

L'Anti-Ennius chez Lucrèce: Satire and Literary Polemic in De Rerum Natura

Polemic refutations of great authors are amply attested in *De Rerum Natura*, so amply in fact that Lucretius at times seems to be contradicting even his own teachings (the latter point is the *L'Antilucrèce chez Lucrèce* argument from which this paper borrows its title). This paper re-examines Lucretius' engagement with a particularly prominent predecessor: the epic and dramatic poet Ennius. First, I argue that Lucretius' oft-noted attacks on Ennius are written in the satiric mode, that is, in a manner that recalls the personal invective of Roman satire; not coincidentally, Ennius was one of this genre's first originators. Second, I show that satiric allusions to Ennius' works occur even more frequently—and are therefore far more significant to the poetics of *DRN*—than has been recognized (see recently also Nethercut 2014).

Two famous programmatic moments in *De Rerum Natura* take their starting point from Ennius. First, Lucretius presents his readers with an anti-religious manifesto that condemns the perverted sacrifice of Iphigenia/Iphianassa as seen in the version staged by Ennius (compare, e.g., *aram / Iphianassai turparunt sanguine foede*, Lucr. 1.84–85 to *aram sanguine turpari*, Enn. *Scaenica* 94 J.; cf. Harrison 2002). Second, we read of Ennius' dream that the spirit of Homer now resides in his body, an idea that leads Lucretius to reject the concept of a transmigration of souls as expressed, again, specifically by Ennius (*Ennius ut noster cecinit*, Lucr. 1.102–135).

I posit that these centrally placed metapoetic attacks are indebted to the genre of satire. Lucretius' reliance on the language of satiric diatribe has long been recognized (Kenney 1971: 11–20). Furthermore, *DRN* has been described as “represent[ing] itself as the culmination not just of *one* poetic tradition but of *all* poetic traditions” (Gale 2007: 74). It would therefore only be logical for Lucretius to try and outdo Ennius on his own turf of satire (cf. Kenney 1970). But perhaps the best “proof” that Lucretius' attack is satirical in a generic

sense comes from the later Roman satirists, who model their own spoofs of Ennius closely on Lucretius’—especially Persius’ description of Ennius as “waking up from snoring” (*destertuit*) about past lives (Pers. 6.9–11, cf. also Pers. Prol. 1–3; Hor. *Sat.* 1.10.53–54; Prinzen 1998: 362–373).

Having thus determined Lucretius’ generic allegiances, I offer samples of many additional Ennian resonances that occur at key moments in all five books of *DRN*. Examples include Lucretius’ construction of Epicurus the philosopher (*Graius homo*, Lucr. 1.66) as a deliberate foil to the hero of book six of Ennius’ *Annales*, Pyrrhus (*Graio patre Graius homo, rex*, Enn. *Ann.* 165 Sk). Later, Lucretius dismisses the Trojan War as a mere *eventum* inferior to the *coniuncta* that are his own subject matter. Here, Lucretius’ description of the Trojan Horse’s entry into the city relies heavily on a similar scene in Ennius’ *Alexander* (*Pergama partu*, Lucr. 1.476 = *partu ... perdat Pergama*, Enn. *Scaenica* 76 J.). Furthermore, when Lucretius earlier spoke of Ennius’ fame, he echoed his predecessor’s own word choice (*per gentis Italas hominum quae clara clueret*, Lucr. 1.119; *nam populos ... Italos res atque poemata nostra cluebunt*, Enn. *Ann.* 2–3 Sk.). Two occurrences of the significant verb *cluo* now bookend his discussion of the Trojan War *qua eventum* (1.449 and 1.480).

These and other Ennian resonances adduced in the second half of my paper have so far been either overlooked or underemphasized. When taken together, they show that Lucretius’ satiric attack on Ennius is more sustained than we might have suspected. It seems, in fact, that *DRN*’s teaching quite frequently does not refute a rather generally defined “common worldview.” Instead, the poem more specifically targets “public opinion as expressed by Ennius.” It turns out, then, that what foreigners, informers, and hypocrites were to, say, Juvenal the Satirist—that is, a persistent target for multiple books of poetry—Ennius was to Lucretius, a writer in the satiric mode, if not a straightforward writer of satire.

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