

## Miszelle

Damien Nelis\*

# Arise, Aratus

DOI 10.1515/phil-2016-0010

**Keywords:** Ovid, Aratus, Vergil, word play, anagram

Ἐκ Διὸς ἀρχώμεσθα, τὸν οὐδέποτε ἄνδρες ἐώμεν  
ἄρητον...

Let us begin with Zeus, whom we men never leave 1  
**unspoken.** (Trans. D. Kidd). 2

There seems to be some agreement that when, at the beginning of the second line of his *Phaenomena*, Aratus wrote the word ἄρητον, meaning “unspoken”, he intended a clever pun on his own name.<sup>1</sup> It has also been argued that Vergil spotted this example of Aratean verbal play and alluded to it at the opening of his *Georgics*:

Quid faciat laetas segetes, quo sidere **terram** 1  
**vertere**, Maecenas, 2

What makes the corn crops glad, under which star  
**To turn the soil**, Maecenas, ... (Trans. L. P. Wilkinson)

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, W. Levitan, “Plexed Artistry: Aratean Acrostics”, *Glyph* 5, 1979, 55–68 at 68 n. 18; N. Hopkinson, *A Hellenistic Anthology*, Cambridge 1988, 139; P. Bing, “A Pun on Aratus’ Name in Verse 2 of the *Phaenomena*?”, *HSCPh* 93, 1990, 281–285; P. Bing, “Aratus and his Audiences”, *MD* 31, 1993, 99–109 at 104–8; D. Kidd, *Aratus, Phaenomena*, Cambridge 1997, 164; C. Cusset, “Poétique et onomastique dans les *Phénomènes* d’Aratos”, *Palladio Magistro. Mélanges Jean Soubiran, Pallas* 59, 2002, 187–196, at 188–192; E. Prioux, “Deux jeux de mots sur le nom d’Aratos: note sur Virgile, *B. III*, 42 et Aratos, *Phaen.* 2”, *RPh* 79, 2005, 309–17, at 313–14; J. Katz, “Vergil Translates Aratus: *Phaenomena* 1–2 and *Georgics* 1.1–2”, *MD* 60, 2008, 105–123 at 106–10; M. Hanses, “The Pun and the Moon in the Sky: Aratus’ leptê acrostic”, *CQ* 64, 2014, 609–14 at 609.

\*Corresponding author: Damien Nelis, Département des Sciences de l’Antiquité, Faculté des Lettres, 5, rue De-Candolle, CH – 1211 GENEVE 4, E-Mail: Damien.Nelis@unige.ch

J. Katz has suggested that the phrase *terram / vertere* is the suppressed equivalent of the Latin verb *arare*, meaning “to plough”, the past participle of which is *aratus*.<sup>2</sup> I would like to offer the additional suggestion that another Latin poet also noticed the pun on Aratus’ name in *Phaenomena* 2 and alluded to it in the second line of his own didactic poem.<sup>3</sup> Ovid begins his *Fasti* thus:

*Tempora cum causis Latium digesta per annum*                    1  
*lapsaque sub terras ortaue signa canam.*                            2

Times and their reasons, arranged in order through  
the Latin year, and constellations sunk beneath the  
earth and risen, I shall sing (Trans. A. Wiseman and T. P. Wiseman).<sup>4</sup>

It has been pointed out that the word *orta*, referring to the rising of the stars, draws attention to their visibility and so evokes the title of Aratus’ poem, *Phaenomena*, which was as important a model for Ovid’s *Fasti* as it was for the first book of Vergil’s *Georgics*.<sup>5</sup> If this is indeed the case, can it be an accident that the second line of the *Fasti*, if reread thus,

*lapsaque sub terr as orta que signa canam*                            2

contains in anagrammatic form, across the main caesura of the verse, the name **Aratos**?<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See J. Katz, “Vergil Translates Aratus: *Phaenomena* 1–2 and *Georgics* 1.1–2”, *MD* 60, 2008, 105–123 at 113 and passim. For possible further considerations see C. Castelletti, “Following Aratus’ plow: Vergil’s signature in the *Aeneid*”, *MH* 69, 2012, 83–95.

<sup>3</sup> On Ovidian wordplay in general see, for example, F. Ahl, *Metaformations: Soundplay and Wordplay in Ovid and Other Classical Poets*, Ithaca 1985; J. J. O’Hara, “Vergil’s Best Reader? Ovidian Commentary on Vergilian Etymological Wordplay”, *CJ* 91, 1996, 268–9; A. Michalopoulos, *Ancient Etymologies in Ovid’s Metamorphoses: A Commented Lexicon*, Leeds 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Ovid, *Fasti*, translated by A. Wiseman/T. P. Wiseman, Oxford 2011.

<sup>5</sup> See A. Barchiesi, *The Poet and the Prince. Ovid and the Augustan Discourse*, Berkeley 1997, 51 n. 7: “... *orta* – ‘rising’, therefore ‘visible’ – points to the title *Phaenomena*.” On Ovid and Aratus see E. Gee, *Ovid, Aratus and Augustus*, Cambridge 2000, and also now more generally E. Gee, *Aratus and the Astronomical Tradition*, Oxford 2013.

<sup>6</sup> With this kind of suggestion, certainty is elusive, scepticism is rife (see, for example, A. Cameron, “Ancient Anagrams”, *AJPh* 116, 1995, 477–484) and, of course, accidents do happen. It may be worth pointing out, however, that the anagram of the name *Aratos* appears exactly at the point in the line where sunken signs (*lapsa ... signa*) arise (*orta*) from beneath the earth (*sub terras*), and so become visible. On use of the Latin word *signum* as a ‘signal’ for the presence of wordplay see M. Haslam, “Hidden Signs: Aratus *Diosemeiai* 46 ff, Vergil *Georgics* 1.424 ff”, *HSCP* 94, 1992, 199–204; D. Feeney/D. P. Nelis, “Two Virgilian Acrostics: *certissima signa*?”, *CQ* 55, 2005, 644–46 and,

**Acknowledgements:** I offer sincere thanks to J. Katz and to the journal's anonymous reader for helpful advice.

---

more generally, K. Volk, "Letters in the Sky: Reading the Signs in Aratus' *Phaenomena*", *AJPh* 133, 2012, 209–240. The first two lines of the *Fasti* are repeated at book 4.11–12 with small changes:

*tempora cum causis, annalibus eruta priscis,  
lapsaque sub terras orta que signa cano.*

Presumably, the reader who spots the verbal play at 1.2 will appreciate its presence again at 4.12. I can see no extra point being made in the second occurrence.