



Note on a Reversed Acrostic in Vergil Georgics 1.429—33

Author(s): Ted Somerville

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NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

NOTE ON A REVERSED ACROSTIC IN VERGIL *GEORGICS* 1.429–33

In 1960, Jean-Marie Jacques called the attention of classical scholars to the word λεπτή spelled out both horizontally and vertically in Aratus' *Phaenomena*,¹ in what Gareth Morgan would later call a “gamma” acrostic (*Phaen.* 783–87):²

λεπτὴ μὲν καθαρὴ τε περὶ τρίτον ἥμαρ ἐοῦσα
εὐδιὸς κ' εἴη· λεπτὴ δὲ καὶ εὖ μάλ' ἐρευθῆς
πνευματὶτή· παχίων δὲ καὶ ἀμβλείησι κερααῖαις
τέτρατον ἐκ τριτάτοιο φόως ἀμενηνὸν ἔχουσα
ἥ ἔ νότῳ ἀμβλύνετ' ἥ ὕδατος ἐγγὺς ἐόντος.

That this acrostic was intentional seems assured by Aratus' use of the initial lambda in line 783 as a pivot letter³ for both the horizontal and vertical spellings of the word, as well as by the recurrence of the verbal referent⁴ λεπτή elsewhere in the passage spanned by the acrostic (line 784). But Jacques went on to make one further interesting claim. The acrostic was not merely a display of Aratus' technical ability as a poet, it was also an allusion to an earlier acrostic in Homer's *Iliad*, spelling out the word λευκή (*Il.* 24.1–5):

λῦτο δ' ἄγών, λαοὶ δὲ θοὰς ἐπὶ νῆας ἕκαστοι
ἔσκιδοναντ' ἰέναι. τοὶ μὲν δόρποιο μέδοντο
ὑπνον τε γλυκεροῦ ταρπήμεναι· αὐτὰρ Ἀχιλλεύς
κλαῖε φίλου ἐτάρου μεμνημένος, οὐδέ μιν ὕπνος
ῆρι πανδομάτωρ, ἀλλ' ἐστρέφετ' ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα

It seems quite clear that Homer's acrostic is unintentional, not only because we are dealing with oral, not written poetry,⁵ but also because the word “white” has no verbal or notional referents in the passage. But it is equally clear that the ancients noticed

I would like to thank Richard Thomas for reading an early draft of this article, as well as the anonymous referee for many helpful suggestions. Throughout this article I base my texts on the following editions: J. Martin, *Aratos: “Phénomènes,”* vol. 1 (Paris, 1998); M. L. West, *Homeri “Ilias,”* vol. 2 (Munich, 2000); R. A. B. Mynors, *P. Vergili Maronis Opera* (Oxford, 1969).

1. J.-M. Jacques, “Sur un acrostiche d'Aratos,” *REA* 62 (1960): 48–61.

2. G. Morgan, “Nullam, Vare . . . Chance or Choice in *Odes* 1.18,” *Philologus* 137 (1993): 143.

3. The notion of the pivot letter was important also for W. Levitan (“Plexed Artistry,” *Glyph* 5 [1979]: 55–58), who later identified two imperfect, but almost certainly intentional, gamma acrostics in the *Phaenomena*: the initial pi of line 802 is the pivot letter for horizontal πάντα and vertical πᾶσα, while the initial sigma of 808 is the pivot letter for horizontal σημαίνει and vertical σεμεῖα.

4. Another of Morgan's terms.

5. But cf. M. Schwartz, “Coded Sound Patterns, Acrostichs, and Anagrams in Zoroaster's Oral Poetry,” in *Studia grammatica Iranica: Festschrift für Helmut Humbach*, ed. R. Schmitt and P. O. Skjaervo (Munich, 1986), 327–92.

these unintentional acrostics in Homer,⁶ as we learn from Aulus Gellius *Atticae Noctes* 14.6.4.⁷ Certainly they would have been noticed by Aratus, who is known to have edited a text of Homer and who was, apparently, keenly interested in the acrostic as a literary artifice. In any event, Aratus' acrostic seems consciously designed to recall Homer's unintentional acrostic, spanning the same number of lines and even encrypting an adjective in the feminine singular,⁸ which contains three of the same letters as its Homeric model. Jacques was almost certainly correct, then, to claim that Aratus' acrostic in *Phaenomena* 783–87 was both intentional and an allusion to Homer's earlier, unintentional acrostic in *Iliad* 24.1–5.

So the matter stood for a few years until 1963, when Edwin Brown discovered one further wrinkle.⁹ When Vergil adapted the meteorological signs of *Phaenomena* 783–87 in *Georgics* 1, he encrypted an acrostic of his own (*G.* 1.424–35):

Si vero solem ad rapidum lunasque sequentis	
ordine respicies, numquam te crastina fallat	425
hora, neque insidiis noctis capiere serенаe.	
luna revertentis cum primum colligit ignis,	
si nigrum obscuro comprehenderit aëra cornu,	
<u>max</u> imus agricolis pelagoque parabitur imber;	
at si virgineum suffuderit ore ruborem,	430
<u>v</u> entus erit: vento semper rubet aurea Phoebe.	
sin ortu quarto (namque is certissimus auctor)	
<u>p</u> ura neque obtunsis per caelum cornibus ibit,	
totus et ille dies et qui nascentur ab illo	
exactum ad mensem pluvia ventisque carebunt	435

In this acrostic, Vergil did not merely reproduce Aratus' λεπτή, but rather left that word (and concept) out of the passage altogether¹⁰ and instead encrypted the first two letters of his praenomen, nomen, and cognomen, in reverse order, in every alternate line beginning with 429: Maro, Vergilius, Publius. Brown's suggestion met with some acceptance,¹¹ but also with some skepticism. R. G. M. Nisbet has pointed out that the sequence *pu- ve- ma-* occurs also in *Georgics* 1.66, but without apparent significance,¹² while Michael Hendry merely expresses a general skepticism that is not helpful when applied to his own proposal.¹³ Michael Haslam seems to accept Brown's

6. Levitan ("Plexed Artistry" [n. 3 above], 57) reminds us that Hellenistic scholars often projected the conventions of written poets back onto Homer.

7. For a modern collection of unintentional acrostics in classical poetry, cf. I. Hilberg, "Ist die *Ilias Latina* von einem Italicus verfasst oder einem Italicus gewidmet?" *WS* 21 (1899): 264–305, supplemented in the next issue by "Nachtrag zur Abhandlung 'Ist die *Ilias Latina* von einem Italicus verfasst oder einem Italicus gewidmet?'" *WS* 22 (1900): 317–18.

8. Though as P. Bing ("A Pun on Aratus' Name in Verse 2 of the *Phaenomena*," *HSCP* 93 [1990]: 281 n. 1) points out, the feminine gender of λεπτή may also be determined by its inclusion in a phrase with the following vertically encrypted words: λεπτή πᾶσα (αἰοδή), or possibly λεπτή πᾶσα σεμείη.

9. E. Brown, *Numeri Vergiliani: Studies in "Eclogues" and "Georgics"* (Brussels, 1963), 102–5.

10. Perhaps he deliberately suppressed it; so R. F. Thomas, *Georgics*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1988), ad 427–37.

11. Thomas, *Georgics* (n. 10 above), ad 427–37.

12. R. G. M. Nisbet, "Review: The *Georgics*," *CR* 40 (1990): 262.

13. M. Hendry, "A Martial Acronym in Ennius?" *LCM* 19.7–8 (1994): 108. One would think that such skepticism might be put to rest by the discovery of other acrostics in both of Vergil's other major works that are widely accepted as intentional: the *Mars* acrostic in *Aeneid* 7.601–4 and the *fons* acrostic in *Eclogues* 1.5–8. See D. Fowler, "An Acrostic in Vergil (*Aeneid* 7.601–4)" *CQ* 33 (1983): 298; J. J. Clauss, "An Acrostic in Vergil (*Eclogues* 1.5–8): The Chance That Mimics Choice," *Aevum Antiquum* 10 (1997): 267–87.

proposal with extreme caution, though he rehearses some possible objections: “Why alternate lines?, Why reversed order of nomina?, etc.”¹⁴ But except for Hendry’s general skepticism, all these questions and objections are in fact answered in Brown’s original treatment.

As for Nisbet’s objection, Haslam rightly points out that it has nothing to do with the subject at hand.¹⁵ Of course sequences of the syllables *pu ve ma* can be found at random in Vergil’s poetry. What makes the sequence in *Georgics* 429–33 compelling is the poetic context in which it occurs, for as Brown has already pointed out, the passage spanned by the acrostic is bristling with *sphragis* material: the pun on Vergil’s name (*virgineum*, line 430) and the obviously self-referential, parenthetical comment (*namque is certissimus auctor*, line 432). And the fact that the sequence occurs in an adaptation of a passage spanned by Aratus’ famous acrostic, which almost invites the reader to look for a new acrostic, seems to put the matter beyond doubt. Moreover, as Peter Bing has pointed out, Aratus signposted his upcoming acrostic within his text with his repeated use of the imperative σκέπτεο (lines 778, 799), as if to say, “Look! Look at the acrostic!”¹⁶ I would suggest that Vergil even mimicks Aratus’ signposting of the upcoming acrostic (*G.* 1.424–25): *si vero solem ad rapidum lunasque sequentis / ordine respicies . . .* (“but if you will look at the rapacious sun and the phases of the moon in sequence”). As in Aratus, we must take the second-person verb inviting the reader to “look” (σκέπτεο, “look!” ~ *si . . . respicies*, “if you will look”) both in its literal sense and in its almost metatheatrical sense, warning us of the upcoming acrostic. Brown did not assemble a random assortment of letters into a signature acrostic: Vergil intended the acrostic as a signature and invited the reader, on many different levels, to look for it.

As to the question of alternate lines, that, too, was answered by Brown, who suggested that, just as Aratus’ acrostic had spanned the same number of lines as its Homeric model, so Vergil wanted his signature acrostic to span the same number of lines as its Aratean model. But it was not easy, for none of Vergil’s names is five letters long; the poet thus lighted upon the stratagem of encrypting the first two letters of his three names, skipping every other line, to produce a five-line acrostic. Yet the off lines are in no way fallow fields, for these are the lines, as we have seen, that Vergil sows with *sphragis* material (*virgineum*, line 430; *namque is certissimus auctor*, line 432). Vergil’s solution does not produce gaps, but rather one continuous five-line *sphragis*. Of course, this solution does produce some divergences from the

14. M. Haslam, “Hidden Signs: Aratus *Diosemeiai* 46ff., Vergil *Georgics* 1.424ff.,” *HSCP* 94 (1992): 203.

15. *Ibid.*, n. 12.

16. Bing, “Aratus’ Name” (n. 8 above), 281 n. 1. Similar signposting may occur in Horace *Odes* 1.18, if Morgan (“Chance or Choice” [n. 2 above]) is right (*Carm.* 1.18.11–16):

discernunt avidi. non ego te, candide Bassareu,
invitum quatiam, nec variis obsita frondibus
sub divum rapiam. saeva tene cum Berecynthia
cornu tympana, quae subsequitur caecus Amor sui
et tollens vacuum plus nimio Gloria verticem
arcanique Fides prodiga, perlucidior vitro.

The gamma acrostic of the imperative *disce*, capped by the word *arcanum* in the last line of the poem seems to invite the reader to “learn the secret.” On further obscure messages of Horace’s poetry, cf. O. Emmet, *Words upon Words: The Anagrams of Ferdinand de Saussure* (New Haven, Conn., 1979), esp. 127.

Aratean model: the acrostic is syllabic rather than alphabetic, and it encrypts the author's signature rather than a word relevant to the author's poetic program.¹⁷ These differences should not surprise us, however, for Vergil seldom left his poetic models unaltered. In particular, Bing has suggested that Vergil's acrostic was not simply an allusion to Aratus' acrostic in *Phaenomena* 783–87, but was rather a conflation of that acrostic with Aratus' pun on his own name, by way of signature, earlier in that poem (ἄρρητον, “unspoken” ~ Ἄρητος, line 2).¹⁸

I would like to take Bing's suggestion one step further. Haslam has pointed out that, in addition to the alphabetic acrostics observed by Jacques and William Levitan, Aratus also encrypted a syllabic acrostic (*Phaen.* 807–8):

μέσφα διχαιομένης, διχάδος γε μὲν ἄχρις ἐπ' αὐτὴν
σημαίνει διχομήνον, ἅτᾳρ πάλιν ἐκ διχομήνου

This acrostic, spelling out μέση, is shown to be intentional by the repeated verbal referents in the passage that it spans, all pertaining to the full moon or the midpoint of the month. If Bing is right in claiming that the idea for Vergil's signature acrostic came from Aratus' pun in line 2 of the *Phaenomena*, it may also be that the idea for a syllabic acrostic came from Aratus' μέση acrostic in lines 807–8. In other words, Vergil's signature acrostic conflated not just two of Aratus' metalinguistic games in the *Phaenomena*, but three.

Finally, there is the question of the reversed order of Vergil's signature, for it is a striking feature of the acrostic that Vergil reverses the standard order of the Roman name from (1) praenomen, (2) nomen, (3) cognomen to (G. 1.427–35):

luna revertentis cum primum colligit ignis,	
si nigrum obscuro comprehenderit aëra cornu,	
<u>max</u> imus agricolis pelagoque parabitur imber;	(3) cognomen
at si virgineum suffuderit ore ruborem,	
<u>ven</u> tus erit: vento semper rubet aurea Phoebe.	(2) nomen
sin ortu quarto (namque is certissimus auctor)	
<u>pur</u> a neque obtunsis per caelum cornibus ibit,	(1) praenomen
totus et ille dies et qui nascentur ab illo	
exactum ad mensem pluvia ventisque carebunt	

Yet surely this reversal cannot be unconnected with Vergil's reversal of the order of the weather signs in the passage spanned by the acrostic. The Aratean original had provided the reader with three weather forecasts, depending on the various appearances of the moon: (1) slender and pure moon = fair weather; (2) slender and red moon = windy weather; (3) rather thick moon with blunt horns, and having feeble light = southerly wind and rain.

The numbers indicate the order in which Aratus lists these weather signs:

17. As pointed out by the anonymous referee of this article.

18. Bing, “Aratus' Name,” 284. It is also worth noting that the pun ἄρρητον ~ Ἄρητος is precisely paralleled by Vergil's pun *virgineum* ~ *Vergilius* in the passage spanned by the acrostic (line 430). The switch to a signature acrostic, however, calls for no special explanation, for that was by far the most common type of acrostic in classical poetry. See E. Lobel, “Nicander's Signature,” *CQ* 22 (1928): 114–15; for general surveys of the acrostic, I refer the reader to E. Graf, “Akrostichis,” *RE* 1.1 (1893): 1200–1207; E. Vogt, “Das Akrostichon in der griechischen Literatur,” *A&A* 13 (1967): 80–95; and E. Courtney, “Greek and Latin Acrostics,” *Philologus* 134 (1990): 3–13.

- λεπτὴ μὲν καθαρὴ τε περὶ τρίτον ἦμαρ ἑοῦσα (1)
 εὐδιός κ' εἶη, λεπτὴ δὲ καὶ εὖ μάλ' ἔρευθῆς (2)
 πνευματὶ παχίων δὲ καὶ ἀμβλείῃσι κεραταῖς (3)
 τέτρατον ἔκ τριτάτοιο φάος ἀμενηνὸν ἔχουσα
 ἥ νὸτφ ἀμβλύνετ' ἥ ὕδατος ἐγγὺς ἐόντος.

Vergil gives us these same three weather signs in precisely the reverse order:

- luna revertentis cum primum colligit ignis,
 si nigrum obscuro comprehenderit aëra cornu, (3)
 maximus agricolis pelagoque parabitur imber;
 at si virgineum suffuderit ore ruborem, (2)
 ventus erit: vento semper rubet aurea Phoebe.
 sin ortu quarto (namque is certissimus auctor) (1)
 pura neque obtunsis per caelum cornibus ibit,
 totus et ille dies et qui nascentur ab illo
 exactum ad mensem pluvia ventisque carebunt

It is not necessary, perhaps, to note all the exact verbal correspondences between Vergil and Aratus here, for we expect them in such a close translation: in (1) *pura* corresponds to καθαρὴ, and in (2) *ventus* corresponds to πνευματὶ with the same emphatic enjambment. But one further remarkable reversal deserves our attention. The third weather sign predicts southerly wind and rain on the basis of three lunar indications: thickness, blunt horns, and faint light. When Vergil moves the third weather sign to the first position in his list, he takes with it the faint light (*obscurum* . . . *cornu* in line 428) but leaves the blunt horns (*obtunsis* . . . *cornibus* in line 432) in the last position, where they stood in Aratus' list. By leaving them in the last position, Vergil strands the blunt horns within weather sign (1), the sign predicting fair weather. Vergil solves this problem with the word *neque*: fair weather is imminent when blunt horns are *not* present. But the negation (another reversal?) does not diminish the effect of the allusion, for the reader would have recognized that the blunt horns are an indication in Aratus' third weather sign. Vergil has thus called attention to the fact that he has moved the third weather sign to the first position by leaving one of the signs, negated, in the the third position, where it stands in Aratus' original.

Vergil operates on the same principle when it comes to the forecast. Aratus' first weather sign calls for fair weather, and his third calls for wind and rain. Vergil has, of course, moved the first weather sign to the last position. But he does not say that the days to follow will bring fair weather. Rather, he says that the days will be free from wind and rain, thus leaving the forecast of Aratus' third weather sign in its original position, but again negating it. For ease of reference, this complex series of reversals is represented graphically in table 1.

It seems, then, that Vergil's purpose was not slavishly to reproduce Aratus' original, but to allude to it in a more subtle fashion, by reversing the order of the weather signs, while at the same time leaving certain elements in their original position but negating them. Vergil's ancient readers would have appreciated the game. Moreover, they would have understood that by reversing the order of Aratus' weather signs, Vergil has given his reversed acrostic meaning. For by restoring the weather signs to the order of Aratus' original, we put Vergil's name, as it is encrypted in the acrostic, back in its standard order of praenomen, nomen, and cognomen:

TABLE 1. WEATHER SIGNS AND THEIR MEANINGS IN ARATUS AND VERGIL

	Aratus	Vergil
1. Signs	(a) Slender moon (b) Pure moon (c) —	(a) — (b) Pure moon (c) [Moon without blunt horns]
Meaning	Fair weather	(a) [No wind] (b) [No rain]
2. Signs	(a) Slender moon (b) Red moon	(a) — (b) Red moon
Meaning	Windy weather	Windy weather
3. Signs	(a) Thick moon (b) Moon with blunt horns (c) Moon giving faint light	(a) — (b) — ^a (c) Moon giving faint light
Meaning	(a) Wind (b) Rain	(a) — ^b (b) Rain

Note: Brackets indicate items displaced by Vergil from their position in the Aratean original.

^a The criterion of a moon with blunt horns is moved to weather sign 1, with negation.

^b The forecast of wind is moved to weather sign 1, with negation; rain is also in sign 1, with negation.

sin ortu quarto (namque is certissimus auctor) (1)

pura neque obtunsis per caelum cornibus ibit
totus et ille dies et qui nascentur ab illo
exactum ad mensem pluvia ventisque carebunt

at si virgineum suffuderit ore ruborem, (2)

ventus erit: vento semper rubet aurea Phoebe.

si nigrum obscuro comprehenderit aëra cornu, (3)

maximus agricolis pelagoque parabitur imber;

The reversed order of Vergil's signature acrostic, then, far from being an obstacle to its recognition, was in fact an integral part of Vergil's literary game of reversing the Aratean original.¹⁹

Understanding reversal as the underlying principle behind Vergil's allusive art in this passage is, I believe, the key to understanding yet another interesting feature of it, which as far as I know has never been recognized. Aratus' λεπτή acrostic in *Phaenomena* 783–87, it is now generally acknowledged, was an allusion to Homer's earlier, unintentional λευκή acrostic in *Iliad* 24.1–5. And as I have just been arguing, we should put aside all doubt that, as Brown claimed, Vergil's signature acrostic in *Georgics* 1.429–33 was in turn an allusion to Aratus' acrostic. Yet an acrostic alluding to an acrostic is a rare thing.²⁰ Is it possible that Vergil, a scholar and a poet, and a

19. On Vergil's reversal of Hellenistic models in the *Georgics* specifically, see J. J. Clauss, "Vergil's Sixth Eclogue: The Aetia in Rome," *Hellenistica Groningana* 7 (2004): 71–93.

20. M. D. Reeve ("A Rejuvenated Snake," *ANThung* 37 [1996–97]: 247) argues that the acrostic in Dionysius Periegetes, discovered by G. Leue ("Zeit und Heimath des Periegeten Dionysios," *Philologus* 42 [1884]: 175–78), which spans a passage containing a snake simile, is in fact an allusion to Nicander's signature acrostic in *Theriaca* 345–53. Similarly, Hendry ("A Martial Acronym" [n. 13 above]) suggests that the

close reader of Homer in particular, alluded to Aratus' acrostic without knowing that it was, in turn, an allusion to Homer's unintentional acrostic? I believe Vergil did know, and that he signals this knowledge with the word *nigrum* in 428, the line immediately preceeding his own acrostic: *si nigrum obscuro comprehenderit aëra cornu*. The word *nigrum*, meaning "black," corresponds to nothing in Aratus' original and is probably intended to refer, on the principle of reversal, to the Greek word of the opposite meaning. To a learned reader, who knew the Homeric source of Aratus' acrostic, and who understood the game of reversal that Vergil is playing throughout this passage, the word *nigrum* would immediately suggest the λευκή of Homer's acrostic. As we have seen, moreover, practically everything in this passage that does not correspond to something in Aratus' original has a double meaning. The parenthetical phrase *namque* *is certissimus auctor* means not only "for this is the surest sign," but, as Brown points out, "for this is the most reliable means of verification."²¹ Also, the word *virgineum* is intended both as a pun on Vergil's name and as a bilingual pun on his Greek nickname, Parthenias. Similarly, the phrase *nigrum . . . aëra* corresponds to nothing in Aratus' original, and the line has a perfectly appropriate surface meaning: "if the moon traverses the black sky with an obscure horn." But the line may also contain a hidden poetic message. As we have seen, Aratus and Vergil both planned their acrostics to cover the space of five lines, the same number of lines covered by Homer's unintentional acrostic. The notion of the moon "traversing the black sky," therefore, may suggest the notion of "traversing the black space," or, in Vergil's world of reversals, "traversing the white space"—that is, the space covered by the word λευκή in Homer's acrostic. Vergil was at pains, like Aratus before him, to make his allusive acrostic cover the same number of lines as the Homeric original. This line was intended, I believe, to ensure that such effort did not go unnoticed.

We have already seen that Vergil's allusive acrostic operates on the well-known Vergilian principle of conflation,²² combining Aratus' alphabetic λεπτή acrostic with the pun on his name in *Phaenomena* line 2 and the syllabic μέση acrostic in lines 807–8. Now we may add that it operates on the well-known Vergilian principle of "window reference," in which the poet alludes simultaneously to an earlier model and to its source.²³ Vergil's signature acrostic in the *Georgics* alluded not only to its immediate Aratean model, but through this model to its Homeric source.

TED SOMERVILLE
Rice University

Mars acrostic in the *Aeneid*, recognized as intentional by Fowler ("An Acrostic" [n. 13 above], 298) is in fact an allusion to an acronym in Ennius' *Annales*: *moribus antiquis res stat Romana virisque* (156 Skutsch = 500 Vahlen). Hendry carries conviction by pointing out that the *m* of the *Mars* acronym is encrypted into the same word (*moribus*) that begins Vergil's acrostic (*mos*). Hendry's analysis illustrates two points relevant to the present article: first, that Vergil does use obscure metalinguistic messages to allude to those of his predecessors, and second, that he is apt to alter them, rather than merely reproduce them.

21. Brown, *Numeri Vergiliani* (n. 9 above), 103.

22. R. F. Thomas ("Vergil's *Georgics* and the Art of Reference," *HSCP* 90 [1986]: 193–98) calls this mode of reference "conflation" or "multiple reference."

23. Thomas ("Art of Reference" [n. 22 above], 188–89) uses the example of *Georgics* 1.373–82, in which Vergil alludes through Varro of Atax back to Aratus. Varro, too, had adapted Aratus' weather signs, but had left out the frogs that figure so prominently in Aratus' original (*Phaen.* 946–47). Vergil reproduces a line of Varro unchanged, only to call attention to his restoration of Aratus' frogs in line 378. This technique of simultaneous reference to a model and its source is discussed also by F. Cairns (*Tibullus: A Hellenistic Poet*

at Rome [Cambridge, 1979], 63) and J. C. McKeown (*Ovid, "Amores": Text and Prolegomena* [Liverpool, 1987], 37–45). It is perhaps interesting to note that, while the window reference ordinarily involves some contextual point of contact between the text of the alluding poet and those of the intermediate and ultimate sources, neither Jacques nor Brown was able to find any such contextual point of contact between Aratus and Homer or between Vergil and Homer. I would argue, however, that the acrostic was the point of contact. If Jacques was right, as he certainly was, to suggest that Aratus' acrostic was an allusion to Homer's unintentional acrostic, then Vergil needed no motivation to recall Homer's acrostic beyond Aratus' allusion to it.

OVIDIAN "CORRECTION" OF THE BIBLICAL FLOOD?

In his account of the flood in *Metamorphoses* 1, Ovid catalogues nameless individuals suffering the effects of Jupiter's wrath (*Met.* 1.293–96):

Occupat hic collem, cumba sedet alter adunca
et ducit remos illic, ubi nuper **ararat**;
ille supra segetes aut mersae culmina villae
navigat, hic summa piscem prehendit in ulmo

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This one occupies a hill, another sits in a curved skiff
And leads his oars there, where recently he had plowed;
That one sails over crops or the roof of a submerged farmhouse,
This one catches fish in the top of an elm.

In these artfully balanced and crafted lines the word *ararat* has drawn the attention of scholars because it is a direct transliteration of the name of the mountain where Noah lands in the Hebrew flood myth. The version in the Septuagint—one of the sources theoretically available to Ovid for this information—is as follows: καὶ ἐκάθισεν ἡ κιβωτὸς ἐν μηνὶ τῷ ἑβδόμῳ, ἑβδόμῃ καὶ εἰκάδι τοῦ μηνὸς, ἐπὶ τὰ ὄρη τὰ Ἀραράτ (*"And the chest settled in the seventh month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, on Mt. Ararat,"* Gen. 8:3).¹ It is worth looking a bit more at the odd form *ararat*.² First, the reading *arabat* does appear in the manuscript tradition, but not widely; if *ararat* is an error, it entered the tradition fairly early, and for no obvious reason.³ If we retain *ararat*—as most editors, including Richard Tarrant, do—then we have to consider the significance of its appearance here.

T. T. B. Ryder, in an article on just this passage, notes that this specific form is unattested in extant Latin literature. The odds, as he says, of this particular form's

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1. West (1997, 493) believes that Ovid was at least indirectly influenced by the Semitic account, though he does not elaborate. He also discusses Greek knowledge of the Near Eastern flood myth more generally (489–93). In West 2004, 249–54, he is more specific in highlighting parallels between Ovid's account and oriental accounts (see especially 254). Ryder (1967, 128) mentions the appearance of the flood narrative in the *Sibylline Oracles* (1.125–282; Ararat appears at line 262), to which Ovid may have had access. On Ovid's use of Genesis, see Speyer 1986, who also discusses the possible ways Ovid could have known about Jewish beliefs (93); Hilhorst (1999) argues conclusively that some Greek (and thus some Roman) authors knew about Noah. For the sources available to a Graeco-Roman author writing about the flood, see Lightfoot 2003, 338–42; West (2004) gives a short overview of sources for the flood myth in Greece and the Near East, with relevant bibliography.

2. Bömer (1969, ad loc.) notes that syncopated forms of *arare* are rare. Cf. Ryder 1967, 126.

3. The primary witness for *arabat*, according to Tarrant (2004), is a conjectured, pre-correction reading of the late-eleventh- or early-twelfth-century Neapolitan MS (his N^{ac}).