

Lucretian Echoes in Claudian's *In Rufinum*

This paper examines Claudian's dynamic recycling of Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* to enrich his praise of Stilicho and his vilification of Rufinus in the remarkable invective poem *In Rufinum*.

Although critics have elucidated Claudian's reuse of Vergil, Ovid, and Lucan for his damning portrait of Rufinus (Bruère 1964; Ware 2012, 207-20; Bureau 2016; Coombe 2018, 33-70), the poet's engagement with other epic predecessors remains a desideratum. I seek to address the issue by analyzing Claudian's appropriation of Lucretius, whose presence in the *In Rufinum* has gone largely unnoticed, despite the fact that Claudian begins the poem with a meditation on the legitimacy of Epicureanism (*Ruf.* 1.1-23).

Claudian's praise of Stilicho at 1.273-96 clearly makes use of Lucretian material. In fact, the whole passage deftly reworks the beginning of Book 5 of the *De Rerum Natura*. For example, Claudian introduces his panegyric with the words *qua dignum te laude feram, qui paene ruenti / lapsuroque tuos umeros obieceris orbi?* (*Ruf.* 1.273-4). This question recalls the opening of Lucretius' laudatory remarks on Epicurus at the outset of his fifth book (*DRN* 5.1-2): *quis potis est dignum pollenti pectore carmen / condere pro rerum maiestate hisque repertis?* Claudian then claims that Stilicho's opposition to Rufinus renders him greater than Hercules (*taceat superata vetustas, / Herculeos conferre tuis iam desinat actus*, *Ruf.* 1.283-4), a feature of his text reminiscent of Lucretius' assertion that Epicurus is superior to Hercules (*Herculis antistare autem si facta putabis, / longius a vera multo ratione ferere*, *DRN* 5.22-3). Moreover, Claudian's catalog of Hercules' victories—over the Nemean lion, Arcadian boar, Cretan bull, Lernaean Hydra, and Geryon—repeats Lucretius' catalog of Hercules' labors in the exact same

order (see Levy 1971, 82). By evoking Lucretius' memorable panegyric of Epicurus, Claudian enhances his heroization of Stilicho. Indeed, in the passage evoked by Claudian Lucretius explicitly claims divinity for Epicurus (*deus ille fuit*, DRN 5.8). Claudian's allusive gestures infuse his praise of Stilicho with hints of deification, thus picking up a theme introduced in the preface to Book 1 where Claudian likens Stilicho to Apollo (1.pr.15-18).

In addition to repurposing Lucretian material to amplify his depiction of Stilicho's heroics, Claudian also turns to Lucretius to enrich his vilification of Rufinus. A good example of this occurs during Claudian's account of the siege of Constantinople. As the city is thrown into turmoil, Rufinus becomes a sadistic spectator, gazing down from the walls and taking pleasure in the pain inflicted on the city's inhabitants (*Ruf.* 2.61-3, 68-70): *obsessa tamen ille ferus laetatur in urbe / exultatque malis summaeque ex culmine turris / impia vicini cernit spectacula campi...immensa voluptas / et risus plerumque subit; dolor afficit unus, / quod feriat non ipse manu*. This recalls Lucretius' famous image of the Epicurean gazing down upon people in trouble (DRN 2.1-14), a passage Claudian's text shares a number of verbal parallels with (cf. *spectare*, DRN 2.2; *iucunda voluptas*, DRN 2.3; *per campos*, DRN 2.6). In Lucretius, the person armed with Epicureanism experiences pleasure while viewing others' pain, not because this is a joyful experience per se, but because it is joyous to be free from the pain one sees afflicting others (*non quia vexari quemquamst iucunda voluptas, / sed quibus ipse malis careas quia cernere suavest*, DRN 2.3-4). Claudian's evocation of Lucretius here is contrastive. On the one hand, Rufinus experiences "measureless joy" (*immensa voluptas*) while watching others in distress. On the other hand, Rufinus feels pain (*dolor afficit*) because he is not taking part in the fighting. This runs counter to the Lucretian ideal according to which one feels pleasure at *not*

taking part in warfare (*suave etiam belli certamina magna tueri / per campos instructa tua sine parte pericli*, DRN 2.5-6).

In sum, I aim to deepen our appreciation of Claudian's *In Rufinum* by examining his allusions to the *De Rerum Natura* in order to present Stilicho as a savior on par with Lucretius' divine hero Epicurus and to vilify Rufinus as a monstrous and power-hungry sadist.

Works Cited

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