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The Maximization of Minimalism

Through an obsession with detail, the Alexandrians achieved a high poetic density and complexity in their work. These same features come into Roman literature in the verse composition of Ennius and especially the Neoterics. One contribution of Virgilian poetics is the use of this detailed technique not only for the jewel-like construction of individual lines but also for structural unity of the larger work. The goal of this paper is to demonstrate the way Virgil used Alexandrian "minimalism" to reestablish an epic "maximalism". In particular, the examples focus on the way allusion became not only programmatic but also structural. The mortar for this larger architectonics is reference, that is to say the use of cross-reference and allusion.

The first part of the paper surveys the small and technical elements in Virgil's poetics, including metrical tricks, hapax legomena, and unusual syntax. An addition to the usual list is homeoteleuton, which is generally avoided by Augustan poets. The examples have been collected by Shackleton Bailey but not previously mined for their allusive or literary potential

It is clear that Virgil was attentive to the minute poetic features which the Alexandrian poets had observed in Homer and cultivated. What is new about the Virgilian poetics is its ability to use these features not as isolated elements but as part of a larger poetic system.

The *Eclogues* demonstrates Virgil's creation of the cross-referential poetry book as an ordered treatment of the bucolic features which seem discrete in Theocritus. Particular attention is given to the beginning and ending of individual eclogues, the most obvious structural markers.

The *Georgics* features two new uses of allusion. The first is a tightening of the structural cross-references by specific line numberings at openings and closings. The second innovation is "sequenced allusionz", a system of references across a work, as discussed by J. Farrell.

The subsequent challenge of renewing the epic especially required Virgil to achieve Homeric magnitude while maintaining Alexandrian compression and attention to detail. One way is Virgil's imitation of Homeric doublets by his own doublets in patterned positions. Another technique is "divided allusion", in which Virgil takes a single passage in a previous work and divides it into multiple passages in the *Aeneid*. The paper discusses a new example of this, the reuse of *Georgics* 4.171-174 at *Aen.* 8.449-453 et al. The Virgilian aesthetic is clearly not just a transference, copying or imitation of Alexandrian minimalism but a new move. It brings back Homeric scale by cleverly but confidently adding Augustan order and structure.