POETICIZING EPICURUS IN LUCRETIUS' *DE RERUM NATURA*

by

KELLY ERIN RYAN

(Under the direction of Sarah Spence)

ABSTRACT

The relationship of Lucretius to his master, Epicurus, is a central question in the study of Lucretius' *De rerum natura*. As a devout follower of Epicureanism, Lucretius claims to adhere faithfully to Epicurus' teachings. However, as a poet, Lucretius openly flouts his master's belief in the inherent immorality of poetry. This paper examines how Lucretius recreates the *persona* of Epicurus in order to make the poetry of the *De rerum natura* seem compliant with Epicurean thought. Through this study, I conclude that Lucretius not only transforms Epicurus into a poet, but into a distinctly Lucretian poet. He does this several ways. Lucretius depicts Epicurus "poetically," placing him in situations more suitable for an epic hero or god; he parallels Epicurus with his poetic predecessors; and he forms associations between himself as poet, Epicurus, and various poetic purveyors of the *natura rerum*, such as Venus, Ennius, Homer and Empedocles.

INDEX WORDS: Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, Epicurus, Epicureanism, Roman imitation, Poetic imitation, Philosophic imitation, Republican poetry

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CHAPTER 1

ORIGINALITY AND IMITATION IN *DRN*

Introduction

The creative adaptation of earlier writing, *imitatio,* is a constant feature of Latin poetry.

D.A. Russell writes, "One of the inescapable features of Latin literature is that almost every

author, in almost everything he writes, acknowledges his antecedents, his predecessors—in a

word, the tradition in which he was bred."[1] Perhaps more than most, the Roman poet is highly

conscious of his predecessors. His task is great—he must come to terms with his forbears and

establish himself in a tradition while simultaneously assimilating that tradition to a new place

and purpose. If done well, *imitatio* allows the author to establish himself as a worthy poet and to

secure an audience for his new poetry.   Conte writes:

> Each new poetic act, by its very nature, tends to present itself as a part of a literary
> tradition, abiding by the norms and values of poetic discourse that give authority to its
> particular message and guarantee the autonomy necessary for its free expression.[2]

Latin writers often adhere to the norms established by the Greek literary tradition.   In the

Georgics, Virgil boasts that he has reproduced Hesiod: *ingredior sanctos ausus recludere fontis /*

Ascraeumque cano Romana per oppida carmen (I approach, having dared to lay open holy fonts

and I sing Ascraean song throughout the Roman towns, 2.175, 176). We find the same sentiment

in Horace's *Odes*: *ex humili potens / princeps Aeolium carmen ad Italos / deduxisse modos*

(powerful [although] from an humble estate, I am the first to have adapted the Aeolian song to

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[1] D. A. Russell, "*DE IMITATIONE*," in *Creative Imitation and Latin Literature*, ed. David West and Tony
Woodman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 1.
[2] Gian Biagio Conte, *The Rhetoric of Imitation: Genre and Poetic Memory in Virgil and Other Latin Poets*, ed.
Charles Segal (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 70.

Latin meters, 3.30.12-14). Both of these men proudly claim to be followers of a long-held Greek poetic tradition.

Poetic *imitatio*, however, has a twofold function. It looks to the past and situates the poem in an authoritative tradition, and, building on that authority, it also looks to the present and allows the work to become something original. Indeed, the language of the above lines suggests that the poets feel they are doing something new. Horace calls himself a *princeps* and Virgil approaches *sancti fontes*, the word *sanctus* suggesting that the fountains are untouched or inviolable. Despite their pride at being *imitatores* of such worthy poetry, they also claim to be original. In fact, most Roman poets appear very conscious of the risk of excessive imitation.[3] This is one reason why Virgil and Horace claim originality based upon heritage. They are the first to write such things *at Rome* and *in Latin*.[4] Virgil first brings Hesiod *per Romana oppida*, and Horace leads Greek poetry *ad Italos modos*. Here, Virgil and Horace employ what has been called the *primus* motif.[5] They are *primi* because Roman culture and the Latin language transform and shed new light on old Greek poetry.

As we see in Virgil and Horace, Roman poets simultaneously portray themselves as followers and innovators, *imitatores* and *primi*. The Roman poet stands as an inheritor of the Greek tradition and pioneer of the Roman. Thill notes that "Le poète latin est rarement l'*inventor* ou l'*auctor*, il lui suffit d'etre le *primus* ou au mieux l'*princeps*, c'est-à-dire l'introducteur et l'adaptateur d'un genre grec "le premier," voire chef de file, mais seulement à

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[3] Gordon Williams, *Tradition and Originality in Roman Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 253.
[4] Ibid.
[5] A. Thill, *Alter Ab Illo* (Paris: Société d'Édition, 1979), 480ff.; Gordon Williams, "Roman Poets as Literary Historians: Some Aspects of *Imitatio*," *ICS* 8, no. 2 (1983): 211-237.; Gordon Williams, *Tradition and Originality in Roman Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 250-357.

Rome."[6]   A Roman poet cannot claim honor as the originator of a poetic genre, but takes his

fame from being the first to use the genre at Rome and in Latin.

Roman philosophers also allude to the *primus* motif in discussing the difficulties of

writing philosophy in Latin. Cicero comments on the need to invent new Latin words to describe

Greek philosophy:

> *idque cum Graecis, tum magis nobis, quibus etiam verba parienda sunt inponendaque*
> *nova rebus novis nomina. quod quidem nemo mediocriter doctus mirabitur, cogitans in*
> *omni arte, cuius usus vulgaris communisque non sit, multam novitatem nominum esse,*
> *cum constituantur earum rerum vocabula, quae in quaque arte versentur.*

> And if it is so with the Greeks, then how much more with us, for whom even new words
> and names must be created and invented for new things. This fact will surprise no one of
> moderate learning, reflecting that in every art, whose use is not common and everyday,
> there is much novelty in vocabulary, when it is establishing the terminology of those
> concepts, which are dealt with in each science. (*Fin.* 3.3)

As this passage illustrates, much of Greek philosophy, although well known to the Romans, was

not yet translated into Latin.   Thus, in the first century BCE, a Roman writer of philosophy

needed great creativity and originality to transmit philosophy from Greek into Latin. It was not

just a matter of translation, but also of the transformation of the Latin language to fit Greek

philosophical concepts. Not only does Greek philosophy change the Latin language, but the

Latin language must also necessarily transform and even *improve* Greek philosophy:

> *quae philosophia dicitur, contineretur, hoc mihi Latinis litteris inlustrandum putavi, non*
> *quia philosophia Graecis et litteris et doctoribus percipi non posset, sed meum semper*
> *iudicium fuit omnia nostros aut invenisse per se sapientius quam Graecos aut accepta ab*
> *illis fecisse meliora, quae quidem digna statuissent, in quibus elaborarent.*

> It was incumbent on me I think to shed light upon that study, which is called philosophy,
> in the Latin tongue, not because philosophy is not able to be perceived from Greek
> literature and writers, but because always it was my judgment that our own countrymen
> in every respect are wiser than the Greeks, either in things they have discovered on their
> own or in things they have made better, having received them from the Greeks, at least in
> such subjects to which they have thought worthy to dedicate their labor. (*Tusc.* 1.1)

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[6]A. Thill, *Alter ab Illo* (Paris: Société d'Édition, 1979), 2.

Despite the widespread knowledge of Greek in Cicero's day, he believed it beneficial for his countrymen to read philosophy *in Latin*. Cicero goes on to disparage the current works of philosophy in Latin as *non satis eruditis* (1.6) and unable to gain widespread readership, however, he makes it clear that Latin literature, although highly indebted to the Greek, brings something new and better to philosophy. *Imitatio* and the *primus* motif, then, prove to be relevant to both the poetic and philosophic genres. Although Cicero acknowledges Roman indebtedness, he believes that Greek philosophy should follow poetry and be written in the Latin language. In a conversation with Varro on this subject, Cicero draws an analogy between poetry and philosophy, arguing for the transmission of Greek philosophy into Latin: *Quid enim causae est cur poetas Latinos Graecis litteris eruditi legant, philosophos non legant* (*Acad. post.* 1.10)*?*

Both the concept of *imitatio* and the *primus* motif are strikingly evident in *De rerum natura (DRN)*, whose author is not only trying to adapt a poetic genre, but also a system of philosophy. Take, for example, the following passage:

> *Nec me animi fallit Graiorum obscura reperta*
> *difficile inlustrare Latinis versibus esse,*
> *multa novis verbis praesertim cum sit agendum*
> *propter egestatem linguae et rerum novitatem.*
>
> Neither does it escape me that it is difficult to illuminate
> the dark discoveries of the Greeks in Latin verses,
> especially since many things must be set down in new words
> on account of the poverty of the language and the newness of the matters.
> (1.136-142)

Lucretius here takes on two roles. As an *imitator*, he makes light of his indebtedness to his Greek predecessors, and as a *primus*, he commends his own accomplishments, the writing of difficult verses in Latin. Diskin Clay comments on Lucretius' use of these motifs:

> ...it is not clear how he [Lucretius] regarded himself. On first impression, it appears that
> he considered himself a follower, but it is also clear in relation to his reader that he

regarded himself as a leader and that in terms of Roman poetry he viewed himself as taking a path taken by none before him.[7]

As Clay's comments make clear, it is difficult to work out in what ways Lucretius regards himself as a *primus* and in what ways a follower of tradition. In part, this problem rises out of the twofold nature of *DRN* as both *poetry* and *philosophy*. The subject and genre require that Lucretius take on the roles of both poet and philosopher, and therefore be a *primus* and *imitator* of both genres. In the above passage we see that Lucretius acknowledges the roles of both philosophy (*obscura reperta*) and poetry *(Latinis versibus)* in the creation of his identity as a *primus*.

The negotiation of Lucretius' roles as poet and philosopher becomes even more difficult when we consider the notable hostility to poetry of Epicurus, Lucretius' philosophic master. According to Epicurus, a philosopher and a poet could not exist in the same person: "The wise man alone shall speak rightly about music and poetry, but he will not actually write poems."[8] In addition, Epicurus believed that poetry's association with myth made it dangerous and corrupting, describing it as ὀλέθριον μύθων δέλεαρ (deadly ruin of myths).[9] Thus, Lucretius strays from the views of his master in the creation of an Epicurean poem.

This departure is especially unexpected considering the insistence of Epicurus upon the devotion and fidelity of his followers. Two unusual *dicta* complement Epicurus' known hostility to poetry: one, his disciples must transmit his writings unaltered, and two, his followers must

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[7] Diskin Clay, *Lucretius and Epicurus* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 40.
[8] Diog. Laert. 10.120.
[9] Heraclitus, *Quaest. Hom.* 4.2. For general discussions of Epicurus' view on myth and poetry see Pierre Boyancé, *Lucrèce et l'épicurisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963), 89-94.; Monica Gale, *Myth and Poetry in Lucretius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 14-18.; Katharina Volk, *The Poetics of Latin Didactic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 94ff.

behave always "as though Epicurus were watching."[10] Epicurus required *imitatio* both in the

writing of Epicurean doctrine and in the lives of his disciples. According to Cicero, adherence to

these *dicta* seems to be the norm for Epicureans. Cicero mentions the writer Philodemus, who

wrote short epigrams, as a remarkable exception to the normal Epicurean way of life: *Est autem*

hic de quo loquor non philosophia solum sed etiam ceteris studiis quae fere Epicureos neglegere

dicunt perpolitus (However, this man [Philodemus] about whom I am speaking, is cultured, not

only in philosophy, but also in other studies which they say Epicureans generally neglect, *Pis.*

70). The surprise of Cicero points to Epicurus' single-mindedness on the topics of poetry and

imitatio. Even centuries after his death, Epicurus' disciples were faithfully mimicking the life of

their master. The *DRN* then poses some difficulties for those considering the relationship

between Lucretius and Epicurus. How is it possible that Lucretius, as an Epicurean poet, can

claim proper imitation of his master Epicurus?[11] Furthermore, how can Lucretius, as a Roman

poet, simultaneously construct relationships of *imitatio* with his poetic predecessors while

remaining true to Epicurean philosophy? I intend to answer these questions through a closer

examination of Lucretius' use of literary and philosophic *imitatio* and, in turn, of his role as

primus.

<div align="center">Poetry and Philosophy in DRN</div>

The inconsistency between the philosophic teachings of Epicurus and the poetry of

Lucretius has long presented difficulties in the interpretation of the poem. Three major

arguments have been put forth about the balance between the roles of philosophy and poetry in

DRN. The first, and by far the most common, is that the Epicurean philosophy ultimately trumps

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[10] Usener, 211. Pierre Boyancé, *Lucrèce et l'épicurisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963), 34, 35. and
A. S. Cox, "Lucretius and His Message: A Study in the Prologues of the *De rerum natura*," *G&R* 18, no. 2 (1971):
8, 9.
[11] For evidence of Lucretius' desire to be an *imitator* of Epicurus, see *DRN* 3.1ff.

the poetry. Cyril Bailey, in his three-volume work on Lucretius, states that for the author "his philosophy comes first...his poetry is of secondary importance and is only an attraction to secure attention."[12] C. J. Classen also finds that Lucretius "does not allow himself to be carried away by his poetry; on the contrary his poetry is subordinated to the philosophic content of his work and its aim."[13] Alexander Dalzell takes the opposite perspective. In Dalzell's opinion, there is the same sort of discord between the philosophic and the poetic, but it is the poetic that actually triumphs. He states, "I should want to argue...that Lucretius is pre-eminently a poet with a vision."[14] Boyancé also believes that Lucretius' poetry should be seen as foremost: "L'originalité la plus profonde de Lucrèce est sans doute là: elle est d'avoir parlé de l'épicurisme en termes de poésie."[15] Lastly, some scholars maintain that Lucretius intends the poetic and the scientific to be more or less equally weighted in *DRN*.[16] A. Amory writes upon the ways that Lucretius turns difficult Epicurean *ratio* into *carmen*. She believes that "it is merely a question of patience to demonstrate that the use of language and the significant connections between scientific content and poetic quality...operate...throughout the whole poem."[17]

What does *DRN* itself say about poetry and philosophy? In the following passage, Lucretius argues for the supremacy of philosophy:

> *Sic ego nunc, quoniam haec ratio plerumque videtur*
> *tristior esse quibus non est tractata, retroque*
> *volgus abhorret ab hac, volui tibi suaviloquenti*
> *carmine Pierio rationem exponere nostram*
> *et quasi musaeo dulci contingere melle.*

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[12] Cyril Bailey, *Titi Lucreti Cari De rerum natura*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947), 757.
[13] C. J. Classen, "Poetry and Rhetoric in Lucretius," *TAPA* 99, (1968): 117.
[14] Alexander Dalzell, *The Criticism of Didactic Poetry* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 69.
[15] Pierre Boyancé, *Lucrèce et L'épicurisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963), 4.
[16] See A. Amory, "*Obscura de re lucida carmina*: Science and Poetry in the *De rerum natura*" *YICS* 21 (1969): 145-168.; R.F. Arragon, "Poetic Art as a Philosophic Medium for Lucretius," *Essays in Criticism* 11, no. 4 (1961): 371-389.; Albert Cook, "The Angling of Poetry to Philosophy: The Nature of Lucretius," *Arethusa* 27 (1994): 193-222.; E.J. Kenney, "Doctus Lucretius," *Mnemosyne* ser. 4.23 (1970): 366-392.
[17] A. Amory, "*Obscura de re lucida carmina*: Science and Poetry in the *De rerum natura*," *YICS* 21 (1969): 149.

> Thus I now, because this argument seems also more
> difficult to whomever is not accustomed, and the
> crowd shudders back from it, I desire to lay out our philosophy
> to you with the sweet-sounding Pierian song
> just as if to touch it with the sweet honey of the Muses. (1.943-947)

In this passage, Lucretius speaks as if he were using poetry merely as a seductive ploy to force the reader to absorb what is really important—the *ratio* behind the poetry. Poetry becomes secondary and simply a means to an end, pejoratively associated with the *volgus*. On the surface, Lucretius appears to follow this policy closely. Each book has a "honeyed" prologue, seducing the reader into the more difficult material that follows. Scattered throughout *DRN* are intervals in which Lucretius utilizes the more "poetic" subjects found in mythology as explanations for various phenomena, giving the reader a rest before embarking upon another long stretch that discusses Epicurean physics.

This passage, 1.943-947, however, is the only place where Lucretius directly addresses the inimical relationship between poetry and philosophy. This fact seems unusual considering the number of times he mentions *ratio* and *carmen,* and considering the difficulties an Epicurean poem would raise. In fact, as one reads the poem, Lucretius' casting of his poetic role as secondary seems more and more unconvincing. Even scholars such as Gavin Townend who believe that Lucretius is justified in his use of the figure of the honeyed cup, question his argument:[18] "This suggestion, that poetical technique is a purely external and almost meretricious addition to an essentially dark and discouraging subject, is a strange example of Lucretius' failure to recognize his own genius."[19] Townend goes on to say that Lucretius'

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[18] Gavin Townend, "Imagery in Lucretius," in *Lucretius*, ed. D. R. Dudley (New York: Basic Books, 1965), 112.
[19] Ibid., 96.

skillful use of metaphor and imagery mark him as a "true poet,"[20] even if the real purpose of the poem, Epicurean philosophy, can be expressed in "straightforward and prosaic language."[21]

An examination of Lucretius' use of *imitatio* may help to resolve the conflict between the poetic and philosophic in *DRN*. Roman poets used *imitatio* to define themselves and their place within an already established tradition.[22] Gordon Williams states that it "actually provided Romans with a frame of reference for meditation on themselves and their own ideals."[23] As an inheritor of two traditions, Lucretius must use *imitatio* to define himself as both an Epicurean philosopher and as a traditional poet. However, the models that Lucretius uses to portray himself are at odds. The tension between the poetic and philosophic then extends to the *persona* of Lucretius himself. How can Lucretius simultaneously imitate Epicurus, a philosopher who is hostile to verse, and epic poets such as Homer and Ennius?

Furthermore, Lucretius must also depict himself as an innovator, a *primus*. According to Conte: "Each work of art is the result of conflict at all levels between originality and convention."[24] As with all writers, originality for Lucretius and his Roman compatriots was of great importance. Discussing literary *imitatio*, Williams argues that in Roman poetry, "what was always needed was the establishment of a distance from predecessors that could accommodate the traditional and even the conventional but absolutely exclude anything approaching mere repetition or plagiarism."[25] As the earlier quotations from Horace and Virgil demonstrate, innovation in Latin literature was bound up in the language. It is a "commonplace, repeated again and again: the Roman poet claims that he is the first to be doing something or other in

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[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid., 112.

[22] Gordon Williams, "Roman Poets as Literary Historians: Some Aspects of *Imitatio*," *ICS* 8, no. 2 (1983): 211.

[23] Gordon Williams, *Tradition and Originality in Roman Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 250, 251.

[24] Gian Biagio Conte, *The Rhetoric of Imitation: Genre and Poetic Memory in Virgil and Other Latin Poets*, ed. Charles Segal (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 91.

[25] Gordon Williams, "Roman Poets as Literary Historians: Some Aspects of *Imitatio*," *ICS* 8, no. 2 (1983): 213.

Latin."[26] In order to assume the status of a *primus*, Roman poets must show themselves to be more than subservient *imitatores* of the Greek tradition by depicting themselves as innovators in the Latin. In a survey of Lucretius' role as *primus*, I shall examine the ways in which he uses his Roman heritage to establish his unique position within the poetic tradition.

Lucretius as Roman Poet

From the first word of the poem, *Aeneadum*, we know that Lucretius sees himself and his work as distinctly Roman. According to Pierre Grimal, the Roman references in the beginning of *DRN* are so overt that they imply that "Lucretius was a Roman first, a philosopher second."[27] By starting his poem with a reference to Aeneas, Lucretius makes clear his desire to claim and "Romanize" Epicureanism. Just as Aeneas came from a foreign land to Italy and was adopted as founder of the Roman nation, Lucretius brings Epicureanism, a foreign philosophy, and desires that the Romans to integrate it into their lives. In the following verses, Lucretius describes his eagerness to communicate Greek thought effectively to the Romans:

> *Nec me animi fallit Graiorum obscura reperta*
> *difficile inlustrare Latinis versibus esse,*
> *multa novis verbis praesertim cum sit agendum*
> *propter egestatem linguae et rerum novitatem;*
> *sed tua me virtus tamen et sperata voluptas*
> *suavis amicitiae quamvis 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.*
>
> Neither does it escape me that it is difficult to illuminate
> the dark discoveries of the Greeks in Latin verses,
> especially since many things must be set down in new words
> on account of the poverty of the language and the newness of the material.
> But however, it is your virtue and the hoped-for delight

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[26] Ibid., 253.

[27] Pierre Grimal, *Love in ancient Rome* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1967), 44.

> of your sweet friendship which persuades me to bear any labor,
> and it induces me to spend serene nights awake
> seeking by what words and by what poetry at last
> I might be able to display clear lights to your mind,
> by which you might be able to see things deeply hidden. (1.136-145)

Lucretius depicts himself as a true pioneer. As an Epicurean poet, he is translating Greek ideas into a new language, and in doing so, acting out his role as *primus*.[28] He must not only make light of strange, new matters (*rerum novitatem*), but while he is doing so, he must create new words (*novis verbis*) because of the poverty of his native tongue, *propter egestatem linguae*. At 1.141, Lucretius makes mention of his poetry as *labor*, emphasizing even more the difficulty of his work. This particular use of the word may have seemed more striking to an ancient Roman reader than it does now to us, because, according to Kenney, Lucretius appears to have been the first to apply the word *labor* to the writing of poetry.[29]

More than anywhere else in the poem, the proem to Venus recalls Lucretius' Roman heritage. Since the function of a proem in general is to introduce the poet's subject-matter, the ideas expressed in the beginning of *DRN* speak to the remainder of the poem. Conte writes that "the opening is the place where all the signals point to the originality of the work or to its position within literary production. The first line serves, therefore, not only as a title to the whole work but...it acquires emblematic value and can stand for the work itself."[30] Thus, the mention of Venus and Aeneas at the start of the poem show that the poet is attempting to frame his poem as distinctly Roman. Lucretius ascribes to Venus even more significance: in the proem, Lucretius seems to invoke Venus as a Muse: *te sociam studeo scribendis versibus esse /*

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[28] See also 5.335-337, *denique natura haec rerum ratioque repertast / nuper, et hanc **primus cum primis** ipse repertus / nunc ego sum **in patrias** qui possim vertere **voces**.*

[29] E. J. Kenney, "Lucretius," *G&R New Surveys in the Classics*, no.11 (1977): 14, 15. Lucretius again refers to his poetry as laborious in 2.730 and 3.419.

[30] Gian Biagio Conte, *The Rhetoric of Imitation: Genre and Poetic Memory in Virgil and Other Latin Poets*, ed. Charles Segal (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 70.

quos ego de rerum natura pangere conor (I am eager for you to be a partner in the writing of

verses, which I am trying to fashion on the nature of things, 1.24, 25). This implies, then, that all

the *poetry* of *DRN* comes from a distinctly Roman source of inspiration.

There are several other Roman allusions in the narrative. For example, Lucretius pairs

Venus with Mars, another progenitor of Rome from a different tradition. Here Lucretius may be

playing not only on nationalistic sensibilities but also on Roman religious feeling—the two

deities were also associated in cult at Rome from the third century BCE onward.[31] He also sets

his poem in a contemporary Roman context by asking Venus to distract Mars, and in doing so

stop the many recurring civil wars. Venus' fulfillment of his request allows him to write freely.

Lucretius pairs the Roman Venus, as his poetic inspiration, with Epicurus, describing the

philosopher using familiar Roman symbols. In introducing his reader to Epicureanism, Lucretius

depicts Epicurus as a Roman *victor*.[32] Epicurus saves mankind from the crushing power of

Religion, *ergo vivida vis pervicit, et extra / processit longe flammentia moenia mundi / atque*

omne immensum peragravit mente animoque (1.72-74). The philosopher goes on campaign, not

physically, but in mind and spirit (*mente animoque*). It is important to note the military words

and imagery. He conquered (*pervicit*) using force (*vis*); he escaped the flaming ramparts of the

world (*flammentia moenia*),[33] recalling the adjective *moenera* used for Mars at 1.32; and he

roamed far and wide throughout the infinite universe (*peragravit*). When Epicurus returns,

triumphant, he carries back his spoils of war (*refert nobis victor*): knowledge of the *rerum natura*

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[31] E. J. Kenney, "Lucretius," *G&R New Surveys in the Classics*, no.11 (1977): 16. Kenney notes that they were found together on monuments and that "iconographical terms" would be intelligible and appealing to Lucretius' readers.

[32] 1.62-101; E.J. Kenney, "Vivida Vis," in *Quality and Pleasure in Latin Poetry*, ed. Tony Woodman and David West (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 22.

[33] The *moenia* are later described by Lucretius in his summary of Epicurean cosmology (5.457-470).

(1.75-77). The roles of Religion and Mankind are now reversed. Mankind is raised high by the victory of Epicurus, while Religion lies trampled underfoot.

Although David West argues against viewing Epicurus as a Roman *triumphator* in this passage,[34] Lucretius' description of the difficulties of Roman war just a few lines earlier (1.29-43) provides an immediate context in the mind of the reader. In addition, the poet uses familiar Roman religious concepts, such as the mention of *terminus* (77) and *mundus* (73). Terminus was a Roman god with his own festival, the Terminalia.[35] The reference to *mundus* also invokes Roman religious concepts.   Ahl notes that the *mundus* was a ditch into which Romans threw the first fruits of all necessities and things traditionally considered sacred. Furthermore, it was situated at the center of the city and determined the shape of the city's boundaries.[36] Last, Virgil also found a link between Epicurus and a Roman victor in this passage. These lines were an inspiration for Virgil's description of the triumphant Caesar Augustus in Book 6 of the *Aeneid*.[37] By depicting Epicurus, a *Graius homo*, in Roman terms, Lucretius clearly reveals his philosophic task to be the *Roman* reinterpretation of Greek Epicureanism. This reinforces his status as a *primus*, a poet who is doing something uniquely Roman, and thus complements his statements about Venus and poetry earlier in the proem.[38]

Many references to Rome in *DRN* come in didactic *exempla*. This is one way that Lucretius puts his Roman reinterpretation of Greek philosophy into practice. These examples

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[34] See David West, *The Imagery and Poetry of Lucretius* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 59, 60. He argues that "Epicurus as a Roman *victor*" has been overplayed and is not a focus in the passage, although he does admit that it serves to appeal to "Roman religious feeling."

[35] E.J. Kenney, "Vivida Vis," in *Quality and Pleasure in Latin Poetry*, ed. Tony Woodman and David West, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974): 24.

[36] Frederick Ahl, "*Moenia Mundi*: The Akritic Poet," in *The Interpretation of Roman Poetry: Empiricism or Hermeneutics?*, ed. Karl Galinsky, Studien zur klassischen Philologie (Frankfurt: Peter Lang Verlag, 1992), 160.

[37] *Aen.* 6.793ff. Augustus crosses and rules over similar boundaries, *iacet extra sidera tellus / extra anni solisque vias...* (795-6). Note especially the emphasis upon fire (sun and stars included) and sky. In addition, we see that Augustus a few lines later is compared with Hercules (6.801ff), just as Epicurus is in Book 5.22-42, further cementing the relationship. See also Vinzenz Bucheit, "Epikurs Triumph des Geists," *Hermes* 99 (1971): 312.

[38] Epicurus is also described as a Roman *pater familias* in Book 3.1-9. See Lydia Lenaghan, "Lucretius 1.921-50," *TAPA* 98 (1967), 239.

often take the form of similes used to help explain difficult Epicurean doctrine.[39] For instance,

Lucretius explains the Epicurean view of color through a beautiful description of Roman theater

awnings:

> *nam certe iacere ac largiri multa videmus,*
> *non solum ex alto penitusque, ut diximus ante,*
> *verum de summis ipsum quoque saepe colorem.*
> *et volgo faciunt id lutea russaque vela*
> *et ferrugina, cum magnis intenta theatris*
> *per malos volgata trabesque trementia flutant.*
>
> For certainly we see many things to cast off and to scatter particles
> not only from deep within, as we have said before,
> but from the uppermost surface. Color itself often does this.
> Commonly, yellow and red and dark purple awnings do it,
> when outspread over a great theater in public view
> they flutter upon the posts and beams. (4.72-77)

Here, the didactic purpose is clear. Lucretius desires to explain a rather subtle Epicurean concept

through the use of a simile, a standard poetic manner of description. Lucretius' example proves

to be explicitly Roman, signaling that he, just like the reader, is Roman. No one before him has

used this example from everyday Roman life to explain a difficult and foreign Greek concept.

As we have discussed, an inescapable feature of Roman originality is the reinterpretation

of earlier traditions. "The Latin poet is...paradoxically, on the one hand a 'first' and on the other

hand a latecomer, dependent on his Greek model."[40] Lucretius' own identity as *primus* is caught

up in his imitation of earlier authors. In a survey of Lucretius' use of his poetic predecessors in

DRN, I will enumerate the ways in which Lucretius depicts himself as *imitator* and as *primus*

with respect to each predecessor. Lucretius tempers his imitation of his poetic predecessors

when their poetry disagrees with Epicurean principles. Lucretius finds it necessary to recreate

the poetic tradition in a way that is distinctly Epicurean. Thus, although unabashedly an *imitator*

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[39] See also 2.114-124, in which Lucretius compares atomic motion with a line of Roman soldiers.
[40] Katharina Volk, *The Poetics of Latin Didactic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 114.

of his poetic predecessors, Lucretius is also *primus*, transforming a seemingly hostile tradition into one that is compatible with the philosophy of Epicurus. Through manipulation of his exemplars, Lucretius resolves the difficulties of imitating both a philosophic and a poetic tradition.

We shall examine Lucretius' appropriation of the poetry of Homer, Ennius, and Empedocles.[41] These three are all explicitly mentioned in *DRN* as purveyors of the *natura rerum*, making them especially significant for our inquiry.

<p align="center">Homer and Ennius in <i>DRN</i></p>

Lucretius speaks highly of Homer in *DRN* and explicitly constructs a relationship of *imitatio* with him, declaring that Homer is the one and only king of poets.[42] Peter J. Aicher cites six passages in which Lucretius imitates Homer.[43] The most famous is found in the prologue of Book 3, in which Lucretius translates a passage from Book 6 of the *Odyssey*. Here, Lucretius describes the abodes of the gods as a vision revealed by Epicurus' mind:

> *...totum video per inane geri res.*
> *apparet divum numen sedesque quietae*
> *quas neque concutiunt venti nec nubila nimbis*
> *aspergunt neque nix acri concreta pruina*
> *cana cadens violat semperque innubilus aether*
> *integit, et large diffuso lumine ridet.* (18-22)
>
> I see things going on throughout the whole void.
> The power of the gods and the tranquil homes
> which wind never shakes nor clouds sprinkle with rain
> nor does the white falling snow, hardened by frost,

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[41] This list is to be considered in no way comprehensive, especially considering the large amount of work that has been done upon influential Alexandrian writers, such as Callimachus. See especially, Robert D. Brown, "Lucretius and Callimachus," *ICS* 7, no.1 (1982), 77-97.; Harold Donohue, *The Song of the Swan* (Lanham: University Press of America), 1993.

[42] See 3.1036-37 where Lucretius casts him as the ruler of the Muses and 1.111-126 in which Homer is the inspiration of the Latin poet Ennius.

[43] Peter J. Aicher, "Lucretian Revisions of Homer," *CJ* 87 (1991-1992): 139-158. The passages are as follows: 2.325-27 corresponds to *Il.* 19.362-64; 6.145-49 corresponds to *Od.* 9.391-93; 3.18-24 corresponds to *Od.* 6.42-45; 2.24-28 corresponds to *Od.* 7.100-102; 3.988-89 corresponds to *Od.* 11.577; 3.1000-02 corresponds to *Od.* 11.596-98; 5.904-906 corresponds to *Il.* 6.181-82.

violate and the cloudless aether always
covers it and laughs with broad diffused light.

This passage is clearly modelled on the Homeric original.

Οὔλυμπόνδ᾽, ὅθι᾽ φασὶ θεῶν ἕδος ἀσφαλὲς αἰεὶ
ἔμμεναι· οὔτ᾽ ἀνέμοισι τινάσσεται οὔτε ποτ᾽ ὄμβπῳ
δεύεται οὔτε χιὼν ἐπιπίλναται, ἀλλὰ μάλ᾽ αἴθρη
πέπταται ἀνέφελος, λευκὴ δ᾽ ἐπιδέδρομεν αἴγλη· (6.42-45)

To Olympus, where they say that the abode of the gods always
remains safe. It is neither shaken by winds, nor ever is wet
with rain, nor does the snow approach, but rather the cloudless
aether surrounds it, and shining splendor spreads over it.

Aicher's approach to the passage is useful, looking first at the similarities between the two

passages and then at the innovations of Lucretius. The parallels are unmistakeable. In particular,

Lucretius' progression of images mirrors that of Homer: the list of wind, rain, snow and

cloudlessness follows closely.[44] The two also show remarkable rhythmical similarities, with the

corresponding pairs at the ends of the lines, ὄμβπῳ and *nimbis*, and αἴθρη and *aether*.

Within Lucretius' translation of Homer's text, however, we see important deviations.

Most notably, the contexts are vastly different. In the *Odyssey*, the narrative of the story is

prominent—Athena is flying home after securing Nausicaa's meeting with Odysseus. The

audience feels dissociated from the narrative. The φασὶ in line 42 distances the reader from the

passage, indicating that this is a report within the story and that we are twice removed from the

sights of Olympus.

In *DRN*, by contrast, the vision proves to be highly personal. Lucretius places himself in

the vision, using the phrase *ibi me* and the first person *video*.[45] He also shares his emotional

reaction with his reader (*divina voluptas* and *horror*). The reader herself feels involved, as if

standing beside Lucretius as his pupil while he receives this revelation from Epicurus. By

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[44] Cyril Bailey, *Titi Lucreti Cari De rerum natura*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947), 990.
[45] Lucretius places *video* in the same position as the φασί and thus further emphasizes the distinction.

excluding all narratological references and radically changing the perspective of the reader, Lucretius avoids any relationship with the specific Homeric context of the passage. He wants his audience to recognize the passage as Homeric, but also recognize it as Epicurean. In changing the passage, he creates a sharp delineation between Homer's view of the nature and that of Epicurus.

Through these changes, the passage expresses more closely the interests of Epicureans. This occurs in small and large matters. For example, West notes that Lucretius changes the succinct χιὼν to the longer *nix acri concreta pruina* and thus refers to the Epicurean explanation of snow. "Epicurus explained it as moisture hardened by the powerful pressure of cold round about it, so he writes 'snow which is made hard by sharp frost.'"[46]

In addition, Lucretius fits the Homeric revelation into Epicurean philosophy by ensuring that the reader is visualizing the image correctly. Immediately following the passage quoted above, he describes how the gods of his vision live in absolute peace (23, 24). This placement contrasts the tranquility of the Epicurean gods with those of the *Odyssey*, who spend much of their time distressed about the state of human affairs.

In the lines immediately following, the poet also emphasizes that in his revelation there is no painful underworld: *at contra nusquam apparent Acherusia templa / nec tellus obstat quin omnia dispiciantur, / sub pedibus quaecumque infra per inane geruntur* (But in contrast not any Acherusian temples appear, nor does the earth stand in the way but all things are laid bare, whatsoever goes on under our feet throughout the void). In denying an afterlife, he paints a picture of a distinctly Epicurean universe and implicitly criticizes Homeric belief in the underworld.

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[46] David West, *The Imagery and Poetry of Lucretius* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969), 32.

By appropriating this Homeric passage, Lucretius establishes himself as an *imitator* of Homer. He roots himself in this earlier poetic tradition and draws on its authority and supremacy. Over the course of the passage, he also transforms the verse to serve didactic ends, thus reinforcing his role as an innovator, a *primus*. It is remarkably effective. The reader can learn about the Epicurean universe by comparing it to something familiar, the world of Homer. Lucretius also shows that he is thinking of his students in other ways. West notes that he makes a distinctly "Latin" poem out of the Greek, appealing to his Roman pupils: "The very sound of the Greek has been Latinized, the complex alliterations of the Greek for instance becoming broader and more obvious in the Lucretius."[47] In this way, he makes use of Homer, not only to construct an *imitatio* relationship, but also to further his didactic purpose, the spread of Epicurean philosophy.

In his imitation of Homer, Lucretius secures a rightful place among the poets inspired by the Greek epic tradition. Throughout *DRN*, however, he also casts himself as an *imitator* of the Roman epic tradition. He does this primarily through references to Ennius, author of the *Annales*. According to W.B. Ingalls, there are no fewer than thirteen known Ennian phrases repeated throughout *DRN*.[48] Just as with Homer, Lucretius imitates these passages of Ennius' poetry while also asserting his own philosophic independence.[49] In Book 1, Lucretius specifically mentions Ennius in conjunction with Homer:

> *Ennius ut noster cecinit, qui primus amoeno*
> *detulit ex Helicone perenni fronde coronam,*
> *per gentis Italas hominum quae clara clueret;*
> *etsi praeterea tamen esse Acherusia templa*
> *Ennius aeternis exponit versibus edens,*
> *quo neque permaneant animae neque corpora nostra,*

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[47] Ibid., 31.
[48] W.B. Ingalls, "Repetition in Lucretius," *Phoenix* 25 (1971): 235, 236.
[49] See David West, *The Imagery and Poetry of Lucretius,* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969), 30. Here, he analyzes Ennius' *Scaenica* 398-400 alongside Luc. *DRN*, 1.114-7.

> *sed quaedam simulacra modis pallentia miris;*
> *unde sibi exortam semper florentis Homeri*
> *commemorat speciem lacrimas effundere salsas*
> *coepisse et rerum naturam expandere dictis.*
>
> Just as our Ennius sang, he who first brought
> down from pleasant Helicon a crown with everlasting leaves,
> through the Italian races of men, a crown which bright fame spoke of.
> Although Ennius set forth in eternal verses
> that there are Acherusian temples,
> in which place neither our souls nor our bodies remain,
> but certain pale images in amazing meters;
> whence he recalls that the likeness of Homer, eternally flowering,
> urged him, pouring forth salty tears,
> to begin and to unfold the nature of things in words. (1.117-126)

First, it is important to note how Lucretius identifies Ennius with Homer. He recalls Ennius'

famous dream in which Homer entrusts him with his poetic mission.[50] This serves to construct

an *imitatio* relationship between Ennius and Homer and makes Lucretius the third in the line of

illustrious poets. Ennius and Homer are also bound together by their immortality. Homer is

called *semper florens* and Ennius not only has *aeterni versus*, but the passage also contains a pun

on his name, a common characteristic of Lucretian poetics. ENNIus holds a *perENNI fronde*,

further emphasizing his deathlessness.[51]

Lucretius depicts himself as an *imitator* of Ennius. He uses the possessive *noster* and the

word *Italas* to emphasize his solidarity with Ennius as his own compatriot.[52] Ennius is also said

to have received the *natura rerum* from Homer, indicating that Ennius and Homer share similar

purposes with Lucretius. This similarity, in particular, firmly establishes Lucretius as the

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[50] Enn. *Ann.* i – iii (Skutsch).

[51] See M. Gale, "Etymological Wordplay and Poetic Succession in Lucretius," *CP* 96 (2), 2001, 168, and P. Friedlander, "Pattern of Sound and Atomic Theory in Lucretius," *AJP* 62 (1941), 20.

[52] *Italas* may also be more general, referring to the anecdote in which Ennius is said to have three mouths, Oscan, Latin and Greek. As Skutsch points out, however, Ennius' work and person "seem to typify and crystallize in exemplary fashion that Roman attitude which made the Romans for ever the imitators of the Greeks, and yet creators in their own right." Ennius is doing what Lucretius wants to do, transforming the Greek into the Roman. Otto Skutsch, *Studia Enniana* (London: Athlone Press, 1968), 1.

recipient of two renowned epic traditions and creates the poetic genealogy of Homer – Ennius – Lucretius.[53]

Lucretius also considers his own poetic mission of bringing Epicureanism to the Romans, to be analogous to Ennius' accomplishment of bringing Greek verse to Italy. In the above passage, Lucretius characterizes the poet Ennius as *primus*. He was the first to bring epic meter down from Helicon to Italian men. We see later in Book 1 a similar passage in which Lucretius puts himself in the place of Ennius.

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

> Now come on, learn that which remains and listen to a clearer argument
> Neither does it escape me how these matters are dark; but
> great hope of praise struck my heart with a sharp thyrsus,
> and at the same time it struck sweet love of the Muses into my breast
> whither now inspired in my lively mind
> I traverse the pathless places of the the Pierides, not ever before
> crossed by a common foot. It pleases to approach pure springs
> and to drink, and it pleases to pick new flowers
> and to seek an illustrious crown for my head from there,
> whence before this the Muses crowned the temples of none.
> First, because I teach about great things,
> and I continue to loosen the mind from the tight bonds of religion,
> second, because I write such clear verses about a dark subject,
> touching all things with the Muses' charm. (1.921-934)

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[53] Monica Gale, *Myth and Poetry in Lucretius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 107.

Here Lucretius becomes the poetic *primus*, traversing and inhabiting places *nullius ante trita* (not ever before experienced, 1.926, 927) and seeking a similar crown, *coronam inde prius nulli velarint tempora Musae* (a crown whence the Muses crowned the brows of no one before this, 1.929, 930; 4.5).[54] In both of these passages, there is an emphasis upon the transmission of the Greek to the Roman. Ennius receives his poetry both from Mount Helicon and also through the shade of Homer himself, a representative of the entire Greek epic tradition. Lucretius' inspiration is conveyed through the thyrsus, the wand of the Greek god Dionysus, and the Pierides, a Greek word for Muses.

Lucretius also tempers his praise of Ennius, indicating that, despite his imitation of Ennius' poetry, he does not agree with his philosophy. For example, when Lucretius likens himself to Ennius and states that Ennius also speaks of the *natura rerum*, this not only aligns Ennius with Lucretius, but also hints at a rivalry between their competing ideologies.[55] In addition, immediately after Lucretius praises Ennius' poetic achievements, he corrects Ennius' beliefs about the afterlife, using a phrase from the *Annales*, *Acherusia templa* (120-122), and emphasizes the impossibility of the existence of ghosts, including Ennius' vision of Homer.[56]

Lucretius also disparages Ennius in more oblique ways. E. J. Kenney notes Lucretius' use of the word *vates* in line 109, just before Lucretius mentions Ennius: *nam si certam finem esse viderent/ aerumnarum homines, aliqua ratione valerent / religionibus atque minis obsistere vatum* (for if men saw that there was certain limit for their suffering, by some method they would grow strong enough to resist superstitions and the threats of priests/bards, 1.107-109).[57] *Vates* here is a negative term, linked to Epicurus' nemesis, the destructive *religio*. Immediately

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[54] Katharina Volk, *The Poetics of Latin Didactic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 88.
[55] Monica Gale, *Myth and Poetry in Lucretius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 108.
[56] W.B. Ingalls, "Repetition in Lucretius," *Phoenix* 25 (1971): 235, 236.
[57] E. J. Kenney, "Doctus Lucretius," *Mnemosyne* ser. 4.23 (1970).

following this passage, Lucretius depicts Ennius as this same sort of *vates*. Ennius believes in

metempsychosis, the transmigration of souls from one body to another, through which he was

able to be possessed by the shade of Homer. He also believes in the horrors of *Acherusia templa*,

which, according to Lucretius, *vates* use to intimidate men into compliance.[58] Kenney ties this

back to Ennius' own work, the *Annales*. He refers to a famous passage of the *Annales* in which

Ennius ridicules the *vates* Naevius, his predecessor: *scripsere alii rem / versibus quos olim Fauni*

vatesque canebant (Others have written the thing in verses which once the Fauns and bards were

singing, *Ann.* 7.231-32). Ennius' use of the term *vates* is as disparaging as Lucretius', yet the

proximity of the word to the reference to Ennius in *DRN* would suggest that Lucretius is actually

calling Ennius a *vates*. Ennius becomes one of the poet-priests, frightening humans with their

terriloqua verba. Kenney comments: "It seems that he [Lucretius] is throwing his great

predecessor's polemic in his teeth."

In this way, Lucretius depicts himself as both *imitator* and *primus* in relation to the

Homeric and Ennian epic traditions. In each case, he departs from his predecessor because they

disagree in some way with Epicurean philosophy. Homer's view of the gods and Ennius'

afterlife are irreconcilable with Lucretius' philosophic purpose, but Homer and Ennius

themselves are important to Lucretius' poetic tradition. While bowing to the greatness of

Homer's and Ennius' poetry, Lucretius simultaneously differentiates his philosophic beliefs from

the earlier poets.

<div align="center">Empedocles in DRN</div>

Lucretius also seeks to construct an *imitatio* relationship with the Sicilian poet

Empedocles. Empedocles is extremely important as a precursor of *DRN* because his poem, Περὶ

φύσεως, provides a precedent for scientific doctrine written in epic meter. Lucretius affords

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[58] 1.103-105, 107-108.

him surprisingly high praise, calling him *praeclarius* (1. 729) and claiming that Empedocles'

homeland, Sicily, contains nothing more *sanctum, mirum,* or *carum* (1.730). In addition,

Lucretius ascribes many divine attributes to him as he did to Homer and Ennius. His poem

comes from a *divinum pectus* (1.731) and what is more, Empedocles *vix humana videatur stirpe*

creatus (scarcely seems to be from the mortal race, 1.733).

What is it that Lucretius finds so admirable in the works of Empedocles?   We see

imitation of Empedocles running throughout the more "honeyed" parts of *DRN*. His influence is

particularly evident in the proem to Venus. David Furley and David Sedley enumerate the many

ways that Lucretius' poetry is indebted to Empedocles, with Sedley even concluding that the

invocation to Venus is more Empedoclean than Lucretian.[59] Furley points out that the beginning

of the invocation includes the four basic elements central to Empedocles' philosophy: fire, air,

earth and water.[60]

> *Aeneadum genetrix, hominum divomque voluptas,*
> *alma Venus,* **caeli** *subter labentia signa*
> *quae* **mare** *navigerum, quae* **terras** *frugiferentis*
> *concelebras, per te quoniam genus omne animantum*
> *concipitur visitque exortam lumina* **solis**
>
> Mother of Aeneas, delight of men and gods,
> nourishing Venus, you who beneath the gliding signs of the sky
> you who fill up the ship-bearing sea and the fruit-bearing lands, since
> through you each living thing is born and rising up, visits the light of the sun. (1.1-5)

Here, we see Lucretius using indexical signs for each of the four elements—*caelum* for air, *terra*

for earth, *mare* for water, and *sol* for fire. In the next four lines, 6-9, Lucretius repeats the

elements again, reinforcing the ties to Empedocles. Even Lucretius' very use of Venus and Mars

can perhaps be traced back to Empedocles' own proem in the Περὶ φύσεως and his conception

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[59] David N. Sedley, *The Transformation of Greek Wisdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 16.
[60] David Furley, *Cosmic Problems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 172, 173.

of the warring elements, Love and Strife.[61] As a representation of poetry in *DRN*,[62] Venus

makes it clear that Lucretius admires Empedocles for his *carmina* (1.731). But what about his

philosophy? Does Lucretius follow the pattern we have seen before, namely, does he praise the

poetry while disparaging the philosophy?

Indeed, Lucretius does place some restrictions on his endorsement of Empedocles, saying

that although great, he and others like him did not understand the causes of things: *principiis*

tamen in rerum fecere ruinas/ et graviter magni magno cecidere ibi casu (however, crashed into

ruin about the beginnings/causes of things and great as they were, they fell with a great fall,

1.740, 741). He continues on for almost a hundred lines, stating more specifically the ways in

which his philosophy departs from that of Empedocles.[63] Because Lucretius disapproves of

Empedocles' beliefs, his tribute to the poet, which even includes comparison with Epicurus,

seems problematic. Sedley comments on the anomaly: "This is remarkable praise to lavish on a

philosopher who did, after all, radically misconceive the underlying nature of the world."[64]

Empedocles receives such disproportionate praise from Lucretius, in part, because of the

manner in which Empedocles navigates the roles of poet and philosopher. Lucretius compares

Empedocles with Epicurus and also implicitly compares Epicurus to Empedocles' primary

philosophical inspiration, Pythagoras. Lucretius' description of Epicurus in the proem of Book 1

echoes closely Empedocles' praise of Pythagoras.[65]

> And there was among them a man of unusual knowledge, and master especially of all
> sorts of wise deeds, who in truth possessed greatest wealth of mind for whenever he
> reached out with all his mind, easily he beheld each one of all the things that are, even for
> ten and twenty generations of men. [trans. Arthur Fairbanks][66]

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[61] David N. Sedley, *The Transformation of Greek Wisdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 25.
[62] See 1.24.
[63] 1.742-829.
[64] David N. Sedley, *The Transformation of Greek Wisdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 13.
[65] *DRN* 1.62ff; see also David J. Furley, *Cosmic problems : essays on Greek and Roman philosophy of nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
[66] B129; Arthur Fairbanks, ed., *The First Philosophers of Greece* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1898).

Lucretius, like Empedocles, considers his master too venerable to be named, calling him only

Graius homo (1.66), and both heroes are praised specifically for their intellectual achievements.

Lucretius says that the lively force of Epicurus' mind conquered (*vivida vis animi pervicit*, 72)

and resulted in a complete knowledge of nature (75-77), just as Pythagoras "reached out with all

his mind and beheld each one of the things that are."

       As an *imitator*, Lucretius also compares himself to Empedocles. In Book 1, Lucretius

claims Empedocles' doctrine is *sanctius et multo certa ratione magis quam* / *Pythia quae tripodi*

a Phoebi lauroque profatur (more sacred and with much more sure reason than the Pythia utters

from Phoebus' tripod and laurel, 1.738).   In Book 5.110-112, Lucretius becomes like

Empedocles:[67]

> *Qua prius aggrediar quam de re fundere fata*
> *sanctius et multo certa ratione magis quam*
> *Pythia quae tripodi a Phoebi lauroque profatur,*
> *multa tibi expediam doctis solacia dictis.*
>
> Before I set out to pour out prophecies concerning this thing
> more holy and with more sure reason than
> the Pythia utters from Phoebus' tripod and laurel,
> I will offer many comforting things to you with my learned words.

The Pythia and her tripod invoke the idea of poetic *imitatio* in a new way. When the Pythia

approaches the tripod she receives the "divine breath" of Apollo, which inspires her to speak

prophetically and poetically. Breath is a symbol of poetic inspiration. J. F. Alton writes: "The

'effluences' from the spirit of a great poet or prose-writer could descend upon others and help

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[67] It is significant that oracular power is not unprecedented in Epicurean doctrine. Epicurus calls himself an oracle: Παρρησίᾳ γὰρ ἔγωγε χρώμενος φυσιολογῶν χρησμῳδεῖν τὰ συμφέροντα πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις...(For I, in investigating nature, would prefer to speak openly and like an oracle to give answers serviceable to all mankind...[trans. Cyril Bailey]) *Sent. Vat.* 29.

them to remould and exalt their own soul."[68] Thill states that images of breath communicate

"l'idée d'une participation, d'une communion, d'une transmission."[69] The laurel branch also

confers poetic inspiration. This idea goes back to Hesiod, to whom the Muses gave laurel as a

staff:

> So spoke the daughters of Zeus, masters of word-craft,
> and from a laurel in full bloom they plucked a branch,
> and gave it to me as a staff, and then breathed into me
> divine song, that I might spread the fame of past and future.[70] [trans. A. Athanassakis]

The laurel staff is a symbol of poetic and prophetic power and because it is associated closely

with Apollo, it is also a symbol of revelation and truth. Lucretius' use of such positive

symbolism shows very clearly that he is presenting himself as a poetic *imitator* of Empedocles.

Lucretius' association of poetry with prophecy holds further implications. In the first

century BCE, there was an attempt to transform the qualifications of the poet. Poets began to

identify themselves with the poetic figures of a remote past who functioned not only as poets but

also as seers for the community.[71] The term for this new poet-priest was *vates*. Lucretius uses

this word twice in Book 1, both times in a religious context: *Tutemet a nobis iam quovis*

tempore, vatum / terriloquis victus dictis, desciscere quaeres (1.102, 103).   And again *nam si*

certam finem esse viderent / aerumnarum homines, aliqua ratione valerent / religionibus atque

minis obsistere vatum (1.107-109). The *vates* in these passages is clearly a religious figure. As I

have discussed, however, Lucretius juxtaposes the *vates* here with Ennius and his use of *vates* in

the *Annales*. Thus, at least implicitly, Lucretius uses the term as a representation of both poet

and priest in *DRN*, and in both cases disparagingly. It seems odd then that Lucretius would wish

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[68] J. F. D'Alton, *Roman Literary Theory and Criticism: A Study in Tendencies* (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1931), 426, 427.
[69] A. Thill, *Alter ab Illo* (Paris: Société d'Édition, 1979), 490.
[70] *Theog*. 29-32.
[71] H. Dahlmann, "*Vates*," *Philologus* 97 (1948): 16.

to identify himself and Empedocles as *vates*, prophet-poets, but this is exactly what Lucretius does.[72] We have seen in the examples of Homer and Ennius that Lucretius is a skillful *imitator*, able to appropriate what he finds useful from his predecessors while setting himself apart from anything he finds opposed to his own views. Here, Lucretius transforms the Ennian *vates*, whose false religious prophecies are destructive to humans, into a Lucretian *vates*, adumbrating later Augustan uses of the term. Lucretius wishes to take for himself the authority of the *vatic* poet, but to redefine it as Epicurean.

The idea of a influential, divinely inspired poet exists during the time of Lucretius, although little mention is made of the term *vates* in Republican poetry.[73] In 62 BCE, Cicero describes *poeta* as a religiously inspired figure much like later conceptions of *vates*: *poetam natura ipsa valere, et mentis viribus excitari, et quasi divino quodam spiritu inflari* (The poet grows strong from nature itself, and is excited by the force of the mind, and becomes fired up as if from some divine spirit).[74] Varro, a contemporary of Cicero, suggests that the word *vates* derives from two possible sources, one of which is '*a vi mentis*,'[75] a phrase that closely echoes Cicero's description of a poet above. This idea of forceful, divine inspiration ultimately finds its roots in the writings of Plato, in particular, the *Ion*. In this book, Plato says that good poets, like

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[72] See also Gian Biagio Conte, *The Rhetoric of Imitation: Genre and Poetic Memory in Virgil and Other Latin Poets*, ed. Charles Segal (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 4-16.; Philip R. Hardie, *Cosmos and Imperium* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 17ff.

[73] For early uses of *vates,* see J. K. Newman, *The Concept of Vates in Augustan Poetry*, Collection Latomus, vol. 89 (Bruxelles: Revue d'études latines, 1967), 13ff. The term "*vates*" is not fully defined in Lucretius' day, but Lucretius, at the very least, seems to be a forbear of the *vates*-concept in the Augustan sense of the term.

[74] *Arch.* 18.

[75] This etymology comes down to us through Servius, discussing *Aen*. 3.443, *vates a vi mentis appellatos Varro auctor est*. The other possible source is the phrase *versibus viendis* – from the weaving of verses. This is found in Varro's own work, *De Lingua Latina* 36.   Philip R. Hardie, *Cosmos and Imperium* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 20. For evidence concerning the etymology of *vates*, see H. Dahlmann, "*Vates*," *Philologus* 97 (1948): 337ff.

the Corybantes or followers of Bacchus, are frenzied and out of their senses when they write poetry.[76]

In the writings of both Cicero and Lucretius, we find the beginnings of the Augustan concept of *vates*. During the time of Augustus, the role of the poet-priest grew more politically and socially important. Horace's *Ars Poetica* discusses the important role of *vates* in the follow passage:

> *Sic honor et nomen divinis vatibus atque*
> *carminibus venit. Post hos insignis Homerus*
> *Tyrtaeusque mares animos in Martia bella*
> *versibus exacuit, dictae per carmina sortes,*
> *et vitae monstrata via est et gratia regum*
> *Pieriis temptata modis ludusque repertus*
> *et longorum operum finis: ne forte pudori*
> *sit tibi Musa lyrae sollers et cantor Apollo.*

> Thus honor and name came to the divine poets and
> their songs. After these famed Homer and Tyrtaeus
> with verses goaded manly hearts into martial wars,
> prophecies were spoken through songs,
> and the path of life was displayed and the favor of kings
> was sought in Pierian songs and games were invented
> and the end of long work: lest by chance there should be
> shame for you in the skillful lyric Muse and singer Apollo. (*Ars Poetica* 400-407)

According to Horace, the *vates* is an extremely influential member of society. Newman remarks on Horace's view of the role of the poet: "The doctrine of *vates* in this passage is extraordinary. They are the spokesman of the gods, they found cities, give laws, establish public morality and religion."[77] The status of *vates* would give Lucretius the authority to purvey true *Epicurean* philosophy and distinguish himself from the bards whom he claims deal in fear and lies.[78]

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[76] 533e-534e.

[77] J. K. Newman, *The Concept of Vates in Augustan Poetry*, Collection Latomus, vol. 89 (Bruxelles: Revue d'études latines, 1967), 78.

[78] Philip R. Hardie, *Cosmos and Imperium* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 18, 19.

Long before Horace and Lucretius, Empedocles first claimed the status of a poet-priest. In the following fragment, he describes prophetic and healing powers remarkably similar to those of Apollo:

χαίρετ'· ἐγὼ δ' ὑμῖν θεὸς ἄμβροτος, οὐκέτι θνητός,
πωλεῦμαι μετὰ πᾶσι τετιμένος, ὥσπερ ἔοικα,
ταινίαις τε περίστεπτος στέφεσίν τε θαλείοις·
τοῖσιν ἅμ' εὖτ' ἂν ἵκωμαι ἐς ἄστεα τηλεθάοντα,
ἀνδράσιν ἠδὲ γυναιξί, σεβίζομαι· οἱ δ' ἅμ' ἕπονται
μυρίοι ἐξερέοντες, ὅπηι πρὸς κέρδος ἀταρπός,
οἱ μὲν μαντοσυνέων κεχρημένοι, οἱ δ' ἐπι νούσωι
παντοίων ἐπύθοντο κλύειν εὐηκέα βάξιν
δηρὸν δὴ χαλεποῖσι πεπαρμένοι ἀμφὶ μόγοισιν.[79]

Greetings! I go frequently among you as an immortal god, no longer a mortal,
honored among all, as is seemly,
and crowned with headbands and blooming garlands.
With these, I come to flourishing cities
I am revered by men and by women; and countless numbers
follow me, seeking out upon what road is there profit,
some having need of oracles, others need help in diseases.
They seek to hear excellent oracular sayings of all sorts of things
truly for too long having borne horrible pains.

The use of the words μαντεύομαι and βάξις highlights Empedocles' status as a prophet. Empedocles also claims that his words have the ability to heal, another realm governed by Apollo. The power that Empedocles, as a poet-prophet, claims to exert over society is extensive and similar to Horace's own description of the role of the *vates*. He is viewed as an expert on all sorts of matters (παντοίων). Countless numbers (μυρίοι) come to Empedocles and honor him as a god (θεὸς). Lucretius counts himself among Empedocles' followers, and thus he also designates Empedocles as godly, calling him *divinus* (1.731) and declaring that he is scarcely human (*ut vix humana videtur stirpe creatus*, 1.733).

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[79] B 112.

In Book 1, Lucretius describes himself using the same language and motifs found in the passage from the *Ars Poetica* and in the Empedoclean fragment. This serves to classify him too as a *vates*:

> *nec me animi fallit quam sint obscura; sed acri*
> *percussit thyrso laudis spes magna meum cor,*
> *et simul incussit suavem mi in pectus amorem*
> *Musarum, quo nunc instinctus mente vigenti*
> *avia Pieridum peragro loca nullius ante*
> *trita solo. iuvat integros accedere fontis*
> *atque haurire, iuvatque novos decerpere flores*
> *insignemque meo capiti petere inde coronam*
> *unde prius nulli velarint tempora Musae.*
> *primum quod magnis doceo de rebus et artis*
> *religionum animum nodis exsolvere pergo,*
> *deinde quod obscura de re tam lucida pango*
> *carmina, musaeo contingens cuncta lepore.*
>
> Neither does it escape me how these matters are dark; but
> great hope of praise struck my heart with a sharp thyrsus,
> and at the same time it struck sweet love of the Muses into my breast
> whither now inspired in my lively mind
> I traverse the pathless places of the the Pierides, not ever before
> crossed by a common foot. It pleases to approach pure springs
> and to drink, and it pleases to pick new flowers
> and to seek an illustrious crown for my head from there,
> whence before this the Muses crowned the temples of none.
> First, because I teach about great things and arts,
> and I continue to loosen the mind from the bonds of religion,
> second, because I write such clear verses about a dark subject,
> touching all things with the Muses' charm. (1.922-934)

Words in this passage evoke the idea of the priestly poet. Lucretius' inspiration is akin to religious possession. He is struck by the thyrsus, the wand of the god Bacchus, a form of stimulation that harkens back to Plato's interpretation of poetic inspiration. It is perhaps worthwhile to recall also that Dionysus was frequently associated with Apollo[80] and tragic and comic poetry were written in his honor. The thyrsus causes Lucretius to become inspired in his

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[80] During the winter months, Dionysus reigned at Delphi and Apollo and Dionysus were often depicted in art together. Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 224.

lively mind (*instinctus mente vigenti*), recalling Varro's etymology of the word *vates* from *a vi mentis*. We find that the Empedoclean imagery of the crown and the flowers is repeated and there is also mention of Horace's *Musae* and Pierides. However, Lucretius' passage is deficient in one aspect. Unlike Horace and Empedocles, Lucretius does not show us what happens after he returns from the region of the Muses and enters society as a *vates*. Horace himself gains honor and a divine name in his role as *vates*: *Sic honor et nomen divinis vatibus atque carminibus venit*.[81] As soon as Empedocles receives his garlands and thus his status as a poet-priest, he goes to the cities and is revered by men and women: ἀνδράσιν ἠδὲ γυναιξὶ σεβίζομαι. Both Horace and Empedocles exert great influence over their society. It is fair to presume that Lucretius, who is struck by a great hope for praise (*percussit...laudis spes magna*, 923), also anticipates such a reaction in his audience. Lucretius ties himself even more to Empedocles' idea of *vates* through medical language and imagery. Just like Empedocles cures the diseased (ἐπι νούσωι), Lucretius hopes to be able to heal and cure his audience of their enduring sickness through his role as an Epicurean *vates*:[82]

> *sed veluti pueris absinthia taetra medentes*
> *cum dare conantur, prius oras pocula circum*
> *contingunt mellis dulci flavoque liquore,*
> *ut puerorum aetas inprovida ludificetur*
> *labrorum tenus, interea perpotet amarum*
> *absinthi laticem deceptaque non capiatur,*
> *sed potius tali pacto recreata valescat,*
> *sic ego nunc.*

> But just as with children, when doctors try to administer
> harsh wormwood, beforehand touch around the rims of the cups
> with sweet honey and with yellow liquid,
> just as the unseeing youth of children is tricked
> as far as the lips, and meanwhile may drink up the bitter
> juice of wormwood, having be deceived may it not be betrayed,

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[81] *Ars P.* 400, 401.
[82] Medical imagery abounds in Lucretius. He frequently uses the sicknesses of the body to describe the sickness of the soul. see 3.506-509.

but rather having been restored by such means, grows strong,
thus now do I. (1.936-943)

The role of healer is unique to Empedocles and Lucretius and, as such, emphasizes Lucretius'

desire to be seen as an Empedoclean *imitator*. It also points towards their roles as philosophers

and teachers as well as *vates*. As we shall see, Lucretius also appropriates these roles in his

imitation of Empedocles.

In Book 5, just a few lines before Lucretius speaks of the oracle, he directly translates a

passage of Empedocles' Περὶ φύσεως to describe a difficult Epicurean concept.[83]

> *nec tamen hanc possis oculorum subdere visu*
> *nec iacere indu manus, via qua munita fidei*
> *proxima fert humanum in pectus templaque mentis.*
>
> However, neither are you able to compel this into the sight of the eyes
> nor to lay hands upon it, by which [touch] the secured path of belief
> leads most directly into the human heart and the temples of the mind. (5.101-103)

Here is Empedocles' original:

> οὐκ ἔστιν πελάσασθαι ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς ἔφικτον
> ἡμετέροις ἢ χερσὶ λαβεῖν, ἧπερ τε μεγίστη
> πειθοῦς ἀνθρώποισιν ἀμαξιτὸς εἰς φρένα πίπτει.
>
> [The divine, says the poet from Akragas,] cannot be approached
> or brought into the range of our eyes or grasped by our hands,
> which is the broadest carriage way of persuasion for men that
> falls to the mind. (trans. by Diskin Clay)[84]

In a characteristically Lucretian manner, Lucretius both adopts and changes Empedocles' poetic

illustrations to promote Epicurean philosophy. It is important to note that Lucretius takes care to

distance the passage from its original context in Empedocles' work. Here, Lucretius is

discussing the death of the world; by contrast, Empedocles' passage describes the difficulties of

framing the concept of divinity. The clear dissociation of the passage from the original assures

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[83] See Catherine J. Castner, "*DE RERUM NATURA* 5.101-103: Lucretius' Application of Empedoclean Language to Epicurean Doctrine," *Phoenix* 41 (1987), 40-49.
[84] Cited in Clement *Str.* 5.12, 694 P.

the reader that Lucretius is not straying from Epicurean doctrine, but merely appropriating and transforming the Empedoclean argument. Thus, the difficulty of comprehending the gods in an Empedoclean view of the universe becomes parallel to the difficulty of comprehending a mortal world in an Epicurean universe.

Looking at the context of the passage in *DRN*, it is evident that Lucretius feels the destruction of the world to be a particularly problematic concept for students of Epicureanism. We see him become especially didactic at the beginning of the passage, calling upon Memmius by name and assuring him that as a teacher he does not forget that this teaching is *nova miraque menti* (97). In fact, he admits that he himself finds this argument exceptionally difficult to prove by words (*difficile id mihi sit pervincere dictis*, 99).[85] It seems doubtful, in the midst of such a difficult doctrine, that Lucretius would authenticate his argument through imitating and comparing himself to a poet, even a *vatic* one. Lucretius invokes Empedocles' role as philosopher in this passage.[86] In addition, the proximity of the passage in which Lucretius imitates Empedocles philosophically, to that in which he likens their poetic identities suggests that Lucretius is presenting himself as a *poet-philosopher* like Empedocles.

We also note that in this passage Lucretius is an *imitator* of Empedocles not only as a poet and a philosopher, but also as teacher. Empedocles uses a holistic approach to teaching,

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[85] See also Catherine J. Castner, "*DE RERUM NATURA* 5.101-103: Lucretius' Application of Empedoclean Language to Epicurean Doctrine," *Phoenix* 41 (1987): 43 ff.

[86] This is dependent upon the recognition of Lucretius' imitation of Empedocles' poem by the reader. I think some evidence is to be found in Cicero's letters. To his brother he writes: *Lucretii poemata, ut scribis, ita sunt, multis luminibus ingenii, multae etiam artis; sed, cum veneris, virum te putabo, si Sallustii Empedoclea legeris, hominem non putabo* (*Ad Q.fr.* 2.9.4). Sedley contends that by repunctuating it to that of the late 19th century (which I have done) the letter compares *DRN* and the *Empedoclea*. He translates it as follows: "Lucretius' poetry shows, as you say in your letter, many flashes of genius, yet also much craftsmenship. On the other hand, when you come, I shall consider you a man if you have read Sallustius' *Empedoclea*, though I won't consider you human." If we agree with Sedley, this may be evidence that there was ancient comparison between the two doctrines: D. N. Sedley, *Lucretius and the transformation of Greek wisdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1, 2. In any case, *imitatio* as a principle depends on the reader's ability to recognize the connection between the two texts. Conte states that in allusion, "the author presupposes the competence of his (or her) own Model Reader." Gian Biagio Conte, *The Rhetoric of Imitation: Genre and Poetic Memory in Virgil and Other Latin Poets*, ed. Charles Segal (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 30.

employing characteristically "poetic" techniques such as imagery and metaphor as didactic tools

to explain his philosophy. In the above passage, Empedocles declares that the easiest way for

men to understand is through their senses, their eyes and hands. This leads him to use common,

everyday actions as explanations of difficult scientific concepts. Empedocles describes the

displacement of breath and blood through the following simile:

> as when a girl, playing with a klepsydra of shining brass, takes in her fair hand the
> narrow opening of the tube and dips it in the soft mass of silvery water, the water does
> not at once flow into the vessel, but the body of air within pressing on the close-set holes
> checks it till she uncovers the compressed stream; but then when the air gives way the
> determined amount of water enters. And so in the same way when the water occupies the
> depths of the bronze vessel, as long as the narrow opening and passage is blocked up by
> human flesh, the air outside striving eagerly to enter holds back the water inside behind
> the gates of the resounding tube, keeping control of its end, until she lets go with her
> hand. Thus in the same way when the soft blood, surging violently through the members,
> rushes back into the interior, a swift stream of air comes in with hurrying wave, and
> whenever it (the blood) leaps back, the air is breathed out again in equal quantity. [trans.
> Arthur Fairbanks][87]

This simile appeals directly to empirical, sensory evidence. Anyone can easily envision a girl

fetching water and thus imagine the sort of interaction between blood and air in the body. In

imitation of Empedocles, Lucretius also declares that the senses "lead most directly into the

human heart and the temples of the mind." The following Lucretian passage describes the

shapes of the atoms in various substances:

> *namque movetur aqua et tantillo momine flutat*
> *quippe volubilibus parvisque creata figuris.*
> *at contra mellis constantior est natura*
> *et pigri latices magis et cunctantior actus;*
> *haeret enim inter se magis omnis materiai*
> *copia, nimirum quia non tam levibus extat*
> *corpibus neque tam subtilibus atque rutundis.*
>
> For water moves and flows with a very small movement
> because it is created by rolling and small shapes.
> But, in contrast, honey is by nature thicker
> and the fluid more sluggish and movement more hesitant;

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[87]287; Arthur Fairbanks, ed., *The First Philosophers of Greece* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1898).

> for the whole mass of the material clings more to itself,
> no doubt because it is not made with such light bodies
> nor ones so delicate and round. (3.189-195)

Through such examples, Lucretius proves that movement is correlated to the type of *semina* in a substance. The contrast that he makes here between water and honey is very visual and certainly easily understood. Everyone has perceived a similar difference between the two substances. Lucretius uses this common experience to explain the Epicurean principle of atoms.

Lucretius' imitation of Empedoclean teaching techniques, supporting his desire to be seen as a poetic and philosophic *imitator* of Empedocles, explains in part why Empedocles is so highly praised in *DRN*. Both Empedocles' poetry (*carmina*, 1.731) and his discoveries (*multa bene ac divinitus invenientes*, 1.736) are commendable in and of themselves; Lucretius, however, praises Empedocles not on account of his philosophy and poetry alone, but rather because of his skillful integration of philosophy and poetry into a single, coherent work. This merits far more praise than other predecessors, whose contributions to *DRN* only went as far as poetics. One might even argue that Lucretius wishes to be seen as a sort of "second Empedocles," imitating the integration of form and content in Empedocles' Περὶ φύσεως in the writing of *DRN*.

Conclusion

In an investigation of three literary figures in *DRN*, Homer, Ennius and Empedocles, we have seen how Lucretius depicts himself as an *imitator* of each. We have also looked at some of the ways that Lucretius tailors the poetry of his predecessors to fit Epicurean philosophic beliefs. As predecessors of *DRN* in the epic tradition, Homer and Ennius prove to be vital to the composition of the poem. Purposefully constructing himself as their *imitator*, Lucretius procures the authority of their tradition. Yet, whenever Lucretius feels the epic tradition has strayed too far from Epicurean thought, he defines himself as *primus*. Although he translates whole

passages from the *Odyssey*, showing his indebtedness to Homer, he also firmly rejects the

Homeric view of the gods through allusion and contextual clues. In a similar way, Lucretius

nods to Ennius' status as his Roman epic predecessor, but disparages his view of the afterlife.

Lucretius shows a slightly different pattern when dealing with the poet Empedocles. As

the first to compose philosophic poetry, Empedocles is an especially important predecessor of

Lucretius. With respect to poetry, Lucretius expresses his admiration, emphatically praising the

man for his *carmina* and even paralleling their poetic identities in duplicate passages. He also

invokes the role of *vates*, a poet-priest, in his discussion of Empedocles as further evidence of his

poetic imitation. With respect to philosophy, as in his dealings with Homer, Lucretius rejects

Empedocles' philosophic beliefs as false. Despite his dismissal of Empedocles' philosophy,

Lucretius translates and adapts a passage of the Περὶ φύσεως in the explanation of a difficult

Epicurean argument. Although this seems to contradict Lucretius' dismissal of Empedoclean

philosophy, we note that Lucretius significantly modifies the passage to support *Epicurean*

thought. This adaptation suggests that it is not Empedoclean philosophy itself that Lucretius

invokes but rather Empedocles' *role* as philosopher. Lucretius wishes to be seen as a successful

poet-philosopher like Empedocles. He reinforces this idea through imitation of Empedoclean

teaching devices, which tend to integrate the poetic and the philosophic using familiar poetic

techniques, such as a metaphor, to explain complex philosophy.

By tailoring his poetic *imitatio* to comply with Epicurean philosophy, Lucretius makes

room for his poetic and philosophic *personae* to exist simultaneously. This does not fully justify

the use of poetry in *DRN*. Despite Lucretius' revisions to the poetry of his predecessors,

Epicurus' own hostility to poetry itself remains. In the next chapter, I will investigate the

character of Epicurus in *DRN* and the ways in which Lucretius transforms the *persona* of

Epicurus himself to validate his poetic purpose.

CHAPTER 2

EPICURUS, VENUS, HOMER AND EMPEDOCLES

Introduction

As one would expect, Lucretius expresses a desire to be an *imitator* of Epicurus in *DRN*

more than of any other figure, as this passage clearly shows:

> *te sequor, O Graiae gentis decus, inque tuis nunc*
> *ficta pedum pono pressis vestigia signis.*
> *non ita certandi cupidus quam propter amorem*
> *quod te imitari aveo.*
>
> I follow you, O glory of the Greek race, and in your
> footsteps left behind now I place my footsteps.
> It is not a desire of competing but rather on account of love
> because I yearn to imitate you. (3.3-6)

Words such as *sequor*, *vestigia*, and *imitari* highlight the urgency and determination with which

Lucretius intends to follow him. We see this idea again in Book 5: *Cuius ego ingressus vestigia*

dum rationes / persequor ac doceo dictis (He [Epicurus] whose steps I follow, whose doctrines I

follow and I teach with poetry, 5.55, 56). Although the poet desires to emulate his master,

Lucretius' relationship of *imitatio* with Epicurus leads to inherent difficulties. Epicurus' hostility

to poetry was widely and well-known.[88] Yet, because Lucretius states his intention to imitate

Epicurus so openly and unambiguously, he must depict an Epicurus who supports his poetic

enterprise. As a student, Lucretius does not want to seem out of step with his master, and as a

teacher, Lucretius desires to emulate his master in communicating Epicureanism. How can a

poet construct a relationship with a philosopher unreceptive to poetry? An investigation into

DRN's portrait of Epicurus may provide answers. If Lucretius can create an Epicurus that

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[88] *DRN* 3.4.; see Diog. Laert. 10.120.; Cic. *Fin*. 1.71-72.

supports, rather than rejects, poetry, he will be successful as both *imitator* of Epicurus and as poet.

Naturally, Lucretius associates Epicurus primarily with the philosophy of *DRN*. As the father of Epicureanism, Epicurus furnishes Lucretius' poem with its didactic purpose and comes to be linked with the *ratio* of the poem. Lucretius casts him as the final authority with knowledge of the entire nature of things: *refert nobis victor quid possit oriri/ quid nequeat, finita potestas denique cuique/ quanam sit ratione atque alte terminus haerens* (A victor, he brings back to us knowledge of what is able to arise, what is not able to arise, in a word, by what each thing has its power curbed, and its deep-set boundary mark, 1.76, 77). Despite the expected associations between Epicurus and philosophy, Lucretius attempts to depict Epicurus in a traditionally 'poetic' manner, even recasting him as a poet.

As a devout Epicurean, Lucretius would find it difficult to represent Epicurus as a poet. Epicurean doctrine and the words of the philosopher himself render this idea absurd. As other scholars have noted, however, Lucretius often *implies* likenesses between seemingly contradictory images.[89] West notes the difficulties of enumerating the "associations" made between the metaphorical and literal in *DRN*.

> But even when the critic correctly understands the poet in exploring the details of the fit between image and illustrandum, he is the owl to the eagle. By the time he propounds his analyses of correspondences and discrepancies, of transfusion of terms and fluidity of imagery, categorizing and docketing, the poetry is no longer exciting. But there is no doubt that some part of its power lies in associations.[90]

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[89] W. S. Anderson, "Discontinuity in Lucretian Symbolism," *TAPA* 91 (1960): 1-29; Katharina Volk, *The Poetics of Latin Didactic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2002), 116-118; David West, *The Imagery and Poetry of Lucretius* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969), 92, 93.
[90] David West, *The Imagery and Poetry of Lucretius* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969), 93.

Likewise, W.S. Anderson details the contradictions inherent in Lucretius' use of symbols, which seem to hold vastly different meanings in different contexts.[91] A well-known paradox is Venus. At the start of the poem, we see her as a glorious goddess of life. She facilitates all kinds of positive creation, including the writing of Lucretius' poetry (1.24-42). Yet in Book 4, she moves from *Venus genetrix* to a menacing *Venus victrix*, crippling men through love and sex. The proemic Venus brings peace for men, satiating Mars with an eternal wound of love, *aeterno devictus vulnere amoris* (1.34), but the wounds of Venus in Book 4 have the opposite effect: *nec reperire malum id possunt quae machina vincat: / usque adeo incerti tabescunt volnere caeco* (4.1119, 1120). As a symbol of both peace and turbulence, both generation and destruction, the Venus of *DRN* is a difficult paradox.

Similar contradictions come to light in the investigation of the character of Epicurus. Scholars comment that Lucretius often depicts him as anything but a philosopher. For example, Cook mentions that "Lucretius characterizes Epicurus as the strict Epicurean would not characterize other philosophers: he is like a god..."[92] Similarly, Charles Segal states that our philosopher Epicurus receives "the immortality of the great heroes of the epic tradition."[93] In fact, Lucretius frequently associates Epicurus with common poetic themes, dealing with heroes, gods, and poets. I would like to investigate the "associations" *DRN* constructs between poets and Epicurus, keeping in mind the implications for the *imitatio* relationship of Lucretius.

Epicurus and Venus

Unlike most ancient poetry, *DRN* restricts severely the role of the gods in human life. The historical Epicurus makes it clear that divinities, in order to preserve their divine

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[91] W. S. Anderson, "Discontinuity in Lucretian Symbolism," *TAPA* 91 (1960): 1-29.
[92] Albert Cook, "The Angling of Poetry and Philosophy: the Nature of Lucretius," *Arethusa* 27 (1994): 204.
[93] Charles Segal, "Poetic Immortality and the Fear of Death: The Second Proem of the De rerum natura," *HCSP* 92 (1989): 200.

blessedness, do not involve themselves in human affairs: "for [the gods] being exclusively devoted to their own peculiar virtues, are partial to those like themselves, deeming all that is not such as alien."[94] Similarly, Lucretius himself argues: *necessest / inmortali aevo summa cum pace fruatur/ semota ab nostris rebus seiunctaque longe* (it is necessary that there is enjoyment for the immortal life with the highest peace separated from our affairs and far away removed, 1.44-46). In *DRN*, however, there is one notable exception to this rule: Venus.[95] Here we will treat her as a symbol of the poet, juxtaposed with the philosopher Epicurus.

As Lucretius' source of poetic inspiration, Venus is an unlikely figure for Lucretius to link with Epicurus. The very nature of Venus seems opposed to *ratio*. Her invocation at the start of Book 1 is frenzied, filled with the mating of animals, the coming of spring, and a graphic seduction of Mars. It contains a great deal of religious imagery, which Lucretius counterposes with Epicurus' conquest of *Religio* fifty lines later. Furthermore, Lucretius emphasizes Venus' role in his poetry, again placing her in direct opposition with Epicurean *ratio*. He asks her for her assistance in the creation of his *versus*: *te sociam studeo scribendis versibus esse* (I am eager for you [Venus] to be an ally for the writing of verses. 1.24) and *quo magis aeternam da dictis, diva, leporem* (what is more, give to my words, goddess, eternal charm, 1.28).

Despite the apparent antinomy between the characters of Venus and Epicurus, Lucretius depicts them as counterparts. Over the course of *DRN*, Epicurus comes to share many traits with Venus, appropriating many of the powers originally ascribed to her. To a certain extent, Epicurus even acquires her dominance over the poetic inspiration of the poem. As partners in the poetic enterprise of *DRN*, Venus and the *persona* of Epicurus faciliate Lucretius' *imitatio*

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[94] Diog. Laert. 10.124.
[95] Mars, too, appears to have a major role in human affairs. However, in the beginning of *DRN*, Lucretius successfully persuades Venus to intervene and restrict the role of Mars (1.29-49). Her power in the poem is far greater than that of Mars.

Epicuri. Through their connection, Lucretius reformulates the *persona* of Epicurus to reconcile

his philosophic *imitatio* and poetic inspiration. Jeffrey Duban puts it well, saying that the

correlation of Venus and Epicurus "was the intended, if not inevitable and paradoxical, issue of

Lucretius' thought process, of his marriage of verse and science."[96]

       Lucretius chooses to open *DRN* with a proem to Venus, invoking her as though a Muse.

She holds the power of physical and poetic creation, and can grant to all things

aeternum...leporem (eternal charm, 1.28). It is here, at the very beginning of the work, that

Lucretius asks for her divine authority and inspiration:

> *quae quoniam rerum naturam sola, gubernas,*
> *nec sine te quicquam dias in luminis oras*
> *exoritur neque fit laetum neque amabile quicquam,*
> *te sociam studeo scribendis versibus esse...*
> *quo magis aeternum da dictis, diva, leporem.*
>
> Because you alone govern the nature of things
> neither without you does anything arise into the shining borders of light
> nor does anything become happy nor joyous,
> I am eager for you to be an ally in the writing of verses.
> Therefore, even more, give to the words, goddess, eternal delight. (1.21-24, 28)

The invocation of Venus as a Muse is remarkable, but not unprecedented. The poet of *Homeric*

Hymn 10 to Aphrodite asks her to grant the poet a desireable, ἱμερόεσσα, song (line 5).

Lucretius also recalls the *Annales* of Ennius here: *te saneneta precor, Venus, te genetrix patris*

nostri / ut me de caelo visas, cognata, parumper.[97] Last, David Sedley argues that the Venus

prologue reflects the influence of the philosopher Empedocles, whose cosmological poem

frequently uses the name Aphrodite for its main protagonist, Love. Sedley contends that

Empedocles' poem opened with a hymn to Aphrodite, similar to that of Lucretius.[98]

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[96] J. M. Duban, "*Ratio Divina Mente Coorta* and the Mythological Undercurrents in the Deification of Epicurus," *Prudentia* 11 (1979): 48.

[97] Skutsch, xxxvi.

[98] David N. Sedley, *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge

In these early passages, Lucretius ascribes many extraordinary powers to Venus. As a goddess, she creates and rules over *rerum natura*, the nature of things (1.21), aids Lucretius in both writing and immortalizing his poem (1.24, 28), and brings peace and delight for men: *tranquilla pace iuvare / mortalis* (1.31, 32). As we shall see, Epicurus also fills many of these roles. Many scholars note the similarities between the prologue to Venus in Book 1 of *DRN* and the prologue to Epicurus in Book 3.[99] These are perhaps good places to start.

At the start of Book 3, Epicurus appropriates many of the powers attributed to Venus earlier in the poem, including her divinity. The format of this prologue is suggestive of a divine hymn. Lucretius emphasizes its hymnic quality through alliteration and the repetition of the pronoun *tu*, spoken several times in the first ten lines:[100] ***tu** pater es, rerum inventor, **tu** patria nobis / suppeditas praecepta, **tuis**que ex, inclute, chartis* (you are the father, the inventor of things, you supply us with fatherly precepts from your pages, illustrious man, 3.9, 10). Such repetitions bring the reader back to the invocation of the goddess Venus in Book 1.6-9: *te, dea, **te** fugiunt venti, **te** nubila caeli / adventumque **tuum**, **tibi** suavis daedala tellus / summittit flores, **tibi** rident aequora ponti* (from you, goddess, from you the winds flee, from you the clouds of the sky flee, and your arrival, for you the wonder-working earth brings up sweet flowers, for you the level stretches of the sea laugh).

Lucretius goes on to speak of the immortality of Epicurus' words, *aurea dicta, aurea, perpetua semper dignissima vita* (golden words, golden, always most worthy of perpetual life 3.12,13), and then of the divinity of Epicurus himself. His golden words have arisen from his divine mind: *divina mente coorta* (3.15). Kennedy, in his commentary on Book 3 of *DRN*, states

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University Press, 1989), 25-27.

[99] See most notably, J. M. Duban, "Venus, Epicurus and *Naturae Species Ratioque*," *AJPh* 103 (1982), 165-177, and J. M. Duban, "*Ratio Divina Mente Coorta* and the Mythological Undercurrents in the Deification of Epicurus," *Prudentia* 11 (1979): 47-54.

[100] E. J. Kenney, ed., *Lucretius DE RERUM NATURA Book III* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 74.

that this phrase both implies divinity and divine lineage. He argues that this phrase is "an implicit reference to the birth of Athena, goddess of Wisdom, from the head of Zeus, chief of the gods: the allusive application of divine mythology to Epicurus."[101] West, in his review of Kenney, notes that the first thing Athena did after she leapt from the head of Zeus was to give a great shout, represented in *DRN* by the word *vociferari*.[102] Thus, Epicurus is a god who fits within familiar epic mythology. This not only serves to make him more "poetic" but to align him with Venus, who also holds a place in the epic canon.

Epicurus' vision of the homes of the gods (3.16-22) serves to associate him further with the Homeric deities and ultimately Venus herself. Not only is Epicurus a god himself, but he allows Lucretius to see an ancient vision of the gods, modelled closely upon Athena's return to the divine abodes in Book 6 of the *Odyssey*.[103] Lucretius' reaction to this epiphany is also marked as divine, *divina voluptas percipit atque horror* (a divine delight holds me and a shuddering, 3.28, 29). The *divina voluptas* in Book 3 takes the reader back to the very first line of the poem, where Venus is declared *hominum divomque voluptas* (1).

Lucretius extends the parallels between the divine Epicurus and Venus into the prologue of Book 5. After declaring Epicurus' superiority to Hercules and Liber, Lucretius states the following: *quo magis hic merito nobis deus esse videtur* (with how much more merit he seems to us to be a god, 5.19). The language recalls unmistakeably the proem to Venus: *quo magis aeternum da dictis, diva, leporem* (1.28). The position of *quo magis* and *deus* and *diva* is the same in both passages.[104] The parallel repeats itself a few lines later at 5.53: *immortalibu' de*

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[101] Ibid., 76.
[102] David West, "Review of Kenney, *De rerum natura* Book 3," *JRS* 62 (1972): 212.
[103] 6.42-46.
[104] J. M. Duban, "*Ratio Divina Mente Coorta* and the Mythological Undercurrents in the Deification of Epicurus," *Prudentia* 11 (1979): 49.

divis dare dicta suërit (he was accustomed to give words about the immortal gods). Like the alliterative *da dictis diva* in Book 1, we see *divis dare dicta*.[105]

Through these repetitions, Lucretius further links the divinity of Epicurus and Venus and thus likens the *carmen* of Venus to the *ratio* of Epicurus. In the *da dictis diva* of Book 1 and the *divis dare dicta* of Book 5, we see the word *dictum* used in two different senses. Lucretius is most certainly asking Venus for help in the writing of *poetic* words, while Epicurus is speaking in *philosophic* words about the nature of the gods. By placing these two different uses of *dictum* in parallel phrases, Lucretius likens the speakers of the words, Venus and Epicurus, and, by association, also likens the roles of Muse and philosopher. Poetry and philosophy come from the same source.

Lucretius tells the reader that Venus brings peace and delight to mortals, *tranquilla pace iuvare / mortalis*, (1.31, 32) and is herself a *voluptas* (1.1). In Epicurus' prologue to Book 3, we find that Epicurus causes a similar reaction. It is from Epicurus that the terrors of the mind flee (*diffugiunt animi terrores*, 3.16) and it is because of Epicurus' discoveries that *divina voluptas* (3.28) takes hold of Lucretius. Likewise, in Book 5, Epicurus brings sweet consolations to sooth the minds of humans: *ex quo nunc etiam per magnas didita gentis / dulcia permulcent animos solacia vitae* (from whom even now the sweet solaces of life soothe our minds, having been spread out through the great nations, 20, 21).

Both Venus and Epicurus create these feelings of peace and joy through their divine abilities to open up the boundaries of nature. The introductory phrase *nam simul ac* occurs in both prologues just prior to the introduction of some new discovery or delight (1.10; 3.14). In Book 1, as soon as the vernal face of the day is made manifest (*nam simul ac species patefactast verna diei*, 1.10), Venus causes animals to worship her and to reproduce in a frenzied manner,

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[105] Ibid.

striking sweet love in their hearts: *blandum per pectora amorem* (1.19). Additionally, since she

alone governs the *rerum natura* (1.21), without her nothing living can actually come into

existence, nor cross the shining shores of light: *nec sine te quicquam dias in luminis oras /*

exoritur neque fit laetum neque amabile quicquam (neither without you does there arise anything

into the shining shores of light, nor does anything happy nor joyous arise, 1.22, 23).

Similarly, the discovery of Epicurus' *ratio* is a joyous occasion. The minds of men are

released from fear and the ramparts of the world open up, thus allowing Lucretius to see the

gods:

> *nam simul ac ratio tua coepit vociferari*
> *naturam rerum, divina mente coortam,*
> *diffugiunt animi terrores, moenia mundi*
> *discedunt, totum video per inane geri res.*
>
> for as soon as your reason began to shout out
> the nature of things, arisen from your divine mind,
> the terrors of the mind flee, the ramparts of the world
> open up, I see action going on throughout the whole void. (3.14-17)

Epicurus' *ratio* uncovers *naturam rerum*, the very territory of Venus herself: *sic natura tua vi*

tam manifesta patens ex omni parte retecta est (thus nature, by means of your power, so

manifestly is opened up and uncovered from every part, 3.29, 30). Again, Lucretius repeats

certain phrases and images that link Venus and Epicurus.

Lucretius associates both Venus and Epicurus with the divine advent of light. Epicurus is

able to lift up so clear a light (*tam clarum extollere lumen*, 3.1) and is also linked to the coming

of light in Lucretius' Homeric description of the homes of the gods: *innubilus aether / integit, et*

largo diffuso lumine ridet (the cloudless aether surrounds and laughs with its light outpoured far

and wide 3.21, 22). Venus' prologue employs light imagery, using similar language: *tibi rident*

aequora ponti / placatumque nitet diffuso lumine caelum (for you the level stretches of the sea

laugh and the peaceful sky shines with outpoured light, 1.8, 9). The repetitions of the verb *rideo*

and the phrase *diffuso lumine* closely link the two invocations.

Lucretius continues to liken the *lux* of Venus and Epicurus. In the prologue to Book 5,

Lucretius states that the light of Epicurus' *ratio* brings life:

> *qui princeps vitae rationem invenit eam quae*
> *nunc appellatur sapientia, quique per artem*
> *fluctibus e tantis vitam tantisque tenebris*
> *in tam tranquillo et tam clara luce locavit.*
>
> He who first discovered the reason of life which
> now is called wisdom, and who, through skill
> brought life from such waves and such darkness
> into so tranquil and so clear a light. (5.9-12)

The *ratio* and *ars* of Epicurus rescue and revitalize men, leading them out of darkness and storms

and into the light. This passage reminds the reader of the creative powers of Venus and her

poetry. Venus also gives life:

> *quae quoniam rerum naturam sola gubernas*
> *nec sine te quicquam dias in luminas oras*
> *exoritur neque fit laetum neque amabile quicquam*
> *te sociam studeo scribendis versibus esse*
>
> Because you alone govern the nature of things
> neither without you does anything rise into the shining shores of light,
> nor does anything happy or lovely come to be,
> I desire you as an ally in the writing of verses. (1.21-24)

In these passages, Lucretius likens Venus and Epicurus. Both passages contain allusions to the

sea, in Book 5, the line *fluctibus e tantis vitam tantisque tenebris* and in Book 1, the phrase *in*

luminas oras. The two passages also share light imagery. Venus brings new life into light-filled

shores and Epicurus transports men into tranquil and clear light. Such imagery would suggest

that both Epicurus' *ratio* and Venus' *carmen* provide deliverance and clarity to human life.

Thus, Venus' poetry and Epicurus' philosophy accomplish the same objective, namely,

preserving and easing the life of men. Using Venus and Epicurus as metonyms, Lucretius unites poetry and philosophy as partners in the spread of Epicureanism.

There is further evidence to support this interpretation. Lucretius' use of the word *socia*, "ally," in Book 1 is significant (24). Monica Gale points out that the word for "ally" in Greek is ἐπίκουρος, a word very close to the name of Epicurus.[106] Although one must be cautious when working backwards from Latin into Greek, I believe that the use of the word *socia* is intentional and also consistent with Lucretius' love for puns.[107] Our Epicurus does indeed become Lucretius' partner. Just as Venus uses her divine powers to create *laeti* and *amabiles* verses for Lucretius, it is Epicurus' precepts that inspire Lucretius' poetry. As Venus uses her generative powers to calm Mars and bring peace for her people, Epicurus also provides the poet with the creative powers needed to seduce and calm the warring aspects of the reader's mind.

Furthermore, the correlation of Venus and Epicurus dissolves the boundaries between his own poetry and Epicurean philosophy. As Epicurus becomes more and more identified with Venus, he is seen as the source of Lucretius' poetic inspiration. By equating Venus and Epicurus, Lucretius redefines *carmen* and *ratio* in such a way that they appear to be the same. Thus, the poetry of *DRN* is a valid Epicurean endeavor, entirely in line with the will of its founder.

<div align="center">Epicurus as Hero</div>

The influence of Homer and epic poetry encompasses a wide range of poetic forms, including didactic poetry. Clyde Murley was the first to suggest that *DRN* contained elements

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[106] Ἐπικούρος is the spelling of Epicurus in Greek; Monica Gale, *Myth and Poetry in Lucretius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 137.

[107] For extensive research on puns in Lucretius see Jane McIntosh Snyder, *Puns and Poetry in Lucretius' De rerum natura* (Amsterdam: B. R. Grüner Publishing, 1980).

from epic poetry.[108] He pointed out Lucretius' indebtedness to Homer, the elevation of his theme, and his use of dactylic hexameter. He also mentions Epicurus, casting him in the all-important role of epic hero.[109] Indeed, our initial impressions of Epicurus in Book 1.62-79 do seem very "heroic," centering around Epicurus' defiance of the ultimate enemy of Epicureanism, *Religio* (1.63). Conte provides a model of the epic duel, citing *Iliad* 17.166ff in which Glaucus reproaches Hector for refusing to do battle with Ajax:

> You did not dare to stand before great-hearted Ajax, looking him in the eyes amidst the enemy's battle-cry, nor to do battle with him face to face, since he is stronger than you [trans. by Glenn Most].[110]

Epicurus' battle with *Religio* follows the Homeric paradigm. Facing his enemy, he first lifts his eyes against her: *primum Graius homo mortalis tollere contra / est oculos ausus* (A Greek man first dared to lift his mortal eyes against her, 1,66, 67). Like the Homeric battle-cry, heaven roars against him: *minitanti / murmure...caelum* (1.68, 69). However, as all good heroes do, Epicurus remains firm (*obsistere contra*, 1.67) and defeats his enemy (*religio...subiecta*, 1.78).

Lucretius brings other, more general Homeric allusions to this passage. As we have seen above, he emphasizes Iliadic martial imagery. The phrases *flammantia moenia mundi* (flaming walls of the world, 73) and *naturae...portarum claustra* (bars of the gates of nature, 71) suggest the idea of a siege. Lucretius describes the world and nature as a sort of city that Epicurus successfully besieges and plunders, bringing back knowledge as booty (75-77). With the repeated use of the word *primus* (1.66, 67, 71), Lucretius convinces us that Epicurus displays a prowess in war that no other mortals have ever duplicated (*primum...mortalis*, 1.66).

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[108] Clyde Murley, "Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, Viewed as Epic," *TAPA* 78 (1947).

[109] Ibid.: 346.

[110] Gian Biagio Conte, *Genres and Readers*, trans. Glenn W. Most (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 2.

Lucretius continues to describe Epicurus' military prowess throughout the poem. Often, the troubles and fears of life which Epicurus "defeats" are in the form of martial enemies. In the prologue to Book 2, he calls them *certamina belli* (5) and *pericula* (15). In Book 3.830-842, the fear of death is depicted as the assault of the Carthaginians in the Punic War. Presumably, with all these military foes, Epicurus conquers fear and passion as a warrior, just like the Greeks defeated the Trojans, or the Romans conquered the Carthaginians.

Epicurus also resembles the Homeric hero Odysseus. At our first meeting with Epicurus, we hear a familiar epithet, *Graius homo*, which closely recalls the ἄνδρα found at the beginning of the *Odyssey*.[111] In this same passage, like Odysseus, Epicurus embarks on a long journey (*omne immensum peragravit*, 1.74) and crosses the boundaries set for normal mortals (*effingere ut arta / naturae primus portarum claustra cupiret*, 1.70, 71). The lightning and the threatening roars of heaven also suggest sea-travel, another Odyssean theme (*nec fulmina nec minitanti / murmure compressit caelum*, 1.68, 69).[112] In Book 2, Lucretius compares the storms of the sea to the troubles from which Epicurus has freed humans (1, 2). The Odyssean metaphor of the storm is recalled in Book 5 with the words *fluctibus* (11) and *litus pelagique severa* (35).

Lucretius further cements these associations through the use of a familiar Homeric epithet to describe Epicurus and his deeds. In Book 6, Epicurus' glory reaches the skies: *iam ad caelum gloria fertur* (8). This recalls the common κλέα ἀνδρῶν[113] and more specifically, κλέος οὐρανὸν ἵκει,[114] both found repeatedly in the *Iliad* and in the *Odyssey*.

Lucretius also associates Epicurus with Hercules, the hero of many myths and of the epic *Argonautica*. In Book 5, he challenges us to compare Epicurus with Hercules: *Herculis antistare*

[111] cf. *Od.* 1.1; Monica Gale, *Myth and Poetry in Lucretius* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 119.
[112] Monica Gale, *Myth and Poetry in Lucretius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 119.
[113] *Il.* 9.189 and 524; *Od.* 8.73.
[114] *Il.* 8.192; *Od.* 8.74 and 9.20.

autem si facta putabis (22). Lucretius likens the two men as liminal figures who straddle the line

between divinity and mortality. At the beginning of Book 5, just prior to the Hercules segment,

Lucretius declares that Epicurus is a god: *dicendum est, deus ille fuit, deus* (8).   And at 5.50, 51,

finishing off the passage on Hercules, Lucretius again brings up divinity: *nonne decebit / hunc*

hominem numero divom dignarier esse (will it not seem proper that this man be worthy to rank

among the number of the gods?). Lucretius frames the Hercules passage with mention of

Epicurus' divinity in order to show Epicurus' similarity and ultimately, his superiority to

Hercules. Myth and ritual often depict Hercules as a ἥρως θεός, a god-hero who is both divine

and mortal.[115] In the *katabasis* of Odysseus, we read that Hercules is simultaneously present

among the dead in the Underworld and the immortals in heaven: τὸν δὲ μετ᾽ εἰσενόησα βίην

Ἡρακληείην, εἴδωλον αὐτὸς δὲ μετ᾽ ἀθανάτοισι θεοῖσι (And after this, I noted forceful

Hercules, his shade that is, for he himself is among the immortal gods, 11.601, 602).

Like Hercules, Epicurus is simultaneously god and man. Although Epicurus ranks

among the gods in Book 5, in Book 1, he is mortal. Lucretius calls him a *Graius homo* with

oculos mortalis (1.66, 67). Furthermore, in Book 3, Epicurus unequivocally dies : *ipse Epicurus*

obit (Epicurus himself died, 3.1042). Epicurus, just like Hercules, is simultaneously immortal

(5.50) and human (3.1042).[116]

In addition, both Hercules' and Epicurus' divine status is contingent upon accomplishing

various "labors." Denis Feeney argues that Hercules "won his immortal reward as a benefactor

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[115] Pind. *Nem*. 3.22; Walter Burkert describes him as an anomaly, one of those few figures who "reach with equal ease in to the heroic-chthonic domain and the domain of the gods...they penetrate below and above, near and far; they do not elude death." Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 208.
[116]Mortality was a defining feature for heroes. One recalls the mortality of Achilles in the *Iliad* or Gilgamesh's quest for immortality. Thomas Greene notes "The epic is a poem which replaces divine worship with human awe, awe for the act which is prodigious but yet human...Epic awe as distinguished from religious or mythical awe, springs from the circumstance that a man can commit an extraordinary act while still remaining limited. It does not matter that, in practice, the poet describes occasionally heroic action which is beyond human powers, if the hero is understood to be subject to ignorance or foolhardiness and *above all to death* [my italics]." Thomas Greene, "The Norms of Epic," *Comparative Literature* 13, no. 3 (1960): 198.

of mankind, an ἀλεξίκακος."[117] As evidence of the link between deeds and immortality, Feeney

quotes the speech of Glaucus the sea-god in *Argon.* 1.1315-20. Glaucus is responding to the

Argonauts' debate over whether they should turn back to look for Heracles:[118]

> Why are you eager, contrary to the plan of great Zeus, to take bold Heracles to the
> city of Aeetes? At Argos it is his fate to toil at fulfilling all his twelve labors, for
> presumptuous Eurystheus, and to live with the gods, sharing their hearth, if he can fulfill
> the few labors left. [trans. Denis Feeney]

Thus, Hercules' divinity has a direct connection to the success of his labors.

Likewise, Lucretius uses the accomplishment of deeds as the reason for Epicurus'

divinity and to display Epicurus' superiority over Hercules. In Book 5, Lucretius directly links

Epicurus' immortality to his destruction of various vices. *Superbia, spurcitia, petulantia* and

other sins (47, 48) become monsters, and thus Lucretius is able to correlate Hercules' and

Epicurus' "labors," concluding that Epicurus' deeds are superior to Hercules'. Even now (20),

Epicurus' victories help men, while Hercules' labors are obsolete: *quid Nemeaeus enim nobis*

nunc magnus hiatus / ille leonis obesset et horrens Arcadius sus? (in what way indeed now could

this great jaw of the Nemean lion and the horrid Arcadian boar harm us? 24, 25). These labors

are the reason that Epicurus deserves status as a god: *haec igitur qui cuncta subegerit ex*

animoque / expulerit dictis, non armis, nonne decebit / hunc hominem numero divom dignarier

esse? (5.49-51).[119]

The comparison of a hero with Hercules and Liber occurs commonly in encomia of

Alexander. Buchheit enumerates the similarities between Alexander and Epicurus and thus

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[117] Denis Feeney, "Following After Hercules, In Vergil and Apollonius," *Proceedings of the Virgil Society* 18
(1987): 50.
[118] Ibid.: 57.
[119] The use of military metaphor in the overcoming of vice suggests reference to Stoicism. In Stoic allegory,
Hercules' deeds represented victory over different passions. By asserting Epicurus' superiority over Hercules,
Lucretius may also be asserting the superiority of Epicureanism over Stoicism. See Monica Gale, *Myth and Poetry
in Lucretius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 35.

bolsters the view of Epicurus as hero. [120] Just as in common panegyrics to Alexander the Great,

Epicurus voyages past the boundaries of the known world, from the ramparts of the earth,

moenia mundi (1.73) and out into the immense universe, *omne immensum* (1.74). Centuries

before Lucretius, Aeschines describes Alexander likewise, saying, "Alexander had withdrawn to

the uttermost regions of the North, almost beyond the borders of the inhabited world."[121]

Buchheit also points out that imitation of Alexander was common during the time of

Lucretius.[122] An obvious example of this is Pompey the Great, who took his title in emulation of

Alexander sometime after 81 BCE.[123] In Book 7.95 of the *Natural History*, the Elder Pliny

describes Pompey the Great's military achievements as equal to Alexander's, providing good

evidence for the association of Alexander, Liber, and Hercules during the time of Lucretius:

aequato non modo Alexandri Magni rerum fulgore, sed etiam Herculis prope ac Liberi patris

(with the brilliance of these things having been the equal of not only Alexander the Great, but

also of nearly Hercules and Father Liber). Furthermore, shortly after linking Pompey and

Alexander, the Elder Pliny states that Pompey *totum...terrarum orbem enumeret, quod infinitum*

esse conveniet (numbered the whole circle of the lands, which is agreed to be infinite).[124] Just

like Aeschines' description of Alexander, this description of Pompey the Great recalls Epicurus

in Book 1 of *DRN*. Through allusions to encomia and contemporary *imitationes Alexandri*,

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[120] Vinzenz Buchheit, "Epikurs Triumph des Geistes," *Hermes* 99 (1971): 303-323. For more information on *imitatio Alexandri* at Rome see, Jacob Isager, "Alexander the Great in Roman Literature from Pompey to Vespasian," in *Alexander the Great: Reality and Myth*, ed. Jesper Carlsen and Bodil Due (Rome: Analecta Romana Instituti Danici, 1993), 75-84.

[121] Aeschines *Adv. Ctes.* 165; Vinzenz Buchheit, "Epikurs Triumph des Geistes," *Hermes* 99 (1971): 309.

[122] Vinzenz Buchheit, "Epikurs Triumph des Geistes," *Hermes* 99 (1971): 314, 315.

[123] Oxford Classical Dictionary, 3d. ed., s.v. "Pompeius Magnus Gnaeus."

[124] *NH* 7.99.

Lucretius firmly establishes Epicurus' status as a Alexander-like hero.[125] The far-reaching

conquests of Epicurus the philosopher become as heroic as Alexander's conquest of the East.

In the above passages, Lucretius often places Epicurus in situations more suitable for

heroes than philosophers. By creating an epic context and juxtaposing the philosopher's

accomplishments with those of heroes, Lucretius depicts Epicurus poetically, using myth and

heroism to shape Epicurus into a more poetic figure. This reflects well on our poet, whose

identity as an Epicurean is bound up in both poetry and philosophy and who desires to be seen as

an *imitator* of his master.

<div align="center">Epicurus and Homer</div>

In the creation of the "hero" Epicurus, Lucretius not only constructs an *imitatio*

relationship with Epicurus, but also with his predecessors in the epic tradition. The very act of

creating an epic hero makes Lucretius an epic poet, like Ennius and Homer. However, as we

have seen, throughout *DRN* Lucretius curbs his imitation of his poetic predecessors to conform

to Epicurean philosophy, a fact that he makes both explicitly and implicitly clear. In some cases,

Lucretius recreates the poetic tradition to conform to Epicurean ideas, and in others, he openly

states his disagreement with the ideas of earlier writers. There is a third tactic that Lucretius uses

to reconcile his imitation of philosophy and poetry: he uses the technique of association to draw

parallels between Epicurus and his poetic predecessors, depicting them as interpreters and

authors of the *natura rerum*.

Lucretius likens Homer and Epicurus, although these two men form an unlikely pair.

DeWitt writes: "As for...Homer, Hesiod, and Theognis, there can be no doubt that his [Epicurus']

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[125] Vergil also utilizes imitation of Alexander in *Aeneid* 6.793-797, in which he describes the extensive rule of Augustus. Monica Gale, *Myth and Poetry in Lucretius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 121n89.

attitude was hostile."[126] In fact, DeWitt goes on to say that Epicurus took "unholy pleasure" in

showing the sinful lifestyle that Homer could inspire.[127] Even so, in Book 3, Lucretius associates

Epicurus with Homer. Here, he describes Epicurus' death, saying:

> *ipse Epicurus obit decurso lumine vitae*
> *qui genus humanum ingenio superavit et omnis*
> *restinxit, stellas exortus ut aetherius sol.*
>
> Epicurus himself died, with the light of his life having run out,
> he who surpassed the human race in intellect and who quenched the light of all,
> just as the etherial sun, having risen, quenched the stars. (3.1042-1044)

The epigram Lucretius uses for Epicurus is highly similar to one Leonidas of Tarentum used to

describe Homer:[128]

> Ἄστρα μὲν ἠμαύρωσε καὶ ἱερὰ κύκλα Σελήνης
> ἄξονα δινήσας ἔμπυρος Ἥλιος
> ὑμνοπόλους δ ἀγεληδὸν ἀπημάλδυνεν Ὅμηρος
> λαμπρότατον Μουσέων φέγγος ἀνασχόμενος.
>
> On the one hand, the emblazoned sun dimmed the stars
> and having whirled the axles, dimmed the divine wheels of the moon,
> on the other hand, Homer brought [other] minstrels altogether to naught,
> lifting up the brightest light of the Muses.[129]

Homer and Epicurus are both said to resemble a rising sun that dims the light of other celestial

objects. Looking at the context of the passage, it seems likely that Lucretius intends this epigram

to be adversative. Epicurus is the final and most important example in a long list of dead kings,

poets and philosophers. Lucretius indicates that Homer is a less important figure relative to

Epicurus by naming him just a few lines before the philosopher: *adde Heliconiadum comites,*

quorum unus Homerus / sceptra potitus eadem aliis sopitu' quietest (1037, 1038). Through

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[126] Norman Wentworth DeWitt, *Epicurus and his philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1954), 107.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Charles Segal, *Lucretius on Death and Anxiety* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 176. Leonidas was an author of epigrams from about the 3rd century BCE.
[129] A. P. 9.24 Jerry Clack, *Asclepiades of Samos and Leonidas of Tarentum: the poems* (Wauconda: Bolchazy-Carducci, 1999), 85.

mention of Homer and imitation of Leonida's epigram to Homer, Lucretius suggests that

Epicurus is superior and "dims" the light put forth by the poet. However, the idea that Homer

the poet and Epicurus the philosopher rival one another reveals their similarities. If Epicurus'

ratio is able to outshine and replace Homer's *carmen*, then in some way, the *ratio* and the

carmen must be analogous. Thus, Epicurus and Homer hold similar positions as writers of the

natura rerum, although Epicurus' discoveries prove to be superior.

There is further evidence to suggest a correlation between the poet and the philosopher.

The participle used for Epicurus' ascent, *exortus* (1044), recalls a passage in Book 1. At 1.124,

Lucretius uses *exortus* to describe Homer, who was said to have risen up from the Underworld

and inspired Ennius to write his poetry: *unde sibi exortam semper florentis Homeri /*

commemorat speciem... / coepisse et rerum naturam expandere dictis (whence he [Ennius]

recalls that to him an image of flowering Homer rose up and began to expound with words on the

nature of things, I.124-126). In this passage, Homer explicates the *natura rerum*, just like

Epicurus in Books 3 and 5.[130]

Homer's inspiration of Ennius constructs a strong *imitatio* relationship between them.

Lucretius uses this relationship to associate Homer and Epicurus.[131] First, Lucretius likens

himself and Ennius as *primi*. As we have seen, Lucretius considers his own poem, which brings

Epicureanism to the Romans, to be analogous to Ennius' accomplishment of bringing Greek

poetry to Italy. Lucretius writes that the poet Ennius was the first to bring poetry down from

Helicon to Italian men: *qui primus amoeno / detulit ex Helicone perenni fronde coronam / per*

gentis Italas hominum (1.117-119). Later in Book 1.925-930, Lucretius, using verbal and visual

cues, puts himself in the place of Ennius. Here Lucretius becomes the pioneer, inhabiting places

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[130] 3.15, 5.52-54.
[131] Katharina Volk, *The Poetics of Latin Didactic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 88.

nullius ante trita (1.926, 927; 4.1, 2) and seeking a similar crown, *coronam inde prius nulli*

velarint tempora Musae (1.929, 930; 4.5). Lucretius and Ennius are analogous because they

have a similar accomplishment, namely, the transfer of Greek writing to Roman literature.

Next, Lucretius juxtaposes the similarities between Ennius' and Lucretius' *personae* with

the strong *imitatio* relationship of Homer and Ennius. In *DRN*, Ennius claims that he receives

the *natura rerum* from the ghost of Homer himself, at which point Ennius becomes the "second

Homer:" *unde sibi exortam semper florentis Homeri / commemorat speciem lacrimas effundere*

salsas / coepisse et rerum naturam expandere dictis (1.124-126). Ennius' *imitatio* relationship

with Homer is so close that it involves channelling the dead poet.

Epicurus and Lucretius share the same sort of relationship. Looking at the prologue to

Book 3, Epicurus is said to have revealed the *rerum natura* in a similar fashion to Lucretius: *nam*

simul ac ratio tua coepit vocificari / naturam rerum, divina mente coortam (for at the same time

your philosophy began to proclaim the nature of the things, having risen up from your divine

mind, 3.14, 15). Just like Ennius, Lucretius receives knowledge of the *rerum natura* right from

the mouth of his master. Lucretius uses similar verbs to describe the Ennius-Homer and

Lucretius-Epicurus interactions: *coepisse* (1.126) and *coepit* (3.14), *exortam* (1.124) and *coortam*

(3.15). He also describes Homer and Epicurus as god-like. Epicurus' teachings rise from his

divina mens and Homer is *semper florens*. Thus, Lucretius manages to convey a parallel

relationship between Homer and Ennius, and Epicurus and himself. Through association, the

reader infers that the inspiration which Homer provided for Ennius in the past is the same as the

inspiration Epicurus now grants to Lucretius.

Thus, through parallel words and imagery, Lucretius associates the *personae* of Homer

and Epicurus. In comparing Epicurus with Homer, Lucretius constructs simultaneous *imitatio*

relationships with both men, seemingly incompatible figures. In this way, Homer, Epicurus and

Lucretius are all among those who write about the *natura rerum*.[132] Lucretius' transformation of

Epicurus into an epic hero confirms the associations between Homer and Epicurus. When

Lucretius depicts Epicurus as a hero like Achilles or Odysseus, he implicitly associates Epicurus

with Homer. In addition, by characterizing Epicurus as an epic figure, Lucretius himself

becomes a sort of "epic" poet, and thus an *imitator* of Homer. Using these devices, Lucretius

then can simultaneously be an literary follower of Homer, writing about "epic" themes, and a

devout follower of Epicureanism, lauding his master as hero. In this way, Lucretius works out

the inconsistencies inherent in constructing *imitatio* relationships with both men.

<div align="center">Epicurus and Empedocles</div>

Lucretius correlates Empedocles and Epicurus more closely than he does Homer or any

other poets, and in fact, more closely than any other *persona* in *DRN*. The passage in which

Lucretius explicitly mentions Empedocles is extensive, a full 24 lines.[133] It not only echoes

earlier passages describing Epicurus in *DRN*, but anticipates later descriptions of the philosopher.

The parallels that Lucretius constructs between Empedocles and Epicurus are complex and

varied. To place some limit on the discussion, we will look specifically at the poetic traits that

they appear to share.

Surprisingly, Lucretius links Epicurus with Empedocles through the role of *vates*. As we

have seen, Lucretius uses the same lines twice to compare himself and Empedocles to the oracle

at Delphi : *sanctius et multo certe ratione magis quam / Pythia quae tripodi a Phoebi lauroque

profatur*.[134] These passages invoke the idea of a *vates*, a poet-priest whose influence goes far

beyond that of the religious or poetic realms, but also sings "the secrets of the universe, of

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[132] Homer - 1.126; Lucretius - 1.950; Epicurus - 3.15.
[133] Book 1.716-740.
[134] 1.737-739; 5.110-112.

cosmology."[135] These lines may allude directly to Epicurean writings. Epicurus too describes himself as an oracle: Παρρησίᾳ γὰρ ἔγωγε χρώμενος φυσιολογῶν χρησμῳδεῖν τὰ συμφέροντα πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις…(For I, in investigating nature, would prefer to speak openly and like an oracle to give answers serviceable to all mankind…[trans. Cyril Bailey]).[136] Other ancient sources affirm that Epicurus characterized himself as an oracle. For example, Cicero mentions it, saying that Epicurus wrote his books as though they were oracular pronouncements, *quasi oracula*.[137] In the *Life of Epicurus*, Diogenes Laertius claims that Athenaeus' epigram to Epicurus ends with the following phrase: τοῦτο Νεοκλῆος πινυτὸν τέκος ἢ παρὰ Μουσέων ἔκλυεν ἢ Πυθοῦς ἐξ ἱερῶν τριπόδων (This thing the wise son Neocles heard from the Muses or from the sacred tripod at Delphi).[138] This phrase is close enough to the text of *DRN* to indicate allusion on the part of Lucretius. Not only do we have a mention of oracles, but also of the Muses, making this passage especially relevant to the theme of *vates*. Is it possible that Lucretius considers Epicurus among the number of *vates*?

One more look at Lucretius' description of Epicurus in the proem may provide additional evidence:

> *Humana ante oculos foede cum vita iaceret*
> *in terris oppressa gravi sub religione,*
> *quae caput a caeli regionibus ostendebat*
> *horribili super aspectu mortalibus instans,*
> *primum Graius homo mortalis tollere contra*
> *est oculos ausus primusque obsistere contra;*
> *quem neque fama deum nec fulmina nec minitanti*
> *murmure compressit caelum, sed eo magis acrem*
> *inritat animi virtutem, effringere ut arta*
> *naturae primus portarum claustra cupiret.*
> *ergo vivida vis animi pervicit et extra*

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[135] Philip R. Hardie, *Cosmos and Imperium* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 16.
[136] *Sent. Vat.* 29.
[137] *Fin.* 2.20; see also *Fin.* 2.102; *Nat. D* 1.66. The description of Epicurus' writings as "oracular" may also have something to do with their difficulty.
[138] Diog. Laet. 10.12.

> *processit longe flammantia moenia mundi*
> *atque omne immensum peragravit mente animoque,*
> *unde refert nobis victor quid possit oriri,*
> *quid nequeat, finita potestas denique cuique*
> *qua nam sit ratione atque alte terminus haerens.*
> *quare religio pedibus subiecta vicissim*
> *opteritur, nos exaequat victoria caelo.* (1.62-79)

Varro's etymology of the word *vates* from *a vi mentis* seems to fit well with the *persona* of Epicurus in this passage.[139] The threats of *Religio* goad the sharp courage of Epicurus' soul: *sed eo magis acrem* / *inritat animi virtutem* (1.69, 70) and Epicurus conquers because of the lively force of his mind: *vivida vis animi pervicit* (1.72). In addition, Epicurus' defeat of *Religio* grants him a sort of *vatic* knowledge which replaces the lies perpetuated by religion. He attains a prophetic understanding of what is and is not able to arise and of the limits and boundaries of nature: *quid possit oriri* / *quid nequeat, finita potestas denique cuique* / *quanam sit ratione atque alte terminus haerens* (1.75-77). The violent inspiration which leads to a prophetic or secret knowledge of the world is key to the *vates*-concept. Hardie writes that the term *vates* implies "a renewed emphasis on the overpowering and transforming effect of poetic inspiration."

Thus, like Empedocles, Epicurus ranks among the *vatic* figures of *DRN*. As parallel figures, Lucretius correlates the mental force, the *vis animi*, of Epicurus and Empedocles, showing them both to be divinely and forcefully inspired. For example, in Book 3, the advent of Epicurus' *ratio* shows remarkable parallels with the *reperta* of Empedocles in Book 1. Empedocles' poems shout out brilliant discoveries:

> *carmina quin etiam **divini pectoris** eius*
> ***vociferantur** et exponunt praeclara reperta*
> *ut vix humana videatur stirpe creatus.*[140]

Likewise, in Book 3, Epicurus' philosophy shouts out the *rerum natura*:

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[139] Philip R. Hardie, *Cosmos and Imperium* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 21.

[140] "The poems of his divine mind shout forth and declare amazing discoveries, so that he seems scarcely born from human ancestors."

> *nam simul ac ratio tua coepit **vociferari***
> *naturam rerum **divina mente** coorta.*[141]

Lucretius repeats many words and images. The dual use of the verb *vociferor* strengthens the

parallel between the *divina mens* of Epicurus and the *divinum pectus* of Empedocles. *Vociferor*

is an especially emphatic verb and when paired with the adjective *divinus*, it gives the impression

of *vatic* inspiration. Furthermore, the very word *divinus* itself has particular significance because

Empedocles and Epicurus are the only men ascribed divinity in *DRN*.

In Book 6, Lucretius continues to construct parallels between the mental vigor of

Empedocles and Epicurus. At line 5, we hear of Epicurus' discoveries:

> *cum genuere virum tali cum corde repertum,*
> *omnia veridico qui quondam ex ore profudit;*
> *cuius et extincti propter divina reperta*
> *divolgata vetus iam ad caelum gloria fertur*
>
> when they brought forth a man endowed with such a heart,
> who, from a truth-speaking mouth poured forth all things;
> and whose glory, though his light is extinguished, is borne
> to the sky, common knowledge for a long time now. (6.5-8)

In this passage, the *divina reperta* of Epicurus recall the *praeclara reperta* (1.732) of

Empedocles. In addition, Epicurus' mind (*corde*), which is endowed with all truth, corresponds

to the mind of Empedocles (*cordis*, 1.737), which has many god-like discoveries: *multa bene ac*

divinitus invenientes (1.736). The phrase *profudit ex ore* implies a sort of possession on the part

of Epicurus, perhaps recalling the prophetic use of the verb *profor* for Empedocles in Book 1

(1.739). The passages also share important imagery. Mount Etna, which Lucretius directly

compares to Empedocles (1.729, 730), bears the lightning of its flame to the sky (*ad caelumque*

ferat flammai fulgura, 1.725), heralding Epicurus' glory: *ad caelum gloria fertur*. Later epic

authors often situate this Homeric sentiment in the context of prophecy. Virgil's Apollo

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[141] 3.14, 15 "For at the same time your philosophy began to shout forth the nature of things, having risen up from your divine mind."

prophesies to Ascanius that it is his fate to journey *ad astra* (*Aen.* 9.641) and Silius Italicus'

Apollo declares that the *vates* Ennius lifts Roman leaders to the sky: *attolletque duces caelo*

(12.411). The *ad caelum...ferre* also takes the reader to Book 1, in which Epicurus assaults the

sky with his *vis animi*. Thus, this passage points towards the relationship of Empedocles and

Epicurus as divinely-inspired bards.

The *vates*-concept links the seemingly incompatible *personae* of Epicurus and

Empedocles, paralleling their *vis mentium*, and, most importantly, transforming Epicurus into a

poetic figure. By depicting Epicurus as a *vates,* Lucretius implies that Epicurus not only

approves of poetry, but also is a poet himself. In the same way that Lucretius tailors Homer,

Empedocles and others poets of the *natura rerum* to comply with Epicurean philosophy, he

manipulates the *persona* of Epicurus so that Epicurus appears similar to those very same poets.

Thus, in writing *DRN*, Lucretius transforms Epicurus into a literary as well as philosophic

predecessor.

We have investigated the *imitatio* relationships that Lucretius creates between himself

and his poetic predecessors, and the parallels between Epicurus and those same predecessors, but

we have only briefly glanced at Lucretius' own *persona* in relation to Epicurus. A closer look at

the associations Lucretius establishes between himself and Epicurus would be profitable in our

overall investigation into the nature of Lucretius' poetic and philosophic *imitatio*.

CHAPTER 3

EPICURUS AS LUCRETIAN POET

Introduction

The relationship between Lucretius and his master, Epicurus, has long been a central

question for students of *DRN*. Lucretius' own statements of purpose demand that the reader

carefully examine this relationship.

> *Cuius ego ingressus vestigia dum rationes*
> *persequor ac doceo dictis, quo quaeque creata*
> *foedere sint, in eo quam sit durare necessum.*
>
> He [Epicurus] whose steps I follow, whose doctrines
> I follow and I teach in my words, how things are
> created and in what law it is necessary for them to abide. (5.55-57)

Lucretius' intentions are clear: he desires to follow closely in the footsteps of Epicurus and in

doing so explain Epicurean philosophy.[142] As we have seen, however, Lucretius' *imitatio*

Epicuri quickly becomes problematic, most notably when considering the medium through

which Lucretius chooses to express Epicureanism, poetry. Epicurus' hostility to poetry creates

an immediate tension between Epicurean thought and Lucretius' poem.

To allow for the paradox of an Epicurean poem, Lucretius transforms the writings and

personae of his poetic and philosophic predecessors. On one end, as an *imitator* of his poetic

predecessors, he makes these poets more "philosophic" by adapting and transforming their

poetry to increase its orthodoxy. On the other end, as an *imitator Epicuri*, Lucretius attempts to

make Epicurus more "poetic," drawing associations between the philosopher, typical poetic

themes and earlier poets. In the middle of this spectrum, we have Lucretius, both a poet and a

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[142] 3.3-8; 5.55, 56.

philosopher. The final task is a closer examination of the relationship between Lucretius' and Epicurus' *personae*. How does Lucretius construct his *imitatio Epicuri*? What sort of techniques does he employ to increase the associations between himself as poet and Epicurus as philosopher?

The author not only transforms Epicurus into a poet, but more specifically, a *Lucretian* poet, thus rendering Epicurus as his own ideal predecessor.[143] Through imagery and association, Lucretius likens Epicurus' writings with his own poetry and blurs the line between Epicurean *ratio* and Lucretian *carmen*. He also associates Epicurus with himself and other poetic writers of the *natura rerum*, such as Ennius, Venus, and Empedocles. In constructing these parallels, Lucretius does not attempt to resolve the contradictions inherent in the Epicurean poetic philosophy of *DRN*, but rather attempts to depict Epicurus as his predecessor, setting a precedent for a philosophic poet like himself.

<div align="center">Animal Imagery</div>

The dedication to Epicurus in the prologue of Book 3 mentions five animals: swallow, swan, goat, horse and bee. In an examination of Lucretius' use of these animals, I shall endeavor to show how each functions to link Epicurus and Lucretius as poets. The prologue to Book 3 contains the only example of direct comparison between Epicurus and Lucretius, making it an appropriate passage from which to start our examination of their *personae*:

> *te sequor, o Graiae gentis decus, inque tuis nunc*
> *ficta pedum pono pressis vestigia signis,*
> *non ita certandi cupidus quam propter amorem*
> *quod te imitari aveo; quid enim contendat hirundo*
> *cycnis, aut quid nam tremulis facere artubus haedi*
> *consimile in cursu possint et fortis equi vis?*

> I follow you, O glory of the Greek race, and I plant

---

[143] This idea is first found in Katharina Volk, *The Poetics of Latin Didactic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 94ff.

> my own footsteps firmly in the tracks that you have made,
> not because of a desire for competition but rather because of love
> I yearn to imitate you; for why should a swallow compete with swans,
> or indeed what could kids with trembling limbs do
> on the similar course with the strong force of a horse? (3.3-8)

At first glance, the pairing of swan / swallow and horse / goat serves to accentuate the differences between Epicurus and Lucretius. When compared to Epicurus, Lucretius is weak and ineffective, like a shaky goat or a twittering swallow. The reference to the swallow is especially self-deprecating; the Greeks so despised the sound of the bird that it became equated with the speaking of the *barbaroi*.[144]

Although the comparison of animals and poets is a literary *topos*, the animals used in this passage are strange.[145] The swallow is not really a singer and, regardless of the amount of prodding, one could never make a goat compete like an *equus in cursu*. Why, out of all the available animals, did Lucretius choose a swan and a horse to describe Epicurus? What do these animals signify?

Lucretius selects characteristically poetic animals. Let us first look at the symbolism of swans. Within *DRN*, the author associates swans with poetry and Apollo. In Book 2, swans are linked with Apollo's music: *et contemptus odor smyrnae mellisque sapores/ et cycnea mele Phoebeaque daedala chordis / carmina* (and the odor of myrrh and the taste of honey would be despised, and swan's melody and the wondrous Phoeban songs with strings, 505-506). In Book 4, Lucretius compares his own poetry twice with the song of swans: *suavidictis potius quam multis versibus edam / parvus ut est cycni melior canor* (I will compose this with sweet-talking

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[144]See Aesch. *Ag.* 1050; for further references see D'Arcy W. Thompson, *A Glossary of Greek Birds* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1936; reprint, 1966), 320, 321. Thompson even claims that "the Pythagorean injuction χελιδόνα ἐν οἰκίᾳ μὴ δέχεσθαι, Pythag. ap. Iambl. Protrept. 119.4 may thus be understood of foreigners."

[145] E.g. Pindar contrasts ravens and eagles to describe the relationship between rival poets and himself (*Ol.* 2.87-88) and Theocritus juxtaposes jays with nightingales and hoopoes with swans (5.136-137).

rather than many verses, just as the short song of the swan is better, 180,181 and 909-911).[146]

Outside of *DRN*, we find that "swan" has long stood as an epithet for poets.[147] In Euripides'

Heracles Furens, the chorus sings hymns to Apollo just as a swan-like bard: κύκνος ὡς γέρων

ἀοιδὸς (691). Virgil also uses this epithet in his *Eclogues*: *Vare, tuum nomen...cantantes*

sublime ferent ad sidera cycni (Varus, swan poets will bear your sublime name to the stars,

9.27-29). In labeling Epicurus a *cycnus*, Lucretius gives the philosopher a title normally

reserved for poets, thus depicting Epicurus as though he were a poet.[148]

The mention of swans also reinforces Lucretius' characterization of Epicurus as a

prophetic and poetic *vates*. The association often made between the *vates* and Apollo is also true

for swans. As far back as the Homeric Hymns, writers mentioned swans in their praise of

Phoebus, often as singers: "Phoibos, even the swan sings of you in a clear tone to the beat of her

wings..."[149] As the bird of Apollo, tradition attributes to the swan, like the *vates*, the ability to

predict the future. In the *Phaedo*, for example, Socrates speaks of the music and divination of

the birds: "I believe that swans, belonging as they do to Apollo, have prophetic powers and sing

because they know the good things that await them in the unseen world, and they are happier on

the day [that they die] than they have ever been before."[150] Likewise, in *Odes* 2.20, Horace links

his role as a *vates* with his metamorphosis into a swan.[151] When Horace is fully transformed into

the bird, he is able to prophesy his own immortality. And in the *Tusculanae Disputationes*,

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[146] Also 4.547, 548: *et validis necti tortis ex Heliconis / cum liquidam tollunt lugubri voce querellam*.

[147] For further citations see D'Arcy W. Thompson, *A Glossary of Greek Birds* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1936; reprint, 1966), 182.

[148] Note also the mention of bees at 3.11 and the *mellis* associated with Apollo at 2.505.

[149] *Hom. Hymn Ap.* xxi; see also, Callim. *Hymn* 2, 5; Sappho fr. 147B; Pind. fr. 122. For further references see D'Arcy W. Thompson, *A Glossary of Greek Birds* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1936; reprint, 1966), 184.

[150] 85a – 85b; translated by Hugh Tredennick. For another reference to swans as singers see Aesch. *Ag.* 1444-6.

[151] *Non usitata nec tenui ferar / penna biformis per liquidum aethera /* **vates** *neque in terris morabor / longius invidiaque maior* (1-4) and *iam iam resident cruribus asperae / pelles et album mutor in alitem / superne nascunturque leves* (9-12).

Cicero imitates Plato's description of swans: *cygni, qui non sine causa Apollini dicati sint, sed quod ab eo divinationem habere videantur* (swans, who are not without reason called the birds of Apollo, but because they seem to have prophetic powers from him, Cic. *Tusc.* 1.73).

These descriptions of prophetic swans correspond to Lucretius' portrayal of the *vates* Epicurus. At the end of the prologue of Book 3, shortly after the comparison of the philosopher and the swan, Epicurus allows Lucretius a glimpse into the entire nature of things (14-30), including the afterlife. Just like the swans of the *Phaedo*, Epicurus has a prophetic revelation of the "unseen world," the *inanis* (17, 27) and of the afterlife (*Acherusia templa*, 25), and this revelation is a source of great joy, *divina voluptas* (28).

In the Roman tradition as well as the Greek, swans have associations with Venus. In the *Odes,* Horace writes that Venus visits Paphos in a chariot drawn by swans: *et Paphum / iunctis visit oloribus* (14, 15). Ovid too writes about Venus' swans in the *Ars Amatoria*: *dicuntur cygni currum Veneris trahere* (3.809).[152] The prominence of Venus as a poetic "*socia*" early in the poem and the connection between swans and the goddess implicitly associate the swan-like Epicurus with Venus. Through such association, Epicurus too becomes an "ally" in Lucretius' poetic enterprise.

Moreover, the swan alludes to the transmission of knowledge or skill from predecessor to successor. Pausanias tells us that on the night before Plato was to become his student, Socrates dreamt that a swan flew into his chest (1.30.3). In addition, in the *Republic,* Plato links swans and the Pythagorean doctrine of *metempsychosis*: Orpheus chooses to return to life as a swan and thus further associates the animal with the power of song.[153] Lucretius seems to be aware of this doctrine, and in particular the possibility of animals as poetic predecessors. We have already

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[152] See also *Met.* 10.717; Sil. *Pun.* 7.441.
[153] *Rep.* 620A.

seen how Lucretius alludes to *metempsychosis* through reference to Ennius' claim to be Homer reincarnated.[154] Just prior to the mention of Ennius, Lucretius asks: *an pecudes alias divinitus insinuet se / Ennius ut noster cecinit* (whether the soul, divinely willed, should work its way into other animals, just as our Ennius sang, 1.116, 117). Lucretius may be referring to the *Annales* here, and the line which states that the shade of Homer was a peacock prior to its reincarnation into the body of Ennius.[155] Since, as we have seen, the poetic lineage of Homer-Ennius is parallel to that of Epicurus-Lucretius, the likening of Epicurus to a swan alludes to the idea of poetic succession.[156] Lucretius further emphasizes the idea of transmission in his deliberate use of the Greek word for "swan," *cycnus* and the Latin word for "swallow," *hirundus*.[157] By juxtaposing these two words, Lucretius sets himself up as the Roman receiver and *imitator* of the Greek philosopher. The traditional Greek association of the swallow and the speech of the *barbaroi* further highlights the distinction between the Greek *cycnus* and the Latin *hirundus*. As a swan, however, it would be assumed that Epicurus would grant to Lucretius *poetic* knowledge, rather than philosophic.[158] Thus, through swan imagery, Lucretius depicts himself as the poetic successor of Epicurus.

A later passage further supports the characterization of Epicurus as a poetic inspiration for Lucretius. Here, Lucretius compares his own poetry with the song of a swan, using the same literary *topos*:

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[154] 1.117-126.

[155] In Ennius' dream Homer says: *memini me fiere pavom*. Skutsch fr. xi.

[156] See also Servius *ad Aen.* 7.691 which states that a passage comparing Messapus with swans refers to Ennius: *ab hoc Ennius dicit se originem ducere: unde nunc et cantantes inducit eius socios et eos comparat cycnis.*

[157] In Latin the word for "swan" was *olor*, and in Greek, the word for "swallow" was χελιδών, a word which was, just as *cycnus*, transliterated into Latin, although perhaps not before the time of Lucretius. See Juv. 6.6: *barbata chelidon*. D'Arcy W. Thompson, *A Glossary of Greek Birds* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1936; reprint, 1966), 321.

[158] The swan also symbolizes the imparting of philosophic knowledge, as shown by the story of Plato and Socrates. Thus, Lucretius may also be exploiting the idea of the "swan" Epicurus imparting both *philosophic* and *poetic* knowledge. However, examples of the "philosophic" swan seem to be confined to mentions of Socrates and Plato, and these are few and far between. For more information on swans and Socrates / Plato see Frederick Ahl, "Amber, Avallon, and Apollo's Singing Swan," *AJP* 103 (1982): 374, 375.

> *suavidictis potius quam multis versibus edam*
> *parvus ut est cycni melior canor, ille gruum quam*
> *clamor in aetheriis dispersus nubibus austri.*

> I will compose this with sweet-talking rather than many verses,
> just as the short song of the swan is better than that honking of cranes
> dispersed in the etherial clouds of the south. (4.180-182)

Just like the prologue to Book 3, Lucretius uses animals, specifically birds, as a method of comparison. This passage, however, contains a reversal. Here, Lucretius' poetry reigns supreme: his swan-like verses are far better than the harsh clamor of cranes. The above lines recall the simile in Book 3, in which Epicurus is the swan and Lucretius a mere swallow. From Book 3 to Book 4, Lucretius transforms himself from the *hirundus* into the *cycnus*, setting himself up to be the recipient of Epicurus' knowledge. However, this knowledge manifests itself in the form of a *canor*, song, as though Epicurus actually transmits *poetry* to Lucretius.

The other half of the comparison likens Epicurus to a horse: *quid nam tremulis facere artubus haedi / consimile in cursu possint et fortis equi vis?* Ancient authors associate both the swan and the horse with the god Apollo. Sappho and Pindar show swans actually carrying Apollo, as leader of the Muses, through the air.[159] In the same way, horses transport Apollo, as the Sun, across the sky in his chariot.[160] Although much later than *DRN*, the epic *Thebaid* provides evidence for the direct association of horses, Apollo, and swans.[161] In this poem, Statius links swan, chariot and race horse imagery with a priest of Apollo, Amphiaraus. The swan-like Amphiaraus dresses all in white and wears a crest of swan-feathers. When he competes as a charioteer, Amphiaraus' horse is actually named *Cygnus*, "Swan."[162] In Book 3,

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[159] Sappho fr. 208; Pind. *Pae.* 3.10-14. Harold Donahue, *The Song of the Swan* (New York: University Press of America, 1993), 22.
[160] E.g. the story of Phaethon in Ov. *Met.* 1.741-2.380; it is significant to note that the brother of Phaethon was named Cycnus and was himself turned into a swan, see *Met.* 2.340, 367 and following. For horses and Apollo, see also *Il.* 2.766 that names Apollo as the breeder of the finest horses at Troy.
[161] Frederick Ahl, "Amber, Avallon, and Apollo's Singing Swan," *AJP* 103 (1982): 387, 388.
[162] *Theb.* 6.326-331; 6.528-530.

Lucretius closely juxtaposes the horse and the swan in order to associate Epicurus further with

Apollo and poetry.

Even without mention of swans, racehorses and chariots stand as traditional images for

poetry. In *DRN*, Lucretius links his own "chariot race" with the Muse of poetry, Calliope:[163]

> *Tu mihi supremae praescripta ad candida calcis*
> *currenti spatium praemonstra, callida Musa*
> *Calliope, requies hominum divomque voluptas*
> *te duce ut insigni capiam cum laude coronam.*
>
> You go before and show to me the course, as I
> run my race to the white line of my final goal, skillful Muse
> Calliope, repose of men and delight of gods,
> you lead so that I will capture the crown with illustrious praise. (6.92-95)

The charioteering of Lucretius recalls Epicurus as an *equus in cursu*. In Book 3, it is Epicurus

who competes and presumably wins the race set before him; by contrast, in Book 6, Lucretius

becomes the contender, striving to reach the final goal. Lucretius enlists the help of Calliope, the

Muse of epic, in order to indicate that he is competing for a *poetic* crown. Through the author's

use of parallel chariot race imagery, once again, Epicurus the philosopher becomes bound up in

Lucretius' poetic enterprise.

Just like the mention of swans, the horse and charioteering imagery allude to Lucretius'

predecessor, Ennius. In the *Annales*, Ennius uses a similar horse metaphor:

> *Sicut fortis equus, spatio qui saepe supremo*
> *vicit Olimpia, nunc senio confectus quiescit.*
>
> Just as a strong horse, that often on the final lap
> won at the Olympic games, now grows quiet, worn out from old age. [164]

The DRN closely follows Ennius' *fortis equus* in its description of Epicurus. Epicurus has the

strong force of a horse: *fortis equi vis* (3.8). Lucretius' charioteering passage also contains

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[163] Katharina Volk, *The Poetics of Latin Didactic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 89.
[164] Skutsch 522-3; Ibid., 111.

numerous echoes of Ennius: *supremae* (92) corresponds to *supremo*, *spatium* (93) to *spatio*, *requies* (95) to *quiescat*. What kind of link is the author drawing between Ennius, Epicurus and Lucretius? According to Cicero, the *fortis equus* of this passage in the *Annales* actually refers to Ennius himself: *Equi fortis et victoris senectuti comparat suam.*[165] Thus, with the phrase *fortis equi vis*, the author implicitly connects Epicurus and Ennius, equating the philosopher with the poet.[166] In a similar fashion, the author also links Lucretius with Ennius by echoing the *Annales* in his description of Lucretius' poetic charioteering.[167] These allusions serve to tie the literary works of three men together, associating the poetic "victories" of the racehorse Ennius and the charioteer Lucretius with the philosophic "victory" of Epicurus.[168] Because Ennius and Lucretius cite poetry as their primary criterion for victory, the philosophic writings of Epicurus are equated with poetry.[169]

Looking once more at the prologue to Book 3, we find that the author associates Epicurus' words with two other traditionally poetic symbols, bees and honey:

> *tu pater es, rerum inventor, tu patria nobis*
> *suppeditas praecepta, tuisque ex, inclute, chartis,*
> *floriferis ut apes in saltibus omnia libant,*
> *omnia nos itidem depascimur aurea dicta,*
> *aurea, perpetua semper dignissima vita.*

> You are the father, the discoverer of things, you
> supply us with fatherly precepts, illustrious man, from your pages,
> just as bees sip up everything in flower-bearing fields,
> we feed again and again on your golden words,
> golden, always most worthy of perpetual life. (3.9-13)

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[165] *Sen.* 14.

[166] Volk notes that Lucretius anticipates this allusion to Ennius in line 3.7 in the phrase *tremulis...artubus*, which is modelled on Enn. *Ann.* 34 (Skutsch): *et cita cum **tremulis** anus attulit **artubus** lumen.*

[167] He also does this intratextually, through parallel imagery within *DRN* alone. *Cf.* 1.117-126 with 1.921-934.

[168] Lucretius calls Epicurus a *victor* at 1.75: *unde refert nobis **victor** quid possit oriri.*

[169] *Cf.* Epicurus as *victor* at 1.75-79 and the charioteering metaphor at 3.1042: *ipse Epicurus obit decurso lumine vitae. Decurso lumine* is noted as a mixed metaphor, *lumina* referring to the sun and *decursus* referring to a chariot. This results naturally from the conception of the sun as a chariot. Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, trans. W. H. D. Rouse and Martin Ferguson Smith, 2nd ed., Loeb Classical Library (London: Harvard University Press, 1992), 271.

Here, Lucretius likens himself to a bee, sipping on the *aurea dicta* of Epicurus. The repeated use

of the word *aurea,* golden, situated in the context of bees, suggests the correlation of Epicurus'

words with honey.[170] Bees and honey have been associated with poetry since the time of Hesiod.

In the *Theogony*, the Muses' inspiration takes the form of "sweet dew" poured on the tongue of

the poet.[171] Likewise, Lucretius refers to his own poetry as *mel dulcis* (1.938) contrasting it with

the "loathsome wormwood" of Epicurean *ratio*.[172] Plato also comments on bees and poetry:

"For the poets tell us, don't they, that the melodies they bring us are gathered from rills that run

with honey, out of glens and gardens of the Muses, and they bring them as the bees do honey,

flying like the bees?"[173] Paradoxically, Lucretius parallels Epicurean *ratio* with the Muses'

honey. The same honey that makes Epicurean teachings palatable, now comes from Epicurus'

writings themselves: *ut apes in saltibus omnia libant / omnia nos itidem depascimur aurea dicta*.

This "honeyed" *ratio* ultimately inspires the "melodies" of Lucretius' poetry, implying that both

the *ratio* and the *carmen* have been taken from the same source: the "garden" of Epicurus,

floriferis...saltibus.[174]

The author supports the link between honey, poetry and *ratio*, by emphasizing the

sweetness of Epicurean doctrine. To describe honey, Lucretius uses the word *dulcis* four times

and *iucundus* once.[175] In describing poetry, he employs numerous "sweet" adjectives and

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[170] Ov. *Fast.* 4.546; M. C. Stokes, "A Lucretian Paragraph: III.1-30," in *Poetry and Poetics from Ancient Greece to the Renaissance: Studies in Honor of James Hutton*, ed. G. M. Kirkwood (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 95.; Katharina Volk, *The Poetics of Latin Didactic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 112.

[171] 83, 84.

[172] *absinthia taetra*, 1.936; see also 4.678, 679 in which the bees follow the scent of honey wherever it goes.

[173] *Ion* 534a-b; trans. by Lane Cooper. E. J. Kenney, ed., *Lucretius DE RERUM NATURA Book 3* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 76.

[174] Epicurus' house and school was called "the Garden." See Diog. Laert. 10.4; Norman Wentworth DeWitt, *Epicurus and his philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1954), 92, 93.

[175] References to *dulcis* - 1.938, 1.984, 4.13, 4.22; references to *iucundus* - 2.398, 399. Strangely, Lucretius classifies honey as both sweet and bitter, *acerba*, although never when referring to poetry (3.889-893; 4.670-672). Seneca too refers to honey as sweet and bitter in *Ep*. 109.7, and according to Sextus Empiricus, *Pyr*. 263, Democritus considered honey neither sweet nor bitter, while Heraclitus said it was both. I would tentatively suggest that this furthers the connection between Epicurean *ratio* and honey, just like honey, Epicurean teachings are bitter

phrases, such as: *suaviloquentum carmen*, *suavidicus versus,* and *dulcis labor*.[176]   Similarly, in

Book 2, an Epicurean life is the sweetest of all, *suavis, iucundus* and *dulcis*:[177]

> *non quia vexari quemquamst **iucunda** voluptas,*
> *sed quibus ipse malis careas quia cernere suave est.*
> ***suave** etiam belli certamina magna tueri*
> *per campos instructa tua sine parte periculi.*
> *sed nil **dulcius** est bene quam munita tenere*
> *edita doctrina sapientum templa serena*
>
> Not because anyone's vexation is a delightful joy,
> but because it is sweet to perceive from what evils you are free.
> It is sweet even to look upon great contests of war
> carried out through the fields without your own part of the danger.
> But nothing is sweeter than to have protected,
> serene sanctuaries fortified by the doctrine of the wise, (3-8)

In Book 5, Epicurus again soothes the lives of men: *ex quo nunc etiam per magnas didita gentis* /

***dulcia permulcent** animos solacia vitae* (from whom even now spreading through the great

nations, sweet solaces of life soothe our minds, 20, 21).[178] Thus, just like honey and poetry,

sweetness figures prominently in Lucretius' characterization of the *dicta* of Epicurus. In this

way, the author further blurs the line between Epicurean *ratio* and Lucretian *carmen*.

Through animal similes, Lucretius attempts to depict Epicurus as a poet like himself.

Literary tradition characterizes the swan, the horse, and the bee as poetic animals. As the bird of

Apollo, the swan becomes associated with many domains of its god, including his poetic and

prophetic powers. Likewise, the horse alludes to poetry, and in particular, poetic competition in

the form of racing or charioteering. Tradition also associates the bee and its honey with poetry

and the Muses. Thus, when the author compares Epicurus to a swan or a horse, or Epicurus'

(like wormwood) and sweet. Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, trans. W. H. D. Rouse and Martin Ferguson Smith, 2nd ed., Loeb Classical Library (London: Harvard University Press, 1992), 328.

[176] *suaviloquentum carmen* - 1.945; *suavidicus versus* - 4.180; *dulcis labor* - 2.730.

[177] The *iucunda voluptas*, although negated here, is the implied result of the practice of Epicurean thought. The separation from troubles (which results from living an Epicurean life) gives you *iucunda voluptas*, not the suffering of other humans.

[178] Just as the discovery of song soothes their minds of the shepherds: *Haec [reperta] animos... mulcebant et iuvabant...* 5.1390.

writings to honey, Epicurus himself becomes a poet, taking on the poetic associations of the animals. Looking more closely at the passages, we find that Epicurus is not just a poet, but a distinctly Lucretian poet. Lucretius inserts himself into each animal simile, constructing links between his own poetry, the works of his poetic predecessor Ennius, and Epicurus' writings. From these associations, the reader infers that the relationship between Epicurus and Lucretius is that of poetic succession. Lucretius transforms Epicurus into his own poetic predecessor.

<center>Journey Imagery</center>

As we have seen, Lucretius constructs parallels between himself, Epicurus and Ennius to transform the *persona* of Epicurus into a poet like himself. This "triangulation" of Epicurus with Lucretius and another writer of the *natura rerum* runs throughout *DRN* and is an important way that Lucretius "poeticizes" Epicurus. Let us look at another example of triangulation between Epicurus, Ennius and Lucretius. We have noted that Lucretius depicts Ennius and himself as poetic *primi*. In the same way that Ennius is the first to bring Greek poetry to Italy, Lucretius considers himself the first to transfer Epicurean thought. He also describes both Ennius' and his own poetic enterprises as journeys. As a *primus* (1.117), Ennius literally carries Greek poetry down from Mount Helicon to Italy: *detulit ex Helicone... / per gentis Italas hominum* (118, 119). Lucretius too is a poetic pioneer: *avia Pieridum peragro loca nullius ante / trita solo* (I traverse the pathless places of the Pierides, never before trodden by any foot, 1.926, 927). In his depiction of poetic originality, Lucretius describes in physical, concrete terms his own and Ennius' mental quests for the *natura rerum*.[179]

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[179] For Ennius and the *natura rerum* see 1.126; Lucretius mentions himself as a writer of the *natura rerum* several times: 1.25, 1.950, etc.

In the prologues and elsewhere, Epicurus is deliberately characterized as a *primus* like Lucretius and Ennius.[180] Through the metaphor of a journey, the author depicts Epicurus' philosophy as the ideal road to follow in life. In Book 1, Lucretius describes Epicurus' assault on the *moenia mundi* (73) as a journey. The words *processit* (73), *omne immensum peragravit* (74), and *refert* (75) complement the author's emphasis upon the pioneering character of Epicurus' actions and discoveries. In this short description of the philosopher, the word *primus* occurs three times (66, 67, 71). At the beginning of Book 3, we read again of Epicurus' philosophical pioneering: *te sequor, o Graiae gentis decus, inque tuis nunc / ficta pedum pono pressis vestigia signis* (3, 4). Words such as *vestigia*, *signa*, and *sequor* depict Lucretius as the follower and Epicurus as the trailblazer, charting paths into unknown territory. In the lines following the swan and horse simile, Lucretius further praises Epicurus for his innovation: *tu pater es, rerum inventor, tu patria nobis / suppeditas praecepta, tuisque ex, inclute, chartis* (You are our father, the discoverer of truths, you supply us with fatherly precepts, illustrious man, from your pages, 3.9, 10). As the "*pater*," Epicurus engenders the nature of things: *naturam rerum, divina mente coortam* (15). The word *coortus* holds connotations of birth and generation.

The author of *DRN* links Ennius, Epicurus and himself as *primi*, as travelers, and as writers of the *natura rerum*. The descriptions of Lucretius' and Epicurus' expeditions echo one another verbally through the repeated use of the rare word *peragrare*; both Epicurus and Lucretius *peragrare* through unknown places.[181] The journeys taken by all three men are intellectual, rather than physical: Epicurus travels in his *mens animusque* (1.74) and Lucretius in his *mens vigens* (1.925). Similarly, we read that Ennius receives the *natura rerum* from Homer,

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[180] See also G. Cabisius, "Lucretius' Statement of Poetic Intent," *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History* 1 (1979): 242.; Katharina Volk, *The Poetics of Latin Didactic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 88, 89.
[181] *Cf.* 1.74, 1.926. Forms of *peragrare* only occur 5 times in the entirety of *DRN*. 1.74, 1.926, 2.355, 2.677, 4.1 – this is a duplication of 1.926.

but only in his mind's eye: Homer comes in the form of a *simulacrum* (1.123) and a *species* (125).

Looking at the associations Lucretius creates between Ennius, himself and Epicurus, we find that Lucretius repeatedly likens the writings of Epicurus with those of himself and Ennius, thus describing the philosophic prose of Epicurus in poetic terms and equating the *persona* and writings of Epicurus with those of a poet. The "poet" Epicurus then becomes a perfect complement to Ennius and Lucretius.

<div align="center">Light Imagery</div>

The author continues to parallel the *dicta* of Epicurus and Lucretius through light imagery and through triangulation with the character of Venus. Throughout *DRN*, the familar themes of light and dark permeate descriptions of both poetry and philosophy.[182] Traditionally, in both poetry and prose, light signifies something good, truthful, evident or alive, while darkness tends to connote evil, ignorance, or death. Lucretius plays on this standard symbolism in the following passage:

> *nam veluti pueri trepidant atque omnia caecis*
> *in tenebris metuunt, sic nos in luce timemus*
> *interdum nilo quae sunt metuenda magis quam*
> *quae pueri in tenebris pavitant finguntque futura.*

> For just as children tremble and fear everything
> in the blind darkness, thus at times we are afraid in the light
> of nothing which must be feared more than
> that which children shiver at in the dark and imagine is about to be. (2.55-58)

He associates darkness with fear (*metuunt*, 56) and ignorance (*finguntque futura*, 68), contrasting the terrors of children in the dark with our own grown-up fears in broad daylight. Lucretius reveals the solution to these terrors in the next lines:

> *hunc igitur terrorem animi tenebrasque necessest*

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[182] See W. S. Anderson, "Discontinuity in Lucretius Symbolism," *TAPA* 91 (1960): 2-5.

> *non radii solis neque lucida tela diei*
> *discutiant, sed naturae species ratioque.*
>
> Therefore, it is necessary that this terror of the mind and darkness
> be dispelled, not by the rays of the sun, nor by the clear shafts of day
> but by the appearance and law of nature. (2.59-61)

Because the daylight does not provide sufficient illumination to curb human fear, we must find relief in the "appearance and law of nature." Lucretius repeats the phrase *naturae species ratioque* four times in *DRN*[183] and many scholars have speculated on its meaning, with most concluding that it connects to Lucretius' overall goals for the poem, or even refers to the poem itself.[184] Minadeo suggests that it demonstrates the integration of poetry and philosophy in *DRN*, with *species* being the observable cycle of nature, and *ratio*, the law underlying this cycle.[185] Lucretius' light-filled poetry depicts the true "appearance of nature," *species naturae*, while Epicurus' philosophy functions as the *ratio naturae*, the explanation behind the *species*. As the passage above suggests (*radii solis...lucida diei*), light symbolism connects descriptions of both Epicurean *ratio* and Lucretian *carmen*.

Epicurus and Epicurean *ratio* enlighten the lives of men. In the beginning of Book 3, we find Epicurus lifting up the light of his teachings: *o tenebris tantis tam clarum extollere lumen / qui primus potuisti inlustrans commoda vitae* (1, 2). Again, in Book 5, Epicurus leads men out of dark storms into so clear a light: *tam clara lux* (10-12). Epicurus, however, is more than just a light-bearer, he is the source of light itself. At the end of Book 3 he literally shines like the sun,

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[183] 1.148; 2.61; 3.93; 6.41.

[184] Richard Minadeo, *The Lyre of Science: Form and Meaning in Lucretius' De rerum natura* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969), 12ff.; J. M. Duban, "Venus, Epicurus, and *Naturae Species Ratioque*," *AJPh* 103 (1982): 165-177.; Eva M. Thury, "Lucretius' Poem as a *Simulacrum* of the *Rerum Natura*," *AJP* 108 (1987): 270-294.

[185] Richard Minadeo, *The Lyre of Science: Form and Meaning in Lucretius' De rerum natura* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969), 21.

dimming all the stars around him: *restinxit stellas exortus ut aetherius sol* (3.1044).[186] In *DRN*,

Epicurus and the sun share many characteristics, including the ability to reveal the laws of

nature. Epicurus' discovery of the *natura rerum* causes the light-filled heavens to open up and

reveal their secrets to Lucretius: *moenia mundi / discedunt, totum **video per inane** geri res*.[187]

Likewise, in 2.114 and following, the sun actually enables men to see and understand atomic

ratio.[188] When the *radii* of the sun pour through a darkened room, the floating particles in the air

reveal the secret movements of atoms: *multa minuta modis multis **per inane videbis** / corpora

misceri radiorum lumine in ipso* (you will see many minute particles mix with varied movements

throughout the void in the light itself of the rays). From this passage, Monica Gale concludes:

"And, as the sun is the source of the *radii* which illuminate the visible world, so Epicurus is the

source of the *ratio* which illuminates the atomic world."[189] In *DRN*, Epicurus and his *ratio* are

the lights which display the truth of reality to men.

As the pairing in the phrase *naturae species ratioque* suggests, Lucretius depicts *species*,

the appearance of nature, as the counterpart to *ratio*. Light imagery also permeates descriptions

of the *species naturae*. The author pairs this light imagery with the character of Venus, creating

another triangle between Epicurus, Lucretius and a purveyor of the *natura rerum*. We find the

first mention of the word *species* in the proem to Venus. Here, she is enlightening and

beautifying the *species* of the earth:

> *per te quoniam genus omne animantum*
> *concipitur visitque exortum lumina solis:*
> *te, dea, te fugiunt venti, te nubila caeli*

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[186] In Book 6, the author describes Epicurus' death using light/ sun imagery: *cuius et **extincti** propter divina reperta / divulgata vetus iam **ad caelum gloria fertur*** (7, 8). Epicurus' glory, which is borne to the sky, reminds the reader of the sun.
[187] 3.14-30.
[188] Monica Gale, *Myth and Poetry in Lucretius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 203.
[189] Ibid.; see also (Sister) Frances, "The Light of Reason and the Darkness of Unbelief," *CJ* 58 (1962-3): 170-172. Sister Frances calls attention to the verbal similarities between *radii* and *ratio*. She also mentions 2.1023ff. in which the *species* of light changes to the *ratio* of philosophy.

adventumque tuum, tibi suavis daedala tellus
summittit flores, tibi rident aequora ponti
placatumque nitet diffuso lumine caelum.
*nam simul ac **species** patefactast verna diei*

Since through you the entire race of living things
is born and having risen up sees the light of the sun:
From you, goddess, the winds flee, from you the clouds of the sky flee
From you and your coming, for you the wonder-working earth puts forth
sweet flowers, for you the level stretches of the sea laugh
and the sky made peaceful shines forth with diffused light.
As soon as the vernal appearance of the day is made manifest. (1.4-10)

Venus is a light-bearer; her coming sheds light on the *species* of the earth, in much the same way

that Epicurus brings the light of his *ratio*. Venus causes all living things to rise up and see the

light of the sun (*visitque **exortum** lumina **solis***), aligning her with Epicurus, who rises like the

sun itself: *restinxit, stellas **exortus** ut aetherius **sol*** (3.1044). In addition, the beautiful earth

which Venus shows the reader in the proem then becomes Epicurus' vision in Book 3:[190]

nam simul ac ratio tua coepit vociferari
naturam rerum, divina mente coortam,
diffugiunt animi terrores, moenia mundi
discedunt, totum video per inane geri res.
apparet divum numen sedesque quietae
quas neque concutiunt venti nec nubila nimbis
aspergunt neque nix acri concreta pruina
cana cadens violat semperque innubilus aether
integit, et large diffuso lumine ridet. (14-22)

Lucretius again lines up the partnership of *species* and *ratio*. In Venus' proem, Lucretius writes:

***nam simul ac** species...* (1.10), while Epicurus' prologue reads: ***nam simul ac** ratio...* (3.14).

Lucretius casts both the Venusian *species* and the Epicurean *ratio* as sources of light. At the

coming of Venus, the cloudless (6) sky shines with diffused light (*nitet **diffuso lumine** caelum*,

9); in Epicurus' vision it is the *aether* which shines: *innubilus aether / integit, et large **diffuso***

***lumine** ridet* (21, 22).

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[190] J. M. Duban, "Venus, Epicurus, and *Naturae Species Ratioque*," *AJPh* 103 (1982): 171.

Through the use of analogous light imagery, Venus' *species* links Epicurean *ratio* and Lucretian *carmen*. Venus' poetic importance relates to her governance of the *natura rerum*:

> *Quae quoniam rerum naturam sola gubernas,*
> *nec sine te quicquam dias in luminis oras*
> *exoritur neque fit laetum neque amabile quicquam,*
> *te sociam studeo scribendis versibus esse*
> *quos ego de rerum natura pangere conor.* (1.21-25)

Here Lucretius emphasizes the generative powers of Venus. The Ennian phrase *in luminis oras* refers to her power over the creation of life. Elder notes that on other occasions Lucretius uses *laetus* and *amabilis* as words to mean "fertile" and "worthy of love."[191] The author asks that the generative powers of Venus be granted to his poem, and thus cause the poem itself to be productive. Interestingly, it is the very powers that Lucretius wishes to appropriate from Venus that he then ascribes to the sun, implying that Epicurus governs and fertilizes life in the same way as Venus. At 1.807, the sun nourishes Venus' earth: *solque sua pro parte fovet tribuitque calorem, / crescere non possint fruges arbusta animantes* (And unless the sun, for its part, favors and grants heat, the fruits and trees and animals are not able to grow).[192] And as the *aeterna lampas mundi* (5.402), the sun recreates and governs all things: *recreavit cuncta gubernans* (5.404).[193] By depicting Epicurus as a *creator* like Venus, the poet associates Epicurus' *ratio* with poetry. The verb *recreo* recurs in a discussion of Lucretius' own "honeyed" poetry: *sed potius tali pacto recreata valescat* (but rather the child, having be restored by such means, grows strong, 1.942, 4.17).[194] Such a repetition could be negligible, especially in an isolated context; however, as we shall see, when Lucretius describes his own poetry in terms of light and generation, he likens his own *carmen* to Epicurus' *ratio*.

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[191] J. P. Elder, "Lucretius 1.1-49," *TAPA* 85 (1954): 111.
[192] Venus fertilizes the **frugi**ferens terra (1.3) and the *genus omne* **animantum** (1.4).
[193] See also 1.1032; 2.147, 150, 210ff.; 4.162, 219.
[194] Lenaghan notes that the verb *recreo* works on several levels. It is used for physical and mental recovery and also gives the sense of *creating something anew*. Lydia Lenaghan, "Lucretius 1.921-50," *TAPA* 98 (1967): 225n19.

The association of light, Lucretius and poetry appears again and again in *DRN*. In Book

1, the poet attempts to dispel the darkness that occupies Memmius' mind:

> *Sed tua me virtus tamen et sperata voluptas*
> *suavis amicitiae quemvis effere 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.*
>
> But however your virtue and the expected delight
> of sweet friendship persuades me to undergo any labor
> and induces me to stay up through serene nights
> seeking by what words and by what song at last
> I might be able to display clear lights to your mind
> by which you might be able to see deeply hidden things.[195]

Clara, lumina and *convisere* all describe the light-filled nature of Lucretius' *carmen*. He makes

this same argument in another passage from Book 1, in which he describes his desire to

illuminate Epicureanism in Latin verses: *inlustrare Latinis versibus* (137). As Cabisius points

out, *inlustrare* occurs only twice in the poem, once to describe Lucretius' task and once to

describe Epicurus' benefits to mankind (*inlustrans commoda vitae*, 3.2).[196] Thus, through the

metaphor of light, the author once again declares that the tasks of Epicurus and Lucretius are the

same.

The fertility and productivity of poetry becomes clear in Lucretius' discussion of

elementa. Lucretius uses the word *elementa* to describe two essential building blocks of the

world: atoms, out of which all living and nonliving matter is created, and letters, out of which

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[195] 1.143-145.

[196] G. Cabisius, "Lucretius' Statement of Poetic Intent," *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History* 1 (1979): 242.; Tatum also points out that *inlustrare* is the word that Cicero uses to describe his rendering of Greek philosophy into Latin at *Acad.* 1.3 and *Tusc. Disp.* 1.5; W. Jeffrey Tatum, "The Presocratics in Book One of Lucretius' *De rerum natura*," *TAPA* 114 (1984): 181.

Lucretius constructs his poem.[197] Lucretius describes the creative importance of *elementa* in the

following passage:

> *quin etiam refert nostris 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.*
> *sic ipsis in rebus item iam materiai*
> *concursus motus ordo positura figurae*
> *cum permutantur, mutari res quoque debent.*
>
> Indeed also it is represented in my verses themselves
> with what and in what sort of order each of these letters were located
> And indeed, the same letters denote sky, sea, earth, rivers, sun, and
> the same letters denote fruits, trees, animals;
> if they are not all alike, the greatest part by far are
> similar; truly the place in which each will be positioned determines the meaning.
> Thus now it is the same in real things
> when motions, order, positions, shapes of the matter
> are changed, the things themselves must also be changed. (2.1013-1021)

He draws an analogy between the arrangement of letters and the arrangement of atoms, both

termed *elementa*. The end result of creation depends upon the order in which the *elementa* are

placed; different patterns produce different results. Just like a certain pattern of letters describes

the sky, sea, earth, rivers and sun, so too do atoms rearrange themselves to create these same

objects. Through this metaphor, Lucretius equates his own poetry and Epicurean philosophy.

The generative powers of *carmen* become approximations of the creative force of atomic *ratio*

and thus Lucretius' poetry not only explains, but also models the universe found in Epicurus'

own writings. In order to emphasize the connection between his poetry and *ratio*, Lucretius ties

these verses to Venus' recreation of the world and also to the creative powers of the sun.

Lucretius' own verses describe poetic creation:

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[197] Paul Friedländer, "Pattern of Sound and Atomistic Theory in Lucretius," *AJP* 61, no. 1 (1941): 16-34. See also Eva M. Thury, "Lucretius' Poem as a *Simulacrum* of the *Rerum Natura*," *AJP* 108 (1987): 284ff.

> *namque eadem **caelum mare terras** flumina **solem***
> *significant, eadem **fruges arbusta animantis**...* (2.1015, 1016)

In the proem, Lucretius uses much of the same imagery to describe Venus' recreation of the earth:

> *alma Venus, **caeli** subter labentia signa*
> *quae **mare** navigerum, quae **terras frugi**ferentis*
> *concelebras, per te quoniam genus omne **animantum***
> *concipitur visitque exortum lumina **solis** ...* (1.2-5)

Likewise, the sun is necessary for the growth of plants and animals:

> ***sol**que sua pro parte fovet tribuitque calorem,*
> *crescere non possint **fruges arbusta animantes***

If we see the sun as an analogue for Epicurus or, at the very least, something which is able to illuminate the *ratio* of the visible world, we can infer that Lucretius associates the creative powers of his own poem with Venus' *species* and Epicurus' *ratio*.

Epicurus, Lucretius and Venus form a triangle of parallel images, leading the reader to equate Epicurean *ratio* with Lucretius' productive and enlightening poetry. The so-called "second proem" of *DRN* demonstrates the triangulation between Venus, Lucretius and Epicurus. This passage combines both light and fertility imagery to describe Lucretius' poetry:

> *Nunc age quod superest cognosce et clarius audi.*
> *nec me animi fallit quam sint obscura; sed acri*
> *percussit thyrso laudis spes magna meum cor,*
> *et simul incussit suavem mi in pectus amorem*
> *Musarum, quo nunc instinctus mente vigenti*
> *avia Pieridum peragro loca nullius ante*
> *trita solo. iuvat integros accedere fontis*
> *atque haurire, iuvatque novos dercerpere flores*
> *insignemque meo capiti petere inde coronam*
> *unde prius nulli velarint tempora Musae.*
> *primum quod magnis doceo de rebus et artis*
> *religionum animum nodis exsolvere pergo,*
> *deinde quod obscura de re tam lucida pango*
> *carmina, musaeo contingens cuncta lepore.*

Now come on, learn that which remains and listen to a clearer argument
Neither does it escape me how these matters are dark; but
great hope of praise struck my heart with a sharp thyrsus,
and at the same time it struck sweet love of the Muses into my breast
whither now inspired in my lively mind
I traverse the pathless places of the the Pierides, not ever before
crossed by a common foot. It pleases to approach pure springs
and to drink, and it pleases to pick new flowers
and to seek an illustrious crown for my head from there,
whence before this the Muses crowned the temples of none.
First, because I teach about great things and arts,
and I continue to loosen the mind from the bonds of religion,
second, because I write such clear verses about a dark subject,
touching all things with the Muses' charm. (1.921–934)

Words such as *cor, amor,* and *flores* bring to mind creativity and generation. The language of

the passage recalls that of the proem to Venus, and in particular, those parts which reference

generation and reproduction. Lucretius recalls the following lines:

aeriae primum volucres te, diva, tuumque
significant initum perculsae corda tua vi.
inde ferae, pecudes persultant pabula laeta
et rapidos tranant amnis: ita capta lepore

First the birds of the air, proclaim you, goddess, and
your coming, having been struck in the heart by your might.
Then the beasts, flocks rejoice over the rich fields
and cross the rapid rivers: thus having been captured by your charm (1.12-15)

Just as the thyrsus strikes the heart of Lucretius (*percussit...meum cor*), Venus' advent strikes the

hearts of the birds (*perculsae corda*). The beasts of the land too go into a sort of frenzy, captured

by the charm of Venus (*capta lepore*), which parallels the charm of Lucretius' poetry (*musaeo*

contingens cuncta lepore). Elder notes that *lepos* here is not just delight, but also refers to the

"attractive appeal" which leads to sexual union, thus reinforcing the fertility imagery.[198]

Lucretius also often links *lepos* with shining, captivating light.[199] For example, at 5.1259, he

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[198] J. P. Elder, "Lucretius 1.1-49," *TAPA* 85 (1954): 110n56.
[199] C. J. Classen, "Poetry and Rhetoric in Lucretius," *TAPA* 99 (1968): 101. Classen cites the following uses of the word: 1.934=4.9; 2.502; 3.1006, 1036; 4.80, 1133; 5.1259, 1376.

writes the following about gold: *tollebant nitido capti levique lepore* (they were picking up the gold, having been captivated by its shine and smooth grace). Thus, lines 933 and 934 also invoke earlier light imagery, creating an implicit connection between *lepos* and *lucida carmina*.[200]

Continuing at 1.19, Venus strikes sweet love into the hearts of all: *omnibus incutiens blandum per pectora amorem*. These lines correspond closely to Lucretius' experience with the thyrsus: *incussit suavem mi in pectus amorem*.   In response to Venus, the animals reproduce generations in a frenzy (*cupide generatim saecla propagent*, 1.20). Similarly, in response to the thyrsus, Lucretius becomes inspired in his mind (*instinctus mente vigenti*) to produce philosophic poetry. In the final lines of the second proem, we discover that Venus has been successful as Lucretius' muse. At the beginning of *DRN*, Lucretius asks for her inspiration and fertility *to attempt* verses about the nature of things: *te sociam studeo scribendis versibus esse / quos ego de rerum natura **pangere conor*** (1.24, 25). And in the passage above, Lucretius boasts that he has accomplished his task, composing light-filled verses worthy of a poetic crown: *deinde quod obscura de re tam lucida **pango** / carmina, musaeo contingens cuncta lepore* (1.933, 934).

Just like Venus herself, Lucretius sheds light on the *natura rerum*. As we have seen, Lucretius depicts Epicurus also as an illuminator of the *natura rerum*, an idea that Lucretius reinforces in the second proem. Through verbal cues, Lucretius equates his own poetic expedition and accomplishments with those of Epicurus. Lucretius' journey to the fonts of the Muses (*instinctus **mente** vigenti...**peragro***) parallels the philosophic voyage of Epicurus: ***peragravit mente** animoque* (1.74).   Epicurus' travels end in his destruction of menacing *religio* and the triumph of mortal life: *quare religio pedibus subiecta vicissim / obteritur* (1.78, 79). Likewise, Lucretius frees men from the bonds of religion: *religionum animum nodis exsolvere*

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[200] Ibid.: 101, 102.

pergo (932). By aligning his own accomplishments with those of Epicurus, Lucretius appeals to the motif of *imitatio*, all the while stressing the importance of the medium of *poetry*. Lucretius mentions typical poetic themes, such as the Muses (925, 926, 930, 934), *coronae* (929), fountains (927), and flowers (928),[201] acting as though he were following Epicurus as a poetic predecessor. Returning to the theme of light, we find a familiar analogy between the philosopher and the poet. Lucretius composes through light-filled song, *lucidum carmen*. *Lucidus* is a word often associated with the sun[202] and here, Lucretius casts himself as a light-bringer like Epicurus.

In the second proem, Lucretius simultaneously identifies himself with Epicurus and Venus, *ratio* and *species*, through the repetition of imagery and the recurring themes of light and generation. This leads the reader to associate the joint enterprise of Venus and Lucretius, as poetic "allies," with the *imitatio* relationship of Epicurus and Lucretius, as purveyors of philosophy. Thus, through a series of associations, Lucretius again places Epicurus in a group of poetic figures. Epicurus' writings on the *natura rerum* are paralleled with the shared verses of Venus and Lucretius, thus equating Epicurus' own luminous *ratio* with Lucretius' light-filled *carmen*.

Weaving Imagery and *Vates*

The metaphor of a poet as a "weaver" of verses has existed since the time of Homer.[203] According to Varro, the Romans may have borrowed this metaphor in the creation of the word "*vates.*" We have noted that Varro cites *a vi mentis* as one possible etymology of *vates* and we have seen how the inspired discoveries of Lucretius, Empedocles, and Epicurus fit this particular connotation of the word. Varro also mentions an alternate etymology for *vates*: *a versibus*

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[201] The influence of Hellenistic poets, such as Callimachus, is especially prominent. E. J. Kenney, "Doctus Lucretius," *Mnemosyne* ser. 4.23 (1970): 366-380.

[202] 1.147, 1014; 2.60, 1039; 3.92; 6.40.

[203] Jane McIntosh Snyder, "The Web of Song: Weaving Imagery in Homer and the Lyric Poets," *CJ* 76 (1981): 192-198.

viendis, "from the weaving of words."[204] Hardie suggests that the distinction between Varro's

two etymologies, *a vi mentis* and *a versibus viendis*, is much like the common Roman dichotomy

of *ingenium* and *ars*.[205] *Ingenium* connotes the notion of forceful, divine inspiration by referring

to the natural, inborn talent of an orator or poet, that is, the talent that the gods have granted to

him.[206] *Ars* refers to the technique and knowledge behind the talent, and thus the ability to

weave carefully one's words. For Varro, the *vates* combines both *ingenium* and *ars* in the

writing of his poetry. Likewise in *DRN*, Lucretius depicts himself and Epicurus both as divinely

inspired poets and as skilled "weavers" of verses.

Looking again to the second proem, we find the etymology *a vi mentis* underlying

Lucretius' description of his own poetry. Lines 922-925 are especially suggestive:

> *...sed acri*
> *percussit thyrso laudis spes magna meum cor,*
> *et simul incussit suavem mi in pectus amorem*
> *Musarum, quo nunc instinctus mente vigenti...*

Words and phrases such as *percutere, incutere,* and *instinctus mente vigenti* promote the idea of

forceful poetic inspiration. The *thyrsus*, as the wand of Bacchus, grants divinity to Lucretius'

poetry and associates Lucretius' poetic inspiration with the divine madness of the Bacchants.

The second proem echoes the description of Epicurus' discovery of the *natura rerum*:

> *quem neque fama deum nec fulmina nec minitanti*
> *murmure compressit caelum, sed eo magis acrem*
> *inritat animi virtutem, effringere ut arta*
> *naturae primus portarum claustra cupiret.*
> *ergo vivida vis animi pervicit...* (1.69-72)

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[204] *Ling.* 36, *Antiqui poetas vates appellebant a versibus viendis, ut <de> poematis cum scribam ostendam*. The participle comes from the archaic verb *viere* – to weave.

[205] Philip R. Hardie, *Cosmos and Imperium* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 20. Interestingly, Cicero uses these very words to describe Lucretius' poem: *Lucretii poemata, ut scribis, ita sunt, multis luminibus **ingenii**, multae etiam **artis**; sed, cum veneris, virum te putabo, si Sallustii Empedoclea legeris, hominem non putabo* (*Ad Q.fr.* 2.9.4).

[206] Cic. *De or.* 1, 5.

Like Lucretius, Epicurus' mind is inspired by a divine source, in this case, the menacing gods of the sky. The phrases *acris virtus animi* and *vivida vis animi* emphasize the mental power of Epicurus and the violent inspiration associated with his discovery of the *natura rerum*. Thus, the author strongly parallels the mental energy of himself as poet and Epicurus as philosopher and in doing so, depicts both *personae* as *vates*, stemming from the etymology *a vi mentis*.

Varro's second possible etymology of *vates*, *a versibus viendis*, also appears in descriptions of Lucretius and Epicurus in *DRN*. Combining weaving and light imagery, Lucretius depicts himself and Epicurus as poetic weavers.[207] As I have discussed, the author compares Epicurus to the sun: *restinxit stellas exortus ut aetherius sol* (3.1044). The *aetherius sol* makes several striking appearances in *DRN*.[208] For example, at 5.267 and 389, the etherial sun evaporates water by unraveling it with its rays: *radiisque retexens aetherius sol*.[209] The unusual weaving metaphor in this line obliquely associates the light of Epicurus' *ratio* with the light of Lucretius' *carmen*. The word *retexens* suggests weaving, as does the reference to *radii*. David West notes that in weaving, *radii* are the shuttles that are sent back and forth on the warp.[210] We see *radii* again in this familiar passage, which comments on the illuminating power of Epicurus' philosophy:

> *hunc igitur terrorem animi tenebrasque necessest*
> *non radii solis neque lucida tela diei*
> *discutiant, sed naturae species ratioque*
> *principium cuius hinc nobis exordium sumet...*[211]

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[207] David West, *The Imagery and Poetry of Lucretius* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969), 81.; Stella R. Pope, "The Imagery of Lucretius," *G&R* 18, no. 53 (June 1949): 73. Both Pope and West note the weaving / light combination.

[208] 3.1044, 5.215, 267, 281, 389.

[209] Stella R. Pope, "The Imagery of Lucretius," *G&R* 18, no. 53 (June 1949): 77, 78. See also 2.147, 148, in which the sun "clothes" the earth: *quam subito soleat sol ortus tempore tali / convestire.*

[210] David West, *The Imagery and Poetry of Lucretius* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969), 81, 82. He references 5.1353.

[211] 1.146-148; 2.59-61; 3.91-93; 6.39-41.

In this passage, the *radii solis* are paired with the *tela diei*. Just as the word *radius* has several

meanings, *tela* can both refer to shafts of light and the loom upon which the weaver stretches the

textile. Lucretius makes the dual meaning clear in Book 5: *textile post ferrumst, quia ferro tela*

paratur (1351). Looking back at archaic Latin, *exordium* too can be a word for "loom."[212]

Radii, tela and *exordium* thus evoke both light and weaving imagery. In this passage, David

West sees the metaphor of poetry: "It's not the shuttles of the sun or the warp of daylight that can

dispel this dark fear, but the warp of our poetry..."[213] Supporting West's interpretation, we find

the traditional associations between weaving and poetry[214] and, more importantly, *DRN*'s

depiction of Lucretius as a poetic weaver.[215] At 1.529, Lucretius weaves his argument with the

verb *retexere*, echoing the passage describing the *aetherius sol*. Lucretius uses this verb only

three times in *DRN*, twice for the sun and once for himself.[216] Again at 6.42, the poet speaks of

himself as a weaver: *quo magis inceptum pergam pertexere dictis* (I will proceed more readily to

weave thoroughly the beginning with my words).[217] Thus, the connection between "light and

looms" serves to associate Lucretius and Epicurus as both light-bringers and weavers.[218] When

the author likens Epicurus to the etherial sun, he implicitly recalls Epicurus in every use of

"aetherius sol" in the poem. Thus the "weaving" of the etherial sun in Book 2 can be seen, at

least in part, as the weaving of Epicurus himself. When we read that Lucretius too is a weaver,

using the same verb, *retexere*, we again equate the enterprises of Epicurus and Lucretius. Like

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[212] David West, *The Imagery and Poetry of Lucretius* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969), 81. For the use of *exordium* as loom, West cites Plauts *Pseudolus* 399-400.
[213] Ibid., 81, 82.
[214] Jane McIntosh Snyder, "The Web of Song: Weaving Imagery in Homer and the Lyric Poets," *CJ* 76 (1981): 192-198.
[215] West sees the connection between light and weaving but does not note that Lucretius himself is characterized as a weaver.
[216] *aetherius sol* : 5.267, 5.389.
[217] 1.418 closely follows this: *Sed nunc ut repetam coeptum pertexere dictis.*
[218] "Light and Looms" is the section heading in David West, *The Imagery and Poetry of Lucretius* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969), 80-82.

Lucretius, Epicurus weaves light-filled verses about the *natura rerum*. Looking once again at the *vates* as a weaver of verses, we conclude that both Epicurus and Lucretius fit this description of *vates*.

By depicting Epicurus as *vates*, Lucretius also associates Epicurus with Empedocles, once again placing Epicurus in a group with two poets. Lucretius, Epicurus and Empedocles form a third triangle of writers of the *natura rerum*. Through triangulation, Epicurus is likened over and over to Lucretius' poetic predecessors, thus transforming Epicurus himself into the ideal predecessor of Lucretius. Not only does Epicurus have obvious associations with Epicurean philosophy, but also appears to have similar associations with poetry in *DRN*. Thus Lucretius works to resolve his *imitatio* of Epicurus not by conforming to Epicurean teachings about poetry, but by transforming the *persona* of Epicurus. In order to be an exemplary *imitator* of Epicurus and still continue with the writing of *DRN*, Lucretius portrays Epicurus as a philosopher poet like himself and thus creates his own ideal predecessor.

Chapter 4

CONCLUSION

We have explored some of the ways that Lucretius draws connections among himself, his poetic predecessors and Epicurus.   By likening Epicurus to his poetic predecessors and *vice versa*, Lucretius transforms Epicurus not only into a poet, but into a distinctly "Lucretian" poet. Although Lucretius casts himself as a poetic *imitator*, he depicts his poetic forbears as purveyors of false knowledge. In contrast to earlier poets, Lucretius proclaims the truth about the *natura rerum*, opening the mind of the reader through Epicurean *ratio.* To be a "Lucretian" poet is to incorporate knowledge of true *ratio* with *carmen*. In transforming the philosopher Epicurus into a poet, Lucretius casts Epicurus as *primus*, the first to assimilate *ratio* and *carmen*. Epicurus becomes both his poetic and philosophic inspiration, the first true "Lucretian" poet. The reader then sees Epicurus as Lucretius' predecessor, and Lucretius, as *imitator Epicuri*, becomes the Roman "Epicurus."

Through the transformation of Epicurus, Lucretius illustrates the close relationship between poetry and philosophy in *DRN*. He uses Epicurus as a metonym for *ratio,* and uses poetic figures, such as Venus, Homer, and Ennius, as metonyms for *carmen*. Thus, when Lucretius likens Epicurus to himself and other poets, he implicitly equates Epicurean *ratio* with Lucretian *carmen*.

In the assimilation of philosophy to poetry, Lucretius redefines the role of the Roman poet, foreshadowing later conceptions of *vates*. The power of the poet is no longer confined to the creation inherent in writing poetry, but extends to the world of the reader as well. The

substitution of letters for atoms and *vice versa* in *DRN* illustrates the power that Lucretius

ascribes to his own poetry. Looking at the use of the term *elementa* as both letters and atoms, we

find that Lucretius depicts his poem as a microcosm of the macrocosm that is the universe. If the

letters of poetry and the atoms of the Epicurean universe perform the same function and work in

the same way, combining and recombining to create various objects or ideas, then Lucretius'

DRN does not just speak of the "nature of things" but actually models them. By depicting his

poem as a microcosm of the universe, Lucretius expects the reader to apply this microcosm, his

own poetry, to the larger world. What Lucretius says and argues in his poem affects not only the

workings of his poem, but the workings of the world outside of his verses. Using this analogy,

Lucretius attempts to transform the reader's ideas about language. The assimilation of atoms and

letters is analogous to the identification of Epicurus as a poet. Both demonstrate the union of

philosophy and poetry in *DRN*.

In order to understand how Lucretius deals with poetry and philosophy in *DRN*, the

reader must take both of these on Lucretius' own terms. By altering the writings of earlier poets

to comply with Epicurean philosophy, and by transforming Epicurus himself into a poet,

Lucretius creates a new type of poetry. In *DRN*, Lucretius does not try to resolve the difficulties

inherent in the construction of an Epicurean poem, but rather to redefine both *ratio* and *carmen*.

By transforming the terms, Lucretius creates an entirely new paradigm from which the reader is

meant to understand and experience the relationship between poetry and science.

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