Abstract: This paper demonstrates that Vergil engages in a kind of verbal one-upmanship with Aratus by opening his Georgics with a multifaceted—and till now entirely overlooked—example of wordplay that is directly indebted to Aratus’ “signature” at the start of the Phaenomena. In all sorts of ways, terram / uertere is a “translation” of ἔωμεν / ἀρρητον.
This paper, which was written between November 2007 and January 2008 (with minor revisions made through June 2008), will be appearing in Materiali e Discussioni.

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Aratus of Soli, who lived from the late fourth to the mid-third century B.C., is best known now, as he was in antiquity, for his hexametric poem the Phaenomena. This 1154-line didactic work, which treats the constellations and weather-signs, had considerable influence on Callimachus and other fellow poets of the Hellenistic age; was a significant source for such Roman writers as Vergil and Manilius; was so admired by Cicero that he — and a number of other Romans, including Ovid and Germanicus — translated it into Latin; and has the distinction of appearing in the Bible (Paul quotes part of the fifth verse in his address on the Areopagus: Acts 17:28). Among the many reasons to be interested in the poem is that Aratus was evidently enamored of virtuoso wordplay, which, if not the weightiest of subjects, is nonetheless one on which there is a regular stream of publications that enliven classical scholarship. The purpose of this note is to add to the stream the observation that the Georgics opens with a remarkably intricate, and seemingly entirely overlooked, translation of an important allusive word at the start of the Phaenomena, a work whose influence on Vergil’s exceptionally allusive poem of the land, especially in book 1, is in any case palpable.

*I owe much to Elaine Fantham and dedicate this paper to her on the occasion of her 75th birthday. Special thanks go to Rolando Ferri and his team of anonymous referees.

† The standard editions of and commentaries on the Phaenomena are Kidd 1997 and Martin 1998. The best book-length account remains Erren 1967; a very good introduction to the poem is now to be found in Fantuzzi and Hunter 2004, pp. 224-245; Lewis 1992 gives an attractive picture of Aratus’ popularity (Damschen 2004, p. 106 n. 58 suggests that the Phaenomena «dürften … das am häufigsten ins Lateinische übersetzte Werk griechischer Sprache sein»; for a recent summary account of Aratus’ influence on Latin literature, see Hübner 2005); and Possanza 2004, informed by ‘translation theory’, discusses Germanicus’ Aratea as a «second original».

‡ Acrostics and anagrams prove consistently popular. From recent years, see, e.g., Damschen 2004; Danielewicz 2005; La Barbera 2006; Katz 2007a; and Gore and Kershaw 2008, all with many references, and note also Damschen’s website The Ancient Acrostic: A Bibliography (http://www.telemachos.phil.uni-erlangen.de/esterni/akrostichon.html), last updated in January 2003. Especially clever work keeps coming from the pens of Michael Fontaine and Damien Nelis, with the former frequently suggesting puns and other verbal jeux d’esprit that rely on Greco-Latin bilingualism (see, e.g., Fontaine 2004; 2006; and forthcoming) and the latter tending to stress formal features of wordplay (see, e.g., Nelis 2006 and 2007, as well as Feeney and Nelis 2005). Both structural considerations and learned interplay between Greek and Latin have a role in the present paper.

§ The Georgics has of course many other models, including Homer and Lucretius; fortunately, debates over such matters as the extent of Callimachus’ influence need not occupy us here. The most detailed and provocative account of Vergil’s sources and the use to which he puts them is Farrell 1991, with ch. 4 (pp. 131-68) on Aratus (and Hesiod, who is both Aratus’ explicit model and an independent source for Vergil); see also Thomas 1988, vol. 1, pp. 4-11, with 6-7 on Aratus (see also Index s.v. Aratus [p. 271]). In the «Appendix of Greek Material» in
Two examples of linguistic games in Aratus are very widely accepted as not only real, but significant: the acrostic Λ-Ε-Π-Τ-Η in verses 783-787, about the phases of the moon as weather-signs, and the (barely) concealed ‘signature’ ἄφρητον at the start of verse 2. In modern times, the acrostic (a so-called ‘gamma-acrostic’: the lambda-initial word that starts off Λ-Ε-Π-Τ-Η is itself λεπτή) was first pointed out by J.-M. Jacques in 1960; because it employs the (supposedly Callimachean) buzzword λεπτότης and because Aratus, not unlike Lucretius a

his posthumous 1990 commentary (pp. 325-33, at 326-30), R. A. B. Mynors lists 13 passages in the Phaenomena that find counterparts in book 1 of the Georgics.

The first scholarly work to mention both (though the second one only in passing: p. 68 n. 18) is Levitan 1979, Plexed Artistry: Aratean Acrostics, which is essential reading; see also Kidd 1981, p. 355 (as well as Kidd 1997, ad Phaen. 2 and 783) and, among the dozens of other shorter and longer discussions, above all Bing 1990 and 1993, pp. 104-108 (the latter a very lightly revised version of the former). By concentrating on Λ-Ε-Π-Τ-Η and ἄφρητον, to which particular attention has been paid, I do not mean to reject (or, for that matter, necessarily to accept) other examples of Aratean wordplay that have been mooted (e.g., by Cusset 1995 and 2002; Rostropowicz 1998, pp. 109-111 and 211-212; and Fakas 1999), including two more acrostics by Levitan himself that I admit to finding attractive (see Levitan 1979, pp. 57-58): the gamma-acrostics Π(άντα)-Α-Σ-Α in 803-806 (note that the first word in 802 is πάντη; similarly, λεπτή is found in 784 as well as 783) and ‘imperfect’ Σ(ημαίνει)-Ε-Μ-ΕΙ-Η in 808-812 (cf. verse-initial σήμαινα in 805). All would-be acrostics in Aratus other than Λ-Ε-Π-Τ-Η are controversial (and even the significance of this one is doubted in a footnote of G. O. Hutchinson that I find very hard to understand [Hutchinson 1988, p. 215 n. 4], as well as being noted with surprising caution by Kidd 1997, ad 2: «If it is right to see a deliberate acrostic in 783-7, …» [p. 164; compare also Kidd 1981, p. 355]), as of course are many, many proposed instances of verbal play in literature the world over: e.g., Kidd 1997, ad 783 is «not convinced that [Levitan’s examples in 803-806 and 808-812] are intentional and significant» (p. 446) and ignores the ‘midway’ syllabic acrostic ΜΕ(σφαι)-ΣΗ (807-808; immediately followed by the further scrambled self-signifying ‘σήμαι’ ΕΣ-ΜΗ in 809-810) proposed by Haslam 1992, p. 201 (half-seriously, but I consider it brilliant); Martin 1998, ad 783-787 (p. [ii.]472) dismisses Levitan’s Π-Α-Σ-Α and Haslam’s ΜΕ-ΣΗ (he does not mention Σ-Ε-Μ-ΕΙ-Η), acknowledging that he has not even read their papers (!); and Danielewicz 2005 lauds Π-Α-Σ-Α and ΜΕ-ΣΗ but finds Σ-Ε-Μ-ΕΙ-Η «less convincing» (p. 321 n. 2) and rejects (most of the) other recent proposals of C. Cusset and J. Rostropowicz (see pp. 321-322 n. 2) before suggesting a host of new Aratean examples on pp. 324-329, the majority of which I will be very surprised to discover win over most other scholars.

As Hunter 2006, p. 146 writes, «Whole literary histories have been spun from Callimachus’ praise for Aratus’ Phainomena and his acknowledgement of the acrostic λεπτή which lies concealed within that poem (Callimachus, Epigram 27[.3-4] …)». Most literary scholars seem to have ignored the important discussion of Cameron 1995, pp. 321-328, who demonstrates that poetic λεπτότης was almost certainly originally associated with Aratus rather than Callimachus (though even in antiquity it quickly became the hallmark of the latter); papyrological work by G. Bastianini, W. Luppe, and others on the would-be phrase ‘κατά λεπτόν’ in verse 11 of the Aetia-prologue (see now Lehnus 2006 for an amusing historia quaestionis of this supplement’s acceptance) neatly vindicates Cameron’s position. See also Volk forthcoming.
couple of centuries later, uses the elements of language to explain the elements of the natural universe, the acrostic now receives nearly obligatory mention in work on the *Phaenomena*, even when it is not in the first place about wordplay. Scholarly recognition that Aratus in effect signs his name in a droll way at the start of his poem (ἐρημητὸν is a ‘speaking name’ that literally means «unspoken») was a decade or two slower in coming, but thanks above all to Douglas Kidd and Peter Bing (see [n. 4 above]), ἐρημητὸν — which evidently harks back to Hesiod’s likewise verse-initial merism ἰητοὶ τ’ ἐρημητοὶ τε «spoken and unspoken» in the proem of the *Works and Days* (4) — is well on its way to achieving the same level of respect accorded to Λ-Ε-Π-Τ-Η.

Since 1963, when Edwin L. Brown set forth the curious case with great flair and originality, it has been generally believed, though sometimes with a raised eyebrow, that Vergil imitates the λεπτή-acrostic in the *Georgics*, and in a way that combines a quasi-acrostic with a signature. The essentials of Brown’s argument for this *interpretatio Romana* are that numerous verbal games in *Georg.* 1.424-437 demonstrate that the poet is engaging in a learnedly playful fashion with the acrostic in Aratus’ certain model for these verses and, furthermore, that Publius Vergilius Maro embeds a quasi-acrostic of his own here by signing his name MA-VE-PV at the

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6 Recent work on Aratus’ complex semiotics, in which form goes hand in hand with content, includes Hunter 1995; Pendergraft 1996; and Volk forthcoming.

7 The form ἐρημητοὶ is a hapax in Hesiod, and it is widely said (e.g., by Kidd 1981, p. 355) to rest on a Homeric hapax as well, ἐρημητοῦ in *Od.* 14.466. The uniqueness of ἐρημητὸν in Homer is, however, a matter of some debate and depends on whether one reads instead ἐρητὸν in verse-initial position in *Il.* 17.37 = 24.741 (cf. also 23.223b), as West 2001, p. 121 assures us we should (suggesting that the translation is «accursed» rather than something like «prayed for»).

8 It is, however, ignored by Jean Martin in his 1998 commentary (compare [n. 4 above]). Cusset 2002, pp. 187-193 suggests that Aratus elsewhere in the poem ‘spells out’ and otherwise finds ways to play with the ‘speaking’ / ‘unspoken’ connotations of his name. It is worth pointing out that Hesiod’s proem itself revels in anaphora and places great emphasis on the rhetorical figure here that inspired Aratus (and also Callimachus at the end of the *Hymn to Zeus* [*Hymn* 1.94-96]: see Schroeder 2005, pp. 161-162 on forms of ἐρητή), specifically the phonetic sequence /r + vowel (+ dental)/, especially in and near verse- (and clause-) initial position: ὅν τε διὰ βροτοὶ ἄνδρες ὡμός ἀφατοὶ τε φατοὶ τε / ῥητοὶ τ’ ἐρημητοὶ τε Διὸς μεγάλου ἐκτητι. / ἰέα {Synizesis!} μὲν γὰρ βριαδεῖ, ἰέα δὲ βριαδοῦτο χαλέπτει, / ἰέα δὲ ἄφιξα διά ὘λικλον μινύθει καὶ ἀδηλωθον ἀλεξεῖ, / ἰέα δὲ τ’ ἱδώνοι σκολοίν ... (Op. 3-7; see, e.g., West 1978, ad 5-7 [p. 139]); note also the preposition διὰ (3) between two occurrences of Zeus’ name, Δι’ (α) (2) and Διὸς (4), though West 1978, ad 3 wonders whether the «collocation may be accidental» (p. 139; compare also ad 1-10 [p. 136]). A fuller analysis of the phonetic and grammatical effects in *Op.* 1-10 may be found in Watkins 1995, pp. 98-101 (see also the references in [n. 23 below]).

9 See Brown 1963, pp. 96-114, esp. 102-105; prominent early support is found in Ross 1975, pp. 28-29. As for the major commentaries on the *Georgics* from the last two decades, Thomas 1988, ad 1.427-437 has a long lemma on Aratus’ acrostic and appears to accept Brown’s claim, writing that «it is difficult to resist»; Mynors 1990 ignores it; and Erren 2003, ad 1.427-437 writes, «Daß das mit Absicht so gemacht ist, dürfte schwer zu erweisen sein» (p. 230).
start of the alternating verses 429, 431, and 433.\(^{10}\) The strangeness is undeniable, and if the whole thing is to be believed, as I think it is,\(^{11}\) one would like to explain such things as why Vergil wrote \textit{ma-ve-pv} rather than \textit{pv-ve-ma} and why he skipped lines doing so.\(^{12}\)

In any event, scholars since Brown have made stabs at refining and augmenting his case. For example, Michael Haslam — in addition to offering the felicitous suggestion about the \textit{Phaenomena} (see \textit{[n. 4 above]} that there is an evenly split syllabic acrostic \textit{me-sz} in 807-808 and that this acts as a signifier of the half-moon (cf. \textit{mβοσα διχασιομενης} [807]) midway between the moon’s full phase (cf. \textit{σκεπτεε δες πληθυν} [799] + \textit{π-α-ζ-α}) and its waning crescent (cf. \textit{διγαδα φθιμενη} … \textit{μηνος άποιχομενου} [809-810] as well as \textit{λ(επτη)-επ-τ-η})\(^{13}\) — looks just ahead to the next two verses in \textit{Georg. 1, sol quoque et exoriens et cum se condet in undas / signa dabit; solem certissima signa sequentur} (438-439), and writes, «The signs emerge into the sunlight, explicit, \textit{certissima}. And let us not forget who gave the signs: unspoken Soleus».\(^{14}\) More recently, Denis Feeney and Damien Nelis have noted that the words \textit{sequentis / ordine respicient} (424-425) «announce the acrostic».\(^{15}\) Of special importance for the present purposes,

\begin{footnote}{\textit{Note also the observation of Ewald 1990 of the unusual scheme of verse-final rhymes right before, in \textit{Georg. 1.398-418; one of the two possible explanations Ewald offers is that «Virgil intended this mannered effect to coincide with his close reworking of material from the artful \textit{Phaenomena} of Aratus, the model for this and the surrounding paragraphs of the poem» (p. 313).}}

\begin{footnote}{\textit{And as do nearly all scholars cited in the text and footnotes of the present and immediately following paragraphs who pronounce on the matter. The exceptions are Mynors (seemingly) and perhaps Erren (see \textit{[n. 9 above]}) and Cameron 1995, p. 327 n. 123 (see also 37-38). Nisbet 1990, p. 262, too, judges it negatively, writing, «though this is the context where Aratus produces the acrostic \textit{λεπτος}, I see no more significance here than at [\textit{Georg. 1.66 'pulverulenta coquat maturis solibus aetas'}]; to this Haslam 1992, p. 203 n. 12 responds, «[B]ut is that [fortuitous occurrence of \textit{pu- … -ver- … -ma-} \textit{ad rem}? Significance is not independent of context}.}}

\begin{footnote}{\textit{See [below in the text, with \textit{n. 43}] for a brief remark on the (mis)order of the \textit{tria nomina}. As for the skipped lines, I know of no explanation and do not have one to propose myself. Can Vergil really have intended a ‘skipped-line acrostic’ \textit{AL-MA-A} in \textit{Aen. 1.1-7} (Heil 2002, pp. 59-61 points it out but suggests that it is «wohl … ein Zufallsakrostichon» [60 n. 150]) or even a ‘skipped-line acrostic-cum-telestich’ \textit{AL-MA-{Roma}E(-)MO-S} (as Damschen 2004, p. 108 n. 64 proposes)? I am skeptical, but the ingenuity is breathtaking. I am not persuaded by the would-be skipped-line acrostic \textit{H-A-E-D-O} in \textit{Ecl. 9.43-51} for which Patrizio Domenicucci pleads in various works (most easily accessible in Domenicucci 1996, pp. 47-60); see on this also Ramsey 2000 and Damschen 2004, p. 108 n. 64).}}

\begin{footnote}{\textit{Damschen 2004, pp. 102-111 is devoted in no small part to demonstrating that «mehrere römische Dichter in der Nachfolge Arats [i.e., his \textit{λεπτη}-acrostic] ihr entweder anti-alexandrinisches oder pro-alexandrinisches Dichtungsprogramm jeweils als ein aus fünf Buchstaben gebildetes Akrostichon in einer Werkstelle versteckt haben, die über den Mond oder die Mondgöttin spricht» (111); he cites would-be examples from Ovid, Grattius, Manilius, and Silius Italicus, at least some of which deserve wide acceptance in my view.}}

\begin{footnote}{\textit{Haslam 1992, pp. 203-204 (quotation on 204).}}

\begin{footnote}{\textit{Feeney and Nelis 2005, pp. 645-646 (quotation on 645).}}
though, is Peter Bing’s cautiously worded suggestion that Vergil is here engaging in his common practice of ‘conflating models’ by alluding in one and the same passage to both Aratus’ acrostic, λ-ε-ι-τ-Η, and his signature, ἄρρητος. As he points out, Vergil would have had precedents for this conflation since one or two Hellenistic Greeks seem in their epigrammatic poems to string together references to both examples of Aratean wordplay as well: Callimachus, certainly, in the intensively studied Epigr. 27 Pfeiffer = 56 Asper = Anth. Pal. 9.507 (compare [n. 5 above]), χαίρετε λεπτάι / βήσιες, Ἀρήτου σύντονος ἄγρυπνη (3-4), and probably also Leonidas of Tarentum, one of whose poems begins, Γράμμα τόδ’ Ἀρήτου δαήμονος, ὡς ποτε λεπτῇ / φροντίδι δηναιους ἀστέρας ἐφράσατο (Anth. Pal. 9.25.1-2).  

16 See Bing 1990, pp. 284-285 and 1993, pp. 107-108, where the author also attempts to explain just what Vergil might be up to with this ‘conflation’ (for the concept he refers to R. F. Thomas). It should be added that Nicander, whose poetry has also influenced the Georgics (including seemingly supplying its title), signs his name with an acrostic in Ther. 345-353 (also, but messily, in Alex. 266-274); Reeve 1996-1997, pp. 245-250, esp. 249-250, gives reasons for believing that it is specifically Nicander’s acrostic in the Theriaca that the Hadrianic Dionysius Periegetes spots and imitates in his hexametric description of the known world, adding (along with caustic remarks about those who «have succumbed to the delusions that beset investigators of such things as acrostics» [250]) that there may also be a little «nod towards another didactic poem, Aratus’s Φαινόμενα» (250). On Vergil’s debt to Nicander, see now Harrison 2004 and the references cited there.

17 There is also a verbal link of sorts already in Aratus: forms of πᾶς, παντ- are exceptionally common in the 18-verse preem (8x) and appear with more than the usual frequency again in and around π(άντα)-α-σ-α (803-806), specifically in verses 797, 802, 803, 805 (bis), and 811 (compare Levitan 1979, pp. 57-58, but see also Cusset 2002, pp. 194-195 on similar polyptoton in verses 465-468/469).


19 See Bing 1990 and 1993, pp. 104-108 (with reference to W. Levitan’s 1983 Texas dissertation on 106 n. 15); Bing’s explanation of Leonidas’ allusion to ἄρρητον involves the enjambed form δεύτερος in verse 4 and, though not easy to reproduce in just a few words here, is compelling (compare especially Cameron 1995, p. 322, as well as p. 321 on how very striking Callimachus’ use of the noun ῥήσις is). Other Hellenistic Greeks pick up on just λ-ε-ι-τ-Η (Ptolemy [Philadelpus?], Suppl. Hell. 712.4) or just ἄρρητον, but not both (the latter only, as far as I know, if Cusset 2005, p. 84 and passim is right to see the vocative Ἄρατε in Theoc. Id. 6.2 as in counterpart with the other speaking vocative, Πολύφαμες [6 and 19], and referring specifically to the author of the Phaenomena — a very controversial opinion [see, e.g., Hunter 1999, p. 243] that is, however, now accepted and extended to Vergil by Prioux 2005, pp. 315-316).
Bing’s idea is certainly attractive. And yet it is remarkable, for at least four reasons, that no one has uncovered what seems to me a far more evident Vergilian rendering of this second prominent example of Aratean wordplay. First of all, since there was a pre-Vergilian tradition of noting that one had spotted ἄρρητον, there is every reason to think that Vergil, who was clearly not immune to the charms of verbal games, would have wished to emulate it as well. Second, a number of modern scholars believe that the word arator in Menalcas’ enigmatic question in Ecl. 3 — in medio duo signa, Conon et — quis fuit alter, / descripsit radio totum qui gentibus orbem, / tempora quae messor, quae curvus arator haberet? (40-42) — points to its answer as ‘Aratus’, but the Eclogues, quite unlike the Georgics, do not appear to have been particularly influenced by Aratus, so is it not surprising that no one has spotted his name in the later work? Third, since at the start of both of his other poems, Vergil recasts with great sophistication the sounds that open his Greek models, there is plenty of reason to imagine that he might do much the same in his middle work: the first Eclogue begins, Tityre, tu patulae …, a nice bit of phonetic play on the (semantically different) beginning of Theocritus’ first Idyll, Ἀδύ τι τὸ ψιθύρισμα και ἄ πτις …, whose repeated /y/’s and /i/’s anyway mimic the sound of the syrinx; and in the Aeneid’s Arma uirumque, which is of course a thematic juxtaposition of Homer’s Μῆνιν (Il. 1.1) and his Ἀνδρα (Od. 1.1), ARMA is phonetically similar (but, again, semantically dissimilar) to

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20 See Prioux 2005 for the latest (but largely derivative) account; especially consequential are the (partly overlapping and apparently independently conceived) papers of Fisher 1982 and Springer 1983-1984, and see also various bracing articles by Godefroid de Callatay (e.g., de Callataý 1992; 1996, pp. 11-13; and 2003, pp. 335-338) as well as O’Hara 1996, pp. 81 n. 335 and 247. All sorts of solutions aside from Aratus are possible — neither of the two standard commentaries on the Eclogues, Coleman 1977 and Clausen 1994, specifically endorses Aratus as a possible answer to quis fuit alter …?, though both (ad 3.40) do mention Eudoxus as one of the options, whose lost prose treatise Phaenomena was a particularly important source for the poet of Soli — and while I consider Aratus to be an especially good response, Henderson 1998, pp. 220-221, 225, and passim is right to stress that «riddles are archetypal hermeneutic traps» and that «A riddle does not have an answer — it has more than one answer» (225; compare Katz 2006, pp. 180-184, with references, on the Hellenistic poet Nicarchus’ version of the Riddle of the Sphinx).

21 Besides arator in Ecl. 3.42, there is one clear allusion to Aratus in the Eclogues, also in the third. As it happens, there is a reason (discussed [below in the text, with n. 32]) why this allusion is exceptionally interesting beyond the fact, which already Servius (ad Ecl. 3.60) noted, that ab Ioue principium Musae: Iouis omnia plena; / ille colit terras, illi mea carmina curae (60-61) is an imitation of the first two verses of the Phaenomena, given below in the text. And then there is Ecl. 3.104-105, Damoetas’ final riddle: if Campbell 1982-1983 and (apparently independently) Hofmann 1985 are to be believed (rather than any of the many prior interpreters or Dix 1995, pp. 259-261 and passim, the most recent scholar, as far as I know, to advance an original view), there is here yet one more hidden reference to the Phaenomena in the poem. Lipka 2001, p. 112 (see also 41, 124, 173 n. 11, and 175) comments on and gives further references to Ecl. 3.40-42 and 60-61 (but he says nothing about Aratus in connection with 104-105), as well as noting a «surprisingly close» rendering of Phaen. 323 in Ecl. 9.44, which, however, «may have been mediated by Cicero’s Aratea».
And fourth, the fact is — and I now turn to the demonstration — that Vergil’s rendering of ἄρρητον into Latin does indeed sit in exactly the same position in the Georgics that the Greek word occupies in the Phaenomena, namely right at the head.

Aratus’ work opens with the following four lines:

Ἐκ Διὸς ἀρχώμεθα, τὸν οὐδέποτ’ ἀνδρές ἔωμεν ἄρρητον. μεσταὶ δὲ Διὸς πάσαι µὲν ἄγυιαί, πάσαι δ’ ἄνθρωπων ἄγοραί, µεστὴ δὲ θάλασσα καὶ λιμένες· πάντῃ δὲ Διὸς κεχρήµεθα πάντες.

Note that this famous beginning and the whole ‘Hymn to Zeus’ (1-18) clearly recalls in both content and form the proem (1-10) of Hesiod’s Works and Days (see [above in the text, with n. 8]) — and Hesiod is, independently, the other most important source, alongside the Phaenomena, for book of 1 of the Georgics (see [n. 3 above]).

And here now are the first four and a-half verses of the Georgics:

Quid faciat laetas segetes, quo sidere terram uertere, Maecenas, ulmisque adiungere uitis conueniat, quae cura boum, qui cultus habendo sit pecori, apibus quanta experientia parcis, hinc canere incipiam.

Servius (ad Georg. 1 praef.) suggests that in the first verse, faciat alludes to Hesiod’s ἔργα («works»), quo sidere to the ἡµέραι («days»). This may well be right. But if Quid … sidere is Hesiodic — in fact, I believe we should say that the first clause (Quid … segetes) is Hesiodic and that quo sidere is a bridge, being both Hesiodic and Aratean — then one might well expect terram / uertere to be Aratean, despite its more obvious semantic connection to Hesiod, whose detailed description of the plough (Op. 427-436) Vergil goes on to imitate in abbreviated form (Georg. 1.169-175). After all, both Aratus and Vergil nod to Hesiod at the very beginning of their respective poems, but Vergil in the Georgics points to Hesiod more through Aratus than directly.

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22 This point about Ecl. 1.1 is well known; see in the first place Pöschl 1964, pp. 10-11 and compare also, e.g., Coleman 1977, ad loc. But recognition that the first word of Aen. 1.1 does much the same thing seems to be absent from the standard commentaries on and studies of the poem; credit here is due to McKeown 1989, ad Ov. Am. 1.1.1-2 (p. 12), as Denis Feeney points out to me.

23 For the relationship between Hesiod and Aratus, see also the detailed studies of Fakas 2001 (with pp. 13-17 on a stylistic comparison between the two proems) and Gallego Real 2004.


25 Mynors 1990, ad loc. writes of sidere that here and elsewhere it «comes very near to meaning simply ‘season’»; but the literal meaning of sidus is of course «heavenly body».

26 Compare, e.g., the words of Thomas 1988, vol. 1, p. 6 (with reference in n. 16 to C. Hardie): «In spite of Virgil’s designation of the poem as an Ascraeum carmen …, explicit reference to Hesiod is limited … Hesiod is more of a notional model, important for Virgil because of his importance to the Alexandrians». 
Consider now nothing more than the first line plus the first word of the second line of these two poems — or, more exactly, just the last word of each first line and the enjambed first word of the second: ἐῶ / ἄρρητον and terram / uertere. There are five interlocking points to make about Vergil’s ‘translation’, which despite the apparently ‘prosy’ style («The Georgics begins with a simplicity of vocabulary and word order that would be natural enough to prose»27) turns out to be a poetic jewel.

— (1) The phrase terram uertere, literally «to turn the earth», would not seem to be terribly interesting: we find in the first Georgic also uersando terram (119) and uertere terram (147).28 However, it is the ‘suppressed’ equivalent of arare «to plough» (see Servius, ad Georg. 1.2), whose past participle is, of course, aratus.29 In other words, Vergil signals his debt to Aratus in exactly the same place in the Georgics that Aratus signs his own name — also in a suppressed way, though less so — in the Phaenomena.30 This may be seen as a ‘step up’ from the similar allusion to Aratus in Ecl. 3.60-61 (see [n. 21 above]), Damoetas’ initial two-line parry in the singing-match with Menalcas, which closely follows the opening two verses of the Phaenomena.

As Michael Lipka writes, «Three aspects [of Arataus’ poem] were imitated by Vergil [in Ecl. 3.60-61], (a) the phrase ἐκ Διὸϛ ἀρχῶμεσθα which is similarly found at Theoc. [Id.] 17.1 (both based on a common source or the one influencing the other?), (b) the motif of abundance (plena / μεσται), (c) the aspect of universality (omnia / πᾶσαι)»31 — but there is a fourth point of contact besides, namely that ille colit terras at the start of the second verse hides Aratus’ name.32

— (2) The verb uertere, usually translated simply as «to turn», is known to be a metapoetic

27 Ross 1987, p. 32.
28 Note also terrae / … solum … / … inuertant tauri (63-65).
29 On Vergilian ‘suppression’, especially of personal names, see above all O’Hara 1996, pp. 79-82; note, too, various papers in the conference volume What’s in a Name?: The Significance of Proper Names in Classical Latin Literature (Booth and Maltby [eds.] 2006). It should perhaps be noted that the ‘real’ (i.e., scientific) etymology of Aratus’ name, Ἄρατος, in addition to having nothing to do with the negative adjective ἄρρητος, may well not involve «ploughing» (cf. ἀροῦν, arare) either but rather be connected to ἀρᾶσθαι «to pray» (compare [n. 7 above]).
30 Erren 2003, ad loc. writes «terram vertere, anschaulich für arare» (p. 6) but fails to mention Aratus; neither Thomas 1988 nor Mynors 1990 says anything at all about either terram or uertere.
31 Lipka 2001, p. 112 (footnotes omitted). I am inclined to believe that Theocritus’ Ἐκ Διὸϛ ἀρχῶμεσθα is an echo of Aratus (see above all Fantuzzi 1980 and see now also Hunter 2003, ad Id. 17.1 [pp. 98-99], with further references).
32 The reference to Aratus is surely there even though ille refers grammatically to Jove. Neither of the standard commentaries on the Eclogues makes this point about ille colit terras, and no other work I have seen does so either: Coleman 1977, ad 3.61 writes little more than that colit means «cares for», ‘sustains’ rather than merely ‘dwells in’» and Clausen 1994 refrains from any comment on the verse; this silence is perhaps not so surprising in view of the fact (see [n. 20 above]) that neither scholar promotes Aratus as the answer to Menalcas’ question in 3.40-42.
terminus technicus for «to translate». Vergil is thus explicitly sending a signal that his words translate ἅρρητον.

— (3) This translation involves an actual linguistic turn: Greek ARRET- (ἈΡΡΗΤ-) is the inverse of Latin TERRA, right down to the geminate RR (and each word appears in the accusative singular, with its characteristic nasal inflectional ending). What is more, the Latin verb uertere has effectively the opposite meaning of the Greek verb ἔαν «to leave alone, let (alone), allow»; Vergil’s terram / uertere (NOUN / VERB) reverses Aratus’ order VERB / NOMINAL (ἐῶµεν / ἅρρητον); and even the subject matter is inverted, so to speak, since Aratus’ poem is about the stars and Vergil’s about the land. (Clearly Hesiod’s merism is being played out here: names are simultaneously ῥητοὶ τ’ ἅρρητοι τε.)

— (4) It is striking that both poems have a single enjambed word in the second verse: ἅρρητον and uertere. Naturally, enjambment calls attention to itself, highlighting the word(s) in question. Kidd writes of the whole phrase in Aratus that it «seems curiously contrived, as if designed to lead up to the word ἅρρητον, emphatically placed at the beginning of the next line and followed by a strong sense pause». As for Vergil’s imitation, the Roman poet goes one step further: the first four verses of the Georgics — which famously summarize, line by line, the

33 The 24th and final definition of uertō in the OLD is «a To render into another language, translate (words, an author, etc.). b to render into another form of words, paraphrase or sim.»; compare Richter 1938, pp. 11-12 (various Latin verbs for «to translate» are discussed on pp. 10-15) and Traina 1989, with a wonderful bibliography. A particularly well-known paragraph on metapoeitic uertere is Hinds 1998, pp. 61-62 on Livius Andronicus’ rendering of πολύτροπον in Hom. Od. 1.1 as uersutum (Od. fr. 1).

34 That the e-vowel in the Greek is long need hardly trouble us.

35 I note in passing that Muse 2005 makes an excellent case for a Vergilian example of Greek-inspired play with the noun terra in Aen. 4.271. To Muse’s account of what lies behind Mercury’s aggressive question to Aeneas, aut qua spe Libycis teris otia terris?, I would add only that the verse begins with another, and very short, question, quid struis?, which might act as a metapoetic signal of the paronomasia to come: teris followed by terris.

36 Of course the verb is negated in Aratus, leading (with ἅ-ρρητον) to a double negative. Kidd 1981, p. 355 notes that «[t]he idiom with ἔαν and negative», used also by Plato in Leg. 793β3 (οὔτε ἅρρητα ἔαν), «may have been a familiar expression» (compare Kidd 1997, ad Phaen. 2 [p. 164]).

37 As is well known, already Aratus’ use of ἅρρητον «retourne donc la pensée d’Hésiode» (italics added) since in Hesiod «c’est Zeus qui fait que les hommes sont … célèbres ou inconnus» while in Aratus «ce sont les hommes qui ne laissent pas Zeus non dit» (Martin 1998, ad loc. [p. (ii).141]). Compare also Kidd 1981, p. 355; Bing 1990, p. 282, with n. 2 and 1993, p. 105, with n. 12; Cusset 1999, p. 291; and Fakas 2001, pp. 15 n. 35 and 34, with n. 98. And see [n. 8 above].

38 Note that the other collocations of uertere plus terra (see point (1) above in the text) do not involve enjambment.

thrust of his four-book poem — all have enjambment.  

— (5) And finally, Vergil pulls off a tour de force in hiding a translation of Aratus’ name in *terra* / *uertere* since he signals his own gentiliciun, vergilius, as the ‘inverting’ translator at the very same time: *uertere* (cf. likewise verse-initial *ventus* in *Georg.* 1.431, the last part of the Aratus-inspired signature MA-VE-PV) is *in exactly the same spot* as *ARRETON.* Furthermore, the other Latin word, *terra*, contains in its six letters not just *ARRE-*, backwards, but (as my student Eiríkur Kristjánsson points out) also overlapping *MAR-*, as in Vergil’s cognomen, *MARI* (cf. *MAXIMUS* in *Georg.* 1.429): *MARRET* / *uertere* (chiastically reading ← at the end of the one line and → at the start of the next).  

(I am tempted to suggest that Vergil’s purpose in flipping MA-VE-PV is to remind his readers of in-VER-ted ARRET- and MAR- at the start of the same poem.  

Some of «MD»’s referees are not persuaded, however, and so I omit the argument.)
Since the very next word is the name of Vergil’s patron, the first one and a-half verses of the Georgics thus present a tightly meshed and really quite extraordinary genealogy: *Quid faciat laetas segetes* = Hesiod; *quo sidere* = both Hesiod and Aratus; *terram / uertere* = both Aratus and Vergil; and *Maecenas* = himself — who is receiving this poem from Vergil, who received it from Aratus, who received it in turn from Hesiod (and the latter two got their material from on high, be it from Zeus or the Muses). It may be noted, too, that there is a ring between Georg. 1.1-2 and the sphragis that closes Georg. 4 (559-566), in which Vergil — uniquely in his œuvre — mentions himself by name in a standard fashion: *Vergilium* (563).

Aratus says, «Let us begin with Zeus» and then, in the second verse, slips himself in, too: evidently it is not just Zeus whose name should never leave «unspoken». Still (or so I imagine Vergil must have felt), why should Aratus be alone in second place after the high god? So when he took up the task of composing the Georgics — having already artfully emulated a Greek incipit at the start of his first Eclogue and probably not yet knowing that he would do much the same in the Aeneid (see above) — Vergil fought likewise against the ignominy of

cum primum (427) may be thought to point out that the acrostic runs backwards); compare also Haslam 1992, pp. 202-203. But no one has considered why Vergil would have done this in the first place.

44 Compare Gale 2001, an interesting article titled *Etymological Wordplay and Poetic Succession in Lucretius*. And to some extent compare also Possanza 2004, p. 157 n. 6 on Avien(i)us’ translation of Aratus: «Avienius takes the translator’s internal reference to the author of the Phaenomena a step further [than Germanicus; see [n. 48 below]] by mentioning not only Aratus (64-66) but also Aratus’s source, Eudoxus of Cnidus (53-54). Thus by means of the authorial sequence Eudoxus — Aratus — Avienius (*me quoque* 67), Avienius writes himself into the history of Greek astronomy and astronomical poetry».

45 The final verse of the Georgics (4.566) is also almost identical to the first verse of Ecl. 1. (For the Hellenistic-inspired numerological game that Vergil seems to be playing in verse 561, see [n. 47 below].) Hesiod names himself once, near the start of the Theogony (Ἑσίόδον [22]), and it is widely believed (see above all Nagy 1999, pp. 296-297) that other nearby verses play with the idea that Ἑσίόδος is literally a ‘speaking name’ meaning something like «Sender of Song / Voice» (vel sim.); if there is anything to this analysis, even just as a folk etymology, then it is all the more striking that Aratus should stress that his name means the inverse, «unspoken» (compare Bing 1990, p. 283 n. 3 and 1993, p. 106 n. 14).

46 Note that ἄρρητοι (mortals; see [n. 37 above]) and Δί- seem both to be played with in the proem to the Works and Days (see [n. 8 above]).

47 In the present context it seems right to point explicitly to the inversions in Vergil’s *Arma virumque vis* à-vis its Homeric models (for a number of very interesting complementary observations, see Weber 1987, pp. 269-271 and passim): while (1) the first word corresponds to the first word of the first epic poem (the Iliad) and the second word to the first of the second (the Odyssey), (2) Vergil’s first six books are Odyssean and last six books are Iliadic and (3) ARMA, which is Iliadic, corresponds in sound to Greek ἌΝ-ΡΑ, which is Odyssean (see [above in the text, with n. 22]) — indeed, the Latin word is very nearly the inverse of the Greek (whose base form lacks the delta: ἄνηρ). (This is to say nothing of the would-be acrostic-cum-telestich referred to in [n. 12 above].) Note also the echo of Μῆνιν in the first bit of speech in Vergil’s epic poem, the wrathful Juno’s *mene incepto* (1.37), as pointed out by Levitan 1993 (see also
oblivion. Of course Vergil has been anything but forgotten. And yet it has taken more than 2,000 years for his sly signature to be spotted.\footnote{Did any of the Latin translators of Aratus see it (or Arabic [see Honigmann 1950] — but this is beyond my competence)? Avien(i)us did not, as far as I can tell, but what about Cicero (whose interest in verbal games is clear from \textit{Div.} 2.111-112; see now Gore and Kershaw 2008), Ovid, and Germanicus? Unfortunately, we do not have verses 1b-2 of Cicero’s version (I shall consider elsewhere an unnoticed example of linguistic play in the incipit, \textit{fr.} 1a), and only five lines of Ovid’s \textit{Phaenomena} have come down to us (none helpful for the present issue, and the same is true for the nine lines that seem to be from Varro of Atax’ \textit{Ephemeris}). It is probably a case of trying too hard to read a quasi-signature in \textit{carminis} at the start of verse 2 of Germanicus’ \textit{Aratea} — \textit{Ab ioue principium magno deduxit Aratus / carminis; at nobis, genitor, tu maximus auctor} (1-2) — though Montanari Caldini 1981, pp. 112-114 and 1987, p. 156 sees verse-final \textit{auctor} in the same line as pointing to \textit{Augustus} (compare also Zehnacker 1989, p. 321) and though some editors (notably Le Bœuffle 1975, p. 1, whose text I print here; see also, e.g., Maurach 1978, p. 24, with further references) treat \textit{carminis} as strongly enjambed and thus belonging syntactically with the words in verse 1, which ends with nothing other than the name \textit{Aratus} (but Gain 1976, pp. 21 and 53 punctuates differently, as does, e.g., Possanza 2004, p. 106). The dedicatee of this paper, in a well-known article, considers the relationship between the start of Germanicus’ poem and Ov. \textit{Fast.} 5.111 (and also Manil. 1.386, which ends \textit{maximus auctor}; note verse-initial \textit{Augusto} in the previous line): see Fantham 1985, pp. 254-256, with 277.}}

Works Cited


O’Hara 1996, pp. 115-116; Fowler 1997, pp. 259-260; and Nelis 2004, pp. 91, 95, and 101-102 n. 54). In fact, the second half of the \textit{Aeneid} begins not in 7.1 but rather with the invocation of Erato in 7.37 (the start of the ‘second proem’), and Nelis 2007 suggests that the reappearance of verse 37 is not accidental. He thus gives us the latest in a long line of possible numerological games that have occupied some Vergilians and Arateans: e.g., is Vergil’s consistent positioning of the name of the river Euphrates six lines from the end of whatever book it appears in (\textit{Georg.} 1.509 and 4.561 and \textit{Aen.} 8.726) significant and a sign of Hellenistic learning? (yes, in my view; see Scodel and Thomas 1984 [\textit{~ Thomas} 1999, p. 320; compare also Thomas 1988, ad \textit{Georg.} 1.509], as well as Clauss 1988); is it mere chance that Maecenas is mentioned by name once in each of the four \textit{Georgics} in what looks like a pattern (1.2, 2.41, 3.41, and 4.2)? (unclear; Thomas 1988, ad locc. thinks the «placement» is «careful» [ad 2.41]); and is $\Lambda$-$\varepsilon$-$\pi$-$\tau$-$\eta$ isopsephic as well as alphabetic? (surely not; but see Scarcia 1993). However, since history (or at least Wilkinson 1969, pp. 316-322) has not always been kind to Princetonians associated with such ideas (witness George E. Duckworth and Edwin L. Brown: the former advised the Princeton doctoral dissertation that became Brown 1963), perhaps I had better stop with that.
Fontaine 2006: M. Fontaine, Sicilicissitat (Plautus, Menaechmi 12) and Early Geminate Writing in Latin (with an Appendix on Men. 13), «Mnemosyne» 59, pp. 95-110.


