

BOOK REVIEW
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The Cambridge Companion to Lucretius. Edited by STUART GILLESPIE AND PHILIP HARDIE. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pp. xiv + 365. Paper, \$34.99. ISBN 978-0-521-61266-1.

Following in the footsteps of Virgil, Horace and Ovid, “lonely” Lucretius now has a companion, a *Cambridge Companion*, that is.¹ Readers longing for a singular focus on the text of Lucretius may be disappointed by what they find here, but those with a broader notion of classical studies will recognize the virtues of this volume, if also its limitations.

Hardie and Gillespie have assembled a collection of essays that—without entirely leaving direct studies of Lucretius’ text to the side—leans more than slightly toward the burgeoning discipline of classical reception. The volume consists of three sections, “Antiquity,” “Themes” and “Reception”; and as many as thirteen of the nineteen essays in these sections may be said to be, at least in part, works of reception studies, including all those within the latter two divisions. Essays range from the history of science to the Middle Ages, from Victorian Britain to “the moderns.” Even many of the pieces in the “Antiquity” portion of the volume treat, rather than the text of Lucretius itself, Lucretius’ philosophical or poetic predecessors or the “reception” of his text within antiquity.

What does this mean? One answer is that this volume tests the *dictum* put forward by Charles Martindale in the form of a rhetorical question: “What else indeed could (say) ‘Lucretius’ be other than what readers have made of him over the centuries?”² If this is correct, the volume under review is every bit as much “Lucretius” as the “Lucretius” one finds in (say) Donald Dudley’s edited *Lucretius* volume of 1965, although all but one or two of the essays here would make strange accompaniments to largely New Critical fare such as “The Language of Lucretius” and “Imagery in Lucretius” (both found in Dudley’s collection).

Many changes—theoretical revolutions and counter-revolutions—have passed through classical studies since the 1960s, so it is hardly surprising that alongside Joseph Farrell’s “Lucretian architecture” and E.J. Kenney’s “Lucretian texture”, which largely offer close readings of rhetoric, style, form and structure, there are

¹ On Lucretius’ rather Romantic loneliness, cf. e.g. O. Regenbogen, *Lucrez: seine Gestalt in seinem Gedicht* (Leipzig and Berlin, 1932) p. 15: “...Lucretius is solitary [*einsam*] ...Lucretius is alone [*allein*], yearningly striving for the light from his darkness, glowing from his experience, thirsting to share it solicitously, sorrowfully striving after his friend and patron, overflowing in his thanks towards his savior.”

² Charles Martindale, *Redeeming the Text: Latin poetry and the hermeneutics of reception* (Cambridge, 1993) p. 10. I have substituted “Lucretius” for Martindale’s original “Virgil.”

pieces here that attempt to connect Lucretius to his contemporary culture (e.g. papyri from Herculaneum and Roman Republican politics) or to various intellectual and literary histories (e.g. Greek philosophy, Latin literature, history of science, Renaissance, Enlightenment, etc.). Critical pluralism is alive and well in this *Companion*. Yet if the *Companion* is critically plural, serving as a home to intellectual history, cultural criticism and literary history, it is perhaps worth asking what it still leaves out: if “Lucretius” is “what readers have made of him,” which readers are given voice and which silenced?

One way of answering this question is to frame it in terms of the (self-consciously) “imperialist vision” of classics that Martindale offered in a recent essay on classical reception:³ “Two things above all I would have classics embrace: a relaxed, not to say imperialist, attitude towards what we may study as part of the subject, and a subtle and supple conception of the relationship between past and present, modern and ancient. Then classics could again have a leading role among the humanities, a classics neither merely antiquarian nor crudely presentist, a classics of the present certainly, but also, truly, of the future.” Although Martindale explicitly eschews the descriptor “imperialist,” we certainly have an image of classics encroaching upon the “relaxed” borders of other disciplines. If we may borrow this image, what borders, however “relaxed,” does *The Cambridge Companion to Lucretius* fail to cross?

Despite the fact that the “imperialist” volume invades many moments from well before Lucretius’ poem to the present day, the basic answer is that it is geographically centered on Western Europe and England in particular. It is no doubt true that the history of the reading of Lucretius, himself a European poet, is richer in Europe; but there is a story to be told, for example, of American poet Rolfe Humphries’ engagement with and translation of the Epicurean.⁴ Americans do appear in the collection—Pound and Zukofsky both merit brief mention—but the reception of Lucretius as told here is heavily English and French. Further, even within the Western European encounter with Lucretius, the story focuses mostly on literature in its traditional sense and not so directly on (e.g.) influential philosopher-theorists who have studied him. The name Deleuze is not found in the *Companion’s* index or bibliography, although—as the English version of *Logic of Sense* shows—the *philosophe* had more than a passing interest in Lucretius.

³ The term “imperialist vision” is employed by Duncan Kennedy in his “Afterword” to Charles Martindale and Richard F. Thomas, eds., *Classics and the Uses of Reception* (Oxford, 2006) p. 293. The following quotation (by Martindale) appears on that same page.

⁴ Humphries’ well-known translation appears in the bibliography of the *Companion*, but there is no discussion of it amongst modern poets.

Yet within these limits *The Cambridge Companion to Lucretius* provides a selective overview of contemporary approaches to Lucretius, and it generally does that well. Some of the essays, e.g., Schiesaro's piece on "Lucretius and Roman politics and history" (which should be of interest to classicists who presume that Epicureans were a- or anti-political, as he successfully sketches an anti-imperialist, Lucretian politics and takes steps towards locating culturally and politically a poet often seen apart from Roman culture) and Porter's essay on "Lucretius and the sublime" (which brings Lucretius into modern discussions of subjectivity), are genuinely groundbreaking. Others, e.g., Warren's "Lucretius and Greek philosophy" and Gale's "Lucretius and previous poetic traditions," provide useful, up-to-date summaries of their topics. Some, though, are more puzzling. Michael Reeve's contribution, for example, begins by asking "Where did the accent fall on *mulier* in the oblique cases?", which may be a fine opening salvo in some instances but not for a volume that claims to be "completely accessible to the reader who has read Lucretius only in translation" [Back Cover]. Little of the Latin in Reeve's essay is translated, and although it is possible to make some sense of his discussion with limited language skills, it seems incorrectly cast for the stated target audience. This is a pity, for the story of Lucretius' medieval survival (when so much Epicurean material was utterly destroyed) needs to be better—and more accessibly—told.

Whatever its shortcomings, though, this volume remains a welcome addition to the thin bookshelf of general introductions to Lucretius and his reception. One has to go all the way back to George Hadzits' (1935) *Lucretius and his Influence* to find an English-language treatment of the Epicurean poet that comes anywhere near this volume in scope. Even if the present collection occasionally misses the mark, it is far more scholarly and useful as a research tool than Hadzits' long out-of-date account. Other reception histories of Lucretius are needed to complement Hardie and Gillespie's collection; but for the moment at least, we are lucky to have it.⁵

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⁵ I have noted few errors, none of substance, in the volume. A random sampling: p. 75: "Hermann 1956" should be "Herrmann 1956"; p. 110: 1965 (middle of page) should be followed by a colon rather than a semi-colon; "Winbolt 1908" (9 lines from bottom) should be "Winbolt 1903"; p. 294: Figure 18.1, Sir George Beaumont's *Peele Castle in a Storm* should be re-done, as it is quite difficult to make out the image in its black-and-white reproduction. [Readers should look rather to the (much more striking and sublime) color reproduction of the same image on the dust jacket.]; p. 329: Benjamin 1999 was published at Cambridge, MA; p. 343: Long's 1977 piece has been re-worked and re-published in his *From Epicurus to Epictetus* (Oxford, 2006).

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