

Animal Didacticism: Ovid's Allusions to Lucretius

This paper shows how Ovid in his *Ars Amatoria* alludes to Lucretius' animal tropes in order to support the didacticism of his poetry. Although Ovid's intertextual games have frequently been studied, scholars have tended to see Ovid's purpose as lighthearted, parodying his objects and exposing his own triviality (Kenney 1958, Steudel 1992, Miller 1997). In *Ars Amatoria*, which combines elegiac and didactic poetry, the collision of genres undermines the seriousness of both and some scholars have hesitated to classify Ovid's work as didactic because of its levity (Wright 1984, Dazell 1996). It recently has been argued that comedy and parody do not exclude the *Ars Amatoria* from didactic genre (Volk 2002). As Volk points out, the *Ars* shares several crucial elements with other recognized didactic poetry, which include explicit didactic intent and the acknowledged teacher-student relationship. Building on this approach, I argue that the *Ars* highlights Ovid's didactic intent through sophisticated allusions to Lucretius' animal metaphors. When Ovid draws upon Lucretian characterizations of animals in creating his own similes, he produces an intertextual dynamic that supports and furthers his didactic purpose.

Animals, for both Lucretius and Ovid, are useful as didactic examples because they have perceivable behavior and relatively similar tendencies to humans, as opposed to other natural phenomena. It is critical to the success of the poems as teaching tools to include examples that are readily understandable. The innumerable variety of animal species in the observable world provides Lucretius a compelling analogy to the likewise various types of atoms that exist (2.342-351). Ovid recognizes the effectiveness of this metaphor and applies it to his own setting as he describes the diversity of girls at Rome

(1.57-59). In providing the original metaphor of animal genera, Ovid highlights the range of female types. But by adding the Lucretian metaphor of atoms, Ovid gives a second example that emphasizes, and perhaps even surpasses, the first in its illustration of variety. The effect is memorable and potent. The student thus comprehends more fully Ovid's lesson that there are many types of girls at Rome.

Ovid also references Lucretius to support the validity of his didactic argument. Coupling animals are described by Lucretius to prove that both men and women experience sexual desire and pleasure (4.1192-1208). He says that animals, and therefore humans, would not bind themselves to one another unless they shared *mutua gaudia*. When Ovid references the Lucretian passage of copulating animals (2.481-488), the reader is reminded of Lucretius' proof that women share common delights with their partners in sex. As a result, when Ovid reasons his audience should use sex to soften female minds, the advice comes with the pledge that women will experience sex pleurably. This strengthens the validity of Ovid's argument and assures the reader's success if he attempts Ovid's advice. This sequence of metaphor and reference appears regularly throughout *Ars Amatoria*, each one reinforcing the knowledge Ovid is trying to impart on his reader. By acknowledging *Ars Amatoria*'s dialogue with Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*, it becomes clear how the latter contributes to the teachings of its successor, while the latter in turn becomes richer in explanation and understanding.

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