Panel Title: Lucretius

Panel Description: The six papers in this panel explore themes of poetics, politics, and philosophy in Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura*. Paper #1, Shattering *Corpora*, Shattering Bodies: Lucretian Echoes in Lucan, Ovid, and Seneca,” argues that Lucretius’ scenes of dismemberment and death function as a poetic model for macabre readings of the dissolution of both the human body and the civic state in Ovid, Lucan, and Seneca. Paper #2, “The Dissolution of Civilization in Lucretius and its Subsequent Augustan Renewal,” argues for the origins of the “ship of state” metaphor in Lucretius’ *DRN* and examines how Lucretius’ use of the storm-tossed vessel differs from Horace’s subsequent treatment. Paper #3, “Lucretius and Vergil: *De Rerum Morte*,” compares Lucretius’ plague to the Noric cattle plague in the *Georgics* and concludes that Vergil is deliberately breaking with Lucretius’ views on Epicurean doctrine at this point in the poem. Paper 4, “An Examination of Lucretius’ Use of Speech and Song,” argues that Lucretius makes a deliberate distinction between song and speech in his verses to tell his audience when he is dealing with certain versus uncertain principles. Paper 5, “Woven Alliteration in Lucretius’ *De Rerum* *Natura*,” looks at the relationship in the *DRN* between weaving and alliteration to argue for a new aesthetic interpretation of Lucretius’ use of repetitive sound, in contrast to prior scholars’ arguments for didactic, formulaic, and elemental use of repetitive hexameters. Paper 6, “Animals and the Lucretian Ideal,” suggests that Lucretius’s use of animal imagery in bucolic scenes is not just epic convention but that these vignettes of humans and animals interacting can be understood as a Lucretian model for human behavior.

Abstracts

Abstract #1

Shattering *Corpora*, Shattering Bodies: Lucretian Echoes in Lucan, Ovid and Seneca

Recent scholarship on Imperial Latin epic has turned its attention to violence and the mutilation of the human form. Most (1992) outlines three avenues of inquiry that inform this particularly first-century phenomenon: history, philosophy and rhetorical training. Poets respond to the aesthetic preferences of their day through interactions with the amphitheater, Stoic philosophy and rhetorical flourish. Bartsch (1997) reads the violence of Lucan’s *Bellum Civile* as a manifestation of ideological concerns, which gruesomely play themselves out on Roman soldiers’ bodies. The fragmentation of citizen bodies, and the *Bellum Civile*’s unique, disjointed syntactical structures reflect the dissolution of the Roman state at large.

This paper asks: what poetic model do Imperial epicists consult when they set about writing their scenes of dismemberment and bodily trauma? I suggest that Lucretius’ *DRN* 3—in its scientific fascination with the human body—offers later writers a poetic framework within which to paint violent scenes of death. Ovid and Seneca’s Hippolytus scenes (*Met.* 15.524-9 & *Ph.* 1093-1103), I argue, look back to Lucretius’ scene of dismemberment at *DRN* 3.640-56. Lucan, too, borrows language from Lucretius for his scenes of the battle of Massilia and Pompey’s decapitation (*BC* 3.509-762 & 8.663-91). Lucretius’ thought experiment systematically removes a man’s arms, legs and head in order to demonstrate the poet’s conclusion that the *anima* is mortal. The liminal spaces opened up by the Lucretian *pes* twitching on the ground, or the moribund *caput* that maintains its vital features, offer the Imperial poets macabre images within which to expand and innovate for their own poetic ends. In a sense, then, Lucretius’ didactic thought experiment of battle-field amputation represents to later authors a “textbook scenario” of dismemberment. Through verbal parallels and similar scene-construction, this paper demonstrates Imperial authors’ familiarity with their Lucretian model. The figurative space between later authors and the Lucretian original suggests an intertextual relationship that offers insight to each author’s “reading” of the human body.

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Abstract #2

The Dissolution of Civilization in Lucretius and its Subsequent Augustan Renewal

Lucretius illustrates the opportunities for society to fall into chaos and strife in the *De rerum natura*, and he argues that these problems are brought about by not following his and Epicurus’ teachings. He gives many examples of the horrible things society can inflict upon itself, especially from the fear of death and superstition (*religio*). Augustan poets such as Vergil and Horace depict a more ordered and optimistic universe, although they take refuge in and celebrate traditional morals including the ancient *religio*. The kingdoms of Latinus and Evander in *Aeneid* 7 and 8 serve as good examples of a well-run and functional state, and Horace puts forth the “ship of state” analogy in *Carm.* 1.14. Late in Lucretius’ poem, he gives a brief sketch of a ship tossed about by wind (4.901-6), which I argue can be seen as a physical representation of the “ship of state” later illustrated by Horace in *Carm.* 1.14. I also examine passages which attest to Lucretius’ skeptical view of politics in general, such as his portrayal of Sisyphus as a corrupt politician seeking honors (3.996-9).

While the Rome of Lucretius’ time was plunged into chaos and civil strife, and he deconstructs this “ship of state,” Vergil and Horace look to Augustus as the leader of a renewed state with its former vigor restored. Aeneas’ shield, which shows Augustus leading his people into battle with his fleet, accompanied by national gods (*Aen*. 8.675-9), also demonstrates the importance of *religio* for proto- and contemporary Romans alike. Horace is more ambivalent and unsure about the nature of civilization, as he portrays the “ship of state” as broken and in trouble on the sea (cf. *Carm*. 1.14). Elsewhere in his poetry the ships are in trouble (cf. *Carm*. 1.14, 2.16; *Epist*. 1.11). Although the ship may have been broken, Horace seems hopeful that it will once again sail, for “new waves” (*novi fluctus*, *Carm*. 1.14.2) are what bring it back into the sea – these new waves can symbolize Augustus and his reforms.

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Abstract #3

Lucretius and Vergil: *De Rerum Morte*

The main focus of this paper will be the interplay between Lucretius’ description of the plague at Athens in *De Rerum Natura* 6.1090-1286 and Virgil’s Noric cattle plague in *Georgics* 3.478-566. Some scholars such as W.Y. Sellar (1965: 199) maintain that the influence Lucretius worked upon Virgil was invasive and wide-spread. Other scholars, such as R.F. Thomas (1988: 4), have chosen to downplay Lucretius’ influence upon the *Georgics*, arguing that the *Georgics*’ debt to Lucretius is more formal and trite. Despite Thomas’ inclination to minimize the Lucretian impact on the *Georgics*, he nevertheless admits that there is one notable exception. This exception is the Noric cattle plague in *Georgics* 3.478-566, which is modeled directly on Lucretius’ adaptation of the Thucydidean original.

Before a comparison of Lucretius and Virgil is made, we will look briefly at the Thucydidean original in order to establish a model for comparison. It has been noted by scholars such as C. Bailey, H.S. Commager, and D.F. Bright (1947; 1957: 108; 1971: 609) that Lucretius’ plague differs starkly from Thucydides. Thus, by understanding the significance of Lucretius’ alterations to Thucydides, when we do contrast Virgil and Lucretius, we will be able to apply the same interpretive scheme. Through this comparison I will show that Virgil’s and Lucretius’ plagues seem to complement, but yet be at odds with one another. While Lucretius evokes psychological horror in his readers, he certainly does not invite them to sympathize with the victims. Virgil by contrast encourages his listener to pity the sufferers at every turn.

By application of the established interpretive scheme I will show that Virgil purposefully shuns accepting whole-heartedly Lucretius’ world-view. I will argue that the first big step towards a break with the Lucretian and Epicurean doctrine comes in Virgil’s Noric cattle plague. Although Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura* heavily influenced Virgil's *Georgics*—on more than a superficial, formal level—Virgil purposefully diverts from Lucretius. He does this in order to maintain a world-view which challenges Lucretius’ idealization of a life that is able to be entirely removed from *metus et cura.* This diversion is most readily observed in, on the one hand, the differences in structural placement of the two plagues, and, on the other, in the depth of narratorial sympathy and the level of subjectivity used in the description of the symptoms and victims of the plague.

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Abstract #4

An Examination of Lucretius’ Use of Speech and Song

Lucretian scholarship has not yet satisfactorily grasped the poet’s distinction between speech and song*.* It is clear that throughout his *De Rerum Natura* Lucretius chooses to ascribe the same verb, *cano*, to his poets, while taking verbs of speech, such as *dico*, for himself. Lydia Lenaghan touches briefly on this relationship, though her own analysis is incomplete, and expressed as an afterthought to her primary arguments (1967). Aside from this brief mention, scholars have seemingly glossed over both this and the next logical question – why does Lucretius make this distinction? Significant to answering that question is the fact that Lucretius thrice mentions the phrase *Graium poetae cecinere*: first while discussing the *pompa* of Magna Mater (2.600-3), next following a brief discussion of the myth of Phaethon (5.405-6), and last during his discussion of the propensity of birds to flock near the temple of Pallas Tritonis in Athens (6.640-7). Each episode is similarly followed by the same statement – that those who believe these poets are “far removed from true reason.”

This paper examines such usages and argues that Lucretius’ continued distinction between song and speech is indicative of the line he draws between certainty and uncertainty. In speaking, he deals only in sound reason and draws certain conclusions. Song, meanwhile, from most poets lends itself to uncertainty, and, when conclusions are drawn, they are prone to being far removed from reason. Furthermore, this paper will argue that Lucretius’ meaning in repeating that phrase – Graium poetae cecinere – is not only to discount the faulty reasoning of Greek poets, who are themselves imparting false reason to their audiences, but to rework the nature of the poetic paradigm to deal in sound reason rather than in *religio*. This new paradigm in which Lucretius dresses himself is certainly evident, although it seems one aspect of his writing which his imitators neglect.

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Abstract #5

Woven Alliteration in Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura*

In this essay I seek to demonstrate an overt connection between complex alliteration and Lucretius’ weaving vocabulary. Many passages in the *De Rerum Natura* are either introduced or loaded with the common Latin vocabulary of weaving (*exordia*, *implico*, *necto*, *radius*, *texo*/*textura*, etc.) and these passages also contain veiled alliteration in chiastic and interlocked patterns that imitate the sense of the verses. I analyze five passages from the *De Rerum Natura*, two from the *Aeneid*, and one from the *Metamorphoses* as evidence for a subtle tradition initiated by the time of Lucretius.

I follow the methodology of Kenneth Burke’s *On Musicality in Verse*, where he notes similar interlocked and chiastic (as well as other more complex structures that have no place in Latin verse) in the work of Coleridge. While this “methodology” is largely by sight and sound, it nonetheless appears sound when applied to the *De Rerum Natura* and subsequent works (Vergil’s *Georgics* and *Aeneid*, and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*) that show evidence of reception.

This paper engages a limited but important scholarly discourse concerning the Lucretian poetics, specifically his prolific alliteration. Previous authors have advocated didactic (Deutsch 1939), elemental (Friedländer 1941; Snyder 1980), and formulaic (Ingalls 1971) reasons for Lucretius’ repetitious hexameters, I contribute a strictly aesthetic interpretation, which partially explains Lucretius’ penchant for alliterative expression. My thesis also expands upon the excellent work of Snyder 1981 and 1983, who has convincingly demonstrated Lucretius’ reliance on the vocabulary of weaving. Through the lens of Burke’s *On Musicality in Verse*, I demonstrate that Lucretius has proven himself once again to be a poet of the first degree: worthy of praise from Cicero and emulation by Vergil.

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Abstract #6

Animals as the Lucretian Ideal

Animals play a vital role in Lucretius’ description of the nature of the universe. The imagery of various species and the philosophical impacts of their presence in *DRN* has received much attention in recent years, especially since the reevaluation of the works of Empedocles (Campbell, 2008). In light of these new associations a closer study of animals as models for man is warranted.

 It has been suggested that animals, as they are depicted in Lucretius, can be compared directly to the Epicurean gods. This paper builds on the idea that Lucretius uses constant comparisons to the animal kingdom to illustrate his points often in bucolic scenes to provide a model for mankind to follow. He also employs animals to confront rival philosophies. Animals, especially domesticated ones seem to be fixed in the second stage of development that Lucretius outlines for human evolution. This stage represents the closest possible comparison to the mythical Golden Age of past writers (Blickman, 1989). By examining several instances of animal and human interaction it becomes clear that Lucretius’ use of animals goes far beyond mere lyric or epic similes. Lucretius seems to have held a particular admiration for animals. This becomes apparent when one compares Lucretius’ examples of animal life with the peaceful existence of the Epicurean gods. Close readings and analysis of select passages illustrate the layers of meaning that Lucretius attributes to the animal kingdom and their importance to understanding Epicurean philosophy.

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