not want Nero to read earlier rhetoricians. Based on this bit of evidence, it would be a jump to conclude that Seneca 'was Nero's tutor in rhetoric and politics, but not in philosophy' (p. 162). This conclusion amounts to a paradoxical underestimation of the philosophers' rôle in Roman culture. After all, Seneca addressed and dedicated his *On Clemency* to the emperor, as M. acknowledges (p. 176).

A more general concern I have has to do with M.'s claims about Stoic influences in Roman authors such as Ovid, (pp. 153–7), Manilius (pp. 157–60) or Cornutus (pp. 193). It is not clear from the passages he cites what, if anything, is specifically Stoic in these accounts. To talk about the universe as a living being permeated by a rational soul, for instance, is a philosophical theme that is common to both Platonists and Stoics of the period, in the wake of Plato's *Timaeus*.

The most serious problem, however, occurs with the bibliography. The bibliography is where a book of this kind can point beyond itself, and direct the reader to further explorations. The Lapidge who has written on Stoicism is not Malcolm Lapidge (p. 193), but Michael. No seminal works, such as those of Bonhöffer and Pohlenz, are included. In general, M.'s bibliography relies too much on the entries in the volume of *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* that is devoted to the imperial Stoa. Many works by prominent scholars in the field are missing. The absolutely indispensable work on the political aspects of Stoicism by Paul Vander Waerdt and Dirk Obbink is nowhere in sight. And the list could be extended.

For all its laudable intentions, and much of value, this book can provide a much needed general introduction in English only if it is combined with other accounts and used with caution.

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DEFINING DIDACTIC

K. VOLK: *The Poetics of Latin Didactic: Lucretius, Vergil, Ovid, Manilius*. Pp. xv + 288. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. Cased, £45. ISBN: 0-19-924550-9.

This book offers a detailed and well-informed analysis of didactic poetry in four Latin authors: Lucretius, Virgil, Ovid, and Manilius. Volk identifies the distinctiveness of the didactic form by applying four criteria (see her schematization at p. 40): '(1) explicit didactic intent; (2) teacher–student constellation; (3) poetic self-consciousness; (4) poetic simultaneity'. The four authors are counted as didactic poets on the basis of their meeting these four criteria (whereas Parmenides, for example, is excluded: pp. 49–51).

This choice of topic, quite understandably, gives the book a certain indeterminacy that could have actually been its strength. The definition of a 'didactic' poetic genre, in parallel with, for example, heroic epos or even bucolic poetry, was an extremely elusive issue for the ancients (as it still is for us today), as we can guess from of our scraps of ancient testimony (usefully discussed by V. herself). We can find a certain theoretical difficulty already in the fundamental passage of Aristotle, *Poet.* 1447b13–20 (aptly V. at p. 2; useful clarifications, p. 30). For example, an interesting point of departure could have been the Aristotelian exclusion of Empedocles from the category of the poets in the proper sense of the word (loc. cit.; but cf. fr. 70 Rose); Empedocles does, in fact, show up again in the definition given by Diomedes, *Ars gramm.* 3, *GL* 1.483.1–2 K. 'didascalice est qua conprehenditur philosophia Empedoclis et Lucreti, item

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astrologia', etc. (quoted at pp. 31–2). Even the Latin poets considered by V. seem to have something to say on this topic (V. includes Empedocles in the number of didactic poets: pp. 51–3). Lucretius, for example, pronounces an enthusiastic eulogy in Empedocles' honour, in which he praises precisely the divine strength of his inspiration, his 'carmina', and his 'praeclara reperta' (1.731 'carmina divini pectoris'). What, then, is the relationship between these Lucretian lines and Aristotle? Furthermore, it is quite probable that when Lucretius speaks about Empedocles he is previewing, in a sense, his own poetry, a poetry able to overcome, through enthusiasm and poetic inspiration, the literary 'limitations' of the scientific topic. Virgil, for his part, in a passage full of Lucretian echoes (*Geo.* 2.475–86), expresses his desire to approach the great themes of nature; but to signify his (supposed) incapacity to do so, he chooses an image, namely, the limitedness of his own heart (484 'frigidus obstiterit circum praecordia sanguis'), that is the opposite of the one Lucretius had used for Empedocles (and that seems to presuppose a doctrine that was also Empedoclean: B 105.3, p. 350.15 D.-K.; cf. Cic. *Tusc.* 1.19; contrast also Lucr. 1.923–5). So the sublime poetics of Lucretius–Empedocles seems to have become a point of reference for Virgil when he looks at didactic topics, that is, the 'natura rerum'.

V. shrinks back from the (fertile) risk of complexity, preferring to display an 'objective' approach, in order to solve, or sometimes even to avoid, any ambiguity. This is apparent in the guiding principle of the whole book, to which the title refers. According to V., the didactic genre is identified by metaliterary, 'poetic' awareness (but her argumentation is evidently circular). One could object that every author who wants to teach must necessarily be fully aware of his own 'teaching' attitude; I do not find V. convincing when she tries to present these teaching attitudes on the part of the poets as 'self-consciously "poetic" '. In other words, the fact that Lucretius, for example, presents himself as a teacher and Memmius as a pupil (a self-evident truth for every reader of the *De rerum natura*) is not tantamount to an assertion of poetics, that is, to a self-conscious assertion of the existence of a didactic genre, in which the poet openly situates himself (see e.g. p. 43; this idea supports all the discussion about Lucretius at pp. 73–93). One can surely assent to V.'s statement at p. 24: 'To begin a text with "In this book I examine the poetics of didactic poetry" makes it a self-conscious scholarly monograph; to start "I sing of arms and the man" renders it a self-conscious poem'. But in the case of didactic poetry the author's statements about the subject of his teaching, or about the teacher–pupil relationship, are not sufficient to indicate a self-consciously 'poetic' intent. All these pieces of information are part of the 'form of the content'; think, for example, of Servius' introduction to the *Georgics:* 'Et hi libri didascalici sunt, unde necesse est ut ad aliquem scribantur; nam praeceptum et doctoris et discipuli personam requirit' (*ad Geo.*, *proem.*, p. 129.9–11 Th.).

It is significant that the same quest for 'objective', 'indisputable' points of reference leads V. to make attempts at re-defining well-established concepts (see, for example, p. 2 n. 3 on use and meaning of the term 'poetics', or p. 5 on 'poetry'), or to take up seemingly sensible but in fact too rigid positions: for example, V. hastily dismisses Effe's well-known definition as affected by intentional fallacy (p. 4; V. wants to remain 'intratextual', p. 10 and elsewhere). It is particularly regrettable that V.'s rigidly 'commonsense' attitude often results both in a rather aggressive attitude towards other people's ideas and in statements of the obvious: see, for example, how V. summarizes her argument about Virgil at p. 151: 'I have endeavoured to show how the speaker of the *Georgics* presents himself as a poet somewhere in the middle of his career and how he draws attention to the poetic choices that he has already made and those that face him now'. This commonsense attitude is probably responsible also for some not very

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convincing terminological choices, such as the 'have-one's-cake-and-eat-it-too principle' (pp. 222, 233, 245 'a procedure that I have referred to as the have-one's-cake-and-eat-it-too principle').

The best part of the book is the one devoted to the criterion of 'poetic simultaneity', that is, the procedure according to which the poet pretends to compose his poem 'as we watch' (p. 13; on the topic, especially as regards Ovid's *Fasti*, V. had already published an article in *TAPA* 127 [1997], 287–313). V. analyses this convention in great detail: she interprets it as a way of preserving the (originary) oral character of poetic composition (pp. 16–20). One could add that this fiction of orality might also be explained as a consequence of the recitative performance: the poet imagines himself in the act of reciting his own text (also through a possible *alter ego*, that is, the public or private performer).

I limit myself to one final comment: *pace* V. pp. 103–4, the interpretation according to which the end of *De rerum natura*, with its violation of the burial rites and its brawls around the pyres, is meant to make the reader reflect on the decomposition of matter and on the disintegration of family bounds, in a complex cycle of death and resurrection which involves also the poem's text, is probably right (see A. Schiesaro, *PCPS* 40 [1994], 81–107). This interpretation of the end of *De rerum natura* is confirmed by the contrast with the first and most important epic closure, that of the *Iliad* (Book 24, esp. 782–804), where the rituals surrounding Hector's corpse give a moment's peace to both armies (even if it is a tense peace: see esp. 800), bringing the family of Priam and the Trojans together again, and so producing a momentary settling of tensions. The comparison between the end of *De rerum natura* and that of the *Iliad* could be easily expanded, and it is a further confirmation of the idea that Lucretius' poem is substantially complete, at least as regards its ending (see, from a slightly different perspective, D. P. Fowler, *MD* 22 [1989], 85; also Statius' *Thebaid* closes with the re-establishment of 'normal' rituals of mourning: cf. 12, esp. 797–809).

The book is accurately produced; misprints are very rare: see, for example, p. 67 n. 79 'communicativa' (read 'comunicativa'); p. 93 'does the poem gives'.

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RETHINKING REALITY

D. F. KENNEDY: *Rethinking Reality. Lucretius and the Textualization of Nature*. Pp. viii +145. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002. Cased, $44.50/£32. ISBN: 0-472-11288-0.

This is a book on the nature of things. That sentence itself operates on various levels of reality and of representation: Lucretius' poem is *On the Nature of Things* and is a work that seeks both to discover reality (the nature of things) and to reveal and represent that reality for the reader. But since the underlying nature of things (the world of the atoms) is actually intelligible not by the senses but only by the intellect, the finished representation of reality then must become the reader's view of the nature of things, and this results in a somewhat dizzying elision of the distinction between the poem and the reality it describes. Lucretius enjoys the poetic motif of figuring himself, and indeed his addressees and readers, as creating the world as they go along, warning us not to imagine reality in a certain way in case everything falls to bits. Lucretius is a constructivist singing the world into being, and also one who kindly allows us to lend a hand in the process. On the other hand, Lucretius must be

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