While R.'s approach and findings are certainly thought-provoking, there are a number of problems. First, there are difficulties inherent in this decontextualized way of reading. Not surprisingly, at points it turns out not to be so decontextualized after all, especially in those instances where R. reasonably enough takes recourse to his knowledge of what 'genuine' Epicurean teaching is like. At other points, however, dispensing as much as possible with outside information gives R. license to engage in wild subjectivity and interpret the text in whatever way he likes.

Secondly, the individual interpretations rather differ in quality (here, obviously, my opinion is subjective—but after all, subjectivity is the name of R.'s own game). R.'s reading of the hymn to Venus (Chapter 3) strikes me as bizarre, especially the claim that Venus is a cultivating force and inspires animals not just with sexual desire, but also with the ability to participate in a loving relationship (*incutiens blandum per pectora amorem* [1.19] need not mean that the animals themselves become 'charming' in their pursuit of love); I am unconvinced by his claim (Chapter 4) that the combined analogies of wind and river in *DRN* 1.271–97 hint that the perceptible world is somehow 'more' than a conglomerate of atoms (in fact, they seem to me a beautiful example of how even complex phenomena *can* be reduced to atoms); and his interpretation of the honeyed-cup simile (Chapter 5), while fine, is not particularly original. By contrast, there are many perceptive observations in the close readings of Chapters 6–8 (on the finale of *DRN* 2; the diatribe against the fear of death; and two passages having to do with infinity), where R. convincingly demonstrates Lucretius' fascination with the concrete and individual. These are, in my opinion, the most successful chapters of the book.

Finally, R. coyly refuses to speculate about authorial intention or even about the function of the textual features he uncovers (interpretive moves associated with the 'didactic' school of Lucretian scholarship he is reacting against). Still, while R. is supposedly simply describing his findings, there nevertheless emerges a picture of what, in his opinion, the *DRN* is all about: his Lucretius is neither a single-minded teacher of orthodox Epicurean theory nor an 'anti-Lucrèce chez Lucrèce'-type pessimist, but instead some kind of romantic, who revels in the individual soul's sublime experience of the wonders of nature (R.'s emphatic, sometimes nearly spiritual, diction in this context is remarkable; witness, for example, his claim that in the hymn to Venus, the poet 'macht das Weltgeschehen zum Sinnbild für seine eigene Erweckung', p. 95). However, would it not be possible to explain Lucretius' unorthodox delight in describing the real world differently, e.g. (*pace* R.) as a didactic strategy, if not simply a function of the *DRN*'s being, well, poetry? Perhaps for Lucretius, joyous 'Naturerfahrung' is indeed the honey on the rim of the sometimes bitter cup of 'Naturerkenntnis'.

Columbia University KATHARINA VOLK

THE *GEORGICS* AND LUCRETIUS

M. GALE: *Virgil on the Nature of Things. The* Georgics, *Lucretius and the Didactic Tradition*. Pp. xiv + 321. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. Cased, £40. ISBN: 0-521-78111-6.

This book sets out to explore the ground between strongly oppositional (aka 'pessimistic') readings of the *Georgics*, as represented chiefly in the writings of David

The Classical Review vol. 54 no. 2 © The Classical Association 2004; all rights reserved

https://doi.org/10.1093/cr/54.2.371 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Ross and myself, and on the other hand the work of Sellar, Wilkinson, and others, whose more emphatically upbeat poem has been implicitly deconstructed by US scholarship in recent years. The subsequent and partially or wholly reactive and revisionist books of Robert Cramer, Richard Jenkyns, and Llewelyn Morgan, whose project it was, in very different ways, and to varied effect, to reassert our grandfathers' *Georgics*, appeared too late to make it into this book, although not too late to produce the swipe on p. xi to the effect that Cramer's book 'offers a moderately effective demolition [which could I suppose constitute an "ineffective demolition"] of the "pessimist" interpretations of Ross (1987) and Thomas (1988)'. However, such rhetoric needs at least to let the reader know that Cramer excludes from the poem more than 200 of the lines that make it the problematic poem that some, including G., find it. (For details, see my review of R. Cramer, *Vergils Weltsicht. Optimismus und Pessimismus in Vergils Georgica*, in *Gnomon* 73 [2001], 580–5; G. merely refers to Cramer's 'equally arguable assumptions (particularly in textual matters)'.) Be that as it may, and more importantly for the present purposes, it is not entirely clear to me that G.'s book really offers many new arguments on this particular issue, and, in sharp distinction from such opening polemic, she in fact argues that the *Georgics* is a more open poem than previous generations allowed. Certainly she is closer in this to Ross and Thomas (neither of whom denied that there are upbeat aspects to the poem) than she is to Cramer, with his bizarre textual suppositions, Jenkyns, with his denial that the *Georgics* confronts ethical dilemmas, or Morgan, with his collapsing of the distinction between the display of violence in the *Georgics* and the poet's endorsement of such violence in this poem and elsewhere. G. notes (p. xi) that Morgan 'presents a powerful defence of the old theory that the poem is essentially a work of pro-Augustan propaganda', but she is 'unconvinced by the view that suffering and violence are consistently portrayed by Virgil as constructive'—which is largely the basis of his defence.

There are eight chapters in all. The Introduction deals with intertextuality in general, preferring that term to 'allusion' or 'reference', as I suppose most of us do now, precisely because it is a 'more neutral term' (p. 5). Some pages on the intertextual polyphony of the proem to *Georgics* 3 (Pindar, Callimachus, Ennius, Lucretius) lead to a claim that the more allusions we are likely to establish to Lucretius, the greater the probability that this particular intertext will be constantly interpretable even when those allusions are themselves absent (p. 17, 'Once we have been alerted to Virgil's engagement with the Lucretian world-view, dialogue between the texts can be seen to continue even where it is not strongly marked as such'). This is *prima facie* problematic, and is based on the same circular reasoning that has given rise to unexamined prior assumptions about the near exclusive centrality of the Lucretian intertext for the *Georgics*, and it goes against the work of Farrell and Thomas that sees the polyphony, and the more eclectic interpretation that it generates, as much more pervasive. As the title of the book indicates, the focus is really on Lucretius throughout, often to good effect, often, however, at the cost of failing to bring out the complexity of the poem, which by any account goes well beyond an encounter with the *DRN*. This problem immediately comes to the fore in Chapter 2 ('Beginnings and Endings'), where the opening assertion that 'the second finale and the third proem are typical of the poem as a whole in their close engagement with Lucretius' (p. 18) is nowhere substantiated for the proem to *Geo*. 3 in the forty pages that follow. Only a single paragraph on pp. 43–4 even attempts to argue for the proposition, based on a single textual allusion to the finale of the second book, and even that is not directly to Lucretius. It seems to me that we are not far from the old assumptions that Lucretius is central even when

https://doi.org/10.1093/cr/54.2.371 Published online by Cambridge University Press

demonstrably absent, and absent from a passage (3.1–48) that is replete with non-Lucretian intertexts.

'Gods, the Farmer and the Natural World' (Chapter 3) contains some useful and perceptive explorations of the relationships between gods and men, and men and animals, relationships that can alternately evoke pathos in the light of imbalance of treatment or a more positive response—for instance, in the case of animal sacrifice: animals must die so we may live, that is the way of the world. Again, this points to an overall ambivalence that goes to the essence of the poem. G. argues that a number of mutually exclusive views about the efficacy of human toil are put in play. The Hesiodic (endless toil is inescapable, success comes only from such toil, so work hard), the Lucretian (happiness comes through realizing that all is in a state of decay, over which we have no power, so avoid toil), and Aratean/Stoic (Jupiter is kindly and well disposed, so be pious) are all available to us. Difference rather than homogeneity is what controls the poem, a proposition that seems to me quite true, but one that hardly leads to the conclusions at which G. arrives on p. 112: 'I have insisted that the apparent optimism of the ending does not cancel out the darker notes struck earlier in the poem'. And yet the darker notes and uncertainties, to which G. and others of us have drawn attention, 'do not undermine the absolute imperative of book 1, *in primis venerare deos* ("above all worship the gods"). Ritual piety may succeed or fail; all the farmer can do is carry on, with no guarantee of success'. But this does not in any way follow, and G. has in fact arrived at a viewpoint as dark as that of the 'pessimists'. If there is only a 33% possibility that ritual piety is even appropriate (and in this poem it only 'succeeds' via the thaumatic *bugonia*, on which the whole region of Egypt rests its salvation, *G.* 4.294), what sort of a world is that? Why not take a chance and enjoy the *otium* of the Scythians, or the retreat of the old man of Tarentum? Or just toil away and do not waste time on piety, since that may be all it takes—though we will have to put the many failures that arise *in spite of toil* down to something other than flawed procedure or impiety, since such failures in the poem are not associated with either. If in the world such uncertainty attaches itself to the very issue of survival, how can the poem that reveals this uncertainty be anything but dark, even 'pessimistic'?

G. sees the problem here, and resorts, throughout and notably in her epilogue, to an aesthetic salvation, as others (notably Griffin, Perkell, Batstone, in addition to Ross and Thomas) have done in recent years. Like all of these critics, she suggests that ultimately the answer may lie in the poetry itself: poetic darkness can be visible, brilliant, and aesthetically fulfilling. The poem demonstrates this at every turn: in the destructive power of its storm; the nightingale uprooted by the ploughman; brother ox mourning his loss; and, always, Eurydice lost, and her lover's gory visage going down the swift Hebrus to the Lesbian shore, still full of song. Having poetic aesthetics constitute the didactic end makes for a curious, even perverse, kind of didaxis, particularly when viewed from a Lucretian perspective, whereby aesthetics are predominantly confined to the honeyed cup intended to deceive the reader into drinking of the actual didaxis—the reverse of the Virgilian outlook.

G. is not inconsistent here, however, and in the central and later parts of the book she conducts more closely her examination of Virgil and Lucretius. The *index locorum* contains seventeen columns of references to the *DRN*, and I can hardly go through all of the arguments of these pages, some of which are quite elusive and discursive. Essentially, she parts company throughout with Sellar and Wilkinson, as well as those, including Hardie in *Cosmos and Imperium*, who have seen the *Georgics* as chiefly an acknowledgement of the ways in which the *DRN* can be for Virgil a sufficient model and guide. G. goes back and forth, but for the most part concludes that Virgilian use of

https://doi.org/10.1093/cr/54.2.371 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Lucretius is predominantly anti-Lucretian. That is a very different outlook on this symbiosis from the traditional one, which (improbably) imagines a respectful Virgil, content with second place. So, in Chapter 6, for instance ('The Wonders of the Natural World'), 'many passages [of Virgil; none are cited] are designed (more or less explicitly) to arouse the sense of wonder which Lucretius' poem set out to suppress' (p. 198). Though again, typically, the ground shifts beneath our feet, as we read on the same page that 'at the same time, the poet [Lucretius] frequently conveys a strong sense of awe and admiration before the majesty of the natural world'. One might also question whether Virgilian *miratio*—for instance, the grotesquely grafted tree 'marveling' at fruit that is not its own (2.80–2)—is not more sinister than G. allows, as some of us have argued. We also miss in this chapter sufficient recognition of the place of Theophrastus, who appears in a few footnotes, but who is demonstrably the model for the first third of *G.* 2. Or in Chapter 7 ('The Cosmic Battlefield: Warfare and Military Imagery'), one of the stronger and more persuasive demonstrations of the presence of Lucretius, where Virgil, by presenting war in agricultural terms, and vice versa, is shown to problematize the Lucretian separation of the contemplative observer of nature (not, however, precisely a farmer) and the non-Epicurean warrior. Chapter 5 ('Labor Improbus') is a fifty-page disquisition on *labor* in Lucretian, Virgilian, and generally Roman thought, looking at it in each of the books, as both an agricultural and a poetic concept. G. claims and argues that the term is neither and both positive and negative, with which most would agree. Given the length and title of this chapter, however, the reader is surely entitled to a translation of the notorious lines on which every interpreter of the *Georgics* is now bound to declare herself, that is, 1.145–6 *labor omnia uicit | improbus et duris urgens in rebus egestas*. Any study that refuses to translate these lines cannot expect to be persuasive in any broader way.

This has been a frustrating book to review (hence the delay, for which I apologize). There is nothing wrong with a degree of indeterminacy; poetry cannot easily be confined to unitary meanings. But G., though obviously of high intelligence, focuses with excessive intensity on the relationship of these two poets, taking it as given that there is a constant intertextuality, but not always sustaining convincing arguments, and not just on the level of the allusion, where Farrell is still the surer and more precise guide. In the end, G.'s *Georgics* is one with which I feel large degrees of compatibility. Despite the stance in her opening pages, she is substantially in tune with American criticism of the 1980s and 1990s, incorporated in many details of her book with implicit or tacit acknowledgement. In all of this, G.'s book is sharply distinct from the positivist works of Cramer, Jenkyns, and Morgan, towards whom her preface seems so oddly deferential, given her ultimate emphasis on indeterminacy and ambivalence.

Harvard University RICHARD F. THOMAS

THE *AENEID* AND APOLLONIUS

D. NELIS: *Vergil's* Aeneid *and the* Argonautica *of Apollonius Rhodius.* (ARCA Classical and Medieval Texts, Papers and Monographs 239.) Pp. xii + 519. Leeds: Francis Cairns, 2001. Cased, £70. ISBN: 0-905205-97-9.

This is the kind of book that one might have thought two men could not produce today, such men as men are now, nor even four stalwart youths, nor even twice six

The Classical Review vol. 54 no. 2 © The Classical Association 2004; all rights reserved

https://doi.org/10.1093/cr/54.2.371 Published online by Cambridge University Press