

*Oxford Readings in Classical Studies: Vergil's Georgics*. Edited by KATHARINA VOLK. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. Pp. 281. Paper, \$49.95. ISBN 978-0-19-954294-9.

This anthology of contemporary criticism on the *Georgics* consists of an introductory chapter, which presents an overview of scholarship between 1970 and 2007; ten essays chosen from the same period; and a bibliography and index of passages cited. The readings have the dual aim of representing diverse approaches to the poem and covering the passages and methodologies that have been most important to contemporary research on the *Georgics*. Originally a single volume was to cover both the *Eclogues* and the *Georgics*, but the project was later split into the present volume and its companion, *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies: Vergil's Eclogues*, also edited by Volk in 2008. Taken together, these volumes constitute the second anthology of criticism on the *Eclogues* and *Georgics* in ten years, following Philip Hardie's four-volume *Virgil: Critical Assessments of Classical Authors* (Routledge, 1999), which covers 100 years of scholarship on all three of Vergil's works. The renewed effort is justified both by the high cost and relatively low circulation of Hardie's collection, and by Volk's narrower chronological focus and overview of recent scholarship.

Volk is a thorough and knowledgeable editor. Her doxographical introduction is broad and current, surveying literature in German and Italian as well as English, and continuing as late as 2006. Pursuing her stated goal of variety, she opts for breadth over detail in her discussion. This approach may frustrate the student encountering the *Georgics* for the first time (one group this series is aimed at), but as Volk points out, it is in keeping with recent trends in scholarship, since the "lack of consensus in Vergilian scholarship has—especially in recent, poststructuralist times—been viewed as a positive thing, with the inherent openness and polysemy of Vergil's works being regarded as indicative of their quality" (p. 2). But although Volk's introduction shows familiarity with even very recent scholarship, her selection of readings, by contrast, gives the impression of stagnancy in the scholarly debate, since only three of her selections are newer than 1987, and none is more recent than 1995. This bias for older works is natural in an anthology, since it takes time for a piece to emerge as influential, and much recent work on the *Georgics* has been in monographs rather than articles. Nevertheless, one misses, for example, a representative of the "metapoetic turn" Volk's introduction (p. 6) identifies in recent Vergilian studies.

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The first four selections in the anthology take methodological approaches to the entire *Georgics*, while the last six discuss specific passages of the poem. Of the four general pieces, the first two can be read as a contrasting pair, emphasizing non-literary and literary aspects of the poem, respectively. In "Agriculture in the *Georgics*," M.S. Spurr takes on the well-established notion that Vergil's agricultural precepts are worthless (a judgment at least as old as Seneca), [[1]] arguing instead that Vergil, like Lucretius, should be seen as honeying the cup of serious didactic. Whether or not one agrees with this latter position, Spurr mounts a compelling defense of Vergil's technical know-how, and his article is valuable for its insistence that any legitimate symbolism must work in concert with the poem's literal, agricultural meaning. The second piece is by Richard Thomas, whose extensive and important work on the *Georgics* has emphasized the poem's literary nature and its intertextual relationship with Hellenistic poetry. In "Prose into Poetry: Tradition and Meaning in Virgil's *Georgics*," Thomas discusses five patterns of Vergilian adaptation that allow the poetry of the *Georgics* to rise above the prosaic nature of its technical sources (a feat not accomplished by, e.g., Aratus or Nicander).

Two further general approaches to the poem are found in pieces by Richard Rutherford and Monica Gale. In "Authorial Rhetoric in Virgil's *Georgics*," Rutherford uses rhetorical analysis to study the ambiguous relationship between poet and audience in the *Georgics* (an approach close to Volk's own in her 2002 Oxford monograph, *The Poetics of Latin Didactic*). Gale's "Myth and Allusion in the *Georgics*" was a preliminary study for her own Cambridge (2000) monograph, *Vergil on the Nature of Things*, and was in fact reworked in two chapters of that book. In both the article and the book, Gale argues two main points: that Lucretius is Vergil's main intertext in the *Georgics*, and that the worldview of the *Georgics* is intentionally unstable and shifting. Among critics of the *Georgics*, Gale is a conspicuous proponent of the polysemy Volk mentions in her introduction, and in this regard her article is a good representative of her important book.

The remaining six selections discuss specific passages and their bearing on the interpretation of the *Georgics* generally. Articles by Richard Jenkyns and Michael Putnam represent somewhat older ideological approaches to the *Georgics*, with readings that are "optimistic" and "pessimistic," respectively (both terms have been problematic for more recent scholarship). In "*Labor Improbus*" (1993), Jenkyns argues that the aetiology of *labor* at *Geo.* 1.118–59 takes a ba-

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sically positive view of the reality that mankind must work constantly in order to survive. The crux of this passage is the interpretation of the phrase *labor improbus*, [[2]] which Jenkyns translates "hard work, dammit," but which many critics have seen as pessimistic. Although Jenkyns makes good observations—e.g. that the passage runs to line 159, not 146 as in some editions—and is sensitive to the urbane wit of Vergil's tone, his own tone is dogmatic and he sometimes exaggerates the strength of his evidence. On the other side of the spectrum is Putnam, who argues in "Italian Virgil and the Idea of Rome" (1975) that apparently positive passages like the praises of Italy (*Geo.* 2.136–76) are in fact ambiguous in ways that expose them as hollow. As a pair, Jenkyns and Putnam should be compared with Gale, whose emphasis on shifting perspective offers one way out of the critical impasse between optimists and pessimists.

Selections by Philip Hardie, L.P. Wilkinson and Richard Thomas discuss programmatic passages in the center of the poem, where Vergil places programmatic passages in the *Eclogues* and *Aeneid* as well. Hardie's rich "Cosmology and National Epic in the *Georgics*" (a chapter from his Oxford (1986) monograph, *Virgil's Aeneid: Cosmos and Imperium*) shows that Vergil uses the same complex of terms and ideas to recuse himself from cosmological didactic at the end of *Geo.* 2 (475–94) and to embrace the future composition of national epic in the proem to *Geo.* 3 (1–48). In "Pindar and the Proem to the Third *Georgic*," Wilkinson argues that Pindaric epinician has been overlooked as a major influence on the opening of *Geo.* 3. Thomas rejoins in "Callimachus, the *Victoria Berenices*, and Roman Poetry" that the primary influence here is not Pindaric but Callimachean epinician, namely the *Victoria Berenices* (published from papyrus in 1977), which likewise introduced the third book of a four-book poem, the *Aetia*. This is an important article that repays repeated close attention and deserves its place in this anthology (although the squabble over Pindaric/Callimachean influence—on which see p. 9 of Volk's introduction—is not in itself very interesting).

Finally, in "The Fourth *Georgic*, Virgil, and Rome," Jasper Griffin argues that the bees in *Geo.* 4, with their conspicuous lack of poetic or artistic attributes, resemble Rome before the second Punic War, and that they find contrast in the Neoterically-styled tale of Orpheus. Griffin's article is useful not only for its sound treatment of *Geo.* 4 but for its "whirlwind doxography" and its judicious, appended discussion of the *laudes Galli*, which according to Servius once occupied the second half of Book 4 (Serv. ad *Ecl.* 10.1, *Geo.* 4.1: probably a mis-

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take). Like many other selections in this book, Griffin's piece admirably mixes close reading with broader attention to the *Georgics* and to Vergil's whole corpus.

All in all, Volk has done a very capable job representing 37 years of scholarship on the *Georgics* (including its blemishes). No one, of course, will be fully satisfied with her selections. Aside from the desiderata mentioned above (recent work, metapoetic approaches), I would like to have seen Scodel and Thomas' important one-paragraph article, "Virgil and the Euphrates" (*AJP* 105 (1984) 339), which would have cost little to include but is absent even from Volk's bibliography. But Volk provides a great convenience by assembling this diverse group of readings from diverse sources (five of them unavailable through JSTOR). And the bibliographical fullness of her introduction compensates for the necessary selectivity of her anthology. If the two parts are consulted together, this volume will indeed "be helpful to students ... while serving as a reference work for more seasoned scholars" (back flap).

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[[1]] *Sen. Ep. 86.15, ut ait Vergilius noster, qui non quid verissime, sed quid decentissime diceretur aspexit, nec agricolas docere voluit, sed legentes delectare.*

[[2]] *Geo. 1.145–6, labor omnia vincit | improbus et duris urgens in rebus egestas.*