CHAPTER 2

Reading the 'Implied Author' in Lucretius' De Rerum Natura

Nora Goldschmidt

In his *Chronicle* for the year 94 BC, Jerome provides the following short notice about the author of the *De Rerum Natura* (*DRN*):[1]

> Titus Lucretius poeta nascitur: qui postea amatorio poculo in furorem versus, cum aliquot libros per intervalla insaniae conscripsisset, quos postea Cicero emendavit, propria se manu interfecit anno aetatis XLIIII.
>
> The poet Titus Lucretius was born. In later life he was sent mad by a love-potion; having composed a number of books in the intervals of his madness, later edited by Cicero, he died by his own hand at the age of 43.

Jerome's miniature biography – the only biographical document about Lucretius that survives from antiquity – has long haunted the reception of Lucretius' poem.[2] Supplemented by an expanded fake *Life* originally believed to have been based on ancient sources known as the *Vita Borgiana*, which added, among other details, a 'wicked woman' (*femina improba*) behind the *poculum amatorium*, Jerome's terse *Life* swelled into a full-blown biographical tradition:[3] Lucretius' wife, 'Lucilia', piqued at the lack of attention she received from her husband (she 'found her master cold', as Tennyson put it), secretly administered a love potion which drove the poet mad and led to his eventual suicide.[4] This story has, as Martha

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[1] Jerome, *Chronicon* ad Ol. 171.1–3 (96–94 BC): text Rostagni 1944, 58–9.

[2] Donatus, Jerome's teacher, also states briefly in his *Vita Vergilii* (6) that Virgil assumed the *toga virilis* on the day Lucretius died.

[3] On the *Vita Borgiana*, discovered at the end of the nineteenth century, see Fabbri 1984; Solaro 2000; Palmer 2014: 101–2.

[4] Tennyson, 'Lucretius' (1868), l.2. The name 'Lucilia' (which also appears in Chaucer's prologue to 'The Wife of Bath's Tale') seems to appear first in Walter Map's twelfth-century *De nugis curialium* (*On Courtly Fripperies*), IV.3: Solaro 2000: 14–16. On the thriving tradition of lives of Lucretius in the Renaissance see further Palmer 2014: 140–91; on the nineteenth-century biofictional reception of the *DRN* see Goldschmidt 2019: 130–55. An alternative version of Lucretius' biography, which takes its ultimate cue from a misread medieval scholion on Ovid's *Ibis*, features Lucretius' homosexual lover, Asterion: Solaro 1993: 60–3; Palmer 2014: 133.

Nussbaum aptly puts it, 'served for centuries as an informal blueprint for interpretation' of Lucretius' poem.[5] From early modern forgeries to Victorian poetry, from twentieth-century fiction to contemporary film, Lucretius' text has consistently been construed through the tale of its author's 'discomposed brain'.[6]

The image of the melancholy and suicidal author of the *DRN* has exercised a similar influence on scholarship on the poem. Textual problems suggest that Lucretius' poem was abruptly aborted, which has led several readers to seek biographical explanations for the state of the text. But the habit of psychologizing the author extends far beyond textual issues to fundamentally colour interpretations of the poem's content. In his canonical three-volume commentary, Cyril Bailey, for example, discerns an 'unnatural preoccupation' with suicide in the poem, which gives credit to the story of the poet's self-murder, finding the *DRN* itself 'not without confirmation' of 'the kind of pessimistic depression, which from time to time might lead to a "breakdown"' or psychopathological 'hallucination'.[7] Among historians, T. P. Wiseman similarly gives credence to Jerome's story, going several steps further to find in Lucretius' text other biographical tales to tell; since the imagery of the *DRN* evinces an intimate familiarity with herbs and potions, we might infer that Lucretius was probably a medic, or, since the poem is strikingly observant about the details of the sound of the saw, he may have been a carpenter.[8] At its most extreme, failing to engage with the poem in a way that is free from the bias of biography, this approach to the *DRN* could easily be dismissed, in Holford-Strevens' memorable words, as the 'failure of Lucretian biography'.[9] In a perpetual feedback loop, the story of Lucretius' life, and especially the state of his mind, originally inferred from the text itself,

[5] Nussbaum 1994: 141.

[6] For Lucretius' 'discomposed brain' see Matthew Arnold, 'On the modern element in literature', in Super 1960–77: 1.33. For fictional prose lives see, notably, Marcel Schwob's short story, 'Lucrèce', in *Vies imaginaires* (1896), and Luca Canali's novel, *Nei pleniluni sereni. Autobiografia immaginaria di Tito Lucrezio Caro* (1995). G. Maccioni's short film, *Cose Naturali* (2010), dramatizes a modern version of Lucretius' biography on screen. For the reception of Lucretius see, e.g., Reeve 2007; Priestman 2007; Passannante 2011; Greenblatt 2011; Palmer 2014; Norbrook, Harrison and Hardie 2015; Goldschmidt 2019: 130–55. See also the Introduction to this volume.

[7] Bailey 1947: 1.11: 'it is not difficult to imagine Lucretius suffering from a recurrent depression, which even had its influence on the "lucid intervals" in which his work was done'.

[8] Wiseman 1974: 40–3; 21–5. For Wiseman, '[t]here is no usable external evidence, only the picture we can get out of the poem itself. But with Lucretius that should be enough' (1974: 13). For defence of the factuality of Jerome's account see also, esp., Stampini 1896 with Bailey 1947: 1.8–9. On the tendency to read the *DRN* 'as a work betraying anxiety, melancholy, and even mental instability on the part of its author' see Gale 2007a: 3 n. 11.

[9] Holford-Strevens 2002: 23.

has – consciously or unconsciously – been applied in interpreting the poem, and, for Holford-Strevens and others, scholarship would do well to purge all remnants of this fallacious reading practice from the rightful analysis of the text.[10]

Yet rather than an abject 'failure' of biographical fact-finding, the biographical and psychological bias that has so marked the artistic and scholarly reception of the *DRN* for so long can, instead, be welcomed as a valid and fruitful strategy of reading. Though we might like to think that we can access a 'pure' version of the *DRN* free from the perceived psychological or biographical presence of the author, the text of the *DRN* itself fundamentally undercuts that aim, calling for just such a 'biased' reading. Written in a culture in which texts were regularly mined for evidence of the life of the poet, where biography was an established mode not only of reading texts but of writing them, there is an important sense in which the *DRN* itself is partially responsible for how we have tended to read the author in the text.[11] Rather than dismissing biographical and cognate readings of the poem, therefore, or, conversely, finding apparent 'facts' to defend them, this chapter explores the terms of that partial responsibility. Drawing on Wayne Booth's concept of the 'implied author' and its later developments, it examines the textually constructed author in the *DRN* – a construct which partly overlaps with, but also goes significantly beyond, the didactic *persona* – to explain the pervasive presence of the author that readers have so often found, and continue to find, in the dynamics of Lucretius' text.

The Textualization of the Author

In his seminal article on the *DRN*, Gian Biagio Conte crucially brought to the fore the presence in the poem of an 'implied reader'.[12] Drawing on the work of Wolfgang Iser, who defined the *impliziter Leser* not as an extra-textual figure existing in reality, but as a role constructed and defined implicitly in the text itself ('an expression of the role offered by the text

[10] Holford-Strevens 2002; Kenney 2014: 5, with Cherniss 1943 for the 'biographical fallacy' in the reading of classical texts.

[11] For biofictional receptions of Latin poetry in antiquity see Goldschmidt 2019: 10–21.

[12] 'Instructions for a Sublime Reader: Form of the Text and Form of the Addressee in Lucretius' *De rerum natura*' = Conte 1994: 1–34. Conte's essay was originally published in Italian as an introductory essay to Luca Canali's translation of Lucretius (= Conte 1990); some of the main ideas were foreshadowed earlier in Conte 1966.

[which] is in no way an abstraction derived from a real reader'),[13] Conte argued that 'the form of the text' and 'the form of the reader' in the *DRN* are one and the same. Independent of the poem's named addressee, Memmius, who is mentioned a mere eleven times in the poem, the reader of the *DRN* is constructed and defined by the text itself, regardless of any historical or biographical reality:

> Th[e] reader-addressee is a form of the text; it is the figure of the recipient as anticipated by the text. To this prefiguration of the reader all future, virtual readers must adapt themselves . . . In short, the text's form and intentionality determine the reader's form.[14]

Formulated in the wake of a theoretical turn away from authors towards texts and readers, Conte's essay emerges from a critical milieu that sought to leave behind the fruitless search for the author's putative 'intention', emphasizing textuality over reality and readers over authors.[15] As Roland Barthes famously put it, 'the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author',[16] and, for Conte, the textually constructed reader in the *DRN* is the fundamental driving force behind how we ought to interpret the poem, so much so that the figure of the author himself disappears: the poem's 'addressees are not only other people (who must be taught) but also the poet himself (who has already learned and now becomes a missionary)'.[17]

Yet the co-option of the author as reader has its drawbacks. Dispensing with the author, 'that somewhat decrepit deity of the old criticism',[18] has done much to push textual interpretation away from the tenacious 'intentional fallacy' that has continued often detrimentally to haunt classical scholarship in particular, and which Conte, among others, has been instrumental in dissipating.[19] But once released from the concept of a knowable author 'out there', the critical pendulum can also swing the other way. As Seán Burke eloquently formulated it, 'the concept of the author is never more alive than when pronounced dead'.[20] The idea of the 'author' fulfils a primary desire, even a necessity, for the reader. As Roland Barthes himself conceded:

[13] Iser 1978: 36.
[14] Conte 1994: xx. For similar readings of the constructed 'implied reader' as 'a creation of the poem itself' see, e.g., Clay 1983: 212 (212–25); Volk 2002: 74.
[15] For Conte's broader theoretical position during roughly the same period see Conte 1986.
[16] Barthes 1995: 130. [17] Conte 1994: 8. [18] Barthes 1974: 211. [19] Feeney 1989: 206.
[20] Burke 1992: 7.

> It is not that the Author may not 'come back' in the Text, in his text, but he then does so as a 'guest' . . . [H]is life is no longer the origin of his fictions but a fiction contributing to his work; there is a reversion of the work on to the life (and no longer the contrary) [il y a réversion de l'œuvre sur la vie (et non plus le contraire)].[21]

Especially given the absence of external biographical sources for a text like the *DRN*, we cannot historicize the 'real' author, with the result that, more than in most texts, the 'reversion of the text on to the life' is complete. As the reception history of the poem energetically attests, we yield to our desire for the presence of the author by finding him, like Conte's reader, in the text itself, a construct independent of objective biographical reality.

It is in this context that the concept of the textually constructed 'implied author' can be particularly useful in interpreting the *DRN*. The term is primarily associated with Wayne Booth's 1961 study of the novel form, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*.[22] As Booth saw it, it is irrelevant whether the 'implied author' corresponds with the real author 'out there': what matters is essentially the textual presence of the author, which – like Conte's (or Iser's) reader – is constructed by the text. As Booth explains: the 'implied author is always distinct from the "real man" – whatever we may take him to be – who creates . . . a "second self", as he creates his work'.[23] Moreover, more than simply a guest appearance in the text, Booth's main aim is to account for our sense of a sensibility behind the text as a whole. Not simply the 'narrator', or '*persona*' or the 'I' of the novel or poem, the 'implied author' is the sense that we extrapolate from the totality of the text:

> 'Persona', 'mask', and 'narrator' are sometimes used, but they more commonly refer to the speaker in the work who is after all only one of the elements created by the implied author and who may be separated from him . . . Our sense of the implied author includes not only the extractable meanings but also the moral and emotional content . . . It includes, in short, the intuitive apprehension of a completed artistic whole . . . that which is expressed by the total form.[24]

Booth was heavily criticized in the 1980s and 1990s, when the postmodern deconstruction of authorship was at its peak, for not being radical enough: the implied author, his critics argued, was no less exclusionary a concept

[21] Barthes 1971: 161.
[22] Booth 1961. The concept is defended and expanded to poetry in Booth 2005. For a comprehensive history of the concept and its later reception see Kindt and Müller 2008 and Schmid 2009, and for a summary of and contribution to recent debates, see Richardson 2011: 1–10.
[23] Booth 1961: 151. [24] Booth 1961: 73–4.

than the notion of the 'Author', perpetuating the illusion of a world *hors texte* peopled by human beings as whole entities with clear boundaries. Moreover, there is, Booth's critics argued, a contradiction in his thinking: how can a textual construct made up of norms of the text as a whole also be the sender in a communicative model of sending and receiving a message?[25] Yet the 'implied author' need not be seen as an ontological fact embedded in the text for all time, but rather as a mode of reception encoded in the text.[26] It is primarily in this adapted form that Booth's concept continues to have currency in modern critical theory. A 'construct inferred and assembled by the reader from all the components of the text', Booth's 'implied author' can be crucial to understanding how it is that literary texts function in reception.[27] The concept continues to generate controversy, particularly in regards to how the implied author might be accounted for in narratological terms, and also in respect of the precise role played by the reader in its construction, but it remains powerfully attractive to many, partly because the search for the author in the text – for all its potential contradictions – seems instinctively to reflect how most readers read.[28]

Lucretius' readers, in particular, have for centuries discovered a version of the author in the text, and though each reading might be skewed by individual bias, there is, with Lucretius perhaps more than any other poet, a critical mass of reception history starting in antiquity itself which has found the author in the 'moral and emotional content' of the *DRN*. It is as the idea of the author fashioned by readers but 'grounded in the indexes of the text' that the implied author can be most useful to understanding what it is about the *DRN* that has led to its long and rich biographical reception history.[29]

[25] As David Bordwell put it in *Narration in the Fiction Film* (published in 1985), Booth's concept mistakenly (for Bordwell) imposes 'the classic communication diagram: a message is passed from sender to receiver', whereas narrative should in fact be seen as an impersonal communication system: Bordwell 1985: 62. Booth's use of the language of agency (the extract above refers, for example, to the ways in which 'the author *creates* a "second self"') may have exacerbated such criticism from proponents of radical textuality.

[26] *Pace* Kindt and Mueller 2008: 'Exit IA, 3.1', 152–5, who resist the 'reception' version of the implied author concept on the grounds of lack of empirical studies.

[27] Rimmon-Kenan 2002: 88; cf. Chatman 1990: 74–89.

[28] Among key narratologists, Bal 1985 has been a particularly vocal critic of the implied author; Genette 1983 includes a chapter on the concept in *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, in which he acknowledges the importance of the implied author as 'everything the text lets us know about the author' (148), but sees it as having no role as an identifiable narrative agent. The debate continues: see esp. the special issue of *Style* (Richardson 2011) as well as Booth's own defence of the concept in Booth 2005. For useful summaries of the controversy see esp. Kindt and Mueller 2008 and Schmid 2009: 165–7.

[29] For this particular formulation of the implied author see Schmid 2009: 161.

The Author in the *De Rerum Natura*

Responding to Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem 'Lucretius', a powerful psychological re-imagination of Lucretius' final hours supersaturated with echoes of the *DRN*, Richard Jebb declared with the conviction of a nineteenth-century reader that he found confirmation of Tennyson's biographical endeavour in the 'real Lucretius' as read from the poem itself:

> The *De Rerum Natura* leaves with any one who reads it attentively a distinct impression of the personality of Lucretius; for he has no conventional literary reserve, no hesitation about speaking of himself when it is natural to do so. He has the concentrated earnestness of a prophet, who feels only that he has a message, and must speak it.[30]

Jebb's confident declaration that the *DRN* gives a 'distinct impression of the personality of Lucretius' might at first sight seem puzzling. In contrast to comparable Latin texts, the *DRN* tells us strikingly little in explicit terms about its author. There are no details about his place of birth, his upbringing or family, or the trajectory of his literary and philosophical career. Yet despite the dearth of concrete information, the poem nevertheless seems to make the almost mesmerizing impression on 'anyone who reads it' that we *know* its author.

One way in which that illusion of intimate knowledge is conveyed is through the *DRN*'s use of first-person verbs, not only in the singular *I*-from in which Lucretius seems to 'reveal himself',[31] but also in the frequent use of plural *we*-verbs. The *DRN* uses these forms far more frequently than other Latin scientific texts, and since the Latin 'we' can often also be read as modulating simply to mean 'I', Lucretius, as he 'puts his arm around the reader's shoulder' to observe the world, seems to be speaking directly from personal experience 'without hesitation', as Jebb put it.[32] Even when couched in the third person, the narrative voice can seem so emotive as to be speaking from first-hand experience. We seem to be able to sense the author's psyche behind such fervidly compelling passages as the gripping description of sexual frustration 'as madness grows day by day' (4.1069 *in . . . dies gliscit furor*), or the discussion of suicide (3.79–84), mirroring,

[30] Jebb 1868: 98 ('the Lucretius whom it describes has a close resemblance to the real Lucretius . . . the picture is not merely a picture, but happens to be a portrait also', p. 97).
[31] Clay 1983: 213 on *studeo* (1.24).
[32] For Lucretius' verbal embrace see Lehoux 2013: 137, who counts 228 'we' verbs and 237 pronouns referring to 'we/us/our' in the poem, excluding the obvious 'royal we' and formulaic phrases. Cf. Volk 2002: 77. See further Taylor in Chapter 3 of this volume.

perhaps, the author's own 'unnatural preoccupation';[33] we think we can see Lucretius revealing himself in the account – famously identified by Jebb's contemporary Matthew Arnold as a compelling 'picture of *ennui*' – of benighted individuals going about their frenzied daily lives as 'each man tries to flee from himself' (3.1068 *hoc se quisque modo fugit*), or even the bizarre imaginings of wild beasts (5.1308–49), the result, perhaps of 'hallucination' or 'a madman's dream'.[34] Such passages seem to lend themselves to the kinds of readings witnessed in the biographical tradition which see the text as a gateway into the consciousness of its author.

All this is broadly consonant with what is often identified as the narrator or '*persona*' of the *DRN*, 'the "I" or part of the "we" of the poem', as Diskin Clay puts it, which can seem to constitute the mask through which 'Titus Lucretius Carus speaks'.[35] But our sense of 'Titus Lucretius Carus', the textualized author in the *DRN*, is more complex than the concept of the speaking *persona* alone can account for. The sense of the author in the text goes significantly beyond – and sometimes directly undercuts – the narrative voice itself to include other aspects of the poem's 'total form'.[36] In order to illustrate this, the remainder of this chapter focuses on three passages of explicit authorial self-construction in the voice of the "I" or part of the "we" of the poem. Written in the first person, each of these makes a crucial contribution to the Lucretian *persona* as conventionally understood, but, fundamentally, each passage also invites readers very clearly to make the connection (and sometimes the disjunction) between the first-person *persona* and the implied author constructed from all the components of the text.

Words and the Poet

Part way through the prologue to Book 1 of the *DRN*, the 'I' of the poem pauses to reflect on the poet's task (*DRN* 1.136–45):[37]

> Nec me animi fallit Graiorum obscura reperta
> difficile inlustrare Latinis versibus esse,
> multa novis verbis praesertim cum sit agendum

[33] Bailey 1947: 1.12.
[34] 'hallucination': Bailey 1947: I.7; 'madman's dream': Postgate (in Leonard and Smith 1942: 13). For Arnold see 'On the modern element in literature' in Super 1960–77: I.33.
[35] Clay 1983: 213.
[36] See Booth 1961: 158 *et passim* on the distance between the narrator, who may be unreliable, and the implied author.
[37] Text: Bailey 1922. Translations are my own.

propter egestatem linguae et rerum novitatem;
sed tua me virtus tamen et sperata voluptas
suavis amicitiae quemvis efferre laborem
suadet et inducit noctes vigilare serenas
quaerentem dictis quibus et quo carmine demum
clara tuae possim praepandere lumina menti,
res quibus occultas penitus convisere possis.

And it does not escape me that it is difficult to cast light on the dark discoveries of the Greeks in Latin verse, especially since many things must be treated in new words because of the poverty of the language and the novelty of the material; but your excellence and the pleasure of the sweet friendship I hope for persuade me to endure any labour and lead me to stay awake through the tranquil nights, seeking by what words and what poetry I may at last be able to open to your mind the clear light by which you may look into the hidden heart of things.

The passage features one of the very few concrete details the poem seems to give about its author's life.[38] We learn about Lucretius' lucubrations as he sits awake through the dark, calm nights (142 *noctes vigilare serenas*) to reach the kind of thrilling inner light he wants to pass on, willing to endure any labour (141 *quemvis effere laborem*) to fulfil that task.[39] The effect is to create the illusion that we have been given a strikingly direct insight into the poetic psyche, a sort of voyeuristic glimpse, as Bailey implies, into Lucretius' study.[40] It is the kind of detail that helped to engender Tennyson's insomniac Lucretius, listening to inner storms and expounding the workings of his rapidly unravelling mind in the darkness of the lonely night. Though there is, perhaps, a nagging sense of contradiction in the background in what the speaker tells us and hence about his ultimate reliability – he writes in an Epicurean calm (142 *serenas*) that is paradoxically fraught with *labor* (141) – all this could well be attributed to the old construction of poetic *persona*.[41]

Crucially, however, one of the most explicit apparent snapshots of the poet's mind comes yoked together with the famous statement, often taken in isolation, about the difficulty of poetic language.[42] Like the night outside, the dark discoveries of the Greeks (*Graiorum obscura reperta*) require illumination, but the Latin language, so the poet feels, is not up to the task (136–9). Since the politics of linguistic and cultural translatability that Lucretius here signals (136–7 *Graiorum ... Latinis*)

[38] Canali 1995 takes the title of his fictional biography from the *noctes ... serenas* of 142.
[39] For Lucretian *labor* cf. *DRN* 2.730; 3.419. [40] Bailey 1947 ad 1.142.
[41] For an attempt to reconcile the apparent paradoxes of Lucretian *labor* see Gale 2000: 152–3.
[42] Cf. also 1.832; 3.260 on the 'poverty of the Latin language', *patrii sermonis egestas*.

cannot have been on Epicurus' horizon, the point here is also one about the relationship between *lingua* (language *tout court*) and *res* (the material universe), suggesting in the chiastic arrangement of line 139 a kind of hendiadys in the collocation *linguae et rerum*.[43] Recent scholarship has been concerned to point out that language itself is an active agent in the philosophical poetics of the *DRN*. Words are intimately linked to the poem's philosophical purpose: as Wilson Shearin puts it, they *do* things to the poem's readers.[44] But even as they function as agents in the poem's Epicurean message, words in the *DRN* also play an active part in the construction of the reader's sense of the author in the text. The famous slipperiness and shiftiness of language in the poem enacts the relationship between the poem and the universe, atoms and words, or the possible disjunction between Latin poetry and Greek philosophy, but as we read it, it also enacts the mental state, as we construe it, of the text's implied author. In a poem in which the difficulty of finding the 'right' word is regularly dramatized in the text itself, where meaning slips and shifts from one instance to the next, the author's own struggle, expressed aloud in this passage, seems to inhere in poetic language itself. In other words, the author's own troubles, mental and poetic (his *labor*), so the poem encourages us to infer, are directly reflected in the language of the *DRN*. In Booth's terms, our sense of the implied author extends to the work's 'total form', and in this famous moment of poetic self-construction, the language of the poem is made to encode the struggle within the poet's psyche. From here on in, reading the words on the page, we are encouraged to think, is partly a road to reading the mind of the poet.

Instructions for a Sublime Author

Later in Book 1, in what is effectively the 'second proœmium' to the poem, the speaker pauses once again to reflect on the poet's task in the first-person voice (*DRN* 1.922–34):[45]

[43] On the relationship between 'word' and 'world' see also the chapters by Tutrone, O'Rourke, Nethercut and Shearin in this volume.

[44] Shearin 2015: vii on the poem as 'centrally concerned with doing things to its readers' from the perspective of speech act theory (associated with J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*). On aspects of the different linguistic strategies of the *DRN* see also the chapters by Taylor, Tutrone and Shearin in this volume.

[45] For this passage in Book 1 as a 'second proœmium' see Bailey 1947: II.756. Lines 926–50 are repeated with minor changes as the proem to Book 4: see Bailey 1947 ad loc.

sed acri
percussit thyrso laudis spes magna meum cor
et simul incussit suavem mi in pectus amorem
musarum, quo nunc instinctus mente vigenti
avia Pieridum peragro loca nullius ante
trita solo. iuvat integros accedere fontis
atque haurire, iuvatque novos decerpere flores
insignemque meo capiti petere inde coronam
unde prius nulli velarint tempora musae;
primum quod magnis doceo de rebus et artis
religionum animum nodis exsolvere pergo,
deinde quod obscura de re tam lucida pango
carmina, musaeo contingens cuncta lepore.

But a great hope has struck my heart with a sharp spur of fame and at the same time has thrust the sweet love of the Muses into my breast; inspired by it now, with a strong mind, I wander through the pathless places of the Muses trodden by no foot before mine. I love to approach the untouched springs and to drink there; I love to pluck new flowers and to seek a glorious crown for my head from places where the Muses have crowned no-one's brows before: first because I teach great things, and I proceed to unloose the mind from the tight knots of superstition; then because the subject is so dark and the lines I write so full of light, as I touch all with the Muses' charm.

In his essay on the implied reader in the *DRN*, Conte identified this passage (922–6) in particular as part of an encoded set of 'instructions for a sublime reader' set out in the poem. For Conte, the sublime in the *DRN* – moments of the flight of the mind, as author and reader stand in awe of the grandeur and terror of the universe, struck with the sheer exhilaration of scientific truth – is associated fundamentally with its effects on the reader.[46] As Conte puts it, the sublime 'offers a model of spiritual attitudes and moral conduct ... that exalts the reader and makes him capable of spiritual greatness', and this includes the author himself who is co-opted as an implicit addressee of his own poem.[47]

Yet, although the reader-in-the-text might well be steered to learn the truth of Epicureanism through the experience of the sublime as conveyed in the *DRN*, that experience of reading can also be retrojected onto another textual construct: the implied author. This passage, in particular,

[46] Citing Ps. Longinus 1.4 and 7.2, Conte notes that even Pseudo-Longinus 'implies that the sublime's true locus is in the reader's mind': Conte 1994: 19. For the sublime in the *DRN* see esp. Porter 2007; Hardie 2009: 67–228; Most 2012; Porter 2016: 445–54; O'Rourke in this volume (pp. 116–17).

[47] Conte 1994: 21, 19.

cries out to be read as one such moment of authorial construction.[48] As Conte rightly notes, *mente vigenti* in line 925 points to the popular Varronian etymology for the inspired *vates* (*a vi mentis*), which can further be associated with the Greek *mantis* and the divine frenzy, *mania*, that goes with it.[49] Inspired with a Bacchic *thyrsus* (923), as presented here, the poet as *vates* might be leading by example in setting a pattern for the kind of readerly qualities the text demands; but he might also be setting out instructions for how to imagine the author as constructed by the text, struck with the thrill of divine inspiration – gripped by 'a godlike pleasure and a thrill of awe' (*divina voluptas | ... atque horror*, 3.28–9) as he responds to the sublime – and perhaps even on the cusp of another kind of *furor*.[50]

This author-centred reading of the sublime is borne out by the poem's reception history. While ancient readers may have been called to action by the Lucretian sublime in 'an exchange between the spectacle and the spectator',[51] it is notable that it is through the sublime, too, that they remembered the poet: *docti furor arduus Lucreti* ('the sublime *furor* of learned Lucretius', as Statius put it at *Silvae* 2.7.76).[52] It may even be that ancient readers took Lucretian *furor* further to full-blown biographical proportions by taking up the link between Empedocles and Lucretius, already latent in the text of the *DRN*, to project the well-known suicide of the Greek philosopher – who jumped into Mount Etna leaving only a bronze sandal behind him[53] – onto their conceptualization of the implied author of the *DRN*, thus anticipating Jerome by several centuries.[54] Whatever the extent of ancient extrapolations of the author's insanity,

[48] Bailey identified this passage as '[b]y far the most illuminating' in understanding the poet's 'Character, Mind, and Temperament' (1947: 1.13).

[49] Conte 1994: 11. For Varro's twin etymologies for the word *vates* (*a versibus viendis*, from plaiting verses, and *a vi mentis*, from the forcible mental impulse associated with poetic inspiration) see *Serv. Dan.* on *Aen.* 3.443; Isid. *Orig.* 8.7.3.

[50] Meaning the frenzy of inspiration, *furor* can also shade into 'madness': *OLD* s.v. On poetic inspiration in antiquity as a kind of madness see Hardie 2009: 217.

[51] Conte 1994: 22.

[52] For the crucial importance of the sublime in the ancient reception of Lucretius more generally see esp. Hardie 2009: 67–228; Porter 2007; Porter 2016: 445–73. Newlands 2011: 241–2 suggests that a literal interpretation of the word *furor* in Statius 'contribute[d] to the legend of Lucretius' madness found in ... Jerome'; cf. Bailey 1947: I.8–12.

[53] Diogenes Laertius 8.69.

[54] See Canfora 1993: 99–105; Hardie 2009: 212–3 on the mad poet at the end of Horace's *Ars poetica*, who is both *sublimis* (*Ars P.* 457) and *vesanus* (*Ars P.* 455), and specifically the image of the suicidal Empedocles leaping into Etna as a stand-in for Lucretius. For Lucretius 'taking possession' of Empedocles' *persona* see Conte 1994: 11.

the link between the Lucretian sublime and Lucretian madness has been made by generations of readers since. As Matthew Arnold eloquently put it, the *DRN*'s sublime presentation of the secrets of the universe seems to give us a vivid sense not just of how the Epicurean should behave, but of the mind of the author implicit in the poem:

> With stern effort, with gloomy despair, he seems to rivet his eyes on the elementary reality, the naked framework of the world, because the world in its fullness and movement is too exciting a spectacle for his discomposed brain. He seems to feel the spectacle of it at once terrifying and alluring; and to deliver himself from it he has to keep perpetually repeating his formula of disenchantment and annihilation.[55]

The poem's ability to 'feel the spectacle at once terrifying and alluring' of the nature of the universe clearly has an impact on its readers, real or textually constructed. But in the end, those very readers have persistently linked that quality in the text not so much with Epicurean truth as with the 'gloomy despair' of the 'discomposed brain' of its imagined author.

L'anti-Lucrèce chez Lucrèce

Hard on the heels of the description of the poet's sublime inspiration, the 'second proœmium' continues with one of the most well-known similes in the *DRN*, functioning as virtual short-hand for the poem itself (*DRN* 1.936–47):[56]

> sed veluti pueris absinthia taetra medentes
> cum dare conantur, prius oras pocula circum
> contingunt mellis dulci flavoque liquore,
> ut puerorum aetas improvida ludificetur
> labrorum tenus, interea perpotet amarum
> absinthi laticem deceptaque non capiatur,
> sed potius tali pacto recreata valescat,
> sic ego nunc, quoniam haec ratio plerumque videtur
> tristior esse quibus non est tractata, retroque
> vulgus abhorret ab hac, volui tibi suaviloquenti
> carmine Pierio rationem exponere nostram
> et quasi musaeo dulci contingere melle.

[55] 'On the modern element in literature', in Super 1960–77: I.33.
[56] The lines are repeated almost verbatim at 4.11–22.

But just as doctors, when they try to administer foul-tasting wormwood to children, first smear the edges of the cups with the sweet, yellow syrup of honey, so that the guileless age of childhood may be deluded as far as the lips and drink up the bitter juice of wormwood, and though taken in be not taken ill, but rather, revived by it, they may grow well, so I now do: since this doctrine commonly seems quite harsh to those who have not dealt with it, and since people shrink back from it, I have chosen to set forth my doctrine to you in sweet-speaking Pierian song, and, as it were, to smear it with the Muses' delicious honey.

There is a famous paradox here. Epicureanism perceived poetry as ineffectual at best and pernicious at worst, so that, on the surface of things, there is an unresolvable problem: Lucretius' medium seems to undermine his message.[57] That paradox may be argued away by various methods. Lucretius, for example, as well as Latinizing a philosophy that did not have Roman cultural concerns on its horizon, might be seen inversely as bringing back his chosen medium of poetry into the philosophical fold by 'Epicureanizing' it in various ways.[58] Interpretive strategies have shifted from emphasizing the apparent dichotomy between irreconcilable media to attempting to reconcile them, and back again to embracing inconsistency as a creative mode of operation.[59] But, as Monica Gale well puts it, it is precisely in this simile that the poem itself is 'in part responsible' for that perceived dichotomy.[60] Poetry, 'the sweet honey of the Muses' (1.947 *musaeo dulci* . . . *melle*), is presented as the contrasting medium that will lead the poem's readers to the medicine of Epicurean philosophy, *decepta* . . . *non capiatur* (941). Yet, as we read the poem – from the problematic Hymn to Venus at its beginning to the plague at its end – things don't cohere quite as the speaker would like us to think.

The sense of a fundamental fissure in the text between the medium and the message has historically led readers to author-based readings. From Cardinal Melchior de Polignac's *Anti-Lucretius* in the eighteenth century to M. Patin's 'L'anti-Lucrèce chez Lucrèce' in the nineteenth, it is precisely an overriding sense of an 'implied author' in the *DRN*, inherent not simply in the first-person passages but in the text as a whole, that lies behind the long tradition of deliberately seeking out contradictions in the text by

[57] Volk 2002: 94 and 86 n. 48; Asmis 1995; Gale 1994: 14–18.
[58] See, e.g., Gale 1994, esp. 138–55; Schrijvers 1970, who links the psychagogic function of poetry here to Epicurean theories of perception; Volk 2002: 95, taking line 935 to mean that 'the speaker's act is not against Epicurean reason specifically'.
[59] Lehoux, Morrison and Sharrock 2013: 6–7. On inconsistency see esp. O'Hara 2007.
[60] Gale 1994: 1–2.

looking for the 'anti-Lucretius in Lucretius'.[61] Like Jerome, Polignac and Patin may have been fundamentally driven by an anxiety about a philosophy inimical to Christianity, seeking to 'declaw . . . and defang' a doctrine felt to be close to atheism or worse by calling into question the mental state of the poem's author.[62] Yet one of the reasons the 'anti-Lucretian' mode of reading has been so compelling, continuing to haunt, in one way or another, much of the subsequent work on the poem, is precisely because it conforms to the notion of authorial presence that seems to be evoked in the textual universe of the poem. Read as an extrapolation from the text's 'total form', the author can be seen, in Patin's words, as, 'so to speak, the first anti-Lucretius'.[63] In bringing to the fore the dichotomy between poetry and philosophy in the first person, the honeyed cup simile plays an important role in justifying that mode of reading by encouraging us to link the 'author' attempting to reconcile his poetic medium and philosophical message with the apparent contradictions in the text as a whole. In Booth's terms, the narrative 'I' of the poem (who can be fallible or unreliable) is not the *same* as the implied author (who is extrapolated from all the components of the text), but it is passages like these that ask us to read the implied author as a pervasive presence – beyond the poetic *persona* – in the *DRN*.

Conclusion: Authors and Readers

Critical shifts in discussions of Latin poetry towards readers and away from authors have done much to liberate interpretation by swinging the critical pendulum away from the ultimately futile reconstruction of authorial intention or the questionable production of positivistic biography to focus on the texts themselves. Yet turning back to the text can also allow us to swing the critical pendulum back again from the reader to the author, this time conceived as a construct extrapolated by readers from the text. As Roland Barthes, the most readerly of twentieth-century readers, put it, 'in the text, in a way, I *desire* the author, I need his figure'.[64] Understood in Booth's terms as a construct encoded in the text and picked up in

[61] Though Polignac's *Anti-Lucretius* is a general attack against materialism, he, too, often reads a divided mind in the *DRN*: *Deinde vocet demens quos tentat perdere Divos,| immemor ipse sui* (5.35–6): Polignac 1747: 184.

[62] On nineteenth-century readings: Johnson 2000: 127; on Jerome: Holford-Strevens 2002.

[63] Patin 1868: 1.118; Johnson 2000: 124. On Patin see further esp. Johnson 2000: 123–4, 127.

[64] Barthes 1975: 27. Cf. Burke 1992.

reception by readers, the author can and should still have a central role in how we interpret texts like the *DRN*.

One of the reasons the implied author concept has come in for criticism is that the precise role of the reader in constructing it is difficult to pin down. Is the implied author a fixed entity in the text that needs to be accounted for in narratological or ontological terms? Or is it wholly reader-generated, and therefore open to 'misreading', re-reading, and revision depending on the proclivities of individual readers? Or is it something in between?[65] Seen as a product primarily of interpretation rather than narration, the passages picked out in this chapter could potentially generate different pictures of the author than the ones put forward here – ones less divided, less contradictory, less subject to the putative psychological pressures which Lucretius' Epicurean poem seems to entail. At the same time, what is striking about the case of the *DRN* is that the poem comes to us with the burden of several centuries of author-centred reception associated with the biographical legend of the madness of Lucretius. Generations of readers have put the author of the poem front and centre of their interpretations, and, more often than not, found in the *DRN* the document of a divided mind. Ultimately, the cumulative desire among the poem's readers to find the author in the text highlights important interpretive possibilities, suggesting that the author should play as active a part in approaches to Lucretius as the long-established implied reader. Far from simply holding 'a certain nuisance value',[66] the insights of reception are worth taking seriously. More than most texts, as its reception history attests, Lucretius' poem demands to be read in an author-centred way, and the implied author offers a crucial avenue to that mode of reading. We cannot ultimately know the 'real' inner or outer 'world of Titus Lucretius',[67] but the implied author, set up in the fabric of the *DRN* and picked up in reception by its readers, goes some way towards allowing us to accommodate that desire.

[65] Schmid 2009; cf. Richardson 2011. [66] Kenney 2014: 5.
[67] Cf. Wiseman 1974 for the search for the 'two worlds' of Lucretius.