-view.

The construction of the poem as cosmic icon can, indeed, be seen to serve Lucretius' didactic rhetoric in a number of ways. In particular, the *poeta creator* trope,³⁰ whereby Lucretius figures himself and his reader not as merely *reading* the universe, but as actually *creating it* together, packs a powerful rhetorical punch. The language of the first two books in particular often hints that we are not just studying but, metaphorically, designing the primary particles as we read through the poem: the reader is warned, for example, to 'beware of staining the seeds of things with colour' (*colore cave contingas semina rerum*, 2.755).³¹ In this context, the repeated line *ne tibi res redeant ad nilum funditus omnes*, 'lest you should

find all things reduced to non-existence' (1.673 = 1.797 = 2.864) hints that mistakes on the poet's or reader's part could be the end of the world, figuratively speaking: an error in the construction of the universe's fundamental atomic building-blocks might mean cosmic cataclysm.³² The trope contributes in this way to the messianic urgency of Lucretius' manner, which has struck so many readers of the poem. By the same token, it serves once again to reinforce the *praeceptor's* didactic authority: who better to explain the nature of atomic reality than its (metaphorical) designer and creator?

Lucretius' *writing* of the universe is, thus, accompanied by a strong sense of its *legibility*: a key word here is *vestigium*, 'trace' or 'footprint', used most notably at 2.124, where the movement of dust motes in a sunbeam is described as the imprint on the visible world (*vestigia notitiae*) of invisible atomic motion.³³ Similarly, the *vestigia* of prehistory or the atomic composition of the soul exist as perceptible 'traces', the source of which can be deduced through logical argumentation (5.1447; 3.309, 320); equally, the *simulacra* which are the medium of vision are the *vestigia* of the objects which produce them (4.87). In a famous simile in Book 1, the reader is compared to a hunting-dog, tracking the *vestigia* to their source, the 'hidden lair' (*caecas latebras*) of truth:

namque canes ut montivagae persaepe ferai
naribus inveniunt intectas fronde quietes,
cum semel institerunt vestigia certa viai,
sic alid ex alio per te tute ipse videre
talibus in rebus poteris caecasque latebras
insinuare omnis et verum protrahere inde.

Lucretius 1.404–9³⁴

For just as dogs very often find by scent the den of a mountain-roaming beast hidden amongst thickets, when once they have fixed upon the sure traces of its path, in the same way you will be able to see for yourself one thing after another in these matters, and wriggle into all the hidden lairs of truth and drag it out from there.

Though in a rather different sense from Aratus' *Phaenomena*, then, this poem is all about reading and deciphering the signs that are all around us. This is nowhere more true than in the case of dreams, a phenomenon widely regarded in ancient as in modern, post-Freudian thought as subject to, and as requiring, interpretation. Of course, the form of oneiromancy practised by Lucretius is a relatively straightforward one: dreams are no more than the traces of the activities (and, presumably, the thoughts) on which our attention has been focussed in

waking life (4.962–70) – again, a kind of *vestigium*. It is perhaps not coincidental that hunting-dogs are one of the species chosen by the poet to illustrate his thesis: they can be observed in their sleep to bark, sniff and move their legs as though running, *ut vestigia si teneant inventa ferarum* (‘as though following the trail of a wild beast they have found’, 4.993). And, indeed, the poet can be seen to have left a *vestigium* here for the reader – or one particular reader – to sniff out: I owe to Philip Thibodeau³⁵ the observation that lines 1015–19 contain the acrostic MEMMI. Lucretius indirectly invokes his dedicatee at just the point where he is dealing with the kind of anxiety dreams experienced by the politically ambitious – men like Memmius himself, who (as Lucretius observes in the proem to Book 1, 42–3) is not in a position to absent himself from public service at a time of political upheaval and civil dissension.³⁶

porro hominum mentes, magnis quae motibus edunt
 magna, itidem saepe in somnis faciuntque geruntque,
 reges expugnant, capiuntur, proelia miscent,
 tollunt clamorem, quasi si iugulentur ibidem.
Multi depugnant gemitusque doloribus edunt
Et quasi pantherae morsu saevive leonis
Mandantur, magnis clamoribus omnia complent.
Multi de magnis per somnum rebus loquuntur
Indicioque sui facti persaepe fuere.

Lucretius 4.1011–19

Furthermore, the minds of men who with great labour bring forth great deeds often act the same way and perform the same deeds in sleep: kings sack cities, are captured, join battle, raise a shout as though their throats were being cut there and then. Many engage in combat and give cries of pain, and – as though they were being mauled by the bites of panther or savage lion – fill the whole place with loud screams. Many speak in their sleep of serious matters, and have very often born witness to their own crimes.

Memmius, and by extension the reader in general, is invited to read the signs – the traces left in our dreams by the futile activities in which we engage during waking life. The poet himself, in contrast, is in hot pursuit of the *rerum natura* even in his sleep, and seeking to ensnare it in the pages of his work (*nos agere hoc autem et naturam quaerere rerum | semper et inventam patriis exponere chartis*, ‘whereas I do this and always seek out the nature of

things and, having tracked it down, commit it to the pages of my ancestral tongue', 4.969–70). The passage as a whole might be read – like the plague at the end of Book 6³⁷ – as a kind of test for the didactic pupil: if we are sufficiently attentive readers to have picked up the acrostic 'trace' formed by the *elementa* of the poem, we should have learned *ipso facto* to track the patterns left in the visible world by the atomic *elementa* that constitute the *rerum natura*. By the same token, the ideal reader should be equipped – by the end of Book 6 – to follow the example set in the dream-passage by the poet himself, and eschew the rival path of political engagement represented by Memmius. The success of Lucretius' didactic enterprise is thus dependent not only on the didactic authority of the *praeceptor*, but also on his willingness to cede control, ultimately, to the reader, who must in the end learn to master his or her *own* desires and fears: hence, perhaps, the unusual step of encoding the dedicatee's name (as opposed to the poet's) in the text through the vehicle of the acrostic.

Like his predecessors, too, Lucretius implicitly founds his authority as *praeceptor* on his didactic heritage, tracing a line of descent (not this time from Hesiod³⁸ but) from Homer, through Empedocles and Ennius to his own poem.³⁹ Name-puns can be shown once again to have a crucial role to play here.⁴⁰ In two passages in Book 1, Lucretius offers (heavily qualified) praise of Ennius and Empedocles; in the former context, furthermore, Ennius' self-depiction in the proem to the *Annales* as the reincarnation of Homer⁴¹ is recalled:

Ennius ut noster cecinit, qui primus amoeni
detulit ex Helicone perenni fronde coronam,
per gentis Italas hominum quae clara clueret.
etsi praeterea tamen esse Acherusia templa
Ennius aeternis exponit versibus edens
...
unde sibi exortam semper florentis Homeri
commemorat speciem

Lucretius 1.117–25

As our own Ennius sang, who first brought down from lovely Helicon a garland of evergreen leaves to win him bright fame amongst the peoples of Italy. Yet nevertheless he also explains and proclaims in his undying verse [sc. alongside the doctrine of transmigration] that the precincts of Acheron exist... From there, he relates, the shade of ever-flourishing Homer rose to meet him...

nil tamen hoc habuisse viro praeclarius in se

nec sanctum magis et mirum carumque videtur

Lucretius 1.729–30

Yet [Sicily], it seems, has held nothing more renowned or holy or wonderful or precious than this man [sc. Empedocles].

In each of these two passages, name-puns are, arguably, implicit. Ennius is said to have won for himself ‘an evergreen garland’ (*perenni fronde coronam*, 1.118), and Homer is described a few lines later at 124 as *semper florens*. Both phrases hint an etymological play on Ennius’ name and the adjective *perennis*, but may also prompt the reader to think of Empedocles, whose name means ‘enduring fame’ or ‘eternally renowned’.⁴² This observation can be supported by two further points: first, that Empedocles himself seems to hint at the same etymology in fr. 77, where he speaks of trees that are ‘evergreen and ever-fruited’, ἐμπεδόφυλλα καὶ ἐμπεδόκαρπα – both adjectives are *hapax legomena*, and sufficiently striking to suggest a word-play, even in a context which is not overtly metapoetic.⁴³ (One wonders, incidentally, whether it is coincidental that the word ἐμπεδος appears in the proems to both the *Phaenomena* and the *Theriaca*, as well as the highly Empedoclean song of Orpheus in Book 1 of the *Argonautica* of Aratus’ contemporary Apollonius.)⁴⁴ Secondly, Lucretius similarly plays on his own *cognomen* when Empedocles is at last explicitly introduced at 1.716–33. Here, the poet claims that the island of Sicily never produced anything *praeclarius* (cf. Empedocles) or more holy or wonderful or precious (*carum*) than the philosopher. The final adjective serves to link T. Lucretius *Carus* to his predecessor and model, just as the epithets *perenni fronde* and *semper florens* link Empedocles to *his* model, Homer, and to Ennius as their joint successor. Ennius and – counterintuitively – Homer are implicitly identified as ‘Empedoclean’, Empedocles as ‘Lucretian’, and the etymological play fills out the chain of succession already implicit in the Ennian trope of reincarnation (a central doctrine, of course, of Empedocles himself). Still a fourth – and, Lucretius insists, the most important – figure has already been added to the chain in the proem to the Book, where Epicurus, explicitly the *primus inventor* of the philosophical system expounded in the poem,⁴⁵ is also implicitly presented as a source of poetic inspiration⁴⁶ – again, by means of an etymological allusion. Venus, in the role of Muse, is asked here to assist in the poem’s composition, or more literally to act as the poet’s ‘ally’, *te sociam studeo* (24). Arguably, this hints at the etymology of the name Epicurus, which can also, of course, mean ‘ally’.

The Lucretian chain of etymologies, then, can be seen to point to the poet’s dual heritage: from the poets Homer and Ennius, and the poet-philosopher Empedocles, he gains the authority of tradition; yet the rival authority of his ‘ally’ Epicurus enables him to correct

his literary predecessors, whose world-views are consistently represented as erroneous. At the same time, the poem itself is characterized as a faithful reproduction of the universe, and the reader is invited to trace its signs and track the hidden truth of things to its lair. From the hunting dog passage of Book 1 to the aside to the reader at 6.527–34⁴⁷ we are repeatedly assured that this is not only possible but *perfacilis*, once we have grasped the powers belonging to the *elementa* (the atoms of the universe, but also the letters of the poem). For all its initial difficulty and infinite reach, then, Epicurean truth is inherently graspable and communicable: its traces are inscribed upon the visible world, and need only to be decoded.

From Lucretius' metaphorical hunt for truth I turn to Grattius' *Cynegetica*, postponing for now a discussion of Virgil's *Georgics*, where – as we shall see – the techniques that I have been tracing are present, but function in a characteristically elusive way. In Grattius, then, as John Henderson has shown, the world of the text is mapped most easily onto the world-empire of Rome.⁴⁸ Grattius repeatedly emphasizes the diverse and often exotic origins of the animals and hunting equipment that are the main themes of his poem; and the hunt itself is characterized throughout the work as a war against the wild, employing the weapons (*arma*) of net and spear.⁴⁹ The hunter is exhorted to exercise *imperium* over his animals, and the chase is implicitly represented as a kind of substitute for literal warfare, which extends Rome's civilizing mission onto a different plane, and ensures that her young men do not grow soft and surrender to the temptations of luxury under the Pax Augusta.⁵⁰ At the same time, Grattius is also eager – like Lucretius, though to quite different ends – to emphasize the power of *ratio*, the 'ally' (*sociam*, 6) who assisted primitive humans in the development of civilization and technology. Inevitably, the hunt in this context suggests itself (as, again, in Lucretius) as a metaphor for the pursuit of truth, or perhaps of success.⁵¹ Here again, the didactic poet's authority is closely related to the nature of his subject-matter: the *artes venandi* and the artistry of the poem are at this level one and the same.⁵² In the final line of the opening prayer to Diana, Grattius duly promises his reader *carmine et arma dabo et venandi persequar artes* (23): the poem *is* a hunt, in which reader and poet together 'track down' or 'pursue' the technique of hunting itself.

The *ars* of the poem exerts an attraction – in good Lucretian fashion⁵³ – on the reader, and this seductive quality too has a role to play in the creation of authority. *gratia*, 'charm', 'attractiveness' or 'gratitude', and *gratus*, 'pleasing' or 'welcome', are relatively prominent terms in the *Cynegetica*, occurring between them four times in the poem's scant 540 surviving lines, and in some strikingly programmatic contexts. Grattius' artistry is a source of *gratia*, and once again the poet's punning allusions to his own name serve implicitly to underpin his role as authoritative teacher.

In what should probably be the final lines of the proem (61–74),⁵⁴ the poet emphasizes the benefits derived from his teaching. Taking a leaf from Ovid’s *Ars Amatoria*,⁵⁵ he implies – with tongue, no doubt, in cheek – that the mythical heroes Adonis and Ancaeus would have benefited from reading his poem; similarly, Hercules’ *decus et fama* was derived from his mastery of the *artes venandi*. Grattius concludes: *exige, si qua meis respondet ab artibus, ergo, / gratia quae vires fallat collata ferinas* (‘see, then, what benefit will come from my skills, which, brought to bear on wild beasts, will outwit them for all their strength’, 73–4). The *ars* of Grattius is the source of *gratia*; authority is inherent in the very name of the *praeceptor*.

In case the reader should have missed this initial hint, Grattius returns to the theme at 215–16. The context here is the *ingens meritum* (249) of the *primus inventor* Hagnon, said by Grattius to have been the first to train dogs for hunting. The passage concludes with a promise of immortal fame *dum carmina ... manebunt* (‘so long as songs shall last’, 251), balancing the opening assurance that *plurima semper gratia* (‘our profuse and undying gratitude’, 215–16) will always be his. *gratia* is assured by Grattius’ poem; and this time the name-pun occurs in a passage specifically concerned with tracking, as the dog with its sensitive nose ‘reads the signs’ (*signa ... legens*, 223–4) left by the hunter’s quarry. The reader, too, is by implication to follow up the traces left by the poet in his text.

The last two occurrences of *gratus/gratia* both fall in contexts concerned with *experientia*, a term of some thematic importance for both Lucretius and Virgil (cf. *Lucr.* 5.1452, *Virg. Geo.* 1.4, 4.316). At 266, in a passage again revolving around the observation of signs – here the physical characteristics of dogs, as indicators of good pedigree – Grattius notes that the most important quality (*gratia prima*) of breeding-animals is their tried and tested temperament (*expertos animi* 266). He returns to the theme at 427–9, a brief encomium of *Experientia* in the course of a long passage on the treatment of canine wounds and diseases. The pupil who relies on *experientia* and does not hesitate to act will attain *gratos ... fines*, so Grattius assures us. As in the proem to Ovid’s *Ars Amatoria*, though less explicitly so, the poet’s didactic authority is connected with his practical experience of the subject under discussion:⁵⁶ the reader who is willing to accept this source of authority will, once again, experience the *gratia* (in all senses of the word) that is inherent in the poet’s name.

Like Ovid, then, Grattius appears to present his familiarity with his subject matter as something derived from personal experience rather than from books, and accordingly (as Formicola points out in his commentary on the poem)⁵⁷ declines to acknowledge any didactic predecessor. Or perhaps we should say declines to acknowledge any predecessor *explicitly*, since the poem is of course permeated by intertextual echoes of (especially) Lucretius and

Virgil's *Georgics*; and, arguably, Grattius like his forerunners does leave another kind of track for the attentive reader to follow. At 494–8, we find the acrostic ASCRA:⁵⁸

ergo impetrato respondet multa favore
Ad partis, qua poscis opem; seu vincere silvas
Seu tibi fatorum labes exire minasque
Cura prior, tua magna fides tutelaque virgo.
Restat equos finire notis, quos arma Dianae
Admittant: non omne meas genus audet in artis.

And so, when her favour is won, the goddess will respond unstintingly, wherever you ask her aid: whether your first care is victory in the woods or to elude the threat of fated ruin [i.e. disease], the maiden is your great hope and protector.

It remains to define by their characteristic features those horses that admit the arms of Diana: not every breed has the courage for my art.

I am less confident in seeing significance here than in the other instances I have discussed, particularly as the acrostic cuts across the end of one verse-paragraph and the beginning of the next, a position which may make it less apparent to the reader.⁵⁹ On the other hand, the context is one where a reference to the poet of Ascræ, and the *Ascraeum carmen* of Virgil as Hesiod's self-proclaimed successor (*Geo.* 2.176), is very much to the purpose. We are here at the very end of the section on diseases: like Virgil at the end of *Georgics* 3, Grattius seems momentarily to be losing confidence in his own teaching (480 *non opibus tanta est fiducia nostris*, 'my confidence in my own resources is not so great'). But it immediately becomes apparent that another kind of remedy is available: the goddess Diana, if supplicated with due deference, will respond to the hunter's prayers (493 *respondet ... favore*). Self-conscious inversion of Virgil is suggested particularly by the emphatic *idcirco* at 483: the word also occurs in the equivalent passage of *Georgics* 3 (445 *dulcibus idcirco fluviiis pecus omne magistri | perfundunt*, 'therefore [sc. as a preventive measure against scabies] the herdsmen drench the whole flock in fresh water'), where, however, Virgil – in one of his more Epicurean moments – urges swift and decisive action and suggests that prayer in such situations is a waste of time (*Geo.* 3.455–6 *dum medicas adhibere manus ad uulnera pastor | abnegat et meliora deos sedet omina poscens*, 'while the shepherd shrinks from applying healing hands to the wound and sits idly by, supplicating the gods for better omens'). Instead, Grattius' confidence in Diana's aid seems to recall Hesiod's at least intermittently confident assurances that hard work will earn divine favour: at *Op.* 298–301 Perses is promised that if

he follows his brother's advice and applies himself to work on his land, 'Demeter will love him and fill his barn with grain'. Here, then, Grattius arguably encodes a reference to the founder of the genre as a religious authority, even as he implicitly contrasts his own confidence in his endeavour with the *Georgic*-poet's much more uncertain reliance on either divine favour or agricultural precept.

Turning, finally, to Manilius' *Astronomica*, a number of acrostics have been detected in Books 1 and 2, of which at least three appear to be guaranteed as non-fortuitous, though in the first two cases imperfect. RESPIC(i)T at 1.334–40 and AEMI(lia) at 1.796–9 are both so-called 'gamma acrostics', like Aratus' ΑΕΠΤΗ, in which the initial letter of the acrostic is also the initial letter of the same word at line-beginning (thus, 1.334 begins *respicit ille* and 796 *Aemiliaeque domus*).⁶⁰ The third instance is SPARSV, in a discussion of comets at 1.813–18, which – as Robert Colborn persuasively argues⁶¹ – is a self-conscious 'improvement' on the apparently accidental acrostic on the same word at [Germanicus], *Aratea* 118–23, where it bears no relation to the context (Colborn contends that this proves the chronological priority of the *Aratea*). I have little to say about these three instances individually, or about the other possibly fortuitous examples discussed by Colborn and Damschen;⁶² but it may be plausible to see a kind of collective force in what (in Manilius' case) really is perhaps little more than a verbal game in any particular instance. For Manilius, more even than for Aratus, the stars form a system, a system which is legible (or perhaps one should say 'calculable') to those who have been initiated into the secrets of astrology.⁶³ That initiation is itself compared at 2.755–71 to the process of teaching a child to read, in a Manilian version of the Lucretian atoms/letters analogy.⁶⁴ As in Aratus, then, the reader is encouraged to look for hidden signs embedded in the letters of the text, just as our destinies are embedded in the apparently fortuitous configurations of planets and constellations at the moment of our birth.

From these relatively clear-cut examples, we return to the much more eccentric and widely-debated acrostic signature of Virgil, at *Georgics* 1.429–33. The Virgilian version of Aratus' ΑΕΠΤΗ acrostic has become well known and reasonably widely accepted since it was first detected by E.L. Brown in 1963,⁶⁵ and the details can be fairly briefly summarized. In the process of translating the Aratean passage where the acrostic occurs, on weather signs given by the moon, Virgil too includes an acrostic, though one that is considerably less evident than its model: lines 429, 431 and 433 begin with the syllables *ma*–, *ve*– and *pu*–, that is, the first syllables of Virgil's *tria nomina* in reverse order, on alternate lines. Obscure though this signature may appear at first blush, Brown himself and more recent critics have pointed to a battery of supporting indications (in addition to the Aratean intertext) that can be understood

as inviting the attentive reader to be on the lookout for something hidden in the text. In particular, Aratus' σκέπτεο ... κεράων ἐκάτερθε σελήνην ('observe the horns of the moon on either side', *Ph.* 778) – which has itself been interpreted as a 'reflexive annotation',⁶⁶ alerting the reader to the presence of the subsequent acrostic – is translated by Virgil as *si ... lunas ... sequentis | ordine respicies* (*Geo.* 1.424–5): as Feeney and Nelis argue, the phrase might be read not just as asking us to watch out for something hidden in the lines that follow, but something in reverse order – Virgil tells us to 'look *back*', and the order of the three moon-signs is duly inverted in relation to the Aratean model.⁶⁷ Furthermore, the lines that interleave the acrostic contain two further annotations: the moon is described at 432 as *certissimus auctor*, 'the most reliable author(ity)', while the reddish cast that foretells wind is depicted as a virginal 'blush', *virgineum ... ruborem* (430), a phrase – Brown suggests – that puns both on Virgil's name, and on the nickname *Parthenias*, 'the maiden', attributed to him in the ancient *Vitae*.⁶⁸

Virgil can thus be seen to inscribe his own name on the poem, and on the heavens, in a more direct but also much more contorted fashion than does Aratus.⁶⁹ The Virgilian acrostic combines the name-pun of the *Phaenomena* proem with the acrostic of the weather-signs passage; but Virgil's name is fragmented and inverted in the process. Michael Haslam, in his discussion of the lines, expresses a degree of scepticism, asking 'why alternate lines?, why reversed order of *nomina*?, etc.':⁷⁰ I believe that we are now in a position to suggest some possible answers to these questions.

It is not, I think, going too far to suggest that – if Virgil expects us to notice the acrostic at all – he asks us to read it with the whole weight of the didactic tradition, not just the immediate Aratean model, at its back. I have argued that didactic acrostics in general have two interdependent effects, both lending authority to the didactic *praeceptor* as one whose very name inscribes the subject matter of his poem, and contributing to the trope of the poem as mirror of the world, and of the world as 'legible', in such a way as to underline the 'teachability' of that subject-matter, and the attentive reader's ability to master it. But Virgil's acrostic, I would argue, characteristically takes away with one hand what it gives with the other. Yes, the poet's name is iconically represented amongst the weather-signs that the reader is urged to observe and decipher; but the name-as-sign is emphatically blurred, interrupted and confused in its appearance. This confusion seems to me to represent very elegantly the paradoxical uncertainty that the Virgilian *praeceptor* displays towards his whole didactic project, as the criticism of the 80s and 90s in particular stressed.⁷¹ Unlike Aratus, or Lucretius, Virgil's speaker seems far from wholly convinced that nature can be mastered, or fully understood: the poem is riddled with a sense of doubt, mystery, wonder and with premonitions of agricultural failure that make it a very strange kind of didactic poem. The

peculiar nature of Virgil's acrostic signature, I suggest, is wholly in keeping with this aspect of the poem.

Virgil revisits the combination of name pun and acrostic (or, on this occasion, telestich) at the very end of the *Georgics*, where – like Nicander⁷² – he signs off with a *sphragis* laying claim to authorship of his work.

Haec super arborum cultu pecorumque canebar
et super arboribus, Caesar dum magnus ad altum
fulminat Euphraten bello victorque volentis
per populos dat iura viamque adfectat Olymp^O.
illo Vergilium me tempore dulcis aleba^T
Parthenope studiis florentem ignobilis oti,
carmina qui lusi pastorum audaxque iuventa,
Tityre, te patulae cecini sub tegmine fagi.

Virg. *Geo.* 4.559–66

This song of the cultivation of fields and flocks, and of trees, I sang, while great Caesar thundered in war on the deep Euphrates and as victor gave laws to willing subjects, and forged a path to Olympus. At that time, sweet Parthenope nurtured me, Virgil, as I flourished amidst the pursuits of inglorious ease, I who played the songs of shepherds and, in the boldness of youth, sang of you, Tityrus, in the shade of a spreading beech.

The word *oti*, at the end of line 564, forms an inverted gamma, its final *-i* coinciding with the last letter of the telestich OTI at the ends of 562–4.⁷³ At the same time, Virgil's use of the eponym Parthenope, literally 'maiden-voice', to refer to his residence in Naples, once again suggests a pun on *Vergilius/Parthenias*.⁷⁴ I submit that, here too, the combination of name-pun and telestich underlines the oddity of Virgil's didactic stance, in a passage whose ideological implications are already notoriously hard to pin down. The juxtaposition of the inactive Virgil, composing poetry at his ease in the peaceful and luxurious surrounding of Naples, and Octavian as triumphant law-giver, in hot pursuit of immortality, is puzzling and elusive. Do we read the poet as distancing himself from the *vita activa* of the warrior and statesman? Or are the two roles to be seen as interdependent or complementary?⁷⁵ The word-play, certainly, tends to emphasize the unpractical nature of the poet's work, and his quasi-pastoral isolation from the 'great world'. Far from identifying himself with his subject-matter – the ceaseless struggle against recalcitrant nature that is the farmer's task, as Virgil has

presented it throughout the poem – the poet seems here in the final lines to separate himself from it: it is Octavian, rather, whose imperial ambitions resemble the metaphorical warfare undertaken by the farmer.⁷⁶ The poem ends under the sign of *otium* and virginal seclusion, a far cry from Aratus’ divinely-sponsored decipherment of the universe, Nicander’s ‘conquest’ of threatening venomous animals and plants, or Lucretius’ devotion to his philosophical project and coded assaults upon his reader’s most deeply held values.

Considerations of space preclude a full discussion of the other major didactic poem bypassed in the chronological survey above, Ovid’s *Ars Amatoria*. Indeed, Ovid’s poem is something of an exception to the rule, in so far as – to my knowledge – neither acrostics nor name-puns have been detected in it. It is very tempting to see this surprising omission, in the most playful work of this most playful of poets, as significant in itself (particularly given that acrostics *have* been found elsewhere in his *oeuvre*),⁷⁷ and to relate it to the problematic status of the Ovidian *praeceptor*. If, as noted above, Ovid claims that his teaching is the product not of divine inspiration but of practical experience – the erotic experience, that is, gained by the poet/lover of the *Amores* – the reader may well wonder just how reliable a guide he is. If elegiac love is by definition unhappy and unfulfilled, it is paradoxical – to say the least – for the ‘teacher of love’ to found his didactic authority on *this* kind of experience; and by the same token, the reader might legitimately wonder whether *amor* is an appropriate subject for systematic teaching at all. Ovid, then, unlike his didactic predecessors, arguably seeks to undermine his own authority even as he asserts it: hence, there is no place in the *Ars Amatoria* for the name pun or acrostic that elsewhere reinforces the *praeceptor*’s claim to be the perfect teacher of subject-matter that is both fully comprehended within the poem and fully able to be assimilated by the pupil.

Don Fowler famously ends his short article on the MARS acrostic at *Aeneid* 7.601–4 on a characteristically self-deprecating note: ‘I await the men in white coats’.⁷⁸ I trust that the present study of acrostics and name puns in didactic poetry as self-conscious strategies of authorization, and as means to convey to the reader the inherently ‘legible’ character of the natural world, will not invite such a reaction on the part of my own readership. The instances of word-play reviewed in this chapter amount, I suggest, to more than an esoteric game, or even an advertisement of the poets’ Alexandrian *doctrina*: they may, indeed, have something fundamental to contribute to our understanding of the genre and of the interrelationships between its Greek and Roman practitioners.

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¹ For surveys of Greek and/or Roman acrostics, see Vogt 1967, Courtney 1990, Luz 2010, 1–77, Katz 2013, 4–10. Acrostic-hunting in the ancient world is attested by Aulus Gellius (*NA* 14.6.4; cf. Eustathius, *ad Il.* 24.1–5 (4.856 van der Valk)); see also p. 00 below on the ancient reception of Aratus' λεπτὴ acrostic.

² On the dating of the acrostic *argumenta*, see Deufert 2002, 283–6.

³ Intentionality has been a bone of considerable contention since Hilberg compiled the 35-page catalogue of *Zufallsakrosticha* appended to his 1899 article on the *Ilias Latina* acrostic. The question certainly merits consideration on a more theoretically-informed basis than it has heretofore received, and might profitably be brought into relation with the parallel issue of intentionality and verbal 'allusion' (for a brief discussion of which see Gale 2000, 3–6, with further bibliography). The case for meaningfulness in any particular instance of may, of course, be more or less convincingly made.

⁴ Outside the literary context in the narrow sense, acrostics are particularly common in epitaphs and other commemorative inscriptions (Courtney 1990, 6–7, Luz 2010, 33–47). According to Cicero (*Div.* 2.111–12; cf. Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 4.62.6) they were characteristically used in the Sibylline oracles, with the aim – presumably – of protecting the integrity of the text against tampering or omission.

⁵ Cf. Courtney 1990, 7: ‘such things are particularly at home in gnomic poetry’; Luz 2010, 76–7. In addition to the instances discussed here, we should note the ‘signature’ acrostics in the geographical poems of Dionysius son of Calliphon and Dionysius Periegetes (for which see Luz 2010, 22–5, 52–8 and Lightfoot 2014, 130, 287–8, 378–9, with further bibliography). Outside of didactic poetry proper, more-or-less convincing instances have been detected in Chaeremon, Callimachus, Apollonius, Catullus, Virgil’s *Eclogues* and *Aeneid*, Horace’s *Odes*, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti*, Valerius Flaccus, Silius Italicus, the *Ilias Latina*, Apuleius and Claudian (see, respectively, Luz 2010, 7–15; Danielewicz 2005, 329–30; Danielewicz 2005, 330–2, Stewart 2010, Cusset 2013; Goold 1983, 248; Fowler 1983, Clauss 1997, Damschen 2004, 107–8 n. 63, Danielewicz 2005, 324, Katz 2007 and 2013, 6–10, Grishin 2008, Castelletti 2012; G. Morgan 1993; Damschen 2004, La Barbera 2006, 181–3; Castelletti 2008, 2014; Damschen 2004, 110; Hillberg 1899; Gore and Kershaw 2008; and La Barbera 2006, 183–4). It is worth noting that several of these fall in passages which – like the Plautine arguments – might be described as didactic or paraenetic in mode: under this rubric we could include Chaeremon fr. 14b Snell (cf. Courtney 1990, 7, Luz 2010, 9), the anonymous ‘*Eudoxou techne*’ epigram found on the reverse of *P.Par.* 1 (see Courtney 1990, 9–10, Luz 2010, 58–63); several of the examples from narrative epic, such as Ap. Rhod. 3.1052–60, from Medea’s speech of instruction to Jason (Cusset 2013), and Ovid, *Met.* 15.194–8, from the speech of Pythagoras (Damschen 2004, 102–6); and Horace, *C.* 1.18.11–15 (G. Morgan 1993), where the acrostic itself is – significantly – on the word *disce*.

⁶ O’Hara 1996, esp. 7–56 on ‘etymological thinking and wordplay before Vergil’, with particular emphasis on proper names. Kidd (1981, 355) cites examples of other Hellenistic poets who play on the (supposed) derivation of their own names.

⁷ Nagy 1979, 296–7 argues that Hesiod hints at a derivation of his own name from the phrase ὀσσαν ἰεῖσαι, ‘giving voice’ or ‘uttering speech’, used of the Muses at *Th.* 10.

⁸ See p. 00 and n. 18 below.

⁹ See e.g. Hunter 1995, J.S. Clay 2003, 175–82, Canevaro 2015, 130–2 and (on Hesiod’s didactic authority in general) 198–208.

¹⁰ Cf. (e.g.) K.A. Morgan 2000, 61–2, Trepanier 2004, 73–107 (esp. 88–9).

¹¹ See esp. *Op.* 298–301, 473–8, 826–8; Empedocles frs. 110, 111.

¹² All translations are my own.

¹³ Hunter 1995; Gee 2000, 66–91. Cf. also Levitan 1979, 64–6, Volk 2012.

¹⁴ Gee 2000, 80–1, Volk 2012, 210–11, 219–21.

¹⁵ On the acrostic, see esp. Jacques 1960, Levitan 1979, Bing 1990, 281–2, Hunter 1995, Kidd 1997, 445–6, Luz 2010, 47–51, Hanses 2014; on the name-pun, Levitan 1979, 68 n. 18, Kidd 1981, 355 and 1997, 164, and Bing 1990.

¹⁶ Whether the use of λεπτός as term of stylistic approbation originates with Callimachus or with Aratus himself is a matter of scholarly debate: see Hanses 2014, 610, with further bibliography at n. 3.

¹⁷ On the Homeric acrostic, see Vogt 1967, 82–3, Luz 2010, 4–5, and esp. Korenjak 2009. The earliest explicit ancient reference is found in the commentary of Eustathius (who dismisses it as fortuitous); but the ‘discovery’ of acrostics in Homer is already attested by Aulus Gellius (n. 1 above), while Korenjak 2009 argues that the *Iliad*-passage was read by Dionysius Periegetes as a coded reference to the island of Leuke (to which, according to the epic cycle and later sources, Achilles was transported after death). Aratus himself may be regarded as our best evidence that the acrostic was known by the Hellenistic period. Given the difficulty, or perhaps rather impossibility, of ‘seeing’ acrostics in an orally-transmitted work, most modern scholars have followed Eustathius’ lead in regarding it as non-significant, though Damschen 2004, 105 is a dissenting voice.

¹⁸ Callim. *Ep.* 27.3–4 Pf. (= *Anth. Pal.* 9.507.3–4), Leonidas of Tarentum, *Anth. Pal.* 9.25.1–2; see also ‘King Ptolemy’, *SH* 712.4.

¹⁹ Levitan 1979, 57–8; cf. Gutzwiller 2007, 102 (who posits a connection with early Stoic theories of poetry as concealing cosmic truths in allegorical or metaphorical guise) and Volk 2012, 226–7. Acrostics/telestichs have been detected elsewhere in the poem, though to my mind these are less clearly non-fortuitous: see Fakas 1999 on the telestich ΙΣΗ at 234–6, and Danielewicz 2005, 325–9.

²⁰ Callim. *Ep.* 27.3–4 Pf. (= *Anth. Pal.* 9.507.3–4); cf. also Leonidas of Tarentum, *Anth. Pal.* 9.25.5–6, with discussion at Bing 1990, 282–4.

²¹ First noticed by Lobel 1928. The *Alexipharmaca* acrostic demands emendation (the MS text yields ΣΙΚΚΝΔΡΟΣ rather than ΝΙΚΑΝΔΡΟΣ), but seems too close to the ‘signature’ of the *Theriaca* to be coincidental – unless, like Levitan (1979, 59–60), we regard it as a self-conscious ‘near miss’. For discussion of the textual issue, see Jacques 2002, lxxi and 2007, 25.

²² As Overduin points out (2015, 314), following van Dijk 1997, 135–6, the marked use of kennings such as πυρὸς λήϊστῳρ for Prometheus (347), or λεπάργος, ‘white-skin’, for the ass (349) strikingly underlines the inherently ‘riddling’ quality of the passage and calls attention to the necessity for interpretation.

²³ For etymologizing plays on *Prometheus* and *mêtis*, see *Op.* 48, 54 and *Th.* 546, 559 (with Canevaro 2015: 169); Epimetheus' name is implicitly connected with his *opsimathia* at *Op.* 85–9.

²⁴ Note also the explicit reference to Hesiod at *Th.* 10–12. Cf. Clauss 2006, esp. 162–5, and Overduin 2015, 48–9.

²⁵ Cf. Clauss 2006, 171: 'By way of the acrostic, Nicander associates his name BOTH with the period when poisonous creatures, the subject of his poem, were coming into being ... AND with immortality, making this a doubly motivated sphragis that links the poet all the more intimately with the subject of his poem and the ever-lasting fame he anticipates'. We might add that fame itself both arises from and, in turn, contributes to the poet's didactic authority.

²⁶ The oracular associations of acrostics are of some relevance to my argument, in so far as they may be seen to contribute to the authorizing strategies I am exploring here: especially germane in this connection are *Lucr.* 1.736–9, where the pronouncements of Empedocles and his followers are compared favourably with those of the Delphic oracle, and 5.111–12, where the comparison is repeated, this time with reference to Lucretius' own teachings. For interconnections between didactic and oracular (especially apocalyptic) writings, see further Van Noorden, this volume; for acrostics in the Sibylline oracles, see Vogt 1967, 90–2 and Luz 2010, 29–33.

²⁷ On the authenticity or otherwise and the probable character of the 'writings' in question, see Courtney 1990, 7–9 and Luz 2010, 25–7.

²⁸ Gale 2004, 57–61; Henderson 2011.

²⁹ Cf. Gale 2004, 60–1, Volk 2012, 213. Hans Blumenberg, in his monumental study of the book-metaphor from antiquity to the present (Blumenberg 1983, 37–40), denies that the atomists' use of the atoms/letters analogy entails the further image of the cosmos as a book, or of the 'legibility' of nature, on the grounds that atomistic theory excludes the element of 'meaningfulness' or 'intelligibility' inherent in such metaphors. He does not, however, specifically consider Lucretius' more poetic and rhetorical use of the image, which on my reading points to a different kind of 'intelligibility', or perhaps 'communicability', in nature: here, the book-metaphor suggests not that the world has a *meaning*, so much as that its workings can be rationally *comprehended*, and – crucially – *conveyed* to the poem's reader.

³⁰ For which see esp. Lieberg 1982.

³¹ Cf. (e.g.) 1.381–2 *aut igitur motu privandumst corpora quaeque / aut esse admixtum dicendumst rebus inane*, 'either we must deprive all bodies of motion or we must declare that

there is an admixture of void in things'; 2.560–1 *sic tibi si finita semel primordia quaedam / constitutes*, 'if you make the number of atoms finite...'.³²

³² Cf. Volk 2002, 78–9.

³³ I am simplifying a little here, in so far as the phrase has a specific, technical (as well as broader metaphorical) sense in this passage: if *notitia* is Lucretius' translation for the Epicurean term *prolepsis*, or 'preconception', then the *vestigium* will be the print quite literally left on the observer's mind by repeated observation of a given phenomenon, which – according to Epicurean epistemological theory – is the source of all knowledge. At the same time, however, the dust motes are themselves a *vestigium*, in so far as their motion is ultimately brought about by atomic movement on the microscopic level: the image is at once an analogy for and an effect of atomic motion and interaction. For illuminating discussion of the whole passage, see Fowler 2002, 186–95 (with 203–5 on the phrase *vestigia notitiae*).

³⁴ On this passage, and its implications for Epicurean epistemology and Lucretian didacticism, see esp. Whitlatch 2014, 46–9.

³⁵ *per litteras*. Hilberg (1899, 267–8, 299) already notes the acrostic, but pours scorn on the notion that it might be intentional or significant.

³⁶ Katharina Volk (2002, 77–8), while apparently unaware of the acrostic, similarly argues that Memmius is closely engaged in the discussion of bad dreams through the use of first-person plurals at 1.132–5, where the theme is first mentioned as an item on the 'syllabus' of the poem.

³⁷ For this interpretation of Lucretius' Athenian plague, see esp. D. Clay 1983, 257–66 (and cf. 224–5): Clay persuasively reads the finale as the culmination of a didactic and rhetorical strategy whereby the *praeceptor* fosters an increasing sense of independence on the reader's part – a strategy which is perhaps already implicit in the passage from Book 4 under discussion.

³⁸ Which is not to suggest that Hesiod is not an important intertext for Lucretius, particularly in Book 5; he is treated throughout the poem, however, as an (implicit) antagonist, and not enlisted as a source of didactic authority (for a full discussion, see Gale 2013).

³⁹ The Homeric poems being, of course, widely read as didactic texts throughout antiquity: cf. Sider in this volume.

⁴⁰ This paragraph summarizes an argument made more fully in Gale 2001.

⁴¹ For which see Skutsch 1985, 147–53.

⁴² The marked emphasis on (literary) immortality in this sequence of name-puns is, once again, striking: like Nicander (see p. 000 and n. 25 above), Lucretius implicitly claims authority on the basis both of literary ancestry and of (his) poetry's reach into the future.

⁴³ On the Empedoclean word-play, see Wright 1981, *ad loc.*, Obbink 1993, 87–8 and Sedley 1998, 25 n. 91.

⁴⁴ Arat. *Ph.* 13 ὅφρ' ἔμπεδα πάντα φύωνται, 'so that everything might grow without fail'; Nic. *Ther.* 4 ἔμπεδα φωνήσαιμι, 'I shall tell faithfully'; Ap. Rhod. 1.499, with Hunter 1993, 163 and n. 41.

⁴⁵ Lucr. 3.9 *tu pater es, rerum inuentor*, 'you are our father, the discoverer of Truth', cf. 1.66 *primum Graius homo*, 'a man of Greece was the first...'.

⁴⁶ For the notion that Epicurus is portrayed by Lucretius in terms which suggest a poetic rather than/as well as a philosophical model, see Volk 2002, 105–16.

⁴⁷ *cetera quae sursum crescunt ... | ...omnia, prorsum | omnia [...] perfacilest tamen haec reperire animoque videre | omnia quo pacto fiant quareve creentur | cum bene cognoris elementis reddita quae sint*, 'everything else that comes into being up above ... everything, everything I say ... it's very easy to discover and to see in your mind's eye how all these things come about or are brought forth when once you fully understand the powers of the *elementa*'.

⁴⁸ Henderson 2001, esp. 9–13.

⁴⁹ Exotic origins: *Cyn.* 34–49 (flax and hemp for net-making), 127–37 (wood for hunting-spears), 154–212 (breeds of hunting-dog), 501–41 (horses); hunting as war: e.g. 22–3 *contra mille feras ... | carmine et arma dabo*; 24, 51, 75–94, 252, 333, 337–8 (hunting equipment as *arma*); 153, 157, 180, 255, 334, 344, 506, 515 (the hunt as *Mars/bellum*).

⁵⁰ *imperium*: 328; the menace of *luxuria*: 310–27 (and cf. 140–1).

⁵¹ For hunting metaphors in philosophical contexts, and the hunt as a general 'paradigm for all didacticism', cf. Green 1996: 221–6.

⁵² Hunting as *ars*: 1, 23, 107, 151, 153, 190, 217, 498, 512; veterinary practice as *ars*: 399, 414, 426, 464; the poem as *ars*: 73, 380 (in several of these instances, phrases such as *meae artes* are ambiguous as between two of the three categories, though I have assigned them somewhat arbitrarily to one or the other).

⁵³ For the seductiveness of poetic form, see esp. Lucr. 1.933–50 = 4.8–25, with discussion at Gale 1994, 138–55.

⁵⁴ For the transposition, see Enk 1918, 11–12, Formicola 1988, 117–18.

⁵⁵ Cf. esp. *Ars* 3.41–2, *Rem.* 55–68.

⁵⁶ *Ars* 1.25–30; cf. Effe 1977, 161.

⁵⁷ Formicola 1988, 118.

⁵⁸ Noted by Damschen 2004, 109–10.

⁵⁹ Unless, of course, the initial letters were picked out by rubrication or offset from the main text, both practices that are exemplified in surviving acrostic inscriptions and later literary texts (see Courtney 1990, 4 and Luz 2010 34–5 n. 109, 59). For speculation that Aratus' ἐπευθής (of the moon at *Ph.* 784, the second line of the *leptê*-acrostic) and Virgil's corresponding *ruborem* (*Geo.* 1.430) might play on the rubrication of their respective texts, see Hanses 2014, 612–13 and Habinek 2009, 131. I owe to Donncha O'Rourke (*per litteras*) the attractive suggestion that the word *notis* ('distinguishing marks', but also 'letters' or 'words', *OLD* 6) serves as a signpost to Grattius' acrostic: an alternative translation for the first half of line 497 might run 'it remains to encompass horses within the bounds of my poem', the verb *finire* perhaps also drawing attention to the *ends* of the lines, like Aratus' ἐκάτερθε (*Ph.* 778: see p. 00 and n. 66 below).

⁶⁰ The term 'gamma-acrostic' was coined by Gareth Morgan (1993, 143). For the AEMI(lia) acrostic, see Scarcia et al. 1996, xviii–xix; for RESPIC(i)T, see Bielsa i Mialet 2000b, who argues that it forms part an elaborate sequence of acrostics at 1.263–5, 275–9 and 334–40 which, in combination with the telestich MVSAS at 343–7, yields the syntactically and semantically coherent phrase ARS AONIA RESPICIT MVSAS. This may be understood, according to Bielsa i Mialet, as a 'poetic manifesto' (142).

⁶¹ Colborn 2013.

⁶² Damschen 2004, 109 n. 65 and Colborn 2013, 452 both argue that SAETA at 2.93–7 is meaningful; Damschen also notes PERFVGA 2.912–18, and Bielsa i Mialet (2000a) adds AQUA 1.705–9.

⁶³ Cf. Volk 2002, 234–44 and 2009, 195–6, Kennedy 2011, esp. 172–81.

⁶⁴ On the simile, and its relation to Lucretian models, see Schindler 2000, 252–72.

⁶⁵ Brown 1963, 96–114; cf. also Haslam 1992, Feeney and Nelis 2005, Somerville 2010.

⁶⁶ The term coined by Hinds (1998, 1) for words and phrases that draw attention to intertextual allusion; it seems equally applicable to the 'signposting' of acrostics discussed here. For Aratus' σκέπτεο as an annotation, see e.g. Bing 1990, 281 n. 1, Hanses 2014, 610.

⁶⁷ Feeney and Nelis 2005, 645 n. 8: they point in addition to *revertentis* at 427, of the moon's light 'returning' as she grows toward the full. See also Somerville 2010, 205–7.

⁶⁸ Donat. *Vit. Verg.* 11; Serv. *ad Aen.* 1 praef. Ted Somerville (2010, 208), building on Brown's observation that the Virgilian acrostic spans five lines (like both its immediate Aratean model and the Homeric 'original'), points out in addition that it is immediately preceded by the phrase *nigrum ... aera* (428), which corresponds to nothing in the equivalent passage of the *Phaenomena* but could be read as an allusion by inversion to the Homeric ΑΕΥΚΗ, 'white'.

⁶⁹ Katz 2008 argues for a second, still less obvious version of the Aratean name-pun at *Geo.* 1.1–2, where the phrase *terram* | *vertere*, in the same *sedes* as Aratus’ ἐῶμεν | ἄρρητον (*Ph.* 1–2), might perhaps hint at a bilingual pun on Ἄρατος and *arare*. According to Katz, we can also detect a Virgilian ‘signature’ here by combining the second syllable of *terram* with the first of *vertere* to yield *Mar*<*o*> *Ver*<*gilius*>; taken together, the two kinds of word-play can be interpreted as pointing to a chain of poetic succession, Hesiod–Aratus–Virgil.

⁷⁰ Haslam 1992, 203.

⁷¹ For a useful review of trends in scholarship on the *Georgics* since the 1970s, see Volk 2008. For my own view of the poems as a ‘profoundly open work’, which ‘offers the reader an uncertain and shifting view of the nature of things’, see Gale 2000, esp. 270–4.

⁷² Both the *Theriaca* and the *Alexipharmaca* conclude with a brief *sphragis* identifying the author by name and place of birth (*Ther.* 957–8, *Alex.* 629–30).

⁷³ The telestich was apparently first observed by Schmid (1983, 318–19), who extends it to line 565, reading *OTIA*.

⁷⁴ So Korenjak 1995, O’Hara 1996, 289.

⁷⁵ For a range of views on the *sphragis*, see e.g. Buchheit 1972, 174–82, Putnam 1979, 321–3, L. Morgan 1999, 213–18, Kyriakidis 2002, Nappa 2005, 216–18.

⁷⁶ For the troping of agriculture as warfare throughout the poem, see Gale 2000, 252–9.

⁷⁷ See e.g. Damschen 2004, 96–104, with further references at 96 n. 28.

⁷⁸ Fowler 1983, 298.