

Civic Ambition and Satiric Authority in Lucilius and Lucretius

This paper examines previously unnoticed and insufficiently discussed allusions to the satires of Lucilius in Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* and argues that the speaker of *DRN* invokes Lucilius as a satiric predecessor, granting poetic and social authority to his own satiric attacks on non-Epicurean foibles. The relationship of *DRN* to Lucilius has not yet been thoroughly explored, with only tentative suggestions or passing glances in Murley, Dudley, Kenney, Brown, Reckford, Sosin, and Fowler. The fragments of Lucilius display interest in philosophic inquiry, as with the philosophers' banquet in book 28; Lucretian allusions to Lucilius—e.g., the echoes of Lucilius fr. 1.1 Charpin (*aetheris et terrae genitabilis quaerere tempus*) at *DRN* 2.1105, 2.1114–1115, and 5.443–508—pick up on this philosophic material and on Lucilian moral critique. A particularly significant and sustained allusion to Lucilius (namely fr. H.41 Charpin) comes in the Lucretian speaker's rejection of civic ambition, at *DRN* 2.5–14 (troubles at sea as a metaphor for vain political desires) and 3.995–1002 (Sisyphus allegorized).

In Lucilius, we see Romans hustling around the Forum from dawn to dusk to gain influence; in Lucretius, we see a Roman hustling all the time in the Forum in an undesirable (because anxiety-producing) and always-unsuccessful attempt to gain influence. Both passages mention the struggle for power (*certare* in Lucilius, *nixantem trudere* in *DRN*). Lucilius' speaker uses a military analogy (*pugnare; insidias facere ut si hostes sint*) that finds parallels in *DRN* both with the mythical allegory of Sisyphus and with military imagery (*uictus; imperium*). By referring to the Lucilian satire on business in the Forum—itsself an open declaration that forensic activity consists of trickery and internecine strife—Lucretius' speaker adds a “moral” concern (trickery of countrymen as if they are enemies) to his “ethical” one (politics is difficult and prevents *ataraxia*).

Even more redolent of Lucilius' Forum is the famous proem to *DRN* book 2 (lines 5–14). The ambitious wretches in each vignette hustle day and night unceasingly. The setting is Roman and civic: the Lucilian *foro* refers directly to the Roman Forum, while the Lucretian *campos*, literally the fields of battle, suggests the field of martial training at Rome, the Campus Martius. In both, the verb *certare* is a key term that summarizes the speaker's basic theme and critique. Each passage, furthermore, is rife with battle-imagery that attests to the vehemence of political contests. Both passages provide a bird's-eye perspective depicting ambitious people as ants scurrying across the field of vision, busying about their tasks; both voice a moralizing indictment of political and economic ambition. Each thus becomes a rejection of the state of statesmanship at Rome, and the speaker of each thereby separates himself from politicians jockeying for power.

Lucilius' satiric verse made ample use of philosophy, both as target and as subject matter. While *DRN* derives its philosophic *bona fides* from the ultimate credibility and clout of Epicurus and his school, by engaging with Lucilius, Lucretius' poem adopts Lucilius' poetic, satiric, and even moral legitimacy. The Lucretius-*ego* uses allusion to Lucilius in order to claim a legitimizing forebear whose development of verse satire brought *satira* in line with and in contact with didactic and epic poetry, whose critiques of Roman social dysfunction and moral degeneration could serve as models for those of *De Rerum Natura*, and whose unquestioned, high-ranking citizen status could have helped forestall Roman readers' suspicion of the Lucretian speaker's own frank, often satiric anti-establishment criticisms. In the case of the proem to the second book of *De Rerum Natura*, the apparently persistent failings of the *nobilitas* advertised by the Lucretian allusion to Lucilius fr. H.41 may justify the comparatively more extreme corrective measure that Lucretius' speaker proposes (at, e.g., 2.20–39, within the same proem): an Epicurean withdrawal from social and political activity into a modest, private, contemplative life of *ataraxia*.

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