

Lucretian Metaphysics in Ovidian Allegory

Scholarship on Ovid's Houses of Sleep (*Met.* 11.592-649) and Fama (*Met.* 12.39-63) tends to highlight their metapoetic aspects, such as allusions to the dramatic stage (e.g., Fantham 1979 and Tissol 1997) and issues of poetic authority (e.g., Feeney 1991 and Rosati 2002). In contrast, I call attention to Ovid's incorporation of Lucretian metaphysics into these scenes, much as Hardie observes in the Narcissus episode (1988) and the speech of Pythagoras (1995). Ovid engages in a mythopoesis, and therefore a reenchantment, of Lucretius's naturalistic accounts of sleep, dreams, sound, and atomic motion.

In the House of Sleep, the sluggish god of sleep, Somnus, and the mobile god of dreams, Morpheus, can be understood as Ovid's mythologizing of Lucretius's treatment of sleep and dreams respectively. Ovid's inspiration for the lethargic Somnus can be found in the explanation of sleep in *DRN* 4, rather than in other epic poetry, in which gods of sleep are not lacking in energy. Ovid describes Somnus as a homebody afflicted with sleepiness, using Lucretian concepts and language. For example, Somnus has trouble opening his eyes and propping himself up on an elbow (11.618-21). Ovid twice uses the words *languor* and *solutus* to describe Somnus's exhausted body (11.612, 11.648). Like Ovid, Lucretius refers to an inability to prop up one's eyelids and limbs (4.950-53). In these lines, he uses *languescere* and *resolvere*, cognates to Ovid's phraseology. Ovid's active dreams can also be traced back to *DRN* 4. Ovid's dreams, or *simulacra* (11.628), are summoned to take on different appearances (11.613-15, 11.633-35). The lead dream, Morpheus, is a traveling artist skilled in imitating others' expressions and gestures (11.36). Like Ovid, Lucretius not only imagines numerous *simulacra* waiting to be summoned (4.778-785), he also anthropomorphizes dreams and compares them

to supple and well-trained performers (4.788-93). Additionally, Ovid's juxtaposition of Somnus and Morpheus maps onto Lucretius's contrasts between the stillness of the body and the motion of the mind during sleep (3.112-116, 4.453-461).

Much like the dreams in the House of Sleep, the voices in the House of Fama are also characterized by movement. These voices, too, seem inspired by a discussion in *DRN* 4, though not of dreams but of sound transmission. As Kelly (2014) notes, both Ovidian and Lucretian voices pass through *foramina* ("openings;" *Met.* 12.44, *DRN* 4.599) in walls and penetrate ears (*Met.* 12.42, *DRN* 4.613). Words in the House are *confusa* ("jumbled;" 12.55); Lucretius similarly describes the effects of distance on words using *confusus* and *confundere* (4.558-562). Ovid's voices are also akin to Lucretian atoms as described in *DRN* 2; both are imagined as moving through structures and are anthropomorphized using political language.

Like Hardie (2012, 152), I posit a difference between the active voices in the House of Fama and the inactive but all-seeing Fama herself. If Ovid is drawing on Lucretian metaphysics, and the voices in the House of Fama correspond to Lucretian atoms, then we might expect the onlooker Fama to correspond to Lucretius's Epicurean philosopher. The evidence bears this out. Ovid's Fama stakes out an elevated position between the *confinia mundi* (12.40); Lucretius's Epicurus, beyond the *moenia mundi* (1.73). Ovid's Fama, to whom several sight-related verbs are applied, is a stationary observer of motion below; so is the Epicurean philosopher of the proem to *DRN* 2. Most significantly, Ovid's Fama sees all that happens in the entire world (12.62-63) paralleling Lucretius's own boasts (3.17); *videre*, *res*, *gerere*, and *totum* appear in both sentences.

Ovid's mythopoesis contradicts Lucretius in one particular. Whereas Lucretius treats fama as a subordinate of the oppressive Religio, Epicurus's opponent (1.68), Ovid

rehabilitates Fama by treating her as an Epicurean. But if I might conclude by indulging in a bit of metapoetic analysis of my own, this is exactly what one might expect from the creator of the mythological and yet largely Epicurean universe of the *Met*. For the most part, Ovid populates books 11 and 12 of the poem with strikingly faithful anthropomorphizations of Lucretian accounts of stillness and motion.

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