

Comic Misunderstanding: The *Adulescens Amans* in *DRN* 4

Lucretius' use of New Comic language, themes, and stock plotlines in the diatribe against love at the end of *DRN* 4 have been well documented in commentaries (Brown 1987, Bailey 1947, Ernout and Robin 1962) and some articles (Rosivach 1980, Taylor 2016). Overlooked, however, has been the effect of these allusions. Lucretius' engagement with New Comedy makes a substantial contribution to his argument against romantic relationships.

I demonstrate that Lucretius incorporates the stock character of the *adulescens amans* familiar from the plays of Plautus and Terence into two sections of the diatribe: 4.1121-40, where he advises his readers of the deleterious financial, social, and emotional effects of romantic relationships, and 4.1171-91, in which he warns against irrational idealization of one's beloved. I argue that, in doing so, he both provides a familiar and relatable illustration of the risks of romantic relationships and encourages his readers to interpret the *adulescens* as afflicted with mistaken and unrealistic expectations of the *meretrix*. These two passages both educate Lucretius' contemporary reader about the hazards of love and offer clues to the expected theatrical competence of his students.

4.1121-40 recalls the diction and content of *adulescentes*' laments about obstacles encountered in relationships with *meretrices*. Phrases such as *labitur res* (1124) and *bene parta patrum* closely resemble specific utterances of New Comic characters (Pl. *Trin.* 243, 347; Ter. *Phorm.* 788), and Lucretius brackets the section with the verb *pereo* (1121, 1136), which in the first-person singular is often wailed in love-related self-pity by the unhappy *adulescens*: *perii!* (Pl. *Bacc.* 625-7, *Poen.* 364, *Pseud.* 45; Ter. *An.* 346, *Hec.* 319). In describing expensive presents that the lover gives his beloved (1124-32) and jealousy resulting from her behavior (1137-40), Lucretius alludes to the *adulescens*' complaints about greedy *meretrices* (Pl. *Truc.* 40-50; Ter.

Hau. 211-14) and rivals for their affection (*Pl. As.* 768-9, 792). While the *adulescens* typically attributes his misery to the peripheral problems surrounding his affair, such as a lack of money or a rival, Lucretius suggests that these negative feelings result from the affair itself and invites a reassessment of the validity of the *adulescens*' behavior.

At 4.1177, Lucretius invokes the *exclusus amator*, a character most familiar from love elegy but shown by Copley (1956) to be equally the product of comedy (cf. *Pl. Curc.* 1-95, *Ter. Eu.* 46-9), and his description of the beloved's efforts to conceal unattractive features "behind the scenes of her life" (*vitae post scaenia*, 1186) explicitly relates the character to a New Comic context. Following Nussbaum's assertion (1994) that Lucretius objects not to love *per se* but to unrealistic expectations of the beloved, I argue that Lucretius draws a comparison between the irrational idealization of the beloved and the *adulescens*' typical misrepresentation of his relationship with the *meretrix* as based in romance rather than in economic exchange (Zagagi 1980, Davidson 1997, Dutsch 2008). Just as the lover who attributes to his beloved "more than is right for a mortal" (*plus ... quam mortali concedere par est*, 1184) is bound to be disappointed when he discovers her flaws, the *adulescens* who expects genuine emotion from the *meretrix* is bound to be angry when expected to pay for her services.

I argue that Lucretius' allusions to the *adulescens amans* function analogously to the similes drawn from everyday life that he uses throughout the *DRN* to illustrate his explanations of Epicurean physics. The image of an inverted plaster mask at 4.296-301 helps readers to understand mirrors through reference to a familiar physical experience; similarly, comparisons between the foolhardy lover of the diatribe and the *adulescens* encourage Lucretius' student to concretize his warning against romantic relationships using their prior knowledge of New Comedy. The diatribe's incorporation of New Comic tropes, together with references to the

theater throughout the *DRN*, demonstrate the work's educational dynamics, implying that familiarity with contemporary drama constituted a part of the cultural competence presupposed by Lucretius and shared between himself and his anticipated readers.

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