jocelyn saidenberg



echo



otherwise



a poetics of sound and loss
in ancient and contemporary poetry

ECHO OTHERWISE

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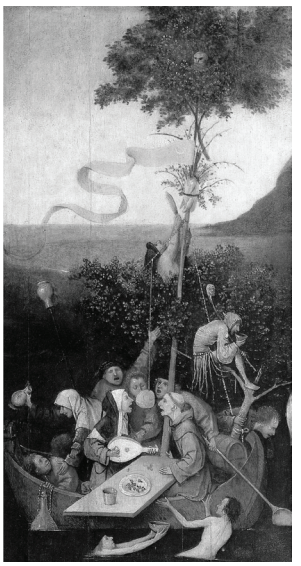


Fig. 1. Detail from Hieronymus Bosch, *Ship of Fools* (1490–1500)

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spontaneous acts of scholarly combustion



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For Nelly

Susceptible to Reading

I have been told that there are two human responses to the perception of chaos: naming and violence. When chaos is simply unknown, the naming can be accomplished effortlessly — a new species, star, formula, equation, prognosis. There is also mapping, charting, or devising proper nouns for unnamed or stripped-of-names geography, landscape, or population. When chaos resists, either by reforming itself or by rebelling against imposed order, violence is understood to be the most frequent response and the most rational when confronting the unknown, the catastrophic, the wild, the wanton, or the incorrigible. Rational responses may be censure; incarceration in holding camps, prisons; or death, singly or in war. There is, however, a third response to chaos, which I have not heard about, which is stillness. Such stillness can be passivity and dumbfoundedness; it can be paralytic fear. But it can also be art.

— Toni Morrison, *The Source of Self-Regard*[1]

In the beginning was
the ravage
    in
word inside time
                inside
History
    Silence seeks the balance
in revenge
the cut in precise
    cleaves to the ever in Word

— m. nourbeSe philip, *Looking for Livingstone*[2]

1 Toni Morrison, *The Source of Self-Regard: Selected Essays, Speeches, and Meditations* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2019), viii.

2 m. nourbeSe philip, *Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence* (Mercury Press, 1991), 31.

> For there is a wind or a ghost of a wind
> in all books echoing the life
> there, a high wind that fills the tubes
> of the ear until we think we hear a wind,
> actual.
>
> — William Carlos Williams, *Paterson*[3]

At the heart of this book is a story about reading, about reading and pedagogy, about pedagogy's readers, about readers who listen, about listening while reading, about poems and their sonic materials, about the demands that poetic sounds make on writers and readers, about seduction, about echoes and repetition, about the resounding qualities of poetic matter. Another story is about time, about how poetic texts animate temporal experiences and historical movements and disorient them. How time, like weather, reliably passes yet unpredictably, until it doesn't. Irredeemable loss: the untimely death of teachers, friends, cousins, communities. Another story is about communication, reception, and exposure — an ethics of reading that attends to the overlooked, the untold, and the "unexpected otherness."[4] And still another is about the limits of difference and similitude. And then there is one about the plague, or rather three plagues at least. And then the story about making meaning and making nonsense. About ideal collectivities and readerly communities. All of these stories are about the lessons I learn and about those I learn them from, about the teachers, living and dead, who encourage my waywardness and tolerate my bewilderment.

> But what if the close attention to the language of a text *didn't* produce a sensible or determined meaning? What if the philologist's attentiveness to language were great enough to open up irresolvable difficulties, *resistances* to meaning, or other, unexpected meanings within the text? [...] What is at stake, then, is clearly the nature of reading; the question is not whether to be or not to be philological but how to read in such a way as to break through preconceived notions of meaning in order to encounter unexpected otherness — in order to learn something one doesn't already know — in order to encounter the other. It is not easy to respond when literature tells us "Do what this letter say." To know whether this requires more closeness or more distance, a leap or a crawl, may very well *itself* be part of the challenge. For it is the question of the nature of the act of reading that philology can either illuminate or repress.[5]

---

3 William Carlos Williams, *Paterson* (New Directions, 1946), 95.

4 Barbara Johnson "Philology: What Is at Stake?," *Comparative Literature Studies* 27, no. 1 (1990): 29.

5 Ibid., 28–29, emphasis in the original. "Do what this letter say" is a citation from Richard Wright's *Native Son;* the line concludes the ransom note written by Bigger Thomas. Johnson writes: "It would take precisely a philologist to read the letter correctly and detect its authorship" (29).

i. Itinerant Readings or Walking in Circles

I have two compulsions — looking up words in dictionaries and reading words slowly and aloud — and by way of these capacities, I roam around poems, feeling for forms, attending to sound, and with this style of listening, I might come to hear, to apprehend, after much circling, abiding, and drifting, what I will call a poem's transmission, its acts of communication. I could then put that impression to work, say, by making a claim or a wager, in order to leverage my analysis and stake a place in some ongoing critical conversation. Whether I enter or refuse to engage tends to depend on the order of discourse, its currents and currency. While I do participate in those contests, either by declining or by assenting (because conversations excite and animate me),[6] here I more often turn to a different approach, one characterized by being with or nearby another who is thinking with or nearby another. I want to register something else, something additional — the labor and experience of reading — and to risk making the narration of the process of reading my organizing priority.

From my point of view, what motivates writing is an urgency to wrestle with a set of questions or to figure out what question or hunch to follow. I know no better way to pursue these questions tenaciously in writing than to accede to and cultivate a reiterative process. Reading in circles or reading slowly or even backwards, oscillating between attention and inattention, between forgetting and remembering, it turns out, creates a space of writing. Writing is also motivated by love, by the desire to encounter another, that "unexpected otherness." Occupying a position of exposure in relation to otherness allows me to enter into that engagement and creates the conditions for an entanglement of pleasures. From the teacher who taught me to love reading, I first learned: "There is nothing more exacting than love."[7]

---

6 When asked by a student why she writes poetry, my friend Stephanie Young replied: "For the conversation." To echo and affirm her reply, I include several citations in this section to illustrate one of the ways that conversation occurs throughout the book.

7 Matthew Ward, "Translator's Note." in Colette, *Flowers and Fruit,* ed. Robert Phelps, trans. Matthew Ward (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1986), ix. Matt Ward was my high school English teacher who died from HIV/AIDS on June 23, 1990. He was 39 years old. Throughout my junior and senior years, I followed him around puppy-like for reasons I can understand only now. My infatuation with Matt incorporated my love for his love, his way of loving literature, the intimacy and enthrallment he inhabited in conversation with a book and the excess of his passions. It also held the tacit understanding that he was gay and so was I, but neither of us could risk being recognized as that in the context of my high school. I have a memory of talking with Matt in a hallway near the supplies room about whether a blank piece of paper could be a poem or not and whether art more generally could exist in its withdrawal or absence, questions I am still obsessed with. Later I learned that he was a translator of French literature, translating works by Colette, Roland Barthes, Jean Giraudoux, and Jean-Paul Sartre. Today, his translation of Albert Camus's *The Stranger,*

> Dear friend,
>
> I think of you so wholly that I cannot resist to write again, to ask if you are safe?
>
> Danger is not at first, for then we are unconscious, but in the after — slower — Days —
>
> [...]
>
> Love is it's own rescue, for we — at our supremest, are but it's trembling Emblems —
>
> Your Scholar —[8]

Reading and writing are inextricably bound together by what they make possible. We work on texts, to be sure, and texts work on us, and what interests me is the space between, the gaps to walk into. Whether by stumbling, stuttering, finding, or falling in, we enter bodily, and the text choreographs its impressions, marking their traces on our bodies. For when reading, if I make myself susceptible, inhabiting a vulnerable position, then the gaps that invite become perceptible. I take it as a given that reading changes the reader, writing changes the writer, and the utterance changes the utterer. I want to track the exchange and to register the changes that transpire, the kinds of transference in and among these susceptible relations. While so much of what happens in a psychoanalytic transference occurs beyond speech and recognition, *something* comes to pass, figures, and takes shape. How might the inarticulate or inarticulable communicate in the sounds of poetry? How does poetry teach us to attend to what is beyond language or even beyond figuration? My desire here is to illustrate an approach to rendering the transferential effects of poetry, a receptive approach as a form of pedagogy, an approach that models how to listen, how to attend to the experience of reading as both process and event. To have reading count, I include the procedural steps, sometimes in a painstakingly slow manner, because, by making an account of reading, I learn how to attend to, at least momentarily, the sonic effects of poetry — the resonances that are echoes of an otherwise.

> As I start working, I have only a vague nucleus of energy, which is sometimes located in a rhythm, an observation, but more often in a phrase, a cluster of words. This means the energy has a semantic field. But the poem starts to happen as the energy encounters a formal pattern, an obstacle. This may be predetermined or may simply arise out

---

for which he won a PEN translation award a year before his death, continues to be the most read. Edmund White's story "Running on Empty" is based on Matt's life. I heard somewhere that he didn't like how White had written about him — but only as hearsay. See Edmund White, *Skinned Alive: Stories* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1995).

8 Emily Dickinson, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson,* 3 vols., ed. Thomas H. Johnson and Theodora Ward (Harvard University Press, 1958), 2:594.

> of *listening* to the *sound,* the "body" of the starter words, which reveals their own vectors and affinities. These pull the poem in unforeseen directions, away from the semantic field of the original impulse.[9]
>
> His intellect intent upon the ratios and movements of the poem, he is almost unaware of depths that may be stirring in his own psyche. What he feels is the depth and excitement of the poem. The poem takes over.[10]
>
> The poem enters its own rhythmical waters.[11]

ii. Circumspect yet Perceptive Kin

> dumtaxat rerum magnarum parva potest res
> exemplare dare et vestigia notitiai. (2.123–24)
>
> Since a little thing can be an example for large things and can provide traces of understanding.
>
> — Lucretius, *De rerum natura*[12]
>
> The ambiguous paths of kinship pull me in opposite ways at once.
>
> — Susan Howe, *My Emily Dickinson*[13]

In *Echo Otherwise,* I bring together two writers, Lucretius and Ferdinand de Saussure, whose kinship might seem to resist notice at first. However, the affinities between this unlikely pair are to be discovered along the wandering paths this book forges, and in the conversation animated by my readings of their attention to sound. Indeed, the texts that I engage with here, *De rerum natura,* a didactic Roman poem, and the unpublished anagram notebooks filled with sound studies, understandably might seem to pull "in opposite ways at once," but, as I will show in the chapters that follow, the correspondences between them disclose a set of remarkably interconnected and overlapping concerns. I have paired Lucretius and Saussure not only because I have found stunning correspondences, but also because bringing them into a speculative conversation has helped me to focus my inquiry — my study of poetry's phonic capacities and the effects of its sonic elements. Both writers are interested in how sound works and in what

9 Rosmarie Waldrop, *Dissonance (If You Are Interested)* (University of Alabama Press, 2005), 203.

10 Robert Duncan, quoted in Waldrop, "Form and Discontent," in *Dissonance (If You Are Interested),* 203.

11 Barbara Guest, quoted in Waldrop, "Form and Discontent," in *Dissonance (If You Are Interested),* 203.

12 Cyril Bailey, ed., *Titi Lucreti Cari De rerum natura libri sex* (Oxford University Press, 1922). Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from *De rerum natura* (hereafter DRN) are from this source. Unless otherwise indicted, all translations in this book are my own.

13 Susan Howe, *My Emily Dickinson* (North Atlantic Books, 1985), 12.

sounds and resounds in the universe of poems and atoms, and they are also attentive to what sound tells us about poems and atoms. I take them to be models for the kinds of attention they perform as readers, writers, and theorists who in turn demand the same modes of attention of their readers. These demands, as I understand them, instruct us to be guided by the keen sensitivity of our perceptions, even if this warrants a disobedience to the conventions of disciplines and the decorum of genre. In the Coda, the modes of instruction I find in Lucretius and Saussure inform my approach to reading m. nourbeSe philip's *Zong!* and several works by Saidiya Hartman. I turn to philip's work because of the urgent questions it asks of us, among them: How are we formed in and by languages at once already determined by histories of subjugation *and* open to linguistic indeterminacy and surplus, the excess that eludes capture? Like philip, Hartman writes within and against the archives of trans-Atlantic slavery, and asks what forms and modes of writing this archive blocks and enables. In the Coda I thus disclose and perform a reading of (a listening to) the sounds that other writers have made resound from depths that ordinary, or ordinarily organized, language, text, or speech could not otherwise body forth. The writing that my listening induces, then, carries forward what they may have heard in what wasn't quite or couldn't be said — an echo and a trace — as an offering toward an otherwise to the aftermath of ongoing catastrophes.

In testing disciplinary, historical, and formal limits along with the attending differences, I am spared being torn apart by the "opposition" between scholarly and poetic practices. With fewer obstacles of this nature, ones that might have circumscribed this book's scope, my meditations on forms of writing can accept the demands, the conditions for reading and writing with a poet who writes about forms of living, a linguist who writes about forms of writing and listening, and the shared echoes that resound into the contemporary. Meanwhile following the paths of kinship, I encounter and come to inhabit areas in between forms of writing and forms of attention where these not-so-unlikely kin become guides and mentors. (So, there is also a story about inhabiting those spaces and writing within and against them.) Last but not the least, I have found Lucretius and Saussure to be good companions who in turn bring with them company of their own, their *sociae,* other writers, students, teachers, interlocutors, addressees, and echoes, literally and figuratively, as compositional companions and sonic figures.[14] For it might be that the accompanying echoes "yield traces of understanding" (*dare et vestigia notitiai* DRN 2.124).

14 In the proem to book 1, the "Hymn to Venus," Lucretius yearns for her to be his companion both in the writing of the poem and for humankind. "I desire you [Venus] to be my companion in the writing of verses which [verses] I seek to compose on the nature of things" (*te sociam studeo scribendis versibus, esse / quos ego de rerum natura pangere conor* 1.24–25).

iii. Instruments and Instrumentals: Musical, Instructional, Critical

We all bring to reading our own desires, interests, inclinations, ones that are often shaped by the training of a discipline and its conventions. While a writer may avow their genuine desire for the text to take the lead and teach on its own terms, some form of instrumentalization is ineluctable. To press x into the service of y in order to z often enough describes the habit of engagement. When the z, the final term, stands for progress or coherence, for instance, my face vaguely contorts, and an audible sigh follows. I'd prefer an unruly analysis that solicits excess or waste, unwanted pleasures or weather, an encounter with "otherness." We all bring to reading what we cannot encounter, too. When their outlines are perceptible and when that z is not overly invested in or pre-determined, there begins the adventure composed of reading and writing, and there too the misread and the illegible are kin. While I can't attest to a form of reading that does not in some way, inescapably, instrumentalize its objects, I ally myself steadfastly with a more immanent form of reading and with the writing that ensues.

Of the many lessons I learned in researching and writing this book is to accept humbly its limits. I failed to discover a form of writing that would describe how the phonic elements of poetry — particularly those elements that resist being recuperated for signification — activate or animate the inarticulate, the poetic transmission. I was neither possessed by an arrogance, nor enthralled by the hunt of capturing the uncapturable, but I had hoped, perhaps naively, to discern some audible impressions and then to develop a form of writing that would make those legible. What I did learn in the process was to render how I inhabit a text, how I position myself to receive what was not expected or evanescent, and the scenes of reading's seductions. This book then attests to the encounters that transpire in the process of reading and its transformative effects, and positions itself so as to encourage forms of relation, receptive to and solicitous of "unexpected otherness." None of this occurred in silence; nothing was possible without the attention and help of others, and their conversations.

> There is poetry whenever writing introduces us to a world other than our own and also makes it become our own, making present a being, a certain fundamental relationship. [...] Poetry is the creation of a subject adopting a new order of symbolic relations to the world.[15]

The teachers I have learned from most, all according to their own inclinations, found ways to rearrange my desires and orient me toward different forms of knowledge, about myself and about the objects I am attached to which instill passion. They, like Jacques Lacan's theory of poetry, have introduced me "to a world other than" my own, and encouraged me to forge new relationships with the objects and subjects of that other world. They helped me to recognize the assemblies, the communities of others, that

15 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan,* Book III: *The Psychoses, 1955–1956,* ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russel Grigg (W.W. Norton, 1993), 78.

enigmatically constitute who I am, and to be receptive to the otherness that both makes and unmakes me as a subject. And in the words of the poet Susan Howe, perhaps more radical than those of the analyst: "As poetry changes itself it changes the poet's life."[16] Meanwhile, they have taught me how to discern differences: to make distinctions and to see when they blur, where the strange is inviting, solicitous of relation. To apprehend the making of meaning and to tolerate, even appreciate, the moments meaning is lost have also been a part of these lessons. To be receptive in part means to allow myself to be modified by these encounters and what they may teach. I have found no other way to open up these possibilities than to linger with a text, to tarry with its language and to be a responsive addressee, to become an addressee of the text. How else is it possible, to use Johnson's challenge to a philological approach, "to open up irresolvable difficulties, *resistances* to meaning, or other, unexpected meanings within the text?"[17]

iv. Read between the Lines or Listen to the Echoes: Murmurs and Traces

> sed tonitrum fit uti post auribus accipiamus
> fulgere quam cernant oculi, quia semper ad auris
> tardius adveniunt quam visum quae moveant res. (6.164–66)
>
> But it happens that we receive thunder with our ears after our eyes see lightning because things always come more slowly to our ears than they stir our vision.
>
> — Lucretius, *De rerum natura*[18]

If a text is always haunted by what has been excluded, then by what means do we encounter the traces and attend to the echoes? Reading for the excluded or absent, that which remains after erasure, might be said to be a hermeneutical commandment. But how might we "read" for the faint echoes of words, the shared, phonic resonances that remain and continue to sound afterwards? While informed by hermeneutics, it is these questions that motivate my inquiries here.[19] As Lucretius observes in the passage above, when we are caught in a thunder storm, there's a temporal disjuncture in the experience of our two senses, a gap between seeing and hearing. Because, as it happens (*fit* 6.164), the storm's thunder arrives more slowly than the lightning, they become out of sync, although both derive from the same event. A flash of lightning and a clap of thunder each corresponds to a particular sense perception, and each has its own timing. Unless we see with our ears and hear with our eyes, our perception of them

16 Howe, *My Emily Dickinson,* 11.

17 Johnson, "Philology," 28.

18 Bailey, *Titi Lucreti Cari De rerum natura.*

19 I am indebted to many teachers and scholars who taught me how to read and listen to Latin poetry, but especially to Ellen Oliensis, Maurizio Bettini, Kathleen McCarthy, Sumi Furiya, Mark Griffith, Alexander Tulin, and Daniel Selden.

will not coincide. It's a disorienting experience. And scary too when the two move toward unity, coming closer and closer, since the decrease in time between flash and clap spells danger for the hiker exposed in a field. Is sound's slowness, its "afterwardness," one of the reasons that sight has gained its privileged status as the dominant metaphor for perception?[20] The slower habits and temporal delay that characterize sound are precisely what make it more alluring from my perspective. So, it's no coincidence that my approach borrows these qualities in its slow, recursive style, and that the meditations that compel *Echo Otherwise* entail avowing and inhabiting disorienting, non-linear temporalities so that the resonances of poetic matter might sound.

20 "Afterwardness" is the English term Jean Laplanche uses for Sigmund Freud's *Nachträglichkeit*. See Jean Laplanche, *Essays on Otherness,* ed. John Fletcher, trans. Luke Thurston et al. (Routledge, 1999), 260.

CHAPTER 1

The Pedagogical Scene

Multas per gentes et multa per aequora vectus
advenio has miseras, frater, ad inferias
ut te postremo donarem munere mortis
et mutam nequiquam alloquerer cinerem,
quandoquidem fortuna mihi tete abstulit ipsum.
heu miser indigne frater adempte mihi,
nunc tamen interea haec, prisco quae more parentum
tradita sunt tristi munere ad inferias,
accipe fraterno multum manantia fletu
atque in perpetuum, frater, ave atque vale.

Through many nations and across the great sea, carried along
I arrive, brother, for these miserable funeral rites,
so that I might give to you death's final gift
and speak in vain to silent ashes.
Since fate has taken you yourself away from me,
Ah, sad brother snatched from me cruelly
now nonetheless, meanwhile these things, ancient and ancestral,
are handed down, the sad work of burial rites,
receive them, drenched thoroughly with brotherly tears,
and always forever, brother, adieu and farewell.

— Catullus, *Carmina*[1]

i. Keeping Vigil

In an act of mourning Catullus, a contemporary of Lucretius, addresses his dead brother, offering a series of contradictions between absence and presence that both compel the poem and fascinate the reader. Speaking to silent ashes in vain (*mutam nequiquam alloquerer cinerem* 4), Catullus's exigent address to the dead is wedded to its futility: he aches to give his brother the final gift that is death's alone to give (*postremo donarem munere*

1 R.A.B. Mynors, ed., *C. Valerii Catulli Carmina* (Oxford University Press, 1958), poem 101.

mortis 5).[2] The questions of how to communicate with an addressee now forever absent and how to present the dead with death — the gift that is also the poem — stunningly animate the impasses and the horizons of the elegiac form. Both Catullus and Lucretius worry over what is handed down (*tradita* 8), the mores and traditions of Roman ancestors, and although Catullus would prefer not to, he stutters "now nonetheless, meanwhile" (*nunc tamen interea* 7) before performing the sad work of traditional burial, while Lucretius works zealously to transform traditional beliefs and customs in his didactic poem, *De rerum natura* (DRN). And although Lucretius shares with Catullus an ardent longing for his own addressees, what he desires most is to have contact and make an impression with consequence on those he addresses, on all of us who read the work and are summoned to attend to his poem and to receive its teachings, (just as you, dear reader, are my hoped-for addressee). Lucretius, modeling a receptive attention that underpins the didactic work of his poem, performs an act of vigilance and instruction in his self-descriptions and his desire for his addressee.

Lucretian pedagogy is relational — it implies more than one and requires at least two for companionship; it's an encounter that precipitates attention and attunement while allowing for wonder and bewilderment. Akin to mourning, the pedagogical relation embodies longing, vulnerability, and susceptibility. Both the work of mourning and of learning, as in friendship, recognize that an inevitable loss constitutes the bonds of belonging, a kinship that makes demands on both the living and dead. At heart social acts characterize these relationships, even when private; they are forms of being together, communal articulations of receptivity, of a mutuality of skin, both active and passive; embodied, impressionable relations marked repeatedly by a surrender to and reception of new forms of relation and of knowing. The pedagogical situates us — learners, teachers, readers, and poets — in positions that are mobile, that move us along horizons that contest hierarchical forms.

Portraits of those who keep vigils recur in the poem's pedagogical scenes, in which Lucretius, along with other teachers, instruct us in forms of attention. Of the vigilant beings, the first met is the poet himself, rendering a picture in which he is composing his poem and yearning for friendship. After describing the thorny task of illustrating in Latin verses (*difficile inlustrare Latinis versibus* 1.137), the Greek knowledge he has discovered, finding new words (*novis verbis* 1.138) for novel things (*rerum novitatem* 1.139), he lets us into a private scene, a portrait of the act of writing, and his aching address to Memmius:[3]

2 For a comparable discussion of elegiac address in this poem, see William Waters, *Poetry's Touch: On Lyric Address* (Cornell University Press, 2018), 4.

3 Pierre Vesperini makes the controversial claim that Memmius was Lucretius's patron and commissioned him to write the poem as a way to increase his own prestige. See Pierre Vesperini, *Lucrèce: Archéologie d'un classique européen* (Fayard, 2017). It's a claim that would seem worth consideration, but the publication of this book has caused such a scandal that its author has been ostracized by many scholars (according to Mauricio Bettini who shared this with me in

> 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. (DRN 1.140–45)
>
> Nevertheless, your merit and my hoped-for pleasure from our sweet friendship urge me to carry through any sort of labor and lead me to be vigilant in silent nights, asking by what words and by what poetry at last I might be able to spread open a clear light before your mind, by which you might be able to see deeply into hidden matters.

Here Lucretius introduces us to motifs that will resonate throughout the poem: the sweetness of friendship, the vigilance and rigorous care shown in relation to music and writing, the desiring and intimate relation between writer and reader, teacher and student. The collocation of the pair (*tua me* 140) introduces this intimate pedagogical scene that blurs the boundaries between friendship and pedagogy: he wants to instruct his students so that we become his peers in friendship. The vertical tilts toward the horizontal on the horizon of the poem. Meanwhile, here words and song (*dictis quibus et quo carmine* 143) are both the content and the means of conveying meaning, whose co-creating relationship the chiastic pattern of the line underscores. In song made of words, the poem at hand and the poem being written in the poem at hand coincide in a textual *mise-en-abîme.* The poem as the poem being written, both the matter out of which the poem is created and the matter that the poem elucidates, reverberates and repeats as a sonic refrain. If we are vigilant readers and keen learners, Lucretius is offering us a lesson to receive when he presents us with his self-portrait: that lesson is in attention, in his and ours. For we are being taught to attend not only to what is being said but how it is being said, the interwoven language of the matter. Indeed, with utter devotion to his mission, he promises us that we will see deeply into all that is hidden (*occultas penitus convisere* 1.145), that is, the workings of atoms and the void, illustrated and illuminated by his words and his desire.

ii. Materialist Missionary and Prophet of the Natural World

> Epicurus's doctrine is identified with the doctrine of salvation for humankind, the prisoners of errors and painful necessities; since it is an instruction in liberation for every person, its addressees are not only other people (who must be taught) but also the poet himself (who has already learned and now becomes a missionary). The poet is the medium between

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conversation and laments the situation). I have to wonder why Lucretius's reputation cannot withstand a possible revaluation. That poets are human, vulnerable, and susceptible Lucretius would never deny.

> that doctrine and people — almost a subordinate means, like the honey smeared onto the rim of a cup of bitter medicine.
>
> — Gian Biagio Conte, *Genres and Readers*[4]

Lucretius ingeniously presents a didactic drama in which he plays the role of the prophet-teacher on a mission, tasked to convert his addressees and to spread the materialist word. In the scene of his own conversion and initiation, he reveals how he is summoned to be prophet and poet. At the same time, the action is itself a form of instruction in that just as Lucretius is repeatedly initiated by the summons, so too are his readers. In each instance, we are addressed by the poet, inciting us to be transformed by his teachings. As a follower in Epicurus's steps and as a student of his materialist thought, Lucretius begins by invoking and addressing Epicurus and proceeds to describe his bodily ritual of imitation, motivated by desire, not rivalry. The drama begins with an affirmation of his devotion to his teacher along with his deference to him. Using an animal analogy to render the relationship and comparative positions, he plays the swallow to Epicurus's swan, the ungainly baby goat to his powerful horse, no match for his teacher, his grace and force, in any contest:

> non ita certandi cupidus quam propter amorem
> quod te imitari aveo; quid enim contendat hirundo
> cycnis, aut quidam tremulis facere artubus haedi
> consimile in cursu possint et fortis equi vis? (DRN 3.5–3.8)
>
> Not desirous to compete but rather on account of love I yearn to copy you [Epicurus], for why would a swallow contend with a swan, or what could baby goats with their trembling limbs be able to do to match the power of a strong horse in a running race?

With reverence for his teacher Epicurus, father, discoverer of all (*tu pater es, rerum inuentor* 3.9), the poet is self-deprecating, an attitude not shown toward any other, in his desire to emulate his mentor. He positions himself in relation to his own teacher in the same way that he positions his reader, as if tending to a sick child in need of the atomist cure (as we will see later). Alike then in this receptive position, poet and addressees are nourished by the golden words of truth of revelations, as bees are by nectar (*omnia nos itidem depascimur aurea dicta* 3.12).[5] Indeed, intoxicated by the sweetness

4 In this section I draw on Gian Biagio Conte's discussion of the poem, in particular his insights into the shared aspirations, methods, and rhetoric of religious discourse and the didactic genre. See Gian Biagio Conte, "Instructions for a Sublime Reader: Form of the Text and Form of the Addressee in Lucretius's *De rerum natura*," in *Genres and Readers: Lucretius, Love Elegy, Pliny's Encyclopedia*, trans. Glenn W. Most (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 1–4.

5 The honey here characterizes the truth of the doctrine, just as it has previously been associated with the sweetness of Lucretius's poetry, used to trick his reader into drinking the bitter truth (DRN 1.936–41, discussed in the next

of truth in initiation and nourished by the doctrines borne from a divine mind (*divina mente coorta* 3.15), he gains god-like perception. He now sees what is hidden from sight, his vision no longer clouded, because his revelation scatters in all directions the terrors of religion that torment the soul. Standing in awe, the world around him crumbling, its walls sundered and destroyed, through the void he sees the working of all things (*diffugiunt animi terrores, moenia mundi / discedunt, totum video per inane geri res* 3.16–17). In the ruins, he attains an intimate relation to matter and to language in its most radical elements. His preternatural powers are matched by the reverent overtones in the verse's hymnal elements — echoing those in the hymn to Venus, the poem's initial proem — with its many repetitions (*tu, tu tuisque, omnia, omnia, and aurea, aurea* 3.8, 3.11–12, 3.12–13),[6] and thus the poet's conversion is staged in a performance of praise and worship of his own teacher. With his divinely inspired words, like a prophet he communicates the truth of atomic theory to his readers who, in corresponding gestures, emulating the form of initiation, will achieve salvation and will savor his golden words that are his teachings.

Lucretius's oracular vision and prophetic powers are not only gained through his conversion to materialist teachings, but also through poetic inspiration. Urging his readers to follow and listen closely, so that we receive his words clearly (*nunc age quod superest cognosce et clarius audi* 1.921), he doesn't deny that the matter might appear obscure. He, however, is amply able to teach the difficult matters, because a great hope for fame spurs him on and he is inspired by the sweet love of the muses in his heart (*suavem mi in pectus amorem / musarum* 1.924). With overflowing enthusiasm, animated by a lively mind (*nunc instinctus mente vigenti* 1.925), the prophet of nature enters the path of his mission:

> 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 (DRN 1.926–30)[7]
>
> I wander the trackless lands of the Pierides, visited before by the foot of no one. I feel joy in approaching and drinking from the untouched springs, and I feel joy in picking young flowers and in seeking a crown of fame for my head there where the Muses have crowned the brow of none other before.

section). Now both cup and contents are all golden with honey. The sweetness, as we will see, also describes the life of the materialist observer, removed from the tumults of life, saved from the shipwreck rendered in the proem of book 2.

6 See DRN 1.1–1.61 and William H. Race, "Aspects of Rhetoric and Form in Greek Hymns," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 23 (1982): 5–14.

7 Lines 1.926–30 are repeated in the first four lines of book 4.

In this scene of enthusiastic inspiration, the poet wanders through pathless lands and is delighted repeatedly by drinking from pure streams, picking fresh flowers, and striving to wear on his head a crown of fame, the victor's floral garland, singled out by the Muses as the first philosopher-poet. We wander with him: What moves him moves us. To share in the wonder, he asks us to pay close attention, enthralling us to travel along where none has before. Simultaneously, we witness the scene of poetic initiation and receive his sermon. In turn, he invites us to join him, exhorting us to seek with him a collective illumination. As companions, we are drawn into the delight of indoctrination by the missionary. Because Lucretius performs his initiation and inspiration as forms of instruction, our own initiation is ongoing, animated through each lesson.

By means of analogy, a favored form for prophets and pedagogues, the poet asks us to grasp the differences and similarities, in favor of community, the continuity that assumes us into its systems of relations — student becomes teacher whose students then become teachers, etc. The revelations, whether in a scene of ruins or of ecstasies, lead us from the known material world to the invisible world of atoms. Atomic theory is the revelation; the prophetic poem, our salvation. As reverent spectators, we are invited to imagine ourselves standing and watching from a distance a scene of oceanic turbulence and of difference between two opposing states of being: the sweetness of observation and vexation of the mind.

> Suave, mari magno turbantibus aequora ventis,
> e terra magnum alterius spectare laborem;
> non quia vexari quemquamst iucunda voluptas,
> sed quibus ipse malis careas quia cernere suave est. (DRN 2.1–2.4)
>
> It is sweet, when the winds stir up greatly the waters of the sea, to watch from the shore the great hardship of another; not because it is delightful for anyone else to be vexed, but rather because it is sweet to discern the misfortunes that you yourself lack.

To watch (*spectare* 2.2) and to perceive (*cernere* 2.4), two verbs of sight attributed to the spectator, one from observation, the other from insight, are both sweet (*suave* 2.1, 2.4). In the process of viewing the natural world, we translate by means of our sense perceptions observations into the vision, the insight that discerns the natural world's atomic motion, its invisible turbulence. When seen from a safe distance, both physical misfortunes and vexatious desires (*malis* 2.4) pertain not to us but to others, because we perceive this from the perspective of difference. We know what we lack, removed from the storms of the sea and political life that buffet those who labor in vain. The perfect dactylic final line lands squarely and soundly on what is sweet (*suave est* 2.4), resounding the initial word (*suave* 2.1), and is immediately repeated a third time (*suave* 2.5), turning us in the direction to take in another vista. Savoring again the sweetness of what we lack, we observe the struggles and dangers of war in which we play no part.

> suave etiam belli certamina magna tueri
> per campos instructa tua sine parte pericli. (DRN 2.5–2.6)
>
> It is sweet likewise to watch war's great battles arrayed on the fields without your share of danger.

Secured at a distance, it is sweet to observe the dangers warring desires motivate. Ambition to accrue political and monetary gain, the endless striving and avarice — we watch these with the vision we gain from our lack of participation and our refusal of pursuit. But nothing is sweeter than to dwell in a brilliant and sheltered realm and to contemplate sweet wisdom, untroubled by the perils of ambition and struggle.

> sed nil dulcius est, bene quam munita tenere
> edita doctrina sapientum templa serena. (DRN 2.7–2.8)
>
> But nothing is sweeter than to dwell in serene sanctuaries, well-fortified with the doctrines of wise teachers.

In the culmination of comparisons, Lucretius creates a refuge, a temple (*templa* 2.7) fortified by an increase of sweetness atop sweetness. In the form of a blessing, an echo of the triple *makarismos,* the poet entwines the philosophical with religious revelation.[8] Nothing is sweeter than the vision gained through this insight: to understand the natural world and be spared the strife of political and military strivings. Here the sweetness of both the poetry (its mellifluous sounds) and also of the materialist way of living (the atomic doctrine) unite and are bound together. And those who live secure within its hold are saved. But this distance, the retreat removed from troubles, should not be understood as a static position — neither the poet, nor his disciples can maintain themselves in stillness, untouched by the cycles of birth and decay, because the lessons, animated by the sweetness of the poetry and doctrine, must be learned and taught repeatedly. For there is

8 Don Fowler, in his excellent commentary, discusses this opening passage's relation to the form of the *makarismos,* or "calling blessed." "To say 'it is sweet to do X' is to praise the happiness of the man who does X. Lucretius's Priamel connects itself also, therefore, with another familiar form, the *makarismós.* [...] This was a popular form, no doubt familiar in many types of literature, but it was 'especially used in proclaiming the happiness of those initiated into the Eleusinian and other mystery cults' [...] and probably featured in the mysteries themselves. Then later 'the *makarismós* of the mysteries it taken over by the philosophers, who proclaimed the blessed happiness of those who have gained enlightenment by contemplation' [...] (Richardson)." DRN, "as a didactic poem, reaches back beyond the Hellenistic didactic to Parmenides and Empedocles, who set out to replace religious with philosophical revelation, and whose works are full of religious terminology. [...] So Lucretius uses the forms of religious revelation throughout his work, and that tone is present in the *makarismós*-like Priamel." Don Fowler, *Lucretius on Atomic Motion: A Commentary on De rerum natura, Book Two, Lines 1–332* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 26.

no outside of revelation. Rather the impressions, marks, traces, tracks, are continually being planted on us. Inscribing our bodies with song, the poem perpetually summons us to join its readerly community.

iii. First Lessons: Letters, Atoms, and Verbal Matter

Words matter and are the matter at hand in our initial atomic curricula. As a composition of letters, words work in both visual and sonic registers, as artifacts and as aural phenomena. In Lucretius's poem, they signify and enact in practice the underlying composition of all matter — the endless and invisible movement of atoms through the void. Both in and through an anagrammatic play of letters and phonic resonances, he animates in language atomic theory. The elements of the alphabet and the elemental structure of all matter are designated by the same word, *elementum*.[9] The poet teaches us by means of analogies between atoms and letters of the alphabet on five occasions, and in each instance the analogy serves to demonstrate an aspect of atomic theory. In these direct comparisons between atoms and letters, the poet is explicitly indexing the letters that we see and hear as we engage with the poem. That they appear in these first two books is indeed no coincidence because in these verses Lucretius elucidates the principles of atomic theory, instructing us in the form, movement, and qualities of atoms. Through arguments and illustrations, and in relation to a diverse range of material phenomena, he works to teach us to perceive how atoms, like letters, constitute and define matter.

His first anagrammatic example illustrates and embellishes his first principle of atomic theory: "nothing is born from nothing by divine power" (*nullam rem e nilo gigni divinitus umquam* 1.150). The visual experience of natural growth — for instance, the sight of a rose blossoming in spring — attests to this first principle. Things are born from things, not on account of any divine direction or intervention; that is, no divine will or whim is responsible for anything, or for nothing. Atoms combine to form all matter, though within limits. Not all forms of matter are possible, for from particular seeds all things are created (*at nunc seminibus quia certis quaeque creatuntur* 1.169). Atoms cannot combine in such a way as to render matter monstrous or inexplicable because a hidden but distinct power dwells in each thing (*quod certis in rebus inest secreta facultas* 1.173), where an almost vitalist statement already animates the verbal play of sounds (*certis/secreta*), *cer-/-cre.* Instead,

9 The etymology of the word *elementum* is uncertain, according to Alfred Ernout and Antoine Meillet, who tentatively suggest that it might be an "adaptation of an Etruscan word" ([*a*]*daptation d'un mot étrusque*). Alfred Ernout and Antoine Meillet, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine: histoire de mots* (C. Klinsieck, 1967), 193–94. Both Cicero and Lucretius use the word for the Greek term, στοιχεῖον (*stoikheion*), from the verbal form, to march or draw up in line or order, thus, element, letters, simple sound of speech, and the component parts into which matter is divided. Henry Liddell et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Clarendon Press, 1968). The word *elementum* also contains the middle letters of the alphabet, *l-m-n,* in a row. When said aloud, the first three syllables of the word sound the letters themselves, *el-em-en-(tum).*

everything specific is born from something definite, in its season, in an orderly procession. All matter shares common elements. What makes matter matter is this commonality of matter that composes all matter, just as the letters of the alphabet make up the words we are reading.

> ut potius multis communia corpora rebus
> multa putes esse, ut verbis elementa videmus,
> quam sine principiis ullam rem existere posse. (DRN 1.196–98)
>
> So you should rather think that bodies share in common many things, just as we see [shared in common] letters in words, than that anything is able to exist without first beginnings.

There is a season, a limit, a sequence, and a pacing that govern all things — matters and bodies. Atomic resources are limitless and everlasting, but what these resources can actualize, their form and shape, their temporality and rhythms, results from a measured orchestration, a timely one. This is unlike the time of the poem's composition, being out of balance, unjust, injurious (*tempore iniquo* 1.41 and 1.182), this historical moment of civil and social wars, political corruption, and military violence that cause human suffering. Our suffering, then and now, the poet yearns to address and cure through our conversion to atomist theory and by our indoctrination in atomist matter. For there is a decorum to the workings of atoms, an appropriate time and place for composition that prevents untimely beings and bodies from coming into being. By analogy, Lucretius's poetic composition responds to a political urgency, to times hostile and out of sync. What sustains order and measure is the commonality of atoms in all things. Their presence in all things, animate and inanimate, assures that they are not born from nothing and do not dissolve into nothing, but rather come from common bodies (*communia corpora* 1.176), and are composed according to what matter allows, according to matter's hidden powers (*secreta facultas* 1.173). In order to make matter, certain matter is needed; in order to make roses, rose seeds are needed; in order to make words, letters; and in order to make a poem, words, the words we see and hear all around us in the poem, words shared in common in many verses. An attention to words and their primary material, the alphabet, infuses the elemental analogies, which in turn serve to augment their illustrative capacities and underscore their presence near at hand.

These lessons in the principles of atomic theory are also instructing us in *how* to learn. Atomic pedagogy asks us to pay attention to both the theory and the *enactment* of theory. For instance, we are learning to discern forms of verbal play such as the repetition of the syllable *-cer-* nineteen times in the preceding thirty-seven lines (1.159–95).[10] This kind of play acts as a

10 As Jane Snyder writes: "In his commentary on 1.173 Smith calls attention to the words *certis … secreta* with advice 'Note verbal play'; to his comment one may add that in 1.159–195, the 37 lines preceding the analogy, there are in fact 19 repetitions or alterations of the syllable *-cer-*: *incerto* (164), *certa* (168),

process of acculturation to the sounds and shapes of atomic theory, that is, an explicit example of atomic pedagogy. In order to prime us for this first analogy between letters and atoms, Lucretius's use of repetition both phonic and visual, playing with the recombination of letters and sounds, instructs us in his theory both by example and through sonic display, which likewise transmit what the poem communicates otherwise. The linguistic play lures and urges us coaxingly to attend closely to elements, atoms, and alphabet, and to the sounds created by the poetic and atomic matter. I see this kind of engagement — seductive and instructive — as an enactment of the pedagogy Lucretius describes through the image of a honeyed cup (1.934–41), where the honey (the sweetness of poetry), is smeared on the rim of the cup to "trick" the child into drinking the bitter medicine (atomic doctrine); the young patient is "beguiled but not betrayed" (*decaptaque non capiatur* 1.941).

> sed veluti pueris absinthia taetra medentes
> cum dare conantur, prius oras pocula circum
> contingent mellis dulci flavoque liquore,
> ut puerorum aetas improvida ludificetur
> labrorum tenus, interea perpotet amarum
> absinthi laticem decaptaque non capiatur (DRN 1.936–41)
>
> But just as with children when healers intend to give them bitter absinth, first they smear the rims around the cup with honey's sweet and golden liquid, in order that the unsuspecting age of the children be tricked at the edge of the lips, and meanwhile may drink up the bitter mix of absinth, and though beguiled is not betrayed.

So too here the verbal play entices us to assimilate the theoretical importance. In both scenes, the workings of language constitute the alluring tricks, conjuring a kind of poetic magic by communicating through sound patterns, and effects the didactic transmission.

The second elemental analogy is more fully actualized, and the verbal resonances as a result are amplified louder. Here, contra Empedocles's theory of four elements, Lucretius uses the analogy to illustrate the primacy of atoms as elemental building blocks, and the comparison underscores the importance of the arrangement of atoms (in what combination and order)

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certis … creantur (169), *certis … secreta* (173), *certa* (176), *creatur* (177), *incerto* (181), *arceri* (183), *crescere* (185), *crescent … certo* (189), *crescentesque* (190), *noscere* (190), *grandescere* (191), *certis* (192), and *secreta* (194)." Jane McIntosh Snyder, *Puns and Poetry in Lucretius'* De rerum natura (B.R. Grüner, 1980), 38. While Snyder concedes the undeniable necessity of using the words *certus* and *creo* when discussing creation, I would add that the fluctuation between *incertus* and *certus,* two opposites, suggests the kind of role that indeterminacy also might play in the creation of atomic matter. See Lucretius, *T. Lucreti Cari De rerum natura libri sex,* ed. William Ellery Leonard and Stanley Barney Smith (The University of Wisconsin Press, 1961), 222.

and the ways they move together in forming all matter. Atoms are the only elements that constitute the whole world — all of it. "For the same [atoms] constitute sky, sea, lands, rivers, sun, the same [constitute] fruits, trees, animate creatures" (*namque eadem caelum mare terras flumina solem / constituunt, eadem fruges arbusta animantis* 1.820–21). Already the repetition of *eadem,* the same things/atoms, serves to emphasize the point that atoms are the singular, primary element. The words in the list, encompassing the diversity of the natural world, are strung together without any coordination, which, along with the omission of the main verb in the second phrases, accelerate the rhythm and emphasize the nouns. Meanwhile, the dynamic effects of the asyndeton create the impression that atoms almost effortlessly, with only a slight difference in arrangement, for instance, can compose the sun or a piece of fruit. Moving from the composition of worldly matter to the permutation of words, Lucretius in the analogy itself teaches us how these different combinations work on the level of letters. If we attend closely, we notice how both within words and between different words the verses illustrate the alterations — *versibus, verbis*, *versus, verba* and *sonitu, sonanti* — that create both different sounds and meanings.

> quin etiam passim nostris in versibus ipsis
> multa elementa vides multis communia verbis
> cum tamen inter se versus ac verba necessest
> confiteare et re et sonitu distare sonanti.
> tantum elementa queunt permutato ordine solo.
> at rerum quae sunt primordia, plura adhibere
> possunt unde queant variae res quaeque creari. (DRN 1.823–29)
>
> Therefore, you see many letters common in many words everywhere in our verses themselves, yet it's necessary to admit that verses and words differ among themselves in meaning [sense] and in the sound of their sounding. So much are letters able to do in only a changed order. But those which are first beginnings of things [atoms] are able to bring about more [kinds of variety] from which all various matter can be created.

The letters of the alphabet and the words they compose, again the very matter of the poem, serve as both analogy and limit case. By changing position, letters combine to form words with different meanings, while also sharing letters in common, and the change of position accounts for the different sounds that words make. And while sounds and meanings are governed by what words are possible and limited by the finite number of letters in the alphabet (although capable of infinite forms of expression), atoms (*primordia* 1.828) have a far greater capacity to form and shape the material world. Atomic elements, like letters, can change their order, but, unlike letters, atoms by varying their interval, position, and motion, create more and more various matter than do words (*plura* 1.828).[11] But the one

11 Cyril Bailey, ed. and trans., *Titi Lucreti Cari De rerum natura libri sex,* 3 vols. (Oxford University Press, 1947), 2:741.

cannot do without the other in an important sense. Worlds are made without words, but Lucretius wouldn't be able to teach us about worlds composed of atoms without the words to describe them. The material world made of atoms is articulated by words made of letters. Although the number of letters of the alphabet is limited in making meaningful words, they perform the prodigious work of creating and communicating through words what is not visible in the visible world: Letters formed into signifying words and composed in verses make manifest atomic theory in language. Words composed of letters, meanwhile, are distinguished both by the meanings that they make and by the sounds they sound (*et re et sonitu distare sonanti* 1.826). That is, meaning is not made solely by the letters that compose words, but also by the sounds that letters make in different combinations. Lucretius insistently, repeatedly instructs us in his verses to attend to how sounds and letters behave in order to apprehend atomic phenomena, that is, to make sensible what is beyond our senses: imperceptible atoms moving continuously through the void.

To reinforce the lesson on atomic composition and ordering, in the next analogy he draws our attention directly to specific words in his poem — to the anagrammatic play of the letters being rearranged and to the remixing of sounds to designate differently.

> iamne vides igitur, paulo quod diximus ante,
> permagni referre eadem primordia saepe
> cum quibus et quali positura contineantur
> et quos inter se dent motus accipiantque,
> atque eadem paulo inter se mutata creare
> ignes et lignum? quo pacto verba quoque ipsa
> inter se paulo mutatis sunt elementis,
> cum ligna atque ignes distincta voce notemus. (DRN 1.907–14)
>
> Thus now do you not see, what we said a little before, that often it matters greatly how these same atoms combine, and in which positions they are bonded together and what motions they give and receive among themselves, and the same atoms having been changed among themselves can create fire and wood [igneous and ligneous matter]? And in this way, these words themselves are made with the letters changing a little among themselves, since we designate [the words] wood and fire each with a distinct name.

We need to situate this analogy in context in order to appreciate the lesson fully. After discrediting Empedocles's theory of four elements, Lucretius takes aim at another adversary's theory. Anaxagoras is the explicit interlocutor for Lucretius in this section, though his treatment is so partial and at times absurd, it is tempting to defend him. Inviting us into the fray, Lucretius begins: "Now let us ransack (scrutinize) Anaxagoras's *homoeomeria* (*nunc et Anaxagorae scrutemur homoeomerian* 1.830). The specific point of contention concerns his theory of *homoeomeria* (made up of like parts or equal parted-ness), according to which the elements that make up a thing

must be similar to the thing they constitute.[12] This implies that the smaller bits that larger things are made up of share the same characteristics, and that after being destroyed a thing's broken bits still carry some identity of what they had formerly constituted. Whereas in Lucretius's theory of atoms, all matter is composed of atoms solely, and the position, shape, combination, and ordering of atoms give a thing its identity and characteristics. Atoms — unendingly indestructible and invisible — suffer no change, but rather through a process of recomposition, they create entirely new matter. Through reasoning we can "see" them, and by analogy we can apprehend and describe their attributes. Thus tiny, itsy-bitsy bits of fire are not hidden inside of wood waiting to burn. If this were so, fire would be latent in everything that burns, and disaster could strike at any time.

One implication of the pedagogic scene of the honeyed cup is that, unlike the gullible child, we are asked with a wink to accept the trick, having already been told we are being tricked. A more cunning version occurs here where we are asked both to collude with a sophisticated and at times parodic critique of Anaxagoras and also to swallow the anagrammatic analogy that *seems* to contradict that critique. The analogy of atoms and letters at once animates Lucretius's atomic theory and plays on his opponent's mistaken concept that fire is in wood. Yes, "real" fire is not contained in "real" wood, but the words themselves "fire" and "wood" (*ignes et lignum* 1.912) are built from the same elements, here the letters of the alphabet, and the latter word contains the other. They both hide and disclose what is manifest. The analogy that represents what is invisible, atoms moving through the void, coincides with that is visible: wood, fire, and wood being burnt by

12 In his work on Lucretius's sources, Francesco Montarese argues, following David Sedley, that the transliteration of the Greek word (rather than finding a suitable Latin word, which he capably does and remarks on elsewhere) suggests that the term and its theoretical concepts don't merit being imported into the Latin language. In Lucretius's wicked description of Anaxagoras's theory, the extraordinary repetition colludes with the poet's hilarious take down of the concept:

> principio, rerum quam dicit homoeomerian
> ossa videlicet e pauxillis atque minutis
> ossibus hic et de pauxillis atque minutis
> visceribus viscus gigni sanguenque creari
> sanguinis inter se multis coeuntibus guttis. (DRN 1.834–38)
>
> To begin he calls [his theory] the *homoeormeria* of things. Bones you see are born out of tiny itsy-bitsy bones, and from tiny itsy-bitsy guts, guts are born, and blood is created from many drops gathered together.

As Montarese points out, "Lucretius is looking at what is the *res* behind the fancy name *homoeomeria*. Trying to find what is hidden seems to be the overriding theme of the refutation of Anaxagoras." See Francesco Montarese, *Lucretius and His Sources: A Study of Lucretius, De rerum natura* 1.635–920 (De Gruyter, 2012), 237.

fire, which *seemingly* contradicts the teachings and supports Anaxagoras's theory — a truly perverse performance of instruction. Fortunately, for his students and readers, Lucretius provides some scaffolding for the advanced topic and exercise.

In the first step, we are instructed to consider the image of a self-starting fire on a windy peak igniting a forest, flowering into flames (*donec flammai fulserunt flore coorto* 1.900). To an imaginary assertion that such a spontaneous forest inferno would support the contention that fire resides inside wood, the poet replies to this still unschooled interlocutor:

> scilicet et non est lignis tamen insitus ignis
> verum semina sunt ardoris multa, terendo
> quae cum confluxere, creant incendia silvis.
> quod si facta foret silvis abscondita flamma,
> non possent ullum tempus celarier ignes. (DRN 1.901–4)

> It is obvious that fire is not grafted into wood, truly there are many seeds of heat, and when they flow together by rubbing, they create conflagrations in the woods. But if by chance ready-made flame was hidden in the tree branches, in no amount of time could the fires be concealed.

Here, where the anagrammatic words in question are composed on one verse line, they appear to have more in common than in the example in the succeeding verses where their commonality is being called to our attention. Due to the syntax of line 1.901, the words *ignis* and *lignis,* in the nominative singular and ablative plural cases, are identical save for the first letter of the latter, whereby fire (*ignis*) is indeed "grafted" in wood (*lignis*) by the addition of the letter *l.* Meanwhile, the vegetative sense of the verb *insero* (*insitus*), "to plant in, to in-graft," suggests that naturally fire, contra the explicit claim of the line, does indeed grow inside wood. The verses delight in the play of words to render how atoms become so heated that wood changes its matter to combust. For instance, the two different words that denote "wood" are repeated twice, and in *lignis* and *silvis* (1.901, 1.903), we detect another alternate, rhyming anagram. The flames designated by *ignis* (1.901) are repeated by three synonyms: *ardoris* (1.902) referring to the heat of atoms/seeds (*semina* 1.902) another vegetative term; *facta … flamma* (1.903) occurring in a less organic figure, referring to ready-made, rather than naturally occurring, fire; and *incendia* (1.903), with its overtones of complete devastation and ruin, contributes an ominous dramatic effect to this scene animating related forms of nomination — *but only if fire were indeed stowed inside wood.* At stake are invisible and hidden things, and what the visible teaches us about what we can't see. If understood atomically, the words themselves indicate that what is hidden cannot remain obscure even while it is not visible. For what is manifest (held in hand, *manus*), does not always reveal openly what is latent. The great variety of forms of living creatures and of material objects is owing to the atoms hidden within them. "Thus you will discover that seeds/atoms of many things are hidden in material/

bodily form and produce various shapes" (*invenies igitur multarum semina rerum / corpore celare et varias cohibere figuras* 2.677–78).

In the next lesson, the task is to learn how to look and to designate. Once more we are offered another elemental analogy, in which the first three lines are a repetition of lines from an earlier analogy (*quin etiam passim nostris in versibus ipsis / multa elementa vides multis communia verbis, / cum tamen inter se versus ac verba necesse est* 1.823–25 and 2.688–89). Again we see that there are many letters in common in many words throughout the verses, yet it's necessary to admit that words are composed of different letters. Whereas in the first instance Lucretius tells us that words differ "in meaning and the sound of the sounding" (*et re et sonitu distare sonanti* 1.826), the emphasis placed on the meaning and sound of words, in this second instance, the focus is on the kind and variety of letters that are used to make meaningful words, that is that different words "are composed of different letters" (*alia ex aliis constare elementis* 2.690). The finite number of letters — not too many or too few — is enough to compose the words that can then compose the poem, the poem that teaches us how an infinite number of atoms are more than enough, in different forms and combinations, to compose all matter. By means of the repetition and remixing of fragments of lines and words from previous elemental analogies, the passages model the material illustrations they display. The different combination and positioning of words, worlds, and elemental atoms create different meanings from different matter. They share similarities, manifest in how the words and verses repeat and rearrange common elements, while each verse describes different meanings of matter.

Indeed, through reproduction and imitation, copying shapes and behaviors engenders the limited variety of phenomena and beings composed of atoms. For we see this with animals: "they live each in a different form, and retain the nature of their parents, and each copies their behaviors in kind" (*dissimili vivunt specie retinentque parentum / naturam et mores generatim quaeque imitantur* 2.665–67). Under discussion is the great variety and great similarity of matter, the sameness and differences that are shared, and the limits of both. What creates both the difference and sameness is the *commonality* of shared atoms, as illustrated by inherited and learned qualities from generation to generation. Thus, great variety requires commonality, sharing some sameness while manifesting some difference. The emphasis between the two, sameness and difference, falls more on the former: the continuity created by shared elements. Indeed, in addition to instructing us in the principles of atomic theory, Lucretius is working through the relationships between like and unlike in order to portray a more continuous set of family relationships between seemingly disparate beings and events.

What are the implications of this working through of sameness and difference? Do atoms have histories? Are the traces of history inscribed in atomic matter? Is every birth always already marked by death? I take up the question of vestigial forms of history and atoms, first when considering the context of the poet's discussion of *simulacra* in the next section, and later when reading his account of human development in Chapter 3. For now,

allow the questions to accompany us, with the reassurance that they will be acknowledged and further elaborated.

The *apparently* immense differences between humans, stars, and trees (formed by atomic recomposition) do not imply that atoms are capable of combining in all possible ways — otherwise we would have all manner of fabulous creatures that "nature would have to nourish grazing on the all-producing earth" (*pascere naturam per terras omniparentis* 2.706). Although parent to all, nature cannot conceive (of) all imaginable offspring.[13] Unconceivable forms are indeed impossible, for living things always make manifest qualities of their origins, traces of what is hidden.

> quorum nihil fieri manifestum est, omnia quando
> seminibus certis certa genetrice creata
> conservare genus crescentia posse videmus. (DRN 2.707–9)
>
> It is manifest that nothing of this kind happens, since we see that all things, created from specific seeds and specific parent, are able to conserve their kind as they grow.

In another instance of repetition of the phoneme *-cer/cre,* we are taught to observe the ordered relationality of phenomena according to atomic structures. Meanwhile the figure of chiasmus, with its reversals and repetitions, instantiates visually the imbricated specificity of inherited relationship, "from specific seeds and specific parent" (*seminibus certis certa genetrice* 2.207). This family of relations enacts the theory both sonically and visually. And what we don't see are those implausible creatures of questionable parentage, perhaps including the opposite of the poem in hand or the poem that could not yet be written.

In the final analogy between atoms and letters — after which the word, *elementum,* will be used in the poem to designate the former except in one instance where Lucretius discusses the origins of poetry (5.1445) — the letters take on an extraordinary materiality. We are asked to see how letters that have the same shape when oriented differently (by being flipped or reversed, such as with the letters p, b, and d), they become distinct from each other. Within the passage, line 2.1012 repeats line 1.823 except for a one-word difference (*passim* and *refert*), and line 2.1014 is a complete repetition of line 1.820, with the variation occurring in the first word on the following line: in the former, the main verb is *constituunt,* "they constitute," and in the latter it is *significant,* "they signify." The repeated phrases are lifted from Lucretius's discussion of a different atomic aspect, there too illustrated by means of an analogy. Thus, the reuse and repetition of the phrases, with specific modifications made to describe another aspect of his theory, offer yet another lesson. In a now familiar fashion, that is, now that we have learned our lessons, the verses recombine to make new meaning and new sounds, just as words and letters do. However, in this final example, Lucretius renders his lesson with an analogy that is not contained

13 See also DRN 5.878–924.

within its own limits but rather works in conversation with other examples and across the borders of books. We are instructed not only to observe the letters and words we are reading as enactments of a particular feature of atomic theory, but also to attend to the phrases we have read over a thousand lines earlier, their echoes instructing us in a comprehensive view encompassing, as it happens, the whole universe. With a perspective that we have earned and learned by analogy, we see that what may appear to be marvelous we can domesticate and what appears as hidden we can discern through the marvel of an atomic perspective.

> quin etiam refert nostris in versibus ipsis
> cum quibus et quali sint ordine quaeque locata;
> namque eadem caelum mare terras flumina solem
> significant, eadem fruges arbusta animantis;
> si non omnia sunt, at multo maxima pars est
> consimilis, verum positura discrepitant res. (DRN 2.1012–18)
>
> Therefore, it matters in our own verses, with what letters and in what order all the letters are placed. For the same letters denote sky, sea, lands, rivers, sun, and the same letters denote fruits, trees, animate creatures. If not all, by far the greater share is altogether similar, thus things [words] are different because of the arrangement [of letters].

We are taught again to notice what is manifest not as a cause of wonder but as an insight. Just as distant, awesome matters, such as the moon and sun, might at one time have appeared like marvels, we in time and through instruction become accustomed to them; we accept them as ours, almost tediously. Don't reject out of fear what seems new or wondrous (such as atomic theory itself), but rather look and inquire into it and weigh it. Familiarity rubs out and replaces beguilement. Letters, enactments of matter, instruct by analogy; the writing itself instructs by articulating the theory; the writer of the poem, through animated comparisons, instructs us in how the natural world in the form of wind and birds, all visible matter, exists to teach us. None is passive, all are made of matter, and each gives impressions (*notitiam* 5.123, *notities* 5.182) that we receive as teachings. Meanwhile, with their various pedagogical modes, all require that we attend and not at a distance but with perspective. For neither reader nor writer can be at a remove from the pedagogical scene. We all must be vulnerable, susceptible to other forms because the poem communicates through both its sonic patterns and its semantic content. All the while the rhythmic repetitions and alterations of sounds and matter attune us bodily, make us porous enough to apprehend and be touched by the sonic impressions of atomic matter.

iv. The Matter of Sound: An Auditory Analogy

Here I am compelled to register a question that both exercises and in truth vexes me, in part because my own desire might be the problem. According to Lucretius's theory, atoms do not retain an explicit history of their former

material compositions; similarly, atoms like the letters of the alphabet, as we have seen, are reused and recontextualized to form new matter and new meaning. But might they perhaps retain a slight trace of their former incarnations? This spells my desire, what I want to pursue, so I turn to Lucretius's discussion of *simulacra* in book 4, where these vestigial figures illustrate the workings of images and the mental processes of visual perception. What he designates as the *simulacra* or images of things (*rerum simulacra vocamus* 4.30) are like membranes that are stripped or pulled from the outer body of things (*quasi membranae summo de corpore rerum / dereptae* 4.31–32) that fly all around in the breeze. He then modifies the description to say they would be better called skins or bark (*membranae vel cortex* 4.51) because the *simulacrum* is an image that wears the same look and form as the object or body that shed it (*quod speciem ac formam similem gerit eius imago* 4.52). Here again Lucretius puts the logic of analogy to work in the form of similes — thin membranes of things are thrown off bodies in the same way that fire throws off smoke, cicadas drop their summer coats, and snakes shed their skins (4.54–64). Being constantly shed from matter, these *simulacra* fill the air, taking the image-forms of their original sources, awaiting apprehension, only perceived when they hit the eyes with their impressions. These invisible forms make the visual perception of matter possible. If *simulacra* wear their bark-like skins that figure the vestigial traces of atomic structures, is there an analogous trace in the process of atomic reconfiguration? I want to know if atoms can be haunted by their previous incarnations, wearing the clothing of their former selves, and, by analogy, if words can be invested with the echoes of other words. Does the latter need to depend on the former? Does the material past resound in the present, summoning and being summoned? Is the present then part of a series of sonic reverberations and diminishing echoes, which might say something else than what has been heard already or written? If we attend to sound in a bodily way, while shedding the constraints of discursive disciplines, we just might hear the echoes of history sound the matter otherwise. In the Coda, I explore this form of listening and animating other histories and narratives in my discussion of m. nourbeSe philip's book-length poem *Zong!* What are the limits of the analogy between atoms and letters, invisible atoms that we never encounter directly and the letters that I am typing and you are reading? Could *simulacra* inform the similarity? Since they carry traces, could atoms, too, conserve their former vestiges? I recognize the speculative pitch of my wager, so, in a gesture meant to cultivate these hypotheses, I offer a running commentary on what Lucretius teaches us about matters of perception, in particular, the sense of sound, and the sound of sense, in order to trace more intimately atomic figurations and, perhaps, the echoes of history.

Having already and repeatedly staged many scenes of analogical instruction, Lucretius coaches us with a now-familiar formulation based on relations of similitude. "Now, how the other senses each sense their own sense-object, a not-at-all-difficult explanation remains" (*nunc alii sensus quo pacto quisque suam rem / sentiat, haud quaquam ratio scruposa relicta est.* 4.522–23). Lucretius begins his account of sound by establishing a distinct and direct

relationship between each sense and its object and, by way of analogy, he confirms the relationships between the ways different sense perceptions work. Lucretius devotes the first quarter of book 4 to an in-depth discussion of the sense of sight, providing materialist explanations of such visual phenomena and marvels as mirrors and optical illusions. He has already relied on the sense of sight in many instances to illustrate the precepts of atomic theory. In one early remarkable scene, Lucretius makes the comparison between the movement of atoms through the void and the chaotic dancing of dust motes whirling in a sunlit room.[14] The analogy asks us to place ourselves in a darkened room, with light slanting in from a southern window, and there to recall how we have observed the animated motion of dust motes illuminated in the rays of light. Even dust, with no value and so close to the intangible, when pressed into the service of instruction, creates the *imago* and *simulacrum* of atomic theory (*rei simulacrum et imago* 2.112). Here the poet summons visual perception to act as an instructional model, this time, for the other sense perceptions by way of analogy.

14 See DRN 2.112–24.

Excursus

What is the difference between analogy and metaphor? Is each a metaphor or analogy of the other?

"Metaphor: A figure of speech in which a name or descriptive word or phrase is transferred to an object or action different from, but analogous to, that to which it is literally applicable."*

"Analogy: A figure of speech involving a comparison; a simile, a metaphor. obs. A comparison made between one thing and another for the purpose of explanation or clarification."†

Whereas the explanatory power of analogy figures in one definition, it is absent from the other. This suggests perhaps that analogies are inherently more pedagogical and metaphors more poetic, although they are inseparable when determining definitions, which suits my purposes well viz. my interest in the interdependence and proximity of poetry and pedagogy. Simile bridges the two, "something regarded as symbolically representing or suggestive of something else; a comparison of one thing with another, usually in regard to a particular attribute, esp. as a figure of speech."‡ In Latin, the substantive form of the adjective *similis* means a comparison, likeness, resemblance, parallel example, and the verb, *simulo,* means to make something like another, to imitate, copy, represent; in its pejorative sense, the verb relies on similitude to accomplish the deceptive sleight, and means to represent something which it is not something feigned, counterfeit. The etymologically related noun, *simulacrum,* defines an image formed in the likeness of a thing, a likeness, semblance, representation, also, a parable, exemplum, icon, allegory. To make a semblance means to work with the resources of both metaphor and analogy, to make a representation formed through likeness, resemblances, comparisons, means to work in the midst of same and different, to distinguish which is to explain, limit, teach, resist the lure of homologies, and hone the distinctions, where they begin to blur and where perception unites with insight.

* *The Oxford English Dictionary Online,* s.v. "metaphor."
† *The Oxford English Dictionary Online,* s.v. "analogy."
‡ *The Oxford English Dictionary Online,* s.v. "simile."

Just as visual perception perceives its visual objects, so too do all other sense perceptions sense their own sense-objects. Lucretius's expanding string of analogies hangs on the logic of similitude. The mechanism of visual perception depends on objects shedding image-layers (*simulacra*) that hit our sense of sight and impress us with their likenesses. By analogy, we hear sounds composed of sound atoms that, like *simulacra,* are materially structured and composed of corporeal atoms. The way we perceive sounds is likened to and mirrored in the way we see images. Thus, via the analogy of the analogy, through the collocation of the series of interdependent comparisons, we arrive at the atomic materiality of sound that accounts for how sound and voice, composed of atomic bodies, create form and sense, auditory matter and meanings.

There's no scrambled calculation (*ratio scruposa* 4.523), no scrappy road ahead, for the path of similitude will lead us steadfastly on. Perhaps because the explanation of the other sense perceptions is going to be just that simple to apprehend, Lucretius allows himself to open the discussion of sound with a flourish of circular reasoning.

> principio auditur sonus et vox omnis, in auris
> insinuata suo pepulere ubi corpore sensum.
> corpoream quoque enim vocem constare fatendumst
> et sonitum, quoniam possunt inpellere sensus. (DRN 4.524–27)
>
> To begin, when having stolen into the ear, they have struck the sense perception [the faculty of hearing] with their own body, all sound and voice are heard. For it must be acknowledged that sound and voice are also bodily since they are able to strike the faculties of sense perception.

Lucretius's use of the passive voice for the main verb (*auditur* 4.524), leaving the agent of listening unspecified, allows us to be those hearing agents possessing attentive ears, stolen (*insinuata* 4.525) like sound into the scene. Sound is audible because once inserted into an ear, having been emitted from a mouth, for instance, it hits the ear's sense of hearing with its own body. Hearing depends on the body of sound hitting the ear of the hearer.[15] Sounds and voice, winding their way inside ears, strike with their bodies to be heard — that is, sound and voice have bodies because they, sound and voice, are able to strike the senses which must be the case in all cases. No matter the direction, these phrases keep winding around each other in their circling sense. So, in order to strike, a sound needs a body (*corpore*) to strike with, and sound, once made, strikes something with its own body (*corpoream*). Or a sound's body hits the senses because sound has a body

15 There is a distinction worth mentioning between hearing and listening because each brings different resources to learning: The former is active, outwardly focused on another's expression while cultivating forms of attention, whereas the latter is passive, porous, susceptible to all forms of external stimuli indiscriminately; both are valued qualities in Lucretian pedagogy.

to hit with. There is no getting out of the circle, but maybe the returning figure *is* the point. The circularity allows for and produces the repetition of bodies and hitting, of voices and sounds hitting senses with their own bodies in an echo chamber inhabited by voices and ears for the bodies of voices to strike (*pepulere [pello], impellere; corpore, corpoream; sensum, sensus; vox, vocem; sonus, sonitum.*) Once we account for all the repetitions, few words are left that are not repeated. With little linguistic interference, what circulates in circles through these lines are voices striking bodies that sound the bodies being struck, repeatedly in an echo of sounds and voices, resounding within a chorus of material variations on the thematic matter, echoing perhaps beyond their temporal limits.

But if we are not yet persuaded by the circulating logic of sounds, we will apprehend through our own lived experience that a voice has a material body with the power to harm — both the one speaking and the one spoken to.

> praeterea radit vox fauces saepe facitque
> asperiora foras gradiens arteria clamor,
> quippe per angustum turba maiore coorta
> ire foras ubi coeperunt primordia vocum.
> scilicet expletis quoque ianua raditur oris. (DRN 4.528–32)

> The voice moreover often scrapes throats, and a harsh shout while exiting makes rough the windpipe, for when the atoms of voice, gathered into a larger throng begin to go outside, through a narrow opening, it's certain that the doorway of the mouth is also scraped due to the jam-packed passageways.[16]

The throng of sound atoms is like a crowd of people trying to get out through a narrow passage. The different meanings of *fauces* (4.528) — throat, gullet, passageway — supply the spatial bridge for the analogy. Voice is characterized by its massing loudness. A loud clamor is the kind of sound we are hearing rather than what the voice might mean to say.[17] We see how this mass moves and comes into contact with other material as it travels through space. Sound scrapes the throat, and the doorway of the narrow passage of the throat is also scraped as voice throngs outside and is released. We are asked to collate our experience of sound with how we experience

16 John Godwin in his commentary notes that this is "a reference to the Greek term for the windpipe *tracheia arteria* (*trachus* = rough = *asper*)." Lucretius, *De rerum natura IV,* ed. John Godwin (Aris and Phillips, 1986), 124. Taking Godwin's comment a step further, we can see how the pun-play is happening also between languages.

17 In the Coda, I enter into another clamor of voice, a cacophony of sounds and song, in a discussion of m. nourbeSe philip's *Zong! As Told to the Author by Setaey Adamu Boateng* (Wesleyan University Press, 2008), and listen, in reconfigured fragments and disfiguring language, for other bridges and for other meanings than what the words of the historical record might say.

crowded bodies, scraping and bumping into each other, moving through cramped canals, exiting mouths and doorways. In a ring composition, voice scrapes (*radit* 4.528) the body with its body, and the body is scraped (*raditur* 4.532) by other bodies clamoring. The repetition of the verb in its active and passive voices rounds out the scene without smoothing over its roughness.

Before we can apprehend fully how a meaningless clamor becomes articulate language, we are taught that the physical harm caused by sound is materially connected to the harm caused by what sound matter signifies. Matter's power to harm teaches how sound becomes language: "Thus it must hardly be doubted that voices and words are made up of first bodies [atoms], with the result that they can harm" (*haud igitur dubiumst quin voces verbaque constent / corporeis e principiis, ut laedere possint* 4.533–34).[18] Words enter alliteratively, following voices (*voces verbaque*) as if to synchronize their shared corporeality, both being composed of atomic first elements. And because voice and words have bodies, those bodies make contact and elbow their way into our room, where they can do harm with their scraping and beating. But voice and words also need to be distinguished from each other; they are related but not the same. Voice makes words hearable. Voices produce verbal sounds that have linguistic signification when what is voiced are words that are heard. Voices in the form of material sound leave the body and can harm the body with its own corporeality, but words harm differently. Lucretius wants us to connect the physical sensations of yelling loudly, clamorously, with the words that are being yelled, and consequently, he is leading us to understand that because words have power to harm, they have the power to heal, like the words that compose this poem when striking attentive listeners. The preacher of atomic theory is committed to this teaching, to the capacity of his words to impress us, to transmit and to transform. And not just any words, but the words we are listening to now, attuned to the lines at hand, sounding with sense about sound.

If we listen, we cannot but hear how sounds, whether as speech or clamor, gain and lose sense, body, and matter:

> nec te fallit item quid corporis auferat et quid
> detrahat ex hominum nervis ac viribus ipsis
> perpetuus sermo nigrai noctis ad umbram
> aurorae perductus ab exoriente nitore,
> praesertim si cum summost clamore profusus.
> ergo corpoream vocem constare necessest,
> multa loquens quoniam amittit de corpore partem. (DRN 4.535–41)
>
> Likewise it does not escape you how much of the body is drawn away,
> and how much is extracted from the nerves and vital forces themselves

18 Whenever I read this passage, I hear these lines: "They that have power to hurt and will do none / That do not do the thing they most do show / Who moving others are themselves as stone / Unmoved, cold, and to temptation slow." William Shakespeare, Sonnet 94, in *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, ed. Douglas Bush and Alfred Harbage (Penguin Books, 1961), 116.

> of human beings by perpetual speech, having been drawn out to the shadow of black night from the first rising gleam of dawn, especially if poured out with the greatest shout. Therefore, it is necessary to agree that voice is made up of body, since talking much takes away a part of the body.

Nonstop talking (*perpetuus sermo* 4.537) not only exhausts but depletes the body of body. For the human body and the body of sound alike are made from atoms. Hour by hour, from dusk to dawn, shouting draws off atoms in order to make the loud matter of speech — it's material *and* relational. In other words, words can hurt. But how could this escape you (*te* 4.535) who are being addressed, because you too are in the act of reading this poem and, if aloud, are diminished in body by it?[19] You are addressed here, by words, by voice; you are asked to summon your own experience of being harmed bodily by speech. When you speak with loud voices from sparkling dawn to shadowy dusk, you are made less. For your voice is made from your body's matter; as the former becomes bodily, your own body becomes less. You are in this now with me, a bodily voice and voicing body.

> asperitas autem vocis fit ab asperitate
> principiorum et item levor levore creatur;
> nec simili penetrant auris primordia forma,
> cum tuba depresso graviter sub murmure mugit
> et reboat raucum *retro cita* barbara bombum,
> et *[iam] Dauliades natae hortis* ex Heliconis
> cum liquidam tollunt lugubri voce querellam. (DRN 4.542–48)

> Harshness of voice, moreover, is created by harshness of atoms and likewise smoothness by smoothness. The atoms that enter the ear are not of the same shape, when the horn deeply bellows low with a deep roar and when the barbarian land, stirred up, reechoes back a raucous rumble and when Daulian birds from the garden of Helicon with a sorrowful voice raised up a liquid lament.[20]

Despite the textual problems indicated by asterisks in two lines, we can nevertheless sense the comparison that Lucretius is asking us to hear. Particular kinds of sound correspond to particular kinds of atoms, underscored by the linguistic similitude: harsh voice is made by harsh atoms (*asperitas* [...] *asperitate* 4.542), and smooth voice by soft ones (*levor levore* 4.543). The repetition of the words creates a specific kind of identity through the figure of the polyptoton.[21] And the sequence of verbal similarities likewise animates

19 In contrast to poetry's capacity for augmentation and instruction, the body uttering words, poetic or otherwise, is diminished.

20 The nouns and adjectives perform a quasi-chiastic dance of distribution in the line (4.548). And while more typically a lament is sorrowful and a voice is liquid, grammatically this line makes a liquid lament and sorrowful voice.

21 Polyptoton refers to the repetition of a word in a different form or case, e.g.

the differences, that is, different kinds of atoms composed as sound create different forms (*forma* 4.544), forming words, heard distinctly, that the ear receives differently and that reinforces the differences. Or put another way, because different kinds of sounds are made by differently shaped atomic materials, they compose different forms, and the differences sound in our ears. For instance, horn instruments make deep sounds that retain their horn-sound forms and stir up their surroundings, resounding, echoing back the sound and form of horns. These examples animate the imbricated relationship between sounds, atoms, and forms that echo back sounds, atoms, and forms, in correspondences tuned to the play of difference and similitude. And the heavy alliteration in the illustration of the different kinds of sounds (*murmure mugit / et reboat raucum retro … barbara bombum* 4.544–45) produces another kind of comparison. In alliterative sequencing, the repetition is produced in the initial sounds of word which is the mirror image of an acoustic echo, where the repetition is made with the final sounds of words. In this valley, the alliterative first sounds (what should first fragment into silence in the diminuendo of an echoed word) are here enlisted into sustaining reverberations. Meanwhile, sonic repetitions echo in final word sounds, for instance, the repeated final *r* and *t* sounds, and the multiple *m* sounds in every position, from initial, to middle, to final. The richly textured sonic patterns create densely chordal sounds, that in rhyming similarities and differences, likewise affirm their material relationships.

While the analogy describes the similar process by which atomic matter in different forms produces different products, the differences, on the one hand, shore up the analogical relationships, and on the other, point to their limitations through a related process. The limitations in turn delimit relative difference, that is, show that not all likes are alike. For through a like process, particular kinds of atoms create particular kinds of sounds, different from other particular kinds of sounds. Meanwhile, the creation of articulated words requires even greater forms of sonic difference — and cunning.

> hasce igitur penitus voces cum corpore nostro
> exprimimus rectoque foras emittimus ore,
> mobilis articulat verborum daedala lingua,
> formaturaque labrorum pro parte figurat. (DRN 4.549–52)[22]
>
> Thus, when we thrust these voices from deep within our body and send them straight out through the mouth, the tongue, mobile crafter of

levor / levore, res / re(bu)s, or look / look(ing).

22 Not only are tongues crafty, but the earth itself is skillful in its generative variety: "from you, goddess, from you, the winds flee, the clouds of heaven, from you and your arrival, for you the crafty earth sends up sweet flowers, for you the ocean's level expanses laugh" (*te, dea, te fugiunt venti, te nubila caeli / adventumque tuum, tibi suavis daedala tellus / summittit flores, tibi rident aequara ponti* 1.6–1.7).

> words, articulates (divides into parts) [the sounds], and shaping of the lips, for their part, forms [sounds into words].

The voice, as articulated verbal sounds, both figures and signifies. The passage of sound into meaning is marked by a narrative of body parts: Voice is pushed out from deep inside the body, then leaves through the mouth; along the way it is given shape by the tongue that divides and crafts; and lastly a word is formed into a meaningful figure by the shapely movements of the lips. Sound becomes words having been touched, divided up, and moved by articulating, skillful, and artistic body parts. Keeping in mind the connection then between the body of sounds and the sounding body, the material atoms that make up the corporeal figures and the sounds that emerge from that body as meaning, we come to consider the conditions that determine and the circumstances that shape which words are possible.

> hoc ubi non longum spatiumst unde illa profecta
> perveniat vox quaeque, necessest verba quoque ipsa
> plane exaudiri discernique articulatim;
> servat enim formaturam servatque figuram. (DRN 4.553–56)
>
> When the distance is not long through which it travels, that voice having advanced forward, then the words themselves also must be heard clearly and marked articulately for it preserves its shape and preserves its signifying form.

A nearby voice preserves what it is made from and consequently preserves its meaningful sounds; form and figure, composed together, arrive together, thus becoming clearly discernable as words. The words are heard meaning what they were meant to mean because the means by which they are articulated and what the articulation signifies are conserved together (*servat* [...] *servatque* 4.556). Closeness creates the condition for mutual survival, and because it makes us less vulnerable, protects us from harm. If the composition of sound survives intact, then the sound is meaningful. For when they sound together, both the material form and its acoustic figure are in concert — sound and sense are in unison.

But at a distance, when coming from afar, words arrive neither intact nor coupled with their meaning.

> at si interpositum spatium sit longius aequo,
> aera per multum confundi verba necessest
> et conturbari vocem, dum transvolat auras. (DRN 4.557–59)
>
> But if the space between is longer than right, then the words must become very confused in the air, and the voice must get mixed up while it flies through the breezes.

Discombobulated by the distance, neither voice nor words arrives clearly, just some kind of noise lacking in meaning and shape, bereft of sound's

figuring form. Under these conditions, when a voice is distorted beyond signification, a nonsensical sound flies through the air, missing our ears. Here the similarity between the words "ear" (*auris* 4.524, 4.563, 4.566) and "air" (*auras* 4.559, 4.569) are played together — for if only there were ears to receive the sound, might it then say something more? Could we make the mixed-up voice (*conturbari vocem* 4.559) sound a meaning? Or interpret, as audience, what is not there to be heard? An invitation to learn from the breezes? What does it sound like when meaningful words devolve, fall into confusion?

> ergo fit, sonitum ut possis sentire neque illam
> internoscere, verborum sententia quae sit;
> usque adeo confusa venit vox inque pedita. (DRN 4.560–62)
>
> Therefore it happens that you are able to perceive a sound and not understand what the meaning of the words is because the voice arrives so confused and impeded.

Words become mere sounds when their meaning is lost in a commotion. When voice arrives confused, sound muddles sense, with no meaning intact. The signifying form is split up, reflected keenly in the *tmesis* that cuts the compound form of the verb (*impedo*) in half at the end of the line: *in*que *pedita*. The enclitic *–que* (and) cuts apart the parts (those parts the conjunction, *–que,* might have conjoined even as it inclines effetely back, leaning toward its attachment). This is stunning: the language of explication enacts its own poetic problem. On the one hand, the meaning's way becomes impeded, both sound and sense confused, broken apart into meaninglessness. Yet on the other, the act of cutting, that is, the shaping of sound by a pliant tongue, artfully forms rather than deforms words (*mobilis articulat verborum daedala lingua* 4.551). Thus, recalling the act of articulation, we can hear this *tmesis* creating more sense. For rather than sounds merely enacting or deforming sense, here the opposite shows: A surplus of meaning is being generated precisely where the poem is giving an account of sense impeded, in a recapitulation of the conjunction's (*-que*) sonically disconnecting force over its grammatically connecting form. These lines of losing meaning march along with a heavy meter; the spondaic feet far outnumber the un-elided dactylic ones, as if to articulate with slowness — mark out deliberately — the distance that disturbs the signifying intent of the voice.

Yet for a single word to be received by many, it must break into myriad repeated and identical words that still maintain the integrity of its meaning and form: "Often one word hits the ears of all, having been sent out from the mouth of a cryer into the public" (*praeterea verbum saepe unum perciet auris / omnibus in populo, missum praeconis ab ore.* 4.563–64). In this case, all hearers' ears receive a word, struck by its singularity with meaning intact. The public caller whose work is to spread some news knows how to manipulate words artfully, keeping the sound and sense secure by neatly cutting and dividing into multiples of the same that hit ears rather than dispersing senselessly into the air.

in multas igitur voces vox una repente
diffugit, in privas quoniam se dividit auris
obsignans formam verbis clarumque sonorem. (DRN 4.565–67)

Thus, one voice suddenly scatters into many voices since it divides itself, into separate ears stamping the form of words and a clear sound.

The voice (*vox* 4.565) and words (*verbis* 567) are united in their purpose. Voice is capable of splitting and hitting, indeed impressing, like a sign (*obsignans*), meaningful words with lucid sound. The voice when split repeats itself in plurals, with a slight difference (*voces vox* 4.565), in another resounding polyptoton.[23] This time the repetition lessens. Hear the two-syllable *voces* (voices) return in the sequence of words in the line as the one-syllable *vox* (voice). Voice fragments though still signifying in contrast to the math of the passage. The voice multiplies in number, is split into many, yet the repetition of the word for "voice" in the sequence decreases in syllables, so that both words, *voces* and *vox,* animate the motifs of difference and similitude in the sound-sense of words.

In contrast to words clearly uttered by a skilled speaker and thus received by impressionable ears, Lucretius renders the fate of relation-less language.

at quae pars vocum non auris incidit ipsas,
praeterlata perit frustra diffusa per auras.
pars solidis adlisa locis reiecta sonorem
reddit et interdum frustratur imagine verbi. (DRN 4.568–71)

But the part of the voice that doesn't hit the ears themselves travelling past, dies frustrated, scattered all through the air. A part [of the voice], thrown back, having been dashed against solid places, returns a sound sometimes and then deceives with the image of a word.

In order not to be useless, that is, not meaningless, the voice needs ears, else it dies in the air. Already in parts, the voice distorts into sound, a sound that perishes, scatters, frustrates, deceives, looking like a word, seeming like meaning, but not sincere, due in part to lack of relation, whether or not it misses or strikes the ears of a receptive auditor, like us, as readers reading aloud. In these heavy, spondee-rich lines, an excess of violence kills a voice with no nearby listener: Already in pieces, it travels, scatters, hits, dashes against rocks, then returns otherwise and corrupted as a warped image of the word (*imagine verbi* 4.571). The soundscape amplifies the echo through the play between *auris* and *auras,* ears and breezes of air. For when the first is unreceptive or absent, the other, always present, provides a har-

23 My delight in these linguistic repetitions, the polyptotons, and in puns indexes my affective responses, and is meanwhile relevant to what I am up to — the repetitions (echoes and variations) are doing pedagogical work once we have learned well our elemental lessons.

bor for the voice as sound, receives it like a crypt to bury its breezes as if a gist. And even if it travels, bangs against walls, and returns, and even if an ear is there to hear it, it is only a likeness of what it was, a similitude that dissimulates, a counterfeit word with no meaningful sounds.[24] Here, however, out of this battered and broken noise the lesson arrives, if we listen with our ears pricked up and attentive.

> quae bene cum videas, rationem reddere possis
> tute tibi atque aliis, quo pacto per loca sola
> saxa paris formas verborum ex ordine reddant,
> palantis comites cum montis inter opacos
> quaerimus et magna dispersos voce ciemus. (DRN 4.572–76)
>
> When you see this well, then you can give the reason to you yourself and to others, why, in isolated places, rocks return in the correct order the exact shapes of words, when we seek straggling companions in the darkness of the mountains and call to the scattered companions with a loud voice.

You return, like an echo echoing yourself (*tute tibi* 4.573), because the object of understanding which you are able to return (*reddere* 4.572) is also the subject of what echoes. Since forms of sounds return in order, that is, in their well-formulated shapes, keeping both sound and meaning intact, you too can return a reason that answers, you, who have followed along, being a student advancing in your studies, listening to how words require your ears to perceive meaning lest the sound dies or, worse, meaning is distorted into nonsense and lies. We are listening together with our ears, you and me, attending to the sense of the poem. For the form of understanding echoes the object of understanding. We reflect and return. These gestures move us to enter a pedagogical scene, a place of reason (and unreason as we will soon see). You and I, listener, reader, teacher, student, become a slender "we" as we find ourselves bereft of others. In an ominous valley, we've lost our wayward companions, who are dispersed among darkening mountains in an unseeing land. Why hadn't we stayed closer? Taken better care? Within the syntax of the chiastic line (4.576), the two main verbs — we are seeking (*quaerimus*) and we are calling (*ciemus*) — encircle the lost ones (*dispersos*) enfolded between the great voice (*magna … voce*), the agent of the hopeful return of what's lost to us, the seekers and callers.

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24 The image (*simulacra*) of a word is an echo, and the visual analog of an echo is a reflection of an image in a mirror (4.269–323). Although the mirror is more faithful when not corrupted, the image is indeed reversed. These companions, mirror image and echoed sound, are consistent in their mechanics and structural integrity. But as we are asked to entertain meanings, deceptive and frustrating meanings, the mirror image evokes Narcissus, deathly companion to Echo who makes meaning with ruins and fragments. For Ovid's version, see his *Metamorphoses* in R.J. Tarrant, ed., *P. Ovidi Nasonis Metamorphoses* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 3.339–508.

Are we reassured by this voice? Elided yet shifting between pronouns, are we safer? If the syntax were to hold, could we call to each other, affirming that echo of relation?

> sex etiam aut septem loca vidi reddere vocis,
> unam cum iaceres: ita colles collibus ipsi
> verba repulsantes iterabant dicta referri. (DRN 4.577–79)
>
> I have seen places that return six or even seven voices when you send out one. Thus, hills to hills themselves, repelling the words back and forth, kept returning the replies repeatedly.

I see places, the stone faces of mountains, where, when you send out your voice, it echoes repeatedly. I see you hear this. Together we can't keep proper count, for the repeating repeats the words, and the hills themselves repeat (*colles collibus* 4.578). The words and replies replay one another (*verba* [...] *dicta* 4.579), the former, the mountains return, and the latter, the former replays. That difference in repetition, the echo degrading, we hear together, a difference that affirms the lesson in a hilly landscape where the echolocations set the coordinates of our pedagogical scene.

And while you and I send echoes to each other, we learn of others who imagine companions, whose desires hear more than us in these echoing woods:

> haec loca capripedes satyros nymphasque tenere
> finitimi fingunt et faunos esse loquuntur,
> quorum noctivago strepitu ludoque iocanti
> adfirmant volgo taciturna silentia rumpi
> chordarumque sonos fieri dulcisque querellas,
> tibia quas fundit digitis pulsata canentum,
> et genus agricolum late sentiscere, cum Pan
> pinea semiferi capitis velamina quassans
> unco saepe labro calamos percurrit hiantis,
> fistula silvestrem ne cesset fundere musam. (DRN 4.580–89)
>
> In these places the neighboring locals imagine that goat-footed satyrs and nymphs live there and they report that there are also fauns, by whose night-roaming noise and happy joking, they declare that the speechless silence is commonly broken, and that the sounds of strings and sweet laments are made which their fluted pipe pours forth, played by the musicians' fingers. And these farming people listen all around [to this music], when Pan, shaking a pine-needle headdress from his half-beast head, often runs his round lip over the hollow reeds [of his instrument] so that his reedpipe does not cease to flow with woodland music.

The sounds are continuous, flowing forth from the music played by the woodland divinities whose instruments and even garments gush with

songs. As much as I am taken in by this description of the mythic creatures who fill the forest with raucous jokes and music from stringed and wind instruments, I return to asking why at this moment we have arrived here. Am I to feel how much *less* I hear as compared to those who dwell and work in the forest? What music and dance am I *not* invited to partake in? It may be a contrivance, imagined by the locals, that the woods are filled with noisy beings, but given the way Lucretius portrays this scene, describing the figures fully and loudly dressed up, it is hard neither to share in the pleasures, though belatedly, nor be absorbed by the sonic diversions: the ceaseless music, the sweet laments that flow from the fingers of these musicians — the fauns, satyrs, nymphs, and Pan, their bandleader.

We watch how Lucretius pivots on the spot from portraying the scene of diminishing sounds of echoes to describing the same scene as a world replete with noisy music, a picture of increase, flooded with rowdy jests and musical laments. The amplification of sounds rather than fragmentation of words — expansion rather than diminution — is what Lucretius invites us to hear, and his rendering of the noisy, raucous crowd rhymes with its poetic style. The lines overflow with characters, movement, noisy music, heavily modified language, and various metrical and virtuosic sonic displays and stylistic pyrotechnics. Even the absence of sound is given potential voice, as speechless silence (*taciturna silentia* 4.583) that joins the clamorous surround to fall in with the beautifully balanced chiastic line of musical orchestration — laments and chords (*chordarumque sonos fieri dulcisque querellas* 4.584). The description of the fully embodied sounds made by the tibia delays the entrance of the musicians, withheld until the very last and only attached by their fingers. The most extravagant line modifies in its entirety the most musical character, Pan: "shaking a pine-needle headdress from his half-beast head" (*pinea semiferi capitis velamina quassans* 4.587). The description evokes a violent tossing of his head partly covered with a pine-needle veil, spraying pinecones wildly in all directions, while miraculously, simultaneously he runs his lips over his reed instrument piping out his non-stop sylvan songs. This riot stands in sharp contrast with the previous scene of isolation and privation, bereft of friends in the ominous dark woods, where a word repeats just six or seven times then sounds no more.

Perhaps as a consolation for our losses, Lucretius overflows with instruction, lest the lesson be drowned out and missed amidst the musical charms:

> cetera de genere hoc monstra ac portenta loquuntur,
> ne loca deserta ab divis quoque forte putentur
> sola tenere. ideo iactant miracula dictis
> aut aliqua ratione alia ducuntur, ut omne
> humanum genus est avidum nimis auricularum. (DRN 4.590–94)
>
> And they speak of other marvels and wonderful tales of this kind perhaps to prevent being thought to live in lonely places deserted by even the gods. For that reason, they boast of these miracles in their tales, or

> they are induced by some other motive, as the whole human race is too
> greedy for little ears [audiences] (or has little ears, greedy [for tales]).

We hear from our guide a set of explanations for the locals' talk of forest sounds and supernatural wonders. First, they do not want to be seen as solitary, dwelling in a place abandoned by the gods, and by definition, barbaric. (For the Romans, to be ignorant of the gods meant to be barbaric.) To make good their solitude, perhaps fearing the silence, these dwellers form an assembly of nearby neighbors (*finitimi* 4.579), hardly living isolated lives, but sharing forms of community with other woodland locals and gods who both look for and look out for each other, call to each other, and in a sense call each other forth. They summon through sound the signs of others who then comfort them with companionship, even if it is only a contrivance, an invention that gives form to the fragmentation of their own voices and figures for stories. The second explanation is that the whole human race loves to have an audience — not just these local farmers but all of us. We want to give ourselves good stories; that is, we are a race of performers and audiences, mutually ever desiring to invent, interpret, perform, hear, and applaud our own tales. We are wanting — relational and interdependent — we need others to tell our stories to: Lucretius needs his Memmius, sound needs ears, I need you. Someone addressing someone else, relational exposure, provides the precondition for communication, the creation of a story, a song, a poem. For without another, what then? We summon an audience in order to conjure a collectivity in a space of coexistence, just as the poem addresses us as student, reader, friend, inducting us into its readerly community, the missionary fold, audiences exposed to multiplying sounds, mutually composed. Indeed, this scene suggests that we are stuck neither with the embattled dyad nor hierarchical pair of doer and done-to; there are others, many, proliferating through the place of communication and community (*haec loca* 4.580), here where the woods shelter all manner of subjects. We find another explanation in an alternate reading of the final phrase (*avidum nimis auricularum* 4.594). If we take *avidum* as a genitive plural modifying *auricularum* (rather than modifying *humanum*), then we hear that we have greedy little ears, ears that crave to hear stories. We demand we be told them, no matter the content, or rather, the more miraculous the content the better for our little ears hungry for words of wonder. Am I craving the fantastic, are we that ravenous? Meanwhile what I do long for is a pastoral scene, our *locus amoenus,* where we might assemble collectively and be sustained by atomic community.

So even our hungry desire for wonders and sensational stories, Lucretius addresses, and in return he asks us to discern with our eyes and ears so that we may learn his meaning.

> quod superest, non est mirandum qua ratione,
> per loca quae nequeunt oculi res cernere apertas,
> haec loca per voces veniant aurisque lacessant,
> colloquium clausis foribus quoque saepe videmus; (DRN 4.595–98)

> As for what remains, there's no cause to be amazed that there are spaces which the eyes are not able to see apparent things on the other side of, and yet through these spaces voices can come and can hit the ears, and often even outside we perceive a conversation, happening behind closed doors.

Lucretius guides us to the end of the passage by weighing the two senses against each other, sight and sound. Indeed, sounds are even more capacious than we might have at first thought, since they do what visual phenomena can't — they travel around closed-off places, through shut doors, and tell us what is apparent if not definite. Sounds seem even to assume the capacities of sight, in that we can "see" (*videmus* 4.598) voices, unlike the hidden, who we are not able to discern with our eyes. Sound traveling so intact, in fact, hits our ears, nearly visibly, still evident, still making sense. Though both are perceptible, sounds, being more able than visual images, move through solid objects and around obstacles:

> ni mirum quia vox per flexa foramina rerum
> incolumis transire potest, simulacra renutant;
> perscinduntur enim, nisi recta foramina tranant,
> qualia sunt vitri, species qua transvolat omnis. (DRN 4.599–602)

> It is not a wonder since the voice is able to cross through the curved openings of things unharmed, which *simulacra* refuse [to go through]. For they [*simulacra*] are torn apart, unless they swim through straight openings such as those that are of glass, which any appearance can fly through.

Difference continues to frame and define the instruction as Lucretius asks us to consider the distinguishing qualities of voice and image (*vox* and *simulacra* 4.599, 4.600). Voice goes through and around objects, unharmed (*incolumis* 4.560), unlike *simulacra,* which in a word, or rather just two, refuse (*simulacra renutant* 4.560). Even while voice arrives in one piece, itself unscathed, it possesses the power to harm both the one who speaks and the one who is spoken to. Perhaps that's why twice I am being asked neither to be amazed nor to feel a sense of wonder (*non est mirandum / ni mirum* 4.595, 4.599). But I can't help myself, for aren't they wonderful, the scenes of sound and the atomic lessons they offer? How *not* to wonder at what I am reading and learning? How sound and voice are produced, composed, formed, and how important our ears along with the rest of our bodies are for these achievements? It's as if my amazement is anticipated, then acknowledged, and then asked to be diminished, as if my wonder might lead me astray like the woodland assembly, or as if the words that create the wonder might move me too strongly, even harm me. Am I being warned against myself or protected from another, tamed or trained, or maybe both?

Lucretius schools us to see that the existence of atoms, while everlasting, is violent and perilous. When not torn to pieces, *simulacra* fly and swim about in every which way, though not as freely and dexterously as sounds

do. Atoms move continuously, coming and going, composing and decomposing the matter of being, in infinite cycles of endless birth and decay. This generative violence that animates all sense perception underscores the force of atomic theory.

> praeterea partis in cunctas dividitur vox,
> ex aliis aliae quoniam gignuntur, ubi una
> dissuluit semel in multas exorta, quasi ignis
> saepe solet scintilla suos se spargere in ignis.
> ergo replentur loca vocibus abdita retro,
> omnia quae circum fervunt sonituque cientur. (DRN 4.603–8)

> Meanwhile, the voice is dispersed in all different directions, since other [voices] give birth to other [voices], once born, having begun as one, it flies apart into many, just as a spark of a flame often sprinkles itself into many flames. Thus, places, out of the way and hidden, are filled with voices swarming all around and boiling with sound.

Slyly, in addition to the local reports, Lucretius suggests another explanation for a woods filled with sound, though here the lesson involves neither human ingenuity nor figuration. It is the sound of voice itself that makes a world teeming with sounds: Sound is self-generating (*ex aliis aliae* 4.604), sounds form from other sounds, in a polyptotonic echo, one becoming many things, dividing and self-propagating, being born to multiply, in multiples of the same. The identity is secured by the simile: like flames scattering into more flames (*ignis* / *ignis* 4.605, 4.606), spitting and hissing, with repeating "s" sounds both initial and final, flooding one word into another, spilling out into the woods flush with sounds. It's a burning, ominous woods, where voices fling themselves in every direction, voices furiously swimming, *sui generis*, self-seeding. Even where there is no one to hear the flood of voice in these hidden chambers, filled with echoes and polyptotonic riffing (or, if we are credulous, perhaps echoing the music of woodland Pan), voices self-animate, summoning the sounds of sounds. How *not* to feel wonder at this noisy atomic scene?

> at simulacra viis derectis omnia tendunt,
> ut sunt missa semel; quapropter cernere nemo
> saepe supra potis est, at voces accipere extra.
> et tamen ipsa quoque haec, dum transit clausa domorum
> vox optunditur atque auris confusa penetrat
> et sonitum potius quam verba audire videmur. (DRN 4.609–14)

> But all *simulacra* tend [to move] in straight ways when once they have been sent out. This is why it is not possible for one to discern [*simulacra*] through a fence, but it is possible to perceive voices on the other side of the fence. And nonetheless even the voice itself when it swims through the enclosed spaces of houses is bruised, and, having been

> mixed up, it enters the ears and we seem to hear sound rather than words.

Unlike visual images, voices, crafted by tongues, our ever-agile articulators, swim in all directions, not just in straight lines like *simulacra*. The voice, though amply capable, is not solid or permanent; we know this because we've heard this. An articulate sound becomes muddled, harmed, undone in closed spaces, confused in shape and meaning. Though there is an ear to hear it, it is lost, made lacking. Indeed, words spoken with meaning become sound bereft of sense but sounding still. Six or seven times?

The enclosure of sounds, the diminishment of meaning, and the limits of *simulacra* all contrast with our prior scene of self-seeding and autogenerating voices, bubbling up in hidden, out-of-the-way places. While this sonic diffusion and propagation serve locally to animate sound's liveliness, the scene also proposes a response to my questions concerning atomic memory and temporal materiality, and offers an account of how atoms, like simulacral skins, might preserve traces of the past. This excess of sound and autonomously sprung echoes suggests a connection between the materiality of atoms and of history. On account of their overflowing, spontaneous, and independent capacities, sound atoms exceed their local dramas, transmitted beyond temporal bounds as reverberations that retain some index of their origins. Even when reconfigured as echoes, the material traces continue to resound. Lucretius illustrates how to apprehend these traces and echoes in his pedagogical relations with his readers and through forms of attention and reception. As we will see, for Ferdinand de Saussure, the semantic echo and syntagmatic correspondences of words are animated in and through the matter of sound in and outside of time, and for m. nourbeSe philip, the sounds of voices, of humans transformed into chattel and thus excluded from the historical record, resound as lament, groan, and chant in the rituals of loss.

Indebted to Lucretian pedagogical relation while learning along with his addressee and other readers, I have worked through this running commentary, aloud, in order to let the verses come alive as sounds being voiced, animated, by lending voice to sound matter. Susceptible and attuned, I want to allow for the images of sounds both to educate via sense perception and to illustrate the sonic enactment of atomic theory. Trained in listening for the echoes oscillating, I next find companionship with another's obsession with the echoes in Lucretius's poems, with one who ardently pursues and sounds poetic traces.

My Walk with Bob

I'm walking with Bob Glück in Scotland. It is raining on and off, and we are meanwhile together, in a near-mythic garden: Little Sparta, the lifetime work of Ian Hamilton Finlay and his many collaborators. In the roaming gardens, time grows and reforms in cooperative cycles, a concert of creating between the living and dead, chance and weather. It survives its makers. Yet I'm reluctant to consider Little Sparta a monument, remembered by its stones and wooden posts; it's too inclusive and capacious in its attention, its various passions compelled in plant life and in plays of language, the syntax overgrown with new intention, relations and histories entwined.

Our approach to Little Sparta is on foot via a dirt road, Stonypath, through meadows of grazing sheep and their lambs; these pastoral enclosures suggest a different economy from that of accumulation, a time when weather reigned. The day is covered in gray.

What's been forgotten or abandoned — unattached relics release flowers and time. We encounter initials and imperatives, commands inscribed to no one in particular: visiting birds, sheep, deer within the dwelling, whether migrating or permanent residents. Each area with its containing name (Julie's Garden, Wild Garden, English Parkland) evokes bodily relation, gestures surprised in their tracks.

The caretaker invites us to enter along the many footpaths. Bob and I understand tacitly our desires to wander alone, to allow for our own curiosity, moved along by different tempos — mine glacially slow, Bob's his own.

SEMPER FESTINA LENTE

Always make haste slowly

No birdsong midday. Its absence focuses me for the parsing of Latin and Greek texts sprung on and among monuments, stones, posts, trees. Lines from Virgil wind on the turf around the trunk of an elm tree. The encircled letters insist on circular reading while pacing in dactylic hexameter around the tree. How the silence of inscriptions attunes my attention, yet unknowing for what. Dear reader, kindly imagine these words circulating around the base of a tree, not as they are here, marching across the page:

ILLE ETIAM SERAS IN VERSUM DISTULIT ULMOS / EDURAMQUE PIRUM ET SPINOS IAM PRUNA FERENTIS / IAMQUE MINISTRANTEM PLATANUM POTANTIBUS UMBRAS

That man even transplanted slow-growing elm trees in rows and blackthorns and pear trees, already bearing fruit, and a sycamore tree furnishing ready shade to those who take shelter to drink.

These are from his fourth georgic, the one that gives advice on beekeeping. After several hundred lines of didactic verse on the stewardship of bees and their social mores mirroring those of Roman ideals, Virgil turns to sickness and the story of Aristaeus. His bees are dying. To heal them he searches for aid and answers along a perilous trail. At last he subdues Proteus in his watery cave, who reveals the reason for his ailing bees. Unwittingly Aristaeus was the cause of Eurydice's death, and widowed Orpheus has to take his revenge. Then in one and the same rite, simultaneously the singer is appeased, and the beekeeper learns the secrets of bee auto-generation.

Within the beekeeper's tale, Virgil renders, in a series of vignettes, the aching final moments between Orpheus and Eurydice. Leading her from the infernal realms, he falters at the rim; almost safe, save for his need to see her, to see that she is there. Rather than mending, he ends it again. Both the beekeeper and the twice-bereft singer share in her doubled death. Meanwhile, these lines circling the elm form part of a *praeteritio;* that is, the story I am not going to tell but in mentioning what I won't tell, end up telling it all, also known as the gossip's ploy. The verses speak of a gardener, an old man from Corycus, who, like Finlay, has made much from a plot of unpromising land. My reading steps enact the relations between eras and elms, between these discrete yet congruous gardeners, in an aside that can't be left unmentioned.

Moving downhill toward the sound of a small brook, there's an opened enclosure. For reasons hard to put into words, I stay outside, hesitating, a herd of one.



Fig. 1. Eclogue, Folding the Last Sheep. Dry-stone walls, with slate plaques, wooden gate. Ian Hamilton Finlay with collaborator Caroline Webb, 1988. This and all following photos in the Interlude by the author, courtesy of the Estate of Ian Hamilton Finlay.

The gate to this enclosure, left open, reads always: ECLOGUE.







Figs. 2, 3, and 4. Details from fig. 1.

Virgil's eclogues too begin in mourning, a shepherd dispossessed of his land, meets another whose sharp-witted girlfriend helps him save up enough money to buy his freedom. The first shepherd's sheep are the last sheep. But this fold here: Had it given up on its sheep or had they abandoned it? The last sheep unfurled. The fold's return to difference. These lines and enclosure pay homage to Samuel Palmer's translation of Virgil's eclogues and the etchings that he made to accompany them. Finlay admired them and his collaboration brings to my mind both the shepherd and the sheep that have been dispossessed, their land confiscated and handed over to soldiers returning from war. This phrase, meanwhile, is from Virgil's "Eclogue 8," a poem I love for its fascination with the power of song to spellbind and enchant.[1]

I follow the line of fold after the last until I am halted, met at eye level by this:



Fig. 5. THESIS fence, SYNTHESIS stile, ANTITHESIS gate. Stile, Wood. Ian Hamilton Finlay with collaborators Michael Harvey and Keith Brookwell, 1985.

1 "Scarce with her rosy fingers had the dawn / From glimmering heaven the veil of night withdrawn, / And folded flocks were loose to browse anew / O'er mountain them or trefoil wet with dew." Samuel Palmer, "Eclogue the Eighth," *An English Version of the Eclogues of Virgil* (Seeley & Company, 1884), 77.

THESIS
fence
ANTITHESIS
gate

This post, whether marking passage or embrace, is part of a magical stile (style?) (fig. 5).

It's not the typical A-framed ladder straddling a fence which hardly alters one's gate, while leaving the four-leggeds inside or out. But this stile of radiating steps proposes a circular view of our surroundings.



Fig. 6. THESIS fence, SYNTHESIS stile, ANTITHESIS gate. Stile, Wood. Ian Hamilton Finlay with collaborators Michael Harvey and Keith Brookwell, 1985.

Winding around like a helix with the fencepost as the axis, the quiet, immobile center, it demands of me a choreography: lifted leg, twist, another lifted leg, spun round.

And I land, unfurled, dizzy, to read the pole's opposite side:

SYNTHESIS
stile

Standing still in this new meadow facing north toward a horizon of trees, again I hesitate to hear the overture. What invites? Leaving the fence, I meet what feels too personal as if I'm its conjured addressee, its determined or destined reader.

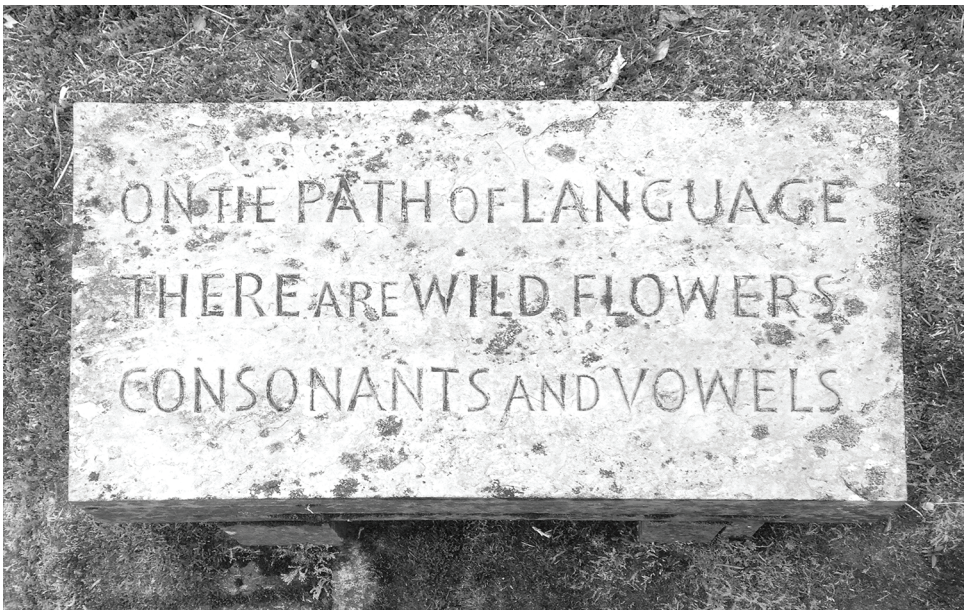


Fig. 7. On the Path of Language. Low Bench. Stone. Ian Hamilton Finlay with collaborators Keith Bailey and Michael Harvey, 1991.

How wild flowers translate the individual letters of an alphabet into flush and rose figures, scrambling the elements to scatter their seeds awaiting a bird or sheep or person to carry them off elsewhere, outside the emergence of what any alphabet might mean, transformed into sounds. At last and finally the alphabet's letters are unburdened of their task to render what they imperfectly mark, a relief underscored by wild soundings of flowers and their friends.

Meanwhile the letters still scratch on whatever surface with whatever's at hand. NO RIPE RASP

(Proserpina :: Persephone :: she, who traffics annually between the infernal and earthly realms, having been abducted by Hades while picking flowers with nymphs. Her mother, Demeter, steadfastly searching, while divini-

ties make deals. The fall out — pomegranate seeds, a split subject, here in Finlay's garden graffitied letters divide into anagrammatic figures; Proserpina's name in parts.)

The sundials we encountered along the paths of Little Sparta, which, on account of the gray day, only faintly suggested our moment. One sundial, surrounded by strawberries, speaks in its first person.



Fig. 8. Dividing the Light I Disclose the Hours. Sundial. Nebracina stone with a steel gnomon. Ian Hamilton Finlay with collaborator John Andrew, 1972.

What sound does light disclose in marking time? The ten-syllable phrase,

DIVIDING
THE LIGHT
I DISCLOSE
THE HOUR

(x X x / x X / x x X / x X ; iamb – anapest – anapest – iamb) seems to imply that the utterance itself not only describes the marking of time but makes time itself, a moment hidden that needs only light to reveal itself in its own pronouncement of what can never be uttered accurately or timely enough.

But what happens at night, the revelation of light obscured? Time sleeps: Hypnos, the brother of death. When stone speaks in the vocative address, it makes it us, you and me, which if lived as uttered would rest in abeyance. What would be the case here? Does my reading create the instance? Am I within its grammar, a third person, useless to formation, but lending my voice to assert the relation? What use then? What us?

Another stone appears and replies, a headstone to Night's other son, Death.

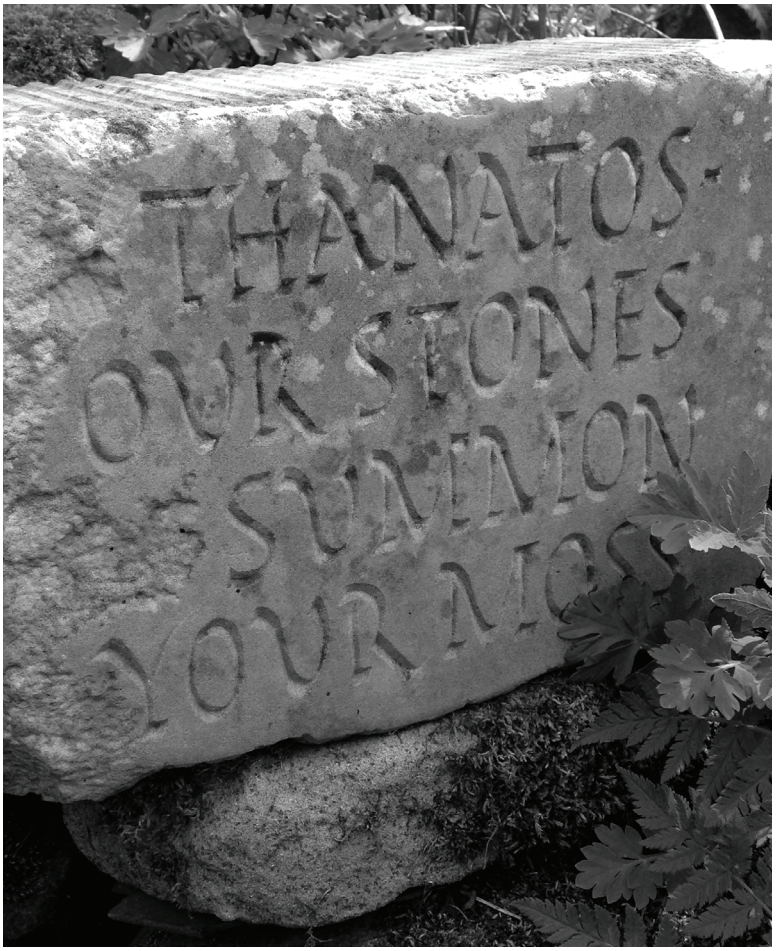


Fig. 9. Thanatos. Inscribed stone. Ian Hamilton Finlay with collaborator Richard Grasby, 1988.

THANATOS
OUR STONES
SUMMON
YOUR MOSS

This conversation between moss and stone, their invocation of death, rehearses a motif I've been following along — how do the stones speak and how do we lend our voice to these stones, these who in fact speak for themselves. As if grief would unite us by enchantment in mourning, the moss is called on to clothe its stone body, a vital garment borrowed from death.



Fig. 10. "He is Hypnos, the god of sleep, his closed eyes becoming the wings that take him to his dreams." Jessie Sheeler, *Little Sparta: A Guide to the Gardens of Ian Hamilton Finlay* (Edinburgh, 2015), 45. *Herm.* Resin head on rustic stone column. Ian Hamilton Finlay with collaborators Michael Harvey and Keith Brookwell, 1985.

AVE ATQUE WAVE UNDA VALE

Farewell Wave Upon Wave Adieu

CHAPTER 2

Ferdinand de Saussure's Poetics of Sounds

> The Martyr Poets — did not tell —
> But wrought their Pang in syllable —
> That when their mortal name be numb —
> Their mortal fate — encourage Some —
>
> — Emily Dickinson, "[544]"[1]

> No subject can easily be conceived as extinguished. Language doesn't allow that thought; its trajectory is always to lean forward into life, to push it along, to propel the dead onward among the living.
>
> — Denise Riley, *Time Lived, without Its Flow*[2]

i. *de s'assurer* de visu *des lectures*

In 1905 Ferdinand de Saussure began the anagram notebooks, late and in mourning. In a work of deferral to stay his own dislocation, he paused from the job of instruction at the Université de Genève. His lectures, composed for speech alone, delivered in his slow aristocratic intonations, were held in abeyance. After the death of his father, Henri, he departed for Rome, a tacit hiatus. He walked in suspension among the ruins of monuments, crumbling stones monumentalizing the dead.[3] Their inscriptions summon the passerby to reanimate a voice. "The reader is a vocal instrument used by

1 Emily Dickinson, "[544]," in *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson,* ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Little, Brown and Company, 1960), 265.

2 Denise Riley, *Time Lived, without Its Flow* (Capsule Editions, 2012), 56.

3 Saussure writes: "Quite apart from questions raised by the metrics of this verse, I thought I could discern in fragments of Saturnina verse, traces of PHONIC laws of which alliteration [...] would simply be a specific instance and one of the least significant at that." Quoted in Jean Starobinski, *Words upon Words: The Anagrams of Ferdinand de Saussure,* trans. Olivia Emmet (Yale University Press, 1979), 16.

the written word [...] in order to give the text a body, a sonorous reality."[4] The letters perch, holding the marked remains, dependent and alluring. With the passerby's attention caught, the stone breathes through the living, while the living lend themselves to the inscription. For an instant, united in breathing, the voiced letters resound: "Stop traveler, I, a great poet of ardor, died for my learned lover." The traveler self-addressed is complicit, pronounced accomplice to the dead. Reading aloud the Saturnian inscriptions on ancient tombs, Saussure began to perceive "traces of PHONIC laws,"[5] sound patterns — couplings of phonemes, vowels echoing vowels, words within words. Over a hundred years later, I am that traveler whose attention again is caught.[6]

I fly to Geneva, a city where none of my friends and none of my friends' friends knows anyone. It becomes obvious why, for who among us could survive in such ceremony bereft of nuance and enigma? I am asked repeatedly if I have taken a boat out on the lake to observe *from close up* the giant spout of water. Le Jet d'Eau's whiteness and artifice hold no appeal to me, not to mention my proneness to seasickness. It's difficult to imagine that allure, to be close to a faux geyser propelled against gravity by an infernal pipe. But mostly I am offended by how expensive everything is in Geneva. If they didn't consent to pay that much, wouldn't living be less dear? But the archives that house the papers of Saussure are free and open to anyone who visits. It's here that I've come to learn how to listen and how to hear the sounds that Saussure has heard. I've come to be schooled, to be taught how to sensitize my ears to poetry, to listen in silence, to listen to the sounds in my head and in the head of the linguist, to feel the rhythms of resonances and echoes that he will lead me toward, to read firsthand what

4 Jesper Svenbro, *Phrasikleia: An Anthropology of Reading in Ancient Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Cornell University Press, 1993), 3.

5 Quoted in Starobinski, *Words upon Words,* 16.

6 I had assumed that while reading the inscriptions he would have read them aloud to himself. In fact I couldn't imagine a linguist who was interested in a problem related to meter *not* reading aloud. However, when I shared a draft of this chapter with Maurizio Bettini, he said he had one question for me: Is there any evidence that Saussure read aloud? I confessed that it was my assumption and explained why I thought it had to be the case. Bettini kindly suggested that I check Saussure's correspondence and other source materials for evidence of Saussure in Rome reading aloud "le bloc énigmatique," the inscriptions on the Lapis Niger. I have no proof to support my claim. However, in a letter Saussure wrote while in Rome, dated January 23, 1906, addressed to his friend Antoine Meillet, he describes walking in the Forum and contemplating ancient inscriptions in person. "The ancient inscriptions in the Forum are an all-consuming amusement when I feel the need for a brain teaser. Nothing to learn, of course, but it's interesting to contemplate the enigmatic block and to check the readings *first hand."* (*L'inscription archaïque du Forum est un amusement tout indigué lorsque j'éprouve le besoin de me casser la tête. Rien à tirer, bien entendu, mais il est intéressant de contempler le bloc énigmatique et de s'assurer* de visu *des lectures*). Émile Benveniste, ed., "Lettres de Ferdinand de Saussure à Antoine Meillet," *Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure* 21 (1964): 106.

was written, to check the readings in person just as Saussure had done in Rome, "de s'assurer *de visu* des lectures."[7]

Anaphony would have been the preferred term for Saussure in lieu of "anagram." But even that term couldn't contain what he wanted to designate, so the terms proliferate: anagram, hypogram, cryptogram, syllabogram, paragram, theme-word. But *anaphony* comes very close since it makes sound the central feature rather than letters. Saussure writes: "In using the word *anagram,* I do not in any way mean to introduce the idea of writing. [...] *Anaphony* would be a more accurate word in the sense I intend, but such a word [...] would seem, in fact, more suited to the performance of another service." *Anaphony* for Saussure describes an incomplete anagram, in the form of simple assonance, where within a given word certain sounds are repeated, but do not form an "anagram with its totality of syllables."[8] Moreover, *anaphony* includes other sound-a-likes like homonyms (worse still, puns), mere irrelevant coincidences that must be excluded. In one notebook in which he devotes himself to a study of Lucretius he writes:

> Beginning with this notebook, the term *anagram* is replaced by *paragram,* which is more accurate. [...] Neither anagram nor paragram intends to suggest that poetry is arranged for these figures in accordance with written signs, but to replace *gram* by *phone* in either of these words would result precisely in a suggestion of something extraordinary.[9]

And in another note, incompletely jotted down, he writes: "Buried in the dictionary there is something called paronomase, [paronomasia] a rhetorical figure which — / Paronomase comes so close with its principle that / Paraphrase by sound — phonic."[10] While the terminology to describe the aesthetic principle is unresolved, always at risk of suggesting more or less than what is heard, Saussure is steadfast in his investigation of the role of sound, its repetition and melodic reconfigurations that he initially finds so prevalent in ancient Indo-European poetry, beginning with Saturnian poetry and including Vedic poetry, Homeric poetry, Latin poetry and prose, and modern practitioners of Latin versification. In more than a hundred notebooks, in example after example, Saussure works through acoustic impressions and their soundings, and these elaborations on phonic phenomena are what I've come to witness.

I discuss in Chapter 4 the reception of and scholarship on Saussure's anagrams in detail during the years following his sons' depositing the notebooks in the archive of the Bibliothèque de Genève in 1959, forty-six years after Saussure's death in 1913. While many charges are leveled at his

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7 Benveniste, "Lettres de Ferdinand de Saussure à Antoine Meillet," 106.

8 Starobinski, *Words upon Words,* 14.

9 Ibid., 18, emphasis in the original.

10 Ibid., 18–19. The French text reads "paronomase" and should be translated with the English word, "paronomasia." See Jean Starobinski, *Les mots sous les mots: Les anagrammes de Ferdinand de Saussure* (Éditions Gallimard, 1971), 32.

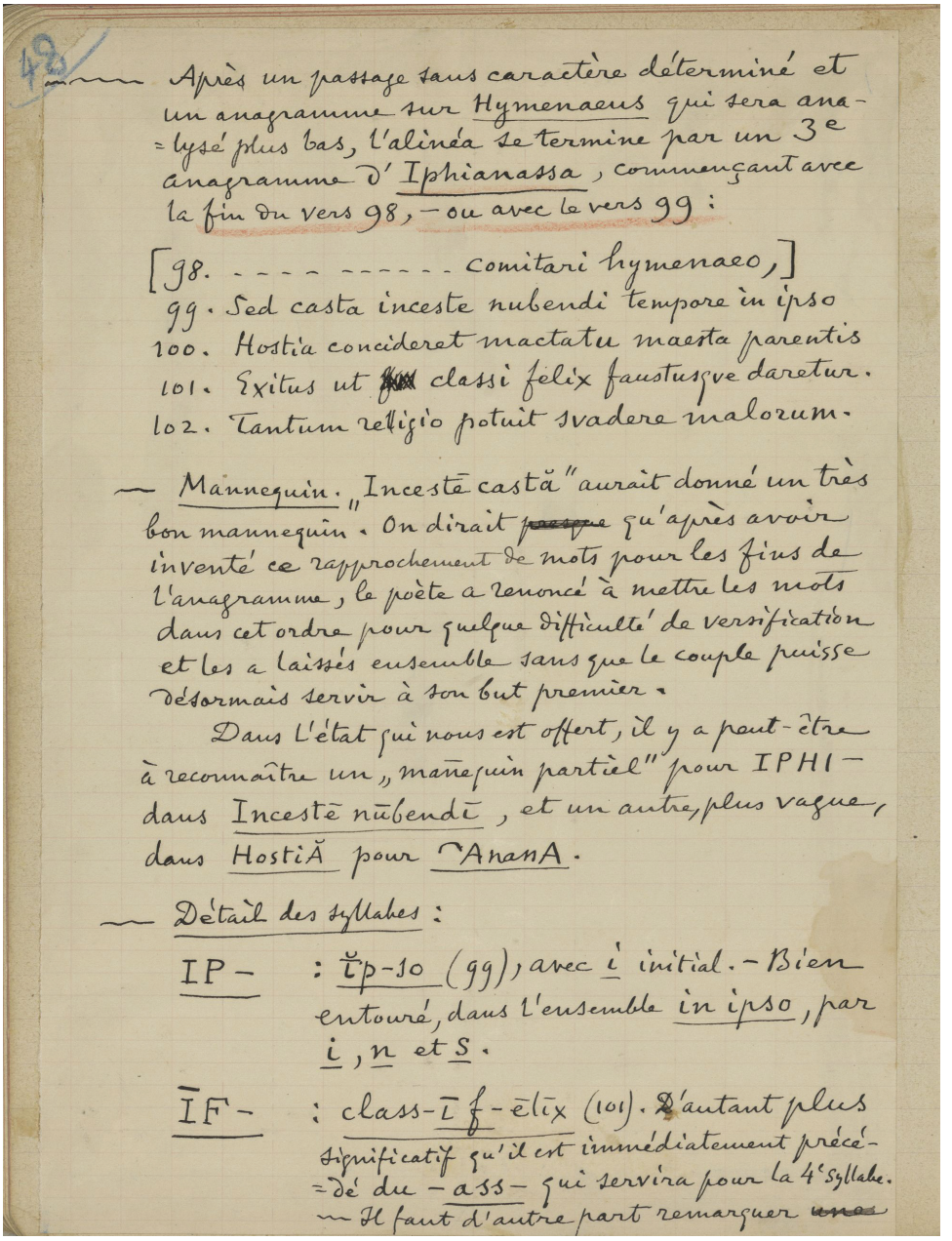
sound studies, commentators agree, with a few notable exceptions, that the project was both inconclusive and abandoned.[11] That he didn't publish his sound studies because he thought them of no value is an odd assessment since the publication he is best known for, the *Course in General Linguistics,* is culled from notes taken by his students and was published after his death, and the works he published during his lifetime are relatively few. That he didn't make public his studies, to my mind, is not an indication of his ambivalence or an ultimate valuation of his theory. Of the scholars who initially engaged with the notebooks, most are troubled, a few even *scandalized,* by Saussure's insistence on a poet's intentional use of anagrams as a compositional element. But I realize they've come to the work with questions that are either unsuitable or ungenerous, and with assumptions about what constitutes poetic composition informed by particularly modern perspectives. Rather than concerning himself with the "inspired words" of poets, Saussure considers phonic substance the matter of poetry. The sounds and resonances that emerge from the anagram-word create the constraining feature of composition such that the phonic paraphrase of the anagram-word is *imposed* on the poet.[12] This acoustic principle for Saussure is the basis of poetic production. I want to take him up, following his convictions, while dodging the consensus of those who are troubled by his claims and dismiss his sound studies. I want to believe him, rather than prove what he allegedly couldn't prove. I want to hear for myself what he was listening to, whether in silence or aloud, reciting verse, the phonic play of swarming sounds, the echoes of poetry in flight.[13]

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11 By the 1990s and in the years following, several excellent studies have been published including most notably: Francis Gandon, *De dangereux édifices: Saussure lecteur de Lucrèce: Les cahiers d'anagrammes consacrés au* De rerum natura (Éditions Peeters, 2002); Joshua T. Katz. "Saussure's *Anaphonie:* Sounds Asunder," in *Synaesthesia and the Ancient Senses,* ed. Shane Butler and Alex C. Purves (Acumen, 2013); Daniel Heller-Roazen, *Dark Tongues: The Art of Rogues and Riddlers* (Zone, 2013); and Pierre-Yves Testenoire, *Ferdinand de Saussure à la recherche des anagrammes* (Lambert-Lucas, 2014). Ivan Callus's chronological and annotated bibliography (compiled by year, 1960–1979) lists published works that refer to the anagram notebooks and is an excellent resource. See Ivan Callus, "A Chronological and Annotated Bibliography of Works Referring to Ferdinand de Saussure's Anagram Notebooks," *Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure* 55 (2002): 269–95.

12 In the context of his investigations regarding Vedic poetry, Saussure writes: *"From the moment in which the poet was obliged,* by law or religious custom, *to reproduce a name, it is clear that, having been led to distinguish its syllables,* he found himself obliged — without any particular act of volition to *distinguish its forms.* [...] I would not be surprised if Indian grammatical knowledge, from both the phonic and the morphological points of view, were a continuation of Indo-European traditions of poetic procedures necessary to the construction of *carmen,* based on the *forms* of the divine name." Quoted in Starobinski, *Words upon Words,* 23–24, Saussure's italics.

13 My focus in this section is exclusively on Saussure's notebooks for reasons that will become clear in my discussion of the initial reception of his anagram studies in Chapter 4. Consequently, I am not engaging with the theories Saussure is best known for in the *Course in General Linguistics*.



48

— Après un passage sans caractère déterminé et un anagramme sur Hymenaeus qui sera ana-
=lysé plus bas, l'alinéa se termine par un 3e anagramme d' Iphianassa, commençant avec la fin du vers 98, — ou avec le vers 99 :

[98. ---- ------ comitari hymenaeo,]
99. Sed casta incesto nubendi tempore in ipso
100. Hostia concideret mactatu maesta parentis
101. Exitus ut ~~flex~~ classi felix faustusque daretur.
102. Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum.

— Mannequin. "Incestō castă" aurait donné un très bon mannequin. On dirait ~~presque~~ qu'après avoir inventé ce rapprochement de mots pour les fins de l'anagramme, le poète a renoncé à mettre les mots dans cet ordre pour quelque difficulté de versification et les a laissés ensemble sans que le couple puisse désormais servir à son but premier.

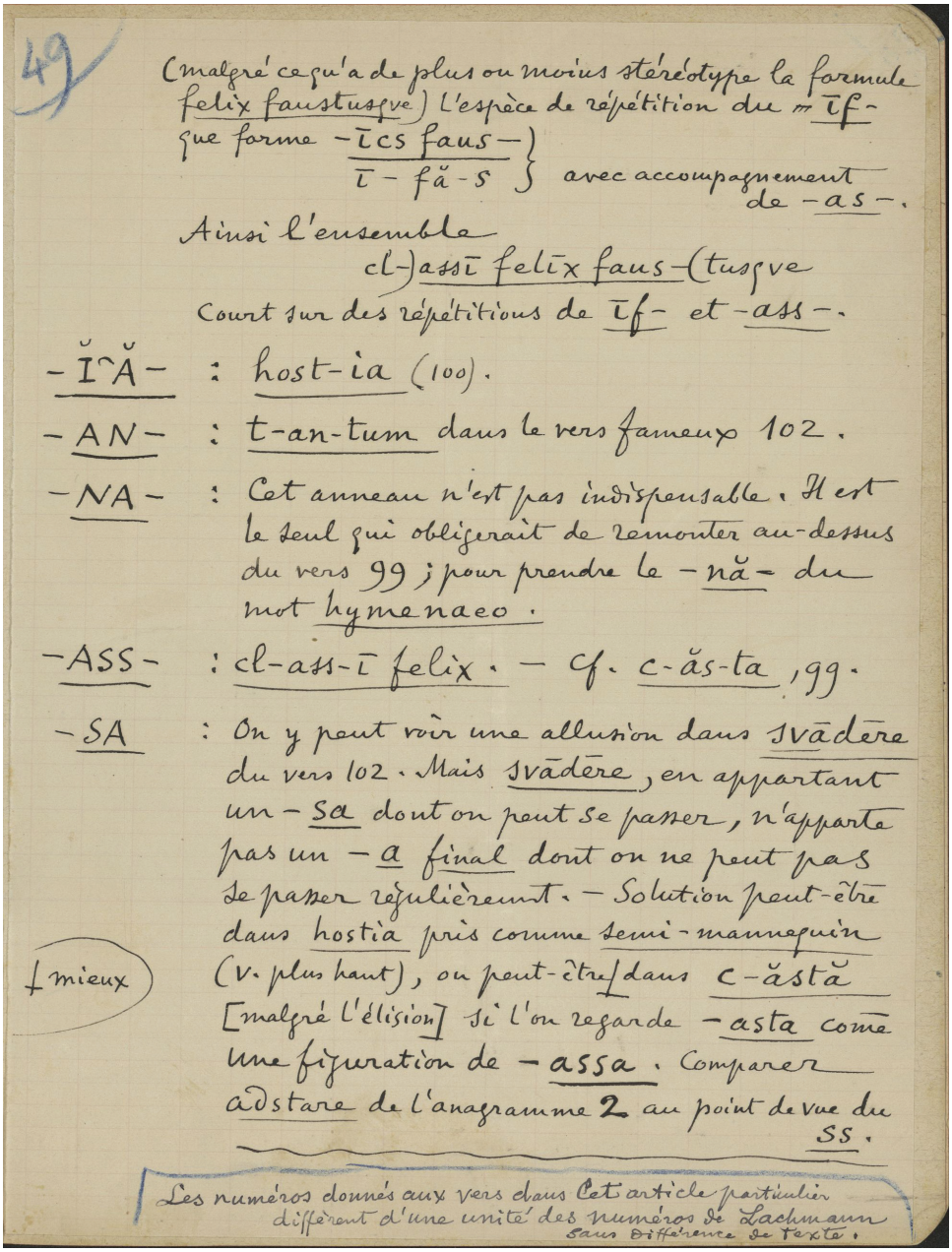
Dans l'état qui nous est offert, il y a peut-être à reconnaître un „mannequin partiel" pour IPHI — dans Incestō nūbendī, et un autre, plus vague, dans HostiĂ pour ĂnanA.

— Détail des syllabes :

IP- : ĭp-io (99), avec i initial. — Bien entouré, dans l'ensemble in ipso, par i, n et S.

ĪF- : class-ī f-ēlix (101). D'autant plus significatif qu'il est immédiatement précé-
=dé de -ass- qui servira pour la 4e syllabe.
— Il faut d'autre part remarquer ~~que~~

Fig. 11. Geneva Library, Ms. fr. 3964/23, p. 48.


49

(malgré ce qu'a de plus ou moins stéréotype la formule felix faustusque) l'espèce de répétition due à -īf- que forme -īcs faus- } avec accompagnement de -as-.
ī - fă - s }

Ainsi l'ensemble
cl-)assī felīx faus-(tusque
Court sur des répétitions de -īf- et -ass-.

-ĭ^ă- : host-ia (100).

-AN- : t-an-tum dans le vers fameux 102.

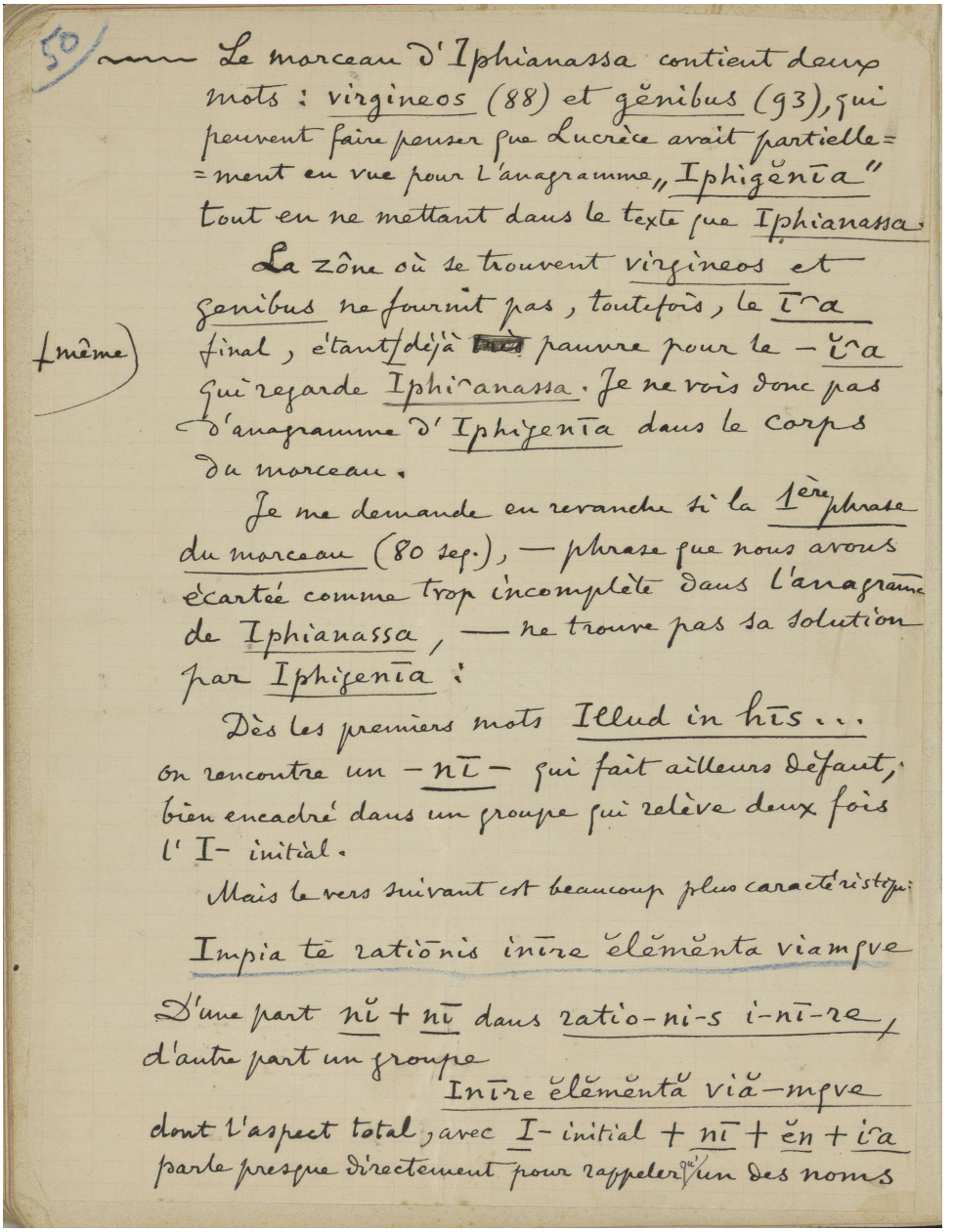
-NA- : Cet anneau n'est pas indispensable. Il est le seul qui obligerait de remonter au-dessus du vers 99 ; pour prendre le -nă- du mot hymenaeo.

-ASS- : cl-ass-ī felix. — cf. c-ăs-ta, 99.

-SA : On y peut voir une allusion dans svādēre du vers 102. Mais svādēre, en appartant un -sa dont on peut se passer, n'apporte pas un -a final dont on ne peut pas se passer régulièrement. — Solution peut-être dans hostia pris comme semi-mannequin (v. plus haut), ou peut-être (mieux) dans c-ăstă [malgré l'élision] si l'on regarde -asta comme une figuration de -assa. Comparer adstare de l'anagramme 2 au point de vue du ss.

Les numéros donnés aux vers dans cet article particulier diffèrent d'une unité des numéros de Lachmann sans différence de texte.

Fig. 12. Geneva Library, Ms. fr. 3964/23, p. 49.



50

Le morceau d'Iphianassa contient deux mots : virgineos (88) et genibus (93), qui peuvent faire penser que Lucrèce avait partiellement en vue pour l'anagramme „Iphigenīa" tout en ne mettant dans le texte que Iphianassa.

La zône où se trouvent virgineos et genibus ne fournit pas, toutefois, le ī^a final, étant déjà pauvre pour le -ĭ^a qui regarde Iphi^anassa. Je ne vois donc pas d'anagramme d'Iphigenīa dans le corps du morceau.

(même)

Je me demande en revanche si la 1ère phrase du morceau (80 seq.), — phrase que nous avons écartée comme trop incomplète dans l'anagramme de Iphianassa, — ne trouve pas sa solution par Iphigenīa :

Dès les premiers mots Illud in hīs ... on rencontre un -nī- qui fait ailleurs défaut, bien encadré dans un groupe qui relève deux fois l'I- initial.

Mais le vers suivant est beaucoup plus caractéristique :

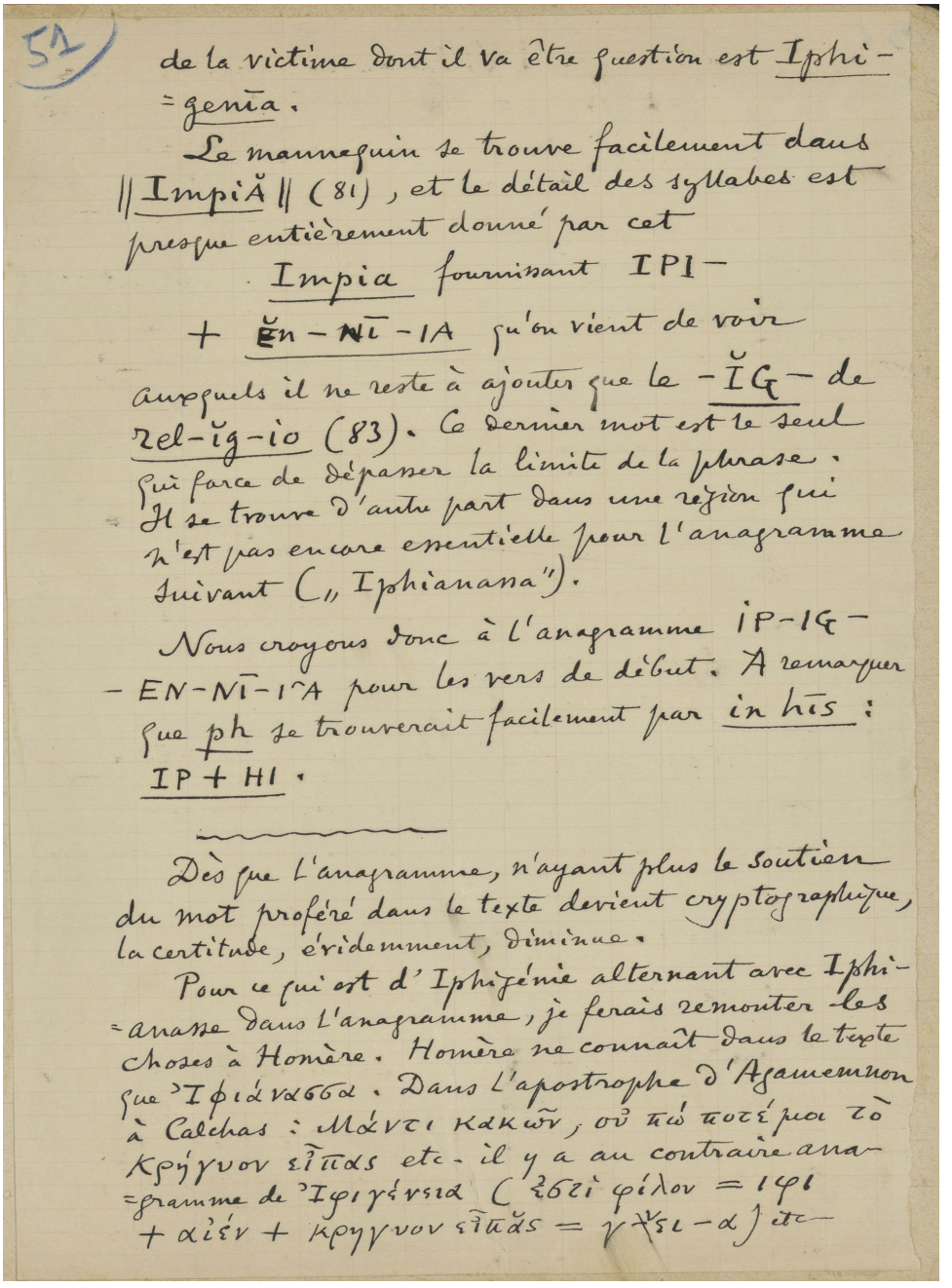
Impia tē rationis inīre ĕlĕmĕnta viamque

D'une part nĭ + nī dans ratio-ni-s i-nī-re, d'autre part un groupe

Inīre ĕlĕmĕntă viă-mque

dont l'aspect total, avec I- initial + nī + ĕn + ĭ^a parle presque directement pour rappeler qu'un des noms

Fig. 13. Geneva Library, Ms. fr. 3964/23, p. 50.


51

de la victime dont il va être question est Iphi-
=genia.

Le mannequin se trouve facilement dans
‖ ImpiĂ ‖ (81), et le détail des syllabes est
presque entièrement donné par cet

Impia fournissant IPI-

+ ĔN-NĪ-IA qu'on vient de voir

auxquels il ne reste à ajouter que le -ĬG- de
rel-ĭg-io (83). Ce dernier mot est le seul
qui force de dépasser la limite de la phrase.
Il se trouve d'autre part dans une région qui
n'est pas encore essentielle pour l'anagramme
suivant (" Iphianassa").

Nous croyons donc à l'anagramme IP-IG-
- EN-NĪ-IA pour les vers de début. A remarquer
que ph se trouverait facilement par in hīs :
IP + HI.

Dès que l'anagramme, n'ayant plus le soutien
du mot proféré dans le texte devient cryptographique,
la certitude, évidemment, diminue.

Pour ce qui est d' Iphigénie alternant avec Iphi-
=anassa dans l'anagramme, je ferais remonter les
choses à Homère. Homère ne connaît dans le texte
que Ἰφιάνασσα. Dans l'apostrophe d'Agamemnon
à Calchas : Μάντι κακῶν, οὔ πώ τοτέ μοι τὸ
κρήγυον εἶπας etc. il y a au contraire ana-
=gramme de Ἰφιγένεια (ἕδει φίλον = ΙΦΙ
+ αἰεν + κρηγυον εἶπας = ΓΕΝΕΙ-Α) etc.

Fig. 14. Geneva Library, Ms. fr. 3964/23, p. 51.

ii. ***impia facta***

In these four pages from one of his notebooks, Saussure is working with a passage from *De rerum natura* (1.80–101) in which Lucretius renders a stunning portrait of the nearly unspeakable horrors committed in the name of religion: the "sacrificial" murder of Iphigenia (*Iphianassa*) by her father Agamemnon at Aulis (see figs. 11, 12, 13, and 14). The passage concludes with the famous line: "Such are the evils that religion is capable of impelling" (*tantum religio potuit suadere malorum* 1.101).[14]

iii. ***avibus contraria***

> There was a strange stillness. The birds, for example — where had they gone? [...] The few birds seen anywhere were moribund; they trembled violently and could not fly. It was a spring without voices.
>
> — Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*[15]

The first day I spend deciphering his handwriting. His penmanship, French cursive from 100 years ago, seems to me to be an impenetrable impediment. But I am tenacious, and my notebooks fill with transcriptions of his notebooks. I need to copy by hand in order to immerse myself in his language and diagrams, remaking the marks, formulating conditions, noting observations, following soundings, phonic repetitions. In part through the act of transcribing what he had written, I began to observe a lack of correspondence between the *sounds* that the anagram precipitates and the *letters,* his and mine, that only can approximately mark in silence the sounds that emerge and resonate in the poetry. That is, while we are working with letters in notebooks, we are attending to sounds. How to render, in the silence of writing, the polyphony that re-sounds each syllable of the anagram? It's an obstacle worth all my attention while I work to transcribe in writing the chordal notes that repeat each of the word's elements in its anagrammatized swarm. And although I sit with the notebooks with which he sat, along with the texts of poems, I realize that silence is not an absence. Conversation and community are being animated, filled with voices, scenes which those voices inhabit, and the writers who are attending to the texts and the texts which accompany them.

Saussure speculates that this phenomenon in Indo-European poetry and later in Roman poetry might have a religious or mystical origin. For a prayer, hymn, or invocation to have power, the sounds of the name of the divinity were written into the text with the effect that the divine name would resound in the utterance of the prayer, thus animating all: divine presence and the utterer of the hymn or the invocation.[16] But these specula-

14 I discuss this passage (1.80–101) in detail in Section iii of Chapter 4.

15 Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Mariner Books, 2002), 2.

16 In the notebook with the title "Saturnian verse. Phoneme count. Inscriptions," Saussure writes: "What do we know of the reason which interwove anagram into the short lyric pieces we place at the foundation of poetry? The reason

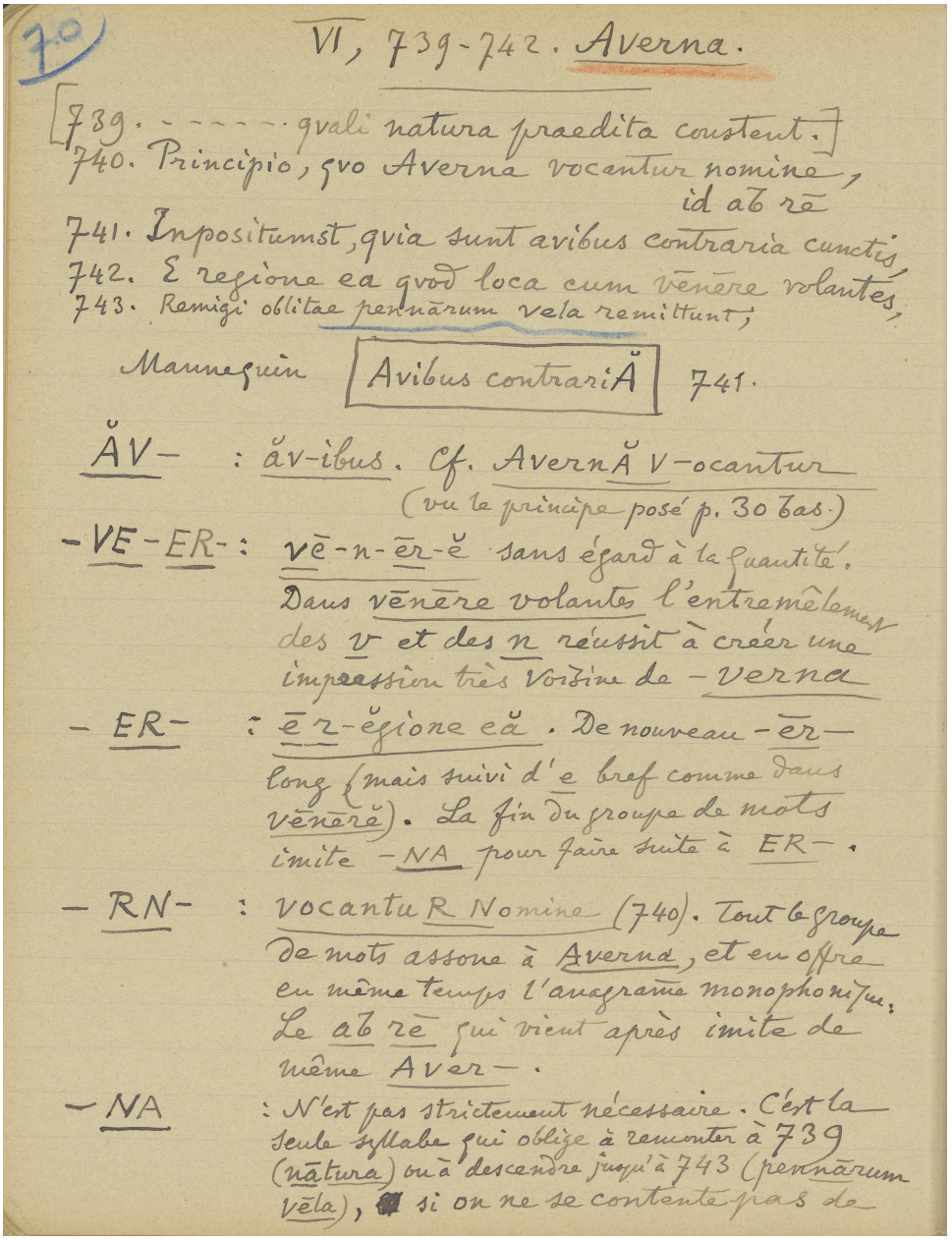
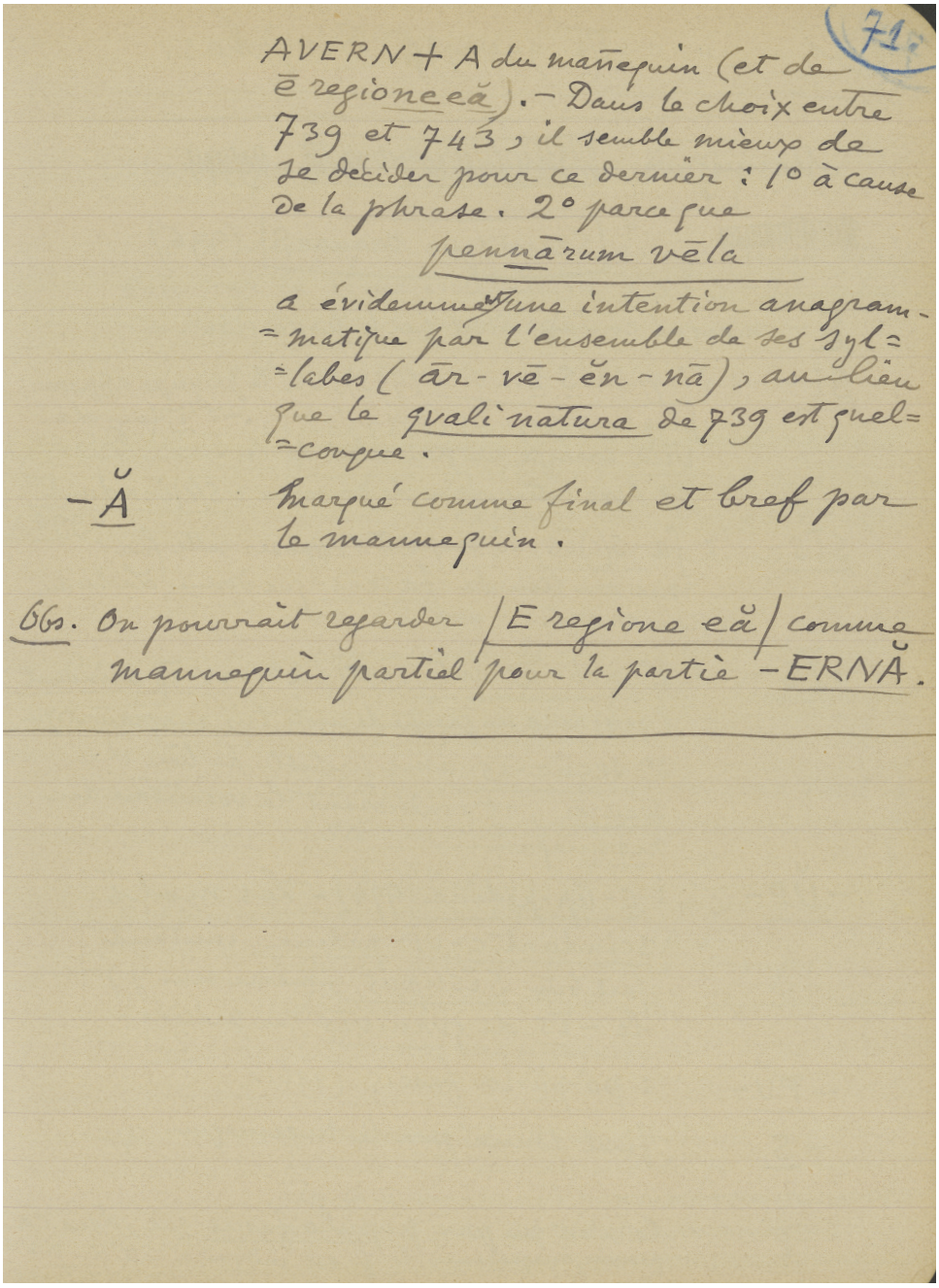


Fig. 15. Geneva Library, Ms. fr. 3964/23, p. 70.


71

AVERN + A du mannequin (et de ē regione eă). – Dans le choix entre 739 et 743, il semble mieux de se décider pour ce dernier : 1° à cause de la phrase. 2° parce que

pennārum vēla

a évidemment une intention anagrammatique par l'ensemble de ses syllabes (ār - vē - ĕn - nā), au lieu que le qualĭ nātura de 739 est quelconque.

-Ă marqué comme final et bref par le mannequin.

665. On pourrait regarder /E regione eă/ comme mannequin partiel pour la partie -ERNĂ.

Fig. 16. Geneva Library, Ms. fr. 3964/23, p. 71.

tions about origins do not detain him — he wants to explore what conditions ground the composition of poetic texts. Animated by his own obsessions, he tracks how and where the words, arising from auditory images, reconfigure into syllabic sounds, unfolding through verses repeating and echoing, sounding poetic matter. I'm transfixed by example after example, and then I come upon one in which he is studying a passage from Lucretius's poem that plays on the anagram word's etymology, and something hits me (figs. 15, 16, and 17).

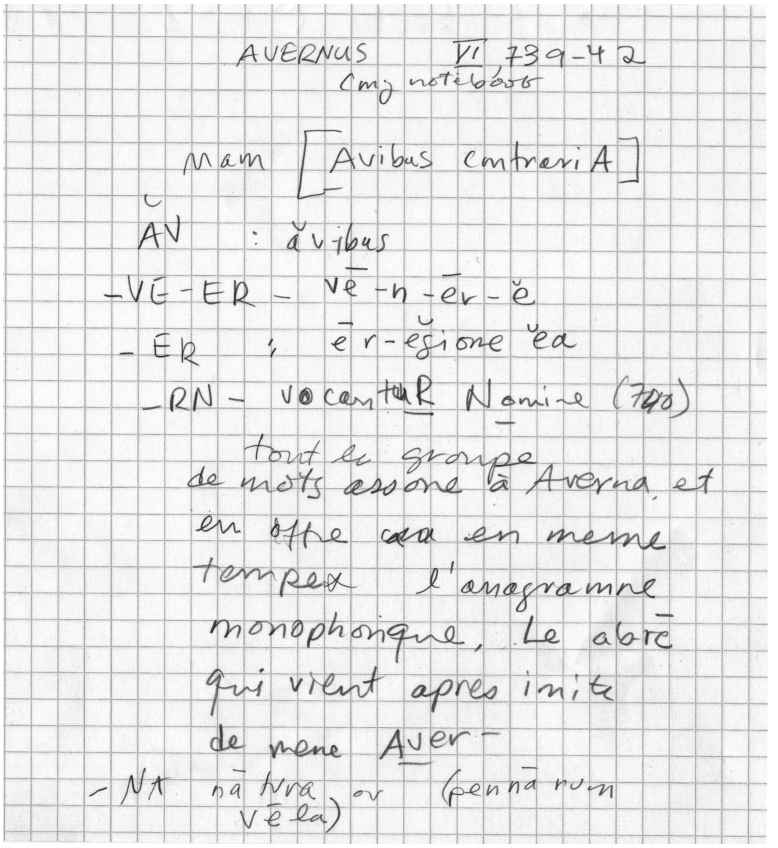


Fig. 17. Page from author's notebook (transcription of S's notebook page 70).

might have originated in the religious idea that an invocation, prayer, or hymn would have power only if the syllables of the divine name were worked into the text. (According to this hypothesis, the funerary hymn itself is already — in respect to the anagram — an extension of the element introduced into poetry by religion.)" Quoted in Starobinski, *Words upon Words*, 42.

My transcription of my transcription:

AVERNUS [AVERNA] VI. 739–42

man [Avibus contrariĂ]

ĂV : ăvibus
-VE-ER- : vē-n-ēr-ĕ
-ER : ē r-ĕgione eă
-RN : vocantuR Nomine

Tout le groupe de mots assone à Averna, et en offre en même temps l'anagramme monophonique. Le āb rē qui vient après imite de même Aver-.

-NA : nātura ou pennārum vēla)

Averna is the theme-word that Saussure is tracking, that is, the particular anagram-word that names the subject or theme of the verse and that resonates phonically through it. And Saussure's theme-word occurs in a passage where Lucretius is explaining the etiology of a term. It's an uncanny doubling: both writers describing the correspondences between the word's sonic and semantic aspects.

nunc age, **Averna** tibi quae sint loca cumque lacusque,
expediam, quali **na**tura praedita constent.
principio quod **Av**erna vocantu**r** **n**omine, id ab re
inpositumst, quia sunt *avibus contraria* cunctis,
e **r**egione ea quod loca cum **ve**n**er**e volantes,
remigi oblitae pen**na**rum vela remittunt
praecipitesque cadunt molli cervice profusae
in terram, si forte ita fert natura locorum,
aut in aquam, si forte lacus substratus Averni. (DRN 6.739–42)

Come now, I will explain to you all the places and lakes which are Avernian, so that what sorts of nature they are bestowed with be known. Firstly, that they [the regions] have been given the name, Averna, this is assigned to them correctly because they are hostile to all birds, for when they [birds] come flying right over these regions, they forget their oars of wings, slack their sails, and cascading headlong with a languid neck, fall to the earth, if by chance it is the nature of the places, or [fall] in the water, if by chance Lake Avernus is spread out below.

In his discussion of the noxious effects that the earth generates, Lucretius offers the example of the vapors that arise from Avernian locales and lakes to define his terms, bolstered by the etymological narrative and by the stunning image of a deathly scene. The theme-word, *averna,* refers to the name of the lake near Cumae and entrance to the underworld (por-

trayed dramatically in book 6 of Virgil's *Aeneid*), which gives rise to its common meaning, "infernal." The mannequin — Saussure's term for a phrase that behaves like brackets and whose first and last letters are identical to the first and last letters of the theme-word (*averna*) — is: *Avibus contrariA* "against birds." This negation clothes the verses and sums up the scene whose nature is toxic. This particular mannequin works in multiple ways, for it both duplicates and re-sounds the first and last letters, *a* and *a* of *averna,* the theme-word, and defines its principle characteristic: a killer of birds. For any bird that flies over the pestiferous fumes falls dead, sailing headlong down, limp-necked, uselessly plying its oars of wings. The etymology of the theme-word, *averna,* and its mannequin, *avibus contraria,* both describe its deadly quality. The Latin word *avernus* is derived from the Greek word ἄορνος (*aornos*), without birds, that is, where no bird can live. Thus, the lake's main characteristic, the theme-word's mannequin, and its etymology *all* describe an anti-bird world. Within this negation of bird life, *averna* resonates phonemically by echoing the sounds that form it. I am stunned to see how the theme-word functions on so many levels. When I situate this passage in the context of Lucretius's poem, at the end of the sixth and final book, it resonates with the poet's vivid rendering of the vast destruction caused by the plague in Athens.[17] The devastation levels all distinction and difference. This is the exalted and crushing conclusion of atomic theory that Lucretius is teaching us to endure, and through which the infernal regions of Avernus reverberate, sounding the silence of the dead — not only contra birds but contra all living beings.

iv. *semper victus*

In passage after passage, I observe how the anagram provides a kind of formal rule, an aesthetic composed of the survival of similitude over difference. The anagrams work through the multiplication of sameness in repeating sounds. The phonic material forms a link to the substance of words, not by forming new meanings, but through the duplication and diffraction of the phonetic parts of words. This is a principle of transformation (rather than an act of creation out of nothing) that both initiates and limits poetic possibility. The phonic elements and sonic residues are the remainders that re-sound a name and reanimate its presence in the verses. This prolonged echo suggests a silence filled with the inaudible, what passes for oblivion, inaccessible as uncontainable, save for the survivals repeated insistently. How to attend to these audible silences and gaps, how to attune our attention to the resonances of sounds, names, etymologies, the latent capacities of language?

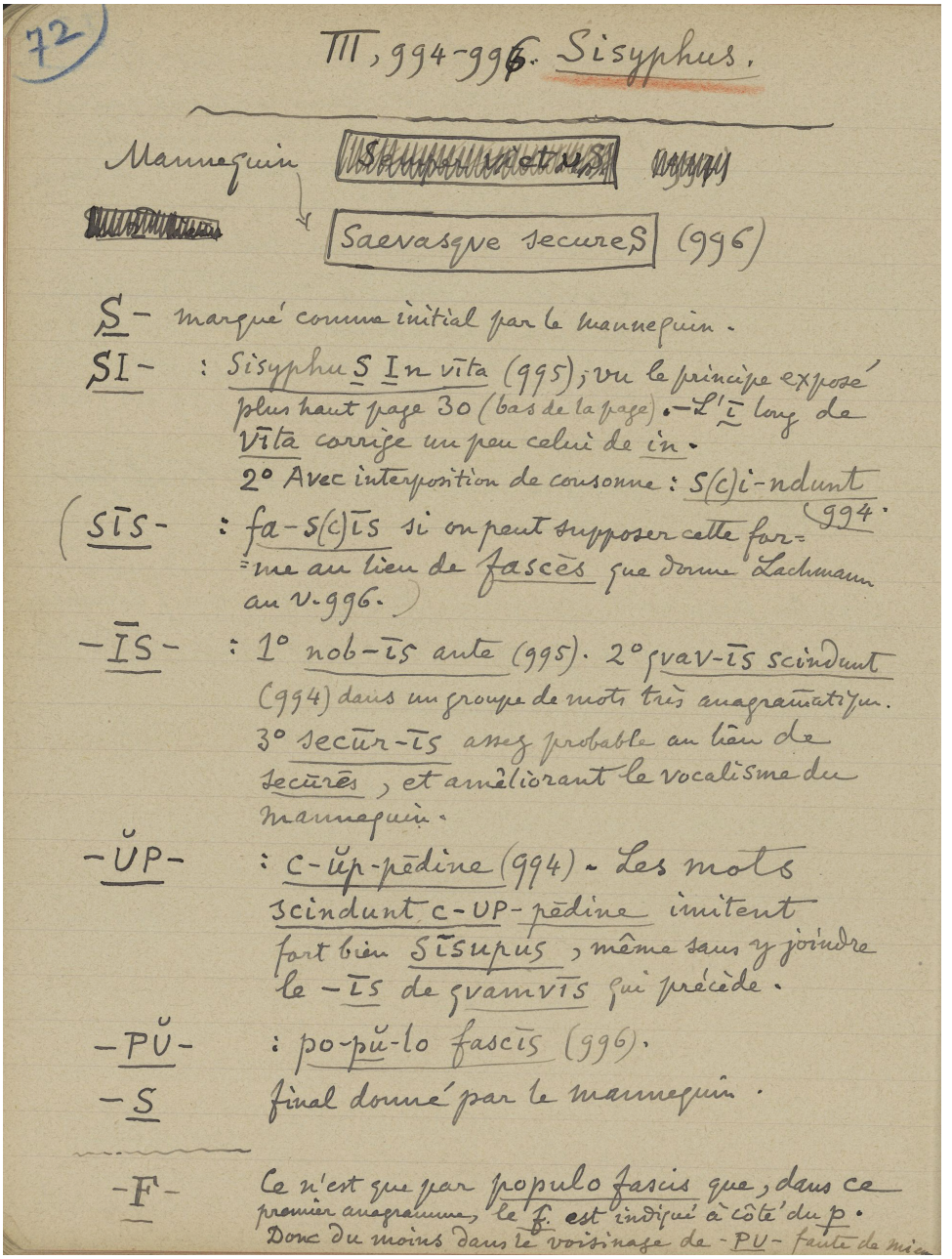
In another example, where the theme-word is Sisyphus, Saussure is working through two anagrams each with its own mannequin, ***saevasque securis*** and ***semper victus,*** that sustain in sound and sense the proper name Sisyphus in the following passage:

17 I return to discuss in detail Lucretius's rendering of the plague in the conclusion of the Coda.

> *Sisyphus* in vita quoque nobis ante oculos est
> qui petere a populo fascis saevasque securis
> imbibit et semper victus tristisque recedit.
> nam petere imperium quod inanest nec datur umquam,
> atque in eo semper durum sufferre laborem
> hoc est adverso nixantem trudere monte
> saxum quod tamen <e> summo iam vertice rursum
> volvitur et plani raptim petit aequora campi. (DRN 3.995–1002)
>
> A Sisyphus is alive also before our eyes, who hungry seeks rods of authority from the people and the brutal axes of power, and he always retreats, a loser defeated. For to seek political authority, which is empty and not ever granted, and to endure always hard suffering in it, this is to push up hill with great struggle a rock which nevertheless from the highest summit right away is turned back and quickly seeks the level of the flat plain.

Saussure's investigation lands us in the midst of an argument, very delightfully and wickedly animated, in which Lucretius takes up the problem of belief: wrong beliefs about death and about punishment in the afterlife, in any afterlife, altogether. Wrong because they cause an excess of anxiety and grief, the sufferings that the mission of Lucretius's atomic theory wants to address through its healing. The endless cycles of birth and decay, atoms coming together and splitting apart, reduces to nothing the fear of death and suffering in an afterlife, one in which Sisyphus is imagined wrongly to suffer eternally. However, our Sisyphus is not abandoned, but rather repurposed to illustrate Lucretius's point. The striving attributed to him in the non-existent afterlife we see now in daily life, in those lives lived by those Sisyphuses all around us who arduously labor for authority and uselessly struggle for power. All that we fear, misattributed anxieties located in the afterlife, is actually flourishing among us. For according to atomic principles having power and authority will neither make us suffer less nor guarantee that we maintain our privileges in life or after life. Amusingly, in what appears to be a joke Lucretius is making, this ever-striving character, whose fate is to repeat his struggles endlessly, returns, reconfigured atomically as himself, the always-conquered endless loser. Sisyphus is with us, striving ever and failing ever. In his elaboration, Saussure hears his name swarming throughout the text, laboring to get our attention, to learn from these lessons — those offered by both Saussure and Lucretius.

I read and hear in Saussure's notebook his attention to the rhyming and resounding syllables of the theme-word, Sisyphus, that play between its two mannequins: *saevasque securis* (brutal authority) and *semper victus* (always defeated). Sisyphus's eternal suffering is augmented by being replayed verbally in the two mannequins and surrounding verses. Saussure notes how the theme-word is echoed through the verse's phonemes producing different sets of effects. The first mannequin, *saevasque securis,* and the theme-word, Sisyphus, are anagrammatically configured in three lines including the previous verse line, which refers to the giant figure of Tityos,


72)

III, 994-996. Sisyphus.

Mannequin [redacted]

Saevasque secures (996)

S- marqué comme initial par le mannequin.

SI- : Sisyphus In vīta (995); vu le principe exposé plus haut page 30 (bas de la page). — L'ī long de vīta corrige un peu celui de in.
2° Avec interposition de consonne : S(c)i-ndunt (994.

(SĪS- : fa-S(c)īS si on peut supposer cette forme au lieu de fascēs que donne Lachmann au v. 996.)

-ĪS- : 1° nob-īs ante (995). 2° ɾvav-īs scindunt (994) dans un groupe de mots très anagrammatique. 3° secūr-īs assez probable au lieu de secūrēs, et améliorant le vocalisme du mannequin.

-ŬP- : c-ŭp-pēdine (994). Les mots scindunt c-UP-pēdine imitent fort bien SĪSUPUS, même sans y joindre le -īs de ɾvamvīs qui précède.

-PŬ- : po-pŭ-lo fascīs (996).

-S final donné par le mannequin.

-F- Ce n'est que par populo fascis que, dans ce premier anagramme, le f est indiqué à côté du p. Donc du moins dans le voisinage de -PU- faute de mie

Fig. 18. Geneva Library, Ms. fr. 3964/23, p. 72.

punished for the attempted rape of Leto, his oversized liver serving up food for vultures, who here, demythologized like Sisyphus, is not eternally tortured in an afterlife but is torn apart by desire here among us living (see fig. 18).

aut alia quav**is** **sc**indunt c**up**pedine curae.
Sisyphus **i**n vita quoque nob**is** ante oculos est
qui petere a po**pu**lo fa**scis** **S**aevasque securi**S** (DRN 3.994–96)

III, 994–996. Sisyphus

Mannequin Saevasque securiS (996)

S- is marked by the initial [letter] of the mannequin.

SI- : SisyphuS In vīta (995), regarding the principle explained above on page 30 (bottom of the page). The long ī of vīta corrects a little [the short i] of in; 2nd With the imposition of a consonant: s(c)i-ndunt (994).

(SĪS- : fa-s(c)īs if we can assume this form in place of fascēs which Lachmann uses in v[erse] 996.

-ĪS- : 1st in nob-īs ante (995). 2nd in quav-īs scindunt (994) in a group of very anagrammatic words. 3rd secūr-īs which is reasonably probable in place of secūrēs and it also improves the vocalism of the mannequin.

-ŬP- : c-ŭp-pēdine (994). The words scindunt c-UP-pēdine imitate very well Sīsupus, and even without joining together the –īs of quamvīs that precedes it.

[Oddly, Saussure mis-transcribes the word, "quavīs."]

-PŬ- : po-pŭ-lo fascīs (99[6]).

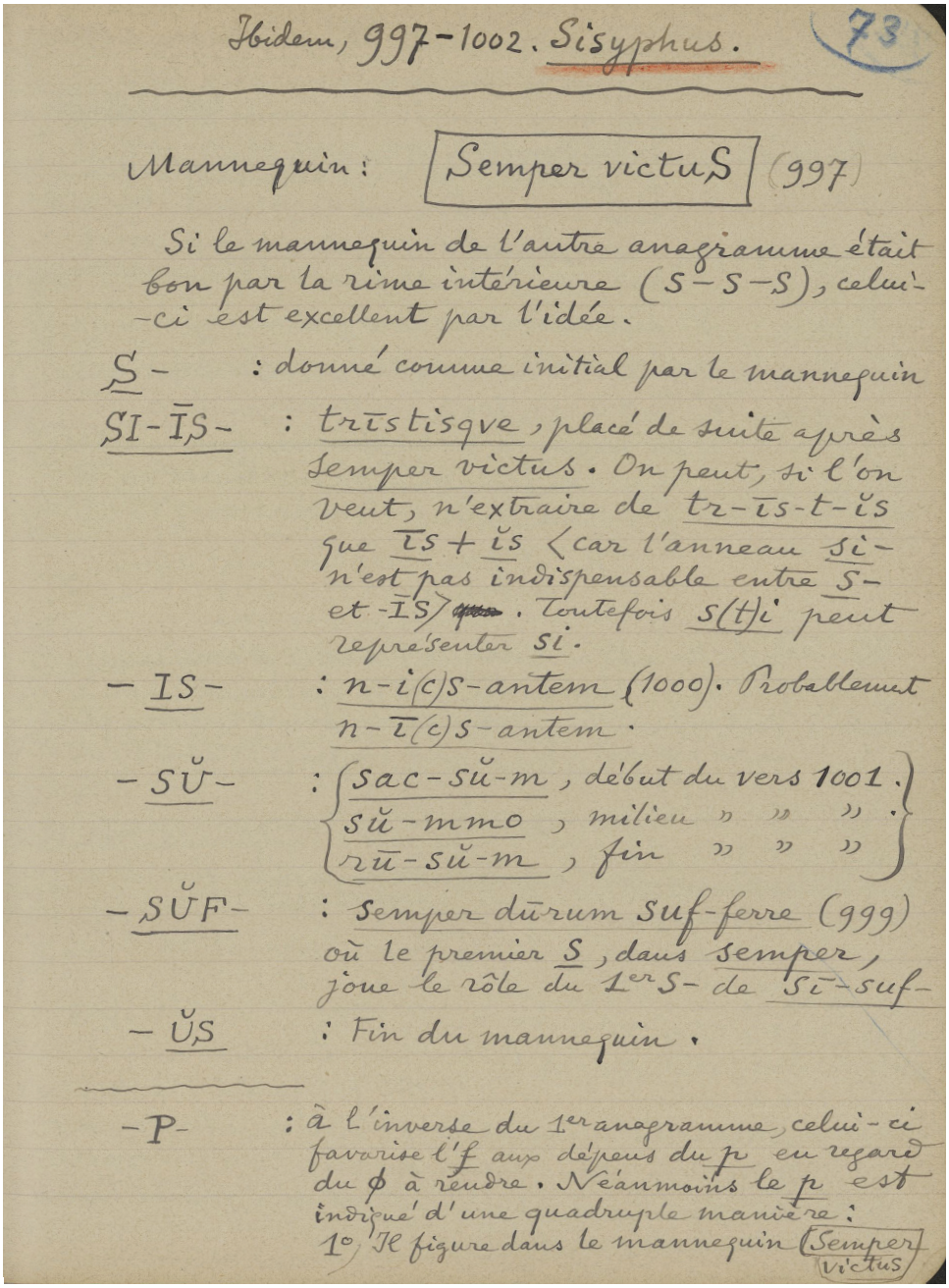
-S : given by the final letter of the mannequin.

[saevasque securis].

———

-F- It is only through populo fascis that in the first anagram the "f" is indicated next to the p. Therefore at least in the neighborhood of –PU- for lack of something better.

§



Ibidem, 997-1002. Sisyphus. 73

Mannequin : Semper victuS (997)

Si le mannequin de l'autre anagramme était bon par la rime intérieure (S-S-S), celui-ci est excellent par l'idée.

S- : donné comme initial par le mannequin

SI-ĪS- : trīstisqve, placé de suite après Semper victus. On peut, si l'on veut, n'extraire de tr-ī-s-t-ĭs que īs + ĭs <car l'anneau si- n'est pas indispensable entre S- et -IS> ~~(mais)~~. Toutefois S(t)i peut représenter si.

-IS- : n-i(c)s-antem (1000). Probablement n-ī(c)s-antem.

-SŬ- : sac-sŭ-m, début du vers 1001.
sŭ-mmo, milieu » » » .
rū-sŭ-m, fin » » »

-SŬF- : Semper dūrum suf-ferre (999) où le premier S, dans semper, joue le rôle du 1er S- de sī-suf-

-ŬS : Fin du mannequin.

-P- : à l'inverse du 1er anagramme, celui-ci favorise l'f aux dépens du p en regard du ϕ à rendre. Néanmoins le p est indiqué d'une quadruple manière :
1°) Il figure dans le mannequin (Semper victuS)

Fig. 19. Geneva Library, Ms. fr. 3964/23, p. 73.

This final comment is compelling. I am watching Saussure listening for the Φ/*f* sound to echo the first consonant of the third syllable of Sisyphus, while negotiating its representation with the letter *p* (which, when combined with the letter *h*, makes the Φ/*f* sound). That is, the *f* sound he hears in *fascis,* he likes on account of the word's proximity to *populo,* which contains *-pu-,* since together the two words (both alphabetically and phonically) work to represent the Greek consonant Φ and make the *f* sound. If "Sisyphus" had been transliterated into Latin with an *f* rather than *ph,* and thus spelled Sisyfus, Saussure would not need to work between sound and letters to find a suitable acoustic match for the Greek Φ in Sisyphus's name. Lucretius and Saussure are both negotiating translation questions, the first from Greek to Latin and the second between letter forms and sounds. What Saussure seems to appreciate most in the example is the repetition of the sequence of the three *s* sounds in Sisyphus's name and in the mannequin with its sequence of four *s* sounds, *saevasque securis,* the latter exceeding the former echoing with one more *s* sound in an internal rhyme.

The second mannequin, *semper victus,* is located in the second half of Lucretius's description of Sisyphus. The phrase of the mannequin, "always defeated," initiates the poet's elaboration of Sisyphus's character, in which Lucretius simultaneously maps the mythical onto the political (see fig. 19).

> imbibit et **S**emper vict**uS** tr**is**t**is**que recedit.
> nam petere imperium quod inanest nec datur umquam,
> atque in eo **s**emper durum **su**f**f**erre laborem
> hoc est adverso n**ix**antem trudere monte
> sa**xu**m quod tamen <e> **su**mmo iam vertice rur**su**m
> volvitur et plani raptim petit aequora campi. (DRN 3.997–1002)

Ibidem, 997–1002. Sisyphus.

Mannequin: Semper victuS (997)

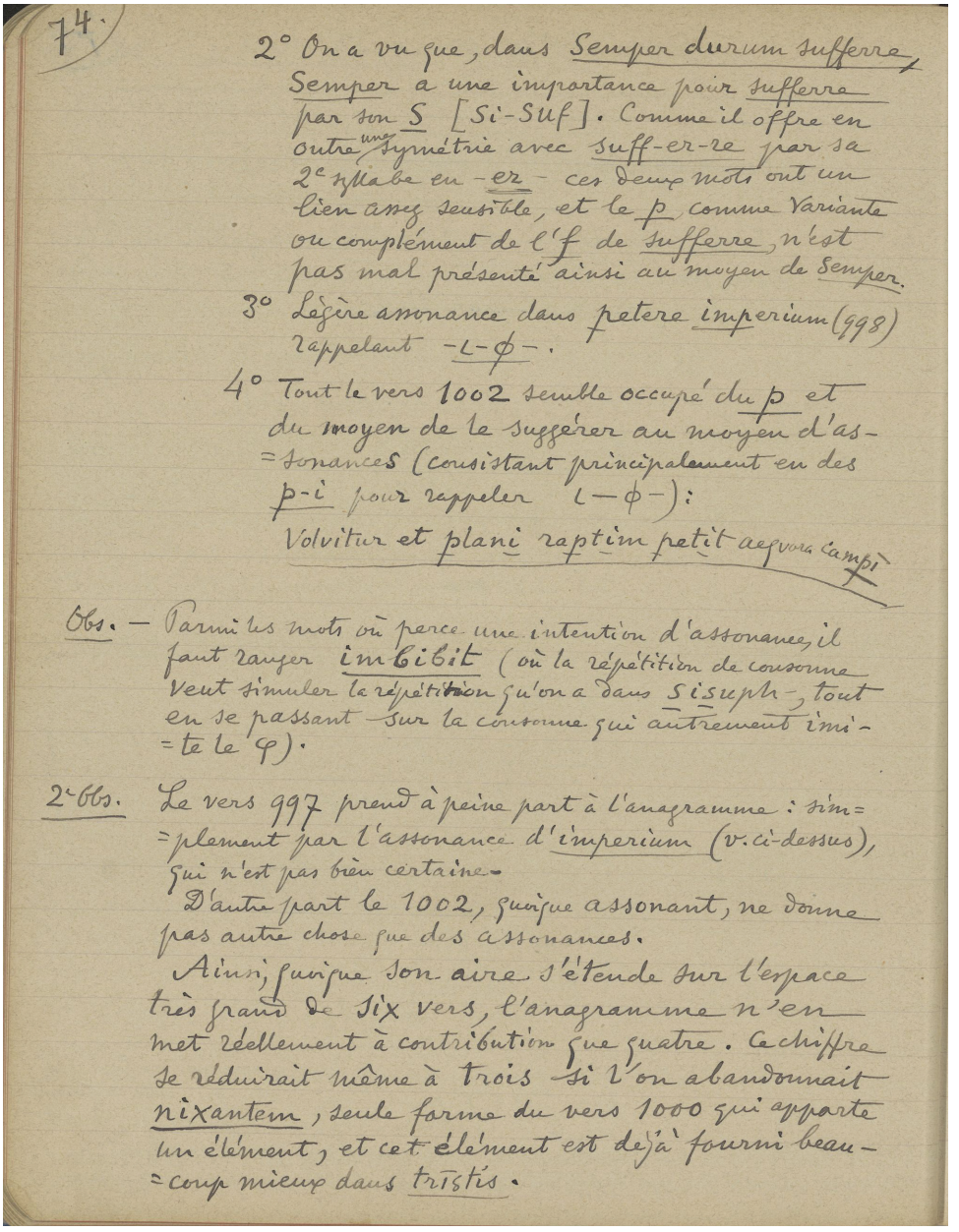
If the mannequin of the other anagram was good because of the internal rhyme (*S-S-S*), this one is excellent because of the idea.

S- : given as the initial [letter] of the mannequin

SI-ĪS- : trīstisque, placed following after semper victus. One could, if one wanted, extract only from tr-īs-t-ĭs, the īs + ĭs (because the ring si- [s-(t)-is] is not indispensable between the s- and īs). Nevertheless, s(t)i can represent si.

-IS- : n-i(c)s-antem (1000). Probably n-ī(c)s-antem.

[Saussure has broken the letter *x* in *nixantem* into two letters *c* and *s* that represent the sound, cs (x) in order to individuate the letters that mark the distinct sounds. One of the many negotiations between sound and writing that occur. (Also, the frequentative of



74.

2° On a vu que, dans Semper durum sufferre, Semper a une importance pour sufferre par son S [Si-Suf]. Comme il offre en outre une symétrie avec suff-er-re par sa 2e syllabe en -er- ces deux mots ont un lien assez sensible, et le p comme variante ou complément de l'f de sufferre, n'est pas mal présenté ainsi au moyen de Semper.

3° La 3ère assonance dans petere imperium (998) rappelant -ι-φ-.

4° Tout le vers 1002 semble occupé du p et du moyen de le suggérer au moyen d'assonances (consistant principalement en des p-i pour rappeler ι—φ—):

Volvitur et plani raptim petit aequora campi

Obs. — Parmi les mots où perce une intention d'assonance, il faut ranger imbibit (où la répétition de consonne veut simuler la répétition qu'on a dans sisuph-, tout en se passant sur la consonne qui autrement imite le φ).

2e Obs. Le vers 997 prend à peine part à l'anagramme : simplement par l'assonance d'imperium (v. ci-dessus), qui n'est pas bien certaine.

D'autre part le 1002, quoique assonant, ne donne pas autre chose que des assonances.

Ainsi, quoique son aire s'étende sur l'espace très grand de six vers, l'anagramme n'en met réellement à contribution que quatre. Ce chiffre se réduirait même à trois si l'on abandonnait nixantem, seule forme du vers 1000 qui apporte un élément, et cet élément est déjà fourni beaucoup mieux dans tristis.

Fig. 20. Geneva Library, Ms. fr. 3964/23, p. 74.

nītor (*nixantem* [striving]), according to Alfred Ernout, is a Lucretian invention.)][18]

-SŬ- : sac-sŭ-m, beginning of the line 1001

[He again breaks the letter *x* into two letters *c* and *s* from *saxum*.]

: sŭ-mmo, middle [of the line 1001]
: rū-sŭ-m, end [of the line 1001]

-SŬF-: semper dūrum suf-ferre (999). Where the first S, in semper plays the role of the 1st S- of Sī-suf-.

-ŬS : End of the mannequin. [*Semper victu***S**]

———

-P- : inversely to the 1st anagram, this one favors the f over the p with regard to the Φ that it has to represent. Nevertheless, the p is indicated in a quadruple manner. 1st it figures in the mannequin Semper victuS.

[Continues on the following page of the notebook.]

2nd We saw, in Semper durum sufferre, Semper has an importance for sufferre for the S in (Si-SUf). Since besides this, it offers a symmetry with suffer-re with its 2nd syllable -er- these two words indeed have a very palpable connection, and the p as a variant or complement of the f of sufferre is fairly well represented in this way by means of Semper.

3rd The light assonance of petere imperium (998) recalls the -ι-Φ-.

4th The entirety of verse 1002 seems to be occupied with the p and the means of suggesting this is through assonance (consisting mainly in the p-i to recall the -ι-Φ):
Volvitur et planī raptim petit aequora campī

Obs.- Among the words that draws attention to assonance we have to include imbibit (where the repetition of consonants strives to simulate the repetition we have in Sisuph-, while at the same time having the consonant that otherwise imitates the Φ.)

2nd Obs. Verse 997 hardly takes part in the anagram, simply the assonance of imperium where it is not very certain (see above). The rest of verse 1002

18 Cyril Bailey, ed. and trans., *Titi Lucreti Cari De rerum natura libri sex,* 3 vols. (Oxford University Press, 1947), 2:1162.

although assonant doesn't give anything else to the anagram but the assonance.

Thus, although its area extends over a very large space of six lines, the anagram only really uses four. This number would even be reduced to three if we abandon nixantem, being the only form in verse 1000 that brings along an element, and that element is already provided so much better by trīstis (fig. 20).

§

I have the feeling here of watching Saussure mid-thought, mid-experiment: he's evaluating what to leave in and what to leave out, that is, what constitutes an anagram. His pleasure in observing its economy and its invention I experience palpably. He notes that each of the two mannequins, *Saevasque securiS* and *Semper victuS,* contributes different effects, in addition to the first and final letters (the four *s*'s) acting as brackets and echoing the first and final letters of the theme-word, Sisyphus. What's notable in the first mannequin is the excessive repetition of the *s* sound whereas in the second he notes the aptness of the mannequin's meaning. "Always defeated" (*semper victus*) is simply a perfect epithet for Sisyphus. Sound and sense are working distinctly in each instance, that is, they amplify either the sounds or the meaning associated with the theme-word. In the second example, he finds an abundance of sounds. For instance, the phoneme *SU,* is sounded three times in three different words in one verse line (sa**xu**m quod tamen <e> **su**mmo iam vertice rur**su**m 3.1000), producing a stuttering effect in the middle of the anagram, *Si-su-su-su-fus.* Meanwhile the effect animates the repeated and vain action of the figure's attempts to push the stone up the hill in the mythological afterlife and his repeated efforts to gain authority and power in life. In his second observation, he is weighing different approaches as he considers whether the anagram occurs over three or six lines. Here, he seems to be negotiating how much reverberation to allow, as if trying to contain the resonances and the attending questions of temporality.

The time of the unfolding, resonating anagrams doesn't correspond to historical and linear logic. Consecutive reading (reading word by word sequentially) is no longer the means for ensuring the ordering of time and relation between elements. Rather, in his studies Saussure performs another manner of reading in which he attends to swarms of sounds that emanate from a theme-word, which, resounding in the phonic elements, are heard scattered across lines of verse, no longer restricted by the linear ordering of sound in the theme-word. For Saussure, this swarming of sounds orchestrates a nontemporal chorus of echoes that resounds "outside of time."

> Can one give TAE by *ta* + *te*, i.e., by inviting the reader to what is no longer a juxtaposition in consecutivity, but to a mean of acoustic impressions *beyond time,* beyond the order in time these element have and the linear order which is observed if I give TAE by TA–AE or TA–E, but

> is not if I give it as *ta* + *te* to be amalgamated *outside of time,* as could be done with two simultaneous colors?
>
> (In the margin: "L'abstrait et le concret.")[19]

The simultaneity of sounds, in a medley of synesthesia, mixed and paired like colors, invokes a different temporality of listening attuned to recursive and chordal phonemic elements. The phonic paraphrases grumble, swarm, create a tapestry of textual music, beyond time and its systematizing order, releasing poetic expressions from linear and sequential logics.

v. ***Combinar las palabras es invocar los ecos comunes.***

While ever wary of fetishizing the archival object, I had expected a molecular, if not atomic, kind of transmission to pass quietly between us. But Saussure's hand having touched the paper my hand now touches doesn't stimulate me, and I wonder why. Perhaps it's because of my fraught relation to objects, an inherited tendency friends have spent years trying to cure me of, but the objects at hand, these notebooks, hold what can't be held in hand, what defies possession, for they gesture toward rhythms and animate sounds — not stuff. I return frequently to this contradiction, yet I can't gather myself closely enough to it. I need sound to have a kind of materiality, a matter to it, yet what these verses are asking us to attend to is the immaterialization of the material, the dismembering of members, to perceive these remainders that follow the withdrawal of substance as if in its wake. The echoes linger, but the stones, though ruins, remain. For help, I turn to Lucretius. Atomic theory, which proposes the materiality of all universes in a continual flux of birth and decay, can only be apprehended via indirection, that is, through analogy and poetry. This is the paradox of Lucretius's theory itself: With our senses we are able to discern what is not available to our senses. We can see dust motes, sheep, stars, but we cannot apprehend directly the infinite worlds of composing and decomposing atoms in the void. We rely on resemblances, similes, and kinship, and on poetry to attune us. And so I abide with the contradictions in order to dwell with the resonances that they allow.

After several days, I meet with the head archivist, Barbara Roth, who invites me into the closed stacks and shows me the rows of boxes that house the manuscript materials for generations of the Saussure family, including his grandfather Horace-Bénédict, the first to climb Mont Blanc (in reality, the second after his guide) and his father Henri, the entomologist and physicist. She offers to pull any of the boxes so that I can work more immersed in the originals. She's friendly and enthusiastically tells me in which classroom Saussure gave his lectures at the university, Room 105. She insists on drawing a map for me to illustrate the location of his house in relation to the archives and university: just across Parc des Bastions, on rue de la Tertasse at the corner of rue de la Cité. Now other senses are

19 Quoted in Starobinski, *Words upon Words,* 30, emphasis added.

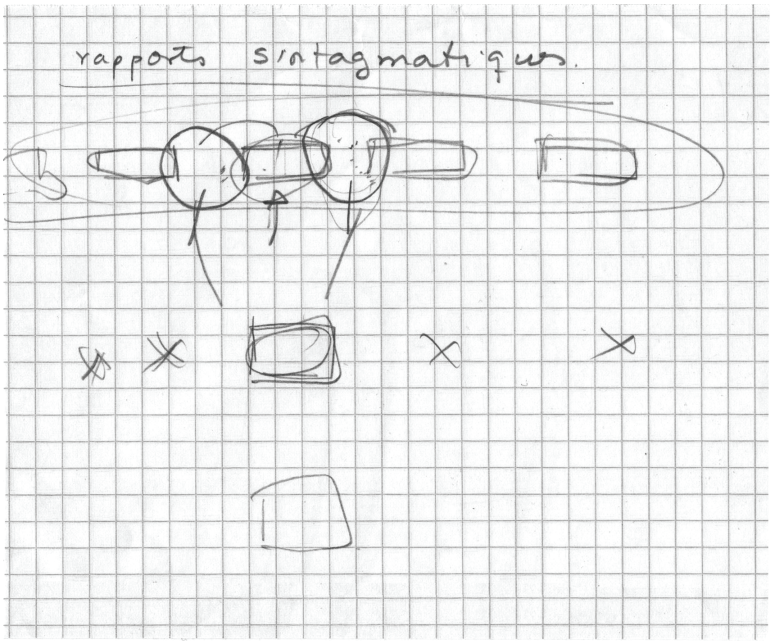


Fig. 21. Claudia Mejía Quijano's note from author's notebook.

engaged — I am in the physical environment, walking the halls and streets, and the weather feels different. But leafing through the notebooks, I am not seduced by touching what he has touched — the paper artifacts are only useful to him and to me to a degree.[20] His regular handwriting in school notebooks points elsewhere, traces aware of their own inadequacy, his written marks indexing what to listen to "amalgamated *outside of time.*" In one of his notebooks, Saussure writes the humbling statement: "I can see no other way but to present the puzzle as it appears to me."[21]

Roth introduces me to the Colombian scholar Claudia Mejía Quijano. We have an immediate affinity. Mejía Quijano knows these archives as if they were her own family albums. She has written a three-volume biography of Saussure and edited a collection of his letters and several lectures.[22] After the archives close that evening, she walks with me to the Saussure mansion, where another generation of the Saussure family still lives, to my astonishment, their names printed below the doorbells. She points out the orangerie within the walled grounds, where in 1996 more of Saussure's notebooks and writing were discovered behind a bookshelf. We walk up

20 I have felt a kind of arousal, emotionally and psychically, in another archive, touching the greasy pages of the spiral notebooks in which Jack Spicer wrote drafts of his poems.

21 Quoted in Starobinski, *Words upon Words,* 103.

22 See Claudia Mejía Quijano, *Le cours d'une vie: portrait diachronique de Ferdinand de Saussure,* 3 vols. (Defaut, 2008, 2012, 2014).

rue de Grand Ville and find a café where we sit at an outside table, unstable on the cobblestones, and drink a pricey cup of tea.[23]

At the table Mejía Quijano draws a diagram in my notebook with the heading: "rapports sintagmatiques" (syntagmatic relations) (fig. 21). In the first line of figures, the rectangles represent words in a phrase, and the circles between the rectangles indicate the space between the words. Each in-between space contains the echoes a word carries with it over time, echoes that continue to sound along with the word among different words. The second line shows a repetition of the word that is being used again, represented by the rectangular box that descends from the first line. In this subsequent use, the word is surrounded by different words, represented by the four *X* marks in her diagram. The third line represents a future use of the word, still retaining its resonances through its repeated iterations in different sentences, a world of echoes "beyond time."

She explains that a phrase creates a semantic echo among and between the words that sequentially form it, with the result that one word evokes the words before and after it. If the phrase is often repeated, then it's impossible to use one of these words without an echo in one's head of the other words which surrounded it. When writers combine words, they play with echoes to give semantic density to phrases: the word has its meanings, the syntagmatic values of the actual combination, but more significantly, all the possible values of the echoes that it carries with it from former use and relations. Even the words before or after may recall certain echoes when they are very strong. She offers the astonishing conclusion: "Combinar las palabras es invocar los ecos comunes" (to combine words is to invoke shared echoes). At the table I begin to recognize the gift that her companionship is. Our lively conversation, in various languages, contributes to and continues the various other conversations to which my writing is indebted, and I apprehend how beautifully they supplement the swarming sounds Saussure's notebooks animate. In yet another turn, the sound studies supplement Lucretius's theory: atoms and letters that recombine endlessly moving through the void within the decorous order to create new matter and meanings, in universes and in song. Here a response to my earlier question about atomic theory and historical transmissions begins to form in greater detail.

Echoes of sounds, evoked and sustained by the space between words — these echoes linger, and they survive, reverberating through time and use. An alphabet's letters are only approximations, marking where and how words fail. Sounds, not consonants or vowels, not syllables, words, or phrases, are the matter of poetry. Saussure heard the space between the words, that "shared echo," when the Roman inscriptions summoned him. In his notebooks, filled with his sound studies, Saussure schools us in forms

23 Is Mejía Quijano why I've travelled to Geneva? She seems to recognize my project and my entry into it, more as a writer than a scholar, and, as if prophesizing, insists that I will make Saussure's work with his anagram notebooks accessible to others. Perhaps because I haven't slept or eaten enough protein for days, I can't reject her belief that this might be accomplished.

of attention, listening for the echoing of the poetic transmission outside of time. To tarry with his figures, while learning his notations, attunes me to listen otherwise, to be alert to a gesture, unanticipated, to follow along even if seeming without promise or end, to welcome a sheepish overture, to allow the riddle to be a riddle, to abide with doubts and mystery, as if sustained by uncertainty and by the refusal of resolution. There is no return to the tonic. Trusting in communities of others, loosely bound together by whatever we might find at hand. For in that company under the shade of trees, with stretched-out limbs, we encounter otherness, in our reveries of attention and inattention, vulnerable, perishable, abiding with aleatory songs. Saussure teaches us how to listen to sounds that echo otherwise. The poems we read in concert create and sustain these readerly communities and the writers who dwell there.

Thinking with someone, with others, aloud, it's this conversation that compels me, causes me to travel to Geneva to immerse myself in Saussure's notebooks, to listen and ponder together with another, dead now over 100 years, and others, and to attend to the echoes of sounds. His ardor and manner of moving by way of questioning, returning, doubting, his intimacy while listening, these he shares with me as though we were accomplices. We work in the shadows of language, taking notes, corresponding. We hear our share in mourning the dead, within or nearby. Neither to discover what was there already nor to invent what could be there — neither. Rather to attune our attention to what we hear and don't hear, a transmission that moves us to inhabit a realm, to haunt it without trespassing overly, immersed in and enthralled as if by a spell. To return from the stormy field, to render the sounds, following roots and trees along vestigial tracks and beyond, we lend our voices to those who summon us to breathe, to animate the echoes bequeathed to us in death.

CHAPTER 3

Lucretian Refrain

> Weeping is the sound form most directly associated with becoming a bird, which is to say, the sound form most closely associated with death and with loss. [...] Moving from spontaneous and improvised to compositionally crafted weeping creates an aesthetic tension demanding the response that, like the deceased, the weeper, too, has become a bird.
>
> — Steven Feld, *Sound and Sentiment*[1]

> Once there was a wayside weed that pleased those who saw it as it bent in the wind and bounded back again in the sunlight and died and came back as a frog whose singing lulled children to sleep until it was swallowed by a heron and came back as a strong and gentle horse that once hauled a wagon full of tired travelers over a mountain and later lived in a field without much grass where it died of starvation and came back as a musician who was very wise and very knowledgeable and could remember everything that had happened to him, including having been a wayside weed.
>
> — Lyn Hejinian, *The Book of a Thousand Eyes*[2]

i. The Conversation — Music Lovers

Reading with Saussure makes a set of demands upon us. If we listen and attend to what he listens and attends to, as we've heard in his reading of Lucretius, then we are made sensitive to linguistic patterns and their auditory reflections, to the inversions and reforming of sounds in language. According to Saussure, this is what poets, particularly ancient Indo-European poets, specialized in:

> The obviously incalculable difference between an alliterative phonism and a phonism structured on any syllable is that, as long as we remain linked to the first syllable, the *rhythm of the line* might seem to be involved, a rhythm, which seeking further emphasis for itself, provokes

1 Steven Feld, *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression* (Duke University Press, 2012), 129.

2 Lyn Hejinian, *The Book of a Thousand Eyes* (Omnidawn, 2012), 252.

> the beginnings of similar words, ruled by a principle which in no way implies any verbal analysis by the poet. The same observation applies to rhyme, at least in a similar system. But if it is established to the contrary, that all syllables can contribute to phonic symmetry, it follows that these combinations are not dictated by any dependence on the line or its rhythmic schema, and that a second principle, independent of the line, has allied itself to the first to constitute the accepted poetic form. I am in effect stating (and from this point making my thesis) that to fulfill the second condition of the *carmen,* completely apart from the constitution of feet or *ictus,* the poet devoted himself to the phonic analysis of words and considered this his basic craft and that it is this science of the vocal form of words which is probably responsible, from the most ancient period of Indo-European culture, for the superiority and extraordinary quality of the Hindu *Kavis,* the Latin *Vātēs,* etc.[3]

This sound science, "the phonic analysis of words," grounds poetic composition and activates Saussure's elaborations in his anagram notebooks. Phonism, based on the sounding elements in any syllable within a word (not restricted to first syllable phonism of alliteration), frees the phonic schema from other compositional acoustic constraints, such as rhyme, meter, and rhythm and makes it "independent of the line." With phonism as the primary sonic element of poetic composition, the combination of sonic features becomes the "basic craft" that constitutes *carmen* — poetry, song, incantation. The centrality of phonism, as the "science of the vocal form of words," is at the heart of what Saussure investigates in his notebooks. Recurring sounds, composed in patterns, untethered from other sound-based poetic features, are capable of occurring in any syllable within words, and this is the foundational poetics of ancient poetry. Attuned poets, practiced in this science, create resounding patterns in verse with all the available syllables.

Sound and sense are unhinged.

Words as sense units are distinguished from the sounds from which words are composed. Since alliteration concerns only the sound at the

3 Ferdinand de Saussure, quoted in Jean Starobinski, *Words upon Words: The Anagrams of Ferdinand de Saussure,* trans. Olivia Emmet (Yale University Press, 1979), 22. It's important to note that because he only worked with Indo-European languages, he had a limited understanding of these poetic traditions' value relative to other linguistic and literary ones. As I understand it, Saussure uses the word "superiority" to indicate that he sees ancient Indo-European poets as being superior both to non-poets and perhaps to poets from different traditions. One implication of this "extraordinary quality" is that these poets would have a certain power over their audiences, which nicely supports my account of the instructive capacities of poetry. Another is that it challenges a progressivist reading of poetry's development from a contemporary standpoint, and it also fittingly supports the ways Lucretius both unsettles the progression of chronological time and also undermines the historical concept of progress more generally.

beginning of words, it privileges the whole word over its syllabic parts and consequently the word's semantic value. The repetition and patterning of sounds *without* regard for word boundaries then have their own poetic capacities. The word as a unit of meaning transmits signification while sounds echoing through and across words transmit otherwise, "chordally," not linearly.[4] Recalling that for Saussure, sonic features are the basis for composing Indo-European poetry, and given that syllabic sounds are not defined or limited by the confines of individual words, his theory of poetic composition then places greater emphasis on phonic elements than on semantic ones, at times almost at the expense of poetry's meaning-making capacity.[5] The sound patterning generated by the theme-word does not align with the sense of words, for the semantic motivation of the anagrammatized word produce echoes of sounds across word and line boundaries.

Saussure's decoupling of the sonic and signifying helps to refine my inquiry. I am interested in pursuing these two poetic elements, sounds and sense, as distinct yet interrelated strands within the context of Lucretius's poetry with its explicitly didactic aims. How does the didactic mode, concerned primarily with the sense of words and their instructional intent to deliver content, work with the sonic mode, concerned primarily with the patterns of sounds that transmit as if by poetic magic? While there's a tendency to relate ancient didactic poetry specifically with its "intention to deliver content," in actual practice, content delivery is only one of many pedagogical activities. In the classroom, although conveying content is allegedly privileged, often it is neither the primary experience nor the most valuable for all present, students and instructors alike. What are the communicative effects of the sonic, magic mode? If the didactic mode relies on a linear transmission of sounds in the service of sense, then I want to suggest that the magic mode relies on a sonic transmission, composed chordally, that does not directly instruct the reader toward comprehension or new insights but moves us toward something else. I want to explore what this "something else" is — whether an experience or a mode of meaning making — and to investigate the ways it is created through chords and sonic patterns transmitted in bundles of phonetic material, rather than through the linear sequencing of meaningful sounds.

How might a phonic transmission produce a different kind of understanding or knowledge that does not depend on insight gleaned through signification? At minimum, I ask for a moment of suspense, to pause in the soundscape, so that then when we next begin to collocate our interpretations, the resonances of the poetic transmissions can participate in the process of meaning making. I want to attend to the sound forms that emerge from Lucretius's poem and to learn how to situate myself so that I might better receive its phonic materials and the transmissions they convey. This

4 In Chapter 4, I discuss in detail Roman Jakobson's analysis of linguistic sounds and his description of how they function "chordally."

5 In Chapter 2, I've noted the tension between the theme-word's signification (and nomination) and its anagrammatized sounds that, swarming in all directions through the verses, become divested of meaning.

form of listening privileges neither the poem's content nor its rhetorical effects but rather the sonic resonances and echoes, that is, what they might transmit by amplifying this "something else."

In his anagram studies, Saussure speculates on the incantatory powers of sound in early Indo-European poetry, such as in funerary hymns. In the Greek and Roman context, magic operated in legal and religious practices by conferring power to institutionalized and ritualized language use, such as taking oaths and casting magic spells. In Aeschylus's *Eumenides,* for example, the Erinyes, the children of Night, the avengers of kin killing, who refer to themselves as an embodiment of a curse, cast a spell on Orestes. In their second choral ode, they perform a binding song, an incantation whose aim is the ruin they intend for their victim. The song is closely related to Greek curse tablets, *defixiones,* that were used, often with small figurines, to cast a spell that binds a rival's ability to perform in a range of contexts. In Virgil's eclogue 8, one of the two main characters sings an incantatory refrain (*carmina*), and performs magic rites (*magicis sacris* 8.66), to bring about her desire, the return of her absent lover, Daphnis. Her spells attest to their power because: "Songs are even able to bring the moon down from heaven" (*carmina vel caelo possunt deducere lunam* 8.69).[6] Magical powers are neither dead nor buried and are not confined to ancient societies, but continue to shape contemporary ones.[7]

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6 R.A.B. Mynors, ed., *P. Vergili Maronis Opera* (Oxford University Press, 1969).

7 Jeanne Favret-Saada's ethnography, *Deadly Words: Witchcraft in the Bocage,* trans. Catherine Cullen (Cambridge University Press, 1980), is just one example of a study in witchcraft and magic. Favret-Saada chose not to leave Europe, breaking from the conventions in her field, to start her ethnographic work on contemporary witchcraft and moved to the Bocage in the western part of France to immerse herself in its community and write about the symbolic workings of power and witchcraft. Her approach, which is explicitly not a scientific demystification, insists on challenging the divisions between cultural and class differences, e.g., the peasant as credulous, the scholar as intellectually coherent. Both the peasant and scholar seek to understand causality, one "backward," the other educated; their theories of reality are incompatible. From this scholarly perspective, confident in its correctness, witchcraft is a non-rational, nonsensical account of causal relations, and this assessment contributes to the apparent cultural divide that creates a conflict between truth and belief, modern and ancient. But two incompatible worlds do exist. In one, misfortune is considered singular; in the other, misfortunes are never singular nor individual; rather, they articulate a repeated pattern and circulate within a community. When misfortunes occur serially, "the believer" seeks both an interpretation and a cure; these inform the workings of power and witchcraft that Favret-Saada's ethnography inhabit. For in the Bocage when words are spoken, they "are power, and not knowledge or information" (9). Indeed, there is no neutral position with regards to words. In the field of social theory, Pierre Bourdieu takes up related questions regarding symbolic power and the rites of institutions in order to theorize what he terms "social magic." He describes the ways in which social magic legitimizes invested speakers in the service of state control and how different forms of authority are constituted through linguistic practices and ritualized performance. Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic*

What I find most compelling of all the many aspects that Saussure discovers in listening to ancient poetry is his thesis on the science of sound and sound's central role in poetic composition. The linguist heard the echoes while reading Lucretius's poem. In turn by enlisting Lucretius, the scientific poet, I hope to elaborate these observations regarding the "vocal form of words." To what extent does Saussure's "science of the vocal form of words" sync up with Lucretius's atomic analogies of perception? How does the poet's understanding of sound production relate to the linguist's analysis of poetic composition? In what ways does a linguistic enactment of a poetics of sound — a staging of acoustic phenomena — complicate the play of sound and sense? To bring these two into a speculative conversation might seem like an unsound or anachronistic proposition, but between Saussure and Lucretius there are several points of contact. They both, as readers, writers, and theorists, model an embodied attention relative to their work and demand in turn the same of us, as readers, and our bodies, that is, to be receptive and vulnerable. Both attend to the phenomena of echo, literally and figuratively, as rhetorical form and compositional companion. And they both are interested in working with parts of language, the alphabet, syllables, fragmenting bits of text and remixing bits of sound. I've already discussed how Lucretius uses the letters of the alphabet (*elementa*) to explain how atoms (*elementa*) reconfigure themselves into new words, shapes, meaning, and knowledge. This *metathesis,* the moving around of elements to form new matter and meaning, closely resembles how Saussure describes anagrammatic harmonies. I want to further elaborate these correspondences as I return to the questions that foreground sound and the sonic patterning that poetry makes audible.

Earlier I explored the moments when Lucretius discusses sound, how it is created and what it teaches; we saw how Lucretius, in his elaboration of the alphabet as an analogy for atoms, instructs us in his linguistic and atomic theory, and how sound and its perception pertain to his materialist doctrines. In these cases, we encounter explicit, didactic moments that engage both the content and the sound of the verses doing their pedagogical work, even when words disperse into nonsense. Here I want to walk through Lucretius's portrayal of other forms of instruction, first by focusing on a pedagogical scene where the subject matter is specifically musical sounds rather than linguistic utterance. His description of human beings first learning music serves nicely both as an example of instruction through repetition and imitation and also as a point of departure for an inquiry into the relationships between sound, sense, and voice in the context of the poet's account of human civilization (5.1379–1411). In these lines, we hear how birds and the wind instructed people in whistling and in playing hollowed pipes, set in a scene that is pastoral as well as pedagogical. Meanwhile these non-human instructors naturalize the didactic in occupying their specific instructional roles. In forests and fields, the beginning musicians soothed their spirits and learned to delight in music making. In a reprise

Power, ed. John B. Thompson, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Harvard University Press, 1991), 111.

Excursus: Temporal or Local Contradiction?

Within Lucretius's account of the origins of human civilization, a basic contradiction, one that runs throughout the poem and Lucretius's atomic theory, becomes increasingly apparent: the discrepancy between a narrative of constant change (the continual cycles of birth and decay) and an account of origins, locating a place from which to begin. Lucretius gives an account of human development that relies on a conception of progress, and these lessons in progression serve both as *exempla* and as counter-histories. But the forward motion of progress doesn't square with the circles that inscribe and determine the movement of atoms and historical shapes. So, it's no minor issue that Lucretius's description of human civilization relies on a narrative of progressive development. And while he does not valorize progress and in fact often criticizes it, his account of human development presupposes an origin. How is an origin any different from a birth? Michel de Certeau in *The Writing of History* considers the problems and fictions of origins in ways I find both compelling and helpful. His contention is that a historical origin creates the fiction of a time before and after, and consequently makes a line, one that distinguishes and demarcates. "History would fall to ruin without the key to the vault of its entire architecture: that is, without [...] the rupture that is constantly debated between a past and present. [...] If history leaves its proper place — the limit it posits and receives — it is broken asunder, to become nothing more than a fiction."* The circular movement of atomic theory, in unending cycles, denies the possibility of an originary moment and exposes the fiction of the founding of history. And in the context of Lucretius's account, these contradictions regarding origins and temporality create an even more entangled relationship between the past, then (*tum*), the time of the woodland race of earthborn people, and the present, now (*nunc*) of the poem, between Roman time and ours. "Then at that time a shortage of food would deliver weary bodies to death, whereas now an overabundance of things drowns us" (*tum penuria deinde cibi languentia leto / membra dabat, contra nunc rerum copia mersat* 5.1007–8). Lucretius stresses the tension of the relationship by asserting that there is both a continuity (in movement) through time — we will never escape death no matter how much or how little sustenance we have — and a lack of correspondence — scarcity versus plenty — between the times. Indeed death in neither era is better or worse: "Not much more then than now did the human race leave the sweet light of life among lamentations" (*nec nimio tum plus quam nunc mortalia saecla / dulcia linquebant lamentis lumina vitae* 5.987–88). The presence of both connections and divisions offers us another way of thinking about the temporal contradiction: Continuity can be seen in the constant and ongoing flux of sameness and difference, and what can be relied upon is change, changes that require both breaking and reassembling, a *metathesis* of times. Meanwhile these very disruptions and continuities are what the passages, discussed below, enact through sonic patterns and linguistic play, in the repetition and the variation of patterns, in the excess of generation — one thing being born from another in an overabundance of flourishing — and in the metrical play between syllabic quantities. Sounds and rhythms both give birth and are born from each other, while they are felt to be stumbling, stuttering, even lapsing into silence. The pleasure of the past, that which both engenders music and dance (*lascivia* 5.1400), is lost in the present, though technique endures. After the first lessons in music, and after lamentation has turned into collective and communal joy, song returns, but for the guardians of night, the contemporary counterpart to the solitary shepherds, as laments amplify laments, the remainders are audible still in melancholic dirges.

* Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History,* trans. Tom Conley (Columbia University Press, 1988), 44.

of a passage from book 2, Lucretius renders a tableau of simple pleasure and leisure, where a group of friends sprawls in the shade under tree cover, sated and recumbent on beds of grass by a running stream. The repetition of the scene invites comparison between the poem's contemporary moment and early forms of sociality, in a meta-pedagogical reflection on human progress, a critique of the values incommensurate with those of his atomic theory. *Then* there was laughter, play, conversation. *Then* with such pleasure and music, people were urged to adorn themselves and dance. And while the music of this kind survives into the poem's present, at the end of the passage we are asked to consider why the pleasure of making music has been diminished and scarcely resembles the music made by those who were first taught its delights. What this brief summary of the passage in no way captures is precisely what I want to describe, that is, how sound itself is working in the text to transmit the rhythm and resonances of the lesson. Just as wind and birds are teachers of music, how might the phonic qualities of these lines instruct readers by means of musical sounds? What kind of attention or inattention is required? And what are the objects of attention, and what escapes notice?[8] What are the correspondences between the rhythmic shuffling of the temporal comparisons and his criticism of a progressivist account of history?

ii. Rough Music — Tough Love

Myriad examples in the poem implicitly and expressly (as discussed in Chapter 1) work the analogy between elements and atoms. While these analogical assertions rely in part on the sound patterns of the poem, I want to underscore that the examples are *made* of sound itself. The analogies can be apprehended by both attending to the letters of the text *and* by listening to the sonic patterns that resound in the text, as Saussure's sound studies likewise propose. Thus, we receive the lessons by means of attending both to what is being said and to how the sounds are acting on us as readers of the poem. Since it is generally held that the texts of this kind in Lucretius's era were read primarily aloud, perhaps we could imagine that the ideal setting for these recitations would be the very scene that recurs in our passage: companions lounging on fields, maybe a leg mindlessly touching an arm touching a shoulder, in the shade at ease, laughing, conversing, reciting

8 Many modern scholars have listened to and explored the phonic elements within Lucretius's poem, and my analysis is in various ways indebted to their work. In an inaugurating essay from 1941, Paul Friedländer argues that letters/atoms/elements perform in an analogical relationship, and both enact and argue the theory simultaneously; thus, the letters of words are in some sense analogous to the elements/atoms of atomic theory. See Paul Friedländer, "Patterns of Sound and Atomistic Theory in Lucretius," *American Journal of Philology* 62, no. 1 (1941): 16–34. In an excellent, in-depth essay from 2005, Brooke Holmes reviews the literature on this subject and helpfully points out the shortcomings with the main trends. See Brooke Holmes, *"Daedala Lingua:* Crafted Speech in *De rerum natura," American Journal of Philology* 126, no. 4 (2005): 527–85.

poems, listening to the hearsay of the birds and wind-song in the reeds. I think of this scene as a visual and sonic emblem of a readerly community that distills what the poem aims to animate.

Before coming to the scene of musical instruction through imitation, Lucretius has already illustrated many instances in which natural elements teach human beings through imitation and by chance.[9] The earth and humans have an umbilical connection. Humans are made from the natural world and are also made to depend on it. In this somewhat overbearing form of parenting, humans are indebted to their natural parent for their initiation into civilization and cultural development, but (mother) nature never allows her human offspring to leave her care and protection fully. So, while nature nurtures and sustains animals and humans alike, her wild offspring is dangerous to her human one (*humanae genti infestum* 5.219). Moreover, unlike other animals, humans are born destitute: An infant at birth is tossed to the ground, without speech, naked, in need of everything, like a sailor cast ashore by cruel waves (*tum porro puer, ut saevis proiectus ab undis / nativa, nudus humi iacet, infans, indigus omni* 5.222–23). There is a sonic play between the words "soil" and "human" (*humus* and *humanus*): Humans being born from the earth's soil are then at birth pitched onto the ground, landing on the dirt of a linguistic embrace. Along with being credited for assisting human development pertaining to the earthly elements, nature compelled humans to produce the sounds that are speech, collaborating with use and expediency (*utilitas*) to shape the language of nomination.[10]

That the poem teaches us, by virtue of being its readers, about the ways in which nature taught early humans implies even more entangled pedagogical alliances: Like nature, the poet instructs, through the example of nature instructing early humans. For just as "nature the creator" (*natura creatrix* 5.1361–78) taught humans the art of sowing and grafting, the poet

9 In the poet's account of the chance discovery of fire and its uses (5.1091–1104), one teacher is the sun who instructed humans in the arts of cooking: "the sun taught [them] how to cook their food and soften it with the heat of flame since they saw many things growing tenderly ripe" (*inde cibum coquere ac flammae mollire vapore /sol docuit, quoniam mitescere multa videbant* 5.1102–3). In the lines preceding these, Lucretius offers two different ways that humans may have encountered fire by chance, either through lightning (*fulmen* 5.1092) or through the friction created by tree branches in the wind. In this second account, the words *arbor* (5.1097) and *ardor* (5.1099), "tree" and "fire," create another elemental analogy just as *lignis* and *ignis* (wood and fire), did in the explicit analogy between letters of the alphabet and atoms (1.907–14) discussed in Chapter 1. Gordon Campbell notes in his commentary that "the play on *arbor/ardor* [...] perhaps is more effective than *lignum/ignis,* since the later seems to emphasize Anaxagoras' false contention that wood contains fire ready-made." Gordon Lindsay Campbell, *Lucretius on Creation and Evolution: A Commentary on* De rerum natura, *Book 5, Lines 772–1104* (Oxford University Press, 2003), 326.

10 "And nature compelled them to produce the various sounds of speech, and utility shaped the names of things" (*At varios linguae sonitus natura subegit / mittere et utilitas expresssit nomina remum* 5.1028–29).

designates the birds and the west wind Zephyr as the natural teachers of musical arts for their human students.[11]

> At liquidas avium voces imitarier ore
> ante fuit multo quam levia carmina cantu
> concelebrare homines possint aurisque iuvare. (DRN 5.1379–81)
>
> Moreover imitating the liquid songs of birds with the mouth came long before people were able to fill and delight their ears with singing of pleasant songs.

In these first lines, Lucretius creates an impression of growth and overflow that characterize both the original site of song and the motor for continuity: the liquid, bird-imitating voices flourish into the singing of songs (*carmina cantu* 5.1380). Within the brief space of these verses, singing arises from imitating the flowing voices of birds and spills into the melodies of songs sung by humans. In a prior scene depicting the development of language, birds and the power of their song also play a lively role, evoking the magical powers of song:

> postremo genus alituum variaeque volucres
> .....
> et partim mutant cum tempestatibus una
> raucisonos cantus, cornicum ut saecla vetusta
> corvorumque greges ubi aquam dicuntur et imbris
> poscere et interdum ventos aurasque vocare. (DRN 5.1078, 1083–86)
>
> Lastly [there is] the race of winged beings and various birds [...] and some birds alter their raucous songs according to the weather (or seasons) just as the noble race of crows and the bands of ravens [do], when they are said to summon the water and rains and even invoke the breezes and winds.

The songs of crows and ravens seem to have incantatory powers, although Lucretius distances himself with inclusion of "*dicuntur*" "they are said." Here again the birds are the only ones given a voice, perhaps the voice of instruction (*voces* 5.1379) that the humans imitate through repetition, as if the birds were singing: "Repeat after me and purse your lips, human

11 *Natura creatrix* recalls the first lines of the poem: "O, Mother of the race of Aeneas [...] / nourishing Venus" (*Aeneadum genetrix* [...] / *alma Venus* 1.1–1.2). *Creatrix* and *genetrix* are linked, though not etymologically, in the sense of production, creation, and birth. *Gigno,* to give birth, produce, bring forth, to be born (in the passive); creo, to make, produce, create (an older form *cereo* may be connected to *Ceres,* a divinity associated with agriculture). *Natura* instructs humans and, through trial and error, guides them toward creative invention — rather than human self-taught destruction, for example, in the cruel and ultimately self-defeating use of animals in warfare (5.1297–340).

pupils." Long before humans learn the poetic language of songs, they are first instructed by birds in the development of musical instruments by using their own bodies, learning how to shape their mouths and modulate their breath, and then the wind, hissing through hollows of reeds, teaches early humans to blow through hollowed-out reeds. It's worth noting the pedagogical sequence of the lessons: Relying on imitation, the students start with the basics, coordinating mouth and breath, and then refine their methods to include an instrument, a reed, played by finessing the mouth-breath relation. The instructor for wind instruments is the west wind Zephyrus, noted for its gentle, mild breezes. "And the whistling hissing of the West Wind through the hollow reeds first taught the rustic people to blow through the hollow reed pipes" (*et zephyri cava per calamorum sibila primum / agrestis docuere cavas inflare cicutas* 5.1382–83).[12] Sibilance, according to the ancients, is not a nice sound; Quintilian comments that the overuse of the *s* sound makes for harsh and unsophisticated effects.[13] However via the act of a resonant transposition and imitation, the distasteful sibilant hissing, the sounds of wind-made instruction, becomes refracted and refined by the early music students while playing their wind instruments. And in this manner the wind's blowing through the hollows of reeds is domesticated by the human invention. Imitating the wind hissing, humans learn to inflate the hollowed-out hemlock reed: Wild sound becomes musical sound in hollowed reeds. The repetition of the word "hollow" both underscores the act of imitation (*cava / cavas* 5.1382, 83) and human improvement. The wind's breeze that naturally blows through the hollow of reeds is cultivated by means of human breath. And the improvements made by these early shepherds inform the lesson itself and shape its music. The repetition of the *k* sound that mark these words, *cava* and *cavas,* reechoes in the words *calamorum* and *cicutas* in the two verse lines and in *carmina cantu* (5.1380), "the singing of song" at the moment the birds' voicing becomes human song.[14] Notable here are the different forms of instruction. The natural teachers rely on humans to repeat the sounds heard and then develop them into skills, whereas the poet-teacher requires that we listen to his instruction which includes both using our senses and applying the right understanding (*ratio*) to what we experience with our senses.[15]

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12 The Latin verbs *doceo,* to instruct, and *disco,* to learn, are both related to the Greek verb, διδάσκω (*didaskō*), to learn, instruct, train. The etymological connection keeps both activities, learning and teaching, in close contact, making the subjects of the actions — teachers and students — more like collaborators, or like actors skilled in performing multiple roles. H.G. Liddell et al., eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford University Press, 1968), and P.G.W. Glare, ed., *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 1982).

13 L.P. Wilkinson, *Golden Latin Artistry* (Cambridge University Press, 1963), 13.

14 This reminds me of the English transliteration of the barred owl's hooting: "who cooks for you cooks for you-all."

15 By book 5, Memmius and the reader have graduated in a sense; at this point Lucretius trusts that we have been schooled well enough to figure out certain lessons all on our own: "Now by what manner the nature of iron was discovered, it is easy for you to understand yourself, Memmius" (*Nunc tibi quo pacto*

Repetition and imitation, two elementary forms of instruction practiced both by students and teachers, work in sync and create a tempo for the musical transmission from the natural world to early humans as they learn and enjoy musical aptitude.

> inde minutatim dulces didicere querelas,
> tibia quas fundit digitis pulsata canentum
> avia per nemora ac silvas saltusque reperta,
> per loca pastorum deserta atque otia dia. (DRN 5.1384–87)
>
> After that little by little they learned sweet plaintive strains which the tibia, when tapped by the players' fingers, pours forth, having been discovered, through trackless groves and forests and woods, in the deserted places of shepherds and in idle daylight.

The musical crescendo is steady yet incremental, "little by little" (*minutatim* 5.1384), as if marching to a beat of the repeated *d* and *t* sounds tapped on the hollowed reed pipes, now transformed into a flute (*tibia* 5.1385) both wind and percussion instrument. The tibia's melodious sounds of lament travel, seemingly unbounded, in every direction, through all terrains — groves, woods, and forests — and yet the music roams alone, secretive in trackless lands (*avia* 5.1386), deserted and abandoned (*deserta* 5.1387). The flute is what governs the three-line relative clause, as if once discovered (*reperta* 5.1386), it pours forth excessively, making songs expressively, on its own. The fluting fills a strange kind of pastoral scene, strange because deserted by its shepherds and yet filled with shepherds' song. As if the discovery in isolation happens in places that would be filled with human activity but are empty, hollowed out, recalling the scene of the *sui generis* echoes in book 4 (4.603–8). Strangest of all, the tibia pours forth into idle daylight (*otia dia* 5.1387), linguistically a challenging construction but thematically germane to the *locus amoenus*, a mid-day place of leisure where shepherds would rest and would play music together.[16] It's a common scene, for instance, in Theocritus's first idyll, where a shepherd recounts to another shepherd the tale of Daphnis, whose sympathetic music animates animals and the natural world. Yet this scene in Lucretius both is and isn't the site of pastoral: It features song, spreading widely through the woods and groves, and yet it is lacking the inhabitants who would be there habitually, the shepherds

ferri natura reperta / sit facilest ipsi per te congnoscere, Memmi. 5.1281–82).

16 In his discussion of the term in Indo-European culture, Émile Benveniste notes that there is no word for "commerce." Rather, it is expressed through what it is not: a negation of leisure, as in **σχολή, ἀσχολία** [*scholē, ascholia*]; *otium, negotium.* With this in mind, the etymology suggests a temporal relationship between the opposing terms such that leisure in order to derive its negation, work, would be first in the sequence. It also helps to make sense of the phrase *"otia dia."* The sweet woodwind tunes, newly learned, pour forth into a time of pleasures and a place deserted by even the most pastoral of labors. See Émile Benveniste, *Dictionary of Indo-European Concepts and Society*, trans. Elizabeth Palmer (HAU Books, 2016), 105.

sweetly playing plaintive songs. Or perhaps, like Daphnis, a solitary and love-stricken shepherd has gone away from his friends, to pipe songs of his despair to the woods. Is this a reflection of an ambivalence regarding origins and human invention? For the scene is also reminiscent of a similar one where echoes resound, throughout a remote and resonant forest in which the rustic inhabitants imagine that the source of the echoes is the music making of Pan and his cohort and thus create companionship for themselves (4.580–89).[17]

Who is doing the discovering or overhearing (*reperta* 5.1386)? Is it the landscape, the missing persons, Lucretius's audiences? Perhaps because the subject is unnamed — though the context is the musical education of rustic people (*agrestis* and *homines* 5.1383, 5.1381) — we readers are carried along by these sad songs into the next lines, where we hear of the beneficent effects of what has been discovered: Music soothes and sates human beings with its pleasure. The tibia's lament is capacious and dynamic, pouring out in all directions into locales abandoned and yet filled with light and lack of cares. It seems to move as if in the absence of human beings but in their service.

In this next crowded scene, the temporality is marked twice: "when" (*inde* 5.1384) at the head, from that time and from that place where music first arose, and "then" (*tum* 5.1391) at the end, enclosing and protecting it. "These things softened their hearts and pleased them along with satisfying food, because then everything is enjoyable" (*haec animos ollis mulcebant atque iuvabant / cum satiate cibi; nam tum sunt omnia cordi* 5.1390–91). This "then," although locally identifies the time when postprandial music soothed and sated, becomes part of a larger claim about difference. In the succeeding lines this "then," emphatically pounded out in its repetition, on the one hand, is working on us pedagogically through sonic patterns, and, on the other, is what will stand in contrast with the "now" of the poem. While the difference underlines the entwined relationship between music "then" and music "now," the emphasis on temporality itself marks the connection between the two times, a relationship that will be reworked and reconsidered as the passage progresses, asking us to pay attention to the ways the poem itself stages these sets of terms. Lucretius focuses us on the different temporal periods because he wants to underline these distinctions so that they participate in his polemic pertaining to progress and cultural development, in particular their failures to address human suffering (discussed in detail in Section iii.)

Meanwhile he marks time through the architecture of the poem with the repetition of the five-line passages which activates in another dimension the work of the sonic patterning. The verses depict two nearly identical scenes that occur at the opposite ends of history, the human history of the poem, the first in the present of the poem and the second in the past before the invention of poems that would record the history of humans. The reprise of the passage from book 2 here activates the tension between what appears as both similar and different.[18] Locally the scene is colored

17 I discuss in detail this passage in Section iv of Chapter 1.

18 Cum tamen inter se prostrati in gramine molli.

with the sound of music, infusing the pleasures with the sonic resonances, which, having flooded in, obviate any need for overt mention.

> saepe itaque inter se prostrati in gramine molli
> propter aquae rivum sub ramis arboris altae
> non magnis opibus iucunde corpora habebant
> praesertim cum tempestas ridebat et anni
> tempora pingebant viridantis floribus herbas. (DRN 5.1392–96)
>
> And so often they sprawled out in groups on the soft grassy turf next to a stream of water under the branches of a tall tree, and, without great expense, they used to take care of their bodies pleasurably, especially when the weather was laughing and the seasons were painting the green grasses with flowers.

Before discussing the repetitions that ring through this passage and what they might suggest, I want to inhabit this scene, another *locus amoenus,* now fully populated and domesticated in contrast to "deserted places of shepherds" (*loca pastorum deserta* 5.1387). The music is the narrative impulse, filtering down and lingering after the meal has ended when everything is pleasing (*nam tum sunt omnia cordi* 5.1391). The music of the scene's language creates an ample phonic accompaniment. The repeated *a* and *r* sounds, the paired *–is* and *–ae* endings in the second line, the metrical regularity, rich in spondaic feet, with a total of ten heavy syllables, seven in a row with only four light syllables, the many *i* sounds noticeable throughout, to my ears all these musical elements contribute to the pleasurably mesmerizing sense of being both in and out of time folded within the languor of the scene. The movement between times and in time, characterizes not only the moment of otiose repose but also the form of echo itself, as it travels in time, through time, and out of sync, untethered from the authority of metronomic tempo. Mixed into the landscape are the sounds of weather (*tempestas* 5.1395) laughing (perhaps a relative of music teacher Zephyr) and of the season(s) (*tempora* 5.1396) coloring, with their own related artistic ambitions, the vernal scenery painted with wildflowers.

Weather, seasons, time, tempo (*tempestas, tempora, tempus*): What is the tempo of weather, the rhythm of storms, in and out of season, the time of unseasonable weather? Through the words' etymologies a set of measurable qualities and temporal connections materialize. *Tempestas* is a portion,

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> propter aquae rivum sub ramis arboris altae
> non magnis opibus iucunde corpora curant,
> praesertim cum tempestas arridet et anni
> tempora conspergunt viridantis floribus herbas. (DRN 2.29–33)
>
> When nevertheless sprawled out in groups on the soft grassy turf next to a stream of water under the branches of a tall tree, and, without great expense, they take care of their bodies pleasurably, especially when the weather laughs and the seasons sprinkle the green grasses with flowers.

a space of time, season, a period, time with respect to its physical qualities, thus weather, season. It is formed from the word *tempus,* whose root is related to the Greek verb τέμνω (*temnō*), to cut, divide.[19] *Tempus* then means a section, a portion or period of time, the state of the times, circumstances, measure, meter, verb tense. What can be cut, divided, and measured as material is apportioned into temporal fields. There is still more I want to draw from these words' etymologies. A rhythmic sequence is predicated on the repetition of regular beats, both connected and cut. Atomic time is cyclical, circulating echoes, neither looking back at a nostalgic, idealized past nor looking forward toward the hopeful promise of future progress. What is of great importance are the distinctions, to be capable of making them and not be seduced by the easy excess of homologies. Only then can we discover where the distinctions blur, where the words are music without words, where the cut both joins and separates. In our passage with these words, *tempestas* and *tempora,* in succession, both active subjects of the two main verbs — one laughs and the other paints — the materiality of the tempo and the environment are being brought into relation through their etymological associations and generative acts, their creation of aural and painterly effects. The laughter of weather, spread out over four initial spondaic feet, is luxuriously heavy, not a meager titter. We might hear it echoing in the plashing of the streams of water, a surround of environmental sounds harmonizing with the scene and its lessons. The weather and seasons continue their active roles in the temporal lives of early humans while instructing them in the ways of embodied pleasures. The musicality of the scene we apprehend both through its description and its sonic play, and when repeated, likewise, both the sound and the sense echo the music between the passages.

Now, what are the implications of the nearly identical repetition of the scene for both the present instance and the earlier one? In its first itera-

19 The word "atom" derives from this verb as well, preceded by an alpha privative. An atom is therefore what is not divisible, the smallest possible unit of matter. Thus, division is what that makes time and weather possible, and time and weather are made up of what is indivisible, and invisible, i.e., atoms. Although Cicero uses the Latin word, *ătŏmus,* Lucretius never uses the word. One dull explanation concerns meter, the first two short syllables in the word are particularly awkward for hexameter, but there's a much more interesting explanation, as James Warren writes: "Lucretius offers a range of Latin terms to capture what it is that atoms do. In just a few lines of DRN 1, for example (1.54–61), he uses the terms *rerum primordia* ('first beginnings of things'), *materies* ('matter'), *genitalia corpora* ('productive bodies'), *semina rerum* ('seeds of things') and *corpora prima* ('first bodies'). Later books occasionally also use *corpuscula* ('little bodies') and *elementa* ('elements'). This range of terms belies any complaints of the lexical poverty of Latin and allows Lucretius to express the importance of atoms by noting the various roles they play as the fundamental existents, components, and material substance, for all other things." James Warren, "Lucretius and Greek Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Lucretius,* ed. Stuart Gillespie and Philip R. Hardie (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 22.

tion early in book 2, Lucretius wants to render a contrast in scenes and senses, comparing luxurious banquets in an opulent palace to sitting in the open air on a grassy bank where friends converse (2.20–33).[20] In the earlier instance, the passage works to underline a difference in ways of living, championing one counter to the prevailing attitudes of affluent and powerful Roman men. After a cry of despair for the suffering of humans, "O the miserable minds of humans," (*o miseras hominum mentes* 2.14) who strive for wealth and status — a cry echoed in book 5 "O unhappy race of humans" (*o genus infelix humanum* 5.1194) — Lucretius puts his proposition plainly: All that is needed is a body freed of pain and a mind freed from care and fears; money and status are useless, vain endeavors. His cure for human suffering both takes up and elaborates the scene in the proem of book 2, where the pleasure of watching others, the sweetness of being at a remove, to dwell in the sanctuaries (*templa* 2.8) well-fortified by the doctrines of the wise, withdrawn from the ambitious striving and agonistic relations of the Roman elite; this is the medicine for the sickness that afflicts Rome.[21] As readers, the pedagogical character of these lessons asks us to see the differences, to distinguish the seasons and eras, while appreciating the rhythm of repetitions, returning with less matter and more insights.

In this scenic passage's second appearance in book 5, slight shifts in syntactic and semantic values mark the contrast between the two while reiterating the image's allure. The time stamp at the head already indexes one of the differences. Rather than positing a moment set apart, differentiating it from others with "when nevertheless" (*cum tamen* 2.29), the second version commences in the midst of continuity, with the many, repeated moments that often arise from the pleasures of music and satiety — "and so often" (*saepe itaque* 5.1392). The second is thus not only a repetition of an early passage but is itself introduced as an iterative activity, a repeating recurrence of continuously available enjoyment, at least in the past for the early human students. Because worthy of repetition, the pleasures of sitting in the grass have been and are continually available, just as the sun, birds, breezes, those first teachers, have been and are continually offering up their models for us to imitate, and meanwhile the scene offers once more an exemplary depiction of how to live in accordance with atomic principles. Another alteration in the second instance concerns the tense and form of the three main verbs: (*currant*) *habebant*; (*arridet*) *ridebat*; (*conspergunt*) *pinge-*

20 In a description of sumptuous but useless excess, the musical reference underscores another contrast: Nature doesn't care whether or not "the house gleams with gold and shines with silver, or if the citheras echo through paneled and gilded halls" (*nec domus argento fulget auroque renidet / nec citharae reboant laqueata auruataque templa* 2.27–28). The musical complexity of the cithara (or lyre), although greater, hardly compares to the simplicity of reed pipes or the musicality of wind or water running in the stream.

21 *Templum*, also related to the Greek verb, τέμνω (*temnō*), designates a piece of ground or area of sky defined (in words) by the augur within which he took the auspices, thus a place set apart, distinguished from others. Glare, *Oxford Latin Dictionary*. I discuss this passage (2.1–6) in detail in Section ii of Chapter 1.

bant. One simple observation is that changing the tense to the imperfect in order to reflect the continuous and repeated nature of the actions in the past affects the meter of the lines. The added syllable needed for the conjugation of the imperfect tense, for instance in the pair *arridet/ridebat* (2.32, 5.1395) the one syllable present ending *-et* versus the two-syllable imperfect ending *-ebat,* requires a shortening of one syllable in the verb-stem itself. Hence, "the weather laughs," *arridet,* becomes "the weather was laughing continually," *ridebat*.[22] One might suggest that using the perfect tense would have allowed the passage to retain more of its original identity, but the perfect wouldn't have provided the temporality that the second version of the scene demands and that the imperfect tense ably delivers, the often-repeated scene of relaxation after the satisfactions of eating, touching, and the enjoyment of musical delights. And musicality connects closely to the didactic concerns of the poem, for this stylistic material is what the poet fashions to meet his teachings. The honey and melody sweeten and enact the atomic doctrine and consequently make us receptive to its cure. Lucretius delivers his teachings with the melodious voices of Pierian song, "as if to touch them with the sweet honey of the Muses" (*et quasi musaeo dulci contingere melle* 1.947), so that his poetry might occupy our minds, possessing and binding us until we perceive the nature of the all things (*naturam rerum* 1.950), and their patterns and shapes.

Both instances of the scene are replete with this sensual, sonic texture, rendered in the first as distinctly set apart , and in the second, as available previously to all. This emblem illustrates how to live a life according to atomic principles, both then and now, one that is not lacking in pleasure. The repeated experience of enjoyment, of the tactile, musical impressions, of undifferentiated touch — all animate a continuous experience of pleasure. Beginning with the instruction in music initiated first by the birds and the wind, musical enjoyments, having been multiplied, repeated, and augmented, reach a crescendo: "Then there used to be jokes, then conversation, then sweet laughter. For then the rustic muse was thriving" (*tum ioca, tum sermo, tum dulces esse cachinni / consuerant. agrestis enim tum musa vigebat* 5.1397–98). Is it the insistent beating on "then" (*tum*), that time past, that pushes ahead and moves onwards, or is the reiteration of a former time, repeated four times, a way of standing in place, as if returning each time to the same place? Both rhythmic movements — running ahead, compelled by the beat and staying in place as if going around in circles — articulate the gestures of joking and laughing with an iterative rhetoric of echo and musical reprise. The pleasures multiply, all augmenting the soundscape with human voicings, chatter, a sing-song kind of laughter (*cachinni* 5.1397), all thriving then because the rustic muse flourished. Who is this rustic muse (*agrestis musa* 5.1398)? A likely relative of the Pierian Muses is one possibility, while Pan is another, perhaps referring back to his appearance in book 4

22 With the pair *curant / habebant,* rather than using a verb with a one syllable stem (*arrideo / rideo; conspergo / pingo*), the initial letter *h* is elided with the letter *a* in the final syllable of the word *corpora* that precedes it so that both phrases metrically contain the same number of syllables.

along with the other mythical forest creatures, playing out their woodland melody (*silvestrem musam* 4.589). With the overgrowing sense of sounds and voices, carried along with the repetition of *tum* — this "then" does carry forward *and* circle back, moving in both time and space to the rhythmic and sonic pulse, the repetition pulsing in both directions simultaneously, making the past more distant still while insistently marking the present.

The laughter and thriving in the final scene of musical instruction in book 5 continue to repeat with another iteration of "then" (*tum*), "sweet laughter" (*dulces cachinni* 5.1400), and the act of flourishing (*vigebat / vigebant* 5.1398, 1404), the final word in both passages, advancing seemingly unstoppably. In this pedagogical scene, the instructor of dance, festivities, and dressing up is now no longer an external, natural one but a human attribute: the joyful pleasures (*lascivia laeta* 5.1402) engendered by the sweetness of making musical sounds.

> tum caput atque umeros plexis redimire coronis
> floribus et foliis lascivia laeta monebat
> atque extra numerum procedere membra moventis
> duriter et duro terram pede pellere matrem
> unde oriebantur risus dulcesque cachinni
> omnia quod nova tum magis haec et mira vigebant. (DRN 5.1399–1404)

> Then, happy mirth used to instruct them to adorn their head and shoulders with crowns woven with flowers and leaves, and to dance with an extra beat, with their limbs awkwardly moving out of time, and to beat mother earth with an awkward foot, from which merrriment and sweet laughter used to grow because all these things were flourishing to a greater extent then, being fresh and marvelous.

Here ecstatic mirth, as a directorial force, steers humans toward movements, unleashing musical joyfulness into dance. Human delight engenders an experience, rendered with an overflowing rush of flourishes, while wonder and novelty augment merriment. Overly energetic moves enable extra foot work, and the score, amplified through gestures, is enhanced by the vegetal costumes adorning the dancers' bodies. The pounding of the earth with too many steps gives rise to peals of laughter, ringing throughout, causing everything and one to flourish still more in the fresh wonder. These mirthful pleasures depend on their own rhythms and times, independent of any need for development or refinement.

Because the lessons are enacted through the sonic patterns, an astonishment of phonic play is found in these lines, such as between the four consecutive words in line 5.1402: *terram pede pellere matrem.* The words *terram* and *matrem* are made nearly from the same letters, with the only difference being the extra *r* in *terram* and the extra *m* in *matrem,* a negligible distinction given that both words share all the same the letters. And "mother" "earth" (*terram … matrem*) embraces the pair of words, *pede pellere,* "to beat with the foot," which share in common the initial letter *p,* and the letter *e,* the only vowel in both, repeated five times. These two words gesturing

An Interlude: locus amoenus

To my mind, these musical acts and their echoes that sound through the poem animate a Lucretian learner, the student whom the poet has been cultivating throughout with these sonic gestures, and whom his poetic language simultaneously summons into being. A learner like the child in the programmatic account of the bitter medicine, that sick child who, seduced by the honeyed sweetness of the poetry, is tricked but cured. Seduction requires separation — the Latin verb *sēdūco* means to lead astray, to separate, to divide. I have wondered often how I might be led astray, separated from what I already know, in order to assume this attitude while reading this poem. How might I be the child-like initiate, make myself susceptible to the teachings, be charmed by the poetry and rhetoric, to receive what the poetry so ardently desires to transmit? And how might I simultaneously be another kind of reader, subsequent to the child-like, having metabolized the teachings? It's an awkward position: I need to have the capacity to be tricked in order to make myself vulnerable and, after the trick has been revealed, continue to be credulous or at least trusting, open to the possibility of transmission. Careful, slow reading of the text, I know now, brings me closer to this openness, but does my attention alone make me susceptible, seducible, separated enough? Or rather, might my inattention be needed for me to be transported into the thrall of the music, and, in a sense, dividing myself from myself? There are times when I enthusiastically recount to a friend a passage or image that I find so compelling or beautiful or stunning in its formulation, and it makes me wonder if I could be, at these moments, both student and teacher, instructing with my learning. On occasion, I notice something in the attention of my friend, some recognition, some wonder. I know too in those moments that this pedagogical magic is activated by speaking and gesturing, through my body, when trying to render aloud what I have perceived, in reading the poem aloud to myself. And while I am reading, what constitutes my experience of temporality? Do I inhabit more the time of the "now" (*nunc*) of the poem than that of the "then" (*tum*) of it? Or neither? Is this my entrance into what is out of time, outside of time, off the beat? There is a debt owed to belatedness for learning, separated both from myself and from my time, a debt owed likewise to Lucretian companions who tarry too in wonder.

together work from the inside of the phrase and incite the words that contain them (*terram … matrem*) so that mother earth becomes a participant in the dance and co-instrument to the beating of feet, like a companion played.

Meanwhile, this scene begins and ends with the repetition of *tum*. It is as if the words echo the four *tum* beats from the preceding act whose pleasure engendered this merriment (5.1397–98). The great quantity of repetitions increases the phonic play that is, for instance, mirrored thematically by the awkward feet, awkwardly clomping on the ground. And in the polyptoton, another figure of increase and repetition resounds (*duriter et duro* 5.1402) as the pounding of feet expresses iteratively a bodily joy. In this setting all are moved by the music whose movement is accentuated by the flowering attire crowning the dancers' heads and shoulders. Personally, as one who can relate to the endearing confession that the early humans care neither for keeping precise (metronomic) time nor dancing in time, I find it a relief. The dance students accompany the music with the percussion of their feet and stamping on the earth, whose role now comes full circle — from teacher to collaborator. Creatures of nature and earthly forces having initiated the instruction now become partners in the simple pleasures.[23] The scene of dancing, playing, making music, and laughter evokes a former time, a past that survives as a marked contrast to the present's diminished and threadbare version of performance and pleasure. In this pedagogical scene, we are schooled, in concert with the phonic patterning, in both spontaneous increase and the making do with what is at hand, aware that the basic ingredients are never lacking (another embedded atomic precept: all matter is made up of atoms which by definition are a limitless resource), and so laughter can thrive and pleasures multiply (*cachinni / vigebant* 5.1403, 4). Just as the elements of the alphabet both signify and enact in practice the atomic composition of all matter, these scenes of musical education and of music making also both express atomic principles and illustrate a life lived according to them. In these sound lessons I begin to apprehend a response to what that "something else" might transmit by listening to the sonic resonances, rhythmical repetitions, and echoes.

iii. Vigilant Friendships — Now & Then

To engage his audience and animate forms of learning, Lucretius composes roles for his students, both addressees and readers, and textually designs the scenes of learning. So it's notable that, in the pedagogical scenes of Lucretius's account of human development, he addresses the reader rarely

23 In an earlier passage, the earth is described as a universal parent and likewise a common tomb for all (*omniparens eadem rerum commune sepulcrum* 5.259). Lucretius sustains this remarkable claim about the earth with a strikingly similar description. "In the first place, no small part of the earth, scorched by incessant sunshine, greatly pounded by the force of feet, exhales mist and clouds of flying dust" (*principio pars terrai nonnulla, perusta / solibus assiduis, multa pulsata pedum vi / pulveris exhalat nebulam, nubisque volantis* 5.251–53).

and Memmius scarcely. Rather, in recounting historical movements and conditions, Lucretius is occupied with animating other sets of relations and dramas for his audience, thus he concentrates on drawing attention to the continuities and differences between former human historical conditions and contemporary ones. As a consequence, these temporal matters, in historical and musical contexts, are embedded in his arguments and illustrations. Here, then, the form of instruction entails working with juxtapositions to elaborate the distinctions. As we have seen, Lucretius's portrayal of musical instruction concludes with scenes of communal pleasure that resonate into the poem's present through the repetition of the vignette of collective repose, an emblem of a way of living, orchestrated by atomic principles and tempos.

In his last musical episode, Lucretius relates a more pointed comparison. In addition to cultivating a collective experience, music serves as a solace for vigilant, solitary characters, then and now, for whom sleep is elusive. After enjoying the communal pleasures of music and dancing, the participants retreat not to remote places but to the remoteness of night. While some find repose, others, wakeful and in need of solace, find companionship with music, a medicine for sleeplessness.

> et vigilantibus hinc aderant solacia somno
> ducere multimodis voces et flectere cantus
> et supera calamos unco percurrere labro;
> unde etiam vigiles nunc haec accepta tuentur
> et numerum servare genus didicere, neque hilo
> maiorem interea capiunt dulcedini' fructum
> quam silvestre genus capiebat terrigenarum. (DRN 5.1405–11)
>
> And for the wakeful, in lieu of sleep there were consolations: drawing out voices in many different ways and elaborating songs and running from above a round lip over the pipes; and whence even now the wakeful guards preserve this [traditional art] that has been passed down, and they learned to pay attention to the style of rhythms, but they do not take a bit more enjoyment of the sweetness than the woodland race of earth-born people used to take.

Playing music in this form of solitary consolation over time is practiced and passed down through time, but the pleasure derived from its sweetness is no greater. The melodic themes and rhythmic traditions echoing into the poem's present serve as companions to work. Yet while the vigilant guardians of power or wealth, the so-called "fruits of progress," are capable of creating forms of music with greater rhythmical complexity (as compared to the over-exuberant, clumsy yet charming, rustic players), the musical instruments are in the service of labor, rather than for the sake of pleasure, solace, or dance.

The passage marks an explicit comparison of temporalities and aesthetics through juxtapositions. Lucretius's elaboration on the music of the past is both more vivid and embodied: "running from above a round lip over

the pipes" (*et supera calamos unco percurrere labro* 5.1407). The phrase echoes the description of Pan playing music who "often runs his round lip over the hollow pipes" (*unco saepe labro calamos percurrit hiantis* 4.588). The connection suggests that the earlier performers had skills that rivaled those of the woodland divinity. In these figures of musical production, he portrays the intimate details of the relation between the body and instrument of the player. The past is designated explicitly as the source of the musical arts that are then handed down (*haec accepta* 5.1408) to the present, while the words "from where" and "now" (*unde* [...] *nunc* 5.1408) create an articulated link between the two. True, because music is like that; at almost any time, human beings are able to enjoy themselves with musical activities, but the contemporary, sleepless watchers (*vigiles* 5.1408) do not enjoy the pleasure a hair more (*neque hilo / maiorem* [...] *fructum* 5.1409–10) than those former ones (*vigilantibus* 5.1405). The connections are further underscored by the repetition of the main verb (*capiunt /capiebat* 5.1410, 1411) and by the sonic link that echoes between the two nouns (*genus / terri**gen**arum* 5.1409, 1411). But notably it is the woodland race of earth-bound people, the offspring of earth (*silvestre genus* [...] *terrigenarum* 5.1411) who are more carefully rendered and who return to conclude the comparison and bracket the other. Despite the complex rhythmic and melodic characteristics of the newer music, the older music feels more impressive and present. This emphasis heightens the distinction between the temporalities while diminishing the value of the present's advancement.

Lucretius underscores these juxtapositions of temporalities in order to elaborate and buttress his critique of progress and to expose our misconceptions about the value of novelty that progress relentlessly ushers in. But what is the process by which we will be released from our self-deceptions? Does intensifying the differences invite a more entwined engagement or a less enmeshed one? In which sense do the differences cleave? With no possible return to the past, what's to be done in the present, how best to live in our now? These distinctions shifting between the temporal frames collate with other sequences in Lucretius's description of the development of music. We begin with an individual musician and move to communal collaborative orchestration, only to return to the solitary isolation of nighttime vigils, ones that recall Lucretius's sleepless nighttime vigils composing his poetry (1.140–45); we move from lament to festive dance and song, then return to sophisticated, lonesome tunes; from rustic to urbane, from pastoral pleasures to wakeful labors, the labor that serves to guard the spoils of progress, a progress "won" over the course of time and distance from the past. Indeed, as well as being apposite to the poem itself, both sweetness and lament remain music's companions. For in all of its senses, sweetness permeates the poem: It is the honey that tricks the youthful patient and conceals the bitter taste of the absinth medicine, sugariness in service of atomic theory (a justification for Lucretius's poetry), and it is the sweet character of life that the theory seeks to create for those who abide with its teachings, the lived condition fantastically rendered in the proem to book

2.[24] Here it is the mellifluous sweet delight in poetry that laments the false faith in progress and mourns the losses, notably without idealizing the past. And all the while our attention is being sweetened by the poetry's sonic patternings to receive the atomic teachings.

Expanding and exceeding the temporal juxtaposition of "then" versus "now," Lucretius is persistent in working out the tensions between sameness and difference, continuity and rifts. Pushing and pulling on the temporal posts of present and past destabilizes the relationships by exposing them to each other. And in his didactic mode, often more like preaching than teaching, Lucretius renounces the promise of the future in what could be called "progress," and instead counsels us to make use of whatever is ready at hand, because with each new invention inevitably we devalue and disregard what we had once enjoyed, believing that each novelty promises to improve on its predecessor.[25] "A subsequent and better thing discovered usually destroys and changes our feelings toward all those older things," (*posteriorque fere melior res illa reperta / perdit et immutat sensus ad pristina quaeque* 5.1414–15). That humans are possessed by greed and envy for anything that is new and better is a source of pain for Lucretius, particularly because in no moment in our history have we learned this lesson: Greed — that hunger for acquisition, fame, power, and accumulation — enflames our seemingly unquenchable desire for vain pursuits, all masquerading as progress. To illustrate that human stupidity and violence are not specific to his contemporary moment but common to all phases of human history and also to thwart nostalgic attachments to the past, the poet imagines that when pelts were first used as clothing, there were fights to the death that caused bloodshed and destroyed the pelt itself, tearing it into shreds. Although now we have fine clothing and fine food, no more acorn meals and leaf beds, we are still fighting and destroying all, and just as heedlessly. So in fact we are no better than, no different from, those earlier humans. The problem is us, just differently dressed, fed, and bedded (5.1412–22).

> tunc igitur pelles, nunc aurum et purpura curis
> exercent hominum vitam belloque fatigant;
> quo magis in nobis, ut opinor, culpa resedit. (DRN 5.1423–25)
>
> Therefore, animal pelts then, gold and purple [clothes] now, trouble the life of humans with cares, and exhaust them with war. So all the more in my opinion the blame rests with us.

24 See 1.934–44 and 2.1–2.6. These passages are discussed in Chapter 1.

25 While Lucretius wants us to understand most novel inventions (*reperta* 5.1414) as worthless, certain discoveries he distinguishes for their great value, for example, the obscure inventions of the Greeks, i.e., Epicurus — which are still obscure because Lucretius has just begun to teach us about them (*Graiorum obscura reperta* 1.135) — and the discovery of music by the early shepherds (*reperta / per loca pastorum deserta atque otia dia* 5.1387). These discoveries suggest a different kind of progress, which if we were to learn and accept, would undermine the false promise of novelty.

The material differences are underlined and succinctly collated with the rhyming adverbs "then" and "now" (*tunc / nunc*) marking the contrast in time periods; we meanwhile are the same now as we were then. Indeed, the fault rests with us.

This is not the first time that we have learned that it is we who are the problem. At the end of book 3, in the dramatic scenes depicting mythological characters and their infamous punishments they receive eternally in death (Tantalus, Sisyphus, Tityos, and the Danaids), Lucretius declares that all these characters, who are said to suffer endlessly in some make-believe afterlife, are not epic in the least, but rather are alive in this life and are our fellow inhabitants (*in vita sunt omnia nobis* 3.979). In fact, Tityos is here living among us (*sed Tityos nobis hic est* 3.992), and Sisyphus also exists in life before our eyes (*Sisyphus in vita quoque nobis ante oculos est* 3.995). Not only are we to blame for our fears and for scaring ourselves to death with nightmarish horrors, but we also are the cause, the originators, of our own suffering because of our own tormenting ideas about love. According to Lucretius, Venus, rather than ennobling us, reduces us to pathetic, self-wounding, self-deceived characters. "This is our Venus" (*haec Venus est nobis* 4.1058). Again, it is we who are responsible for our own miseries. In romantic love, we manufacture our own sorrow and anguish, crushed by wounds and indignities. Accusing or trying to appease divine forces only makes matters worse. For all blame rests with ourselves; all suffering, in short, is ours, in this life, now. What blame tries to deflect is accountability: If we are responsible for our suffering, then it rests with us to learn well Lucretius's atomic lessons and suffer less. We can keep walking around like an anguished Tityos or a pathetic Venus — or not. Lest this be mistaken for individualistic self-determinism, I need to emphasize that this work is collective (*in nobis*), founded on communal interdependence and mutuality. So it's in our hands now.

Yes, it is true that the woodland race of earth-born humans (*silvestre genus* [...] *terrigenarum* 5.1411) may have frozen and starved, whereas we have plenty. Still more true, however, is that we are deceived about the limits of achievement and pleasures, and we are harmed by excess. Constant striving only wastes the matter of life, wears us away. It's all useless. For what appears as augmentation, an increase in matter, doesn't nourish us, but consumes us. Nothing escapes ruin. "Therefore, the race of humans labors in vain always uselessly and wastes away life with worthless troubles" (*ergo hominum genus incassum frustraque laborat / semper et in curis consumit inanibus aevum* 5.1430–31). Here we humans, ever striving, ever laboring, ever augmenting, are hurled overboard into the depths. We are now the ones at sea, the shipwrecked, the ones heavy with cares rather than those sweetly watching from the shore, aware of the limits of matter.[26] And from this

26 Worth mentioning in this context is a scene at the end of book 2 in which the human condition and the cycles of birth and decay are rendered in yet another light. Here the earth, once generously plentiful, former protector and instructor, now is depleted, and the old ploughman mourns its exhausted condition with his melancholic reflections.

depth of delusions comes an endless swell of war and destruction, ever increasing. Lust for power and mindless belief in progress "drove life little by little into the bottom of the ocean and from the depths agitated huge raging waves of war" (*idque minutatim vitam provexit in altum / et belli magnos commovit funditus aestus* 5.1434–35). While little by little early humans were taught music by imitating forms of nature, instructed by the birds and the wind, we have learned nothing beyond how to gorge ourselves, feeding on unrestrained greed for extravagant gains. Now music can only offer companionship for those who vigilantly protect the excesses that humans limitlessly strive to accumulate but all in vain.

So as neither to discourage us nor allow us to fall to pieces, dejected on the floor in utter despair, Lucretius, steadfast in his mission and his aspiration to guide us to the shore, introduces another set of vigilant instructors: the sun and moon. The ever-wakeful watchers of the world offer and animate a further set of natural lessons, potent as the medicine of healers. The celestial pair know the fixed order and limit of matter, and each, with their particular kind of light, illuminates and guides. If we humans would attend to their quiet instruction about the passage of time, we would grasp how to live with the rhythm of the seasons and within the limits, defined by a certain order and design, and illuminated by these celestial models of atomic principles. In their vigilance, the poet and the planetary teachers are united in their pedagogy: Poetry through its sonic patterns teaches us what the sun and moon offer through their corporeal *exempla*.

> At vigiles mundi magnum versatile templum
> sol et luna suo lustrantes lumine circum
> perdocuere homines annorum tempora verti
> et certa ratione geri rem atque ordine certo. (DRN 5.1436–69)
>
> But the vigilant watchers of the world, the sun and the moon, illuminating the great revolving precinct all around with their light, taught humans well that the seasons of the years revolve, and matter is governed by a fixed pattern and a fixed order.

Watchful, vigilant figures, whether poet or planets, teach humans the ordering of the world around them (and even at night when asleep, Lucretius

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> iamque caput quassans grandis suspirat arator
> crebrius, incassum magnos cecidisse labores,
> et cum tempora temporibus praesentia confert
> praeteritis, laudat fortunas saepe parentis. (DRN 2.1164–67)
>
> And now the old ploughman, shaking his head frequently, sighs that his great labors had fallen down in vain, and when he compares the present times with past times, he often praises his parent's fortunes.
>
> Times present and past (*tempora temporibus* 2.1166) sit side by side, repeating continuously yet divorced due to loss, a loss that makes the distance feel that much more poignant.

claims, this vigilance persists).[27] The language of the lines echoes the architecture of atomic order. Patterns of repetitions promise reassurance — in contrast to the seemingly insistent, unchanging suffering borne of human greed and desire — modeling in their design an alternative perspective from which to view the atomic inter-workings of earthly and planetary beings. The visible, constant movements of planets collate with seasonal patterns. Sun and moon illuminating, night and day, watch over human affairs while their planetary motions luminously enact lessons for humans. In their yearly seasons and daily intervals, earthly cycles and celestial gestures possess a reliable rhythm, dislocated from and unmoved by human strivings. Reiteratively they meter and measure their temporal itinerary as they orchestrate their movements through the temple-like dome of the sky (*tempora … templum* 5.1438, 36).[28] The first line's melody of chiastic alliterations, *vigiles versatile* and *mundi magnum,* sounds in a chordal mode by playing with the syllables, *-num, -lum, mun-* and *lu- lu- lum, cum,* that occur regularly in the first two verses. The repeated *s* and *l* sounds of the illumination of sunlight and moonlight alternately score the scene like waves rolling in and out. Then in the third line, a different order of attention is set up with the chiastic verb-noun-noun-noun-verb sequence, leading into another pair of mirroring figures: (*certa ratione … ordine certo* 5.1439) the "set pattern" and "set order" that govern all human, astrological, and natural matters. The resonant celestial realm reverberates, where the music of the sun and moon, with their imbricated phonic echoing, conjures the pedagogical scene of resounding order and cyclical sense. The lesson offered by the poet, who teaches here in collaboration with the sun and the moon, is one of attention and vigilance that harmonizes planetary order and atomic matter.

In Lucretius's account of the development of human culture and civilization, the art of poetry, his métier, enters belatedly but prodigiously, at the very height (*cacumen* 5.1457) of human accomplishments. After the land has been divided and cultivated, after the sea flourishes with commerce, after treaties and alliances bind and define human communities, then, following a condensed recapitulation of civilization's advances, poets enter to recount human history to humans:

> carminibus cum res gestas coepere poetae
> tradere, nec multo priu' sunt elementa reperta.
> propterea quid sit prius actum respicere aetas

27 When sleeping, seemingly neither vigilant nor watchful, he dreams of composing his poem that orders the world according to atomic theory. For Lucretius, whatever we love and study, whatever we are eagerly engaged with, constitutes our dream's material. So just as the legislator dreams of lawmaking, the generals dream of fighting battles, poets dream of writing poetry. "Therefore I do this [write this poem] to seek the nature of things always and to set out in my native language my discovery" (*nos agere hoc autem et naturam quaerere rerum / semper et inventam patriis exponere chartis* 4.969–70).

28 See footnote 21 above on the etymological connections.

> nostra nequit, nisi qua ratio vestigia monstrat. (DRN 5.1444–47)
>
> At that time poets began to recount heroic human deeds in songs,
> for not much before had the letters of the alphabet been discovered.
> On account of this, our age is not able to look back at what was done
> before [the discovery of the alphabet], except where reason shows the
> traces.

Poets need the alphabet to set down in verse the songs that record human accomplishments, the writing of verse itself now being one of these accomplishments, exemplified by the poem at hand, in which the letters of the alphabet are the elements used to refer to themselves and the matter of song being composed. Poets with their alphabets assume the role of documenting and disseminating human affairs in song, although only those of recent history after the late discovery of letters (*elementa reperta* 5.1445). An important contrast is inferred here: The song which Lucretius composes records the matters (*res gestas* 5.1444) of natural and atomic phenomena, in addition to his teachings, whereas the songs of the earlier poets recount a truncated history of military deeds and human affairs. Song (*carmen*) is an aid to memory and learning, but the first poets are limited by temporal constraints that contract their poetic reach. In the atomist poet's hands, poetic capacity is not regulated by such restraints, fittingly confirmed by this very narrative that recounts natural affairs prior to human ones. For through deduction, by means of demonstration and via analogy — the epistemic practices that poem has instructed us in — we come to perceive the traces of the past (*ratio vesitigia monstrat* 5.1447). *Elementa*, letters and atoms, are the material the poet uses to transmit (*trader* 5.1445) the matter his poem conveys. A poetry shaped according to the designs of perceptible orders and patterns teaches us materialist doctrine, and can thus both transmit and recover the past, a past not bound by the alphabet's inventions. For the traces (*vestigia*) of history are inscribed in atomic theory, and *vestigia* like *simulacra* carry with them remainders bundled in residual clothing and ornamented with the patterns of their myriad formations and ruins, so that historical matter atomically resounds, echoes in our ears trained to hear it.

Meanwhile, little by little, human achievements accrued (the long list includes fashion to my delight), yet what Lucretius singles out among all the other advancements are the arts:

> carmina picturas et daedala signa polire
> usus et impigrae simul experientia mentis
> paulatim docuit pedetemptim progredientis. (DRN 5.1451–53)
>
> Regarding poetry, painting, and artfully polished statues, practice and
> also the inventiveness of a diligent mind together gradually taught
> them, slowly, step by step advancing.

Trial and error, chance, experience, utility, and investigation, all have played roles as instructors, and as a consequence humans learned these arts, little by little, with diligence, practice, and their own experience (*usus et impigrae simul experientia mentis* 5.1452), auto-pedagogic to a degree. When left to their own devices, humans are apparently plodding in their self-instruction. In the final four-word line, with three words beginning with the letter *p* and two ending with the adverbial suffix *–tim* (a favorite form for Lucretius), the glacially slow, step-wise, incremental process of human learning is audibly underscored. And with the repetition of the adverb *paulatim*, "gradually," in the next line, the scale shifts as the focus widens to encompass the span of ages. "For time," together with atomic theory, with its measured rhythms, "little by little, reveals each and all things, and understanding carries them onto the shores of light" (*sic unumquicquid paulatim protrahit aetas / in medium ratioque in luminis egirit oras* 5.1454–55). In this way, all matter is brought into the light, elevated, shining. "Thus they were observing one thing after another growing clear in their hearts, until they came to the summit of the arts" (*namque alid ex alio clarescere corde videbant / artibus ad summum donec venere cacumen* 5.1455–56).[29] At this ultimate, extreme limit (*cacumen*) of human culture, clarifying its process and formation, step by step, little by little, in increments, Lucretius ends the penultimate book of his poem. The question then perched at the topmost edge of the pinnacle is: what next? Does one more, tiny, incremental step precipitate the misstep that sends everything tumbling down into the depths? Here poetry too sits on this ledge and listens for the vestigial traces of the past.

Well-schooled and initiated into Epicurus's divine discoveries (*divina reperta* 6.7), we enter the last book. From the praise of Athens in the sixth proem, Lucretius leads us into the final trial, the Athenian plague at the end of the poem, a test for all the senses and apprehension. I've come to see the plague as both a master-class in Lucretius's poetic capacity to render human devastation and also a test of our capacity to apply the atomic medicine and cure ourselves, to face loss directly — the plague's devastations, past, present and future — and to tolerate the excesses of both language and death. Collaborating with our other teachers, Lucretius with various forms of instruction, through juxtapositions in temporalities, comparisons that mark both difference and continuity, has illustrated the order and patterns of all matter. And in doing so, he's dispelled any productive idea of progress. In this and with this, we are meant to receive the fullness

29 Lucretius uses the word *cacumen* twice, here and at the end of book 2 (5.1456; 2.1130). Books 2 and 5 are paired symmetrically, as the second and second to last books. While book 5 concludes with the highest achievements of human civilization, book 2 concludes with the perishability of the earth: Our planet is nearing the end of its cycle of birth and decay, as the image of the old ploughman illustrates (discussed in footnote 26). See Joseph Farrell, "Lucretian Architecture: The Structure and Argument of the *De rerum natura*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Lucretius*, ed. Stuart Gillespie and Philip R. Hardie (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 76–91.

of the poem, from the springtime hymn to Venus in its opening lines to the plague's utter devastation of the living, the waste and ruin at the end. Meanwhile, making my way slowly through these passages performs a form of reading that demands a generous attention to all that sounds in and among the words, lines, and books. The sonic patterning and echoes, manifestly not merely flourishes and poetic ornaments, work in concert with the atomic lessons — neither would be possible without the other — both are central to apprehend all that Lucretius teaches.

CHAPTER 4

by splitting sound and sense, they double to cleave

> Words are the burden of poems, poems are made of words.
>
> — William Carlos Williams, *Paterson*[1]

> The scattered cadavers, plague-ridden, corrupt, burned, decayed into dust. The cloud of germs produces the dust cloud. So, by the end of the poem the global result is the chaos-cloud. And everything begins over again. [...] Book Six ends with the labors of Mars, violent fighting amid the heaps of cadavers, and the poem resumes with the victory of Aphrodite over the god of war. Venus indefinitely revives what falls by violence. The final chaos, decay, is a beginning, through conjunctions and coitus or encounters. [...] The resumption is elsewhere, not necessarily at the point of the greatest fall, not necessarily at the time at which this, singular, enters the shadows. Elsewhere and it matters not where, at another time, and it matters not when. Indefinite in time and place. Nature, in everything, is turbulence of turbulence. And Lucretius's poem is written in a vortex. [...] It turns back on itself without meeting itself. It dies and is reborn, but elsewhere, in another time. Furnished with coefficients of chance. Hence the chorus of criticism since its production: it is disordered, its author is a maniac. No, Lucretius has written a text which exactly expresses the physics to be described. His discourse is rigorously true to its contents, that is, to nature.
>
> — Michel Serres, *The Birth of Physics*[2]

Controversy has not infrequently characterized the reception of the writing of both Lucretius and Saussure. That each has his own set of enemies or, worse still, dismissive readers, serves as a testament in my view to the provocative powers of each writer's work. What these readers stumble over are particular forms of contradictions, contradictions so perplexing and threatening that critics are moved to dismantle and neutralize them, by

1 William Carlos Williams, *Paterson* (New Directions, 1946), 243.

2 Michel Serres, *The Birth of Physics,* trans. Jack Hawkes (Clinamen Press, 2000), 138–39.

cleaving into more conveniently digestible bits both texts and writers. In the case of Saussure's projects, his materials needed to be parceled out into disciplinary bunkers, and in the case of Lucretius's poem, his critics devised intricate, even bewildering, strategies to isolate his poetic capacities from his materialist doctrine. For instance, one critic found lurking inside the poetry a religious fanatic (rather than an atomist poet on a mission) whose mere presence negates the materialist project, which simultaneously allows the critic to save the poetry by cleansing it of any atheistic and atomist contamination.[3] These apparent contradictions indeed exist but are more helpfully understood as tensions in these two writers' work, which, when followed up and dwelled within, and when read with generosity, offer not resolution but an expansion of their concepts that in turn precipitates an amplification of the role of their readers. Confronted with radical and revolutionary forms of writing that challenge existing power structures and value systems, institutional reactions tend to take a scandalized tone. That authorities when threatened respond in conservative, brutal, and shaming ways is no surprise; what is surprising (and perversely delightful) and also instructive, however, are the distortedly awkward readings and interpretations critics are compelled to propose in their attempts to immunize institutional power against revolutionary thought. And in both cases, the inoculation requires a splitting of sound from sense and a silencing of the echoes.

PART 1: ANTI-LUCRETIUS — AGAIN LUCRETIUS

i. The Brotherhood of Rivals

The supply of Lucretius's enemies flows from a seemingly endless source. While many of his contemporary poets and writers admired him (including Cicero and his brother Quintus, Virgil, Ovid),[4] beginning with early

3 Joshua T. Katz provides a review of how Saussure's work has been parceled out among different traditions to maintain exclusionary disciplines. See Joshua T. Katz, "Saussure at Play and His Structuralist and Post-Structuralist Interpreters," *Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure* 68 (2015): 113–32.

4 Cicero: "The poems of Lucretius, as you write, are [full] of so many flashes of talent, and also of great technical skills. But after you arrive [we will talk more about it]" (*Lucreti poemata, ut scribis, ita sunt multis luminibus ingeni, multae tamen artis. Sed cum veneris* [*ad Quintem fratrem*] 14.3 (ii.10[9].3)). D.R. Shackleton Bailey, ed., *M. Tulli Ciceronis Epistulae: ad Quintem fratrem et M. Brutum* (Cambridge University Press, 1980). Virgil: "Happy is he who was able to perceive the causes of things and threw under his feet all fear and inexorable fate, the clashing noise of greedy Acheron" (*Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas / atque metus omnis et inexorabile fatum / subiecit pedibus strepitumque Acherontis avari* [*Georgic*] 2.490–92). R.A.B. Mynors, ed. *P. Vergili Maronis Opera* (Oxford University Press, 1969). According to Virgil, this happy human not only defeated all fears, but also stamped out under his feet the noisy roar of the river in the un-

Christian writers through the nineteenth century, opponents of materialist philosophy found an adversary worthy of intense, passionate criticism.[5] Among the most notable are Jerome's fourth-century characterization of him as a suicidal lunatic, poisoned by a love potion,[6] and Cardinal Melchior de Polignac's *Anti-Lucretius, sive de Deo et Natura,* a Latin hexameter epic of over 1,200 lines, posthumously published in 1747, that simultaneously imitates Lucretius's poetic style and attacks his materialist doctrine, addressing a wayward atheist by the name of Quintus rather than the aristocratic Roman, Memmius.[7] His critics, with the exception of Jerome, are transported by Lucretius's poetic genius only to find themselves washed up on rocky shores, scrambling to find some way to contend with their problem — the poetry is so exceedingly excellent, but what to do with the materialist program that threatens their own religious doctrines and beliefs? Why does the aesthetic value matter that much? How is it that the poetic force prevents critics from completely disavowing the atomic theory? Might Jerome's approach have sufficed — discredit the man in order to obviate the need to dismiss either his poetic virtuosity or doctrine? (Or was Jerome such a philistine that he didn't recognize the aesthetic charm?)

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derworld. I love how Lucretius is described as being able to silence fears, that terrifying noise of a rumbling threat. Ovid: "The sublime songs of Lucretius will not perish until one [last and final] day will deliver the earth to destruction" (*Carmina sublimis tunc sunt peritura Lucreti, / exitio terras cum dabit una dies* [*Amores*] 1.15.23–24). E.J. Kenney, ed. *P. Ovidi Nasonis Amores, Medicamina Faciei Femineae, Ars Amatoria, Remedia Amoris* (Oxford University Press, 1995).

5 Cyril Bailey summarizes the ancient and contemporary debates about the origins and accuracy of Jerome's account of Lucretius's life, written nearly 400 years later in his entry for the year 95 BCE. Cyril Bailey, ed. and trans., *Titi Lucreti Cari De rerum natura libri sex,* 3 vols. (Oxford University Press, 1947), 1:8–13. Monica Gale updates Bailey's account in Monica R. Gale, "Introduction," in *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies: Lucretius,* ed. Monica Gale (Oxford University Press, 2007), 1–4. Lucretius's poem also had a positive reception by advocates of philosophy and science in early modern Europe. See Gerard Passannante, *Lucretian Renaissance: Philology and the Afterlife of Tradition* (The University of Chicago Press, 2011), for an excellent, contemporary study of the influence of DRN on early modern literature, philosophy, and science.

6 Jerome wrote: "[In the year 94] Titus Lucretius the poet is born, afterwards turned mad by a love potion, during respites from insanity he had written a few books, which Cicero edited later, he killed himself by his own hand in the 43rd year of life" (*Titus Lucretius poeta nacsitur, postea amatorio poculo in furorem versus, cum aliquot libros per intervalla insaniae conscripsisset, quos postea Cicero emendavit, propria se manu interfecit anno aetatis* XLIII). Quoted in Bailey, *Titi Lucreti Cari De rerum natura* (1947), 1:I.

7 De Polignac: "Truly, Quintus, you whom, being incautious, rash youth and pleasure, the enemy of the law, snatched up" (*Te vero, Quinti, praeceps quem forte juventus / incautum abripuit, legique inimica voluptas* 1.33–34). Melchior de Polignac, *Anti-Lucretius: sive de Deo et natura, libri novem,* 2 vols. (apud Johannem Nourse, 1748). Unless otherwise indicated, all Latin quotations from *Anti-Lucretius* are from this source.

De Polignac's poem, his *Anti-Lucretius,* is both so indebted to Lucretius's poem and so ardent in its denunciations, it's too tempting not to wonder if the cardinal protests too much. Might he be his own Anti–de Polignac? Although the poem was unfinished at his death in 1742,[8] de Polignac worked on it for forty years and had completed nearly nine books with plans for a tenth. His attacks on Epicurean philosophy and its representatives are myriad and unrelenting throughout the poem. For instance, he describes Lucretius as singing a song of seeds (or atoms) and paints an exaggerated image of his face bloated with wind, seeds spilling from his mouth: "Celebrating his seeds he used to sing with puffed out cheeks" (*Plenis cantabat ovans sua semina buccis* 4.14). Even in the mocking image, de Polignac renders Lucretius's subject and song still entwined. While his mission is to show how wrong the materialist thought was and how anti-religious the path that Lucretius and Epicurus championed, the cardinal does praise Lucretius for his poetry, if only in passing, and recognizes the powers of songs.

At the beginning of book 5 of *Anti-Lucretius,* de Polignac imagines Lucretius in obscurity, a madman (*demens* 5.35), singing still but harming none. He exhorts: Let him live in his Epicurean gardens, but alone, and may none of his companions go there in a crowded swarm (*nunc Epicureos habitare Lucretius hortos / at nulla comitum pergat stipante caterva* 5.22–23), where he pursues his seductive arts. "Let him gather myrtle and flowers, stained with the blood of Adonis, the beloved son of Venus" (*hic myrtum floresque legat; quos tinxit Adonis / sanguine, dilectus Veneri puer* 5.25–26). If not in the garden, the cardinal would have him settled in a variety of locales: on Mount Helicon with Bacchus and Apollo or in a cold cave listening to a drunken Silenus, raving and stammering. He renders a scandalous portrait of an adulterous Mars and his lovers, in which he places the poet singing, recounting his natural history and explaining in equally suggestive terms how, for instance, steaming hot "vapors from Earth's groin were released into the sky" (*et gremio Terrae missi in sublime vapores* 5.43). While the poet is transported through these ancient scenes, keeping company with mythic figures, he is continually singing and abundantly (*haec at plura canens* 5.50). Because the cardinal seems unable to stop the poet from being a poet, tucking him away out of sight appears to be the best stratagem. Indeed, in any of these otherworldly plots, the cardinal would wish for him a calm retirement, free from strife and noise, forever forsaken by philosophy, in obscurity harming no one.

> Non Sapientia amet. Lauro insignire Poetam
> Quis dubitet? Primus viridantes ipse coronas

8 Robert Hooke used a microscope to make the invisible visible and published his findings in *Micrographia; or, Some Physiological Descriptions of Minute Bodies Made by Magnifying Glasses. With Observations and Inquiries Thereupon* in London in 1665, four years after de Polignac was born in 1661. *Anti-Lucretius* was published in 1745 by Hooke's friend Abbé de Rothelin and translated into French prose in 1749 and into French verse in 1786.

> Imponam capiti, et meritas pro carmine laudes
> Ante alios dicam; dum scilicet ille docendo
> Abstineat; nec morifero ceu perfida Siren,
> Gestiat ignatas cantu male perdere gentes. (*Anti-Lucretius* 5.52–57)
>
> May Wisdom not adore him. Who would hesitate to distinguish the Poet with a laurel crown? I myself would be the first to set leafy crowns on his head, and I would consecrate him before others with deserving praise because of his song, that is so long as he abstains from teaching, and he doesn't exert himself with his deadly song, like the treacherous Siren, to destroy unfortunately unsuspecting people.

So, while the cardinal praises the poet for his poetic merit, above all others, the conditions are clear: He must never teach his deadly lessons and remain walled up in these mythological locales and gardens. Specifically, his abstention from preaching his message means not using his poetic powers to ensnare his listeners and trap them in his dangerous maw. For the poet's song, like that of the perfidious siren, threatens to prey on those who are unaware of the murderous consequences. The excess of fortification only further attests to Lucretius's powers. What would the cardinal have the poet do with his superior talent? His *Anti-Lucretius,* indebted to the poet's poetic capacity, might offer his oblique answer.[9] For a refutation filled with so much admiration and imitation aspires to not only rival but defeat an adversary. Yet their shared compulsion and determination to conquer their opponents joins the cardinal and the poet in an inexorable relationship, laboring alike to compose epic poems.

Voltaire, a contemporary of de Polignac and reader of his *Anti-Lucretius,* satirizes the cardinal and his aspirations in *Le Temple du Goût* (1733). Early in the drama, the cardinal and Lucretius meet in a crowded scene where Criticism, the star of the play and revered resident of the temple, comments on various luminaries as they arrive, whom she then seats in telling arrangements. Just after she has placed Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle next to Lucretius, the cardinal shows up. According to Criticism's narration, Lucretius blushes when he sees the cardinal enter the temple:

> [B]ut scarce had he heard him speak, he loved him. He ran and embraced him, confessed his errors and addressed him, in excellent Latin verse, to the following effect. "Blind as I was, I thought I saw *Nature;* I walked in the night, conducted by *Epicurus* whom I adored, like a *God,*

9 Ernest Ament details how the writer adopted much of Lucretius's vocabulary, neologisms, and archaic style, and writes: "Above all Polignac imitated those poetic and rhetorical elements that Lucretius employed to make his hard truths palatable to the non-philosophical Roman reader: alliteration, anaphora, asyndeton, chiasmus, hendiadys, the other figures of speech, and, in particular, the forceful use of metaphor and simile." Ernest J. Ament, "The *Anti-Lucretius* of Cardinal Polignac," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 101 (1970): 42.

> that conceited mortal, who made war with heaven, and dethroned the gods. The *Soul* appeared to me but a faint spark, which the night of death dispersed in air. You have vanquished me; I yield and confess the soul is immortal, no less than your name, your writings, and my verses." The *Cardinal* answered *Lucretius* in the language of that poet.[10]

While seemingly vanquished by the mere sight and sound of his denouncer, Lucretius, however, does *not* renounce his own poetry but marks out his own verses as immortal, distinguishing them by their inclusion in a select group: the soul and the cardinal's name and his writing. His confession of his own errors — mistaking nature for God, following and adoring Epicurus like a god — leads him to the stunning antithesis: the soul is immortal rather than ephemeral (notably, however, the soul's transience is described in the most poetic language as "the night of death dispersed in air" as if indeed made of atoms moving through the void). The soul's immortality, possessing the power of permanence, stands triumphant along with the cardinal's name, his writing, and the poet's verse. The character "Lucretius" in Voltaire's play seems to have sacrificed his own person to gain immortality for his poem, splitting himself, martyr-like, to save it. Rescued, his "verses" now appear in a new context, inducted into the literary and spiritual world of his critic. Meanwhile, his poetic capacities receive praise directly from Criticism, who notes his "excellent Latin verse" and gives him a seat of honor next to Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, "a writer of tolerably good verses" himself.[11] The cardinal too shows his deference to Lucretius by replying in Lucretius's language and poetic form rather than his own, with the result that the cardinal is easily mistaken for an "Old Roman" by the poets of antiquity present in the play's temple. And in another reversal, the cardinal is transported into Lucretius's world through the compliment of mistaken identity, and adopted into his culture through identification, suggesting that the Roman world might be preferable to the cardinal's at least on aesthetic grounds.

The cardinal's relationship to the poet, as portrayed by Voltaire and embodied in de Polignac's poem, is a rivalrous one. The fight to destroy the other is as if to the death, leaving only one person (or poem) standing. But do combatants ever leave the field of battle clean of any stain? I am thinking of a particular passage from DRN that describes bodily entanglement, equating the wounds of love with combat wounds:

> inritata tument loca semine fitque voluntas
> eicere id quo se contendit dira libido,
> idque petit corpus, mens unde est saucia amore.
> namque omnes plerumque cadunt in vulnus et illam
> emicat in partem sanguis unde icimur ictu,
> et si comminus est, hostem ruber occupat umor. (DRN 4.1045–51)

10 Voltaire, *The Temple of Taste: By M. de Voltaire,* trans. unattributed (printed by Robert Urie, 1751), 52–53.

11 Ibid., 53.

> The excited regions [of the body] swell with seed, and the inclination arises to eject it toward the place where dreadful desire is stretching itself, and it seeks a body, whence the mind is wounded by love. For the most part, all humans fall toward their wound, and blood spurts in that direction from which we are struck by the blow, and if it's hand-to-hand combat, red liquid drenches the opponent.

The wounded fall upon what wounds them: For just as the lover pleadingly seeks the body of desire that wounds, so too one combatant falls toward the other, and no one is left whole or untouched. Those who engage an enemy, intimately ensnared with a rival, will receive in return the red blood of conquest as an emblem of victory. One wounded by love (*amore* 4.1048), the other marked by red liquid (*umor* 4.1051): *umor /amor: amor /umor,* love and blood are deadly alike, for neither can be contained. Limitless, no place is safe; no one is ever free from stain, all infected by desire, by longing and want. Insight is always belated, already too late for those who are marked, drenched in blood (and semen), made destitute by love. What lives on are the traces, vestigial pain. Centuries after Lucretius's death, the cardinal died with his *Anti-Lucretius* unfinished, as in life, attached in death to his beloved rival.

ii. *dei vestigia*

> The poetry of Lucretius works its magic on everyone who is not quite immersed in the spirit of our time, but rather who sees himself occasionally as an observer of his contemporaries and their mental attitude.
>
> — Albert Einstein, "Foreword"[12]

Following in de Polignac's footsteps, Henri Patin, another eloquent hunter of contradictions and ardent admirer of Lucretius's artistry, appears on the scene. In his 1857 lecture, "L'anti-Lucrèce chez Lucrèce," delivered at the Académie Française, Patin describes how potently attractive Lucretius's poem is. The work "is so skillfully constructed, so plausibly managed, it is so passionate, so colorful, that it still attracts us, binds us, charms us" (*est d'une construction si habile, d'une conduite si vraisemblable, il est si passionné, si coloré, qu'il nous attire, nous attache, nous charme encore*).[13] As if under the influence, Patin's language, cadence, and phrasing are charmed by his fascinating subject. The particular characteristics that create such poetic power Patin indexes astutely in his analysis: "He was, in the highest degree, an observer and a painter; his descriptions of sensible phenomena, acts of thought, various affections, various states of the soul, faithful and living descriptions, separate themselves from the vain explanations of his atom-

12 Albert Einstein's introductory note to Diels's edition of DRN: Hermann Diels, ed. *T. Lucretius Carus De rerum natura,* vol. 2 (Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1924), VIa. Quoted in and translated by Passannante, *Lucretian Renaissance,* 215.

13 Henri Patin, "Du poëme de la nature: L'anti-Lucrèce chez Lucrèce," in *Études sur la poésie latine,* vol. 1 (Hachette, 1875), 118.

istic physics and psychology."[14] We see the prying apart begin, as Patin segregates the unwanted parts from the desirable ones, the atomic theory split off from the poetic charm.

Although put to work for useless, vain ends, Lucretius's descriptive proclivities unwittingly reveal, according to Patin, involuntary contradictions. Patin argues that it is remarkable, suspiciously fortuitous, that in the materialist poem the divine so often shows up, suggesting that Lucretius, unknowingly, was actually sympathetic to what he fought against with so much fervor. Indeed, the poet now can be rescued, situated on the correct side of the doctrinal divide. According to Patin's analysis, he supersedes de Polignac, and Lucretius then is himself the first Anti-Lucretius.[15] In fighting against the divine so sublimely, with so much conviction and ardor, he, Lucretius, in spite of himself, shows a deep understanding of divine powers. And by association, he is in fact a colleague of Patin. This is a truly clever, perverse move: In revealing his true character, Patin can claim that Lucretius is his own opposite, his very own enemy, with the happy result that they, critic and poet, are united, teammates in religious debate. For only "due to a fatal mistake, he turned away from his true path, and he was called by nature to another order of doctrines."[16] Patin throughout expresses such great sympathy for Lucretius, and in his desire to redeem him, to save him, he quotes de Polignac's admonition to Epicurus (here addressed to Lucretius): "You are fleeing from God's footsteps everywhere, but you cannot erase them; you, you, they pursue" (*dei vestigia passim / effugis, at delere nequis; te, te illa sequuntur* 9.329–30).[17] Meanwhile, he regrets that Lucretius lacked a better understanding of the material and spiritual worlds because then Patin wouldn't have to regret his exquisitely brilliant poetry being pressed into the service of the wrong cause. "The regret that the genius of Lucretius lacked a better cause and this cause [lacked] the genius of Lucretius, this regret [...] is perhaps the greatest homage that the author of the poem could receive" (*Le regret qu'au génie de Lucrèce ait manqué une meilleure cause, et à cette cause le génie de Lucrèce, ce regret* [...] *est peut-être le plus grand homage que puisse recevoir l'auteur du poëme*).[18] The wonderful implication of this elliptical inversion in the repeated phrase (the second iteration lacking the verb that itself signifies lack "et à cette cause le génie de Lucrèce") is that his *own* religious doctrine might have been charmed by Lucretius's beguiling, poetic genius. So, with tributes and regrets, Patin concludes his lecture by reiterating how the poem's hypotheses in particular seduce and thrill the imagination.[19] How much more might Patin's own

14 "[I]l a été, au plus haut degré, un observateur et un peintre; ses descriptions des phénomènes sensibles, des actes de la pensée, des diverses affections, des divers états de l'âme, descriptions fidèles et vivantes, se dégagent pour nous des vaines explications de sa physique, de sa psychologie atomistiques." Ibid., 118.

15 "Il est alors à lui-même [...] un premier anti-Lucrèce." Ibid.

16 For only "par une fatale méprise, il a été détourné de sa véritable voie, qu'il était naturellement appelé vers un autre ordre de doctrines." Ibid., 135.

17 Ibid., 127.

18 Ibid., 135.

19 "[H]ypothèses que séduisent et ravissent l'imagination." Ibid., 136.

imagination have been captivated, seduced, and charmed, if he were not so determined to follow "God's footsteps" (*dei vestigial*) and to amputate the materialist thought, severed from poetic capacities?

Postscript on Splitting

Not only did Catholic French scholarship of the nineteenth century perpetrate the splitting of Lucretius's poetry from its materialist philosophy, but the German philological tradition did as well. Theodor Mommsen, for instance, in 1854 writes: "It is a remarkable fatality, that this man of extraordinary talents, far superior in originality of poetic endowments to most if not to all his contemporaries, fell upon an age in which he felt himself strange and forlorn, and in consequence of this made the most singular mistake in the selection of a subject. [...] [T]he task of poetically unfolding this mechanical view of the world was of such a nature that never probably did a poet expend life and art on a more ungrateful theme."* Even modern commentators (Cyril Bailey, Diskin Clay, David West, Gian Biagio Conte) continue to entertain and discuss Patin's and de Polignac's critiques, curiously keeping them active in prominent scholarly discussions, as recently as in Monica Gales's 2007 introduction to the *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies: Lucretius*.† Why do they still grant any importance to these readings that are so patently biased and ham-fisted? It would seem below their dignity to mention them since unwittingly (?) this serves to resurrect the Anti-Lucretius spirit and suggests, to my mind at least, that they themselves may be enthralled or possessed by a kind of textual symptom, indexing a trauma that needs to return and to persist through its repetition. Trauma, because always unspeakable, remains nameless.

* Theodor Mommsen, *The History of Rome, Book IV,* trans. William P. Dickson (Scribner, 1909), 1558–59.

† See Bailey, *Titi Lucreti Cari De rerum natura* (1947), 1:17; David West, *The Imagery and Poetry of Lucretius* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), 29 with no citations, only the title of Patin's essay; Diskin Clay, *Lucretius and Epicurus* (Cornell University Press, 1983), 235–36; Gian Biagio Conte, *Genres and Readers: Lucretius, Love Elegy, Pliny's Encyclopedia,* trans. Glenn W. Most (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 5; and Gale, "Introduction," 3.

iii. Lucretius Teaches; Or, "By Indirections Find Directions Out"[20]

While not disavowing my own regrets and failures of vision, I have come to see these critics' suspect analyses and partial rejections from two different yet related perspectives. On the one hand, Lucretius cultivates a particular relationship with his readers that invites — nearly seduces — them to engage with his poem, even as they are predisposed to reject his atomic theory. And on the other, in recognizing openly the consolations won by belief in divine presence, he is able to provide compelling insights into how religious institutions function in order to then offer the greatest consolation of all, his atomic theory, which neuters religion, leaving the divine intact but distant and unconcerned with human activities. Because he seems truly to sympathize with the lure of the divine, his keen apprehension of religious sensibilities is liable to be turned against him to such an extent that his critics slander him with madness and misread his poem in their hunt for irreconcilable contradictions. Indeed, finally they pathologize him for his own failure to embrace the truth of the divine, as if his own lack of understanding was what he wanted to illuminate rather than the other way around. But it is precisely by means of his subtle understanding of religion that he cultivates the trust of his readers and affirms his identification with them. In demonstrating his sympathetic familiarity with the world of his readers, he charms and disarms them enough to receive his materialist instruction, his own poetic revelation. This solicitous relationship forms the basic texture of his teaching, dramatized in the many pedagogical scenes in which he acts, aspiring to catch and hold his reader. And to sustain the power of his pedagogy, Lucretius accesses the resources of poetry (the honey that keeps our lips to the cup) to render the atomic theory (the cure we drink from the same cup). If, as his critics did, we fail to understand how *entwined* the sound and sense of the poem are in their relationship as the co-creators of the phonic matter and materialist doctrine, we'll miss Lucretius utterly.

Ever ardent in his efforts to ensure his audience's salvation from the harms of wrong belief propagated by religious superstitions, Lucretius is hardly the atheist that de Polignac or Patin et al. accused him of being (though this stratagem handily allows them to rescue the poetry and even imagine a belated salvation for the poor poet beyond himself). Because his critics interpret both his relation to the divine and his understanding of the value of traditional religion according to their own agendas, they misrecognize the intent of his missionary enthusiasm and the attending pedagogical claims made on his addressees. And because they recognize and react so anxiously to the brilliant ways that Lucretius mobilizes and arranges all of his resources collaboratively in order to cultivate a relationship between teacher and student, poet and audience, the only recourse left

20 William Shakespeare, *Hamlet: An Authoritative Text, Intellectual Backgrounds, Extracts from the Sources, Essays in Criticism*, ed. Cyrus Hoy (W.W. Norton, 1963), I.ii.65.

is to pursue their mission, to split his poetic capacities from his materialist doctrine even more fervently, disavowing Lucretius's inspired teachings.

Lucretius, in imagining and articulating the position of the student-reader for the reader-student, works via analogy, his preferred pedagogical mode. He mirrors the relationship with his reader in the way he performs his engagement with Memmius, his addressee, that is, through the form of address, he animates the connection he wants to cultivate with his readers. But Memmius is neither cypher nor puppet, for he stands at one end of the journey, the beginning where the poet meets all of his readers. From there the poet articulates a bridge, a path to travel — inviting, instigating, challenging his readers to follow him from Memmius's position to his own materialist one. By showing how deeply and sympathetically he understands his readers and Memmius, he encourages them to move toward and through his teachings. And if, like Memmius, they may doubt or fear the path he is revealing to them, he responds with care, emboldening them to take heart. Whereas he delights in the satirical scorn he levels at his philosophical opponents, he treats his readers like accomplices, colluding with them, letting them in on his jokes, often at someone else's expense. To be sure, at times it looks a bit like tough love, but through his devoted concern for his readers (desiring that they will soon be peers lounging in the grass together), he is declaring both his kinship with them and their capacity to learn what he has to teach and has himself learned. The promise of arrival is available to all. For this is his calculus: Just as he is one of them, so, too, after metabolizing the poem, each one of them will be like him, or better, will join him in his mission to spread the atomist word.

Each time he anticipates a doubt, a reader's hesitation, or the wrong direction that he himself might have pursued and that he fears his reader also may head in, I perceive a tenderness in his genuine concern that his reader stick with him because he too has "been there." This didactic dynamic between poet and reader is activated throughout the poem. For example, Lucretius acknowledges the potential possessed by religion to lure readers away and to cause them to stray from the materialist path he is charting:

> Illud in his rebus vereor, ne forte rearis
> *impia* te rationis inire elementa viamque
> indugredi sceleris. quod contra saepius illa
> religio peperit scelerosa atque *impia* facta.[21] (DRN 1.80–84, emphasis added)

> Regarding these things, I fear lest you by chance think the philosophical principles you are starting to learn are *impious*, and you are entering upon a path of wickedness. But on the contrary, more often has religion itself given birth to wicked and *impious* deeds.

21 Saussure locates the mannequin for the name, ***I**phianass**A***, in the phrase ***I**mpia fact**A***, underscoring the sonic association between her murder and religious impiety (see Chapter 2).

By way of introducing and addressing the fears that religion stirs up in his readers, he initially confesses his own fear in a gesture of emotional identification and sympathy, for no one, save those who are expert in denial, lives completely without fear. Lucretius's fear is for his readers: He's concerned that their own fears, instilled by religion, will impede them from following him, being fearful of where his doctrine might lead them. But both fears are in a sense misplaced — once his readers dismiss their fears of his path, then he can dismiss his for them. Meanwhile another transposition is located in the shifting identification and attribution of the word *impia*. His principles are impious (*impia* [...] *elementa* 1.81)[22] from the point of view of religion, but when the word returns, modifying a different noun, "impious deeds" (*impia facta* 1.84), the meaning is transferred to religion itself, the true perpetrator of impieties from an atomist perspective. To illustrate this more explicitly, he provides the example of the murder of Iphianassa at Aulis at the hands of her father Agamemnon. Whereas the Greek context distances the impious acts from a Roman one, the description of her deception, of the sham marriage and of her pitiful death at the sacrificial altar, uses language that indexes the Roman context of marriage.[23] Wedding and sacrifice confused, Greek and Roman practices associated, linguistic antitheses abounding (*casta inceste* / *hostia* [...] *maesta* / *felix faustus que* 1.198),[24] the example culminates in the uncompromising declaration: "Such are the evils that religion is capable of impelling" (*tantum religio potuit suadere malorum* 1.101).

§

Here's what we might overhear him saying:

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22 Here is another use of the word *elementum,* which (in addition to designating atoms and letters) in this context recalls its relation to *alimentum,* nourishment, and the root, *al-,* to nourish. The principles, rather than being deleterious, are associated with vital, life-sustaining food.

23 For example, the word *infula* in "the band braided around her virgin headdress" (*cui simul infula virgineos circumdata comptus* 1.87) refers to the headband worn by the Vestal virgins and to the adornment worn by animal victims in sacrifices. Bailey, *Titi Lucreti Cari De rerum natura* (1947), 2:614. It also is used to denote the official mark of honor in relation to government. All of these meanings resonate through the passage in which she is treated as a virgin bride and a sacrificial animal, and by whose death her father gains a military advantage. *"Deductast* [1.96] alludes to the technical phrase *deductio sponsae in domum mariti"* (the leading of the bride to the groom's house). Lucretius, *T. Lucreti Cari De rerum natura libri sex,* ed. William Ellery Leonard and Stanley Barney Smith (The University of Wisconsin Press, 1961), 211.

24 *sed casta inceste nubendi tempore in ipso*
hostia concideret mactatu maesta parentis,
exitus ut classi felix faustusque daretur (DRN 1.98-100)

But in an impure way, a pure girl at the very age for marrying, the sad victim is slain by her murdering parent in order that a favorable and fortunate passage be given to his fleet.

So powerful is religion that I will not be surprised that you might at times be overcome by the terrifying sayings of the priests, false prophets, and you will want to free yourself from us.[25] *I know the terrors they conjure for you, the stories that would shake your faith in my words, but it is precisely my words that will release you from the fears that religion threatens with its terrifying weapon of eternal punishment. For those seers and soothsayers have it all wrong.*

Together we will understand through our keen reason[26] *where the soul comes from and the nature of our minds, and we will understand why certain experiences and encounters terrify us, for instance, when we are not in full possession of ourselves, either diminished by illness or hallucinating when buried in sleep, we believe we can touch and hear close by the dead whose bones the earth embraces.*[27]

The earth, I tell you, the earth embraces us,[28] *not religion, for the earth nurtures us in life and in death. Visions of the dead are optical and auditory illusions, phenomena easily explained by atomic theory that in turn defangs the false beliefs fortified by religion's terrifying threat. Meanwhile our keen observations of the earth and nature in general will lead us to an ample understanding of the perishability of all things. We see how nature balances all with a fair hand, through the unending cycles of birth and decay, since nature remakes one thing out of another thing and doesn't allow anything to be born unless compensated by another's death,*[29] *all in stark contrast to the injustices committed by the hands of religion.*[30]

My teachings will save you from wandering in doubt.[31] *Together we travel, following the tracks of what was once there but is now gone, that passage traced by vestigial marks made for us. And in this you and I are learners alike. I follow in the path of Epicurus the Greek. I plant my feet in the tracks marked out by his signs.*[32] *By remarking his steps, I practice his teachings in order that my words are marked for you to practice repeatedly. Tracking and retracing, again and again, foot after foot, we learn together. Just like students playing at being teachers, we too start in*

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25 *tutemet a nobis iam quovis tempore vatum / terriloquis victus dictis desciscere quaeres.* (DRN 1.102–3).

26 *ratione sagaci* (DRN 1.130).

27 *unde anima atque animi constet natura videndum,*
et quae res nobis vigilantibus obvia mentis
terrificet morbo adfectis somnoque sepultis,
cernere uti videamur eos audireque coram,
morte obita quorum tellus amplectitur ossa. (DRN 1.131–35).

28 *tellus amplectitur* (DRN 1.135).

29 *quando alid ex alio refecit natura nec ullam / rem gigni patitur nisi morte adiuta aliena.* (DRN 1.263–64).

30 Humans are not the only animals murdered in the name of religion. See (DRN 2.353–70) Lucretius's stunning and heartrending description of a sheep searching vainly everywhere for her lamb who, slaughtered on an altar, sacrificed in the name of religion, will never return.

31 *nec sinet errantem dubitare et quaerere semper.* (DRN 1.333).

32 *te sequor, o Graiae gentis decus, inque tuis nunc / ficta pedum pono pressis vestigia signis* (DRN 3.3–3.4).

imitation, moving our bodies in unison as an aid for memory, imprinting it both in our minds and limbs. For to arrive at the highest good by means of his course, he demonstrated the way along a small footpath by which we are able to journey on a straight course toward it.[33] *Worth reiterating, I declare in whose footprints, I, having followed, meanwhile pursue his teachings, and I teach with my words.*[34] *I follow his tracks, so now you, like I, will follow them too. Truly for a sharp mind, these slender tracks are enough, with which you yourself will be able to understand all the rest.*[35]

Let us be like dogs — pursuing our prey, single-minded in our determination. We find the truth and are found in it.[36] *Reciprocal and recursive, doggedly we persevere. For just as mountain-roaming dogs with their noses very often discover the hiding places of wild animals, protected by foliage, once they've pursued the sure tracks of the way, so too it is with you, because you yourself will be able to see such things one after the other and gain access to all the hidden places and from there to see the unseen.*[37]

Dogs, with their superior nature, are better equipped to hunt hidden prey, so for them the tracks are dependable and true but less clear for us, by nature sorrowfully fettered.[38] *So I will show you the traces, the tracks to follow in order that you yourself will discover one by one all that was obscure and once hidden. No, you will not be abandoned. I will stay with you, even when old age creeps up on us, never deserting you. And if you falter, hesitate, or withdraw,*[39] *I promise you, I will keep telling you all the treasures from my heart, until wearing out our bones, old age unbinds the bonds of our life.*[40] *But until that time I will animate for you myriad examples and proofs, by ever sending my verses into your ears. I promise you: I will weave my labor into words honey-sweet for you to hear.*[41]

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33 *atque viam monstravit, tramite parvo / qua possemus ad id recto contendere cursu* (DRN 6.27–28).

34 *cuius ego ingressus vestigia dum rationes / persequor ac doceo dictis.* (DRN 5.55–56).

35 *verum animo satic haec vestigia parva sagaci / sunt per quae possis cognoscere cetera tute.* (DRN 1.402–3).

36 See DRN 5.335–37: "and finally the nature of things and this understanding was discovered recently, and I myself am now the first of all found who could translate it into my native tongue." (*denique natura haec rerum ratioque repertast / nuper, et hanc primus cum primis ipse* ***repertus / nunc ego sum*** *in patrias qui possim vertere voces*).

37 *namque canes ut montivagae persaepe ferarum*
naribus inveniunt intectas fronde quietes
cum semel institerunt vestigia certa viai
sic alid ex alio per te tute ipse videre
talibus in rebus poteris caecasque latebras
insinuare omnis et verum protrahere inde. (DRN 1.404–9).

38 *vestigia certa / vestigia parva* (DRN 1.406, 1.402).

39 *pigraris … recesseris* (DRN 1.410).

40 *in nobis vitai claurstra resolvat* (DRN 1.415).

41 DRN 1.411–18.

These teachings, at first bitter to the taste, are hardly palatable, I well know! But swallow and see for yourself — the truth of atomic theory will release you from the fear religion creates to ensnare you. [42] *Because for you I compose songs so lucid on dark matter, touching them all over with the charm of muses.*[43] *I've sweetened my teachings to enchant and dissolve your doubts and aversion. Coating my motifs with the elegance of the muses, I will hold your mind to my verses until you are able to see through all, perceive thoroughly the nature of the universe, and the*

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42 The etymology of *religio* is worth mentioning in this context. Lucretius's contemporary, Cicero, describes the origin of the word:

> *Non enim philosophi solum verum etiam maiores nostri superstitionem a religione separaverunt. Nam qui totos dies precabantur et immolabant ut sibi sui liberi superstites essent, superstitiosi sunt appellati, quod nomen patuit postea latius; qui autem omnia quae ad cultum deorum pertinerent diligenter retractarent et tamquam relegerent, sunt dicti religiosi ex relegendo, ut elegantes ex eligendo, [ex] diligendo diligentes, ex intellegendo intellegentes; his enim in verbis omnibus inest vis legendi eadem quae in religioso. Ita factum est in superstitioso et religioso alterum vitii nomen, alterum laudis. (De natura deorum 2.72)*
>
> For, not only philosophers but also our ancestors have separated superstition from religion. For those who would pray all the days and sacrifice so that their children would be their survivors (*superstites*) (would outlive them), these people were called "superstitious" (*superstitios*), and the meaning expanded wider afterwards. Those, however, who diligently retraced and, as it were, reread (*relegerent*) all that pertained to the worship of the gods, those people were described as religious (*religiosi*) which comes from "rereading" (relegendo), just as "elegant" (*elegantes*) comes from "selecting" (*eligendo*), just as "dilligent" (*diligentes*) comes from "caring for" (*diligendo*), and "intelligent" (*intellegentes*) from "understanding" (*intellegendo*). For in all these words, the meaning of the word "gathering" (*legendi*) is present in them, the same as in the word "religious" (*religioso*). Thus in this way, regarding the words "superstitious" and "religious," the terms correspond in the former to a sense of moral failing and in the latter to a sense of approval. (Arthur Stanley Pease, ed., *M. Tulli Ciceronis De natura deorum libri secundus et tertius* [Harvard University Press, 1958])
>
> Thus, for Cicero *religio* is derived from *relego* (short "e"), and thus in contrast to superstition, religio is associated with what is re-gathered, re-collected, thereby distancing it from superstitious practices. However, it was the early Christian writers, among them Servius and Augustine, who understood the etymology of the word to be derived from the verb *religo,* to bind, fasten, fetter, and to support this derivation, Lactantius cites Lucretius (DRN 1.931–32; 4.6–7): "to set loose the mind from the tight knots of (religious) superstitions" (*artis / religionum nodis animos exsolvere*). It's stunning that the Christian writers attribute such authority to Lucretius in their religious etymology! P.G.W. Glare, ed., *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 1982), s.v. "religio"; and Robert Maltby, *A Lexicon of Ancient Latin Etymologies* (F. Cairns, 1991), 522–23.

43 *deinde quod obscura de re tam lucida pango / carmina, musaeo contingens cunta lepore* (DRN 1.933–34).

shape by which it is composed in its barest elements.[44] *Together we'll wander and wonder at all the marvels.*

We have set out on the journey, following footsteps that mark our path, hunting the hidden, together. With me as your guide, you will see through all with little toil, for one step makes clear the next, and dark night will not hide the path, rather you will see straight into the deepest depths of nature because matters will make clear their brilliant splendors.[45] *Just as I make brilliant shining songs from dark themes,*[46] *so did Epicurus — no mortal but a god truly. Through his wise teachings, he brought life from such darkness and turbulent waves into such calm and such clear light.*[47] *For the gods themselves set an example for us to emulate. Impress your mind with the image of them in peace and tranquility, removed and unmoved. They shed their forms, like skins, and simulacra are carried to our human minds from sacred bodies, being messengers of divine form.*[48] *Indeed, only by banishing those images of gods being tossed by giant waves of wrath*[49] *will we find communion with them. But before we erase such ideas, let us salvage a few lessons from frightening stories about violent and awful divinities, for there are correspondences worthy of our notice.*

In the tales about the Magna Mater we notice these resemblances. All around us we see her generative character, nourishing and augmenting life in so many forms. The earth's awesome capacities are attributed to Cybele, as ancient poets called her. Her rituals and pageants indeed are deeply moving. While they affect me, too (only the most obtuse can resist the allure of the musical pageantry), these displays are far from harmless, because they feed the superstitions and fears that prevent us from perceiving the character of the earth. For all that has been attributed to Magna Mater and Cybele rightly correspond solely to this earth. I ask you to hold this in your remembering mind, sealing it there:[50] *The earth is composed of the first beginnings of things that compose all living things. A skillful creator,*[51] *clever like Venus, the earth sustains all we see: beast, birds, humans, springs, fires, smiling crops, and happy trees.*[52] *Indeed, the earth alone is the great mother of the gods and the mother of wild animals and the creator of our bodies.*[53] *Mother Earth,* Ma**ter Ter**ra — *you*

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44 *et quasi musaeo dulci contingere melle,*
si tibi forte animum tali ratione tenere
versibus in nostris possem, dum perspicis omnem
naturam rerum, qua constet compta figura. (DRN 1.947–50).

45 *Haec sic pernosces parva perductus opella;*
namque alid ex alio clarescet nec tibi caeca
nox iter eripiet quin ultima naturai
pervideas: ita res accendent lumina rebus. (DRN 1.1114–17).

46 DRN 1.933–34.

47 *in tam tranquillo et tam clara luce* (DRN 5.12).

48 *de corpore quae sancto simulacra feruntur* /[...] *divinae nuntia formae* (DRN 6.76–77).

49 *magnos irarum vovere fluctus* (DRN 6.74).

50 *obsignatum* (DRN 2.581).

51 *daedala tellus* (DRN 1.228).

52 *tum porro nitidas fruges artbustaque laeta* (DRN 2.594).

53 *quare magna deum mater materque ferarum / et nostril genetrix haec dictis est corpo-*

see how ingenious! Notice the letters they share, the elements in common, and now listen for echo everywhere of Communitarian Mater Terra!

For more correspondences, we can observe how the old Greek poets in their songs portrayed her, as lavish and awesome. Each feature of her portrait holds a lesson: The earth, like Cybele's cart hangs in the air, and to her cart she yokes a brood of wild lions, dominated and subdued, just as the earth teaches all creatures to soften and tame their offspring. She rides through lands, silent, blessing mortals with unspoken prosperity.[54] *And in some lands, she has one name and in others another. For the particular nomenclature matters little, or how it propagates and multiplies. Cybele, Mother of the gods, Mother of wild creatures, Phrygian Mother of Ida, Great Mother, the names clang about her, silent and wordless, just as her followers dance and sing wildly in her wake: First the galli,*[55] *the self-mutilated followers of Attis,*[56] *their un-membered form, another warning, and the armed, frenzied curetes*[57] *marching in rhythmic, bloody choreographies. It is all very awesome, even awe-inspiring, but you and I know, it lacks the true reason.*[58] *Divine beings exist, peacefully, excluded and far removed from our human affairs, free from all pain, free from dangers, powerful in their own resources, in need of nothing from us, they can neither be won over by gifts nor touched by anger.*[59]

Some of you still might want to use familiar names on account of their correspondences. Call grapes Bacchus, the sea Neptune, grain Ceres, attribute to them any such stories or powers,[60] *but there's a price, dear: You'll stain your mind with religious marvels and terrors.*[61] *You do not need these names or tales to contain or domesticate the experience of nature. While terrifying at times, these awesome powers and unfathomable motions, however, are not beyond our comprehension. Dears, stay with me on this journey, for the finish line is marked out for me and that means for you, too, where we will be crowned the winner.*[62] *We will arrive together because with ardent labor I have set out in my verses sweetened for you, worthy of your life, songs meditated and discovered.*[63]

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ris una. (DRN 2.598–99).

54 *munificat tacita mortalis muta salute* (DRN 2.625). *Munificat*, a Lucretian neologism, contributes the line's almost dizzying repetition of sounds.

55 DRN 2.614.

56 See Catullus, poem 63, in R.A.B. Mynors, ed. *C. Valerii Catulli Carmina* (Oxford University Press, 1958).

57 DRN 2.629, 2.634.

58 *vera ratione repulsa* (DRN 2.645).

59 *semota ab nostris rebus seiunctaque longe .*
nam privata dolore omni, privata periclis,
ispa suis pollens opibus, nil indiga nostri,
nec bene promeritis capitur neque tangitur ira. (DRN 2.649–52).

60 DRN 2.655–60.

61 *religione animum turpi contingere parcat* (DRN 2.660).

62 DRN 6.92–95.

63 DRN 3.419–20.

Worlds flourish, we flourish, and worlds end, we end. Ever growth and ruin.[64] *Then and now, here and there, the vital forces of all matter overcome and are overcome in turn. The funeral moan blends with the wail of new born babies when they first arrive at the shores of light, and dusk follows dawn, dawn dusk, for there is no night that hasn't heard the sickly wails of newborns mixed with the laments that accompany death.*[65]

This is our song, the sounds of perishability.

Let us be as dust motes, let us sit in the grass together, let us accept all perishability with tranquility, even our devastation, plagues, ruin, for this poem I've written is for you, my readers. And as with my love and my poetry, as with all, nothing remains — we are all born and perish, born to perish.

— ave atque vale, L

§

In the horizon of the infinite — We have left the land and have embarked. We have burned our bridges behind us — indeed, we have gone farther and destroyed the land behind us. Now, little ship, look out! Beside you is the ocean: To be sure, it does not always roar, and at times it lies spread out like silk and gold and reveries of graciousness. But hours will come when you will realize that it is infinite and that there is nothing more awesome than infinity. Oh, the poor bird that felt free and now strikes the walls of this cage! Woe, when you feel homesick for the land as if it had offered more *freedom* — and there is no longer any "land."

— Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*[66]

64 DRN 2.1048–174; and 5.1452–57.

65 *nunc hic nunc illic superant vitalia rerum*
et superantur item. miscetur funere vagor
quem pueri tollunt visentes luminis oras;
nec nox ulla diem neque noctem aurora secutast
quae non audierit mixtos vagitibus aegris
ploratus mortis comites et funeris atri. (DRN 2.575–80).

66 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (Vintage Books, 1974), 180–81.

PART 2: LES DEUX SAUSSURE

> C'est là ce qui m'échappe, je l'avoue, absolument. Je ne vois autre chose à faire qu'à présenter l'énigme telle qu'elle s'offre.
>
> — Ferdinand de Saussure, *Les mots sous les mots*[67]

Is it the fate of those who disturb the order of discourse, of institutions, of relations and kinships, to be cleaved, rendered unknown to themselves, not only in their own beings, but also in their bodies of thought and work, all a dismembered corpus? Is it the fate of these works to be made unrecognizable, to seem to arrive from alien lands such that their deepest preoccupations become like babble when heard in conversation? This fate has befallen Ferdinand de Saussure; indeed, so numerous are the ungenerous and insensitive interpretations that have attached themselves to his thought at times, it is as if some of his commentators wished to smother it, to bury his insights under the weight and noise of their own excesses, to such a degree that his work has met with uncaring, unhearing, nearly patricidal responses (and so rich were the seeds he germinated). I don't want to believe that writers, who bring to our attention what has eluded us or what we have tried to evade, must receive this treatment. Resistance, ever resourceful, takes many forms. In the hopes of not colluding with the evasion, I have attempted to attend closely to their reception in order to describe how Lucretius's and Saussure's writings have troubled and thrown off course so many subsequent writers. Both have been subject to splitting by commentators, and just as Lucretius was diagnosed as a suicidal, love-sick madman, Saussure also received such diagnoses. Whereas Lucretius's critics were motivated by religious intolerance or by ideological justifications, external to his world-view, Saussure's appeared much closer to home — fellow linguists and scholars — making the cut that much crueler, and perhaps more suspect.

Along lines now well drawn, scholars have parceled out Saussure's work, bracketing off his phonic studies from the "linguistic doctrine" attributed to him after his death in 1913 by his colleagues, the ghostwriters of the *Course in General Linguistics*.[68] The notes used for this "authoritative" text, as is well known, were written by students who attended his final lectures for a course he had never taught before, one that fell to him to teach due to the death of another professor, which he taught three times between 1907 and 1911. As Beata Stawarska argues in "Strange Life of a Sentence: Saussurean Doctrine and its Discontents," the *Course* in many ways reflects the meth-

67 "There is something there, I admit, that escapes me all together. I see no other thing to do but to present the enigma such as it occurs." Quoted in Jean Starobinski, *Les mots sous les mots: Les anagrammes de Ferdinand de Saussure* (Éditions Gallimard, 1971), 135. Unless otherwise specified, French translations are my own.

68 "Saussure was interested in historical/comparative linguists, synchronic linguistics, and anagrams, but there is no scholar today who studies all three." Katz, "Saussure at Play," 113.

ods and interests of Saussure's heirs, which tend to obscure the complexity of his thought and his own doubts, through the insertion of concepts that were fabricated by the editors, such as the famous formula that states the primacy of *la langue* over everything deemed external to it, which became a "structuralist motto."[69] Stawarska traces how dominant social structures of the European academy, much like those of so-called "primitive kinship," enabled his earlier editors to achieve success and promote their own vision.

Meanwhile the notebooks in which Saussure worked through his phonic studies sat in boxes, silent, unnoticed, until his two sons relinquished them to the Bibliothèque Publique et Universitaire de Genève, where until 2022 they would remain only accessible in person. The addition of new materials obliged Robert Godel in 1960 to amend his inventory to include them in its list of the contents, where he describes the anagram notebooks as "the results of a long and sterile investigation."[70] In 1964, Émile Benveniste (a student of Antoine Meillet) added to the Geneva archive letters Saussure wrote to his pupil and friend Meillet, a trusted interlocutor and one of the few with whom he shared his thoughts about his sound studies (also notably *not* one of the Swiss heirs). Benveniste edited and published the letters in *Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure* which he received after Meillet's death.[71] In the same year, Jean Starobinski began to publish essays on the anagram notebooks, transcribing and commenting on their contents. Between 1964 and 1970, he published five essays that he then collected in his book, *Les mots sous les mots: Les anagrammes de Ferdinand de Saussure,* published in 1971 and in English in 1979 as *Words upon Words: The Anagrams of Ferdinand de Saussure.* In effect, Starobinski became the initial, and most consequential, voice of the archived notebooks, and his engagement and approach determined almost all subsequent research on them, not only due to his own interpretation and assessment of Saussure's studies but also due to the selections he chose to transcribe and comment on. The dissonance around the 100 or more notebooks speaks not only of the limited access to the materials, but of the neglect, and worse still, the myopic and motivated interests of many of those who conducted early research on Saussure's sound studies.[72] It was not until the 1990s that commentators of the notebooks begin to regard them less as "marginal texts than as investigations which complement Saussure's long and varied exploration of the nature of language."[73] Indeed, thirty years after publishing his first essay, Starobinski

69 Beata Stawarska, "Strange Life of a Sentence: Saussurean Doctrine and Its Discontents," *Philosophy Today* 59, no. 2 (2015): 305.

70 "résultats de cette longue et stérile enquête." See Robert Godel, "Inventaire des manuscrits de F. de Saussure remis à la Bibliothèque publique et universitaire de Genève," *Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure* 17 (1960): 5.

71 See Émile Benveniste, ed., "Lettres de Ferdinand de Saussure à Antoine Meillet," *Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure* 21 (1964): 93–130.

72 Roman Jakobson and Julia Kristeva are notable exceptions, who are discussed below in this chapter.

73 Ivan Callus, "A Chronological and Annotated Bibliography of Works Referring to Ferdinand de Saussure's Anagram Notebooks," *Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure* 55 (2002): 269.

returned to his previous engagement with the notebooks, and published an essay in 1995, in which he confesses his own errors in his earlier interpretations of Saussure's anagrammatical studies. What happened between those years, especially in the late 1960s and 1970s after the publication of *Les mots sous les mots,* tells a story shaped by ideological undercurrents and psychoanalytic fashions. Is there a common tone, a shared gesture, that links the reception of Lucretius and Saussure? To my mind, their readers, in their own particular historical moments, demonstrate their limited capacities to hold difference and to tolerate the enigmatic character of language that motivated these readers to split sound and sense along their seam. They also reveal their resistance to recognizing the relevance of chance (in the sense of events not having causal explanations). This is particularly bewildering, for both difference and chance are motifs dear to Lucretius and Saussure, who alike tried to teach us that difference is generative and who recognized, and even celebrated, the indeterminacy of language.

i. *Les Mots,* or First and Last Words

For reasons I hope to make legible, I want to start where Starobinski begins in "Concern for Repetition" the first chapter of *Les mots sous les mots* in order to draw attention to his mistaken assumptions which cast a long shadow over the entire book. *"On a torn, undated page, we find this note from Ferdinand de Saussure"* is Starobinski's first sentence (whose own words are printed in italicized letters to distinguish them from Saussure's). In this fragment of a letter, Saussure, with a sense of obligation, confesses "that I suffer from a morbid horror of the pen, and that this work is for me an experience of sheer torture."[74] "[T]his work" Saussure is referring to concerns specifically writing about *general linguistics,* since this particular subject matter served indeed to increase his torture. As he writes: "[T]he more simple and obvious a theory may be, the more difficult it is to express it simply [...] this being so, one is tempted five or six times between the beginning and the end of a sentence to rewrite."[75] Saussure, however, in his more than 100 notebooks — the vast majority of pages dedicated to working through examples — does not show signs of this kind of excessive revision. So, I have to disagree here with Starobinski, and underline the distinctions between Saussure's different inquiries more accurately. When read carefully, Saussure's note suggests that the work that causes him "sheer terror" is *not* the work he commits himself to in his sound studies. Indeed, what causes morbid fear and torture is of another order: having to engage with the dismal state of linguistics *in general* evokes disgust for Saussure.[76] Yet

74 Quoted in Jean Starobinski, *Words upon Words: The Anagrams of Ferdinand de Saussure,* trans. Olivia Emmet (Yale University Press, 1979), 3.

75 Ibid., 3.

76 In a letter to Meillet dated January 4, 1894, Saussure writes: "I am very disgusted with all of this, and the difficulty there is in writing even ten lines with common sense regarding matters of language" (*Mais je suis bien dégoûté de tout cela, et de la difficulté qu'il y a en général à écrire seulement dix lignes ayant de sens*

Starobinski takes this note as evidence to argue that regarding his sound studies *"Saussure sensed that clarity, so nearly in his grasp, was eluding him."*[77] I do not see in this note the image of Saussure grasping at what eluded him in his sound studies, though I do see his frustration and determination in the face of difficulty. That Starobinski begins with this portrait of the linguist, located on the first page, in such a charged and privileged place, and with his questionable analysis and assumptions, in effect overshadows the rest of his text and overdetermines his interpretations of Saussure's studies. What resisted him? You see, by now I have developed a sensitivity to writers being mishandled, characterized as anguished, ill, incapable, in order to discredit their work and to split them from themselves. And it's not simply that such treatment is distressing to me; rather it's that with both Lucretius and Saussure the complexity and the generative connections between how they wrote and what they wrote are bound to be lost. Losing this means losing both the poetic force and the theoretical eloquence, and how sound and sense work in concert to create unpredictable and expansive realms for us to inhabit, the fields in which we can receive their teachings.

Throughout and not unfrequently, Starobinski does offer generous and helpful analyses and sympathetic elaborations on Saussure's notebooks, yet, as if to bracket the bulk, in the final pages he makes a comparison between Saussure's writings and mythological tinkering, truly a deeply troubling analogy.[78] After Starobinski's discussion of Saussure's need *"to establish anagrammatic intention by direct proof,"* followed by a discussion of what he calls *"the sign of repudiation"* that he believes Saussure must have deduced from the lack of response from the Italian poet Giovanni Pascoli (discussed below), he cites a passage from Claude Lévi-Strauss's *The Savage Mind* (published in 1962, just before Starobinski's first essay appears), in order to characterize the ways in which Saussure in his research had *"indulged"* in activities similar to those Lévi-Strauss describes as bricolage and mythological thinking.[79] With this comparison Starobinski seems to want to explain (maybe even pardon?) what he sees as Saussure's obsession and his missteps, for, *"Perhaps Saussure's only mistake was to have posed the alternatives so sharply between 'chance' and 'conscious deliberation.'"*[80] It is hard not to read these lines as saying, "if only Saussure were a better reader and understood better (like I do) the workings of language." Indeed, I hear this in the way Starobinski describes Saussure's work on anagrams as an indulgence and as a tinkerer's activity — the reworking and redistribution

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commune en matière de faits de langage). Benveniste, "Lettres de Ferdinand de Saussure," 95.

77 Starobinski, *Words upon Words*, 3.

78 Starobinski's engagement with the notebooks holds a special place for me personally. On account of his enthusiasm for Saussure's anagram studies (and my spending many hours reading and pouring over the reproductions in *Words upon Words*), I became fascinated by the topic and applied for research funding to visit the archives in Geneva.

79 Ibid., 118–20.

80 Ibid., 122.

of prefabricated materials — that is, as bricolage. He pursues the comparison, working with Lévi-Strauss's formulation, and argues that just as with mythological thinking, in which there is a reworking of existing images, so too with tinkering[81] or bricolage. Starobinski continues, noting that what Lévi-Strauss calls the "*the do-it-yourself expert*" (i.e., Saussure, the tinkerer, the bricoleur),

> *"must turn back toward a whole which is already constituted, formed by tools and raw materials — to make, or re-make its inventory; and finally, and above all, to engage that material in some sort of dialogue, in order to make a repertory — before choosing among them — of the possible responses that whole can offer to the problems it places before him." Mythological thinking runs up constructions from pre-existing images. In this case, as Lévi-Strauss sees it, the linguist has come to suppose that poets compose their lines as mythical thinking composes its system of images.*[82]

Lévi-Strauss formulates the retrospective work of bricolage in opposition to the work of scientific analysis, a determinately forward-looking activity, and between the two, he places art-making. Thus, when Starobinski ventriloquizes Lévi-Strauss interpreting both Saussure's activities as bricolage and poetic composition as mythological thinking, the attribution appears spurious: Lévi-Strauss does not equate poetry solely with mythological thinking, for he argues that the activity of poetic composition shares in both the scientific and bricolage-inspired approaches.[83] I leave aside this misrepresentation to follow Starobinski as he continues to draw on Lévi-Strauss's concepts. He writes: "*But in the end it is the linguist who is ensnared by the proceedings he attributes to the poet. Unable to prove the reality of the phonic tinkering practiced* [...] *by the poet, he multiplies the analyses which themselves are precisely such tinkering.*"[84] The linguist-tinkerer, because mistaken in what constitutes poetic composition, is transformed into the poet-tinkerer through his own obsessive tinkering with pre-made tools and materials. Yet couldn't we say that this might describe many forms of analysis and commentary, including Starobinski's? The linguist, according to his commentator, in searching for and not finding his necessary proof, becomes beguiled by his own objects, succumbs to so-called "unscientific"

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81 Lévi-Strauss's term "bricolage" is translated as "tinkering" in *Words upon Words.*

82 Starobinski, *Words upon Words,* 120. Italics original. "*Mythological thinking runs up constructions from pre-existing images*" is the translation of the original sentence "*La pensée mythique bricole au moyen d'image préexistantes.*" The main verb, "*bricole*," is challenging to translate into English; however, it's worth noting its connection to the subject, "bricolage," of the passage. See Starobinski, *Les mots sous les mots,* 151.

83 Lévi-Strauss develops these concepts in detail in the conclusion of the first chapter of *The Savage Mind.* He writes: "The painter is always mid-way between design and anecdote, and his genius consists in uniting internal and external knowledge, a 'being' and a 'becoming.'" See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind,* trans. George Weidenfield (The University of Chicago Press, 1966), 17.

84 Starobinski, *Words upon Words,* 120. Italics original.

and regressive activities (a tinkerer tinkering with poetic tinkering), and loses any distinction between himself and the poets he is reading, in that like them he is tinkering with pre-made matter. Although for Levi-Strauss, the terms — tinkering/bricolage, mythological thinking, scientific constructions — are descriptive, I see Starobinski using them to disparage Saussure's work, because he assumes that the linguist would only value scientific analysis and proven results from his sound studies.

The final scene Starobinski renders portrays the linguist who, after studiously listening to poetics resonances, ends in silence. In concluding his characterization of Saussure, he first offers his readers a lesson that we might learn from Saussure's errors: *"He will have taught us how difficult it is for the critic to avoid the trap of taking his own lucky find as the rule followed by the poet,"* and by implication failing to keep separate the poet and the critic. He continues, *"[h]e resigns himself badly to remaining alone with his discovery. He wishes to share it with the poet. But the poet, having said all he has to say, remains strangely silent."* (The poet in this context is again Pascoli). The unsolved problem Starobinski places so much emphasis on concerns whether the existence of anagrams in poetic texts is either a matter of chance (*hazard*) or the result of conscious deliberation on the part of the poet. Starobinski in a moment of generosity would like to believe that this is the only mistake Saussure made, that is, his need to pose *"the alternatives so sharply."* Meanwhile he provides the solution to Saussure's mistake: *"Why should one not see in the anagram an aspect of human speech* (parole) *as it unfolds itself, in a way which is neither haphazard nor fully conscious? Why should there not be a repetition, a generative palilalia, which would project and multiply in discourse the raw ingredients of a primary word which is neither stated nor entirely suppressed?"*[85] As I will discuss below, this is precisely what Roman Jakobson does recognize in Saussure's work on the anagrams, that is, his valuable and valid insights concerning poetic sound practices.

Saussure's letters to Pascoli need to be given more attention than Starobinski offers. Though Pascoli's first letter in reply to Saussure has not been found yet, in Saussure's second letter, I do hear some encouragement where Starobinski judges that Saussure received *"very little encouragement."* Starobinski, however, claims that the lack of the poet's response to Saussure's second letter causes him to abandon his research. *"The Italian's silence was taken as a sign of repudiation, and the inquiry into the anagrams was discontinued."*[86]

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85 Ibid., 122–23.

86 While in the first letter he does not describe in detail his questions, in this second one Saussure offers a few examples and then poses the question of verification. Rather than calculating the possible chance coincidences of the twenty-four letters of the Latin alphabet, that would, as Saussure writes, "require the talents of a mathematician, it seems to me quicker and more certain to address the person who, *par excellence,* might instruct me as to the value one should attach to these conjunctions of sound." Pursuing his request further, Saussure writes: "Because of the obliging promise you were good enough to make me, I shall not delay settling this point, with greater assurance than could be provided by any mathematical calculation." For assistance, even perhaps for fine companionship, Saussure appeals to the poet who has made him an oblig-

This assertion along with his mistaken assumptions at the beginning of his analysis seemingly want to enclose and undercut the findings of Saussure's sound studies. Starobinski's assessment, indeed, came to have such a prodigious influence on almost all of the many subsequent critics, yet I remain unconvinced.[87]

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ing promise, not the scientist or mathematician, for such encouraging promise invites Saussure to write him in greater detail and share with him what he has not shared with any others aside from his two closest friends, a risk the linguist will take surely based on the hoped-for response. See Starobinski, *Words upon Words*, 120.

87 In 1968, Guiseppe Nava published the letters from Saussure that he found in Pascoli's archive, along with his careful analysis of the correspondence. When the letters Saussure wrote to Pascoli are read attentively, another, more nuanced encounter emerges, one that Starobinski fails to notice. In his second letter, Saussure offers several examples, whereas in his first he does not provide any specific information about his anagram work. He only writes that he has been thinking about modern Latin poetry, and he has encountered something that he was unable to arrive at a definitive answer to and he turns to a living, modern Latin poet for assistance. As documented by Giuseppe Nava, "Lettres de Ferdinand de Saussure à Giovanni Pascoli," *Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure* 24 (1968): 73-81, he asks Pascoli: "Are some of the technical details which seem to be observed in the poetry of certain modern writers purely fortuitous, or are they deliberate and consciously applied?" (*Certains details techniques qui semblent observes dans la versification de quelques modernes sont-ils chez eux purement fortuits, ou sont-ils voulus, et appliques de maniere consciente?* 79, emphasis in the original). Notably in his second letter, after receiving Pascoli's letter, he writes, "Already I believe it is quite probable, if I can judge from a few words of your letter, that it must be simple fortuitous coincidences." (*Par avance je crois assez probable, si je puis en juger d'aprés quelques mots de votre lettre, qu'il doit s'agir de simples coïncidences fortuites* 80). I have to wonder how Pascoli could have asserted that it is simple coincidence when Saussure has yet to describe any specific details. What precisely is coincidental? Did Pascoli reply that all technical details are coincidental? Even if he said something to the effect that much is coincidental, Saussure was encouraged enough to offer several examples of anagrams that he observes in Pascoli's own poetry. Nava contends that it must *not* have been due to Pascoli's silence alone that Saussure discontinued his sound studies: "Saussure was fully aware of the internal contradictions of his theory, as evidenced by the continual oscillations between doubt and certainty during his research, as well as the decision he ultimately made to abandon studies on the anagrams and not to publish the notebooks which concerned them, a decision which cannot be due only to a negative response possibly or to silence from Pascoli" (*Saussure se rendait exactement compte des contradictions internes de sa théorie, comme le prouvent les oscillations continuelles entre doute et certitude au cours de ses recherches, ainsi que la décision qu'il prit finalement d'abandonner les études sur les anagrammes et de ne pas publier les cahiers qui les concernaient, décision qui ne saurait être due seulement à une réponse négative éventuelle ou au silence de Pascoli* 75). Nava's considered analysis went unheard.

§

Silence is a gap, not a gag, and gaps, like enigmas, are invitations to enter.

> There was witchcraft in little Pearl's eye; and her face, as she glanced upward at the minister, wore that naughty smile which made its expression frequently so elfish. She withdrew her hand from Mr. Dimmesdale's, and pointed across the street. But he clasped both his hands over his breast, and cast his eyes towards the zenith.
>
> Nothing was more common in those days than to interpret all meteoric appearances, and other natural phenomena, that occurred with less regularity than the rise and set of sun and moon, as so many revelations from a supernatural source. [...] It was, indeed, a majestic idea, that the destiny of nations, should be revealed, in these awful hieroglyphics, on the cope of heaven. A scroll so wide might not be deemed too expansive for Providence to write a people's doom upon. [...] But what shall we say, when an individual discovers a revelation, addressed to himself alone, on the same vast sheet of record! In such a case, it could only be the symptom of a highly disordered mental state, when a man, rendered morbidly self-contemplative by long, intense, and secret pain, had extended his egotism over the whole expanse of nature, until the firmament itself should appear no more than a fitting page for his sole's history and fate.
>
> We impute, therefore, solely to the disease in his own eye and heart, that the minister, looking upward to the zenith, beheld there the appearance of an immense letter — the letter A — marked out in lines of dull red light.[88]

§

Starobinski, thirty-one years later in 1995, published a sixth essay on Saussure's sound studies and his work with anagrams, too late to repair or modify the immense influence his initial work had already. In it, he confesses that he was among the many who doubted Saussure's hypothesis that the poet used the anagram intentionally, and he concedes that, while anagrams are not generally used, poets writing in encomiastic modes, such as Francis Petrarch and Pierre de Ronsard, did employ phonic anagrams to create garlanded crowns around the heads of their subjects. He then concludes that, "Saussure's hypothesis can be confirmed," and that the use of anagrams, created through the resonances of sonic elements, was an intentional practice in poetic composition.[89] If only he had praised Saussure and created just such a crown earlier.... But while Starobinski delayed in reassessing his own interpretations and in making his concession, in the meantime

88 Nathaniel Hawthorne "The Minister's Vigil," in *The Scarlet Letter,* ed. Rose C. Murfin (Bedford Books, 1991), 136–37.

89 Jean Starobinski, "Lettres et syllabes mobiles: Complément à la lecture des *Cahiers* d'anagrammes de Ferdinand de Saussure," *Littérature* 99 (1995): 8.

many scholars had asserted the validity of Saussure's hypothesis regarding ancient Indo-European poetry and others demonstrated its important contribution to the study of poetry.[90] Even so, a drama in the intervening years, played out in linguistic, theoretical, and literary scenes, produced a splitting of Saussure, reflecting the battles and agendas of the players themselves more than his sound studies, a familiar echo of the dramatic fate of Lucretius's poem.

ii. *lectio difficilior potior*

In his amendment to the inventory of Saussure's archival materials, Godel sums up the purpose of his inquiry into the anagrams, writing: "To demonstrate the validity of his idea, he sifted patiently through a considerable number of Greek and Latin texts — up to the Latin verse of the humanists." He concludes, "The notebooks and tables in which he recorded the results of this long and sterile investigation form the largest part of the manuscripts which he left."[91] Godel's unpromising assessment nevertheless produced initial responses by two linguists, Émile Benveniste in 1963 and Roman Jakobson in 1966. Benveniste, in "Saussure After Half a Century," mentions his work on anagrams in passing during a discussion of the radical and difficult task that the linguist faced.[92] To describe the principles that drove and animated Saussure's inquiries, Benveniste articulates singular characteristics that a creative person possesses, "a certain drive, hidden and permanent, which sustains him and devours him, guides his thoughts, directs him to his task, spurs him on when he lapses, and shows him no quarter when he attempts to evade it."[93] He cites Saussure's own justification for his work to exemplify this creative drive. Saussure writes at the age of twenty-one in the preface to his *Mémoire sur le systéme primitif des voyelles*

90 See Jacquiline Risset, *L'Anagramme du désir: Essai sur la* Délie *de Maurice Scève* (Bulzoni, 1971); Henri Meschonnic, *Pour la poétique* (Gallimard, 1973); Samuel Kinser, "Saussure's Anagrams: Ideological Work," *MLN* 94, no. 5 (1979): 1105–38; Garrett Stewart, *Reading Voices: Literature and the Phonotext* (University of California Press, 1990); Mikhail Gronas, *Cognitive Poetics and Cultural Memory: Russian Literary Mnemonics* (Routledge, 2011); Daniel Heller-Roazen, *Dark Tongues: The Art of Rogues and Riddlers* (Zone Books, 2013); Joshua T. Katz, "Saussure's Anaphonie: Sounds Asunder," in *Synaesthesia and the Ancient Senses,* ed. Shane Butler and Alex C. Purves (Acumen, 2013); and Ivan Callus, "Anagrammatology: Derrida before Saussure's Anagram Notebooks," *Word and Text: A Journal of Literary Studies and Linguistics* 7, no. 1 (2017): 39–68. For a comprehensive list of works published between 1966–1979, see Callus, "A Chronological and Annotated Bibliography."

91 "Pour démontrer la justesse de son idée, il a dépouillé patiemment une masse considérable de textes grecs et latins — jusqu'à des vers latins d'humanistes. [...] Les cahiers et les tableaux où il a consigné les résultats de cette longue et stérile enquête forment la partie la plus considérable des manuscrits qu'il a laissés." See Godel, "Inventaire des manuscrits de F. de Saussure," 6.

92 Émile Benveniste, "Saussure after Half a Century," in *Problems in General Linguistics,* trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek (University of Miami Press, 1971), 29–40.

93 Ibid., 29.

dans les langues indo-européens (1878): "If we have nevertheless ventured to go there, convinced in advance that our experience will go astray many times in the labyrinth, it is because [...] attacking such questions is not temerity, as had often been said, but a necessity."[94] What's striking about Benveniste's characterization, to my mind, is his admiration for Saussure's tenacity, his perseverance, and the necessity (not audacity) of continual exploration, allowing for false starts and for encountering impasses, which are both constitutive of the practice of inquiry. With a sense of resignation, sixteen years after the publication of his *Mémoire,* in 1894 Saussure writes to his friend Meillet that he will have to author "a book in which I shall, without enthusiasm or passion, explain why there is not a single term used in linguistics to which I grant any meaning whatsoever." Benveniste discerns from this letter the entangled arguments Saussure had to pursue, for "the more he probed into the nature of human speech, the less he could be satisfied with the accepted ideas." Earlier in the same letter, Saussure writes that he would have preferred to devote himself "only to picturesque aspects of language, that which makes it different from all other [aspects] in that it belongs to a certain people having certain origins, it is this almost ethnographic aspect which still holds an interest for me"; his ethnographic passions are notably distinct from theorizing general principles of linguistics. And it is in this context that Benveniste mentions his work on anagrams. He affirms that Saussure was always brought back to "his first obsession," to questions regarding the nature of language, and then speculates that "perhaps it was to keep on escaping from it that he threw himself into that ceaseless quest for anagrams. [...] But we see today what was at stake: Saussure's drama was going to transform linguistics."[95] In the concluding paragraph of his essay, Benveniste writes: "[W]e can say that Saussure really did accomplish his destiny. Beyond his earthly life, his ideas spread further than he could have imagined, and his posthumous destiny has become, so to speak, a second life which henceforth mingles with ours."[96] That destiny, his "second life," will in a matter of a few years take a form that Benveniste could not have imagined. It will entail the insights of thinkers to recognize that his "ceaseless quest for anagrams" was far from a distraction or escape, and, even more significantly, that his work on anagrams complemented and complicated the basic principles as they were established by his students and professional heirs in the *Course.*

In contrast, a handful of literary theorists and thinkers avidly analyzed Saussure's anagram notebooks with a different set of questions. Their particular assessments of the notebooks interest me not only because they represent the initial sustained engagements, but also because they illustrate the tensions I have been observing especially between the phonic elements in poetry and the signifying capacities of language, between poetic play and linguistic synthesis. Each of the theorists I discuss in detail below offers stunning readings of the notebooks, and their responses highlight, when

94 Ibid., 30.
95 Ibid., 34.
96 Ibid., 40.

working with Saussure's writing, the difficulties in allowing for the complexity and range of his interests, difficulties that still fascinate.

iii. *Tel Quel* and *Les Deux Saussure*

> If there are two Saussures, there is therefore a difference to note. And Saussure is the first to teach us that differences are productive.
>
> — Jean Starobinski, "Pour introduire au colloque"[97]

The publication of Starobinski's essays and book set in motion responses to Saussure's sound studies by theorists associated with the journals *Tel Quel* and *Sémiotexte,* who held a conference at Columbia University in April 1974.[98] The papers presented at the conference were published by Sémiotexte in *Recherches* 16 (in September 1974), entitled "Les Deux Saussure." The issue includes essays by Wladyslaw Godzich, Luce Irigaray, Sylvère Lotringer, Michel Riffaterre, and Starobinski, and in addition a facsimile reproduction of two of Saussure's notebooks containing detailed sound studies of Virgil's poetry. Lotringer contributes two essays, "Introduction: Flagrant Delire" and "Le 'Complexe' de Saussure," the latter an elaboration of concepts already developed in "The Game of the Name," his review of *Les mots sous les mots* published in 1973 in *Diacritics*. In his essay, whose scope far exceeds a conventional book review, he delivers an elaborate assessment of Saussure's sound studies based on the texts produced in *Les mots sous les mots,* and he attempts to locate the points where his inquiry relates to psychoanalysis.

In an apposite gesture, Lotringer places an epigraph by Jacques Lacan from *Radiophonie* at the head of his review (repeated in the advertisement for the conference): "If Saussure doesn't make public the anagrams he deciphered in Saturnian poetry, it was because they overthrow academic litera-

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97 Jean Starobinski, "Pour introduire au colloque," *Recherches* 16 (1974): 5.

98 An advertisement announcing the colloquium "Les Deux Saussure" was placed in the first issue of *Sémiotext(e)* 1 (1974): 84. The title suggests a pun with Ferdinand de Saussure's name: "de" and "deux" are homophones in French. To generate interest, the notice features three quotations regarding Saussure's work by noteworthy names in French theory at that time. Jacques Derrida: "Something writes itself in Saussurean discourse which has never been said and which is nothing other than writing itself as the origin of discourse" (*Quelque chose s'écrit dans le discours Saussurien qui n'a jamais été dit et qui n'est rien d'autre que l'écriture elle-même comme origine du langage*). Julia Kristeva: "The *Anagrams* of Saussure are to be located among those theories that seek meaning through a signifier dismantled by an insistent sense in action" (*Les* Anagrammes *de Saussure sont a situer parmi ces théories que cherchent la signification à travers un significant démantelé par un sens instistant en action*). Jacques Lacan: "If Saussure doesn't make public the anagrams he deciphered in Saturnian poetry, it was because they overthrow academic literature. Such critical chicanery didn't make him stupid: you see he wasn't an analyst" (*Si Saussure ne sort pas les anagrammes qu'il déchiffre dans la poésie saturnienne, c'est que ceux-ci jettent à bas la littérature universitaire. La canaillerie ne le rend pas bête; c'est parce qu'il n'est pas analyste*).

ture. Such critical chicanery didn't make him stupid: you see he wasn't an analyst."[99] He will proceed to demonstrate how this not-being-a-psychoanalyst caused Saussure to miss two important avenues of escape: one route via lack and the other via excess. The linguist's desire to constrain how the anagrams function shows up in his avoidance of rhetorical forms of similitude (paronomasia), his exclusion of the material of writing in favor of speech, which asserts the ascendency of proper name (theme-word), as origin and the poet as creator, and his attempts at mastering the signifying production. All of these efforts, according to Lotringer, result in his missing both the essential lack at the heart of language and also its excess — the irrepressible abundance created by modes of signification alien to the subject, akin to dreamwork, jokes, and puns. Meanwhile he draws his conclusion that linguistics, that is, the concepts in the *Course* — linearity, the sign, the primacy of speech over writing — were born from the exclusion of what Saussure intuited, as Lotringer sees it, in his work on anagrams and their implications. Indeed, he concludes that "The *Cours* [...] appears therefore, by means of this reversal, as an escape forward, a grandiose *synthesis* — a pyramid erected on a fundamental repression."[100] If only Saussure had read Sigmund Freud's *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious,* Lotringer half-heartedly laments, he might have avoided "his epistemological impasse," and by implication would have been an analyst rather than a linguist.[101]

His approach to reading Saussure not only influenced other critics' similarly inflected psychoanalytical readings of the anagram notebooks, but also Lotringer's analysis offers a sophisticated, provocative engagement. However, Lotringer promotes the trope of splitting Saussure into two, by announcing "a second Saussurian revolution" (allegedly proclaimed by Jakobson), which he finds by comparing the different modes of propagation of the anagrammatical sound studies and the *Course*.[102] He writes: "The two ways of Saussure appear so opposed, moreover, that one hesitates to attribute paternity of these two enterprises to the same man: in one case, a discrete, quasi-secretive inquiry, pursued pragmatically, accumulating con-

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99 Lacan quoted in Sylvère Lotringer, "Review: The Game of the Name," *Diacritics* 3, no. 2 (1973): 2.

100 Lotringer, "The Game of the Name," 8.

101 Ibid., 6.

102 Ibid., 2. I have searched at length and have found no place that Jakobson makes this statement. However, Louis-Jean Calvet states in his book, *Pour et contre Saussure:* "But in this shadow work, this hidden face that comes to double the *Course* in an unexpected and paradoxical manner, it may have opened the way for the true Saussurean revolution, the one which is being born today" (*Mais, dans ces travaux de l'ombre, dans cette face cachée qui vient doubler le* Cours *de façon inattendue et paradoxale, it a peut-être ouvert la voie à la véritable révolution saussurienne, celle qui est en train de naître aujourd'hui*). See Louis-Jean Calvet, *Pour et contre Saussure: vers une linguistique sociale* (Payot, 1975), 107. The phrase, "a second Saussurian revolution," appears in the title of an earlier essay by Thomas Aron and is posed as a question: "Une seconde révolution saussurienne?" See Thomas Aron, "Une seconde révolution saussurienne?," *Langue française* 7 (1970): 56–62.

crete evidence; in the other, a series of public lectures situated from the beginning on a theoretical level." The anagram work pursues an intuition, while the *Course* pursues a *"clear idea"* in response to a reigning confusion in the field of linguistics. His studies of anagrams are inscribed in notebooks, writing that will wait half a century to be uncovered, whereas the *Course* holds the prestige of the spoken word, "leaving no trace, that nevertheless immediately wins disciples and a place in the foreground of Western thought."[103] He continues:

> The two Saussures are historically, systematically and philosophically opposed: the "first" lays the scientific grounds for a discipline which constitutes the most indisputable fruition of our culture; the "second" inaugurates a practice of the text, the theory of which is at present attempting to constitute itself.
>
> A two-faced Janus, Saussure situates himself, inescapably, at the crossroads. Apostle of linearity, institutor of a systematics which will issue in the methods of "structuralism," here he turns about paradoxically and underwrites a series of polyphonic studies which thicken his famous sheet of paper and, bursting the tufts that were supposed to hold it together, consecrates the irruption of the signifier on the scene of writing. One could attempt to reconcile the two "ways" of the Geneva master by moving, as is indeed proper, over and beyond their differences. This madness, after all, will have served reason. [...] [L]inguistics emerged from the anagram fully *armed,* and rather than "sublating" it in an expedient synthesis, it is important to sharpen the contradiction and to displace it onto what is still unsure ground, precisely there where reason strives to hold madness back to the limit of its own truth.[104]

Into this almost-militarized scene, the two-faced Janus-master enters, setting the stage for Lotringer to stake his own claims on his own terms. On this "unsure ground," he reconciles the divergence, "beyond their difference," by outlining the places where Saussure's revolution went astray, "deviated, bifurcated or simply stopped short," in order to return the inquiry to its "import in its relation with psychoanalysis."[105] In other words, if Saussure had been an analyst, he would have seen his way through. In light of this counterfactual argument (which takes as given Saussure's not being able to move "over and beyond" himself), Lotringer himself will launch that "revolution" for his readers.

The first hazard Saussure needed to avoid was the reduction of anagrammatic play to mere rhetoric, according to Lotringer. In order to avoid this pitfall, the letter — that is, writing — needs to be excluded. As Saussure explains: "In using the word *anagram,* I do not for a moment intend to bring

103 Lotringer, "The Game of the Name," 2.
104 Ibid.
105 Ibid.

writing into consideration."[106] But in settling on the word "anagram" (with the emphasis on gram, what is written, the written sign) and by replacing *phonē* (sound) with *gram,* "the spoken word is inscribed in the space of writing. [...] Saussure's discovery will proceed in disguise, metaphorized by recourse to the very letter whose return it prohibits." The implications of this (following Jacques Derrida's critique of the first of Saussure's principles of linearity), are that it "uncovers a non-linear, extra-temporal space where speech is lost in infinite disconnections."[107] In other words, by using a reference to writing, *gram,* to designate *phonē* (sound and speech), he risks elevating the written letter which would contradict the tenets of the *Course*. For in the texture of the poetic line, this phonic play of elements creates correspondences by presenting a space of phonic echoes, calls, and responses that explode the linear temporality of the signifying chain of meaning. In order for Saussure to avoid pursuing this troubling intuition, one that would have led him, according to Lotringer, to a textual process, "caught in a ceaseless play of referral and reverberations... [that] unfolds in a self-referential space," he has recourse to a "domesticated analogy," an approach to the form of the anagram that divides the process into external and internal constraints.[108] These constraints lessen the signifying production to such a degree that "anagrammatism, thus rendered powerless, is limited to imitating a word."[109] With the master-name, its creator, and its recreator thus constrained and bound together, the unity of the project and of Saussure as a unified subject would be reinforced.

Linking the creation of poetic texts so tightly to the poet's intentionality deprives words of their mobility and initiative, for Lotringer, and motivates Saussure's need to discover proof of such a poetic practice by poets. His letters to the living poet Pascoli demonstrate the linguist's search for evidence of the practice, but Saussure himself had already considered other possible explanations that do not hinge on the poet's intentionality. For instance, Saussure considers that if it were not a deliberate, conscious practice, it might have become a "habitual accompaniment for any Latin writer [...] the moment it sprang from his brain, whether he intended to put it into prose or verse. [...] That the hypogram attained for the Latins this degree of inevitable and profound psychological sociation [*sic*] is the conclusion we must draw from the overwhelming quantity of texts and is beyond the scope of what I wish to say here."[110] According to Lotringer, in suspecting "the implacable signifying activity of a second nature, Saussure

106 Compare Lotringer's condensed translation of Saussure to the original text: "Ni anagramme ni paragramme ne veulent dire que la poésie dirige pour ces figures d'après les signes écrits" (Starobinski, *Les mots sous les mots,* 31), and in English: "Neither anagram nor paragram intends to suggest that poetry is arranged for these figures in accordance with written signs" (Starobinski, *Words upon Words,* 18).

107 Lotringer, "The Game of the Name," 3.

108 Ibid., 4.

109 Ibid., 5.

110 Quoted in Starobinski, *Les mots sous les mots,* 120; and Starobinski, *Words upon Words,* 90.

never came closer to recognizing the dis-sociation of a subject inscribed in scriptural practice — the elocutory disappearance of the poet."[111] That is to say, the poet erases themself by surrendering themself to the initiative and mobility of words themselves. If Saussure were an analyst (as per that Lacanian-inflected contra-factual), he would have been capable of working through other possibilities, ones informed by a psychoanalytical approach that frees the subject from the enclosures of reason and unity and that avails itself of the language of dreams and its enigmatic character. Thus, for Lotringer, the lack Saussure misses is nothing less than the myriad dimensions of a lost language.

Not only does he miss the lack that might have offered another approach to consider the workings of the text, but, according to Lotringer, he misses another possibility for considering textual productivity. This would have been accomplished "through an excess, in an anagrammatical overabundance, an irrepressible riddling of the manifest text. Theme-words come *en masse* to saturate any given fragment." He cites here Saussure's own speculation: "'One reaches the point of wondering whether all possible words could not actually be found in every text.'"[112] If *only* Saussure would have allowed for the productive function that "escapes from the constraints of linearity and the snares of meaning," he would have apprehended "the strangeness of the subject in relation to a language which does nothing but traverse him at the very moment he claims [...] to have mastered it."[113] But, being a linguist, he repressed these other possibilities, whose very suppression allowed for all that would be elaborated (by others) in the *Course,* creating "a pyramid erected on a fundamental repression." Thus, "the *Anagrams* weren't published: linguistics was born of that exclusion."[114] In staging the missed encounter between Freud's work and Saussure's, Lotringer sets the stage, albeit empty, or after the fact, for two non-meetings, the one between linguistics and psychoanalysis, the other between the two Saussures, the signatory of the *Course* and the writer of the anagram notebooks. For if they had met, would the anagrams have been published?[115] Is the repression of one work the prerequisite for the birth of another? For Lotringer's own interpretation to survive, the two Saussures need to be divided, so that by means of the disavowed, the repressed, they can form the co-constitutive relationships, between poetic play and linguistic synthesis. Lotringer is one among many in this period who identifies this contradiction that divides Saussure and his work. For the model of language that the *Course* outlines, a system of signs, seems to be undermined by the model of poetic production elaborated and explored in the notebooks.

Like Lotringer, Michael Riffaterre finds in Saussure's notebooks rich material for his considerations of poetic production and forms of reading.

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111 Lotringer, "The Game of the Name," 6.

112 Ibid., 8.

113 Ibid., 8, 9.

114 Ibid., 8.

115 Saussure's son, Raymond de Saussure, was a patient of Freud, and published in *La méthode psychanalytique* (Payot, 1922), which includes a preface by Freud.

In his contribution to the conference, "Paragrams and Significance," the question of the subject, both the poet-creator and ultimately, Saussure, the reader, is displaced, and in its place, Riffaterre introduces two additional characters: self-sufficient textual production and the creatively engaged reader. He begins his essay by stating his two purposes: to "explore Saussure's concept of paragram in a different direction from his and, in doing so, [...] to come closer to a definition of the significance of a text." Significance in literary texts, according to Riffaterre, is located "only outside of linearity" whereas "normal meaning is both referential and discursive — experienced through linear reading." Accordingly, Saussure was too fixated on proving the presence of the paragram's theme-word (intentionally motivated by a poet-creator), and missed, yet again, being captivated otherwise by textual phonic play. Riffaterre's reader, in contrast, is absorbed in textual effects and stylistic influences.

> [T]he form (the way things are said), captivates the reader, limits his options, and imposes itself on him clearly and inevitably, even if the meaning remains obscure. These problems [i.e., the proof of the presence of the theme-word] [...] can be avoided if the analyst begins with what the surface features of the text — that is, its style — force him to perceive.[116]

He argues that "the decoding of stressed elements and other formal distortions sensitizes readers to their recurrence and, hence, to their equivalence," and as a result these aspects are experienced in relation to semantic and formal structures. This conceptualization then would remove the difficulty that Saussure had in finding a proof of his hypothesis, "because the structure's complex is self-defining."[117] In Riffaterre's understanding, there is no need to consider whether the phonic play in the text is produced intentionally, habitually, or even unconsciously, by the writer, because the reader-decoder, having undergone textual instruction, is compelled to engage with surface features, its style, the way the text is written (and not what it is saying explicitly).

The text, now given its own agency, expresses (through indirection and displacement) its "true significance [...] in its consistent formal reference to and repetition of what it is about, despite continuous variation in the way it goes about saying it." For Riffaterre, the significance is to be found in the lexical transformations of a semantic given, transformations that need neither end point, nor point of departure. Rather, in its self-referential and recursive structure, the text builds through expansion into a semantic paragram. "The point on which all self-reference should focus is then an empty space, and the verbal referent that is the paragram is left unspoken, even as the reader is able to circle around it."[118] Thus, he also concludes that Saus-

116 Michael Riffaterre, "Paragrams and Significance," in *Text Production*, trans. Terese Lyons (Columbia University Press, 1983), 75.

117 Ibid., 76.

118 Ibid.

sure, or the Saussure "who has not yet escaped nonlinearity and renounced the *cahiers* for the *Cours*,"[119] understood "that the text's true center is outside the text, and not behind it, hidden away." For Riffaterre, then, Saussure (the Saussure of the notebooks) understood that the function of a text "lies in this system of references and repetition, and not in the content of what is repeated." This insight he calls Saussure's "stroke of genius."[120]

According to this interpretation, neither Saussure nor his approach to reading is associated with the repressed subject, but the text itself functions like a repression. Through a process of transformations, expansions, and generative variations, significance is "both what is transformed and the fact of the transformation that represses, displaces, and disguises it."[121] The text, self-sufficient, with no reliance on the intentionality of its creator, produces its own signification by means of what it doesn't say and how; through various forms of repression, it goes about avoiding saying what it means. The task of the reader, sensitized to the surface features, is to react to the disruptions and displacements, while in turn, the semantic anomalies in the text force the reader to look to nonlinearity for the solution. Even if readers are not versed in the intertextual relations, they still see "the distortions, the imprint left upon the verbal sequence by the absent hypogrammatical referent."[122] The gaps and "ungrammaticalities" are what disrupt the linear sequence and force the reader "to accept a verbal detour and perform the deciphering *a contrario.* [...] It is in this very game and in our awareness of this artifice that the significance is constituted."[123] By disassociating his form of reading from Saussure's, Riffaterre avoids his perceived limitations while expanding upon his concepts in order to propose his own system of literary production and signification. Although less intrusive than Starobinski's and Lotringer's dissections, Riffaterre's approach requires that Saussure be subtracted like a bad object, a failed reader, in order to elevate his own theories of poetic meaning.[124]

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119 Ibid., 296n2.

120 Ibid., 76.

121 Ibid., 77.

122 Ibid., 87.

123 Ibid., 88.

124 More than a few of Riffaterre's concepts are obviously problematic, such as the distinction between "normal meaning" and literary significance, and the paradoxical claim for self-sufficiency of the verbal referent, hindering my capacity to read his work with generosity. But I try to work with my resistance in order to present the different direction he takes and the ways he expands and reworks Saussure's concepts. I cannot not mention in this context Paul de Man's critique — his unraveling — of Riffaterre's reading of Saussure's anagrammatical studies in his review of Riffaterre's *La Production du Texte;* see Paul de Man, "Review: Hypogram and Inscription: Michael Riffaterre's Poetics of Reading," *Diacritics* 11, no. 4 (1981): 17–35. See also Roman Jakobson's refutation of Riffaterre's thesis of the "irrelevance of grammar" in the study of poetry, Roman Jakobson, "Retrospect" in *Selected Works,* vol. 3: *Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry,* ed. Stephen Rudy (Mouton Publishers, 1981), 769.

Having noted their partial fidelity to and departure from Saussure's phonic studies, I want to bring into the conversation another writer who holds a singular position in the genealogy I am tracing. Although closely affiliated with the *Tel Quel* group, Julia Kristeva's approach models a more generous engagement with Saussure's notebooks than the instrumentalizing methods that I see at times of her peers. We all read (and misread) in interested ways, with our desires, agendas, and identifications, but the difference I want to locate concerns the quality of one's attention and one's willingness to be susceptible to unanticipated encounters. Kristeva's generosity and attention to Saussure's sound studies are indeed notably exceptional. Meanwhile, with her training in linguistics, she brings a different set of resources that are of particular interest to this genealogy. Though they share the same point of departure, she, more than any of members of the *Tel Quel* cohort, elaborates a complex theoretical approach to the study of poetic language and its social and political implications *without* relying on a negation of Saussure's theories (neither Saussure one, nor Saussure two).

In "Towards a Semiology of Paragrams," her first essay in *Tel Quel,* she both engages directly with Saussure's work on anagrams and also describes a theory of intertextuality. While she does offer a critique of monological and systematic semiotic practices, buttressed by the static, ahistorical concepts of structuralism — the scientific logic that excludes contradictions in order to establish certain truths, that is, a logic used to explain what society is and justify its passivity and disturbances — Kristeva never seeks recourse to the other Saussure associated with structuralism, the signatory of the *Course*.[125] Rather, she starts by summarizing and accepting the principles in Saussure's anagrammatic work in order to develop a methodology of literary semiology. In rearticulating Saussure's anagram theory, she offers the following assertions: poetic language adds a second, artificial, supplementary mode of being to words; there is a sonic correspondence between paired poetic elements; "these binary poetic laws go so far as to transgress the laws of grammar"; the elements of a theme-word extend over the poetic text.[126] Building on these adopted principles, she announces her wager for the paragrammatic text:

> This "paragrammatic" conception of poetic language (the word "paragram" is used by Saussure) suggests three major theses:
>
> a) Poetic language is the only infinity of code.
> b) The literary text is double: writing-reading.
> c) The literary text is a network of connections.[127]

125 Julia Kristeva, "Towards a Semiology of Paragrams," trans. Roland-François Lack, in *The* Tel Quel *Reader,* ed. Patrick ffrench and Roland-François Lack (Routledge, 1998), 27. Kristeva did not contribute an essay for the 1973 colloquium "Les Deux Saussure" and its associated publication.

126 Ibid., 25–26.

127 Ibid., 26.

Her conception of poetic language includes all the elements that Saussure was working with — the poetic text, the writer, the reader — and places them in a dynamic, dialogical relation within an open network of connections, in a tabular, non-hierarchical space, expanding paragrammatic writing to refer to the infinite possibilities of poetic texts. Significantly, poetic language is not a subset of other forms of language; rather, it is only through poetic language that the operation of signifying practices manifests its most radical, transgressive, and transformative possibilities, operations that are non-linear, non-symbolic, and non-rational.

What is so stunning about Kristeva's essay is that, in the process of building a case for the paragrammatic text and poetic language, she performs a deft dismantling of structuralism and current linguistic practices as part of her argument for the radical, political capacities of poetic language. Regarding the latter (current linguistic practices), she points to the limitations and ideological underpinnings of the prevailing modes of linguistic description of poetic language in her discussion of her first hypothesis. Their positing of so-called everyday discourse, rationalized by linguistic science, excludes "the logic of a marginal, subversive discourse" from scientific logic, based on social utility. When linguists do pay attention to poetic discourse, it is demoted to a sub-code in order to instantiate the hierarchical structures of both linguistics and society, making poetic language a deviation from "normal" language. The problem is not solved by reversing the perspective because poetic codes do not encompass all others. Rather, in the operations and modes of poetic language, understood as a social practice, "we can observe [...] the dynamic process whereby signs take on or change their significations. The practical realization of the 'totality' of the code is only found in poetic language." In the ordered infinity of the code in a complementary system of codes, poetic practice "is revealed to be a discovery and the exploration of the possibilities of language," whereby the subject is freed from given, social linguistic networks. The dynamism of this activity "breaks the inertia of language-habits and offers the linguist a unique opportunity to study the becoming of the signification of signs."[128] She likens poetic language to an organism, having interdependent parts, in a fluctuating system. Given its dialectical dynamism, poetic language does not exclude ordinary discourse, but works in the unbreakable bond between the law of ordinary language and its destruction.

The manner in which Kristeva negotiates binaries, on the one hand, reflects her principal mode of critique, developed simultaneously with her own hypotheses, and, on the other, displays her performance of fluid, nonhierarchical gestures, which she associates with her object of study, an association shared by Saussure.[129] In the multi-dimensional space in which

128 Ibid., 28.

129 A beautiful example of how Kristeva handles binaries is demonstrated in the way she works through the concept of prohibition. As a consequence of her hypothesis that the literary text is double, she characterizes both writing and reading as aggressive forms of participation, as modes of appropriation of the other. This double orientation requires in writing acts of reminiscence

the poetic paragram moves and in its active relation between the doubling of writing and reading, ordinary and poetic languages are co-constitutive. Thus, the law is not excluded because its existence and its destruction are realized in the poetic text, dwelling within it. In this inhabitable space of becoming, the text evokes the foreign and the other, here, where the contradictions are not excluded, where no truth is established, where the law is both transgressed and implicit. In a broken and politicized space, the binaries and distinctions once occluded become visible. For only in a system where contradictions are not non-sense, where the dynamism adds to the mobility of language and meaning, the semiotic practice becomes transformational.

Here signs are blurred, disengaged from denotation and oriented toward the addressee, the other, who is modified by them. Here the logic is not organized by truth, for it contains both prohibitions and transgressions. Kristeva concludes her essay with these words:

> It seems paradoxical that signs can explain the functioning of words. What justifies that claim is that in our society the word has become clarification, petrification, straitjacket; it fixes, it ossifies, it brings to a close. Even after Rimbaud, Lautréamont and the Surrealists, it seems surprising [though it should not be surprising] when in someone's work the word engages with spaces, attracts those vibrations that describe a rhythm. We have to encounter the restrictions of rationalism and seize the palpitating life of gesture, of the body, of magic, in order to rediscover that man possesses languages that do not confine him to the line, that allow him to extend himself into space. [...] Today's linguistic science is determined to show how the word fixes and breaks

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(the evocation of the other) and acts of summoning and transformations (a dialogue between texts and citations). These acts grant the text "a new way of being, elaborating thereby its own signification." She describes how this kind of doubling occurs in a space whose dimension is neither exclusively horizontal (the message sent by the writing subject to addressee), nor vertical (signifier — signified). To this spatialization of the poetic paragram engendered by the doubling of writing-reading, she adds a third dimension "to the two dimensions of writing [...]: that of the 'foreign text.'" Thus, the doubling does not exclude the other dimensions of writing, but transgresses them. Unlike the scientific logic that "evolves in the binary space of 0-1 and proceeds by means of identification, description, narration, the exclusion of contradictions, the establishment of truth," the paragram in its dialogic movement both transgresses the laws of grammar, syntax, and semantics *and* also implies them. The transgression "by absorbing the prohibition, announces the *ambivalence* of the poetic paragram: there is a coexistence of the monological (scientific, historical, descriptive) discourse and the discourse that destroys this monologism. Without the prohibition there would be no transgression." Poetic language makes this apparent; it is a visible realization of the invisible and their coexistence. Through the poetic paragram, "we can see that the *distinction* censorship — liberty, conscious — unconscious, nature — culture, is historical. We should speak of their indivisible cohabitation." See ibid., 30–31.

> down this momentum of distance and relation: this flight of the object that is language.[130]

Why is it not surprising then that her engagement with Saussure's notebooks is also ignored by the other writers affiliated with *Tel Quel?* Several years prior to the conference at Columbia University, in their own publication, Kristeva elaborates on Saussure's studies on anagrams, without the compulsion to double or split the linguist, the figure most associated with structuralism. Reflecting on her earlier work, she writes in the preface to the 1980 publication in English of *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* that it "was perhaps also necessary to be a *woman* to attempt to take up the exorbitant wager of carrying the rational project to the borders of the signifying ventures of men."[131] Not only a woman, but also an exile (and spy) who had experienced Soviet-style communism firsthand, Kristeva unfixes the word to create a multidimensional world in which the poetic word circulates, in which poets and readers actively participate, emancipated from the linguistic and social structures that have barred access to dialectical movement. The network of connections that she articulates encompasses the linear, the signifying chain, and the rational, while paragrammatic writing practices, through movement, gesture, magic, and dynamic relations, *make* meaning rather than expressing it as if it were a truth there to be found and affirmed. To study "this flight of the object that is language" modifies all who allow themselves to be susceptible to its poetic dimension, "the palpitating life of gesture, of the body, of magic."[132] Her affirmation of the vulnerability of the reader and claims about the power of poetic language offer a very different picture of Saussure and his work on anagrams, in contrast, for instance, to Starobinski's picture of him as isolated and defeated. Meanwhile Kristeva's willingness to treat Saussure's linguistic and sonic studies as informing one another exemplifies how a generous approach to apparent contradictions can be richly generative and indeed radical. Within the context of the pedagogical scene, her approach is a model for the kind of receptivity and vulnerability that Lucretius aspires to cultivate in his readers.

iv. Why Do Linguists Love Puns? Wunderli's and Jakobson's Encounters with Saussure's Anagrams

While during the late 1960s and early 1970s the primary responses to Saussure's work with anagrams came from writers connected with the journal *Tel Quel,* two linguists, in addition to Benveniste, were also working through and with his phonic studies. In 1972, a year after the publication of

130 Ibid., 45. In the version of this essay Kristeva published subsequently in her book *Séméiotiké, "l'homme* is replaced by *le sujet."* Ibid., translator's note, 47n2.

131 Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art,* trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (Columbia University Press, 1980), x.

132 Kristeva, "Towards a Semiology of Paragrams," 45.

Starobinski's book, Peter Wunderli, a historian of linguistics, published his *Ferdinand de Saussure und die Anagramme,* considered to be the most thorough study of Saussure's anagram notebooks,[133] in addition to four articles on the subject, the first of which contains a transcription of a notebook in which Saussure describes his hypotheses and theoretical propositions.[134] Wunderli sidesteps the splitting of Saussure into two by splitting language into "'normal'" and poetic, and resolves the apparent contradictions by separating the *Course* and the notebooks on either side of this divide. So, for instance, Wunderli annuls the inconsistency between the two different conceptions of linearity by asserting that the deviation from linearity in the anagrammatic play of phonemes that sound out the theme-word is a form of "poetic license" and is exempt from the rules of everyday language, whereas in the *Course,* the signifier, being auditory, unfolds in time along a line that has the properties of being one-dimensional and a measurable span. To support this claim that "a special status exists for poetic language alongside the (communicative) rules of 'normal' language," and to demonstrate that the poetic text requires a basic text of everyday language in order for the anagram to be realized, he cites Saussure himself: "In a highly specialized area such as the one with which we are dealing here, it is always in accordance with the basic rules of human speech that the issue of the consecutive and non-consecutive nature of language can be raised."[135] Likewise, the formal character of the sign (the inseparability of the signifier and the signified) is qualified, and the so-called laws of everyday speech are repealed by "poetic license." Consequently, the theme-word appears as material substance when in its anagrammatical condition, and as form when in the differential condition as signifying units. Wunderli maintains that "poetic freedom according to Saussure's anagram theory consists of the fact that the signs are not only used as forms but that their substantial aspect becomes relevant as well and plays a functional role. This does not contradict the comments made in the *Cours* but it represents a poetic epiphenomenon, which is superimposed on the standard language." Because the anagram, according to Wunderli, is superimposed on normal language, the link between the signifier and signified is loosened, "which leaves the regularities of standard language untouched."[136] After Wunderli sanitizes and domesticates the contradictions, he declares that Saussure's real failure is giving the poet so much intentionality and creativity.

In defense of his indictment, Wunderli turns to the poets themselves, although their role in his claim is given less value in the end. In an argu-

133 Peter Wunderli, *Ferdinand de Saussure und die Anagramme: Linguistik und Literatur* (Niemeyer, 1972). For the claim of its significance, see Callus, "A Chronological and Annotated Bibliography," 283.

134 Peter Wunderli, "Ferdinand de Saussure: '1er cahier à lire préliminairement': Ein Basistext seiner Anagrammstudien," *Zeitschrift für französische Sprache und Literatur* 82 (1972): 193–216.

135 Peter Wunderli, "Saussure's Anagrams," in *The Cambridge Companion to Saussure,* ed. Carol Sanders (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 180.

136 Ibid., 181.

ment that recalls Riffaterre's emphasis on the reader, Wunderli, with the help of Stéphane Mallarmé and Francis Ponge, argues that what matters most in the making of meaning is the reader, and how the reader activates the structures found in texts. While their approaches, Saussure's and the poet's, share certain perspectives, they are structured in distinctly different manners. For Mallarmé, poetic meaning is made by the reader in "a process of unveiling" step by step, "on the basis of certain evocative and associative mechanisms." In addition, the poet observes that: "The melody or song under the text (*L'air ou chant sous le texte*) leads the divination forward, weaving a pattern of invisible fleurons and ornamental endpieces." The poetic message thus is perceived in the repetitive structure of a motif, in the "echoes within a text." Wunderli then concludes that in both Saussure's and Mallarmé's approaches, "the essence of a poetic text is not to be seen right away, rather it is to be discovered and uncovered by the reader in the course of reading."[137] Yet for Saussure, the element to be discovered is the theme-word, whereas for Mallarmé it is "the poetic meaning as such" having to do "with sense-evoking echoes and with structural equivalents." For Ponge, the reader discovers the sense of a poem by attending to "'a concert of words, of meaningful sounds.'" Wunderli interprets this to mean that the relational structure and ordering of elements are decisive, and that "the individual meaning of singular elements is absolutely pushed into the background for the time being. The meaning of the poetic message is generated based on the structures in the field of the *signifiant*, on the basis of echoes, harmonies and contrasts."[138] The text becomes in this scheme self-sufficient and autonomous, no longer an expression of its writer, but activated by the reader who will find a variety of meanings in it. In short, the model of meaning making that Wunderli locates in Ponge and Mallarmé is one of depth (where the reader reveals hidden meanings), whereas Saussure's is a surface model because the anagram one finds in a text can be recognized through the phonic patterns and repetitions. Wunderli, having worked out these distinctions, contends that Saussure's studies were "not as absurd as some would claim"; they were "no *folie*."[139] Yet his resolution depends on the splitting of poetic and normal language.

In contrast to Wunderli's approach, Roman Jakobson reads Saussure's studies with the kind of generosity worthy of emulation, also resonant with Kristeva's approach. Two years after Benveniste published in *CFS* the letters Saussure wrote to Meillet, in 1966, Jakobson published two essays that mention Saussure's work on anagrams. In the first, "Grammatical Parallelism and its Russian Facet," Jakobson, in writing about oral poetry, makes mention of Saussure in a footnote regarding the relevance of his phonic studies to sound play in oral poetry and specifically in Russian folk songs. He begins his essay by citing "Poetic Diction," an early essay by Gerard Manley Hopkins:

137 Ibid., 182.
138 Ibid., 183.
139 Ibid., 184–85.

> The artificial part of poetry, perhaps we shall be right to say all artifice, reduces itself to the principle of parallelism. The structure of poetry is that of continuous parallelism, ranging from the technical so-called Parallelism of Hebrew Poetry and the antiphons of Church music to the intricacy of Greek or Italian or English verse.[140]

Expanding Hopkins's proposition while drawing on the suggestive etymology of the term "verse" (versus, return), he generalizes the observation, writing that "on every level of language, the essence of poetic artifice consists in recurrent returns."[141] To explore this inference, Jakobson turns to Russian folk poetry, "the only living oral tradition in the Indo-European world that uses grammatical parallelism as its basic mode of concatenating successive verses."[142] In his detailed analysis of the song, "Oh, to live in grief, to be unchagrined," he describes the range of grammatical, syntactic, and semantic parallelisms in paired lines of the song. For instance, working with the rhetorical device anadiplosis, repetition of a word in quick succession, he describes how this form "turns the second half of the couplet into a sort of sequel to its first half. [...] (And [if one is] to live in grief — [he has] to be unchagrined, And [if] chagrined in grief — [one has] to perish)."[143] What creates the parallelism in the song's lines, as Jakobson notes, is an identically repeated word, which "is reinforced by the paronomasia" of other words in the verse lines.[144] What is odd, however, at least to my mind, is the context in which he makes reference to Saussure's "precept" regarding the theme-word and its group of phonemes, "that everything responds to each other in one manner or another in the verses."[145] That is, while discussing the roles of paronomasia and other sound-alike words, he mentions the anagram studies, yet, as we have seen, paronomasia and homonyms are what Saussure believed needed to be excluded from his studies. Suffice to say that for Jakobson here, responsive and repeated poetic elements are what is compelling in Saussure's sound studies.

Saussure's notebooks appear in a different context in an essay Jakobson wrote the same year (1966). In this "Retrospect," he details at length the narrative of his intellectual life and linguistic research. Again while discussing Russian epic poetry, Jakobson writes "F. de Saussure's penetrating remarks on the archaic '*fureur du jeu phonique*' [passion for phonic play],

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140 Hopkins's essay continues: "But parallelism is of two kinds necessarily — where the opposition is clearly marked, and where it is transitional rather or chromatic." Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Humphry House (Oxford University Press, 1959), 84. Notable for me here is his use of the word "chromatic," which relates both to music (a scale of semi-tones) and to color (a prismatic display). Roman Jakobson, "Grammatical Parallelism and Its Russian Facet," in Roman Jakobson, *Language in Literature*, ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Belknap Press, 1987), 145.

141 Ibid., 145.

142 Ibid., 151.

143 Ibid., 159–60.

144 Ibid., 160.

145 Ibid., 518n51

tenacious in the poetic tradition of diverse Indo-European peoples and traceable back to their common ancestral language, are entirely applicable to the ancient Russian epic art, where any passage *'n'est qu'un grouillement de syllabes ou de groups phonique qui se font écho'* [is only a swarm of syllables or of phonic groups that echo each other]."[146] In his discussion of the twelfth-century Russian epic, *Slovo,* Jakobson describes anagrammatic allusions to the name of Igor's companion, writing that "a set of phonemes responding to an omitted name emerges within one of the most apposite and elaborated sections of the *Slovo* (XXXVI), [Igor's wife] Jaroslavna's incantatory lament." He contends that Saussure's analysis and theory of sound figures, in particular anagrams, "may certainly be counted among Saussure's most daring and lucid discoveries." He is interested both in the absence of the theme-word in the poetic verse (or in Saussure's terms, "the cryptogram") and also in the irrelevance of the consecutiveness of the phonemes of the anagrammatized word, that is, the phonemes "may appear dislocated."[147] The lack of linearity of the order of the phonemes, in addition to the repetition of some phonemes and the simultaneity of signifiers in absentia, are subjects that Jakobson had previously discussed in one of the six lectures delivered in 1942 where he expanded upon the Saussurean sign to investigate systematically "the relation between sound and meaning within a word."[148]

In his fifth lecture in the collection *Six Lectures on Sound and Meaning,* Jakobson sets out to demonstrate that a sequence of phonemes is not a mechanical aggregation of differential elements, but is a structure which "manifests certain combinatory characters."[149] As developed in the *Course,* differential elements are used to characterize phonic elements, specifically those created through oppositions between relative and negative entities. For Jakobson, however, in addition to having *differential* features, phonic elements when combined manifest *distinctive* features. Consequently, through the inclusion of additional indices and phonic distinctions, he introduces a variety of features that can define phonic elements. This expansion allows Jakobson to show how phonemes work as bundles of units in the "phonatory act" that produces greater complexity within the linearity of sounds: the auditory unfolding in time of a chain of signifiers. While two phonemes cannot be emitted simultaneously, "it is perfectly possible to emit several distinctive features at the same time. Not only is it possible, it is what is normally done, since *phonemes are complex entities."* As a result, the phonatory act thus maintains both the unity of its linear character (unfolding

146 Roman Jakobson, "Retrospect," in *Selected Writings,* vol. 4: *Slavic Epic Studies,* ed. Stephen Rudy (Mouton Publishers, 1966), 680. Jakobson cites Saussure in his original language.

147 Jakobson, "Retrospect," vol. 4, 685.

148 Roman Jakobson, *Six Lectures on Sound and Meaning,* trans. John Mepham (The Harvester Press, 1978), 3. Jakobson was invited to give these lectures in 1942 at the École Libre des Hautes Études in New York, founded by French and Belgian scholars in exile.

149 Ibid., 95.

along a linear, single dimension) and concomitantly activates the non-linear features of phonic elements, due to their additional complexities. Jakobson writes that "in this respect it can be compared to a musical chord, which is at one and the same time a unity and a 'bundle' of units [...] Saussure himself remarked in another context that each phoneme brings several 'factors in play' each of which is endowed with a 'differential value.'"[150] His description of the complexity of sound, as "a musical chord," is extremely helpful, not only because it amplifies the character of the phonatory act, but because it resonates so nicely with Saussure's sound studies — although in 1942 the notebooks had yet to make their existence known!

In order to develop further the identity and function of the phonatory act and sound chains, Jakobson expands on the *Course*'s theses, which describe linguistic value in relation to two axes: the axis of simultaneity and the axis of succession. Along each axis temporality is constructed differently. On the horizontal axis, the sound elements have a syntagmatic relationship defined as being *in praesentia* and have a sequential temporal relationship, where each sound element unfolds one after the other in homogeneous acoustic time and "is taken to be unitary."[151] On the vertical axis, that of simultaneity, elements co-exist in a paradigmatic relation, that is, one element can be substituted by another. The relation between elements on this axis is defined as being in absentia, such that only one element at a time is functioning in the chain of sounds. Yet through their relation of association, the elements exist simultaneously, "in a virtual, mnemonic system," according to the *Course,* "from which any intervention by time is excluded." Time here is not relevant, due to the simultaneity of each element. Jakobson contributes an additional feature to the vertical axis. He writes of the virtual series: "[T]his latent system [...] provides the oppositions which are necessary to the constitution of the sign" — although certain elements are absent from the actual series, they are nonetheless *present in language.* Consequently, for instance, the word *amō* might be followed by the word *tamen* along the horizontal axis of succession (verb + adverb, "I love nevertheless"), while on the vertical axis of simultaneity, *amō* is connected with *amās, amāmus,* etc. Thus, with the word *amō,* "the forms to which it is opposed are not part of this sign, they are *in absentia,* but as for the *oppositive qualities,* these are inherent in this sign, they are *in praesentia,* and it is they which constitute the sign."[152] Thus, while the other forms of *amō* (*amās, amāmus,* etc.) are absent in their simultaneous relations (along the vertical axis), they are present in language because they are possible replacements for the word (*amō*) and constitute its *"oppositive qualities."* This means that each phoneme or word "comprises *in praesentia* a bundle of distinctive features" along with their absent features.[153] The

150 Ibid., 99. Emphasis in the original.

151 Ibid., 100.

152 Ibid., 102. Translation modified slightly. Emphases in the original.

153 Ibid. Jakobson will develop these ideas in later essays, for instance in "Linguistics and Poetics" where he produces his famous formulation: *"The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combina-*

implications of Jakobson's expansion of the capacities of the axes and the increase in the complexities of phonemes not only concern how the signifier's linguistic value is defined along both axes *in praesentia* and in absentia, but also modify how time functions. Because the temporality of a phonatory act is not tied exclusively to the horizontal axis, time becomes more ample, less straight.[154] Brought to bear on Saussure's sound studies, Jakobson's hypotheses resound in two very particular ways. First, in relation to the cryptogram, the theme-word is absent in the verse but made present (heard) by the phonemes that sound it, such that it is both *in praesentia* and in absentia. Second, in Jakobson's elaboration, the temporality of the sound chain is no longer seen as solely linear, unfolding in one dimension, homogeneously along the horizontal axis, but also as simultaneous and chordal. Thus, in terms of the anagram, the phonemes neither need to appear in succession, nor in order; rather, they swarm, echo, playing the chord of the theme-word. This remarkable and generous expansion of concepts presented in the *Course* will both obviate any need to split the linguist in the future, and also prepares the way for the rigorous work that Jakobson will undertake when he encounters Saussure's sonic studies and hypotheses he elaborated in the notebooks.

In the summer of 1970, the first letter that Saussure wrote to his friend about the anagrams (dated November 12, 1906), was found in Meillet's library by his wife.[155] Along with a lengthy commentary on its contents and relevance, Jakobson published this letter in *L'Homme* a year later.[156] In "La première Lettre de Ferdinand de Saussure sur les anagrammes," Jakobson declared that Saussure's work both on poetry and on the principles of linguistics went hand in hand and that Saussure perhaps hoped to use his research into the anagram as the basis for a presentation to the Collège de France because Saussure wrote them "with a reader in mind" (*comme en vue d'un lecteur*). In his letter he requests that Meillet read his notes to help him discern "if he [the writer of the studies] is a victim of an illusion, or if there is some truth at the base of his ideas, or if there is only half a truth" (*s'il est victime d'une illusion, ou si quelque chose de vrai est à la base de son idée, ou s'il n'y*

tion." Jakobson, *Language in Literature*, 71, emphasis in the original.

154 Jakobson's expansion of Saussure's theses, especially his reformulation of time in the phonatory act, relates to Claudia Mejía Quijano's comments regarding linguistic echoes which I discuss earlier in Chapter 2. Her linguistic echoes are akin to Jakobson's understanding of the chordal unfolding of sounds both in and out of time, *in praesentia* and in absentia.

155 Six years earlier in 1964 and thirty years after Meillet's death, his wife gave the first set of letters to Benveniste, who noted that it appeared that an earlier letter was missing, in particular the one "where Saussure 'made the first announcement of his research on the Saturnian.'" See Émile Benveniste, "Avant-Propos," *Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure* 21 (1964): 91. This letter is indeed the missing one which Madame Meillet found by chance as she was going through his library. Benveniste's "Avant-Propos" introduces the letters he edited.

156 Roman Jakobson, "La première Lettre de Ferdinand de Saussure sur les anagrammes," *L'Homme* 11, no. 2 (1971): 15–24.

a que moitié vrai).[157] Saussure recalls Meillet's sincere support and encouraging response in a letter two years later, dated January 8, 1908, in which he writes to his friend, "I remember with real gratitude the friendly encouragement that you gave me at the start of this research, when we were talking about Saturnian verse, and that you gave me precious support through your review; because I believe that if you had not confirmed for me that the idea of the anagram did not seem false to you, according to the Saturnian examples, I would not have had the idea to pursue my research."[158] Given these remarks, what strikes Jakobson as completely surprising is that "the 99 handwritten notebooks by Saussure, devoted to 'phonic poetics' and in particular to the 'principle of the anagram', have remained hidden from readers for more than half a century."[159] His surprise, as I understand it, stems from what linguists have been missing and how important Saussure's phonic studies are. Jakobson cites himself, to affirm again, that "the theory and analysis of the sound figures (*jeux phoniques*), particularly anagrams, and their role in the diverse poetic traditions as elaborated by him simultaneously with his renowned courses of general linguistics may certainly be counted among Saussure's most daring and lucid discoveries."[160]

Jakobson insists on bringing together — emphatically *not* splitting — Saussure's sound studies in notebooks and the material from his courses on general linguistics, and understands them as mutually inclusive investigations. He notes that an oscillation between the vision of a path open to indisputable phenomena and fears of being "a victim of an illusion" characterizes Saussure's research in *both* areas. Indeed, he observes that with regard to general linguistics, he felt continually disgusted and rejected "more and more the idea of publishing materials from the course" he was teaching. Whereas, regarding the anagrams, he notes that Saussure considered that material as part of book in preparation with an eye toward a reader. With regard to Saussure's alleged decision not to publish his work on anagrams, he refers to the linguist's "talent" for not publishing articles on linguistics that he had already written and completed.[161] He goes still further in noting, following Nava, that Saussure lucidly confronted the contradictory aspects that his theory of poetic structure presented, just as he treated contradictions in his courses on general linguistics.[162] In both

157 Ibid., 16.

158 "Je me souviens avec une bien véritable gratitude du concours amical que vous m'avez donné au début de cette recherche, lorsque nous parlions du vers saturnien, et que vous m'avez donné un appui précieux par votre critique; car je crois bien qui si ne m'aviez vous pas confirmé que l'idée de l'anagramme ne vous semblait pas fausse, d'aprés les exemples saturniens, je n'aurais pas eu l'idée de poursuivre une recherche." Benveniste, "Avant-Propos," 119.

159 "Il est véritablement surprenant que les 99 cahiers manuscrits de Saussure, consacrés à la 'poétique phonisante' et en particulier au 'principe de l'anagramme,' aient pu rester plus d'un demi-siècle dissimulés aux lecteurs." Jakobson, "La première Lettre," 21.

160 Ibid. French insertion in the original. Also in Jakobson, "Retrospect," 4:685.

161 Jakobson, "La première Lettre," 21.

162 Nava, "Lettres de Ferdinand de Saussure."

cases, "Saussure highlights the irreconcilable contradictions by perceiving the synthesis with extraordinary clairvoyance, but at the same time, remains fettered by the prejudices of his ideological climate which prevent him from taking advantage of his own intuitions."[163] Such a climate, argues Jakobson, explains why the question of chance versus authorial intention weighed on Saussure and hindered him both in his research on general linguistics and "in his penetrating discoveries of the unexplored regions of poetry."[164] These discoveries are even more striking because Saussure had no signposts, precedents, or precursors to follow. As a result, according to Jakobson, while he recognized the latent and subliminal intention in creating and maintaining poetic structures, he hypothesized that there was an occult and carefully preserved tradition. Fifty years later, in a different "ideological climate," Jakobson is able to support and affirm what Saussure recognized intuitively, adding that: "We need only recall Russian riddles which, as it has been repeatedly demonstrated in folklore studies, often contained in their text the riddle-word in the form of an anagram, without those who propose them or solve them, needing to question the fact of the anagram."[165] Not only does Jakobson maintain the connection between the different fields of research and underscores the similarities in Saussure's approaches to them; he brings current linguistic research to bear on his theory of poetic structure in order to dispense with the question of authorial intention that weighed on Saussure and prevented him from arriving at a synthesis.

Recalling that Jakobson published his commentary on Saussure's letter in 1971, the same year that Starobinski published *Les mots sous les mots,* I find it surprising that his evaluation of the anagram notebooks is neither engaged with, nor incorporated into the essays by the *Tel Quel* writers, though they often cite Jakobson's remark regarding the significance of the notebooks. Lotringer misattributes a phrase to Jakobson in the first paragraph of "The Game of the Name" when he writes that the importance of the other Saussure's work, "must be recognized if it is true, as Roman Jakobson had written, that we are in the presence of a major discovery, a second Saussurian revolution."[166] While the *Tel Quel* writers make reference to Jakobson's work on linguistics and poetics, they seem to avoid the remarkable claims he makes at the end of his commentary on the letter, signaling again a compulsion to split, or at least, to repress.[167] For instance, Jakobson writes: "In this research, Saussure opens up incredible perspec-

163 "Saussure met en relief des contradictions irréconciliables en pressentant la synthèse avec une clairvoyance extraordinaire, mais reste en même temps enchaîné par les préjugés de son ambiance idéologique, qui l'empêchent de tirer parti de ses propres intuitions." Jakobson, "La première Lettre," 21.

164 Ibid., 22.

165 "Il nous suffit de rappeler les devinettes russes qui, comme on l'a maintes fois démontré dans les études de folklore, renferment souvent dans leur texte le mot d'énigme sous forme d'anagramme, sans que ceux qui les proposent ou les résolvent, soupçonnent le fait de l'anagramme." Ibid.

166 Lotringer, "The Game of the Name," 2.

167 I am indebted to Ellen Oliensis for this insight.

tives for the linguistic study of poetry. [...] Linguistic analysis of Latin, Greek, Vedic, and Germanic verses sketched by Saussure is, without a doubt, beneficial not only for poetics, but also, in the words of the author, 'for linguistics itself.'"[168] He refers to Saussure's intuition with regard to the "polyphonic and polysemic of poetic language," which, as his friend Meillet understood, presented a challenge to the pervasive conception of "rationalist art" and "infallibly rational poetry," suggesting Saussure recognized that extra-ordinary, perhaps even magical, forces were involved.[169] Jakobson's appraisal of Saussure's work on anagrams, if it had been read and considered with the similar attention given to Starobinski's writings, would have provided a more complex understanding of the anagram notebooks and their implications for poetics and linguistics. In particular, his discussion of Saussure's understanding of poetry as more complex than "rationalist art" contests the argument that he was unaware of the role of the irrational and the unconscious in poetic composition. Meanwhile, his approach to the two projects that Saussure was engaged with at the end of his life, the lectures on general linguistics and his sound studies in poetry, illustrates that working through apparent contradictions can precipitate remarkable insights. Indeed, his comment on the relevance of the studies to other studies of poetry will be taken up by several writers in the late 1970s and 1980s, who show in more detail their significance in relation, for instance, to Vedic and troubadour poetry.[170]

v. Compelling Magic

At this point I need to introduce a writer whose work offers us lessons in listening to the phonic play that composes poetry's music; his attention to sound and his desire to investigate its role in poetic composition uncannily resemble Saussure's. David Masson, an astute, though overlooked, reader of English poetry, published two studies on phonic patterning in the 1950s.[171] While Masson would not, indeed, could not have read Saussure's anagram studies, his elaboration of phonic patterning — repetition, permutation,

168 "Dans ces recherches, Saussure ouvre des perspectives inouïes à l'étude linguistique de la poésie. [...] L'analyse linguistique des vers latins, grecs, védiques et germaniques esquissée par Saussure est, sans aucun doute, bienfaisante non seulement pour la poétique, mais aussi, selon l'expression de l'auteur, 'pour la linguistique elle-même.'" Jakobson, "La première Lettre," 23–24.

169 Ibid., 24.

170 See Paul Zumthor, *Langue, texte, énigme* (Éditions du Seuil, 1975); Paul Zumthor, "Des paragrammes chez les troubadours?," *Romantic Review* 65 (1974): 1–12; David Shepheard, "Saussure's Vedic Anagrams," *Modern Language Review* 77, no. 3 (1982): 513–23; and Tatyana J. Elizarenkova, *Language and Style of the Vedic Ṛṣis,* ed. Wendy Doniger (State University of New York Press, 1995). These writers argue that Saussure's work on anagrams constitutes an important part of the study of Indo-European and medieval French poetics.

171 Masson returned to this subject in his essay, David Masson, "Poetic Sound-Patterning Reconsidered," *Proceedings of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society* 16 (1975–1978): 64–122.

and modulation — what he calls "sound-artistry," has extraordinary resonances with the notebooks. He brings to his discussion a musical lexicon to assist in describing how sonic effects, like echoes and magical incantations, relate to levels of meaning. In his essay, "Free Phonetic Patterns in Shakespeare's Sonnets," he starts by defining three sound "tricks": the equivalence trick, where "A resembles A' in sound, therefore in meaning or in the author's attitude to them"; the distinction-trick, where there is a sound resemblance, "but they are clearly opposites, and this likeness accentuates their polarity" of meaning; and the relation-trick, where "A is related to A' grammatically, dialectically, etc.," but the precise effects depend on the details of the pattern and the significance of words. These patterns Masson likens to the "quasi-meaningful effects for pure music," and as a consequence they have the capacity to produce impressions, ranging from poetic authority to "magical correspondence or mysterious 'rightness.'"[172] In this first essay, he develops a complex set of terms to describe the "total pattern of repeated (or imperfectly echoing) sounds in a given passage" in order to elaborate the poetic artistry of the sonnets.[173]

In "The Keatsian Incantation: A Study in Phonetic Patterning," Masson's desire is both to analyze the sound patterns, "the characteristic music," of Keats's poetry and also to "resensitize our ears" to hear the harmonies that the poet's "half-conscious mental ear" heard in the web of sounds, in particular, during his process of revision.[174] He suggests that the use of sound in poetry is "probably related to something fundamental in the human nervous constitution," and that the elaboration and refinement of sonic patterns are akin to the babbling of infants and "the repetitions and inversions of a melodic line of music." Such patterns, he claims, "may even short-circuit consciousness, while they stir the whole organism to response."[175] In the poetry of Keats, Masson sees a rich tapestry of sonic forms that are of "great importance to his mental ear, for it will often be found that his second thoughts in compositions have greatly improved the formal beauty and suitability of the sound-patterns." In his evaluation of Keats's use of sound-patterns in comparison with his Augustan predecessors, he argues that the poet used the devices "to excess," divorcing them from "rhetorical and didactic purpose." Masson concedes that "at their best, they exercise a compelling magic," which is what justifies them. His aim is to show how linguistic and aesthetic perception are intimately bound together, that is, to link the activity of communication based on identifying speech-sounds with the semi-conscious activity of recognizing patterns of sound in poetry that carry emotional relevance and "the simpler connotations of sound."[176]

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172 David Masson, "Free Phonetic Patterns in Shakespeare's Sonnets," *Neophilologus* 38 (1954): 281.

173 Ibid., 282.

174 David Masson, "The Keatsian Incantation: A Study in Phonetic Patterning," in *John Keats: A Reassessment*, ed. Kenneth Muir (Liverpool University Press, 1969), 159–60.

175 Ibid., 160.

176 Ibid., 161.

What I like about Masson's approach is his commitment to a phonic description of poetry and his recognition of the connections and limits of sound patterns in relation to meaning making.

While the essay contains many astonishing examples, I include just one, an analysis of Keats's revisions in the penultimate stanza of the "Ode to a Nightingale."

> Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
> Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
> She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
> The same that oft-times hath
> Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
> Of perilous seas in faery lands forlorn.[177]

These lines, writes Masson, "represent, perhaps, the crown of the Keatsian incantation. To attempt to map out this hallowed precinct may seem sacrilege," but the lines neither suffer nor lose anything from his analysis.[178] He assesses several revisions, the first in the first line of this stanza, in which Keats replaced the word "voice" with the word "song," to avoid a word repetition from the two previous lines: "The voice I hear this passing night was heard / In ancient days by emperor and clown."[179] He notes that the alteration results in a "more sonorous vowel and a booming *-ng*." In another instance, Keats originally had written: "Charm'd the wide casements" in which case, Masson notes, "the line would have had a *-d* series, but the amended version gives [...] a hesitating or doubled /k/ at 'casements'. Moreover, the stressed vowels of the line now afford greater variety, the first three *å, è, ɔy,* contrasting with the couple in *ɔw.*"[180] In addition to describing in detail several motifs and sound patterns that build through the stanza, in the final line he notes the sub-pattern: "F...l-S|S-S-n| |F...l-n'S| |F-l-n" — from "O**f** peri**l**ou**s** sea**s** i**n** **f**aery **l**a**n**d**s** fo**r**lo**r**n" — whose most significant feature is "the gradually tightening sequence F...l...n| |F...l-n| |F-l-n, with a stress-shunt in member 3."[181] That is, the word "**f**o**r**lo**r**n" gives the sequence, *f-l-n,* and pushes the stress to the end of the word. Masson concludes his analysis of "this hallowed precinct" with these comments:

> This produces an effect of a supra-logical argument, here clinched at the end of the line [...] and like most Keatsian patterns, it is separated from syntax, and even from the "rhetoric of emotions." It has attained,

177 John Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale," in *Keats's Poetry and Prose,* ed. Jeffrey N. Cox (W.W. Norton, 2009), 459. Typing in these lines of poetry, after the slog of working though the various ways others have reworked and undermined Saussure's sound studies, gave me such pleasure. To return to verse, versus, the turning of the line, words and network of sounds, is a solace.

178 Masson, "The Keatsian Incantation," 176.

179 Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale," 459.

180 Masson, "The Keatsian Incantation," 177.

181 Ibid., 178. Bold type added.

> in fact, the transcendental quality of great music. Even at the most humdrum valuation, the patterns of the last line would seem to serve as a magical incantation which, though it may carry certain connotations, works chiefly to subdue the critical-analytical faculties in the reader or listener, and to free his imagination.[182]

Note that the lines themselves render both audience and song: Ruth listening to "the self-same song" that runs through her.[183] Is her mind subdued while her heart is free to imagine what lies beyond, longing for what is not alien to her? Has our mind been tamed by "a drowsy numbness" like that of the speaker, or is it free to imagine the pain the numbness wants to soothe?[184] To hear that song and its power to charm, to open like a window onto "the foam / of perilous seas" in magical realms? What I want to emphasize in particular is how sound complicates, even eclipses, sense; so, while not divorced from sense, sound wins this time. And Masson helpfully draws the connection between poetic sound and pedagogy. Like an incantation whose rhythm and music can fascinate and enthrall an audience, by seducing us with "a compelling magic," poetry's sounds release us from "critical-analytical" confines and teach us to listen and to imagine otherwise.

Because Masson's analysis of Keats's poetry relies in part on the very divide I have wanted to question, it is too risky, even irresponsible, to leave the last word to him, lest the limits be reinstated, as they always keep threatening to do. While sound and sense attract one another, and sound patterns are tied to semantic context, it's not the relation I want to break in two. Rather, I want to open the space, to charm the "magic casements," to create a place for the in between, the overlooked, and the other, before forging ahead to make meaning, to name the figures, to interpret. Kristeva, Jakobson, and Masson in their approaches, their reception, affirm for me an ethics of reading, a being with and working with what might be heard, overheard. In different ways, each of their approaches brings together the mythic and scientific, the poetic and the theoretical, the magical and the everyday, in a space just before or beyond meaning.

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182 Ibid., 178–79.

183 In his first version, Keats made a pun on Ruth's name with the word "ruthless" that was excised and replaced by the word "perilous." Masson, "The Keatsian Incantation," 177.

184 Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale," 457.

What Sounds Do Broken Words Tell?

A language without the expression of person cannot be imagined.
— Émile Benveniste, "Subjectivity in Language"[1]

The archive is [...] a death sentence, a tomb, a display of the violated body, an inventory of property, a medical treatise on gonorrhea, a few lines about a whore's life, an asterisk in the grand narrative of history.
— Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts"[2]

The violence of the body reaches the written page only through absence, through the intermediary of documents that the historian has been able to see on the sands from which a presence has since been washed away, and through a murmur that lets us hear — but from afar — the unknown immensity that seduces and menaces our knowledge.
— Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*[3]

But the rags, the refuse — these I will not inventory but allow, in the only way possible, to come into their own: by making use of them.
— Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*[4]

Our entrance to the past is through memory. And water. It is happening always — repeating always, the repetition becoming a haunting. Do they, the sounds, the cries, the shouts of those thrown overboard from the *Zong*

1 Émile Benveniste, "Subjectivity in Language," in *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek (University of Miami Press, 1971), 225.

2 Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 12, no. 2 (2008): 2.

3 Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History,* trans. Tom Conley (Columbia University Press, 1988), 3.

4 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project,* trans. Howard Eiland, Kevin McLaughlin, and Rolf Tiedemann (Belknap Press, 1999), 460.

> repeat themselves over and over until they rise the from the ocean floor to resurface in *Zong!?*
>
> — m. nourbeSe philip, *Zong!*[5]

> Poetry has no proof nor plan nor evidence by decree or in any other way. From somewhere in the twilight realm of sound a spirit of belief flares up at the point where meaning stops and the unreality of what seems most real floods over us. The inward ardor I feel while working in research libraries is intuitive. It's a sense of self-identification and trust, or the granting of grace in an ordinary room, in a secular time.
>
> — Susan Howe, *Spontaneous Particulars*[6]

At the heart of this book is a story about reading, about reading and pedagogy, about pedagogy's readers, about readers who listen, about listening while reading, about poems and their sonic materials, about the demands that poetic sounds make on writers and readers, about seduction, about echoes and repetition, about the resounding qualities of poetic matter. Another story is about time, about how poetic texts animate temporal experiences and historical movements and disorient them. How time, like weather, reliably passes yet unpredictably, until it doesn't. Irredeemable loss: the untimely death of teachers, friends, cousins, communities. Another story is about communication, reception, and exposure — an ethics of reading that attends to the overlooked, the untold, and the "unexpected otherness."[7] And still another is about the limits of difference and similitude. And then there is one about the plague, or rather three plagues at least. And then the story about making meaning and making non-sense. About ideal collectivities and readerly communities. All of these stories are about the lessons I learn and about those I learn them from, about the teachers, living and dead, who encourage my waywardness and tolerate my bewilderment.

The unwritten story at the heart of this book is about mourning and trauma, historical and psychic catastrophes, about the disappearance of traces.[8] "The untold story that cannot be told yet must be told, but only through its un-telling."[9] Stories that must be told but resist being captured. Impossible stories that render the unsayable and unknown perceptible, intelligible, through acts of un-telling. A process of apprehension animated

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5 m. nourbeSe philip, *Zong! As Told to the Author by Setaey Adamu Boateng* (Wesleyan University Press, 2008), 203.

6 Susan Howe, *Spontaneous Particulars: The Telepathy of Archives* (New Directions, 2014), 63.

7 Barbara Johnson, "Philology: What Is at Stake?," *Comparative Literature Studies* 27, no. 1 (1990): 29.

8 During the final months of writing this project, Ellen Oliensis asked me the question: "What is the unwritten thesis?" For this and many other questions, comments, and for her ability to affirm the project and my "wayward" process, I am and will be forever grateful.

9 philip, *Zong!*, 207.

by visionary pedagogies in readerly community, occupying forms of collective mourning and refusal; that is to say, by acts of poetry.

i. Timestamp

I was living in San Francisco when the COVID-19 pandemic started. A few days before the shelter-in-place order went into effect on March 16, 2020, I left my house for a final time to hear a public conversation between Trinh T. Minh-ha and Isaac Julien. In my notes, scribbled while listening, I transcribed a few of her astonishing phrases:

> When you focus on meaning, all the sensual dimensions are lost.
> The music is lost.
> A kind of language that is not equated with self-expression, but that is both intimately personal and collective.
> A language of re-assembly.
> Speaking nearby not speaking in the position of the other.
> Identity as a strategy to move beyond identity.[10]

As the pandemic continued, how much more complex, more urgent her words sounded, in particular after the murder of George Floyd on May 24, 2020 by a Minneapolis Police Department officer. The global protest against police brutality and anti-Black racism and the Movement for Black Lives summoned millions to march in protest. Participating in marches, holding up signs and chanting, I like many others believed then that the uprisings would transform what seemed foundational and petrified in US society, the inseparable history of slavery and the history of the present, of "the precarious life of the ex-slave, a condition defined by the vulnerability to premature death and to gratuitous acts of violence." A history of the present that illuminates "the intimacy of our experience with the lives of the dead."[11]

ii. Call and Response

With Trinh T. Minh-ha's words in mind, recollecting how her talks often feel like teachings offered to her audiences, I turn to Lucretius and Saussure and their modes of instruction, which have come to inform my approach to the work of the contemporary poet, m. nourbeSe philip. Lucretius is an exacting and demonstrative teacher; his pedagogy requires a form of reading that I've attempted to model in my painstaking way of working through passages that animate the intimate and analogical connections between the matter of sound and atomic matter. In acting out my role as a reader, I've tried to show the attentive engagement he demands

10 Isaac Julien and Trinh T. Minh-ha, "A Conversation with Trinh T. Minh-ha and Isaac Julien," *The Wattis Institute*, https://wattis.org/calendar/friday-february-28-2020.

11 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 4.

of me, and the relation those demands strengthen and affirm between writer and reader. Forms of reading as forms of learning make the first of several connections to philip's book-length poem *Zong!,* in particular in that both *Zong!* and *De rerum natura* enact their fugal transmissions and (im)material transformations. And just as Lucretius's poem makes demands on its readers, Saussure's sound studies also summon a range of responses from readers. While Saussure, at least in his anagram notebooks, doesn't make explicitly didactic claims, he illustrates how to listen to the phonic elements alive in poetry and models an approach to reading that foregrounds attention to the re-assembling of sounds and to phonic play. Both Lucretius and Saussure are fascinated by non-signifying linguistic elements, the letters of the alphabet and the phonemes, and they show us how to attend to sonic impressions as they amplify poetic capacities, specifically ones not contingent on linguistic signification. "[W]orking in and out of meaning," philip takes up these motifs. By fragmenting and breaking open language and by pushing against the limits of grammar and syntactic order, she composes a work, proposes a world, that readers and writer might apprehend: "this story that must be told; that can only be told by not telling."[12] In repurposing the language of the law that authorized the murder of Africans on board the slave ship *Zong,* she invokes the traumas of the Middle Passage; in the sounds of lament, chant, invocation, in song itself, she asks us to contend with the limits of historical representation.

I am compelled by many of the questions that her work raises, perhaps most by this: How are we formed in and by languages at once already determined by histories of subjugation *and* open to linguistic indeterminacy and surplus, the excess that eludes capture? And of the many astonishing lessons the text offers, this practice, now, feels most urgent: to face the irreparable, to look at, return to, and not turn away from the history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and to reckon with how this history defines the history of our now.

iii. The Tenacity of Copulas

> *am interested in them not working together — resisting the order and desire or impulse to meaning*
>
> — m. nourbeSe philip, *Zong!*[13]

The complete title of philip's book is *Zong! As Told to the Author by Setaey Adamu Boateng.*[14] It takes as its points of departure an event — the deliberate drowning of 150 African women, men, and children on board the slave ship *Zong* — and the only extant document that records this event, the legal report of the case *Gregson v. Gilbert* written in 1781. Due to the

12 philip, *Zong!,* 204, 194.

13 Ibid., 193. philip uses italics in this section ("*Notanda*") to indicate that the lines are from her own notebooks.

14 "Setaey Adamu Boateng is the voice of the ancestors revealing the submerged stories of all who were on board the *Zong.*" philip, *Zong!,* back copy.

captain's navigational errors and inexperience, the ship runs out of provisions. The "cargo" of African people is fully insured, and while some of the human "cargo" is lost to disease and lack of water, "many [...] by order of the captain, are destroyed." The captain believes that the loss caused by throwing the Africans alive into the sea (rather than letting them die of "natural causes") should be underwritten. "In other words, the massacre of the African slaves would prove to be financially advantageous to the owners of the ship."[15] philip relies solely on the language and letters of the legal case in composing *Zong!*. Fragmented, stuttering, broken, and splintered words give utterance to an impossible, untold, and untellable story performed as chant, moan, fugue, and cry, as linguistic act and embodied ritual, repeating, ongoing.

> *The ones I like best are those where the poem escapes the net of complete understanding — where the poem is shot through with glimmers of meaning.*[16]

When I heard philip perform "*Zong!* #1," the opening poem, I heard an apostrophe and address, an enactment of an invocation:

Zong! #1

w w w w a wa

w a w a t

er wa s[17]

The poem struggles to speak, stumbles to name and to figure a word: "water." The water of the poem is water of want, of what is lacking to maintain the lives of Africans on board the *Zong*. And water calls out to the sea, the aqueous non-site of the unnamable and unmourned dead. The sea is also the water the Africans on board were thrown into to be drowned to death. To invoke water, in its myriad possibilities and soundings, as the first gesture of the poem, summons a divine presence to inspire its language and its ancestors whose names are sunk below a line, a silent footnote or "footprint." For philip the idea of footnotes *"in general is acknowledgement — someone else was here before — in* Zong! *footnote equals the footprint / Footprints of the African on board the* Zong."[18] The poem invokes the names and voices of its ancestors, lost and silenced, within the cacophonous dis-

15 Ibid., 189.
16 Ibid., 192.
17 Ibid., 3.
18 Ibid., 200.

order that the text performs *and* insists upon; these invocations initiate a practice that flows through and saturates the book's rites and unauthorized language. philip, in claiming no authority over the language of the poems, works against authorial intention: "[*M*]*y urge to make sense must be resisted*" she notes in her journal on the writing of the text, "*there are always at least 2 poems — the one you want to write and the other that must write itself, and this work appears to be the culmination of that because* [*I*] *am not even using my own words. Are they ever my own words, though?*"[19] This other poem written with the words of others invites her readers to dwell in a non-place composed from anti-meaning and anti-narrative, a not-telling to tell, a telling as untelling.

In the first section, "*Os,*" the poems seem possessed by the copula, the linguistic link that joins subject with predicate. Forms of the verb "to be" are everywhere scattered in their compositional space. Rather than asserting an identity between two elements as would statements of existence, these verbs prompt us to question any possibility of joining and recall the non-existent. "*Zong!* #4" for instance is composed of the demonstrative pronoun "this" followed by a disordered, partial conjugation of the verb "to be":

this is

not was

or

should be

this be

not

should be

this

should

not

be

is [20]

19 Ibid., 193.
20 Ibid., 7.

The text's inability to join "this" with what it might index or anticipate, in the past or present tenses or in the conditional mood, enacts the problem of making *any* statement about existence or identity, echoed by the repetition of "not." But the impossibility of rendering in language an overlooked and unwritable history *is* what the text wants to animate through its disorder(ing), fragmented language, and "semantic mayhem," a term philip uses to describe her compositional process.

> I murder the text, literally cut it to pieces, castrating verbs, suffocating adjectives, murdering nouns, throwing articles, prepositions, conjunctions overboard, jettisoning adverbs: I separate subject from verb, verb from object — create semantic mayhem, until my hands bloodied from so much killing and cutting, reach into the stinking, eviscerated innards, and like some seer, sangoma, or prophet who, having sacrificed an animal for signs and portents of a new life, or simply life, reads the untold story that tells itself by not telling.[21]

Through killing and cutting the legal decision, she reenacts shipboard scenes that she seeks to render in the remainders, the mutilated fragments. It is as if it were only through murdering language, the language and grammar of the law, of "the European project," that the murders of Africans on the *Zong,* "the spectres of the dead" can make their presence felt, if only as shadowy apparitions.[22] So, like a prophet, she reads portents and works with sacrifice to touch the dead, to grieve the irreparable, if possible, and to reestablish the copula, the ties to those of the untold and untellable story.

In "*Zong!* #21" the verb "to be" animates another negated form of correspondence. This poem's array of copulas is punctuated by the conjunction "or" as if suggesting alternative ways of joining or proposing being or not being. The word "there," straining to stand in grammatically for a substantive or to affirm what is or what is not, travels among verbs through the space of the page in slow repetition.

21 Ibid., 193–94.

22 Ibid., 200, 201.

have been

is there is

or

being

there

is was

is is

should

and

have been

there is

was

there

Ogunade Omotayo Yewande Abibola Sonubi Abeke [23]

23 Ibid., 38. The names below the line in "*Zong!* #1–26" are the footnotes/footprints: "*The Africans on board the Zong must be named. They will be ghostly footnotes floating below the text — 'underwater* [...] *a place of consequence'*" (200). The names in the footprint/footnote can only stand in for the names of the Africans on board the ship because it's not possible for philip to find actual names in the archives of Atlantic slavery. The information recorded serves for the purpose of insurance in sales books, and these solely preserve the financial value of the Africans who were "stripped of all specificity, including their names" (194).

In this poem, the conjugated verb forms morph into noun-like words under the pressure to impose a grammar on the proliferating copulas. For instance, "is was / is is" could be read as verb noun verb noun? (is *was* is *is?*), proposing two questions, or as noun verb noun verb (*is* was *is* is), asserting two statements of existence or different temporalities. Yet my tentative and labored efforts to shift between parts of speech only underscore the tenacity of the grammatical copula, while its semantic potential to state what exists (or even to ask if anything exists) seems on the verge of being foreclosed. The words, "being / there" appearing at an awkward distance, like a giant return in the line, might suggest a proximity to the experience of being on board the *Zong*.[24] Or does "being / there" animate an ambivalence between the desire to recreate the ties that have been devastated and the resignation merely to mark the effects of the losses that the poems can only provisionally mourn? Oscillating between the loss of the lost and the loss of a loss? With these questions I want to articulate an important tension, one not meant to be resolved but experienced in the act of reading. Being there in the space of the composition, in the gaps and silences, is a way to be moved toward linguistic and historical contradictions in order to dwell in an elsewhere, outside the enclosures of grammatical controls and the terms of order that govern the ways the living and the dead appear.

> *I enter a different land, a land of language — I allow the language to lead me somewhere — I don't know where, but I trust.*[25]

philip places her trust in "being / there" in this different land of language, and we are asked to hear the gaps and silences with her, nearby. For just as her need to resist making meaning propels her instead to read the legal case not for meaning, "but for something else,"[26] she asks her readers to read otherwise with her. "At times it feels as if I am getting my revenge on 'this/fuck-mother motherfucking language' of the colonizer — the way the text forces you — me — to read differently, bringing chaos into language or, perhaps more accurately, revealing the chaos that is already there."[27] Because much of the language we use is determined, "preselected and limited, [...] by cultural norms — by systems that shape us such as gender and race — by what's acceptable. By order, logic, and rationality," what forms

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24 philip addresses explicitly the correspondences between the experience of reading and writing the poems and those of the Africans on board the ship in the final section, *"Notanda": "When I start spacing out the words, there is something happening in the eye tracking the words across the page, working to pull the page and larger 'meaning' together — the eye trying to order what cannot be ordered, trying to 'make sense' of something, which is what it must have been like trying to understand what was happening on board the* Zong." Ibid., 192. Italics in the original.

25 Ibid., 191.

26 Ibid., 193. This "something else" echoes the discussion in Chapter 3 concerning the transmission of "something else" in phonic resonances.

27 Ibid., 205. The lines, "this/fuck-mother motherfucking language," are from her poem, "Testimony Stoops to Mother Tongue." See m. nourbeSe philip, *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* (Wesleyan University Press, 1989), 53.

of writing and reading might subvert that "order, logic, and rationality"? I see her responses in her compositional procedures and the forms of reading they ask of her readers. "The not-telling of this particular story is in the fragmentation and mutilation of the legal text, forcing the eye to track across the page in attempt to wrest meaning from words gone astray." If you choose to enter the text, to enter its broken language, you may also get your revenge on language. If you tarry with the "abbreviated, almost non-sensical style of the poems" that require a corresponding effort on your part "to 'make sense' of an event that eludes,"[28] you might be her accomplice and discover how "sense" can be made otherwise. And just as she learns the need to "'Break and Enter' the text," her lessons instruct us in what it means to read differently and to listen to the telling of un-telling.[29] To engage generously with bewildering styles and to surrender to the text, its "silences and all," is to allow "the fragmented words to speak to the stories locked in the text."[30] Here I feel the pull and am pulled by the poetic force that links reading and listening. If I read in the ways the poems are teaching me, might I hear speak what has been muffled, locked in the archives that house the legal record, or obliterated, drowned?

iv. Law and Poetry

> *the legal report is the tomb stone which speaks*
>
> — m. nourbeSe philip, *Zong!*[31]

philip, trained as a lawyer, has ample experience to work and insist upon the intimate relationship between the language of law and that of poetry. In a literal sense, the poems have an exclusive bond with the language of the two-page legal document, the sole material out of which philip fashions her poems. And in another sense, the language of law and poetry share the magical capacity to transform existence; indeed both specialize in these supernatural and beguiling powers. "In its potent ability to decree that what is is not, as in a human ceasing to be and becoming an object, a thing or chattel, [...] the law approaches the realm of magic and religion. [...] Like a magic wand the law erases all ties."[32] This wand, made of language, she makes her own to wave at language, to wrestle with its power by reconfiguring and fragmenting words and at times by breaking them beyond recognition.

> I deeply distrust this tool I work with — language. It is a distrust rooted in certain historical events that are all of a piece with the events that took place on the *Zong.* The language in which those events took place promulgated the non-being of African peoples, and I distrust its

28 philip, *Zong!,* 198.
29 Ibid., 200.
30 Ibid., 204.
31 Ibid., 192.
32 Ibid., 196.

> order. [...] However, if language is to do what it must do, which is to communicate these qualities — order, logic, rationality — the rules of grammar must be present. [...] Exceptions to these requirements exist in religious or spiritual communication with nonhuman forces; [...] in puns, parables, and, of course, in poetry. In these instances humans push against the boundary of language by engaging in language that is neither rational, logical, predictable or ordered. It is sometimes even incomprehensible.[33]

While the law has the ability to decree in language that "what is is not," poetry, in availing itself of its own resources, also comes to possess the power to transform. Indeed, by being an exception to the laws of communication, by exercising its magical capacities, poetry can re-transform chattel, what the law declares as insurable cargo. In re-possessing the language that authorized the events on board the *Zong,* the language whose decrees spelled profit for owners, philip upends the logic of grammar and undresses the order of law to render the unreason the rules hide, and in doing so she makes poetry. While potent, hers is no triumphalist poetics — no one is immune. "The disorder, illogic, irrationality of the *Zong!* poems can no more tell the story than the legal report of *Gregson* v. *Gilbert* masquerading as order, logic, and rationality. In their very disorder and illogic is the not-telling of the story that must be told."[34]

Whereas the language of law risks disclosing its charade, risks being undone by its magic in its efforts to disguise its own unreason, the same language, now in the hands of philip — who embraces these risks like magic charms — is transformed into the poems, capable of performing a different magic. Her poetry, in recognizing the law's incapacities, tells and un-tells the counter-narrative that the law silences. Like a magician, she "conjures the infinite(ive) of to be of the 'negroes' on board the *Zong.*"[35] In re-presencing the unreason inherent in language, philip releases the words through their mutilation; she takes possession of and is possessed by them. "[T]he African, transformed into a thing by the law, is re-transformed miraculously back into human. Through oath and through moan, through mutter, chant and babble, through babble and curse, through chortle and ululation to not-tell the story."[36] The poems perform a counter-transformation, a transubstantiation, through what would be audible utterance and song.

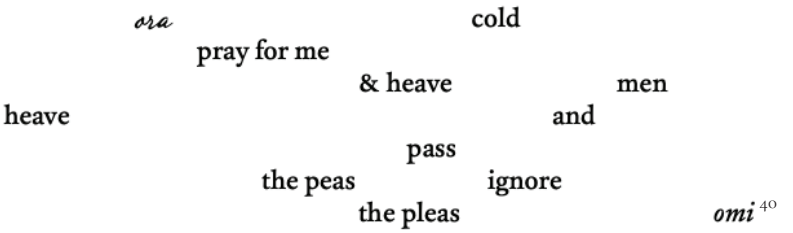
If philip's poem begins by sounding out an invocation to summon ancestors, song itself surfaces as broken or broken down — as grunt, groan, stutter, and moan. The text's fragments and the attending silences of the compositional field, philip ties to the fragments of sound and meaning that have been broken by the history of the Middle Passage and the events aboard the *Zong.* "Within the boundaries established by the words and their meanings are silences; within each silence is the poem, which is revealed

33 Ibid., 197.
34 Ibid., 197.
35 Ibid., 199.
36 Ibid., 196.

only when the text is fragmented and mutilated, mirroring the fragmentation and mutilation that slavery perpetrated on Africans, their customs and ways of life."[37] These mutilated words of the legal document are an offering, broken and released into song. It is a song born out of silence that speaks to the devastations that the law authorized by turning humans into cargo into the source for profit, and then throwing this cargo overboard, again for profit. "The only reason why we have a record is because of insurance — a record of property."[38] Without the law, there would be no record to (literally) break into song and to resound otherwise.

> The story that cannot be told must not-tell itself in a language already contaminated, possibly irrevocably and fatally. I resist the seduction of trying to cleanse it through ordering techniques and practices, for the story must tell itself, even if it is a partial story; it must be allowed to be and not be.[39]

v. The Alphabet Implicates Us All



[40]

After the first section *"Os"* — which includes the *"Zong!* #1–26" poems and the six unnumbered *"Zong!* #" poems in the subsection *"Dicta"* — the five subsequent movements of the text obtain a different relation to the legal document.[41] Departing from the order of twenty-six letters of the English alphabet, each letter also ordering the first twenty-six poems, philip allows the letters themselves to depart from the confines that word boundaries enforce: *"for the first time am looking at breaking down the words themselves and pulling words out of them."*[42] These sections compose a drama of muffled curses, of words splintered, syllables, phonemes, mere consonants, the

37 Ibid., 195.
38 Ibid., 191.
39 Ibid., 199.
40 Ibid., 82.
41 The arrangement of the book's contents is as follows: six sections containing "the flesh and bones" of *Zong! "Os," "Sal," "Ventus," "Ratio," "Ferrum," "Ebora,"* followed by four additional sections: "Glossary: Words and Phrases Heard on Board the *Zong"*; *"Manifest"*; *"Notanda"*; and *"Gregson v. Gilbert."* In the section *"Notanda,"* philip reflects on her process of writing and her approach to research; she includes in this section the notes she made while was composing the text.
42 philip, *Zong!,* 195.

sounds of a linguistic undoing in the un-telling. The text explodes, releasing itself into "anti-meaning"[43] while opening up to voices of those recognized by the legal decision and those excluded from it.

philip thinks of the first two sections as "the bones of the poem," the ones that follow as "the flesh." This flesh, engendered by breaking her own rules and by blowing up the words of the legal document, is born out of *"a grand boggle game,"* a confusion of order that reveals words inside words inside words, anagrammatic powers within and against the law.

> *I devise a dictionary with a list of each of the 'mother' words followed by the words contained in that particular word — for instance apprehension yields hen, sion, pare and pear. The dictionary becomes a drama.* [...] *The alphabet is the universe of language — all the sounds contained in each alphabet of letters and each letter a fragment — of the whole.*[44]

As readers having listened attentively along with Saussure and Lucretius, now practiced in resisting the impulse to making meaning, we enter in these sections another dimension of poetic making, where sounds and compositional space propose the measure and the gap. We step in to devise a drama, attuned to its historical conditions. Our poetic vulnerability is activated, embodied in the practice of un-telling and abiding with its incoherence. The ambivalence of the text takes up residency in the reader as if to share or even hand over its work, enticing us into its exploding realm.

Yet risks attend this practice. In acts of poetic making and unmaking, the danger — that bones and flesh become "just" a metaphor — is present always. And while philip lets the poems write themselves, working against imposing meaning and narrative in her commitment to fragmentation and to reading for "something else," she can't limit the risk of exposure that implicates both writer and readers. She constricts herself to working solely with the language of the legal decision, thereby the document becomes her *given* material. Indeed, she willingly locks herself inside the document as in a "word store,"[45] while being acutely aware that language is never *a* given, insofar as it can never be assumed to be neutral or untouched. That is, because it is given, language is always already contaminated. Masquerading as order and rationality, language perpetrates violence, in an all-pervasive way, like an invisible virus, under the guise of transparency. And because we are implicated, we are all infected. "In the discomfort and disturbance created by the poetic text, I am forced to make meaning from apparently disparate elements — in so doing, I implicate myself. The risk — of contamination — lies in piecing together the story that cannot be told. And since we have to work to complete the events, we all become implicated in, if not contaminated by, this activity."[46] Consequently to write and read the un-telling of *Zong!* forces us to enter "the zone of contamination," where

43 Ibid., 200.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid., 191.
46 Ibid., 198.

the language of law, "all language, in fact," prescribes that we be implicated, contaminated.[47] But this risk also creates the conditions for us to understand "that we are at least one and the Other. And the Other. And the Other [...] we are indeed multiple and 'many-voiced.'"[48]

§

> I find that my very formation implicates the other in me, that my own foreignness to myself is, paradoxically, the source of my ethical connection with others. I am not fully known to myself, because part of who I am is the enigmatic traces of others. In this sense, I cannot know myself perfectly or know my "difference" from others in an irreducible way.
>
> — Judith Butler, *Precarious Life*[49]

vi. Over-Exposure

Some of the most discomforting effects I experience in reading *Zong!* occur in my encounters with the multi-voices, specifically, when I hear European, white, male ones. philip writes: "One of the strongest 'voices' in the *Zong!* text is that of someone who appears to be white, male and European. [...] This realization, however, presents me with a powerful example of how our language — in the wider sense of the word — is often preselected for us, simply by virtue of who we understand ourselves to be, and where we allow ourselves to be placed."[50] Implicated as I am and reading as the text teaches me, also trained by the Lucretian pedagogy of relation and the Saussurean archive, I'm compelled to attend to the voices of the captain and the crew of the *Zong* that surface and sound. For instance, in "Sal," after an initial opening onto grief, "water parts / the *oba sobs*"[51] (a phrase repeated like a musical refrain throughout *Zong!*), the scene on deck soon becomes flooded with the voices of others.

With the declarative statement, "it is the age of guns / [...] of / murder," already another authority presents itself on the page, these "lords of reason / all we were / and sane men too."

47 Ibid., 199.
48 Ibid., 205.
49 Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (Verso, 2004), 46.
50 philip, *Zong!,* 204–5.
51 Ibid., 59. The "Glossary: Words and Phrases Heard on Board the *Zong*" is organized by language; under the heading "Yoruba," the word "oba" is listed, meaning king, ruler. Ibid., 184.

it is the age of guns

gin & rum of

murder rimed with sin

her sex

open all night rain

a seam of sin &

to market to market tin

such

to trap a fat pig

a fat nig as never be

fore seen

lords of reason

all we were a lace cap for my

and sane men too [52]

We sane-lord-men like to sing jingles, when drinking rum (guns?) and gin that we "rimed with sin" covered and counted,[53] sounding like sex, "her sex" that is "open all night" to all of us, "to market to market," to the "lords of reason."

I hear inside reason a seam, a "seam of sin" with the *s*-sounds of "her sex" and next the jingling rhyme of sin and tin, and tin reverses back into nit that sounds like nig, pig. Ringing out the rhymed pair: "a fat pig / a fat nig," all fungible (tin, pig, nig) "to market to market," tin to trap, to sell, to profit object for object. "as never be / fore seen," are what? Profits, sex, sin, murder? Lords of reason, sane men (sin men?), "all we were" is all we are.

We sane men on board who drink gin and rum on rainy seamy nights like to drink tea with jam and bread, "bile *cum* pus" "port too." Bile with pus or is it bile *cum* pus, come puss? Piss *cum* bile *cum* pus leaky bodies sobbing bodies. Bilge water, bottom boat foulness for making my tea, for arguing my case:

52 Ibid., 66–67.

53 The word "rime" in its verb form means to reckon, number, cover, to vacate, to steep in water, pry into, explore. In Latin, the word *rīma* means a fissure, cleft, chink. In its noun form the word means frost, fog, frozen mist, also a thin coating. In my readings, I am hearing also its homonym: rhyme, which etymology is related to rime in both Latin and German. See *The Oxford English Dictionary Online,* s.v. "rime."

serve the *oba*
sobs again
the tea men there was piss *cum*
let s have some bile *cum* pus
jam and bread
port too
& leaky
teats there was only
bilge wat
er for tea
i argue my case
to you take
ruth everything
you must hear me i say
cum grano *salis*
with a grain of salt there was in
surance again
st sun not sin [54]

"cum grano salis" In Latin, the law's language, "i argue my case / to you" and "you just hear me i say": "there was in / surance again / st sun," thus the "fat nig" is underwritten, but "not sin." So you take it with a grain of salt just as "you take / ruth everything / you just hear me." Take it how? "*cum grano salis*" Doubtfully? Not literally? With a pinch or punch of wit?

Salt. *Sal*. Sail. Sale. *Salve*. Slave. Save?

a lease on *mes* *rêves*
erase this erase
me*aveaveave*
slave save the
ave s save the *salve s* the *vale s*
too but not the
slaves bilge
water [55]

aveatquevalesalve

54 philip, *Zong!*, 70. In an endnote she writes: "I chose Latin to emphasize the connection with the law, which is steeped in Latin expressions, and, also, to reference the fact that Latin was the father tongue in Europe" (209n45).

55 Ibid., 103.

we dare
the deed
act the part he cut
the cards i won the throw one
deuce two aces
cut
her
open her
shape tie her
ripe toes
round
and firm
the cord[56]

We, he, i, she, am pronouns for persons. Some persons unpersoned. Some other persons who win who dare who cut cards who cut her tie her toes. Her ripe, round toes tied firmly with cord, "*cum grano salis*" by sane men, "all we were" is all we are who were all.

The men write letters, to

ru th cl
air ro
se
ev
e e va
cla ra sa
ra
co ra ma
ry etc
all[57]

et al. They write letters for other men, I hear these writers of letters in "*Ventus,*" hear writing the wind having come.[58] "these words / come" hear the multi-voices in disturbed letters, written to women, their kin, maybe an intended, (lisa, clair, eve, eva davenport) who wait at home for a crew of men (dave, sam, piet):

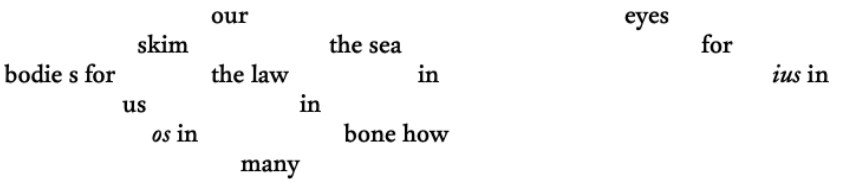
56 Ibid., 71.
57 Ibid., 95.
58 The noun *ventus* in Latin means wind; *ventus* is also the passive participle of the intransitive verb *venio,* to come.

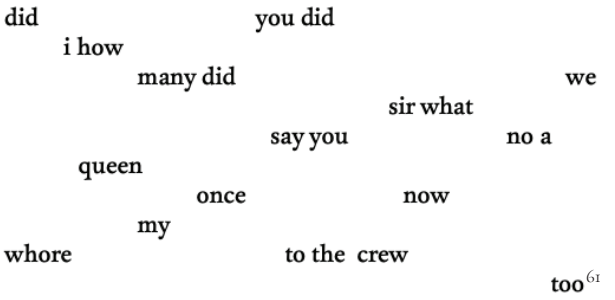
dear lisa
dave ask s this is but
an oration he ask s that i
these words
come that i write from his lips
though my hand shapes why
are we here dear
clair i
write this
for
sam who
is
by
my
side
there was
ague on
board
pus
too dear eve
piet says he longs
dear eva
davenport i fear
the news is
not good
today at ten
at four at
six & at
seven my hand
writes
we seal the deal the sale of
negroes
on board the
sail
slap slap in[59]

The hand that writes, hand writing, hand from lips, shapes letters in letters, asks a question: "why / are we here dear"? Same (sane) hand that writes "the news is / not good" also writes "we seal the deal the sale of / negroes." The letters written with the same letters that are in the legal decision and that are re-shaped in *Zong!,* the letters of the law make up and unmake a world/words, exploding across the pages. Hands trace them, eyes, tracking them, skim words on page and on sea, the law is "in *ius* in / us in / *os* in bone" binds us with bones.[60]

59 philip, *Zong!,* 85.

60 In Latin, *ius, iuris:* law, oath, that which is binding; *os, ossis:* bone, kernel; *os, oris:* mouth, speech, face, expression.





"skim the sea / for / bodies," for us, *ius,* the law, the law in us, in *ius,* the law in the law, in *os,* in bone. "how / many / did you did / i how / many did we / sir" skim the sea, says the sea says you? what say you? sir (sin skin) "you say no" how many say no? not a queen, though once was, now is "my whore" say you sir "whore to the crew / too"[61]

my / nonce / my / once / queen the t / ruth[62]

Dear nourbeSe,

The words that are and are not yours echo through me, reading, standing nearby, glimmer with sense and non-sense, being and not being,

61 philip, *Zong!,* 87–88.

62 Ibid., 93. It occurs to me that my engagement with philip's text — my apprenticeship to philip's text — might be an example of the activity that Lévi-Strauss describes as "bricolage" in Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind,* trans. George Weidenfield (The University of Chicago Press, 1966). For the bricoleur, "the rules of the game are always to make do with 'whatever is at hand'" (11); the bricoleur addresses herself "to a collection of oddments left over from human endeavors" (12), collecting messages that "have to some extent been transmitted in advance" (13); the bricoleur's activity involves building, using "the remains and debris of event, [...] or odds and ends, [...] the fossilized evidence of the history of an individual or society," creating "events and structures as ends and means" (14–15). From this perspective, both Lucretius's atomic theory and Saussure's anagram studies also exemplify "bricolage" and are exemplary. See also Michel de Certeau, "'Making Do': Uses and Tactics," in *The Practice of Everyday Life,* trans. Steven Rendall (University of California Press, 1984), 29–42.

> I hear your voice, I recall your gestures, how you made yourself and your *Zong!* into an offering, holding that space on the third floor of a mattress factory on Market Street in San Francisco, you had let the podium fall away by then, let your body resonate in sound and in each of your gestures. Your reading, reading you, sound in multi-voice songs. Also multi-hearing, a listening while reading aloud. Attending to the assembly of sounds, I learn from you to hear then write versions of versions, under the thrall of them, yours, enchanted by the fragmentation, its allure seduces. I ask your permission, to "break and enter," again, recursively, to compose in multi-other ways. May I show you me composing, recomposing your telling untelling? And decomposing and aleatory, a witness being dispossessed, wanting neither authorship nor authority, so possessed by the other songs making being and not being, re-sounding, *Zong!* songs.
>
> With gratitude beyond measure,
> Yrs,
> J

Hearing an echoing, what emerges otherwise, surfaces: a different or differentiated collectivity assembling, binding, and singing, voices rimed with salt songs, salt skin of the sea, sing, skim the skin in kin, salt in ears, eyes, nose, hair, air, under the skin under sea voice of kin:

sang **sa lt in the e ye salt i**
n the h air salt un der the na
ils sal t in the e
ars sa lt in the no se salt on the s
kin salt un der the sk
in of the s ea bo ne sal
t sk im the sk in of the se
a for the wo rds the voic
es of k in the trap of rea
son binds u s in the net
of time we s
kim the scu m of prof
its[63]

skin become kin become sea son, letters lure me, as if ritually, summon me: s, *k, i, n, g* — skin kin king sing — to propose a drama in which I act, as if compelled, and play them together, committing more and more violence, exposing my selves, in letters, implicated and contaminated. Reading writing noting. Reiterating rearticulations, listening to the letters makings, marking. I'm stitching together along "a seam of sin" these phrases that call

63 philip, *Zong!*, 169.

me, summoned, culled.[64] From you I take my cue: *"the words suggesting how to work with them — I look at them and certain words leap out at me, asking me to choose them* [...] *eyes skimming the text for phrases, words, feelings, as one would cast one's eyes over the sea looking for bodies — so much flotsam and jetsam ... the text is whole / then rent."*[65]

song sing song sing song sing skin in kin in wind in skin in mutual being kin[66]

Within flesh, through skin, whole then rent, I am, you are, all is, and we are distributed, divisible, and parts of us are in others, like words within words, anagrams of beings, where kinships, kin and ship, become networks of filiations and mobile alliances, always already tied together, caught "in the net / of time," "the trap of rea / son binds us," "s / kim the scum of pro / fits."

Is flesh, both binding and porous, worn like a skin of defense and of vulnerability? Neither profits nor promises can condition or restore the loss. And yet to summon the dead, an invocation to the dead whose loss is the irreparable, holds us. How? If words and letters are mobile, ever shifting through meaning and incoherence, swarming sounds, then any articulation of connection bespeaks the elusive work of surfacing the "story that cannot but must be told."

In a realm bereft of assertion and of connection, contra symbols and interpretation, might the practice of exposure, of relation, create the conditions for a heterogeneous life, to act and be acted upon, attuned to the transmissions of the silenced?

vii. History's Problems; Or, Another Call and Response

> [William Wilberforce] chose not to speak of Venus, the other dead girl. The pet name licensed debauchery and made it sound agreeable. Nor did he mention the nineteen men who died. Too many dead slaves would have had the opposite effect and diminished the significance of the tragedy. From the *Zong* case he had learned that 132 live slaves dumped into the sea were just cargo. It was easier to feel fully the loss of one life and to hang your hopes on one girl. Too many deaths were unmanageable.
>
> — Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*[67]

64 Ibid., 67.

65 Ibid., 195.

66 This owes to Marshall Sahlins's terms, "mutuality of being" and "mutual persons," that he uses to reconsider the forms and structure of kinship relations. Marshall Sahlins, *What Kinship Is — And Is Not* (The University of Chicago Press, 2013), ix, 1.

67 Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 143.

Through her engagement with the archives of trans-Atlantic slavery, writing within and against them, Saidiya Hartman wrestles with historical materials in ways that are similar to philip's compositional process. While implicating herself by identifying a shared guilt, Hartman questions her own desire to recuperate lost lives buried in the historical record.

> The captain, the surgeon, and the abolitionist all disagreed about what happened on the deck of the *Recovery*, yet they all insisted they were trying to the save the girl's life. In this respect, I am as guilty as the rest. I too am trying to save the girl, not from death or sickness or a tyrant, but from oblivion. Yet I am unsure if it is possible to salvage an existence from a handful of words: *the supposed murder of a Negro girl.* Hers is a life impossible to reconstruct, not even her name survived.[68]

Both Hartman and philip tenaciously pursue a set of related questions, at times articulated in nearly identical ways. In her essay, "Venus in Two Acts," a reprise or a second act to her earlier work in *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route,* Hartman returns to an event that she had written about in her chapter, "The Dead Book." The event is the murder of two young women aboard the slave ship Recovery, one nameless "dead girl," the other referred to as "Venus" during the court proceedings in which captain John Kimber was tried for the murders. As with the *Zong* case, the legal records provide the only account of the lives of these two girls; the law that absolved the captain, both captains, of murder, renders in scant words the lives of the murdered Africans. Hartman, like philip, understands fully that to write a narrative, to "reckon with [their] precarious lives" requires another form of writing, another approach.[69] But in contrast to philip, Hartman accepts that the young girls "never will have any existence outside 'the precarious domicile of words' that allowed [them] to be murdered."[70]

Hartman questions the risks of working with the language preserved in the archive, the "risk[s of …] contamination involved in restating" the words of legal documents. By reiterating the accounts, is it possible to tell a story about the lives of captives, a story about "*degraded matter*"?

> Infelicitous speech, obscene utterances, and perilous commands give birth to the characters we stumble upon in the archive. Given the condition in which we find them, the only certainty is that we will lose them again, that they will expire or elude our grasp or collapse under the pressure of inquiry. This is the only fact about Venus of which we can be sure. So is it possible to reiterate her name and to tell a story about *degraded matter* and dishonored life that doesn't delight and titillate, but instead ventures toward another mode of writing? Why risk the contamination involved in restating the maledictions, obscenities, columns of losses and gains, and measures of value by which captive

68 Ibid., 137.
69 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 12.
70 Ibid., 9.

> lives were inscribed and extinguished? Why subject the dead to new dangers and to a second order of violence? Or are the merchant's words the bridge to the dead or the scriptural tombs in which they await us?[71]

In restating words found in the archive, does she commit more violence, "a second order of violence," or can she instead find in them "the bridge" that would connect us to the past, to the dead, reinstating the ties, through "another mode of writing"? To respond, she weighs the risks of reiterating the events, of re-presencing, if possible, the lives of captives, risks that are inseparable from questions regarding the ethics of historical narration and representation.

Hartman's inquiry into these problems precipitates the return to her "earlier account of Venus's death in 'The Dead Book'" and to Venus's inevitable return "as both 'haint,' that is, one who haunts the present, and as disposable life."[72] Yet even returning to look again for Venus doesn't result in a narrative of her story; Hartman will not allow herself that consolation. "I was forced to admit that I wanted to console myself and to escape the slave hold with a vision of something other than the bodies of two girls settling on the floor of the Atlantic."[73] Instead, in the course of recounting her failure to tell the impossible story, she describes an approach that performs something else, that enacts "another mode of writing" itself as a form of narrating the unwritable, the unspeakable, and the unknown. It is a reiterative approach that, as she has described in *Scenes of Subjection*, entails a "working through of the past" as "a significant aspect of redress."[74] So she returns, again, to work through the events of the past. For to narrate what appears at the limit of the knowable and writable means to wrestle repeatedly with what the archive of trans-Atlantic slavery both blocks and enables. With her recursive approach, she enters and reenters this archive neither to represent, again, the violence of that history nor "to give voice

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71 Ibid., 6–7.

72 Ibid., 5. philip makes a similar remark about her own text: "I come — albeit slowly — to the understanding that *Zong!* is a hauntological; it is a work of haunting, a wake of sorts, where the spectres of the undead make themselves present." philip, *Zong!*, 201.

73 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 9. Both philip and Hartman are careful not to claim to represent untellable stories. However, the distance that emerges between Hartman's refusal to "give voice to the slave," and philip's unrelenting composure of "multi-voices" is attributable to the difference in genre: the implications of voice in narrative prose or history (for Hartman) and the protracted lyric (for philip). To give voice in prose is too near to narration to risk, whereas giving voice in lyric can happen without even approaching the threshold of recognizable language. philip writes of her poems that they *"move more towards the lyric and less towards language"* (philip, *Zong!*, 197), as if to suggest that lyric were made of something other than language. I owe this amazing and helpful distinction to Jane Gregory. For this insight and her generosity in conversation and in friendship, I am deeply grateful.

74 Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 74.

to the slave." Hartman's approach to the historical materials is instead a narrative practice that wants "to imagine what cannot be verified, a realm of experience which is situated between two zones of death — social and corporeal death — and to reckon with the precarious lives which are visible only in the moment of their disappearance."[75]

For Hartman, the narration of events and lives that left only traces in the archive — echoes resounding at the margins of the historical record — makes demands on the present, on her, and on the discipline of history. These demands forbid repurposing the events, the torture, the murder, in an effort to transpose them. For doing so would make yet "another demand upon the girl, by requiring that her life be made useful or instructive, by finding in it a lesson for our future or hope for history. [...] It is much too late for the accounts of death to prevent other deaths; and it's much too early for such scenes of death to halt other crimes."[76] In this time, both too late and too early, that is ours, is it possible to tell a story "about two girls capable of retrieving what remains dormant — the purchase or claim of their lives on the present," a story predicated upon impossibility — listening for the unsaid, translating misconstrued words, a story "intent on achieving an impossible goal: redressing the violence that produces numbers, ciphers, and fragments of discourse, which is as close as we come to a biography of the captive and the enslaved"?[77] These questions and dilemmas engender, for Hartman, a productive tension between the risk of representing, again, the violence, and a commitment to telling the stories of "the nameless and forgotten" all the while having respect for "the limits of what cannot be known."[78] They also demand restraint and determine the modes of writing.

What kinds of narration then are available? By what means is it possible to render the lives of two Black girls without committing more violence? If it is a story of absence, of silence, the approach needs to acknowledge the loss, what has already gone missing. What approach might "recuperate lives entangled with and impossible to differentiate from the terrible utterances that condemned them to death, the account books that identified them as units of value?" The very lack of different and differentiating accounts found in the archive precipitates a specific set of problems that relate to the discipline of history, and more general humanistic studies, with their established modes of research and authorized forms of writing. Is there a form the narrative might take, a collective biography of dead subjects, a play in two acts, animated by gestures that self-reflexively index failure? "How can narrative embody life in words and at the same time respect what we cannot know? How does one listen for the groans and cries, the undecipherable songs, [...] the laments for the dead, [...] and then assign words to all of it?"[79] philip's approach unfolds — and explodes — as song as

75 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 12.
76 Ibid., 14.
77 Ibid., 2–3.
78 Ibid., 4.
79 Ibid., 3.

poem; whereas Hartman's approach is both limited by a respect for what cannot be known and demands a different form of writing, and it also is shaped by her commitment to interrogating the problems inherent in historical representation.

> Admittedly, my own writing is unable to exceed the limits of the sayable dictated by the archive. It depends on the legal records [...] and in this regard falters before the archive's silence and reproduces its omissions. The irreparable violence of the Atlantic slave trade resides precisely in all the stories we cannot know and that will never be recovered. This formidable obstacle or constitutive impossibility defines the parameters of my work.[80]

Through her acknowledgment of what she is unable to write, both the silences and the excesses, and "the limits of the sayable" in the face of the irreparable, she is also making visible her field's complicit role in the production of knowledge and the accounts created with historical materials. The violence of the archive and of the discipline are inextricably woven together. So, for Hartman, to "think historically about matters still contested in the present and about life eradicated by the protocols of intellectual disciplines" means to construct counter-histories of slavery.[81] Writing a counter-history is "inseparable from writing a history of the present. [...] A history of the present strives to illuminate the intimacy of our experience with the lives of the dead, to write our now as it is interrupted by the past, and to imagine a *free state,* not as the time before captivity or slavery, but rather as the anticipated future of this writing."[82] Writing history, for Hartman, means recognizing the fictional nature of historical narrative *and* accessing the resources of fictional writing. Through her "critical reading" of the archive "that mimes the figurative dimensions of history," Hartman writes what she calls "critical fabulations."[83]

In *Lose Your Mother,* she creates counter-histories while opposing the discipline's authorized forms of writing. Her goal was to "expose and exploit the incommensurability between the experience of the enslaved and the fictions of history."[84] Her critical readings and critical fabulations throw "into crisis" the discipline of history and expose its role in creating "disposable lives":

> By playing with and rearranging the basic elements of the story, by re-presenting the sequence of events in divergent stories and from contested points of view, I have attempted to jeopardize the status of the event, to displace the received or authorized account, and to imagine what might have happened. [...] By throwing into crisis "what hap-

80 Ibid., 12.
81 Ibid., 10.
82 Ibid., 4.
83 Ibid., 11.
84 Ibid., 10.

> pened when" and by exploiting the "transparency of sources" as fictions of history, I wanted to make visible the production of disposable lives (in the Atlantic slave trade and, as well, in the discipline of history).[85]

In this magnificent and devastating text, she listens "for the mutters and oaths and cries of the commodity" and in doing so she illuminates "the contested character of history, narrative, event, and fact, to topple the hierarchy of discourse, and to engulf authorized speech in the clash of voices."[86] Hartman's language here echoes philip's. philip similarly listens for these sounds, "the cries of the commodity," and in *Zong!* comes to understand that, in letting the writing choose her, in allowing for that second poem to be written, she does "have a language — this language of grunt and groan, moan and stutter — this language of pure sound fragmented and broken by history." Both writers upend the fictions of reason, exposing the workings of its power in the law and the archive, in order to repurpose the historical material and repossess its language, and both augment "the clash of voices" amplifying the multi-voiced to resound in a space and time beyond the archive, in order to narrate the events and perform the lives of the dead that the law disavows, and the historical record denies. "The stories [...] that comprise *Zong!* are jammed together [...] so that the ordering of grammar, the ordering that is the impulse of empire is subverted."[87]

philip, unlike Hartman, is not constrained by "the limits of the sayable dictated by the archive,"[88] though she too limits herself to the legal document. But these she "reads differently" by bringing "chaos into language."[89] Both Hartman and philip are deeply united in their refusal to fill in the gaps; both too acknowledge the temptations "to provide closure where there is none." But for philip, not filling in the gaps, that refusal, is productive and enabling of her form of reading. Both are stayed by additional demands. Hartman is bound to "the imperative to respect black noise — the shrieks, the moans, the non-sense, and the opacity, which are always in excess of legibility and of the law,"[90] whereas philip is bound to a different imperative: "to move beyond representation" in order not to commit a "second" violence "to the memory of an already violent experience."[91] To "defend the dead," is enacted by telling and un-telling.[92] To "move beyond representation" is likewise enacted by "fragmenting the text and re-writing it through *Zong!*, or rather over it." By "essentially erasing it, the original text becomes a fugal palimpsest through which *Zong!* is allowed to heal the original text of its fugal amnesia."[93] There is neither redress nor recovery in the face of

85 Ibid., 11.
86 Ibid., 12.
87 philip, *Zong!,* 205.
88 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 12.
89 philip, *Zong!,* 205.
90 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 12.
91 philip, *Zong!,* 197.
92 Ibid., 25.
93 Ibid., 204.

the irreparable; the text doesn't heal the wounds, but instead seeks to heal the archive itself of its amnesia, and perhaps the amnesia that characterizes our historical moment. Because *Zong!* enlists the magical, "miraculous" powers of poetic language, it can bear witness to the transformation of "the desiccated, legal report into a cacophony of voices — wails, cries, moans, and shouts that had earlier been banned from the text [...] the sounds of those murdered Africans continue to resound and echo underwater. In the bone beds of the sea."[94] If the archive were to be healed provisionally or partially of its amnesia, would it then reveal, as Hartman wants to show, "the realist illusion customary in the writing of history," and also "illuminate the ways in which our age is tethered to" Venus's age and the history of slavery?[95]

Hartman's counter-histories do not avail themselves of such resources, heard in the "cacophony of voices"[96] and in the song composed of fragments and erasure. At least she does not avail herself of them when she returns to the story of Venus, the other girl, from "The Book of Dead."[97] She will

94 Ibid., 203.

95 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 12.

96 philip, *Zong!*, 203.

97 In her subsequent book, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (W.W. Norton, 2019), Hartman, working within and against a different archive, allows herself to recreate, to fabricate, and to imagine in order to compose counter-histories as counter-narratives of the lives of Black women at the turn of the twentieth century in Philadelphia and New York. She describes her approach in the following way: "In the turn of the twentieth century, young black women were in open rebellion. They struggled to create autonomous and beautiful lives, to escape the new forms of servitude awaiting them, and to live as if they were free. This book recreates the radical imagination and wayward practices of these young women by describing the world through their eyes. It is a narrative written from nowhere, from the nowhere of the ghetto and the nowhere of utopia. I have pressed at the limits of the case file and the document, speculated about what might have been, imagined the things whispered in dark bedrooms, and amplified moments of withholding, escape and possibility, moments when the vision and dreams of the wayward seemed possible." Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments,* 8–9. The questions that attend narration and naming (ones *Wayward Lives* proposes to redress), Hartman strips to the bone, bare and terse, in a different essay. The title, "The Plot of Her Undoing," is the text's refrain, whose repetition and variation feel like its other or counter-narrative. "The plot of her undoing begins with the violence of reason. It begins with an entry in the ledger that itemizes her as number 71, a meager girl, and forever erases her name. [...] The plot of her undoing begins with the enclosure. [...] The plot of her undoing begins with dispossession and the rule of law. [...] It begins with the pledge of allegiance, with the stars and stripes, with the iron cross, with the dream of belonging, with the division of us and them, with profit margins and returns. [...] The undoing of the plot proceeds by stealth. [...] It unfolds when she is not much noticed, it advances at a snail's pace, it is stoked by quiet persistence, [...] it is secreted by leaving no traces of human habitation. [...] The undoing of the plot begins with her runaway tongue, with her outstretched hands, with songs shared across the unfree territory and the occupied lands, with the pledges of

not play the role of prophet or of magician; she does not transform what exceeds the archive. In respecting the "black noise" that is "always in excess of legibility and of the law," she will not fabricate the story of two young girls, their friendship. "I feared what I might invent, and it would have been a romance [...] the friendship that could have blossomed between two frightened and lonely girls. Shipmates. Then Venus could have beheld her dying friend, whispered comfort in her ear, rocked with promises. [...] Picture them: The relics of two girls. [...] Two world-less girls found a country in each other's arms." Here Hartman asks us to picture what she will not invent, but will describe at least enough for us to picture it, while playing on our desire for more. "The loss of stories sharpens the hunger for them. So it is tempting to fill in the gaps and provide closure where there is none. To create a space for mourning where it is prohibited. To fabricate a witness to a death not much noticed."[98] But to do this would be antithetical to Hartman's project. Although she had wanted to imagine them as friends, to "represent the affiliations severed and remade," a few words could not rescue them or salvage their lives. "I could not have arrived at another conclusion. So it was better to leave them as I had found them. Two girls, alone."[99] While she insists on the intimate connection between the powers that murdered the two girls and the law that exonerated the captain, "this knowledge brings us no closer to an understanding of the lives of two captive girls or the violence that destroyed them."[100] Yet she is compelled to ask herself again: "Hadn't I too consigned them to oblivion? In the end, was it better to leave them as I found them?"[101] Is it not possible to go beyond the limits of the sayable, "the limits of what cannot be known"?[102] Is it only then possible to leave them there "in the bone beds of the sea"?[103]

Might this question be one of the lessons that Hartman offers her readers in this stunning and complex essay? Should we too leave them there at the bottom of the Atlantic? philip would say "no," leaving them is not a choice, neither for herself nor for readers of *Zong!* Entering the poem compels us to stay with them, nearby, at the bottom of the Atlantic, and teaches us how to listen to the "cacophony of voices," to hear "the sounds of those murdered Africans,"[104] resounding and echoing, and to learn there, as we see illuminated by Hartman's projects and in the story of Venus, "the way in which our age is tethered to hers."[105] Could forms of listening ever evade representing, again, the violence and achieve the impossible goal: to redress the violence that continues to turn humans into numbers, cargo, ciphers?

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love that propel struggle." See Saidiya Hartman, "Notes on Feminisms: The Plot of Her Undoing," *Feminist Art Coalition*, 1, 3–4, and 5–6, https://feministartcoalition.org/essays-list/saidiya-hartman.

98 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 8.

99 Ibid., 9.

100 Ibid., 10–11.

101 Ibid., 10.

102 Ibid., 4.

103 philip, *Zong!*, 203.

104 Ibid.

105 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 13.

viii. in the afterlife of property, in the aftermath of poetry[106]

Where does *Zong!* end? With the final sentence on the last page of the book, which would in effect give the law, the legal document, the last words: "Rule absolute on payment of costs"? Or the final word of the last poem "reason," one of the few legible words on the page that has several pages of text superimposed on each other, becoming "a dense landscape"?[107] Or at the end of the Manifest, in the final column — after African Groups & Languages, Animals, Body Parts, Crew, Food & Drink, Nature — under Women Who Wait, the name: Um? Or the last lines of the final section, "*Notanda*"?[108] While there are a number of different places where I might locate an ending, this last option is the one I want to consider here in my coda while thinking with Hartman in these meditations on the limits of discourse and on the sayable.

philip suggests near the conclusion of "*Notanda*" that what happened on board the *Zong* might be language itself. And the loss of language "levels everyone to a place where there is, at times, no distinction between languages," for all on board are reverted "to a state of pre-literacy." What state is before letters, language without letters, orality? She explains that "[t]he same letters in the same order mean different things in different languages: ague and *ague* — the first English, the second Yoruba. The former means bodily shaking in illness, the latter, to fast. Take a letter way and a new word in a different language is born. Add a letter and the word loses meaning."[109] Her suggestion that it was language that happened, in a radical form of misrecognition between languages, risks undermining so much of what the book works to fight against, that is, turning African people into things, into chattel, slavery becoming a metaphor, and language becoming so contaminated that it has lost the capacity to tell by un-telling. If indeed language is what happened on board the *Zong,* then could the poem in some ways have betrayed the African captives, "consigned them to oblivion"? If, however, language is understood as capable of doing something beyond or other than this, then the final lines of "*Notanda*" offer another possibility. "Many is the time in writing this essay when my fingers would hit an *S* rather than a *Z* in typing *Zong.* Song and Zong: with the exception of one letter the two words are identical; if said quickly enough they sound the same."[110] The sounding of letters transfigures. And the exclamation mark after Zong in the title "is chant! Shout! And ululation! *Zong!* is moan! Mutter! Howl! And shriek! *Zong!* is 'pure utterance.' *Zong!* is Song! [...] *Zong!* is the Song of the untold story; it cannot be told yet must be told, but only

106 "[I]n the afterlife of property." Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 13.

107 philip, *Zong!,* 211, 206.

108 Ibid., 186.

109 Ibid., 205–6.

110 Ibid., 207. In an endnote, philip writes: "The name of the ship was the *Zorg,* meaning 'care' in Dutch. An error was made when the name was repainted" (208n11). Does her poem transform the ship into song as well? Returning it likewise to its overwritten name, to care?

through its un-telling."[111] Sound transforms the vessel (both ship and poem) into song, the Song composed of sounds that resound, sounds unhinged from nomination, resisting signification. The magic of phonic powers invoked here by philip recalls Saussure's swarms of sounds, the anagrammatized songs reconfiguring fragments, poems born from assemblies of sonic patterning, repeating phonic matters, and resounding echoes.

ix. Lucretius's Archive — *in suos versus ultimos*

> This language of the limp and the wound.
>
> — m. nourbeSe philip, *Zong!*[112]

I had not wanted to write about the plague that Lucretius describes in the conclusion to his poem. I preferred to tarry with its lessons and the readerly community they animate. I had lived through one plague, the HIV/AIDS epidemic in New York City; had friends, relatives, my cousin Tom Rubnitz, and Matthew Ward, a beloved high school teacher, who died from the virus; had learned that bodies mattered in forms of protest and that civil disobedience could make a difference, and that I had to encounter my own fears and desires intimately. The losses came to characterize the lives of those who lived through and survived that plague. So as the number of deaths due to COVID-19 and of cases of infection continued to rise with no end in sight, as the global health crisis seemed to be unraveling the fictions of safety while engendering alternative forms of care, it felt too perversely stubborn of me to avoid the plague at the end of Lucretius's poem.

I had not wanted to write about those final 148 lines for another reason as well: Because, far from being overlooked, they have given rise to voluminous debates by scholars who have tended to see the lines' pessimism as undercutting the work of the poem as a whole, while some have even argued that the poem is incomplete.[113] One aspect that has particularly exercised commentators, from the scholiasts in the 1500s to contemporary editors, concerns how Lucretius engaged with his source (his archive): the account of the Athenian plague in Thucydides's historical work.[114] "According to his editors, Lucretius [...] is guilty of mistranslation, misrepresentation and a general lack of competence with regard to his source."[115] When Lucretius's

111 Ibid., 207.

112 Ibid., 205.

113 For a summary of this "traditional scholarly problem," see Peta Fowler, "Lucretian Conclusions," in *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies: Lucretius,* ed. Monica Gale (Oxford University Press, 2007), 199.

114 Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War,* trans. Charles Forster Smith (Harvard University Press, 1962), 2:48–53. Thucydides comments on the incommensurate relationship between the plague and language: "Indeed the character of the disease proved such that it baffles description, the violence of the attack being in each case too great for human nature to endure (2.50.1)" (347).

115 See H.S. Commager, Jr., "Lucretius' Interpretation of the Plague," in *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies: Lucretius,* ed. Monica Gale (Oxford University Press, 2007), 182.

so-called failings are put in the context of the other writers I've discussed in this coda and their relationship to the archive, then his working through and against his source suggests another way for me to enter that plague.

In his instructive essay, Steele Commager carefully details how the divergences (between Lucretius and his source) betray a remarkable pattern. He argues that Lucretius views "physical phenomena in moral or psychological terms, [...]physical facts and events in non-physical terms."[116] While his analysis offers many helpful insights, he refrains from advancing the argument that Lucretius's treatment of the plague might be "a metaphor for life" and instead suggests that if the plague had a didactic function, Lucretius was unconscious of its symbolic value and didn't deliberately intend it to be a lesson for his readers. From this perspective, he contends that the patterns he has noted are "evidence of ... the associative manner in which Lucretius' imagination works."[117] It's not my interest here to parse the various terms of Commager's argument, to ask, for instance, how he defines authorial intention, but to apply the patterns that he has identified and to elaborate the correspondences between how Lucretius engages with his archive and the motifs that I've been tracking throughout this book.

Lucretius compares himself to a healer who will, with this atomic theory (*ratio*) and the seductive powers of his poetic designs, cure us of all that ails us — our fears of death and the desire that motivates avarice and ambition.[118] And, as I have discussed, he enlists the rhetorical idiom common to both pedagogy and religion to cultivate a relationship with his audience. So, it seems to me more than fitting to consider his rendering of the Athenian plague to be his last class, the final pedagogical scene. While his vivid descriptions of the disease itself and of its gruesome effects on those afflicted produce visceral responses, even more impactful is his portrayal of ways humans behave in the face of it.

> et graviter partim metuentes limina leti
> vivebant ferro privati parte virile,
> et manibus sine nonnulli pedibusque manebant
> in vita tamen, et perdebant lumina partim:
> usque adeo mortis metus his incesserat acer. (DRN 6.1208–12)
>
> And some, fearing greatly death's door, continued to live after their male genital parts had been removed with a knife, some, with no hands or feet, still continued to remain in life, and some others lost their eyes, to such an extent had the bitter fear of death triumphed over them.

As many of his commentators point out, Lucretius departs from the clinical description of his source. In Thucydides's text, the loss of body parts and their function is the condition of survival, whereas in Lucretius's, because

116 Ibid., 183.
117 Ibid., 193–94n23.
118 See my discussion in Chapter 1 of DRN 1.936–43, 4.11–18.

they fear death so greatly, some willingly have their limbs removed *in order to* survive. Indeed, the difference, underscored by the lines that frame the description, serves to articulate one of Lucretius's central lessons: the fear of death (*metuentes limina leti / mortis metus* 6.1208, 1212) causes great harm, and here in the context of the plague leads to additional, even self-inflicted harm in excess of the disease itself. For this is a sickness of wrong belief and of misguided understandings of birth and death.

We can hear again the didactic intent in his description of human behavior when he creates a causal link between a deathly disease and the refusal to care for others:

> nam quicumque suos fugitabant visere ad aegros
> vitai nimium cupidos mortisque timentis
> poenibat paulo post turpi morte malaque,
> desertos, opis expertis, incuria mactans. (DRN 6.1238–41)
>
> For whoever would flee from looking after their own sick, being lustful beyond measure for life and fearing death, a little later, by means of a foul and evil death, murderous neglect would punish them, left deserted, deprived of aid.

Because they were lacking in care for others, for their own, they died without care, punished by their own neglect, abandoned in death, left to die destitute. It's a graphic equation. In Thucydides's narrative there are two types of people for whom the plague is fatal: those who die alone and those who die having visited a sick person, whereas in Lucretius's account "those who refuse to give aid" are "the ones who die *desertos, opis expertis* [left deserted, deprived of aid (6.1241)]." Commager notes that by "introducing ethical terms masquerading as clinical ones (*turpi … malaque,* 'loathsome' and 'evil,' 1241), he makes the plague a punishment for those displaying *cupido* and *timor* ('desire' and 'fear,' 1240), an idea quite alien to Thucydides," and as a consequence "the physical narrative has been altered and erected into a moral question."[119] Lucretius uses the historical account of the plague as an occasion to make connections between observable, physical objects and phenomena and those that are hidden, intangible and only accessible through analogical relations, just like those between letters of the alphabets and atoms. In this case, the visible effects of the plague are like the invisible ones of the illness that afflicts all of us.

Sick with the disease in both mental and physical forms, humans betray humans to death as they fight with each other to bury their dead, turning neighbors into enemies, into ones other than themselves. Does the order of difference win out? They attend to those who were once filial and are now atoms moving through the void. Death's fury resounds in a clamor of wailing in the final three lines of the poem.

> namque suos consanguineos aliena rogorum

119 Commager, "Lucretius' Interpretation of the Plague," 187.

> insuper exstructa ingenti clamore locabant
> subdebantque faces, multo cum sanguine saepe
> rixantes potius quam corpora desererentur. (DRN 6.1283–86)
>
> For they would lay their own [dead] kin, with a tremendous cry, on top of funeral piles, built up for [the kin] of others, and put torches under them, often fighting with much bloodshed, rather than let the bodies be abandoned.

They set fire to stolen funeral pyres erected for others. They fight to burn their own with others who burn their own (*consanguineos aliena* 6.1283). Us versus them. Clan against clan. All at all. Difference and sameness, alien and kin. All die alone, no matter if abandoned or burned. Buried or unburied. Both metaphor and reality. Both then (*tum*) and now (*nunc*), Lucretius makes one past present as a lesson to his present, now past.

But how to maintain the difference, the distance between then and now, when no one is left untouched?

> nec poterat quisquam reperiri, quem neque morbus
> nec mors nec luctus temptaret tempore tali. (DRN 6.1250–51)
>
> Nor could anyone be found whom neither illness, nor death, nor mourning had attacked at such a time.

Through the repeated forms of negation (*nec neque nec nec*) that resound in these lines, Lucretius underscores that no one can be found untouched by the plague: illness, death, and grief, no one escapes. The plague that Lucretius puts to work in his last class — that plague is also the plague we are living today. It is our catastrophe. The disease, uncontained and indifferent, makes us all vulnerable, but not all the same or in the same ways; those living closest to precarity, the disease harms and kills in the greatest numbers. Just as in Lucretius's poem, the plague uncovers ideology by making the unseen and intangible present before us. Is this, will this have been, the irreparable of our today? To face this and not turn away. For it is just one of many catastrophes.[120] The language of the poems persists — listening, attuned to their songs and rhythms might be one way of being with what is no longer and what might be.

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120 philip reflects on the catastrophic in an essay she composed during the first months of the global pandemic: "I think of the COVID-19 virus, invisible to the naked eye, which has wreaked such havoc in such an achingly short time, and see the parallel with another virus, albeit metaphorical — the virus of greed that spawned that earlier global disruption and destruction of nations, peoples and cultures. [...] We can call it colonialism, imperialism or whatever we care to, but like COVID-19 it has penetrated our lives as it did the lives of our ancestors and left in its wake a plethora of ills — racism, sexism, classism, xenophobia — the bedrock of our catastrophic lives today." m. nourbeSe philip, "Covidian Catastrophes," *Critical Times: Interventions in Global Critical Theory*, April 9, 2020, https://ctjournal.org/2020/04/09/covidian-catastrophes/.

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