

*Fidem dictis conradere nostris*: Persuading an Audience in *DRN* 1.398-416

About the middle of Book 1 of *De Rerum Natura*, Lucretius performs one of his characteristic apostrophes to the addressee (*DRN* 1.398-416). This paper will explore what this apostrophe, accompanied by the simile of a hunting dog, can tell us about who the poet imagines as his audience and how he envisions the process of persuasion. Lucretius reveals in his proem a desire to convince the politician Memmius of the initially repellent doctrine of Epicureanism (1.21-43). Memmius as the individual addressee is presumably a figure standing for some wider intended audience whom Lucretius wishes to persuade, but who does he imagine that wider audience to be? What does he see as the reader's role and the author's in the process of persuasion, and how does he engage them as his allies in it? Scholars have often explored Lucretius' rhetoric (Classen 1968, Asmis 1983), and I argue that he himself is interested in his own process of persuasion, to which he deliberately calls the reader's attention in 1.398-416. He pictures Memmius at this point as recalcitrant and reluctant to be convinced, but assures him that nevertheless he will eventually be able to finish the argument all by himself, "per te tute ipse" (*DRN* 1.407), using the simile of a hunting dog who seeks out the hidden lairs of wild beasts. The image is directly applied to Memmius, but it also suits, perhaps better, Lucretius' broader imagined audience, who, as Mitsis 1993: 124 argues, are made the poet's allies—his faithful hounds, as it were—against the stubborn and shortsighted Memmius.

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