of it, is central to all the plays, and that the latter mode is necessarily 'leavened' by the former. M. seems too dogmatic in denying (e.g. pp. 17–18 n. 27) any liberating potential to the plays so far as the slaves in the audience are concerned, and does not deeply engage with critical literature (e.g. Bristol's study of carnival in Renaissance drama) which suggests that theater inherently bears significant challenges to authority. And if Plautine comedy was as comforting to the élite as M. would have it, why did the ruling class at Rome regard the theater as a locus of immorality (e.g. Tac. *Ann*. 14.20)? Given her critical affinities, M. is not concerned with the historical Plautus, but the reader is left wondering who (what?) Plautus was (e.g. why would a person of [probably] humble status devote his comic genius to palliating the anxiety of the socially dominant?). Questions such as these perhaps might have been addressed in a fuller conclusion. M. merits praise for remaining sensitive to performance in a study of this kind, and only occasionally burdens the reader with excessive abstraction. This book should invigorate what has become something of a critical stalemate, and supply Plautinists with hermeneutic tools for years to come.

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LUCRETIUS' MESSAGE

W. R. JOHNSON: *Lucretius and the Modern World* (Classical Inter/faces). Pp. x + 163. London: Duckworth, 2000. Paper, £9.99. ISBN: 0-7156-2882-8.

I would like to put this book into the hands of anyone who thinks that Lucretian scholarship is dull and irrelevant in the 'modern world'. The brief of the new series (Classical Inter/faces), of which this is a volume, is 'to show how Classical ideas have helped to shape the modern world'. J.'s book is inspired with a deep sense of concern about the state of the world and yet this concern is voiced with a sense of humour and a readability which makes it one of the most entertaining and interesting books about the ancient world that I have read.

J. says very little about the physics of the *DRN* and devotes most of his discussion of the poem to the ethical side: the fear of death, attitudes to love, and the growth of society. There is a brief discussion of the prelude and the epilogue, but by and large J. wisely concentrates on the ideas of best relevance to his theme of human values.

The first section is devoted to a study of the poet and his poem: the tabloid version of his biography found in Jerome is discussed, and will recur when its use in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to discredit the poet is discussed. Memmius ('on the make and on the take') is brought in and used to give some good Roman background. The need to remove our fears of the gods and death is rightly stressed as the ethical basis for the atomic theory. J. devotes a good deal of time to the Epicurean thinking on love, contrasting it with that of Cicero (*Tusculan Disputations* 4) on the one hand ('think of other things—just say no') and of Catullus on the other ('think of none but the beloved'), thus showing what Lucretius' diatribe against romantic love is all about and also setting it into its first-century B.C.E. context. In doing so he is perhaps less than fair to poor Catullus, who was a poet and not a guest on the Oprah Winfrey Show, and whose texts are not necessarily autobiographical. But the point is well made and the poetry of Catullus is well used to typify an attitude which Lucretius is certainly firing at in the finale to Book 4. Above all, J. brilliantly shows that the real finale of the book is not the fireworks of 1058–1191 but 1192–1287, where the poet

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gives us the truth about sex and married happiness in biological and also psychological terms which show the poet's acceptance of the need for intimacy. In the next chapter J. goes on to argue that for Lucretius this intimacy produced family life and thence the social-compact ethical system which he argues for in Book 5. Lucretius, J. argues, created a materialist ethics which is far more than mere 'eat, drink and be merry . . .' but which does justice to our nature and our needs. J. goes on to describe the growth of civilization as depicted in the *DRN*, with one eye on his later chapters on technology in the modern world. He clearly points out the link between the invention of arms and the growth of technology in that wonderfully deft metaphor *vulnera vasta serebant* (5.1290) and discusses the famous 'beasts-in-battle' sequence with an interesting line of interpretation: the passage is a caricature (a 'shaggy-beast story') designed to show what happens when the technological imperative is blindly obeyed. This need to see our true pleasures is at the heart of Lucretius' finale to Book 5 just as much as it is in the jeremiad against romantic love in Book 4. His reading of the ending of the poem faces the text in front of us without flinching (or hypothesizing alternative *envois* which the poet might have wanted to write). The poem (like ourselves) ends with death and discord: and that is the awful truth from which we need Epicurus to save us. He will not stop us being 'torn to pieces by hostile atoms'—neither will anybody else—but he will help us to look steadily at our worst fears.

Part two looks at the *Nachleben* of the poem, both literary and philosophical. Dryden admired his poetry but not his 'atheism'. The other (known) translator of the poem of that period, Creech, invoked Jerome's tale of madness and suicide—ironically it was Creech who suffered depression and took his own life. Meanwhile, on the continent, the French were also producing their own versions—Cardinal Polignac painting him as the wicked materialist, Diderot drawing inspiration from Lucretius in his own materialism, and Voltaire producing a wonderful fictional set of letters from Memmius to Cicero. The nineteenth century saw at least three versions of Lucretius: the melancholic suicide who deserved his fate, the heartless sceptic, and finally Sellar's 'modern' thinker of great relevance to the theological issues of that century. Sellar plays down the emphasis on pleasure—this is the Victorian age, after all—and brings that old love philtre/suicide story back into play, assisted here ably by Tennyson, whose 'Lucretius' is then eloquently discussed by J. Mr Hyde is lurking behind Tennyson's view of the poet, and J. persuasively suggests that Tennyson, in perpetuating the *anti-Lucrèce* image, has written a poem which is in fact more of an anti-Tennyson. J. well brings out the eroticism and the madness inherent in Tennyson's poem, typified in what J. calls 'Helen's flame-throwing breasts' (p. 113, where incidentally the reference to 5.1030 should read 4.1030). In France, meanwhile, Patin had elevated his notion of *l'anti-Lucrèce chez Lucrèce*, and was closely followed by Martha's Olympian judgement on the *tristesse du système* which saw the Epicurean as doomed to inevitable misery owing to the lack of challenge and hope in his philosophy. The British Victorians did something similar by discounting Lucretius' science (out of date) and his philosophy (*passé*), whilst seeing him as a great poet of the natural world whose materialism is now harmless. Bertrand Russell trots out the old 'recurring insanity' chestnut and even Santayana finds it hard to read the poet without seeing melancholy. One leitmotif of this book is the way in which this poet has been read as melancholic for centuries, when he in fact offers us a message of joy and hope.

Eadem sunt omnia semper. Carl Sagan's novel/film 'Contact' is discussed as a remystification of science, and J. scathingly shows how blind faith in science has replaced faith in gods, and how we still have not learnt the lessons of Epicurus and *vera voluptas.* The book concludes with a trenchant account of the invention of the bomb

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and the conscience of one particular unsung scientist, Leo Szilard. The book thus ends with a rousing call to read Lucretius not as a relic of the past but rather as a message for always, and one which we need now more than ever before as we trash our planet in the blind hope of 'terraforming' outer space. In studying the 'reception' of this text, we soon see that each generation has found its own way of not receiving it at all. Readers will rejoin that J.'s reading is itself part of the reception it discusses: but J. is solely concerned to get us reading the *DRN* and thinking about it. He deserves our warmest thanks and praise.

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A GUIDE TO THE *AENEID*

C. PERKELL (ed.): *Reading Vergil's* Aeneid. *An Interpretive Guide*. Pp. vii + 353. Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999. Paper. ISBN: 0-8061-3139-X.

This collection of essays had its origin in a summer school for American college and university teachers which aimed to encourage non-specialists to read the *Aeneid* in courses where it might otherwise not have been included. The collection takes up the baton by aiming to offer non-specialists and the general reader discussions of critical issues in the poem from a contemporary perspective. In this it succeeds well, but those who are more familiar with the scholarly issues will also find some stimulating writing here. The book should prove a useful addition to sixth-form and undergraduate libraries.

The collection consists of an introduction by Perkell and sixteen chapters by other established scholars. The first twelve chapters are given over to sequential readings of the books of the poem, one book per chapter, by P. herself, W. R. Johnson, Ralph Hexter, Sarah Spence, Joseph Farrell, Eleanor Winsor Leach, Sara Mack, Anthony Boyle, Susan Ford Wiltshire, Denis Feeney, William S. Anderson, and Michael Putnam. The final four chapters open up more general themes: Gary B. Miles treats the *Aeneid* as foundation-story, Georgia Nugent discusses women in the *Aeneid*, Charles Rowan Beye approaches Virgil and Apollonius, and Anderson makes a second appearance to survey English translations of the *Aeneid*.

Undergraduates who read this book should not skip P.'s well-crafted introduction, which provides the fledgling reader with some essential background for the poem and makes it clear that the *Aeneid* cannot be adequately read in an historical or literary vacuum. Beginning with the life of the poet, she briefly discusses Greek and Latin literary context, highlighting *inter alia* the importance of Apollonius (a welcome emphasis in the collection as a whole) before opening up questions of interpretation. Here she provides a judicious *tour d'horizon*, emphasizing the importance for modern critical approaches to the poem of its seeming ideological self-contradictions, unsurprisingly a well-developed theme in the volume.

The essays take for granted a knowledge of what happens, and concentrate on explication, using a variety of critical approaches. Thus Johnson usefully takes the opportunity offered by *Aen.* 2 to explore questions raised by the nature of the narrative, focusing on the way in which Virgil exploits the perspectives of self-narration to formulate a new, non-Homeric, pattern of heroism. Teachers should find it a useful way of introducing narratological problems to their pupils. Leach, in her essay on *Aen.* 6, emphasizes the importance of reconstructing a Roman cultural context for the

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