

Introduction: Swerves, Events, and Unexpected Effects

ὔστατος αὖ φυσικῶν καὶ κύντατος, ἐκ Σάμου ἐλθὼν
 γραμμοδιδασκαλίδης, ἀναγωγότατος ζώντων.

Last of the *physikoi*¹ and most shameless, he came from Samos,
 a teacher of letters, the most undisciplined of living creatures.

So Timon of Phlius describes Epicurus.² However exaggerated these lines, they contain, like many fragments of ancient biography, elements of central importance for understanding not so much Epicurus himself but, rather, his historical and intellectual impact and the reception of his philosophy. The papers in this collection offer a series of engagements with Epicurus in this latter guise, that is, as the founder of a philosophy that has been transmitted, appropriated, and reanimated multiple times over the past two millennia.

Timon's remarks imply that Epicureanism's journey through history has been a bruising one. And, in fact, from its inception, it has been a philosophy that, while at times eagerly received, has also been subject to vicious attack. In the hands of both admirers and critics, moreover, Epicurus's ideas have appeared uncommonly vulnerable to misrepresentation, willful or otherwise. The present volume does not try to reverse the damage by reconstructing the ancient doctrines or offering philosophical justification for them. Rather, the essays included here take up Epicureanism as a catalytic object that must be read *together with* its effects. We approach Epicureanism not as a closed

philosophical system but as a dynamic “text” that is capable of producing patterns of response—patterns that are nevertheless diversified by the temperaments (individual, cultural, historical) of those who encounter it—and that comes to incorporate those responses into itself.

To this end, the papers gathered here range over more than two millennia to plot reactions to Epicurus’s legacy, from Cornelius Nepos and Diogenes Laërtius to Gilles Deleuze, Leo Strauss, and Michel Foucault. Some of the papers explore the ways in which Epicureanism disturbs and inhabits those who would reject or critique it. Others trace the various effects produced in Epicureanism’s adherents, whose minds are as often unsettled by these authors as they are led toward *ataraxia*, the psychic calm at which Epicurean teaching aims. Extending these lines of inquiry, some contributors adopt concepts from Epicureanism, such as the swerve or the analogy between atoms and letters or the sublime, to reflect on the tradition of reading and response to which it gives rise and the very concepts of influence, impact, and imitation.

The volume thus takes up Epicureanism as a kind of text that has been thickened by a rich history of reading and rereading, a thickening that reshapes the “original” while also attesting its enduring creative powers. By referring to Epicureanism as a “text,” we aim to capture its status as an interlocking, if not watertight, system of concepts that travels through history both as a relatively cohesive system (e.g., in the *De rerum natura*) and in fragments and paraphrase and sound bites to be cited, praised, appropriated, reinvented, critiqued, and mocked. The notion of a “text” captures, too, the idea that Epicureanism is under constant modification and expansion as the oldest stratum of texts by or about Epicurus generates new texts, both pro- and anti-Epicurus, that become part

of the larger “text” of Epicureanism. With regard to these individual texts, we also understand the concept of “text” in more conventional terms as “the wording of anything written or printed; the structure formed by the words in their order, the very words, phrases, and sentences as written,” on the one hand, and as a physical object encountered by a reader (e.g., “I am holding a text of Lucretius”), on the other.³ For the two senses, “text” and text, it may be useful to compare the transmission of Platonism as opposed to the transmission of specific texts of Plato (recognizing that, in the case of Epicurus, one of the most important transmitting texts is authored by an uncommonly gifted disciple).

What we might call “philosophical reception” need not, of course, be figured solely in textual terms. Rather, the deliberate decision to use “text” in this double sense in speaking of the Epicurean tradition reflects our sense that Epicureanism is also a valuable resource for thinking about reception more generally, that there is an “Epicurean” way of thinking about reception as well as a reception of Epicureanism. Among the powerful tools that Epicureanism has to offer the theorization of reception is the well-known analogy between letters and atoms, where the written word models the atomic compound. In referring to Epicureanism itself as a text, we have the atomist analogy in mind, which facilitates the conceptualization of Epicureanism as something material and capable of impacting the minds of listeners and readers, as well as the notion of a text as an interrelated and dynamic complex of ideas.

The aims of the volume are twofold. On the one hand, by offering a series of papers that explore the powerful impact of Epicurus’s ideas on the Western tradition, we stake out ground for a renewed encounter with Epicureanism in the present. On the other hand, the volume suggests new directions for theorizing the interaction between ancients,

moderns, and the many readers who have come between. In the introduction, we point out ways in which Epicureanism has already contributed to what “reception” means and offer suggestions as to how Epicureanism may continue to shape reception studies by turning scholarly concerns from an emphasis on epistemology (what we can *know* about a given work and its meaning) to an emphasis on affect and dynamic response (how a given idea, philosophical system, or text provokes us to think, imagine, and even feel in new ways).

Both aspects of the project, we hope, can contribute to a conversation about the reception of ancient philosophical ideas. While the field of reception studies has grown exponentially in the last decade or so, most of the attention has been directed towards the afterlife of literary and aesthetic works, as well as to the ways in which the idea of classical antiquity has influenced the emergence of philology as a modern academic discipline. There has been less interest in the reception of philosophical systems, at least within this field, and little interaction with the history of philosophy.⁴ Historians of philosophy, conversely, have tended to engage with ancient philosophers and philosophies more at the level of doctrine and argument than at the level of their historical reception.⁵ There are important crosscurrents to this approach, some becoming increasingly dominant. The study of philosophy in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, in particular, has been highly sensitive to the transformation of positions and arguments within the philosophical schools under internal and external pressures.⁶ Moreover, the inquiry into the reception of philosophical and scientific ideas *within* antiquity has been greatly enriched in recent years by the rapidly growing attention to doxography and the commentary tradition as objects of study in their own right.⁷ Historians of philosophy,

together with historians of science and medicine, have shifted away from an approach that mines later authors for fragments of earlier thinkers in order to bring to the foreground the context and structure of these citations, as well as the philosophical, doctrinal, and methodological commitments of the doxographer. By confronting head-on the mediated nature of so much of what we know about Greek philosophy, science, and medicine, these scholars have developed a significant subfield of reception studies within the history of these disciplines, marked by its own concerns and debates.⁸ The present volume contributes to this larger project while, at the same time, moving beyond the ancient world and the specific genre of doxography. By bringing together an inquiry into the impact of the Epicurean tradition on later authors with the theoretical concerns that have occupied those working primarily on aesthetic works from classical antiquity, we hope to open up space for greater interaction between the history of philosophy and science and the field that has come to be termed reception studies.

In what follows, we flesh out the overarching aims of the volume. We begin by outlining some contributions that Epicureanism can make to recent and current work in the field of reception before considering what this volume hopes to offer to the specific reception of Epicureanism. The introduction closes with a brief summary of the essays in the collection. These essays bear witness to the long afterlife of Timon's attack on Epicurus as the most "undisciplined" (*anagôgotatos*) of creatures, a word that, in Greek, describes both someone intemperate in his pleasures and someone unconstrained by *agôgê* ("training, discipline").⁹ The word's double sense suggests that it is precisely *because* of Epicurus's lack of discipline that his legacy has proved so fascinating and productive.

Reception Studies, Epicureanism, and Epicurean Reception

What has come to be called reception theory is by no means as uniform as it may seem. Its various ramifications are marked by a basic duality, incorporating both the reception of the literary text and its effects on its potential reader....An aesthetics of reception explores reactions to the literary text by readers in different historical situations....By delineating the historical conditionality of readers' reactions, an aesthetics of reception turns literature into a tool for reconstituting the past.

While an aesthetics of reception deals with real readers, whose reactions testify to certain historically conditioned experiences of literature, my own theory of aesthetic response focuses on how a piece of literature impacts on its implied readers and elicits a response. A theory of aesthetic response has its roots in the text; an aesthetics of reception arises from a history of readers' judgments.¹⁰

Thus Wolfgang Iser, in a recent introduction to literary theory, characterizes reception theory, an approach to literature that, for all its still-developing variety, remains chiefly identified with Iser himself and his former Konstanz colleague, Hans Robert Jauß. Here Iser, while treating “an aesthetics of reception” and his own “theory of aesthetic response” as two parts of a single theory, nonetheless takes pains to draw a distinction between Jauß's more historical contribution (*Rezeptionsästhetik*) and his own more textual one (*Wirkungsästhetik*). This distinction is worth preserving, if for no other reason than it fairly accurately characterizes the Anglo-American reception of the two

scholars and their work. Iser's textually-driven "theory of aesthetic response" has long since been received among, if not entirely subsumed into, other "reader-response" theories;¹¹ Jauß's historical work, on the other hand, has become the basis, albeit in substantially modified form, of much that today is termed simply "reception."

While any attempt to sever Iser's project too firmly from Jauß's does injustice to their shared development in Konstanz, recent reception studies, particularly as conducted within the discipline of Classics, have developed largely in dialogue with Jauß rather than with Iser. Typical in this regard are the works of Charles Martindale, who has spearheaded much of the growing enthusiasm for reception studies in the U.K. and elsewhere. Two works in particular – *Redeeming the Text* and *Classics and the Uses of Reception* (an edited collection with Richard Thomas) – have established Martindale as a leading writer on theoretical problems of classical reception.¹² In both of these works, Martindale marries Jaußian reception to "other, more deconstructionist models of dissemination."¹³ He thus adopts Jauß's historical approach, with its real, historical readers and its historically-conditioned "horizon of expectations" (*Erwartungshorizont*), only to explode anything like a Jaußian notion of history. More specifically, Martindale criticizes the tenet, central to Jauß's notion of history (and inherited from the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer), that – despite any manifest plurality of interpretations – the text "remains the same work."¹⁴ On this model, receptions differ entirely because of historical circumstance and not because of any difference that may be located within the text itself. Martindale, by contrast, prefers to understand reception on the model of musical performance, where each reception or performance – even if it bears a "family relationship" to other performances – is a distinct event.¹⁵ In other words, for Martindale,

different receptions (which effectively create different “texts” or “works”) do not differ due to varying “horizons of expectations” but rather due to the fact that different receptions are distinct occurrences.

What is so striking about the move to understand reception as performance is that it tends to commit Martindale to a position that better resembles that of Iser than that of Jauß. Of course, Martindale (not unlike Stanley Fish¹⁶) would be displeased with some of the terms of Iser’s textual theory. Iser continually divides up texts between their determinate portions, where there is no question as to the meaning of the text, and their indeterminate ones, where there are “blanks” to be filled in by the reader.¹⁷ This division implicitly suggests precisely what Martindale aims to deny – that “texts” or “works” are, with regard to their interpretation, in some way fixed. Nonetheless, with a Derridean re-definition of history, a definition of history that locates reception in the event rather than in a given historical period with a given “horizon of expectations,” Martindale changes the problematics of reception from a largely positivist attempt at the reconstruction of history to a problematics of reading, a description more apt, it would seem, for Iser’s work than that of Jauß.¹⁸

[This brief summary of Martindale’s engagement with reception theory provides key terms for articulating both the specific contribution of the present volume and the contribution of Epicureanism more generally to reception studies. In the first instance, we would like to suggest that the dichotomy presented by Iser and Jauß – aestheticizing *or* historical, textual *or* cultural – is, in many ways, false. Instead, we understand reading and interpretation as always already ideological and cultural. Even the most formal or aesthetically oriented readings of texts can be shown to be rife with historical and cultural](#)

meaning. To some extent, this position separates us not only from Jauß and Iser but also from Martindale, who has recently been criticized by Miriam Leonard for his aestheticizing interpretation of Derrida, which tends to occlude the role of history in the philosopher's thought.¹⁹ Moreover, in place of a performance theory of reception, we prefer to speak of reception as an event. The term "event" better captures, we feel, the dynamics at play in reception, particularly the sense that interpretation is an affective transaction, one that may not be directed entirely by either the reader-performer or her text. Instead, we suggest, something complex happens in reception – namely, an event – and one of the most significant traces of this event is often its affective impact. Additionally – and here we turn to another significant focus of the present volume – "event," at least as it can be understood as an eventum ("accidental property"), is a term of Epicurean physics.

The recent history of literary and cultural theory has shown that Epicureanism – especially in the guise of Lucretius's poem *De Rerum Natura* – can be a productive resource for theorizing reading and interpretation. More specifically, Epicureanism has provided a number of recent philosophers and theorists with the figural vocabulary to characterize not only reading but also a number of the phenomena attending to reading, including, as we have just mentioned, the event itself.²⁰ In other words, Epicureanism's claim on reception studies is quite direct and organic: it is not merely yet another text whose history of readings we may trace but a "text" that in many instances helps define the terms of reading itself.

To catalogue all the ways in which modern critics and philosophers have deployed Epicurean or Lucretian themes (and tropes) in the characterization of reading

(and interpreting) would be a vast undertaking. Yet a brief sampling of this work may give some sense of just how important Epicureanism has been for recent theoretical and philosophical work. In his book *La naissance de la physique*, philosopher Michel Serres points to Lucretius's frequent comparison of letters and atoms (both, at times, *elementa* in Latin), as well as to his famous description of the *clinamen*, or atomic "swerve,"²¹ in presenting discourse as defined by turbulence and movement, features that frustrate any search for originary causes or influences.²² The critic Jacques Lezra fastens upon the Lucretian notion of the *eventum* ("accident" as in "accidental, rather than proper, attribute"),²³ turning it upon us, as readers and interpreters, in order to point out that there may be other ways of configuring the past than merely in terms of what is proper or accidental to period terms like "Renaissance."²⁴ In his last writings and interviews, the Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser speaks of an "aleatory materialism," which he traces back to Democritus, Epicurus, and Lucretius.²⁵ For Althusser, Epicureanism's anti-teleology, its denial of a first cause at the origin of the world, is a central element in displacing philosophical attempts to locate reason, sense, or necessity authoritatively. Finally, Jacques Derrida reads much of the ancient atomist tradition as a forerunner of modern psychoanalytic thought, focusing specifically on how "accidental" occurrences in Epicurus become "symptoms of the soul."²⁶ In each of these authors, Epicureanism, by teaching us to read through symptoms, swerves, anti-teleology, or *eventa*, functions not only as a philosophy whose reception we study but also as a theoretical resource informing and defining how we read.

Many of the pieces in the present volume likewise draw critical and theoretical tools from Epicureanism for pondering and figuring reception. W. H. Shearin, in

studying the ancient Epicurean Titus Pomponius Atticus, looks at ways in which Epicurean anti-teleology may be not only a characterization of the natural world but also a descriptor of how we read and interpret texts. Adam Rzepka draws upon both Michel Serres and Jacques Lezra to consider the ways in which Epicureanism figures the terms of its own reception. Gerard Passannante explores the affective sympathy of one Renaissance reader with his text of Lucretius, studying tensions between this encounter and the stated aims of Epicurean doctrine. Brooke Holmes examines how Deleuze, in his reading of the *De rerum natura*, explores the function of the simulacrum as a mechanism for explaining not only how we view the physical world but also how philosophy and, more specifically, philosophical texts, inform our ethical relationship to that world.

Other essays in the volume may be seen to approach these – and related issues – in other ways. With the remainder of this section, we aim to explore one particular way in which Epicureanism, ever a fertile resource for re-thinking reading, can open up current discourse within the discipline of reception studies, namely by bringing the physical recipient and her embodied experience back into the act of reading and receiving the text.

Recent writing about reception studies, especially within the discipline of Classics –with its largely historicist and positivist past—has tended to ponder reception in epistemological terms.²⁷ The theory of reception is concerned above all with what we, as readers, can *know*. In the first instance, this epistemological focus serves a primarily negative function: reception reveals to us the limits on our knowledge. In his afterword to *Classics and the Uses of Reception*, for example, Duncan Kennedy writes:

A position of *epistemological* [emphasis added] certainty is a comfortable one to inhabit, particularly if you are a scholar, but reception theory has the capacity to

challenge that confidence if the predisposition to a retrospective view that the term “reception” encourages is set against the possibility that knowledge is *provisional* [emphasis original], in the strong sense: looking towards the future, toward a desired plenitude that is not yet there (and indeed may never be)...²⁸

Kennedy’s point that reception theory can undermine epistemological certainty is well taken.²⁹ The diversity of historical readings of [the *De Rerum Natura*](#), coupled with, as Kennedy stresses, the text’s potential for future readings, should make us question any reading that professes absolute, eternal certainty. But, without disagreeing with Kennedy, we must ask whether questions of epistemology are the only, or even the primary, ones at stake in the process named by reception.

A detour into the recent history of literary theory can help us reconsider the place of epistemology in reception studies, [specifically by suggesting that affect has been an overlooked element in theorizing reception](#). Although the observation is not often made, reception (named by the more traditional term “influence”) and Epicureanism collide productively within Harold Bloom’s well-known theory of poetry, as presented in *The Anxiety of Influence*.³⁰ There Bloom articulates a number of what he calls “revisionary ratios,” that is, figurations of poetic influence. It is significant that the chief of these models for influence is Lucretius’s *clinamen*,³¹ or atomic “swerve,” the uncaused, minimal movement that, on one reading, is the basis for free will.³² Bloom describes his use of the *clinamen* as follows:

Clinamen...is poetic misreading or misprision proper....A poet swerves away from his precursor, by so reading his precursor’s poem as to execute

a *clinamen* in relation to it. This appears as a corrective movement in his own poem, which implies that the precursor poem went accurately up to a certain point, but then should have swerved, precisely in the direction that the new poem moves.³³

Here Bloom rereads the swerve, replacing the atoms in the traditional Lucretian account with poet-readers. This juxtaposition of human readers and atoms serves, we may suggest, to blur the boundaries between the two.³⁴ Bloom's use of the *clinamen* implicitly paints poets as atoms that move mechanically until liberated by a chance movement that occurs at "no fixed place and no fixed time" (*De Rerum Natura* 2.293). (Lucretius himself makes this figural move well before Bloom: readers of his poem will recall, among other moments, how, in his second book, atoms fight wars, while in his fifth, humans gather and dissipate mechanically like atoms.)³⁵ Juxtaposing humans and atoms raises many issues (not least questions of the limits and composition of "the human"), but in the realm of reception one of the most obvious is that of agency and intention. Suggesting (if only indirectly) that poet-readers act like mindless matter seems to call into question their ability to act as autonomous, intentional agents, a point noted by Bloom: "[t]he student of Poetic Influence... must understand that the *clinamen* always must be considered as though it were simultaneously *intentional and involuntary* [emphasis added]..." (44-45).

Within the well-traveled terrain of literary theory, the issue of intentionality may seem an old one, but it may yet have something to teach us. Bloom, it should be noted, does not utterly discount intention; instead, he couples it together with the involuntary.

(Lucretius parallels this move in connecting free will to apparently mindless atomic motion.) If reception (or influence), as Bloom surmises, is a process that is at once intentional and involuntary, then it is no surprise that recent writers on reception like Duncan Kennedy can stress our ignorance no matter what perspective we take on the process. To be clear, although Bloom addresses himself to poet-readers – and indeed tends to concern himself with “strong poets” and strong “misreadings” – there is no reason not to understand his theory as applying to all reading and reception. Thus, whatever an agent’s, or a reader’s, intentions – whether these include producing poetry or merely coming to grips with the words on the page – they cannot be known to succeed in the material event of reading.

To put this point somewhat differently, we might think of it as a reminder of a somewhat intransigent material and bodily presence in reading, a presence that affects and is affected by reading in productive, if sometimes unpredictable, ways. This material presence may be viewed from an Epicurean perspective as a symptom not only of the reader’s physical encounter with the text but also of reading as a transforming and transformative encounter with the material world, a point to which we return below. Epicurus himself reminds his students of the infinity of possible worlds, a statement against the uniqueness of this (or any other) world but also a hopeful suggestion of *physically* better worlds.³⁶

Bloom’s exchange with Paul de Man about the former’s theory of poetic influence dramatizes some of these concerns. Their exchange is one, as we shall see, that has often been read as turning upon epistemology and the epistemological status of figural language, but there may be other, more material issues at work. In reviewing Bloom’s

work, de Man points out, in a move we may call Epicurean, that the matter of language, his analogue of Lucretius's swerving atom, may be the agent just as well as the poet:

If we admit that the term "influence" is itself a metaphor that dramatizes a linguistic structure into a diachronic narrative, then it follows that Bloom's categories of misreading not only operate between authors, but also between the various texts of a single author or, within a given text, between the different parts, down to each particular chapter, paragraph, sentence, and, finally, down to the interplay between literal and figurative meaning within a single word or grammatical sign. ... The passage through rhetoric reveals that the traditional scheme, still much in evidence in *The Anxiety of Influence*, according to which language is a tool manipulated by extralinguistic impulses rooted in a subject, can be dislodged by the equally reasonable alternative that the affective appeal of text could just as well be the result of a linguistic structure.... The very scheme of things based on such terms as cause, effect, center, and meaning is put in question.³⁷

Bloom reads this critique as an epistemological one:

...[L]iterature relies upon troping, a turning away not only from the literal but from prior tropes.... Any stance that anyone takes up towards a metaphorical work will itself be metaphorical. My...decades-long critical quarrel with Paul de Man, a radiant intelligence, finally centered upon just the contention stated in the previous sentence. He insisted that an

epistemological stance in regard to a literary work was the only way out of the tropological labyrinth, while I replied that such a stance was no more or less a trope than any other.³⁸

In other words, Bloom takes the force of de Man's critique to lie in the epistemological uncertainty created by the inability of the external reader to decide between the agency of the poet and the agency of his language.³⁹ There are certainly grounds for reading de Man as Bloom does.⁴⁰ Essays such as "The Epistemology of Metaphor" show the emphasis on the epistemology of figural language in de Man's writing.⁴¹ But there is also another presumption, a suggestion if not a developed argument, lurking in de Man's commentary: de Man is interested in explaining, whether by recourse to linguistic structures or human agents, "the affective appeal of text."⁴² This phrase is striking because it is absent from many recent, more purely epistemological treatments of reception. Whatever de Man here suggests we may know, he aims to explain the affective or emotional appeal of texts. While affective appeal is perhaps inseparable from knowledge in the case of reading and receiving, an emphasis on affect and emotions can call into question the persistent recourse to knowledge and epistemologically-based formulations we have been tracking in some of the more theoretical writing on reception.

"Meaning," Charles Martindale writes, "is always realized at the point of reception."⁴³ Perhaps so, but texts and their readers do things other than realize meaning. In trying to locate Epicurean reception, it is worth remembering that Epicureanism has often been understood primarily as an ethical philosophy, one that aims at joy and pleasure, even if this latter term originally holds a sense (*ataraxia*, "freedom from

disturbance/pain”) unfamiliar to most modern pleasure-seekers. Indeed, pleasure possesses a striking, if potentially accidental, textual connection to the *clinamen*, the Lucretian swerve that Bloom chooses to figure poetic influence, the swerve that at once undermines and underwrites intentionality. There is a famous confusion, perhaps nothing more than the error of an inattentive scribe, in Lucretius’s text in the very passage where he justifies the need for the swerve. At *De Rerum Natura* 2.257, Lucretius speaks, in most modern editions, of a “free will, turned away from fate,” but in all of his reported manuscripts (most ninth- or tenth-century) this is a “free pleasure.” That is, by what amounts in Latin to the change of a letter – from *voluptas* to *voluntas* – the intent of Lucretius’s swerve is moved from the characterization of affective appeal to the characterization of intention.⁴⁴ While there is no need to attribute this reading to Lucretius himself – the text certainly provides easier sense if corrected to *voluntas* – for an understanding of Epicureanism that values rather than rejects the history of reading and misreading Lucretius, it is worth holding onto the conjunction of will and affect that this textual “error” encapsulates.⁴⁵

Natania Meeker, [in a recent reading of this passage, has interpreted](#) the textual conjunction of *voluptas* (“pleasure”) and *voluntas* (“will”) [as creating a kind of choice in how we understand Lucretius’s own intentions for the impact of the *De Rerum Natura* on the reader:](#)

Lucretius, for all his critique of theology as mass delusion, is less concerned with freedom as “enlightened” choice than he is with pleasure as giving rise to a moment in which one reader’s experience of the world may be materially reconfigured. His intention is at least in part to give

readers what they most want to receive – not an illusory freedom of pure choice – but the possibility of bodily reinvestment in the material autonomy of the *semina rerum* as the very substance of delight.⁴⁶

By emphasizing the idea that our “experience of the world may be materially reconfigured” by encountering Lucretius’s poem, Meeker gives a sense of the ways in which reinscribing the embodied reader into a theory of reception can fundamentally alter the parameters of what we mean by reception itself. For she suggests, through her reading of Lucretius’s own understanding of “reception,” that a reader’s engagement with a text is not only affected by his or her cultural, historical, and physical situatedness but also has the potential to reconfigure our encounters with the world around us.

If Epicureanism holds unexpected resources for thinking about reception in general, what kinds of resources might it hold for an understanding of its own specific reception? Are there particular elements in the nature of Epicureanism that make it such a dynamic force in the history of thought? We turn now to a discussion of where the present volume stands in relationship to scholarship on the legacies of Epicurus and Lucretius in the West, before reviewing the contributions it makes to the study of Epicureanism’s unsettled and unsettling *Nachleben*.

Encounters with Epicureanism

The last few decades have seen a remarkable rise of interest in the afterlife of ancient materialism and Epicureanism, in particular. The reception of Lucretius’s epic masterpiece, the *De rerum natura*, has received comparable attention.⁴⁷ It may be that

we are coming to see more clearly the major role played by Epicureanism and Lucretius in the formation of modernity, thanks to the work of Catherine Wilson and others.⁴⁸ It may be, too, as the later twentieth-century theoretical interest in Epicureanism documented above suggests, that its conceptual resources hold particular potential in the twenty-first century.⁴⁹ Whatever the reason for its resurgence, evidence of a renewed sense of Epicureanism's significance in the West has been abundant in recent years.

Scholarship on the reception of both Epicureanism and Lucretius has focused primarily on specific periods and milieus (e.g., early imperial Rome; Renaissance Florence; eighteenth-century France).⁵⁰ Besides yielding all the advantages of thick histories, work in this vein has amply demonstrated its capacity to provoke and vitalize conversations and debates in a range of climates, by embedding Epicureanism in the intellectual, cultural, and political dynamics of a given period. Taken individually, however, such studies give little sense of Epicureanism as a trans-cultural, trans-historical phenomenon. For more comprehensive coverage, scholars have been well served by the recent *Cambridge Companions* on Epicurus and especially on Lucretius, volumes whose format joins synoptic scope with the specialized knowledge of the contributors.⁵¹ Even at the level of the individual chapter, however, the aim of the *Companions* is largely to foster broad acquaintance rather than to provide in-depth analysis.⁵²

The present volume combines elements from both these approaches—the detailed micro-history and the sweeping survey—while experimenting with a different strategy. In scope, it spans the full afterlife of Epicurus and Lucretius in the West, from Greco-Roman antiquity to the late decades of the twentieth century in Europe and America. But, while wide-ranging, it makes no claims to being exhaustive. On the contrary, the

majority of the studies included here dilate specific and at times unexpected points of impact within the reception of Epicureanism. These targeted interventions are grounded in the historical and cultural contexts of their subjects. They tend to favor close reading over survey without forfeiting a sense of the larger picture or an interest in the nature of Epicurean reception as a specific phenomenon. They thus adopt the methods of fine-grained historical and literary analysis characteristic of work on the reception of Epicureanism in given authors or periods. Yet it is precisely through such localized techniques, together with an interest in the nature of reception itself, that these studies collectively explore the internal coherence, outside the boundaries of historical period or genre or cultural and intellectual context, of a tradition of thinking about and responding to Epicureanism.

Coherence here should not be understood along the lines of a closed or static system, as we emphasized above. We are interested, rather, in how Epicureanism functions as a *dynamic* entity, one that is transformed in the hands of new readers or critics or converts while at the same time producing reactions that, if not always predictable, nevertheless generate distinct series. From this perspective, as we have been arguing, reception unfolds through collisions between a body of ideas, most often transmitted through a text but also, say, through conversation and debate, and a reader (or listener). It is possible to understand such collisions in materialist terms, that is, as events triggered by the particular nature of the doctrines and the objects transmitting them but always realized more or less differently depending on who is reading, and when, and where, under which conditions and for what purpose. The nomadic journey of Epicureanism through these many encounters changes, in turn, the “text” of

Epicureanism itself as at least some of these encounters are folded into its future reception through the responses to which they give rise.

The idea of a collision or encounter between a material text and an embodied reader finds support in Epicureanism itself. It is not simply that Epicurus conceives of words as physical objects, born out of our simulacral contact with the world around us and productive of atomic changes in our interlocutors. His philosophy could be conceptualized as a form of medicine that acts on those exposed to it.⁵³ Describing his own attempt to shape the minds of his listeners through the *De Rerum Natura*, Lucretius famously speaks of his poem as a bitter but curative potion (Epicurean philosophy) delivered in a cup rimmed with honey (Lucretian verse and imagery).⁵⁴ Lucretius thus extends the medical analogy so prevalent in Hellenistic philosophy to describe reading (or, as would have been the case for many elite Romans, being read to) as physically engaging. Indeed, Lucretius crafts his poem in such a way so as to grab hold of his addressee, Memmius, with his verses, as Memmius is coming to see the world in a new way (1.948-50). He describes his poem as something that “labors” (*molitur*) to fall upon the ears of the listener (2.1024-25). The poem, animated by this striving, not only engages Memmius but also, hopefully, transforms him, by delivering him to the state identified by Epicurus as the goal (*telos*) of a human life: *ataraxia*, freedom from disturbance in the soul (accompanied, ideally, by *aponia*, freedom from bodily pain).

It does not take long to notice, however, that neither Epicurus nor Lucretius tends to leave their readers at peace. That is not to say Epicureanism’s adherents have failed to find fulfillment through its teachings. It is only to recall the remarkably turbulent wake of Epicureanism through Western history. Rather than bringing prospective disciples to

an enlightened state of calm, the Epicurean axiom that the gods are indifferent to us has often left them angry, despairing, and unsettled. Those who have encountered Lucretius's poem and its sublime vision of the cosmos are just as likely to be seized by restlessness, pleasure, and amazement (*horror ac divina voluptas*, in Lucretius's own words) as they are to achieve the tranquility promised by Epicureanism as an ethical philosophy. The tumult of Epicureanism is due, too, of course, to an entrenched misunderstanding of what kind of pleasure Epicurus named as the goal of life. From antiquity to the present day, Epicureanism has been a byword for hedonism at its most sensual, as the quote from Timon at the beginning of this essay indicates. It is true that even a brief acquaintance with the fragments of Epicurus undermines this characterization. It is neither drinking nor gourmet meals nor sex with women and boys, he writes, that produces the pleasant life. These kinds of pleasures are fleeting; giving rise to the desire for more pleasure, they make satisfaction ever more costly.⁵⁵ Epicurus, then, was not a straightforward hedonist.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, he has more often than not been mistaken by both self-proclaimed adherents and sworn enemies for the archetypal defender of the pursuit of sensory pleasures, making those pleasures among the most volatile elements within Epicureanism as it is transmitted both within and after antiquity.

The representation of Epicurus as a base hedonist is perhaps the most obvious case of "misreading" or "misreception" in the afterlife of Epicureanism. What should we do with such a misreading? Can we find a way to conceptualize a text or, here, a doctrinal system that would include its capacity to generate competing reactions, reactions that nevertheless cluster into patterns across diverse historical, intellectual, and cultural contexts? Can we formulate a model of reception that does not cut off some of

these clusters as errors but, rather, finds a way of understanding them as realizing some potential, what the Greeks would call a *dynamis*, within the original textual object? The present volume is an experiment in reading the reception of Epicureanism as the history of realizing different potentialities within the “text” of that philosophical system. In bringing together admirers alongside detractors, placing faithful and faithless readings next to each other, and attending closely to the dynamics of reaction and our own task of making sense of these dynamics, we have tried to open up a conversation about what it would mean to think of the reception of Epicureanism not in terms of successes or failures of interpretation, nor in terms of an unrelated string of individual performances, but as a history of encounters that say as much about the catalytic object as they do about those who meet with it. At the same time, we continue to insist that the affective and transformative potential of Epicureanism be read together with the specific circumstances under which it is realized: both aspects are crucial to the model we are proposing. Such a conversation can, we hope, have something to say about the reception of ancient texts, including philosophical systems, more generally.

A complex model of physical reception is implied, in fact, by Lucretius himself in his famous honeyed cup simile. For the transmission of the poem as it is described by the simile is not arrested at the lips. Lucretius imagines his work will have a physical impact, too, on the recesses of the mind, much as food acts on both the senses and the cavity of the body. The model of dynamic reception that we are suggesting also envisions different zones of impact and reactions that are both, as it were, conscious and unconscious, felt immediately and intensely on contact as pleasure or pain, as well as

through changes that work themselves to the surface of our experience and transform our lives more slowly.

At the same time, an affective model of reception would see the reactions at both levels, at the surface and in the depths, as determined at least in part by the specific physical and mental conditions of the reader, conditions created by individual temperament, historical setting, cultural context, intellectual background, and so on. Yet it is worth remembering that Lucretius, having observed the rich variability of constitutions among people, still concludes that these variations do not preclude anyone from being able to see the truths and achieve the states promised by Epicureanism.⁵⁷ In the same way, we can say that despite all the historical and cultural and temperamental and circumstantial differences that stratify the last two millennia of readers, we can speak in a similar way of a shared potential for engaging Epicureanism across the centuries. Nevertheless, these differences ensure that reactions to Epicureanism will never be entirely uniform. They account, too, for the specific responses within certain intellectual communities or historical periods or philosophical traditions. Indeed, we should expect that at certain times and places—say, eighteenth-century France—the external influences on the temperament of the reader inform how he or she responds to particular aspects of Epicureanism, such as the status of sensory pleasure or the absence of providence, with particular force.

It is no great stretch to say that texts and ideas impact us. The challenge is to bring a more rigorous concept of impact into our thinking about reception, a concept that accounts, on the one hand, for the patterns created by a text through its influence both on readers who live under the historical, cultural, and intellectual conditions of the text's

initial emergence and on those readers who live far removed from its point of origin; and, on the other hand, for the non-uniformity of reactions. It is to bring a concept of affect into our understanding of how we interact with texts and the power they exercise over us, without denying that texts affect us at many levels, both palpably and more subtly. The papers that follow explore in various ways how we can begin to imagine two millennia of reactions to a body of ideas, sometimes quite tight, sometimes quite loose, as one part of the Epicureanism that we engage with today.

In “Haunting Nepos: *Atticus* and the Performance of Roman Epicurean Death,” **W. H. Shearin** examines the death of a famous Epicurean, T. Pomponius Atticus, during the later Roman Republic. This death, when read in the company of various Epicurean and Stoic deaths, exemplifies the central role that disease (particularly *sudden* disease) plays in the demise of famous Epicureans. By contrast with Stoics, for whom death is largely about the exercise of the will (and for whom suicide – in Latin *mors voluntaria*, “voluntary death” – is the ideal), the death of Atticus – although in some sense a suicide – is accomplished through the frustration of any direct intention. Atticus starves himself in the face of a disease that is apparently no longer there, an act that dramatizes the very “swerviness” of Epicurean nature.

In “Epicurus’ s Mistresses: Pleasure, Authority, and Gender in the Reception of the *Kuriai Doxai* in the Second Sophistic,” **Richard Fletcher** faces head-on the “willful misrepresentation” of Epicureanism by some of its earliest critics who were active in the lively intellectual milieu of the second-century CE Greco-Roman world. Fletcher advocates a “contextual” reading of Epicureanism, one that embeds it in the sexual and philosophical politics of self-fashioning in this period. By way of illustration, he zeroes

in on one of Alciphron's fictional *Letters of Courtesans*, purportedly written by the Epicurean courtesan Leontion. Fletcher shows how the common accusations against Epicurus at this time (and for centuries)—too little spirituality, too much sensuality—become creative and complex challenges to philosophical authority in Alciphron's playful text. Leontion complains not only about her sexual enslavement to Epicurus, but also, jealously, about her lover's devotion to the master's "windy doctrines." She thus draws an analogy between her subordination to her master's pleasures and her lover's blind attachment to the pleasure promised by his philosophical master.

Gerard Passannante's contribution, "Reading for Pleasure: Disaster and Digression in the First Renaissance Commentary on Lucretius," explores the reception of Epicurean pleasure in the early sixteenth century in the crucible of loss and melancholy. By carefully following the digressions that repeatedly take us away from the Lucretian text in the first commentary edition of [the](#) *De Rerum Natura*, published by Gianbattista Pio in 1511, Passannante provides an exemplary demonstration of the interaction of philology and affective response, love of text and the bittersweet pleasures of Lucretius's lessons on disaster. As Passannante declares, these digressions must not be seen as minor asides, but rather as "a crucial entry into the mental world of the poem" as it was taking shape at the birth of humanism.

Exploring the limitations of current scholarly discourse on the presence of Lucretius in literature of Elizabethan England, **Adam Rzepka**, in his paper "Discourse *ex nihilo*: Lucretian Poetics in England to 1605," confronts the notion that [the](#) *De Rerum Natura* figures the poetics of its own subsequent transmission. Drawing upon Michel Serres and Jacques Lezra, who have both used Lucretian terms (swerve, *eventum*

[“accident”]) to figure discourse, he urges the need for a more mobile, complex model of discursive interaction during the Elizabethan period, which heretofore has presented Lucretian influence as a sudden, *ex nihilo* (and therefore highly un-Lucretian) occurrence.

In “Oscillate and Reflect: La Mettrie, Materialist Physiology, and the Revival of the Epicurean Canonic,” **James Steintrager** studies the radical wing of French Enlightenment philosophy, which tended towards implicit atheism and more open materialism, two positions often called (by proponents and scholars) “Epicurean.” Intellectual historians have understood this Epicureanism to entail a materialist physics—chiefly, atomism—and an ethics that eschews above all fear of the gods. In its more libertine guise, this “Epicurean” ethics also advocates sensual pleasure as the sovereign good. Steintrager argues that while associating radical *philosophie* with Epicurean physics and ethics makes good sense, limiting ourselves to these branches of philosophy overlooks the crucial revival of the Epicurean “canonic” (its explanation of the empirical bases of knowledge) in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

In “Engendering Modernity: Epicurean Woman from Lucretius to Rousseau,” **Natania Meeker** analyzes the role played by women in the figuration of Epicurean subjectivity in the writings of Rousseau as he seeks to envision a new political and social order for revolutionary France. For Rousseau, Meeker argues, women stand at the intersection of Epicureanism and a voluptuous modernity; they are subjects naturally in thrall to pleasures that refuse to yield to the discipline of reason. Women make visible the need for ideological controls that acknowledge the power of pleasure without allowing it to destabilize the social order. Rousseau thus deploys the figure of the

Epicurean woman, Meeker points out, as the foil that allows the male subject to “imagine [himself] as free.”

In “Sensual Idealism: The Spirit of Epicureanism and the Politics of Finitude in Kant and Hölderlin,” **Anthony Adler** studies Kant’s idiosyncratic and surprisingly positive reception of Epicureanism. Adler argues that despite his rejection of Epicureanism as dogmatic doctrine, Kant nonetheless endorses, and remains engaged with, the spirit of Epicureanism throughout his critical philosophy. [Particularly important to this discussion is Kant’s reading of the Epicurean technical term, *prolēpsis*, which the German views as an anticipation of his own *a priori* concepts.](#) As a coda to his [study of Kant](#), Adler examines Hölderlin’s largely unrecognized engagement with Kant’s reformulation of Epicureanism in his *Death of Empedocles*.

Benjamin Aldes Wurgaft, with his paper “From Heresy to Nature: Leo Strauss’s [History of Modern Epicureanism](#),” traces the varying roles of the “Epicurean” throughout Strauss’s [corpus](#). Wurgaft shows that, despite Strauss’s [leanings towards and frequent association with Platonism](#), Epicureanism nonetheless plays a substantial role in defining his conception of philosophy. In particular, Strauss’s [early reflection on Epicureanism as heretical religious critique](#) seems to bear a certain attraction (if only by implication) for Strauss, who denies philosophers the ability to submit to the “salutary law” of religion. At the heart of this attraction lies a particular cross-linguistic pun: *apikores* (Hbr. “heretic”) phonetically (and perhaps etymologically) suggests Epicurean.

Brooke Holmes’s [paper](#), “Deleuze, Lucretius, [and the Image of Naturalism](#)” [addresses](#) the attraction exercised by what Gilles Deleuze spent his life critiquing as a particularly dangerous myth, the myth of Platonism. Given the seductive appeal of a

philosophy of essences, Deleuze sees an urgent need to reiterate philosophical pluralism as a rival image of thought. One such reiteration is his early reading of the *De Rerum Natura*, at the heart of which lies the figure of the simulacrum. The Lucretian simulacrum gives rise to two ways of seeing, two ways of understanding “the infinite.” On the one hand, the simulacrum, by concealing the “shocks” and “motions” through which it is produced, causes us to believe in the stable image and, hence, immortal forms. On the other, the simulacrum is the basis of an inferential seeing that allows us to go past the surface to glimpse the events and microbodies of the atomic world. Recognizing that this glimpse into atomic reality takes place through philosophy itself, since there is no naked disclosure of that world, Deleuze addresses the need for naturalism to “produce a phantom at the limit of a lengthened or unfolded experience.”

In his contribution, “The Sublime, Today?” **Glenn Most** studies what he calls the “Lucretian sublime,” a concept he contrasts with the more familiar ancient notion of the “Longinian sublime.” As Most demonstrates, whereas the Longinian sublime depends upon a theistic perspective, the Lucretian sublime is rooted precisely in a rejection of that perspective. He then tests and works out this notion of the Lucretian sublime against a series of striking twentieth-century visual examples, especially drawn from the work of Mark Rothko. The positing and development of the Lucretian sublime allow us to understand the persistent presence of the sublime in modern art (as well as in critical discourse about that art) that itself rejects a theistic worldview.

In his piece, “Epicureanism in Michel Foucault's *Hermeneutics of the Subject*,” **Alain Gigandet** studies the ways in which Epicureanism, while providing some of the evidence for Foucault's 1981-82 course on the hermeneutics of the subject, nonetheless

seems to posit a subject that operates in terms different than those articulated by Foucault's predominantly Stoic picture. Specifically, Gigandet suggests that Epicurean ethics posits a subject defined above all by the image of the conquest of a place, especially in a defensive manner. To make his case, he examines some of the central metaphors in *the De Rerum Natura* and other Epicurean texts that define the nature of the subject. He considers, for example, the famous Epicurean dictum that because of our common mortality we inhabit a "city without walls," a metaphor that points to the ultimately precarious foundation of our happiness, as well as famous Lucretian images of the wise man as "fortified" by his Epicurean doctrine. He thus defines an Epicurean "hermeneutics of the subject" that is perhaps necessarily marginalized in Foucault's writings, as it is not entirely reducible to Foucault's broader and largely Stoic portrait.

¹ The term φυσικός (*physikos*) does not have an easy English equivalent. Perhaps the best rendering is "natural philosopher," one who studies φύσις (*physis*, "nature") as part of a tradition going back to the Pre-Platonic philosophers.

² This couplet is attributed to Timon at Diogenes Laërtius 10.3. In referring to Epicurus as a "teacher of letters," Timon is playing on his alleged conversion from schoolmaster to philosopher; see Diogenes for further anecdotal information about Epicurus's early career.

³ "text, n." *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. 1989. *OED Online*. 18 May, 2011 <<http://www.oed.com/>>. We can imagine the physical position of the reader as the complement to that of the writer as Jane Bennett describes him or her in terms of what Deleuze and Guattari call an assemblage: "The sentences of this book also emerged from

the confederate agency of many striving macro- and microactants: from “my” memories, intentions, contentions, intestinal bacteria, eyeglasses, and blood sugar, as well as from the plastic computer keyboard, the bird song from the open window, or the air or particulates in the room, to name only a few of the participants. What is at work on the page is an animal-vegetable-mineral-sonority cluster with a particular degree and duration of power” ((2010) 23).

⁴ Philosophy is largely absent, for example, from the excellent survey of recent scholarship in Güthenke (2009). Modern scholarship on doxography is briefly mentioned at Porter (2008) 473.

⁵ This approach to the history of philosophy is defended, for example, in Frede (1992).

⁶ Historical – and historically informed – studies of ancient Epicureanism are numerous. Clay (1998), for example, in a series of specific case studies, considers much evidence, both material and textual, for the practices of the Epicurean school. Frischer (1982), written by a specialist in material culture, speculates (if not always convincingly) about the practices of philosophical recruitment within the ancient Epicurean school. Sedley (1973), in presenting a new edition of Epicurus *On Nature* XXVIII, also offers much of interest on the historical development of Epicurus’s own thought.

⁷ For recent surveys of work on the doxographical tradition, see Mansfeld (1999a); (1999b); Mejer (2006); van der Eijk (2009). For case studies, see, e.g., Mansfeld and Runia (1996-); Baltussen (2000); Wolfsdorf (2009). The essays in van der Eijk (1999) address doxography within the history of medicine. On the commentary tradition, see the essays in Gibson and Kraus (2002).

⁸ See, for example, the competing positions of Zhmud (2001) and Mansfeld (2002).

⁹ *Anagôgos* is a term Plutarch uses to describe a man who is “intemperate in his pleasures”: Plutarch, *Moralia* 140B (*Precepts for Marriage*): ἀκρατῆς...περὶ τὰς ἡδονάς.

¹⁰ Iser (2006) 57.

¹¹ Cf. e.g. Tompkins (1980), which presents – among a set of essays penned largely by American-based critics – a selection from Iser (1974). (Iser, of course, eventually became an American-based critic, but most of his founding theoretical works were penned in Germany.)

¹² Martindale (1993) and Martindale and Thomas (2006). Cf. Martindale (2007).

¹³ Martindale (1993) 10. Jauß is explicitly named and discussed in Martindale’s work (e.g. Martindale (1993) 7-10 and Martindale (2006) 3). Iser, by contrast, appears only marginally in Martindale’s writing. In Martindale (1993), for example, Iser appears only in one footnote (16n.22), where he is “dispos[ed] of” by Stanley Fish.

¹⁴ Gadamer (1975) 336, cited at Martindale (1993) 17.

¹⁵ The term “family relationship” is Martindale’s, although it clearly echoes Wittgenstein’s notion of “Familienähnlichkeiten.” See Wittgenstein (1997) § 67.

¹⁶ Cf. Fish (1989b).

¹⁷ For “blanks” in Iser’s theory, cf., e.g., Iser (1978) 182-203.

¹⁸ Indeed, one might speculate that Martindale makes Jauß his primary forebear precisely because classical studies has such a long history as a positivist, historical discipline. That is, writing on (and revising) Jauß allows Martindale to attack positivist historiography in a way that writing on Iser would not.

¹⁹ [Leonard \(2006\)](#).

²⁰ It is perhaps worth noting that Lucretius himself, if not Epicureanism more generally, makes a substantial contribution to our understanding of what *figura* (and “figural”) may mean. Cf. Auerbach (1984) 16-18.

²¹ For passages within Lucretius that compare letters and atoms, cf. *De Rerum Natura* 1.197, 1.824, 1.912, 2.688, 2.1013. For the swerve, cf. *De Rerum Natura* 2.216-93 as well as the further discussion *infra*.

²² Cf. Serres (1977) 168-71.

²³ Cf. *De Rerum Natura* 1.449-58.

²⁴ Lezra (1997) 4: “Disagreements over periodization quickly show themselves to be debates about what characteristics or attributes are definitionally proper (*coniuncta*) or accidental (*eventa*) to a thing or term...”

²⁵ Cf., e.g., Althusser (1994) 35. Selections from Althusser (1994) are translated in Althusser (2006).

²⁶ Derrida (1984) 8.

²⁷ To be fair, there are certainly moments where Martindale and others point to non-epistemological concerns in reception, cf. e.g. Martindale (1993) 10; Batstone (2006) 19. Both Kennedy and Martindale tend, however, to revert to epistemology in their more general formulations about reception and its significance. For the idea of a “materialist” reception studies, cf. Porter (2008) 477.

²⁸ Kennedy (2006) 292.

²⁹ And it is echoed variously throughout the Martindale-Thomas volume. Martindale, for example, speaks in his introduction of the “situated, contingent...character of readings”

((2006) 3) and makes clear that, for him, “is a way of doing classics that is at odds with the positivism of much that is now labelled ‘reception’” (12).

³⁰ [Bloom \(2011\) represents the most recent statement of Bloom’s theory of poetic influence. This work, his “final reflection upon the influence process” \(ix\), shows just how much Epicureanism – and Lucretius in particular – lie at the heart of his thought. Here he devotes an entire section, nearly a quarter of the work, to “The Skeptical Sublime” \(133-206\), where he traces “Lucretian tradition” \(136\) from Dryden, Milton, and Shelley through to Giacomo Leopardi, Merrill, and Yeats. In terms of defining his “revisionary ratios,” this new book largely restates Bloom’s previous views, but in terms of articulating a particularly “Lucretian sublime” \(166\) – a term that is also treated by \[Most in this volume\]\(#\) – it represents a powerful addition to Bloom’s critical catalogue.](#)

³¹ Cf. Wolfreys (2000) 23-26, who reads the “swerve” as a (if not the only) distinctively Bloomian trope of reading.

³² Many modern (analytic) philosophers have found the Epicurean doctrine of the swerve incoherent. Cf., e.g., Purinton (1999). Classicists (even those working within a largely analytic framework) tend to be more sympathetic to the notion: cf. *inter alia* Englert (1987) 64-66; Fowler (2002) 407-27 (and *ad loc.*). (This scholarly literature is largely ignored by those who appropriate the swerve for theorizing reading.)

³³ Bloom (1997) 14.

³⁴ Some of the result of such blurring would undoubtedly be “psychoanalytic,” at least in the weak sense that intentions would not be fully present. Scholars have perceived a certain loosely “psychoanalytic” element in Epicureanism, especially in Lucretius: [see](#) Jope (1983). While far from hostile towards psychoanalytic approaches, the present

discussion aims to describe a type of reading, one that need not be psychoanalytic, where texts are engaged as opportunities for interlocking with an external, othered world that produces an experience of pleasurable or unpleasurable assimilation.

³⁵ Cabisius (1985) and Fowler (1989) both examine the intersections of representation for humans and atoms. Shearin (2007) 106-56, building upon this work, examines, among other things, how human names become more atomic.

³⁶ On the infinity of worlds, cf. Epicurus *Letter to Herodotus* 45, 73-74; Lucretius *De Rerum Natura* 2.1052-104. There is need for greater scholarly exploration of Epicureanism as a philosophy of possibility, which is one of the most common and potent notions in both Epicurus and Lucretius. In Lucretius alone, the Latin verb *posse* (“to be able”) occurs 517 times. Cf. Shearin (2007) 57.

³⁷ de Man (1983) 276.

³⁸ Bloom (1997) xix. Emphasis added.

³⁹ “Agency of his language” is a strange turn of phrase, particularly for those who are not well-acquainted with de Man’s *œuvre*. Perhaps the best way of understanding the agency which de Man accords to language is on the analogy of the machine. Just as machines, which are in some sense nothing more than artificial products of human effort, nonetheless may “do” things, including things we do not wish, so language can act and even misfire. The scholar who has identified de Man most clearly as a thinker of the machine is Avital Ronell. See Ronell (2002) 97-98.

⁴⁰ But it should be noted that the position Bloom carves out for himself is what others would attribute to de Man. See Jameson (1991) 238: “Metaphor, in DeMan [*sic*], is therefore itself a metaphorical act...” Jameson’s reading of de Man is fascinating for

trying to understand de Man's relationship to Epicureanism, primarily because it attributes to him an eighteenth-century epistemology and locates him, as a thinker, in close proximity to Rousseau. These two (related) observations are interesting because Rousseau, particularly the Rousseau of the *Second Discourse*, is arguably the most Lucretian writer since Lucretius himself. Cf., e.g., Lovejoy and Boas (1935) 240-42.

⁴¹ "The Epistemology of Metaphor" appears most conveniently at de Man (1996) 34-50, although it was originally published in 1978.

⁴² Terada (2001) presents a strong case for the centrality of emotions in de Man's work.

⁴³ Martindale (1993) 3. This statement is echoed through Martindale and Thomas (2006). Cf, e.g., Batstone (2006) 16.

⁴⁴ On this connection/vacillation between will and pleasure, [see](#) Derrida (1984) 7-8 and Meeker (2006) 30.

⁴⁵ For a consideration of classical texts that aims to keep them alive to the plurality represented by their transmission (e.g., the *voluntas-voluptas* conjunction here), [see](#) Gurd (2005).

⁴⁶ Meeker (2006) 31.

⁴⁷ [The reception of Lucretius is, on our view, inseparable from the reception of Epicureanism. See also Gillespie and Hardie \(2007\) 14, where they locate the reception of Lucretius within the reception of Epicureanism more generally, and Erler \(1994\) 477: "\[d\]ie Geschichte der Nachwirkung von Lukrez stellt sich zeitweise als eine Geschichte der Nachwirkung Epikurs dar."](#)

⁴⁸ [See esp. Wilson \(2008\); \(2009\).](#)

⁴⁹ See also Holmes in this volume on the reception of Lucretius and Epicureanism in the last hundred years.

⁵⁰ There is a large and rapidly growing bibliography here. Up through 1994, the most comprehensive bibliography on all aspects of the reception (or *Nachwirkung*) of both Epicurus and Lucretius may be found in Erler (1994), esp. 195-202, 482-90; see also the wide-ranging, if uneven, selection of papers in Scherer 1969. On Epicureanism in antiquity, see the papers in Erler (2000). On Lucretius's reception generally, see Poignault (1999); in Latin poetry, see Hardie (2009), which includes a chapter on Milton. On Epicureanism in the Renaissance, see Goldberg (2009); Brown (2010); Passannante (2011); in early modern Europe, see the papers in Osler (1991); Wilson (2008). On the recent reception of Lucretius, see Johnson (2000); Kennedy (2002).

⁵¹ See Gillespie and Hardie (2007) (Lucretius); Warren (2009) (Epicureanism). For coverage of the whole tradition, see also Jones (1989). Gordon and Suits (2003) covers the tradition's historical range, loosely in the name of assessing its contemporary relevance.

⁵² Moreover, the reception aspect is tilted heavily toward Lucretius. The material on reception in the Epicureanism volume is far less extensive.

⁵³ On philosophy as a cure in Epicureanism, see esp. Nussbaum (1994) 110-11, 123-24; Tsouna (2009). Cf., e.g., Long (1996) 128-30.

⁵⁴ Lucretius *De Rerum Natura* 1.921-50=4.1-25 (with minor variations in ll. 4.11, 24, 25 and possibly 8, 17).

⁵⁵ Letter to Menoeceus 131. See also Plutarch *Moralia* 1088B-D (*Non Posse*); Cicero *De Finibus* II.3.

⁵⁶ What kind of hedonist he was, of course, is still very much under discussion. The difficulty in large part stems from the uncertain status of sensory pleasures in Epicurean hedonism. For discussion of the problem, see Glidden (1980); Brunschwig (1986); Annas (1993) 337; Purinton (1993); Striker (1993); Cooper (1999); Porter (2003a); Woolf (2009).

⁵⁷ *De Rerum Natura* 3.314-22.