Epicurean Intertextuality in Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*

This paper seeks to further explicate the relationships between the exposition of core Epicurean doctrines in Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* and those same doctrines within the three letters of Epicurus preserved by Diogenes Laertius, that is, the letters to Menoeceus, Pythocles, and Herodotus, by drawing heavily on the methodology developed by Stephen Hinds (1998). Scholarship has long established Lucretius' propensity to use wordplay and anagrams in an effort to model Epicurean atomic theory within the poem itself, most notably in the interplay between the words *mater*, *materies*, and *terra* (Snyder 1980, Volk 2002). Furthermore, there have been a number of examinations of the ways in which Lucretius utilizes Greek vocabulary within *De Rerum Natura* and adapts it for his Roman audience (Sedley 1999, and more recently, Taylor 2020). Despite these demonstrations of Lucretius' careful attention to language, less attention has been paid to the ways in which his Latin vocabulary coheres with and, in fact, imitates the phraseology developed by Epicurus in his letters.

In beginning Book 3 of *De Rerum Natura* with a eulogizing passage about Epicurus himself, Lucretius makes clear that he intends to track a similar course in laying out the principles of Epicurean philosophy. Appropriately, near the close of Books 3, he reminds us of the Epicurean attitude toward death, that, "*Multo igitur mortem minus ad nos esse putandumst,*" "One must think, therefore, that death is much less to us." (*DRN* 3.926) Not only is this consistent with Epicurean doctrine, but it is a near perfect Latin imitation of Epicurus' own Greek words in his *Letter to Menoeceus*: "Συνέθιζε δὲ ἐν τῷ νομίζειν μηδὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς εἶναι τὸν θάνατον," "Grow accustomed to thinking that death is nothing to us." (*Letter to Menoeceus* 124.6)

I argue, based on this and other similar intertexts, that Lucretius deliberately imitates the language of Epicurus for two significant purposes. The first is to clearly reflect Epicurean principles in Latin, despite, as Lucretius puts it, the "poverty of the language," (*DRN* 1.139) and the second is to contrast the clarity and originality of those principles with those of previous philosophers whom Lucretius refutes, such as Heraclitus and Anaxagoras. As a consequence, a reader who is unversed in Epicurean doctrine would be able to more easily digest the philosophical program, while at the same time, a reader who is well-versed in Epicureanism would be able to identify the particular aphorisms of Epicurus and the care which went into keeping them intact, despite the act of translation.

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