PURSUING ACROSTICS IN OVID AND VERGIL

or

Looking Edgeways. Pursuing Telestics and Acrostics in Latin Epic's Extremities

Pursuing acrostics

To briefly state my approach to acrostics,[1] for which I argue in detail elsewhere: I believe it can be helpful to think about acrostics in the same way that we think about allusion and

[1] For recent surveys of classical acrostics and acrostic scholarship, see J.T. Katz, 'The Muse at Play: An Introduction', in J. Kwapisz, D. Petrain, and M. Szymański (eds.), *The Muse at Play. Riddles and Wordplay in Greek and Latin Poetry* (Berlin, 2013), 1-30, with updates in his chapter 'Another Vergilian Signature in the *Georgics*?', in P. Mitsis and I. Ziogas (eds.), *Wordplay and Powerplay in Latin Poetry* (Berlin, 2016), 69-85; C. Luz, *Technopaignia. Formspiele in der griechischen Dichtung* (Leiden; Boston, 2010), 1-77 (mainly on Greek acrostics); G. Damschen, 'Das Lateinische Akrostichon', *Philologus* 148 (2004), 88-115. Still useful are E. Courtney, 'Greek and Latin Acrostichs', *Philologus* 134 (1990), 3-13 and E. Vogt, 'Das Akrostichon in der griechischen Literatur', *A&A* 13 (1967), 80-95. I. Hilberg, 'Ist die *Ilias Latina* von einem Italicus verfasst oder einem Italicus gewidmet?', *WSt* 21 (1899), 264-305, in which the author lists thousands of acrostics in Latin hexameters that he has identified (but rejected as 'accidental') is still of some interest; he added a two-page update in the same journal the following year (at 317-18). As for J. Simon, *Akrosticha bei den augustischen Dichtern*, (Köln, 1899), while it contains some moments of interest, the claim by Hilberg (1899 above) at 270 that it is a work 'not of philological but rather pathological interest' is not entirely without foundation.

intertextuality, particularly in two key areas. The first concerns authorial intention: its underlying importance in many discussions of acrostics mirrors a similar importance in discussions of allusion some years ago. In the latter case, there was a general move away from explicit appeals to authorial intention and from use of the intention-bearing term 'allusion' to the supposedly more objective 'intertextuality' and text-based 'intertexts'. Even if on this new approach the nature of arguments in support of a textual correspondence changed very little, and even if the intention-bearing author was in fact never far beneath the surface for many of us, this greater focus on the text did have some effect: it encouraged readers who might otherwise have dismissed certain features of a text as fortuitous to submit those features to greater intellectual scrutiny. Some suggestions did not convince; some indeed were wildly fanciful; but overall, this has been a very productive approach for modern scholarship. I do not propose to discuss the topic of authorial intention or intertextuality versus allusion here: rather I want to suggest that the lesson that can be learnt from these debates is that we should embrace the interpretative possibilities offered by a text—with suitable intellectual rigour, of course: an open mind need not equate to open floodgates.

Second, the reading practice for many of us working on Latin literature (particularly Latin poetry) is to read the text in constant pursuit of allusions or intertexts, and this has again proved productive. This approach often assumes, implicitly or explicitly, the existence of a type of ancient reader (the 'learned reader') who employed a similar reading practice, a reader also in pursuit of allusions and who in their reception of the text was able to create the same kind of meaning that we do. My approach is to adopt a similar reading practice with reference to acrostics, and to assume that the ancient 'learned reader' was also in the habit of reading texts in pursuit of acrostics, and was sensitive to them. Given that all writers are presumably readers of their own texts prior to circulation, this entails that a (learned) writer

would have been aware of the acrostics in their own text, even those which occurred by chance during the process of composition. As with allusion, any acrostic that the author felt to be problematic or out of place could have been removed; those that remain in the text do so with the tacit approval of the author, whatever the circumstances of their creation.

What follows is an attempt to put the above approach into practice, to see if it bears any fruit. In presenting a number of acrostics and telestics that to my knowledge have not been noticed before, I hope to show not only that this is a productive reading strategy, and one that can significantly enhance our interpretation of the text, but also that it can raises some interesting questions about how the ancient reader read their text.

Beginnings, Middles, and Ends

Poets often use the beginning, the middle, and the end of their works not only to announce explicitly their theme or put a seal to their work, but also to reflect on the nature of their poetic project, and to triangulate their generic or literary affiliations via intertextual reference to earlier texts. The dense metapoetic and allusive content of these structurally significant moments invite and have received close attention. In this section, I want to see what happens when we expand that attention to the edges of the text.

I want to begin with Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* a text which takes particular delight in playing with a reader's conceptions and expectations regarding beginnings and – in particular – endings, constantly resisting closure. Indeed, it is a poem that is particularly focused on boundaries and their subversion: boundaries of form, of genre, of narrative, and of the

physical book roll.[2] In a gesture to this Ovidian subversion, I want to begin at the end of the poem; and (by way of introduction) with an acrostic that has already been noticed.

The close of the *Metamorphoses*, as Barchiesi has shown, is particularly and playfully complex: the final book seems to be always marking closure, but the story keeps going—the narrator has "elaborated an interminable ending".[3] However, when we do finally get to the very end of the poem, and when Ovid does finally begin his poetic seal, which he marks with a number of intertextual references to other closural texts,[4] he takes great delight in further complicating its closure:

> iamque opus exegi, quod nec Iovis ira nec ignis
> nec poterit ferrum nec edax abolere vetustas.
> cum volet, illa dies, quae nil nisi corporis huius
> ius habet, incerti spatium mihi finiat aevi:

[2] For the latter, cf. e.g. A. Barchiesi, 'Narrative technique and narratology in the *Metamorphoses*', in P. Hardie (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid* (Cambridge, 2002), 180-99, at 187: "We cannot gain an overview of the story as a whole, and even when we turn to the individual tales, beginning as they do in mid-sentence and mid-hexameter, straddling book divisions, and framing each other, they resist separation and reordering". See also A. Barchiesi, 'Endgames: Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 15 and *Fasti* 6', in D.H. Roberts, F.M. Dunn, and D.P. Fowler (eds.), *Classical Closure. Reading the End in Greek and Latin Literature* (Princeton, 1997), 181-208.

[3] Barchiesi ('Endgames', n. 2), 184.

[4] Cf. e.g. P. Hardie (ed.), *Ovidio: Metamorfosi, Volume VI: Libri XIII-XV* (Milan, 2015), ad loc.

parte tamen meliore mei super alta perennis 875
astra ferar, nomenque erit indelebile nostrum,
quaque patet domitis Romana potentia terris,
ore legar populi, perque omnia saecula fama,
siquid habent veri vatum praesagia, vivam.

Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 15.871-9

> And now my work is done, which neither the wrath of Jove, nor fire, nor sword, nor the gnawing tooth of time shall ever be able to undo. When it will, let that day come which has no power save over this mortal frame, and end the span of my uncertain years. Still in my better part I shall be borne immortal far beyond the lofty stars and I shall have an undying name. Wherever Rome's power extends over the conquered world, I shall have mention on men's lips, and, if the prophecies of bards have any truth, through all the ages shall I live in fame.
> (tr. Miller)

Having promised in the opening lines to bring the poem down to 'my times' (1.4 *mea… tempora*), it becomes clear that Ovid's times will in fact last forever (875 *perennis*, 879 *uiuam*).[5] Furthermore, as Barchiesi has noted, the very words that announce that the work is

[5] D. Feeney, '*Mea tempora*: Patterning of Time in the *Metamorphoses*', in P. Hardie, A. Barchiesi, and S. Hinds (eds.), *Ovidian Transformations: Essays on the Metamorphoses and its Reception* (Cambridge, 1999), 13-30, at 30.

finished (*iamque opus exegi*) begin an (unfinished) acrostic INCIP- (the root of the verb 'begin').[6]

So there is evidence for acrostic playfulness at the very end of the poem – and also at the very beginning, as I and others have argued elsewhere.[7] However, I believe that we can find evidence for similar playfulness – and the first of the new acrostic/telestics I want to propose - not in the first but the second proem to the work,[8] which starts at 1.452.

This passage introduces the theme of *amor* in to the *Metamorphoses*, whose role in the text will be as central as the word itself is to the *Met**amor**phoses*, providing the motivating force behind a significant number of the metamorphoses that we will encounter. As Miller

[6] Barchiesi ('Endgames', n. 2), 195. For the possibility that this incomplete INCIP- acrostic looks to an incomplete DESIN- acrostic in Catullus 36 (in which Catullus consigns the epic *Annales* of Volusius to the flames) see below.

[7] Simon (n. 1), 227, notes (but does not interpret) a NESO telestic at 1.10-13 (he emends line 11 to produce NASO), followed by an ERATO telestic at 1.14-18; he also notes a DEUS acrostic at 29-32. Damschen (n. 1), 97, n. 30, notes that *deorum* ends line 32, the line that ends the acrostic *DEUS*, thus forming a (sort of) gamma acrostic. Elsewhere I attempt to interpret the coincidence of ERATO with a (ridiculous) MUS acrostic at 1.14-16. I owe the Simon reference to Talitha Kearey.

[8] For the idea at the introduction of *amor* marks a new phase in the *Met*, cf. e.g. E. Fantham, *Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Oxford, 2004), 122, for whom it marks 'a new beginning'; the same phrase in K. Volk, *Ovid* (Malden, MA, 2010), 48.

comments, the 'story marks an important new beginning, the (abrupt) announcement of what is to be one of the whole poem's principal subjects'.[9]

> Primus amor Phoebi Daphne Peneia, quem non
> fors ignara dedit, sed saeva Cupidinis ira,
> Delius hunc nuper, victa serpente superbus,
> viderat adducto flectentem cornua nervo 455
> 'quid' que 'tibi, lascive puer, cum fortibus armis?'
> dixerat: 'ista decent umeros gestamina nostros…

> Now the first love of Phoebus was Daphne, daughter of Peneus, the river-god. It was no blind chance that gave this love, but the malicious wrath of Cupid. Delian Apollo, while still exulting over his conquest of the serpent, had seen him bending his bow with tight-drawn string, and had said: "What hast thou to do with the arms of men, thou wanton boy? That weapon befits my shoulders…

Miller has shown how this passage (as befits a [second] proem) is "richly inscribed with allusions to literary beginnings: namely the openings of the *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, and *Aeneid*, the start of the war in Vergil's epic, the transition from Delian to Pythian story in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, the beginning of Propertius' first book of elegies, and (most famously) Ovid's own *Amores* 1.1".[10] This introduction of *amor/Amor* is a key and complex moment in

[9] J.F. Miller, 'Primus Amor Phoebi', *CW* 102 (2009), 168-72, at 168. Cf. also A. Barchiesi and L. Koch (eds.), *Ovidio: Metamorfosi, Volume I. Libri I-II* (Milan, 2005), on *Met.* 1.452.

[10] Miller (n. 9), 168. Cf. also W.S.M. Nicoll, 'Cupid, Apollo, and Daphne (Ovid, *Met.* 1. 452 ff.)', *CQ* 30 (1980), 174-82.

terms of the generic identity of the *Metamorphoses*: the savage anger of Juno that drives forward the epic *Aeneid* is recalled in the savage anger of Cupid (which will drive forward the epic *Metamorphoses*), but it simultaneously recalls Ovid's enforced rejection of the epic *arma* of the *Aeneid* for the elegiac metre of the *Amores* in *Amores* 1.1.

It seems entirely appropriate that it is at this moment in the poem, when epic and elegy are first confronted, when the poet's past finds itself in the poet's present, that Ovid chooses to reveal himself, not at the beginning of the line, but at the end, with the telestic in lines 452-5 spelling "NASO". This textual revelation of the poet's presence is immediately followed by another, as Apollo's words to Cupid (*'quid' que 'tibi, lascive puer, cum fortibus armis…*) recall Ovid's own angry response to the same god on being forced to write elegy: (*Amores* 1.1.5f. *Quis tibi, saeve puer, dedit hoc in carmina iuris? / Pieridum vates, non tua turba sumus*).[11]

It is worth adding that ancient readers were familiar with the idea of an authorial signature encoded in an acrostic: we find acrostic signatures in a number of authors (e.g. Nicander, the

[11] Apollo also suggests that Cupid should just concern himself with *Amores* at 1.461: on which see Barchiesi (n. 9) ad loc. Stephen Heyworth suggests to me that we could read *lasciue puer* as a reference to Ovid himself, especially if Quintillian's frequent descriptions of Ovid as *lasciuus* reflect contemporary criticism (c.f. e.g. *IO* 4.1.77; 10.1.88; 10.1.93); cf. also Sen. *Nat. Quaest.* 3.27.14, who uses the verb *lasciuire* in criticising Ovid's description of the flood. On this reading, Apollo's criticism gains even greater relevance to the elegiac Ovid's attempt at epic.

author of the *Ilias Latina*, and others)[12] and hear about them in several more (e.g. Ennius);[13] scholars have also suggested authorial signatures encoded by other kinds of word play.[14] One

[12] Our oldest extant example could be an acrostic signature in the 4th century BC tragic poet Chairemon: we have a fragment of papyrus containing lines which appear to be attributed to him (*TrGF* 1.71 F14b = P.Hibeh II.224): the initial letters are missing in the final lines, but those that survive spell ΧΑΙΡΗΜ. See Luz (n. 1), 7-14. As regards Nicander, we find the acrostic ΝΙΚΑΝΔΡΟΣ at *Theriaca* (345-53), and again (almost) in his *Alexipharmaca* at 266-74, where we find ΣΙΚΚΝΔΡΟΣ; various emendations of the latter have been suggested to produce ΝΙΚΑΝΔΡΟΣ. On these acrostics, see E. Lobel, 'Nicander's Signature', *CQ* 22 (1928), 114-14, who first noted them; Luz (n. 1), 16-22; and F. Overduin, *Nicander of Colophon's Theriaca: a literary commentary* (Leiden, 2015), on 345-353. The text known as the *Ilias Latina* contains (depending on one's preferred emendation) the acrostic *ITALICUS* or *ITALICOS* or *ITALICE* at its beginning and *SCRIPSIT* at its end; some have also argued for a mesostich in the first few lines too, spelling *PIERIS*. Hilberg (n. 1) produced his famous list of acrostics as a response to this topic. For more recent discussion, see M. Scaffai, *Baebii Italici Ilias Latina* (2 edn., Bologna, 1997). Courtney (n. 1) at 12–13 wonders if Italicus was happy to have a partially defective acrostic (*ITALICES*); R.S. Kilpatrick, 'The "Ilias Latina" Acrostic: a Milder Remedy', *Latomus* 51 (1992), 857-59 suggests *ITALICOS*; and C. Schubert, 'Ein Zeugnis aus Neros Dichterkreis? Zu den Kryptogrammen der Ilias Latina', *WJA* 23 (1999), 137-41 suggests *ITALICOS PIERIS … SCRIPSIT*. There are also two geographical poets whose works contain acrostic signatures, both called Dionysius: one thought to belong to the 1st century BC (Dionysius, son of Calliphon), for whom see Luz (n. 1), 22-25: his signature acrostic occurs at the beginning of the poem; the other thought to belong to the 2nd century AD (Dionysius Periegetes), for whom see Luz at 52-58.

of the more famous/infamous (depending on one's perspective) examples of this is the authorial signature that has been suggested at *Georgics* 1.429-33, which translates the passage of Aratus' *Phaenomena* that contains his famous ΛΕΠΤΗ.[15] There the claim is that the first syllables of the alternate lines 429, 431, and 433, which give MA-VE-PU, represent the poet's full name **PU**blius **VE**rgilius **MA**ro in reverse.[16] I have no intention of getting into that

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[13] According to Cicero (*De Div.* 2.111f.) Ennius also included an acrostic signature in one of his works: *quae ἀκροστιχίς dicitur, cum deinceps ex primis versuum litteris aliquid conectitur, ut in quibusdam Ennianis : 'Q. Ennius fecit.'* ('…in what are termed 'acrostics,' wherein the initial letters of each verse taken in order convey a meaning; as, for example, in some of Ennius's verses, 'Q. Ennius wrote it.'). Suetonius claims at *de Gramm.* 6 that Aurelius Opillius (early 1st century BC) signed his name in an acrostic in his *Pinax*. Diogenes (*Lives* 8.78) records that Epicharmus (6th century B.C.) put acrostics in his works as proof of his authorship, but we do not know what form those acrostics took; and ironically, those particular texts are not thought to be genuine. For further examples, see Damschen (n. 1), 92, n. 9.

[14] Authorial signatures have also been detected via other word-games: cf. e.g. ἄρρητον as a signature for Aratus at *Phaen.* 2, on which see W. Levitan, 'Plexed Artistry: Aratean Acrostics', *Glyph* 5 (1979), 55-68, at 68, n.18 and more recently J.T. Katz, 'Vergil Translates Aratus: Phaenomena 1-2 and Georgics 1.1-2', *MD* (2008), 105-23, who sees a translingual play on Aratus' name at the beginning of the *Georgics*; and an Propertian signature in line 2 of the sphragis poem that closes the first book (1.22) *quaeris **pro** nostra sem**per** amici**tia**,* on which see H. Dettmer, 'A Poetic Signature in Propertius 1.22.2?', *LCM* 13 (1988), 55-56.

[15] At *Phaen.* 783-7.

[16] On this passage, see E. Brown, *Numeri Vergiliani. Studies in Eclogues and Georgics* (Brussels, 1963), 102-105; D. Feeney and D. Nelis, 'Two Virgilian Acrostics: Certissima

particular passage here, but it is interesting to note that in Ovid's signature passage we find a recurrence of the *cornua* that are thought to be an important sign-post to the acrostic in the *Georgics* passage,[17] and these are found in conjunction not with the Phoebe of the *Georgics*

Signa?', *CQ* 55 (2005), 644-46.; J. Katz (2016, n. 1). A number of arguments for the significance of this acrostic have been proposed: we find verbs encouraging us to look in sequence (*si … sequentis / ordine respicies* 424f.); hints that the 'acrostic' is reversed have been found in *luna reuertentis* and in the fact that Vergil reverses the order of the Aratus passage; before the final syllable of the acrostic we are told *is certissimus auctor*. Furthermore, in adding the detail of the virginal blush to Aratus in the *uirgineum* of line 430, it has been argued that Vergil is here glancing at his nick-name Parthenias. M. Haslam, 'Hidden Signs: Aratus Diosemeiai 46ff., Vergil *Georgics* 1.424ff', *HSCP* 94 (1992), 199-204. sees hidden signs in anagrams of *ignis* and *si nig-* at 427f., and also a glance to Aratus with *sol … signa dabit* (Aratus of Soli or Aratus Soleus). T. Somerville, 'Note on a Reversed Acrostic in Vergil *Georgics* 1.429-33', *CPh*105 (2010), 202-9, notes that Vergil's use of a syllabic acrostic looks to Aratus' use of one at *Phaen.* 807-8; J. Danielewicz, 'Vergil's *certissima signa* Reinterpreted: The Aratean *lepte*-Acrostic in *Georgics* 1', *Eos* 100 (2013), 287-95. has suggested that we catch of glimpse of LEPTE in the PTE of 432-5, which we can complete with an 'L' and an 'E' from elsewhere. More convincing perhaps is his suggestion of a reverse acrostic at 439-443, giving (reading upwards) SCIES, with the final letter of the acrostic in 439 being the first letter of SIGNA, i.e. *scies signa*.

[17] The Aratus passage encourages us 'to look between (or on each side of) the moon's horns' (778), and the acrostic is enclosed between mentions of these horns. Similarly in the *Georgics* passage, the acrostic is to be found if we look 'between the horns' (the word *cornu* 'horn' ends line 428, immediately before the first syllable; and the word *cornibus* is the penultimate word in line 433, the final line of the 'acrostic').

but her brother, Phoebus. Be that as it may, that Ovid claims at the start of the telestic that 'this did not happen by chance' (452f. *non / fors ignara dedit*) might offer some further textual reassurance for its significance.[18]

The reader on the look-out for intertextual play at the beginning(s) and the end of the *Metamorphoses* is rewarded with clear echoes of important structural moments from other texts. However, as we have seen, readers on the look-out for acrostics or telestics are also rewarded. One might begin to wonder whether such textual play was another way by which these structural moments were marked.

With this in mind, let us remind ourselves that if the end and (second) beginning are important moments for an author (and reader), so too is the middle.[19] Space allows only for the briefest mention of this topic, but it is one to which I hope to return in more detail at another time.

As the central book of the *Metamorphoses*, it is no surprise to find that Book 8 is full of authorial self-reflection, in both the senses of the word – that is to say, both musings on and

[18] The reaction of Heracleides when confronted with an acrostic he chose not to believe (Diog. Laert. *Lives* 5.93 'he said such a thing might happen by chance [κατὰ τύχην]') reminds us that ascribing acrostics to chance was not merely a modern phenomenon.

[19] Cf. e.g. G.B. Conte, 'Proems in the Middle', in F.M. Dunn and T. Cole (eds.), *Beginnings in Classical Literature* (Cambridge, 1992), 147-59; S. Kyriakidēs and F. De Martino (eds.), *Middles in Latin Poetry* (Bari, 2004).

images of the *Metamorphoses* and its poet,[20] whether in (for example) Daedalus' creation of the Labyrinth and its comparison to the river Meander,[21] or in the shocking scepticism of Pirithous's response to the idea of metamorphosis.[22]

In this metapoetic light, the opening words of the book, *iam nitidum*, may well be a further moment of self-comment, given the stylistic connotations of *nitidus* and its cognates[23]—just

[20] Cf. e.g. B. Pavlock, *The image of the poet in Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Madison, Wisconsin, 2009), ch. 3; B.W. Boyd, 'Two Rivers and the Reader in Ovid, "Metamorphoses" 8', *TAPhA* 136 (2006), 171-206.

[21] *Met.* 8.159-68.

[22] *Met.* 8.614f. *"Ficta refers nimiumque putas, Acheloe, potentes / esse deos" dixit "si dant adimuntque figuras."* / *obstipuere omnes nec talia dicta probarunt…* (' "These are but fairy-tales you tell, Achelous," he said, "and you concede too much power to the gods, if they give and take away the forms of things." All the rest were shocked and disapproved such words…').

[23] The words denote an elegant style, though occasionally (and entirely appropriately for Ovid) with the pejorative sense of flashiness. Cf. e.g. for *nitor*, *OLD* s.v. 4b: Cic. *Att*. 13.19.5 = SB 326 [on representing the arguments of Antiochus in the *Academica*] *quae diligenter a me expressa acumen habent Antiochi, nitorem orationis nostrum, si modo is est aliquis in nobis* ('Antiochus's arguments … have the acuteness of their originator with my elegance of style, that is if I can claim such a quality'); Quint. *IO* 8.3.3: on the crowd's loud applause in response to Cicero's 'ornament': *sublimitas profecto et magnificentia et nitor et auctoritas expressit illum fragorem* ('No, it was the sublimity and the splendour, the elegance and the authoritative manner that evoked that storm of applause'); Quint. *IO* 8.2.17 *est etiam in quibusdam turba inanium verborum, qui, dum communem loquendi morem reformidant, ducti*

as the phrase *puluinar … politum* ('polished couch') of Catullus 64 offers a reflection on Catullus' own foray into epic.[24] Furthermore, the adjective *nitidus* has particular point in the context of the provocative challenge offered by Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to Horace's precepts as presented in the *Ars Poetica*. As is often noted, Ovid cheerfully flaunts in his poem many of the things Horace encourages an artist to avoid:[25] the 'dolphin in the trees, the boar in the waves' that Horace counsels against at *AP* 29f. find themselves at *Met.* 1.302 and 305; the complex generic texture of the *Metamorphoses* suggest that Horace's strictures at 92 that generic boundaries should be observed received similarly short shrift; perhaps most strikingly

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specie nitoris circumeunt omnia copiosa loquacitate… ('Some writers too produce a medley of pointless words. In their horror of normal forms of expression, they are seduced by the appearance of elegance into wrapping up everything in long-winded circumlocutions'); for *nitens*, cf. *OLD* s.v. 6: Horace, *Ars Poetica* 351 *verum ubi plura nitent in carmine, non ego paucis / offendar maculis* ('But when the beauties in a poem are more in number, I shall not take offence at a few blots'); for *nitidus*, cf. *OLD* s.v. 7, and note esp. Sen. *Suas.* 2.10 of Aurelius Fuscus, Ovid's teacher: *huius suasoriae feci mentionem non quia in ea subtilitatis erat aliquid quod vos excitare posset, sed ut sciretis quam nitide Fuscus dixisset vel quam licenter* ('I have mentioned this *suasoria* not because it contained anything very subtle that might stimulate you, but so that you could learn how brilliantly Fuscus spoke—or how licentiously').

[24] Cat. 64.47f., recalling Catullus' dedication of his *libellum … expolitum* ('highly polished little book') to Nepos in poem 1.

[25] On this cf. G.K. Galinsky, *Ovid's Metamorphoses. An Introduction to the Basic Aspects* (Oxford, 1975), 81f.; G. Tissol, *The Face of Nature. Wit, Narrative, and Cosmic Origins in Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Princeton, 1997), 95-97; A. Barchiesi, *The Poet and the Prince. Ovid and Augustan Discourse* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1997), 250.

of all, where Horace's mocks the over-ambition of cyclic poet who attempts to tell of the entire Trojan war (136-9), and encourages the writer not to start at the beginning (146-8), Ovid—in a typically hyper-competitive gesture—will tell the story not of the entire Trojan war, but of the entire history of the universe, from its very beginning.[26] Just after this passage, he suggests at 149-52 that an artist should abandon what they cannot make attractive:

> … et quae
> desperat tractata nitescere posse relinquit
> atque ita mentitur, sic veris falsa remiscet,
> primo ne medium, medio ne discrepet imum.

Horace, *Ars Poetica* 149-52

> and what he fears he cannot make attractive with his touch he abandons; and so skilfully does he invent, so closely does he blend facts and fiction, that the middle is not discordant with the beginning, nor the end with the middle.

Some artists will abandon whatever material they fear will not be able to shine (*nitescere*). Here, halfway through his colossal unHoratian universal epic, Ovid reminds us that everything is just fine on that score (*iam nitidum*).

With this in mind, let us turn to the passage that closes the central story of the central book of the *Metamorphoses*, the lament and transformation of the Meleagrides. This is a moment of

[26] Given that Horace urges poets to take on a subject equal to their strength (38f.), it becomes clear Ovid is something of a poetic superman.

exquisite generic friction, as here in the heart of his epic Ovid describes something quintessentially elegiac (tears and lamentation)[27] with something quintessentially epic (the *topos* of the many mouths):[28]

> non mihi si centum deus ora sonantia linguis
> ingeniumque capax totumque Helicona dedisset,
> tristia persequerer miserarum fata sororum.
> inmemores decoris liventia pectora tundunt,
> dumque manet corpus, corpus refoventque foventque,
> oscula dant ipsi, posito dant oscula lecto.
> post cinerem cineres haustos ad pectora pressant
> adfusaeque iacent tumulo signataque saxo
> nomina conplexae lacrimas in nomina fundunt.

Ovid, *Met.* 8.533-41

> "Not if some god had given me a hundred mouths each with its tongue, a master's genius, and all Helicon's inspiration, could I describe the piteous plight of those poor sisters. Careless of decency, they beat and bruise their breasts; and, while their brother's corpse remains, they caress that corpse over and over, kiss him and kiss the bier as it stands before them. And, when he is ashes, they gather the ashes and press them to their hearts, throw themselves on his tomb in

[27] Cf. S. Hinds, *The Metamorphosis of Persephone: Ovid and the Self-conscious Muse* (Cambridge, 1987), 103-4.

[28] For the *topos* of the many mouths and its epic connotations, see M. Robinson, *A Commentary on Ovid's Fasti, Book 2* (Oxford, 2010), at 140-42 with further bibliography.

> abandonment of grief and, clasping the stone on which his name has been carved, they drench the name with their tears."
>
> (tr. Miller)

If we look closely, we can see that this passage is marked by a further moment of authorial self-reflection, specifically one that recalls the very same self-reflection (*iam nitidum*) with which the book began, with lines 533-38 forming the acrostic NITIDO, a form which I would take to be the verb *nitido* ('I make bright, polish'), rather than the dative/ablative of the adjective *nitidus*. Textual confirmation could be found both in the suggestion of close attention in the *persequerer* of 535 but also more tellingly in the hint at *signa* in the already suggestive phrase *signata … nomina* of 540f.[29] Here at the heart of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid makes a subtle claim for literary brilliance that echoes in form (an acrostic) and meaning ('elegance') the famous *LEPTE* acrostic of Aratus, while at the same time underlining his transcendence of Horatian limitations.

At this point I would like to note an interesting coincidence. Taking Tarrant's recent text of the *Metamorphoses*, and accepting all his decisions as regards lines to be deleted and lines to be kept, we have a text with 11908 lines. On that basis, the mathematical middle of the *Metamorphoses* would be lines 5954 and 5955, that is to say, lines 535 and 536 of Book 8. In other words, this acrostic is to be found not only at the climax of the central story of the central book, but also in the very centre of the poem itself.[30]

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[29] Reading ahead a few lines, we might detect the faint presence of *cornua* once again in the *cornea ora* of the transformed Meleagrides (546).

[30] If we just count the number of actual lines in the text (without worrying about deletion), we get a similar result – the centre being 8.538 (the last letter of the acrostic).

Emboldened by our productive pursuit of acrostics at the beginning, middle, and end of the *Metamorphoses*, let us now turn to Vergil. Acrostics of various kinds have been proposed at the beginning and ends of Vergil's works (some more plausibly than others): FONS at the beginning of the *Eclogues*;[31] the right-angle acrostic OTIA at the end of the *Georgics*;[32] at the beginning of the *Aeneid* variously ALMA (in alternate lines) or ALMA MOS (in an alternate line akroteleuton),[33] or A STILO M(aronis) V(ergili) in a boustrophedon acrostic;[34] or the less gymnastic *ILUM*, in lines 2-5.[35] Word-play that looks back to Homer has also been

[31] J.J. Clauss, 'An Acrostic in Vergil (*Eclogues* 1.5-8): The Chance That Mimics Choice', *Aevum(ant)* 10 (1997), 267-87.

[32] Cf. W. Schmid, *Vergil-Probleme* (Göppingen, 1983), 317f.

[33] For A-L-M-A, see A. Heil, *Alma Aeneis : Studien zur Vergil- und Statiusrezeption Dante Alighieris* (Frankfurt am Main, 2002), 59-61 (who does not think it is a deliberate acrostic); for the proposed ALMA MOS, see Damschen (n. 1), 108.

[34] Cf. C. Castelletti, 'Following Aratus' plow: Vergil's signature in the "Aeneid"', *MH* 69 (2012), 83-95. Schmid (n. 32), 334f., manages to extract (through a rather tortuous and extremely unlikely process involving mesostics and telestics) a dedication to Gaius Sosius from the *Ille ego qui* verses (MA SOSIOS S), and another one at the beginning of the *Georgics*.

[35] For Ilus (son of Tros, brother of Assaracus and Ganymede), cf. 6.650 *Ilusque Assaracusque et Troiae Dardanus auctor*. For Ilus-Ascanius, cf. 1.268 *Ilus erat, dum res stetit Ilia regno*. The acrostic seems to have escaped Hilberg (n. 1).

detected at the beginning of the *Aeneid*;[36] word-play that looks back to Aratus has been detected at the start of the *Georgics*, with an authorial signature of sorts;[37] and various other authorial signatures have been suggested throughout his works.[38] I argue elsewhere for a reverse telestic SAT at the very end of the *Aeneid*, looking back to the OTIA of the *Georgics* and the close of *Eclogue* 10. For reasons of space I do not propose to discuss any of these (or other proposed acrostics in Vergil),[39] but I want instead to think briefly about the middle of the poem.

As it happens, the end of book six and the beginning of book seven do not seem to provide any obvious acrostic material.[40] But the reader on the look-out for acrostics will find something in a passage a little later in Book 7 that is connected to middles, in the sense that it looks back to the middle of the *Georgics* and indeed marks itself as a middle. Given the methodological problems involved, I will do no more than note the coincidence that the passage occurs, like the *Metamorphoses* passage above, almost exactly at the mathematical

[36] R.H. Lansing, 'Vergil's Homage to Homer in *Aeneid* 1.1-7', *Vergilius* 54 (2008), 3-8. argues that the 48 words of the *Aeneid*'s proem look to the 48 books of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and to the 24 words of the proem to Apollonius' *Argonautica*.

[37] Katz (n. 14).

[38] On these see e.g. Brown (n. 16), 96-114; M. Carter, 'Vergilium Vestigare: *Aeneid* 12.587-8', *CQ* 52 (2002), 615-17. and Katz (2016, n. 1), the latter with further bibliography. I note one more such signature below, suggested to me by Stephen Heyworth.

[39] For an overview of these see the bibliography in Katz (2013, n. 1), with updates in Katz (2016, n. 1).

[40] Or at least, nothing I would want to put in print at this stage; but there may be something of interest at 6.891-96.

middle of our text of the *Aeneid*.[41] The passage in question involves the description of Latinus' temple at *Aeneid* 7.170–91, a temple where we are told (7.169) Latinus sits *medius* – 'in the middle'.[42] The description of this temple looks back to the description of Vergil's poetry-temple in the middle of the *Georgics* (at the beginning of Book 3), and in the middle of the description we find an acrostic:

> quin etiam ueterum effigies ex ordine auorum
> antiqua e cedro, Italusque paterque Sabinus
> uitisator curuam seruans sub imagine falcem,
> Saturnusque senex Ianique bifrontis imago
> uestibulo astabant, aliique ab origine reges,
> Martiaque ob patriam pugnando uulnera passi.

Aeneid 7.177-82

> There, too, in order are images of their forefathers of long ago, carved of old cedar—Italus and father Sabinus, planter of the vine, guarding in his image the curved pruning hook, and aged Saturn, and the likeness of two-faced Janus—all standing in the vestibule; and other kings from the beginning, and men who had suffered wounds of war, fighting for their fatherland.
>
> (Tr. Fairclough)

[41] That is, by counting lines. The precise middle depends on one's edition and whether or not one includes the Helen episode. Using Conte's edition, the middle of the poem is at 7.191. For the position of this passage at the mathematical heart of the poem, see also R.F. Thomas, 'Virgil's Ecphrastic Centerpieces', *HSPh* 87 (1983), 175-84, at 180.

[42] As noted by Thomas (n. 41), 180.

This line of Italian ancestors, hewn out of ancient cedar (an interesting contrast to the Parian marble of *Georgics* 3.33-5), forms the acrostic AUSUM, an acrostic signposted (or perhaps supported) by the phrases *ex ordine* (177) and *ab origine* (181).[43] The word is a significant one, in that *audacia* ('daring') and its cognates are often associated with a bold creative endeavour,[44] but more specifically, it is used in this sense a number of times by Vergil in structurally significant locations. The word bookends the *Georgics*: at the start of the poem it looks forward to the poem Vergil is about to begin (*Georg.* 1.40 *audacibus adnue coeptis*),[45] and at the end, it looks back to the *Eclogues* (*Georg.* 4.565 *carmina qui lusi pastorum audaxque iuuenta, / Tityre, te patulae cecini sub tegmine fagi*).[46] Furthermore, on one reading of *Odes* 1.3, Horace seems to associate the adjective *audax* specifically with the writing of the *Aeneid*;[47] and this use by Horace of *audeo* in relationship to the *Aeneid* seems to be

[43] Dr Calypso Nash suggests to me another possible sign-post: that Vergil is here describing statues (*signa*), perhaps an implicit link to the *signa* that have a long tradition in acrostic sign-posts: see e.g. the discussion of σήματα with which Aratus introduces the passage containing his ΛΕΠΤΗ acrostic (768-71); and cf. also note 16.

[44] Cf. e.g. Cat. 1.5f. (of Nepos) *ausus es … omne aeuum … explicare*.

[45] 'Grant approval to my bold undertaking'.

[46] 'I who toyed with shepherds' songs, and, in youth's boldness, sang of you, Tityrus, under the canopy of a spreading beech'. Cf. also *Georg.* 2.175 *ingredior sanctos ausus recludere fontis*.

[47] Cf. *Carm.* 1.3.25 and 27: for readings that see Vergil's voyage in *Odes* 1.3 as a poetic one, and *audax* as a comment on Vergil's poetic boldness, see the summary in M. Robinson, 'Augustan Responses to the *Aeneid*', in M.J. Clarke, B. Currie, and R.O.A.M. Lyne (eds.),

exampled once again by its role in an intertextual acrostic game all about the development of one's poetic career.[48] Given Vergil's interest in the presentation of his poetic career,[49] the suggestion that at this point in the *Aeneid* he looks back to the centre of the *Georgics*, to a passage in which he looked forward (in one sense) to the *Aeneid*, and that he should annotate this self-reflection with the word he used to describe his composition of both the *Eclogues* and the *Georgics*, seems entirely appropriate; even more so if, as Stephen Heyworth suggests to me, we can see an authorial signature concealed in the final line.[50] Here at the heart of the *Aeneid* then, we find not Maecenas, not Augustus, but the poet himself.

To conclude this section: we are familiar with the idea that at important structural moments readers on the look-out for intertextual play are often rewarded; it would seem that at such moments readers on the look-out for textual play (be it acrostics, telestics, or other word-

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Epic Interaction. Perspectives on Homer, Virgil, and the Epic Tradition Presented to Jasper Griffin (Oxford, 2006), 185-216, at 188-191.

[48] Kearey (forthcoming) argues that Horace's *OTIA* acrostic at *Sat.* 2.1.7-11 engages with Vergil's *OTIA* acrostic at the end of the *Georgics*. In this passage, Trebatius advises Horace that if he cannot keep silent then he should write about Octavian (2.1.10-12): *aut si tantus amor scribendi te rapit, aude / Caesaris invicti res dicere, multa laborum / praemia laturus.* As she comments, both these acrostics 'occur at points where the two poets actively negotiate poetic production in the newly autocratic Rome of the early 20s B.C. … [Horace's] *aude* (*S.* 2.1.10) echoes Virgil's *audax* (*G.* 4.565), though now the 'audacity' is in writing imperial panegyric, rather than Virgil's youthful composition of the *Eclogues*'.

[49] On which cf. e.g. M.C.J. Putnam, 'Some Virgilian Unities', in P. Hardie and H. Moore (eds.), *Classical Literary Careers and their Reception* (Cambridge, 2010), 17-38.

[50] ***Mar****tiaque* ***o****b patriam* ***pu****gnando* ***u****ln****er****a passi* (*MARO – PU – UER*).

games) are also rewarded. To these examples could be added others that have been suggested elsewhere in Ovid[51] and in other authors such as Propertius and Catullus:[52] together these examples suggest that the proposed reading strategy can at the very least can produce some interesting stories about familiar texts.

The ekphrastic edge and beyond

In his 2004 article, Damschen argued for a kind of acrostic intertextuality,[53] where one author's acrostic looks back to another author's acrostic, and perhaps also that acrostic's 'source' in another author's acrostic. Whether or not one is convinced by his particular

[51] For another 'second proem' marked with an acrostic in Ovid, see S. La Barbera, 'Divinità occulte. Acrostici nei proemi di Ovidio e Claudiano', *MD* (2006), 181-84, who notes the gamma(ish) acrostic IANE at the beginning of the 'second proem' to the *Fasti* that begins Book 2; for anagrammatic word-play at the beginning of *Fasti* 1 (an anagram of 'Aratos' concealed in the second line of the poem *lapsaque sub terr**as orta**que signa canam*), see D. Nelis, 'Arise, Aratus', *Philologus* 160 (2016), 177.

[52] A number of the acrostic authorial signatures listed in note 12 are found at the beginning of a text; as for the end, scholars have noted the akroteleuton NATU CEU AES in Catullus 60, first by W. Schmid, *Catullus. Ansichten und Durchblicke* (Göppingen, 1974), 102 and also by G.P. Goold (ed.), *Catullus* (London, 1983), 248; for an interesting discussion of this poem, its closural force and its akroteleuton, see S. Hawkins, 'Catullus 60: Lesbia, Medea, Clodia, Scylla', *AJPh* 135 (2014), 559-97. For Propertius' authorial signature in the final poem of Book 1, see Dettmer (n. 14) and note 13.

[53] Damschen (n. 1), 102-110.

example,[54] the idea of one author's acrostic reproducing or responding to another's seems to me to be a very strong one. It is often suggested, for example, that Aratus' *LEPTE* acrostic looks back to the *LEUKE* acrostic in Homer;[55] and that Nicander's authorial acrostic signature looks both to Aratus' acrostic and Aratus' own authorial signature in the *Phaenomena*;[56] and it has recently been argued that an *OTIA* acrostic in Horace looks back to and engages with Vergil's *OTIA* acrostic at the end of the *Georgics*,[57] and it may be that Vergil's *AUSUM* acrostic may look back in part to this passage in Horace. One could make a case that Ovid's incomplete *INCIP*- acrostic at the close of the *Metamorphoses* engages with the incomplete *DESIN*- acrostic in Catullus 36 (a poem all about epic poetry and the cessation of writing) – it is worth noting that to do so we need to make no special claim about the intentionality or otherwise of the latter acrostic, only that Ovid noticed it and responded to it.[58] Another example, of course, would be MA-VE-PU authorial signature mentioned above:

[54] That the acrostic CANES ('you are white') in a description of the moon at *Met.* 15.194-198 looks back both to Aratus' ΛΕΠΤΗ (in a description of the moon) and its source (as some argue) in the acrostic ΛΕΥΚΗ ('white') at Hom. *Il.* 24.1-5.

[55] Cf. e.g. J.-M. Jacques, 'Sur un acrostiche d'Aratos (Phen., 783-787)', *REA* 62 (1960), 48-61.

[56] Cf. Overduin (n. 12), at 59-61 and on 345-353.

[57] Cf. Kearey (forthcoming), n. 48.

[58] Catullus 36.5-9. It should be noted that not all editors agree on the text. The manuscripts read *et uos pessima* at line 9, but the emendation *nec uos pessima* (on which the acrostic depends) has been suggested by a number of editors for literary reasons that have nothing to with acrostics. See S. Harrison and S.J. Heyworth, 'Notes on the text and interpretation of Catullus', *PCPS* 44 (1998), 85-109, at 91f. Here at the close of Ovid's own epic, he evokes and inverts the ending Catullus has devised for the *Annales* of Volusius (fire cannot harm

the claim is that this signature is Vergil's response to Aratus' *LEPTE* acrostic. Whether that is the case or not, I believe that we can find direct evidence of Vergil's engagement with the Aratus acrostic: namely, the presence in Vergil's text of the acrostic *LEPTE* itself.

If we assume that Vergil read Aratus' acrostic as we do, namely as a self-referential gesture, then we would presumably interpret his re-creation of that acrostic not only as a comment on Aratus' artistry, but also his own. Other than beginnings, middles, and ends, where might we expect to find such authorial self-reflection in great supply?

One of the most obvious places to look would be in those passages in which an author describes a work of art, or in which they describe an artist creating a work of art: such moments often provide the author with the opportunity to reflect or comment upon their own craft. We find a number of such passages in the *Aeneid*, most notably the song of Iopas at the close of Book 1 (740-46); the description of the pictures in Juno's temple in Carthage (1.453-98); the description of Daedalus's artwork on the doors of Apollo's temple in Book 6 (14-33); and of course, in the passages connected with the shield of Aeneas in Book 8, the longest and most detailed of all (8.370-453; 520-540; 608-728). It is not just the number of lines that mark this particular work of art as something special. In terms of content, the shield itself contains the historical climax of the *Aeneid*, namely the victory of Augustus at Actium and

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Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which the poet himself will subsequently consign to the flames – though without ill effect), and evokes Catullus' own (false) promise to put an end to his own (invective) poems.

the triple triumph that follows.[59] Hardie sees the shield, which he terms a 'cosmic icon',[60] as the climax of the poem more generally,[61] arguing that it presents 'the final and most vivid realization' of Virgil's identification of *cosmos* and *imperium*.[62] In terms of literary texture, the description of the shield, of its manufacture, and of the events leading up to its creation are full of intricate and sophisticated intertextual play, as has been well documented.[63]

The shield passage is also intensely metapoetic: clearly Vulcan and Vergil are both engaged on the same task of creating Aeneas' shield, but we are frequently reminded of this fact. An early example of this comes with the striking simile that compares the early-rising Vulcan and (proleptically, his Cyclopes) to a woman and her *famulae* at their wool (8.407-15) – weaving is of course the metaphor for literary creation *par excellence*. Amidst all this

[59] Verg. *Aen.* 8.675-728. Although this passage is in many senses the historical climax of the *Aeneid*, the final historical event alluded to in the poem is actually the death of Marcellus in 23BC (*Aen.* 6.860-886).

[60] The final chapter of P. Hardie, *Virgil's Aeneid: Cosmos and Imperium* (Oxford, 1986) is entitled 'The Shield of Aeneas: the Cosmic Icon' (336-76), and discusses the shield of Aeneas in depth. Hardie argues (at 338-43) that the shield of Aeneas is to be read in the light of ancient Homeric exegesis, which saw the Shield of Achilles as an allegory for the cosmos.

[61] Cf. Hardie (n. 60), 362-64, a section entitled 'The Shield as climax of the *Aeneid*'.

[62] Hardie (n. 60), 339.

[63] See especially D. Nelis, *Vergil's Aeneid and the Argonautica of Apollonius Rhodius* (Leeds, 2010), 339–59 and S. Casali, 'The Making of the Shield: Inspiration and Repression in the "Aeneid"', *G&R* 53 (2006), 185-204; and see the useful bibliography on the shield in H. Vella, 'Vergil's *Aeneid* VIII and the Shield of Aeneas: Recurrent Topics and Cyclic Structures', *Studia Humaniora Tartuensia* 5 (2004), 1-17.

sophisticated literary play, it is no surprise to find that the weaver's concern is with a *tenui Minerua* (409), given that *tenuis* is one of the key adjectives (along with *deductum*, a metaphor from wool-working) used to evoke the *leptotes* of the Alexandrians.

As the artist puts all other creative endeavours on hold to begin the substantial task of creating the shield, in the fire and smoke of Vulcan's furnaces the homely image of women at their wool becomes one of more appropriate epic grandeur: creation is now not so much a case of spinning and weaving as the huge arms of the Cyclopes hammering out metal: 8.451f. *illi inter sese multa ui bracchia tollunt* / *in numerum, uersant tenaci forcipe massam* ('They with mighty force, now one, now another, raise their arms in measured cadence, and turn the metal with gripping tongs'). They do so, appropriately enough, *in numerum*, that is to say, 'in rhythm', or even 'into poetry'.

But whether they are weaving or forging or writing, the end product of this creative effort will unite all three image systems in the *non enarrabile textum* of 8.625.[64] But we are not yet done with images of creation: in order to (one might say) hammer home the metapoetic point, the opening image on the shield is of the wolf suckling Romulus and Remus, bending her head back in an intertextual gesture,[65] and licking her cubs into shape in a metatextual one: for this is the very image that Vergil is said to have used of his own creative process.[66]

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[64] It also underlines the intertextual link between Aeneas' breastplate and the golden fleece: compare 8.622f. with *Arg.* 4.125f. with Nelis (n. 63), 356f.

[65] With *Aen.* 8.633 *tereti ceruice reflexa* cf. Lucr. 1.35 (of Mars with Venus) *atque ita suspiciens tereti ceruice reposta*. That we find it also at Cic. *Arat.* fr. 9.5 (of Draco and the Bears) *obstipum caput, a tereti ceruice reflexum* has led some to believe that the phrase may be Ennian.

That Vulcan working on the shield is in some way a reflection of Vergil working on the shield is clear, but the hall of mirrors comes closest to vanishing point with depiction of the shields of the Salii (the *ancilia*) at 664f.: there we read *lapsa ancilia caelo / extuderat* ('he had hammered out shields fallen from heaven'). This is a moment where, in the words of Barchiesi: 'the wording collapses the difference between the two levels of narration and description'.[67] As Putnam notes, *extuderat* is the most graphic of the verbs used to describe Vulcan's actions: this helps draw attention to this moment where Vergil, in describing a scene on his shield (which will come down from the heavens), describes Vulcan hammering out a scene on his shield which in turns depicts shields—the *ancilia*—that come from heaven.[68] The *mise-en-abyme* finally engulfs us when we remember the crucial point about these *ancilia*, namely that they themselves are copies, the result of repeated imitation of the one original shield that came from heaven.[69]

The passage is also notable for its content: it seems to begin with the Gauls on the capitol, but the presence of the Salii and Luperci followed so closely by Cato and Catiline in the

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[66] Cf. *Vita* 22 and in Aulus Gellius *NA* 17.10.3. For the metapoetic elements here, see A. Barchiesi, 'Virgilian Narrative: Ecphrasis', in C. Martindale (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil* (Cambridge, 2006), 271-81, esp. 275f., 278f.; S. Bartsch, 'Ars and the Man: The Politics of Art in Virgil's Aeneid', *Classical Philology* 93 (1998), 322-42, at 330. For Hardie (n. 61), 349f., the echo has more abstract significance as representing the 'bestowal of form'.

[67] Barchiesi (n. 66), 276.

[68] M.C.J. Putnam, *Virgil's Epic Designs* (New Haven, 1998), 134f.

[69] Cf. e.g. Ov. *Fast.* 3.373–82; Dion. Hal. 2.71; Plut. *Num.* 13.2.

underworld is striking. These elements have proved troublesome for those seeking a thematic unity to the images on the shield.[70] Even if we accept the idea that the Salii, Luperci, and *matronae* evoke the re-establishment of Roman religious norms after the Gallic threat, the chronological leap (and the tonal shift) from the early 4th century history to the late Republican figures of Cato and Catiline in the Underworld is striking. If Vergil's historiography, like most Roman historiography, has an hour-glass shape, then this is the almost infinitely slender middle section. We make another significant jump too, in terms of the topography of the shield: the attack of the Gauls on the Capitol is depicted at the top of shield (652 *in summo*), and presumably (if not explicitly) with 666-8 *hinc procul addit* / *Tartareas etiam sedes, alta ostia Ditis* we move to the bottom.

So let us look at this intensely self-referential passage, when author, artist and artwork collapse into one, this delicate middle, this moment where we move from one edge to another and see what we find:

> hic exsultantis Salios nudosque Lupercos
> lanigerosque apices et lapsa ancilia caelo
> extuderat, castae ducebant sacra per urbem 665

[70] Cf. e.g. Hardie (n. 60), 120f. (on the Gauls) 'The description of the attack of the Gauls … is the longest scene on the Shield of Aeneas before that depicting the battle of Actium, and it is curiously elaborate…'; at 125 'The two scenes that follow that of the Gauls on the Capitol, the religious ceremonies in lines 663-6 and the description of the Underworld in lines 666-70, have often caused difficulty'; S. Harrison, 'The Survival and Supremacy of Rome: The Unity of the Shield of Aeneas', *JRS* 87 (1997), 70-76, at 72 (on 663-6): 'the rock on which some previous interpretations have foundered'.

pilentis matres in mollibus. hinc procul addit
Tartareas etiam sedes, alta ostia Ditis,
et scelerum poenas, et te, Catilina, minaci
pendentem scopulo Furiarumque ora trementem,
secretosque pios, his dantem iura Catonem. 670

Vergil, *Aeneid* 8.663–70

> Here he had wrought the dancing Salii and naked Luperci, the crests bound with wool, and the shields that fell from heaven; and in cushioned carriages chaste matrons moved through the city in solemn progress. At a distance from these he adds also the abodes of Hell, the high gates of Dis, the penalties of sin, and you, Catiline, hanging on a frowning cliff, and trembling at the sight of the Furies; and far apart, the good, with Cato giving them laws.

It is here, on the edge of Aeneas' shield, on the famous icon of the Roman cosmos, that we find the acrostic that was both the hallmark and demonstration of Aratus' own poetic *kosmos*,[71] the LEPTE acrostic of *Phaenomena* 783-7. For a final flourish, and some textual confirmation,[72] let us look more closely at line 667 *Tartareas etiam sedes, alta ostia Ditis.* The line is almost identical to *Georgics* 4.467 *Taenarias etiam fauces, alta ostia Ditis*, but the

[71] For the *LEPTE* acrostic as an illustration of various senses of *kosmos* in the Phaenomena, see R. Hunter, 'Written in the stars: Poetry and Philosophy in the *Phaenomena* of Aratus', *Arachnion* 2 (1995).

[72] Further pointers to the edge might be found in the *lanigeros apices* – the 'tops' that are appropriately 'wool-bearing' on this *non enarrabile textum*.

Taenarias … fauces of the *Georgics* have been replaced by *Tartareas … sedes*, inviting scrutiny of this change. We do not have to look too hard in the 'Tartarean seats' to find *ARATEA*: a nod to the original author of the acrostic and yet another example of word-play involving this poet's name.[73]

Dido, Ajax, and Lavinia.

Having suggested that Vergil reproduces an acrostic he found in an earlier author, I now want to explore an example in which he reproduces an acrostic he has created himself. In this case, we move away from the low-hanging fruit of commonly self-referential passages, where we might expect particular readerly scrutiny, into more ordinary narrative (if there is such a thing in Vergil). Again, however, a reader on the look-out for acrostics is rewarded.

Let us begin with Dido. She is one of Vergil's most vivid characters, yet at the same time she is a highly complex literary construction, incorporating elements from a bewildering variety of different models, both literary and historical. She is at various times Circe and Calypso, Nausicaa and Penelope; she is the Medea of Apollonius and of Euripides, the loyal Alcestis and the abandoned Ariadne, not to mention Helen or Hypsipyle; she is Cleopatra with a hint

[73] Aratus seems to have begun the trend, playing with his own name with the ἄρρητον in the second line of the *Phaenomena*, on which see Levitan (n. 14), p. 68, n. 18. Katz (n. 14) argues for a translingual and verbal play on Aratus' name at the beginning of the *Georgics*, with *terram uertere* suggesting *arare* and its past participle *aratus*; and *terra* backwards is *arret-*; and Nelis (n. 51) argues for anagrammatic word-play with Aratus' name in the second line of Ovid's *Fasti*, with *lapsaque sub terr**as orta**que signa canam* yielding ARATOS.

of Hannibal.[74] That Dido's gender status is a complicated one is further underlined by her proximity to the sex-swapping *femina Caeneus* in the underworld,[75] by the glimpse of Hercules that we see (or think we see) when Aeneas first catches sight of her there,[76] and by the links forged between her and perhaps her most striking and surprising model, the towering hero Ajax.

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[74] Again the bibliography is considerable. A.S. Pease, *Aeneidos liber qvartus* (Cambridge, MA, 1935), at 11-39 is still a good starting point for information on the models for Dido, as is Heinze's chapter in his *Virgil's epic technique,* trans. H. Harvery, D. Harvey, and F. Robertson (London, 1999), part 1, chapter 3; and a brief but useful summary (with references) can be found at F. Muecke, 'Foreshadowing and Dramatic Irony in the Story of Dido', *AJPh* 104 (1983), 134-55, at 144. See also D. Quint, *Epic and Empire. Politics and Generic Form from Virgil to Milton* (Princeton, 1993), 109-11, esp. for Dido as Polyphemus; for an in depth look at her relationship to Apollonius' Medea, see Nelis (n. 63), 125-85; see also S. Spense, '*Varium et Mutabile*: Voices of Authority in *Aeneid* 4', in C. Perkell (ed.), *Reading Vergil's Aeneid. An Interpretive Guide* (Norman, 1999), 80-95.

[75] The once-woman then-man *nunc femina* Caeneus appears in his/her gender ambiguity at 6.448-9, immediately followed by Dido at 450.

[76] Cf. *Aen.* 6.453f. esp. *aut uidet aut uidisse putat per nubila lunam* with Ap. *Arg.* 4.1477-80 (Lynceus thinking he might have seen Heracles), esp. 1479f. ὥς τίς τε νέης ἐνὶ ἥματι μήνην / ἢ ἴδεν ἢ ἐδόκησεν ἐπαχλύουσαν ἰδέσθαι. For this gendered aspect of Dido, see G.S. West, 'Caeneus and Dido', *TAPhA* 110 (1980), 315-24, and J. Tatum, 'Allusion and Interpretation in Aeneid 6.440-76', *AJPh* 105 (1984), 434-52., who both discuss Dido's relationship with Ajax.

The relationship between Dido and Ajax is a familiar one,[77] so I will be brief. That Dido in the underworld casts a very similar shadow to the Homeric Ajax is well known: both stand in silence, refusing to speak to the man they hold responsible for their death.[78] In Book 4, however, it is not the Homeric but the Sophoclean Ajax who supplies the model for Dido. Sophocles' play opens with the revelation that Ajax has just slaughtered whole flocks of cattle and sheep; we then learn that in fact Ajax had intended to slaughter Odysseus, the Atreidae and other of his comrades, in revenge for being denied the arms of Achilles, but Athena had fooled him into attacking animals instead. When Ajax realises that he has been fooled, he fears that he will become a laughing stock, and decides to commit suicide, which – after some subterfuge - he does using a sword given to him by Hector. So both Ajax and Dido are driven to suicide; both will deceive those closest to them as regards their suicidal intentions; both make similar speeches before they kill themselves; both kill themselves with a sword given as a gift by a Trojan; and both die in isolation from their family. However, there is a more general connection between the two in that they are motivated by a similar temperament. Tatum notes that both are very much concerned with their reputation (Ajax his

[77] In addition to West and Tatum mentioned in the previous note, see in particular V. Panoussi, *Greek tragedy in Vergil's Aeneid: ritual, empire, and intertext* (Cambridge, 2009) and also her article 'Vergil's Ajax: Allusion, Tragedy, and Heroic Identity in the *Aeneid*', *ClAnt* 21 (2002), 95-134; G.B. Conte and S. Harrison, *The Poetry of Pathos: Studies in Virgilian Epic* (Oxford, 2007), 158-60, and E. Lefèvre, *Dido und Aias: ein Beitrag zur römischen Tragödie* (Mainz, 1978).

[78] Aeneas' address to Dido at *Aen.* 6.456-66; Dido's stony silence *Aen.* 4.467-71. Compare Odysseus' speech to Ajax at *Od.* 11.553-62; and Ajax's behaviour at *Od.* 11.543f. and *Od.* 11.563, noted by Servius on 6.468 *tractum autem est hoc de Homero, qui inducit Aiacis umbram Vlixis conloquia fugientem, quod ei fuerat causa mortis*.

τιμή, Dido her *fama*); and Panoussi makes the point that what drives both to suicide is the violation of a value they hold dear: the *aidos* of Ajax corresponds closely to the *pudor* of Dido: 'Dido's high valuation of *pudor* and extraordinary attachment to her community are qualities she shares with Ajax, the champion of *aidos*.'[79]

So let us look at the moment at which Dido first introduces the term, and its importance to her, at the beginning of book 4:

> sed mihi uel tellus optem prius ima dehiscat
> uel pater omnipotens adigat me fulmine ad umbras,
> pallentis umbras Erebo noctemque profundam,

> But rather, I would pray, may earth yawn for me to its depths, or may the Almighty Father hurl me with his bolt to the shades—the pale shades and abysmal night in Erebus—

She continues:

> ante, pudor, quam te uiolo aut tua iura resoluo.
> ille meos, primus qui me sibi iunxit, amores
> abstulit; ille habeat secum seruetque sepulcro.'
> sic effata sinum lacrimis impleuit obortis.

[79] Panoussi (2002, n. 77), p. 105.

> before, Shame, I violate you or break your laws! He who first linked me to himself has taken away my heart; may he keep it with him, and guard it in the grave!" So saying, she filled her breast with upwelling tears.

The very line which introduces the important theme of *pudor*, the quality that links Dido and Ajax and motivates their two stories,[80] happens to be the same line that begins the acrostic *AIAS*.[81]

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[80] That the stories of Dido and Ajax have a similar arc (one that ends in suicide) may be one reason why we find the *aidos* of Ajax privileged over that of Medea, for example. There may be even greater similarities in their narrative if, as has been suggested, Sophocles' play presented a radical innovation in the Ajax story. We know of no version of the Ajax story prior to that of Sophocles in which Ajax, the great defender of the Achaeans, was actually planning to kill them. It is possible that such versions existed, but it is also possible that Sophocles presented a dramatic and shocking inversion of the usual story (see M. Heath and E. Okell, 'Sophocles' *Ajax*: Expect the Unexpected', *CQ* 57 (2007), 363-80).[80] In which case, recollection of Ajax at the start of Book 4 would provide a foretaste of the similarly striking inversion of the traditional narrative about Dido, in which the heroic queen died to save her *pudor*, not because she had violated it. For a good account of the various traditions surrounding Dido, see M. Desmond, *Reading Dido: gender, textuality, and the medieval Aeneid* (Minneapolis, 1994), ch. 1.

[81] Dr Calypso Nash suggests to me that we can see a simultaneous telestic *OSO*S in the same lines, which if one follows N. Adkin, 'On a New Virgil Acrostic: 6.77-84', *Mnemosyne* 68 (2015), 1018-19, can be read as an epigraphic form of *OSUS* ('full of hate'). It is perhaps noteworthy that this is not the first time that Ajax has made an appearance in acrostic form: the word AIAS is the only gamma acrostic of four or more letters that we find in the *Iliad* (at

Let us turn now to another character in the *Aeneid* who is notable for her *pudor*, indeed, whose most significant moment in the poem is a physical manifestation of her *pudor*, a figure who is in many ways a reflection of Dido, a Dido in reverse, namely Lavinia.

Lavinia forms a fascinating counterpoint to Dido: either of these two women could have been the *regia coniunx* promised by Creusa in Book 2,[82] but other than that they diametrically opposed. Whereas Dido is passionately eloquent, Lavinia is famously silent; whereas Aeneas' union with Lavinia will result in the birth of Postumus Silvius and the generation of the Roman race (according to one genealogy), Aeneas' failed union with Dido results in the metaphorical birth of Hannibal and the generation of a destructive enmity between Rome and Carthage. Whereas it seems that Aeneas had strong feelings for Dido, the importance of Lavinia to him seems to be entirely political.

The two are also interestingly linked in terms of their *pudor*. As is frequently noted, Lavinia does very little in the *Aeneid*, and of her few appearances, two are particularly marked by displays of *pudor*, both of which are linked to Dido. The first is when she accompanies Amata and other Latin *matres* in a visit to the temple of Athena in Book 11:

Iliad 16.358-361). For name-acrostics in Homer, see J. Hilton, 'The Hunt for Acrostics by Some Ancient Readers of Homer', *Hermes* 141 (2013), 88-95. According to my own investigations, there are only two gamma acrostics of four or more letters in all of Homer: the ΑΙΑΣ acrostic just mentioned, and ΔΗΜΩ at *Odyssey* 24.27-30. There are a number of three-letter gamma acrostics, but these are less interesting (e.g. ΚΑΙ at *Il.* 23.494-6 and *Od.* 21.349-51; ΗΔΗ at *Od.* 3.335-7; ΝΩΙ at *Il.* 13.238-40; ΤΗΝ at *Il.* 14.312-4; ΤΟΝ at *Od.* 4.388-90).

[82] Cf. Verg. *Aen.* 2.783f. *illic res laetae regnumque et regia coniunx / parta tibi*.

nec non ad templum summasque ad Palladis arces
subuehitur magna matrum regina caterua
dona ferens, iuxtaque comes Lauinia uirgo,
causa mali tanti, oculos deiecta decoros.

11.477-80

Moreover the queen, with a great throng of mothers, drives up to the temple of Pallas and her towered heights, bearing gifts, and at her side the maiden Lavinia, the source of all that woe, her beautiful eyes lowered.
(tr. Fairclough)

Here the Latin women replay the scene in *Iliad* 6.297-310, where the Trojan women visit the temple of Athena on the citadel. Their embassy is unsuccessful – as Homer comments, 'Pallas Athene denied their prayer' (6.311 ἀνένευε δὲ Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη).[83] This Iliadic scene happens also to be one of the scenes depicted in the paintings in the Carthaginian temple of Juno in *Aeneid* 1 (1.479-82): there Athena's refusal to accept the offering is described slightly differently:

interea ad templum non aequae Palladis ibant
crinibus Iliades passis peplumque ferebant
suppliciter, tristes et tunsae pectora palmis;
diua solo fixos oculos auersa tenebat.

[83] Literally, 'she threw back her head in a gesture of refusal'.

> Meanwhile, to the temple of unfriendly Pallas the Trojan women passed along with streaming tresses, and bore the robe, mourning in suppliant guise and beating breasts with hands: with averted face the goddess kept her eyes fast upon the ground.

This pose, with 'face turned away and eyes on the ground' (*solo fixos oculos auersa tenebat*), is of course exactly the same pose that Dido strikes in the underworld, in her Ajax-like refusal to acknowledge Aeneas: 6.469 *illa solo fixos oculos auersa tenebat*. So while Lavinia's downward gaze recalls Athena and Dido, it is of a very different kind: Lavinia's pose here is of one of *pudicitia* or *uerecundia*, not strength.

If her first display of *pudor* links her to Dido and indirectly to Ajax, so too does her most famous moment in the entire Aeneid. So how does Lavinia, the anti-Dido, display her *pudor* here?

> accepit uocem lacrimis Lauinia matris
> flagrantis perfusa genas, cui plurimus ignem
> subiecit rubor et calefacta per ora cucurrit.
> indum sanguineo ueluti uiolauerit ostro
> si quis ebur, aut mixta rubent ubi lilia multa
> alba rosa, talis uirgo dabat ore colores.
> illum turbat amor figitque in uirgine uultus;
> ardet in arma magis paucisque adfatur Amatam

Vergil, *Aeneid* 12.64-71

> Lavinia heard her mother's words, her burning cheeks steeped in tears, while a deep blush kindled its fire, and mantled o'er her glowing face. As when one stains Indian ivory with crimson dye, or as when white lilies blush with many a blended rose — such hues her maiden features showed. Him love throws into turmoil, and he fastens his looks upon the maid; then, fired yet more for the fray, briefly he addresses Amata…

She blushes—the classic display of *pudor*—but she does so in a way that intriguingly evokes Dido. The strong and violently metaphorical *uiolauerit* takes us back to the line that introduced Dido's *pudor* (*ante, pudor, quam te uiolo* at 4.27), but the same passage is evoked in another way. In the moment that Lavinia's *pudor* is most clearly revealed, in a moment intertextually linked to the introduction of Dido's *pudor*, we find precisely the same acrostic as we did there, except this time in reverse, with *AIAS* running from line 71 to 68.

Conclusion

My goal in this article was to see whether a reading practice that pursues acrostics in the same way that it pursues allusions would prove to be a productive one. That it has unearthed a number of acrostics and telestics in familiar texts, in some cases in passages that have been subject to lengthy scholarly scrutiny, is at least a good start. Are these acrostics intentional? As with allusions, it is impossible to know for certain; indeed, it is possible that to insist on a

rigid distinction between chance and intention in these areas misrepresents the creative process. I do hope to have shown, however, that they are at least meaningful, and can offer something more than just a clever manipulation of letters; that they enrich our understanding of the text, and that we miss something interesting and important if we ignore them.

If we assume, as I think we should, that there were ancient readers who adopted a similar reading practice, then we are reminded, given the textual nature of the acrostics, of the importance to these readers of a written text. We are of course familiar with the importance of and interest in textuality at this time, so this will come as no great surprise, but the study of acrostics does encourage further exploration of one particular approach to textuality, namely to think about the text as a physical, visual object. It invites us to consider how the content of a text can negotiate with its own physical appearance on the page – the kind of analysis we see in Donncha O'Rourke's 'paratextual' analysis of Propertius 4, in which he explores the possibility that the layout of the text can create visual as well as verbal relationship between different passages.[84]

Such questions are for another time. For the moment, let us turn to Aulus Gellius, and to his reaction upon receiving a book that the giver claimed to be 'overflowing with learning of every kind'.[85] Among the wisdom it contained were lists of various Homeric textual oddities,

[84] Cf. D. O'Rourke, 'Paratext and intertext in the Propertian poetry book'', in L. Jansen (ed.), *The Roman Paratext. Frame, Texts, Readers* (Cambridge, 2014), 156-75, esp. 168-175. As O'Rourke himself suggests (at 174), 'Paratextual "special effects" on papyrus can be considered alongside other Hellenistic and Roman pyrotechnics: like acrostics, palindromes, *technopaegnia* or *carmina figurata*'.

[85] Gell. *Noct. Att.* 14.6.

including isopsephic verses, verses in which each word contained one more syllable than the last, and a list of names that occurred in acrostic form. Gellius was, surprisingly, not impressed: his view was that these things 'have the appearance of learning, but are neither entertaining nor useful'.[86] I hope that the same cannot be said for the above.

[86] Gellius' view is clear from his title to the chapter: *cuimodi sint, quae speciem doctrinarum habeant, sed neque delectent neque utilia sint*.