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Author

Saxon, Houston Cole

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Lucretian Anxiety

By

HOUSTON COLE SAXON
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Approved:

Ralph Hexter, Chair

John Rundin

Carey Seal

Committee in Charge

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Lucretian Anxiety; Or the Odd Epicurean

Yet often when the woman heard his foot
Return from pacings in the field, and ran
To greet him with a kiss, the master took
Small notice, or austere, for—his mind
Half buried in some weightier argument,
Or fancy-borne perhaps upon the rise
And long roll of the Hexameter—he past
To turn and ponder those three hundred scrolls
Left by the Teacher, whom he held divine. “Lucretius”, Tennyson

Introduction

In Tennyson’s introduction to his dramatic monologue about Lucretius these lines appear. The marked contrast between philosophy (“weightier argument”) and poetry (“long roll of the Hexameter”) carries with it a long tradition of bifurcating the poetic project of Lucretius. There were two of him, this idea goes, the devoted Epicurean who contrived to fit the atomist theory to verse, and the poet who wrote a grand invocation to Venus. Perhaps the best example of this is Patin’s work from the 1800’s *Anti-Lucrece chez Lucrece*.¹ In fact, Patin posited that such was the wide distinction between these two aspects of Lucretius a second author of the poetic sections seemed likely. Although today this view is resoundingly rejected, it nonetheless intimates at a conflict in the poem.

Indeed, this conflict in the poem underscores a deeper historical irony that the fullest account of Epicurean philosophy comes down to us from the hands of a Roman poet. The irony of this situation comes from the well-known contempt and hostility that Epicurus in particular and later Epicureans in general treated the poetic art. Lucretius then from the start placed himself in a very precarious situation by trying to justify the ways of Epicurus to man

¹ Patin, M. *Etudes sur la poesie latine*. Paris. 1868.

through a method the Founder despised. In setting this task for himself, it left Lucretius without a working model in his own philosophical tradition. He had to look elsewhere for a model for didactic verse or what may be called philosophic epic. This model he found in the Pre-Socratic philosopher Empedocles. The influence of Empedocles gave Lucretius both a form and a poetic language to discuss such “weighty arguments” as the swerve of the atoms and the nature of perception.

Yet choosing Empedocles for his model further created more tension for Lucretius as not only was Empedocles a philosopher the Epicureans criticised for his erroneous doctrines, but in several instances throughout the poem the influence of Empedocles threatens to overtake the purported Epicureanism Lucretius wished to promulgate. This essay will argue that far from being a faithful, or servile, follower of the Epicurean doctrine Lucretius was far more amenable to his Greek forbearers, particularly Empedocles. I will demonstrate that Lucretius was more open to other philosophical ideas outside Epicurus by first examining the relevant sections of Epicurus’ discussions of poetry as well as the discussions of Philodemus (an Epicurean contemporary of Lucretius). This demonstration will reveal a consistent mistrust on the part of the Epicureans of poetry and its ability to convey the truth thereby indicating that no doctrinal alteration regarding the inadequacy of poetry occurred from the time of Epicurus to Lucretius’ own day. I will then examine Lucretius’ engagement with Empedocles showing that Empedocles’ influence acts as a destabilising force against the purported Epicureanism of the poem. I will demonstrate the destabilising element of his influence in examining Lucretius’ invocation to Venus and the tradition behind it as well as the place of Empedocles in Lucretius’ critique of Pre-Socratic philosophers.

1. Epicurean Poetic Theory

An examination of Epicurean philosophers’ opinions concerning the uses of poetry will reveal the exceptional position Lucretius occupied. Furthermore, what this examination

will reveal is the rather static nature of the Epicurean tradition in contrast to other Classical philosophical traditions. Unlike, for example, Plato's Academy, in which Plato's immediate successor, Speusippus, denied the existence of the Forms, an essential doctrine of Platonism, radical changes in the tenets of Epicureanism were quite rare. Indeed, whenever a philosopher in the Epicurean school attempted to introduce a doctrinal innovation, it would be not through logic or argument, but by using the words of the Founder to show that in fact no innovation was happening. Instead, it was a better understanding of Epicurus' words. What this fact indicates is that Epicureanism was a very conservative philosophical movement.

This section will examine the opinions of two Epicurean philosophers concerning poetry as well as reports from other philosophers about the opinions of the Epicureans. First is of course the Founder himself, Epicurus. Given Lucretius' appeals to him as well as his grand claim that he was in fact a god (*ille, ille deus fuit* 5.8) it is important to examine what Epicurus said about when, if ever, poetry may be used. Yet given the scanty remains of Epicurus' own writings, we must look to reports from other ancient authors who quoted from Epicurus or discussed his views about poetry, chief among them Plutarch, Diogenes Laertius, Cicero, Sextus Empiricus, and the allegorist Heraclitus.

The second philosopher is Philodemus. He is a very suitable choice for two reasons. First, he was roughly a contemporary of Lucretius as well as being known to other famous Roman intellectuals. Second, he also wrote poems and in this way was a potential poetic link in the tradition that leads to Lucretius; however as will be seen, he wrote his epigrams with very different aesthetic purposes than Lucretius.

A. Epicurus

Epicurus established his school in the Garden, as it was called. In many ways it was quite a revolutionary group in comparison to the other Greek philosophical schools: the social

class of the adherent was of no consequence, both slaves and women were allowed to join his school. According to tradition, he wrote around three hundred works, but precious little of that survives today. Furthermore, he seems not to have written a book specifically outlining his views on poetry. As a result of these two facts, what his ideas were about poetry must be gleaned from the testimony of other ancient writers as well as quotations other writers preserve. Fortunately for us, there is sufficient evidence to suggest what it was that Epicurus thought about poetry. He was, for example, often associated with Plato in his opposition to poetry as Athenaeus says, “ἀλλ’ ὅμως τοιαῦτα γράφοντες τὸν Ὅμηρον ἐκβάλλουσι τῶν πόλεων” (but like such grammarians [Epicurus and Plato] throw out Homer from the city).²

Yet, a closer examination does reveal a more nuanced picture than what the quotation initially suggests about Epicurus’ idea. As in Plutarch’s work Ὅτι οὐδὲ ἡδέως ζῆν ἔστιν κατ’ Ἐπίκουρον, *That There is No Pleasant Life with Epicurus*, he elucidated the apparent distinction that lies at the heart of Epicurean poetic theory. Although, as the title indicates, Plutarch’s work is a critique of Epicurean lifestyle, it nonetheless does present a sketch of Epicurus’ idea that is consistent with later Epicureans’ opinions. Plutarch began his examination of the philosophy by quoting some of the insults Epicurus was alleged to have uttered against Homer, (ποιητική τύρβη, poetic confusion, μωρολόγημα, foolish statements).³ That the Epicurean criticism of poetry is often directed at Homer suggests that, given Homer’s role in Greek education, his critique of poets was subordinate to his mistrust of traditional education. Indeed, as Plutarch states, such was Epicurus’ disdain for traditional education that he is said to have told one Pythocles, “ὅπως οὐ ζηλώσει τὴν ἐλευθέριον καλουμένην παιδείαν”, “so that you do not set your heart on so-called liberal education.”⁴

² Athenaeus. *Deipnosophistae*. 5.187c. All translations mine unless otherwise noted.

³ Plutarch. Ὅτι οὐδὲ ἡδέως ζῆν ἔστιν κατ’ Ἐπίκουρον. 1087A.

⁴ Ibid. 1094D.

Furthermore, as the allegorist Heraclitus said, Epicurus wished to purify himself all at once of poetry as a destructive lure of fictions.⁵ Moreover, like Plato, as Asmis says⁶, Epicurus “believed that the whole traditional educational system, with its teaching of Homer and other poets, was a corrupting influence that prevented a person from achieving happiness.” What wonder then that he praised those who were pure (καθαρόν) of learning! Indeed, as Asmis continues, “he assured his students that it was an advantage not to be educated; and, unlike most philosophers, he welcomed the uneducated, both young and old, to his school.”⁷ That this condemnation of all poetry anterior to Epicurus also extends to subsequent poetic acts I will discuss in the section on Philodemus. For now, it is necessary to know that poetry as education was for Epicurus something dangerous and to be spurned. Yet further, Plutarch alleged that not even during symposia did Epicurus permit discussions of music and poetry. Indeed, Plutarch said that he asserted that an educated monarch should instead of listening to learned discourses about poetry hear descriptions of stratagems and foolish buffooneries (στρατηγικὰ διηγήματα καὶ φορτικὰς βωμολοχίας).⁸ For Plutarch this was an absurdity, yet it seems clear that it was part of Epicurus’ rejection of all traditional methods of learning.

For, as one may learn from a more sympathetic source to Epicurus, Diogenes Laertius, Epicurus did in fact permit some discussion of poetry. However, Diogenes’ description is not without its own ambiguity. He stated that Epicurus said, “only the wise will rightly speak concerning music and poetry” (μόνον τε τὸν σοφὸν ὀρθῶς ἂν περὶ τε μουσικῆς

⁵ Heraclitus. *Homeric Problems*. 79.

⁶ Asmis, Elizabeth. “Epicurean Poetics.” In *Philodemus and Poetry*. Ed. Dirk Obbink. Oxford: OUP. 1995. Pg. 15-34.

⁷ *Ibid.* pg. 19.

⁸ Plutarch. Ὅτι οὐδὲ ἡδέως ζῆν ἔστιν κατ’ Ἐπίκουρον. 1095C.

καὶ ποιητικῆς διαλέξεσθαι)⁹. Of course, it must be asked, who is the wise one here? Undoubtedly the only one who can be considered wise is the one educated in Epicurean philosophy. Thus, it is not simply that Epicurus banned the discussion of poetry but that the only ones who would be qualified to speak about it are those who would be properly enlightened by Epicurean truth. But the wise will only leave behind prose writings (καὶ συγγράμματα καταλείπειν).¹⁰ Indeed Diogenes quoted Epicurus as making an even stronger prohibition against the wise writing poetry than that. As he said, “but (the wise) will not write poems in reality (ποιήματα τε ἐνεργεία οὐκ ἂν ποιῆσαι).¹¹ This quotations admits to some debate. In all the manuscripts, the word reads ἐνεργεῖν, but two infinitives are incomprehensible in this construction. As such, I used the emendation of Usener (as quoted), which changes the infinitive into a dative noun. What Usener’s emendation did to change the meaning was to suggest that Epicurus’ opinion was that, even assuming the wise had the poetic ability to compose poems, he would refuse. Why precisely he will refuse, whether because it is insufficiently pleasurable or because poetry is inherently deceptive, is unclear. What is important, however, is that Epicurus seems to admit no room in the life of the wise for the composition of poetry. But Amis attempted to argue for the manuscript reading in order to show the interesting implications of following such a reading. In her idea, ἐνεργεῖν works as a “gloss on ποιῆσαι, in the sense ‘being busy at,’ or ‘making a practice of,’ or ‘practicing energetically’ - meanings primarily associated with the corresponding adjective ἐνεργός and adverb ἐνεργῶς.”¹² This reading allowed the wise to engage in poetry as a leisure

⁹ Diogenes Laertius. Βίοι καὶ γνῶμαι τῶν ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ εὐδοκμησάντων. 10.120.

¹⁰ Ibid. 10. 119.

¹¹ Ibid. 10. 121.

¹² Amis, Elizabeth. “Epicurean Poetics.” In *Philodemus and Poetry*. Ed. Dirk Obbink. Oxford: OUP. 1995. Pg. 22.

activity, but not as a professional activity and not as something about which he would expend much effort in its composition. The possibilities that later Epicureans took up this reading I will demonstrate in the next sections.

Although given the fragmentary remains of Epicurus' writings and given that he apparently never wrote a work outlining specifically his ideas concerning the use and abuse of poetry, what emerges from this survey is that Epicurus explicitly permitted no role for poetry in the education of his followers. Yet, he seems to have allowed at least a little room for the wise to read poetry provided that he did not occupy too much of his time on it.

The discrepancy between the opinions of Epicurus as outlined here and the practice of Lucretius is quite apparent. Not only, as it seems clear, would Epicurus have objected to the versification of his philosophy and one of his followers of his leaving behind a book of poetry rather than a prose explication (as the quotations from Diogenes Laertius illustrate), but also at the practical level Lucretius may be said to have violated the principle that the wise, even supposing he would engage in the poetic craft, would not spend much effort on it, as that would not contribute to his path toward happiness. This contradiction will become more apparent as we move forward in examining other relevant sources.

B. Non-Epicurean Reports about Poetry

The earlier reading that allows for the practicing Epicurean to spend some time on poetry merely as a leisure activity also seems consistent with the report from later writers who either discuss Epicureans or make use of Epicurean arguments about poetry. It is useful to examine these writers for the use they made use of Epicurean ideas well exemplified the evidence of the doctrinal consistency of Epicureanism. That there is agreement in the two examples presented here is also significant for in the case of Cicero he was critical of the philosophy, but the use of Sextus Empiricus was more sympathetic, at least to the particular

arguments that he employed, thus safeguarding against the possibility of Cicero's misrepresentation of Epicurean practice insofar as concerns the doctrine of poetry.

In Cicero's dialogue, *de finibus Bonorum et Malorum*, he critiqued Epicurus' views of education and, in the figure of Torquatus, attempted to deal with the apparent contradiction between Epicurus' rejection of poetry, as outlined above, and the interest in poetry that Torquatus, a professed follower of Epicurus, showed. His critique in fact bears many similarities to the arguments Plutarch later used as he tried to portray Epicurus as devoid of all learning when he said, "For the rest I would desire that he had been more equipped with learning (for thus, which it is necessary for you to admit, he was not sufficiently cultivated in these arts which for those who have them are called learned) or had not discouraged others from study. Although I see he did not deter you at least" (*De cetero vellem equidem aut ipse doctrinis fuisset instructor (est enim, quod tibi ita videri necesse est, non satis politus iis artibus quas qui tenent eruditi appellantur), aut ne deterrisset alios a studiis. Quamquam te quidem video minime esse deterritum*).¹³ The *studiis* in this case are things that Epicurus is said to have eschewed: poetry, geometry, music, and so forth. The purpose of this argument is two-fold. First, Cicero, by saying that Epicurus was not properly educated (*non satis politus iis artibus*), he wished to discredit Epicurean philosophy both as a rival system and as something, by being against education and political engagement, incompatible with Roman values. Second, he tried to suggest that Torquatus, by expressing an interest in these *studiis*, was disobeying his master. Torquatus' response to this critique is important. "He whom it seems to you little educated because he said these things to be no education unless it aids the cultivation of a blessed life" (*Qui quod tibi parum videtur eruditus, ea causa est quod nullam eruditionem esse duxit nisi quae beatae vitae disciplinam iuaret*).¹⁴ In other words, the rejection of those

¹³ Cicero. *De finibus Bonorum et Malorum*. 1. 26.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 1. 71-2.

studies which Cicero alleged made Epicurus uneducated were in fact undeserving of being called education since in the Epicurean system they afforded no pleasure. He goes on, “Should he have consumed his time in reading poets, as I and Triarius should do by your urging, in whom there is nothing solid or useful, and is a delight for every child” (*An ille tempus aut in poetis evolvendis, ut ego et Triarius te hortatore facimus, consumeret, in quibus nulla solida utilitas omnisque puerilis est delectatio*)?¹⁵ The study of poetry becomes then not simply useless (*nulla utilitas*), but also as an activity that brings pleasure only to children (*puerilis est delectatio*) and is therefore unsuitable for an adult to spend much time in pursuing. This argument against poetry hinges on the definition of education that was quoted earlier from Plutarch, “ὅπως οὐ ζηλώσει τὴν ἐλευθέριον καλουμένην παιδείαν”, “so that you do not set your heart on so-called liberal education.” Torquatus in fact follows Epicurus’ rejection of traditional education (*παιδεία*) in favour of those things that aid the cultivation of the blessed life (*beatae vitae disciplinam iuvaret*).

In another important example the philosopher Sextus Empiricus from the 2nd CE in his work *Against the Grammarians* (*Adversus Mathematicos*) records several arguments against poetry which he attributed to the Epicureans. Given his scepticism, the work is an onslaught against the acquisition of knowledge and learning itself, but some of the arguments will be familiar to what has been discussed previously. He cites three specific arguments which he ascribed “especially from the Epicureans” (καὶ μάλιστα τῶν Ἐπικουρείων).¹⁶ For example, although there are some good things in poetry, far more numerous are utterances corrupt and harmful for life (ἐπεὶ πολλαπλασίωνα τούτων διαστρόφως καὶ ἐπὶ λύμῃ τοῦ βίου

¹⁵ Ibid. 1. 72.

¹⁶ Sextus Empiricus. *Adversus Mathematicos*. 1. 299.

παρ' αὐτοῖς ἐξενήνεκται).¹⁷ And poets, unlike philosophers, whose chief concern is conveying truth, wish to move the soul. Because falsehood moves the soul more than truth, poets therefore use the false more than the truth (οἱ μὲν γὰρ τοῦ ἀληθοῦς στοχάζονται, οἱ δὲ ἐκ παντὸς ψυχαγωγεῖν ἐθέλουσιν, ψυχαγωγεῖ δὲ μᾶλλον τὸ ψεῦδος ἢ τὸ ἀληθές).¹⁸ But when poetic language is clear there can be some things that are profitable in them. As he says, “For first so that we agree with them [the Grammarians] not making a critique against poetic things but it is clear that whatever is found profitable for life and necessary in the poets such as the gnomic sayings and hortatory sayings, these things were clearly expressed by them” (πρῶτον μὲν γάρ, ἵνα συνδράμωμεν αὐτοῖς μηδὲν ποιητικῆς κατεϊπόντες, ἀλλ' οὖν γε ἐκεῖνο πρόδηλόν ἐστιν ὅτι ὅποσα μὲν βιωφελῆ καὶ ἀναγκαῖα εὐρίσκεται παρὰ ποιητῶν, οἷά ἐστι τὰ γνωμικὰ καὶ παραινετικά, ταῦτα σαφῶς αὐτοῖς πέφρασται).¹⁹ Indeed, as Asmis says, “The demand for clear speech, the distinction between civic and private life, the view that poetry does much harm, and, in general, the claim that learning is useless for happiness, are all fundamental tenets of Epicureanism.”²⁰

What the survey of these two writers, one critical of, the other sympathetic to, the Epicurean arguments against poetry, and, moreover, from two different times and locations, one being Greek and the other being Roman, reveals is the consistency of Epicurean doctrines as those who were not directly involved within the school understood them. Moreover, this helps to confirm that the opposition to poetry, especially as it relates to poetry's purported educative capability, was a notable doctrine familiar to other philosophers.

¹⁷ Ibid. 1. 279.

¹⁸ Ibid. 1. 296-7.

¹⁹ Ibid. 1. 278.

²⁰ Asmis, Elizabeth. “Epicurean Poetics.” In *Philodemus and Poetry*. Ed. Dirk Obbink. Oxford: OUP. 1995. Pg. 26.

We next turn to Philodemus, an important Epicurean voice who was contemporary with Lucretius himself.

C. Philodemus

The survival and recent recovery of the fragments of Philodemus is of great fortune for a clearer understanding of historical Epicureanism through the ancient world. Philodemus studied the Epicurean philosophy in Athens before moving to Rome where, according to the testimony of Cicero, he had some prominence.²¹ As a contemporary of Lucretius as well as an Epicurean who wrote verses, his opinions related to poetry and its composition are quite significant. For that reason, this section will examine his opinions about poetry and poets as they are expressed in the fragments of his works *On Piety* and *On Poems* as well as an analysis of two of his epigrams to observe his thoughts in action and to discuss, as mentioned earlier in the section concerning Epicurus, the profound role that empiricism played in Epicurean philosophy specifically as it relates to the variety of human experiences and productions.

In the fragments that survive of Philodemus' work *On Poems*, he surveyed many theories from other philosophers concerning poetry. In the subsequent critiques of the theories, an important principle emerged. In his critique of Heraclides of Pontus, who thought that poems should have both beauty and utility, Philodemus says, "He expels from virtue the most beautiful poems of the most notable poets because they supply no benefit at all, of some poets he rejected most poems, and for some he rejected all poems".²² The argument here is that if utility becomes a deciding factor in the determination of whether a poem is good or not, many poems from very famous poets will be excluded on that account. In a later section,

²¹ Cicero. *In Pisonem*. 68–72.

²² Philodemus. *On Poems*. 5. 10-18.

he refined his position by rejecting any concern for utility in poetry because it “expels many totally beautiful poems as useless, those containing useless things, and prefers many that are lesser, as many as have useful or more useful thoughts”.²³ In removing utility as a criterion for a good poem, Philodemus carried to its logical conclusion Epicurus’ dictum that poetry has no role within education. Although in fact it may be useless, it still may satisfy when poetry supplies beautiful language or images.

In his other work, *On Piety*, Philodemus’ hostility to poetry, or at least to previous poets, is more evident. In the work Philodemus’ intention is to show that according to the Epicurean perspective previous poets as well as philosophers spoke about and said things that were impious toward the gods. Much of this work is devoted to a criticism of what other philosophers and poets wrongly said about the gods. Yet the cumulative effect of this critique is to show how poets improperly speak of the gods. For example, Philodemus says, “but to show the gods as the most evil from birth is a sign of those who lack nothing with respect to impiety. Or does Homer not show Ares the son of Zeus as foolish and lawless and murderous and a lover of war and usually as one whom his closest companions insult”.²⁴ In this quotation Philodemus critiqued Homer and his portrayal of Ares as a rather human figure with rather common vices. What this does is to show how Epicureans thought about divinity and the gods. The Epicurean doctrine of what a god is a figure totally removed from human emotions and actions. Thus, any portrayal of the gods as being in any way comparable or relatable to humans was utterly impious. Moreover, using the critique of Homer indicates that from its beginning poetry was used to give a false understanding of the gods. Thus, Philodemus was following the original critique of Epicurus against using poetry as an

²³ Ibid. 5. 9-17.

²⁴ Philodemus. *On Piety*.

educative tool because, as he illustrated, even the greatest of poets, Homer, gave a false and dangerous view of the gods and immortality.

But this immediately begs the question, if previous poetry has been immoral, why not compose poems that are in fact moral, poems that adhere to the Epicurean critique? Indeed, this would be a useful argument for Lucretius to employ in his justification of versifying Epicurean philosophy. But this justification was in truth not an option available to him because of the rather rigid empiricism at play in Epicureanism. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy defines empiricism thus: “*The Empiricism Thesis*: We have no source of knowledge in S or for the concepts we use in S other than experience. To be clear, the Empiricism thesis does not entail that we have empirical knowledge. It entails that knowledge can only be gained, *if at all*, by experience.”²⁵

What this means in the context of Epicureanism is the belief in the limitation of change. For the Epicurean, that which can be observed about a thing indicates the only possibility for that thing. Variation then becomes very rare or impossible. As, for example, Epicurus seemed to think that in any world that could support life would produce the same animals and plants as are observable here. So, he said in his *Letter to Herodotus*, “For neither can anyone determine that in one world these seeds were contained from which animals and plants and all remaining things that are seen are composed, but in another world it would not be able” (οὐδὲ γὰρ ἂν ἀποδείξειεν οὐδεὶς, ὡς <ἐν> μὲν τῷ τοιούτῳ καὶ οὐκ ἂν ἐμπεριελήφθη τὰ τοιαῦτα σπέρματα, ἐξ ὧν ζῷά τε καὶ φυτὰ καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ πάντα <τὰ> θεωρούμενα συνίσταται, ἐν δὲ τῷ τοιούτῳ οὐκ ἂν ἐδυνήθη.).²⁶ The point is somewhat obscure, but what Epicurus seems to be suggesting here is that, in any possible world -Epicureans believed in an infinite

²⁵ Markie, Peter and M. Folescu, "Rationalism vs. Empiricism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2023 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2023/entries/rationalism-empiricism/>>.

²⁶ Epicurus. *Letter to Herodotus*. 74.

number of worlds- that could support life on it would have the same flora and fauna as is found on our own world. His point seems to be that given the limitations of nature, the only plants and animals that can exist anywhere are those that are seen here. This restrictive view is not reserved for only things of the natural world but also to human culture and artistic productions. Thus, in the case of poetry, that which Epicureans observed about previous poetry sets the limitations on all subsequent poetic productions. As Wigodsky says, “The goodness of poetry is the subject of something like the *prolepsis* of a natural kind, similarly based on past experience and on the confidence that other members of the species will not differ greatly from those we already know- in the case of good poems, from those of Homer and the other classics.”²⁷ What this means for the Epicurean critique of poetry is that, given the uselessness of poetry for education and for its promulgation of false ideas of the gods and an unreasonable fear of death, all, indeed all, possible future poetry will be subject to the same faults and incapable of overcoming them based on the example of previous poetic production.

That a poet himself, that is Philodemus, would subscribe to such a view is quite remarkable. It is for this reason that I will analyse some of Philodemus’ epigrams to understand what sort of poetry would have been acceptable to an Epicurean given this very restrictive empiricism. The composition of epigrams, all that survive of Philodemus’ poetic work and presumably all he wrote, is consonant, as Sider points out, with Epicurus’ dictum that the wise man does not give an excessive time to the writing of poetry.²⁸ As such it is necessary to take a typical example of his corpus.

ἑπτὰ τριηκόντεσσιν ἐπέρχονται λυκάβαντες,
ἤδη μοι βιότου σχιζόμεναι σελίδες:

²⁷ Wigodsky, Michael. “The Alleged Impossibility of Philosophical Poetry.” In *Philodemus and Poetry*. Ed. Dirk Obbink. Oxford: OUP. 1995. Pg. 65.

²⁸ Philodemus. *The Epigrams of Philodemus*. Trans. David Sider. Oxford: OUP. 1997. Pg. 33.

ἤδη καὶ λευκαί με κατασπείρουσιν ἔθειραι,
Ξανθίππη, συνετῆς ἄγγελοι ἠλικίης.
ἀλλ' ἔτι μοι ψαλμός τε λάλος κῶμοί τε μέλονται,
καὶ πῦρ ἀπλήστῳ τύφετ' ἐνὶ κραδίῃ.
αὐτὴν ἀλλὰ τάχιστα κορωνίδα γράψατε, Μοῦσαι,
ταύτην ἡμετέρης, δεσπότιδες, μανίης.²⁹

Seven years is coming upon thirty,
Already pillars of my life are split:
And already white hairs besprinkle me,
O Xanthippe, announcing the age of wisdom.
But still the loquacious harp and revels are a concern to me,
And fire burns my greedy heart.
But write straightway her as the *koronis*, O mistress Muse,
For this my madness.

As typical of the Anthology poets, the poem is elegantly written, containing a delicacy of feeling and language conventional to erotic epigrams. The poet balances his lament, or perhaps realisation, that age is upon him as even at thirty-seven he has white hairs (λευκαί με κατασπείρουσιν ἔθειραι), with the admission that still he desires the activities and events of young men (ἔτι μοι ψαλμός τε λάλος κῶμοί τε μέλονται). Although he hopes, as he appeals to the Muse, that Xanthippe, who presumably will become his wife, will be his *koronis*. This is a rather infrequent metaphorical use of the noun that usually means crook-beaked (an allusion to Koronis who was turned into a crow) or curved, but which here means the end.³⁰ The end, one supposes of the life of revels and the talkative harp. So much for this poem. Indeed, much of what survives of his epigrams is erotic in nature. The few that are not contain very little in the way of palpable philosophy.

The possible exceptions are two dinner poems in which the Epicurean values of modesty and poverty are espoused.

αὔριον εἰς λιτὴν σε καλιάδα, φίλτατε Πείσων,
ἐξ ἐνάτης ἔλκει μουσοφιλῆς ἕταρος,

²⁹ Ibid. pg. 72-3.

³⁰ LSJ. Κορωνίς.

εικάδα δειπνίζων ἐνιαύσιον³¹

Tomorrow, dear Piso, your Muse-beloved friend,
Drags you to his frugal hut at three,
Making a feast for you on the 20th your annual visit.

Similar sentiments are expressed in the next poem:

Κράμβην Ἀρτεμίδωρος, Ἀρίσταρχος δὲ τάριχον,
βολβίσκους δ' ἡμῖν δῶκεν Ἀθηναγόρας,

Artemidorus has given us cabbage, Aristarchus salted meat,
And Athenagoras the tassel hyacinth.³²

What both of these pieces convey is the emphasis on frugality as the poet described his dwelling as a frugal hut (λιτήν καλιάδα) and when he listed the various cheap ingredients his friends brought for the feast. However, although the Epicureans insisted on poverty, one searches in vain for argument or philosophical language in the epigrams. What this suggests is that despite Philodemus being both a poet and Epicurean, given his hostility to poetry as outlined above, there is in fact no connection with his modest verse and the grand philosophical epic of Lucretius.

What the preceding section has demonstrated is that Lucretius stands outside of Epicurean orthodoxy in terms of poetic production. Contrary to the teachings of Epicurus and the example of Philodemus, Lucretius attempted to invest poetry with precisely the educative utility to poetry that Epicureans consistently denied it, and to do with great effort. Whether the Epicureans would have accepted the poem is another question, but it is possible that they would have rejected it out of hand on the basis of the strong empiricist bend of the philosophy. Given this remarkable break with the school's tradition, where then did Lucretius find models for his project?

³¹ Philodemus. *The Epigrams of Philodemus*. Trans. David Sider. Oxford: OUP. 1997. Pg. 152.

³² Ibid. Pg. 160.

2. Lucretius and Empedocles

What the second section will seek to help demonstrate is the profound influence that Empedocles had on Lucretius as well as the allegiance that Lucretius gave to Empedocles in his poem. Indeed, although there is no doubt that much, if not most, of Lucretius' philosophical thinking is derived from Epicurus and Epicureans in general, nonetheless this fact has tended to obscure the true depth of Lucretius' philosophical and poetic engagement with his Greek predecessors. For it was not, after all, the Epicureans who gave to Lucretius a philosophical language that was suited for poetry, but the eccentric Sicilian, Empedocles. I will demonstrate this in two ways. First, it will be shown how Lucretius' hymn to Venus is part of a broader agon in Greek philosophic hymns. That is, it will be shown how Lucretius, in asserting Venus as the chief deity governing the world, was following the example set by Empedocles against the contrary tradition found in Hesiod and Cleanthes who placed Zeus as the chief deity. Second, I will examine Lucretius' critique of Pre-Socratic philosophers. This will reveal his largely positive appraisal of Empedocles as well as how his description of Empedocles in that passage foreshadowed similar language used to portray Epicurus.

A. Lucretius and Empedoclean Elements

What this section will demonstrate is the allegiance Lucretius gave to Empedocles in his choice to invoke Venus in the beginning of his poem. Indeed, it is a peculiarity that an Epicurean would open his philosophic poem with an address to a god given that Epicureans believed the gods are distant figures not involved in the affairs of men. As Sedley poses the issue, "How can Lucretius, as an Epicurean, praise Venus as a controlling force in nature, and even beg her to intervene in human affairs? In Epicureanism, the gods emphatically do not intervene in any way in human affairs- as Lucretius himself paradoxically goes on

immediately to point out.”³³ Yet this section will not follow Sedley, but will instead follow the thesis of Furley, namely, that Lucretius, in opening his poem with the invocation to Venus was expressing his debt to Empedocles. As he said, “Lucretius wrote his proem so that comparison with Empedocles was inevitable, and also to suggest that by prefacing his poem thus Lucretius was claiming a particular position for it in the history of natural philosophy.”³⁴ Nor is there in fact anything peculiar about Lucretius’ expression of this, as Gale said, “Virtually every didactic poet in the sequence which has come down to us seems to look back to his predecessors and seek to take on their mantle, creating a kind of ‘apostolic succession’.”³⁵ Let us turn to the poem then.

Aeneadum genetrix, hominum divomque voluptas,
 alma Venus, caeli subter labentia signa
 quae mare navigerum, quae terras frugiferentis
 concelebras, per te quoniam genus omne animantum
 concipitur visitque exortum lumina solis:
 te, dea, te fugiunt venti, te nubila caeli
 adventumque tuum, tibi suavis daedala tellus
 summittit flores, tibi rident aequora ponti
 placatumque nitet diffuso lumine caelum. (1. 1-9)³⁶

Mother of the race of Aeneas, pleasure of men and gods,
 Nourishing Venus, beneath the sliding signs of heaven
 Who fills with life the ship-bearing sea, the fruit-giving lands,
 Since through you every race of living things is conceived,
 And view the rising light of the sun:
 You, O goddess, you and your coming
 The winds and clouds of the sky flee,
 For you the cunning earth bears sweet flowers,
 For you the smoothness of the sea laughs,

³³ Sedley, David. *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom*. Cambridge: CUP. 1998. Pg. 16.

³⁴ Furley, David. Variations on Themes from Empedocles in Lucretius’ Proem.” *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, 1970. No. 17. Pg. 55-64.

³⁵ Gale, M.R. “Avia Pieridum loca: Tradition and Innovation in Lucretius.” In *Wissensvermittlung in dichterischer Gestalt*. Ed. Horster and Reitz. Stuttgart. 2005. Pg. 175-191.

³⁶ Lucretius. *De Rerum Natura*. Oxford: OUP. 1972.

And the calm sky shines with scattered light.

One of the most striking things about the opening lines is, as noted by Campbell, that Venus' name is delayed until the second line.³⁷ In all previous hymns the god or goddess who was addressed was named within the first line; in all hymns that is, except Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus*, to the significance of which we shall return later. Another striking feature of the poem is the decidedly mythological opening of it. Venus, Lucretius declared, was the mother of Aeneas and by extension the whole of Rome. Some scholars have argued that this should be read as an allegorical appeal to the generative and creative force that Venus represents here.³⁸ But the reverence of the language as well as the subsequent prayer for intercession (29-43) indicate this interpretation cannot exhaust the nuance of the poem.

In fact, excluding for the moment the question of choosing to write a hymn to Venus, a very curious feature in these lines is the repetition of elements. Twice Lucretius lists the traditional fourfold elements of sky, water, air, and earth. Furley connects this directly to two surviving fragments of Empedocles.

ἀλλ' ἄγε τόνδ' ὀάρων προτέρων ἐπιμάρτυρα δέρκευ
εἴ τι καὶ προτέροισι λιπόξυλον ἔπλετο μορφῇ
ἠέλιον μὲν λαμπρὸν ὄραν καὶ θερμὸν ἀπάντη
ἄμβροτα δ' ὅσσ' εἶδει τε καὶ ἀργεῖ τε δεύεται ἀνγῇ.
ὄμβρον δ' ἐν πᾶσι δνοφθένά τε ῥιγαλέον τε
ἐκ δ' αἴης προρέουσι θελυμνά τε καὶ στερεωπά
ἐν δὲ κότῳ διάμορφα καὶ ἄνδιχα πάντα πέλονται
σὺν δ' ἔβη ἐν φιλότῃ καὶ ἀλλήλοισι ποθεῖται.
ἐξ ὧν πάνθ' ὅσα τ' ἦν ὅσα τ' ἐσθ' ὅσα τ' ἔσσειτ' ὀπίσσω
δένδρεα τ' ἐβλάστησε καὶ ἄνδρες ἠδὲ γυναῖκες
θῆρες τ' οἰωνοὶ τε καὶ ὕδατοθρέμμονες ἰχθῦς
καὶ τε θεοὶ δολιχαίωνες τιμῆισι φέριστοι
αὐτὰ γὰρ ἔστιν ταῦτα δι' ἀλλήλων δὲ θέοντα

³⁷ Campbell, Gordon. "Lucretius, Empedocles and Cleanthes." In *The Philosophizing Muse: The Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry*. Ed. Garani and Konstan. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014. Pg. 26-60.

³⁸ Lucretius. *De Rerum Natura*. Ed. Cyril Bailey. Oxford: OUP, 1972. Vol. II. Pg. 589-90.

γίγνεται ἀλλοιωπά τὰ γὰρ διὰ κρήσις ἀμείβει. (26)³⁹

But come, behold this witness of my previous words,
If something was in my previous words left lacking in form,
The sun bright to see and warm in every way,
And the immortal things which are covered in heat and shining light,
And rain in all ways dark and cold;
And from the earth flows dense things and solid things.
And they come together through love and are desired by each other.
From these all things were and are and will be afterward,
Trees were sprung from and men and women,
Beasts and birds and water-nourished fish,
And the long-lived gods first in honour.
For these things indeed are and running through each other.
They become different in form. For the blending changes them.

And again, Empedocles discusses the elements in a subsequent fragment:

ἄρθμια μὲν γὰρ ταῦτα ἑαυτῶν πάντα μέρεσσι
ἠλέκτωρ τε χθών τε καὶ οὐρανὸς ἠδὲ θάλασσα
ὅσσα φιν ἐν θνητοῖσιν ἀποπλαγχθέντα πέφυκεν
ὡς δ' αὐτως ὅσσα κρήσιν ἐπαρκέα μᾶλλον ἕασιν
ἀλλήλοις ἔστερκται ὁμοιωθέντ' Ἀφροδίτη
ἐχθρὰ πλεῖστον ἀπ' ἀλλήλων διέχουσι μάλιστα
γέννη τε κρήσει τε καὶ εἶδεσιν ἐκμάκτοισι
πάντη συγγίγνεσθαι ἀήθεα καὶ μάλα λυγρὰ
ναικεογεννητῆσι ὅτι σφισι γένναι ἐν ὀργῇ. (37)⁴⁰

For all these things are fitted together by their own parts
The beaming sun and earth and sky and sea
Which having been separated from them were born amongst mortal things,
In the same way as many as are more fitting for blending
Have come to be loved by each other made similar by Aphrodite;
Most hostile are those most separated from each other,
In birth and in blend and in molded form
Totally unfamiliar with mixing together and very mournful,
Because of their birth in strife because their births were in wrath.

In these fragments fire stands in for the sun, rain stands for water, the references to earth are clear, but the element of air in the first fragment as the immortal stuff (ἄμβροτα)

³⁹ Empedocles. *The Poem of Empedocles*. Ed. Brad Inwood. Toronto: UPT. 2001. Pg. 228.

⁴⁰ Ibid. Pg. 234.

that is warmed by the sun. What this means is not entirely clear, but the second fragment refers to air as sky (οὐρανὸς). Likewise, Lucretius refers to air as sky in both of his enumerations of the elements (caeli; 2,6). Moreover, as Furley says, “It is also important that the four elements are identified not so much as materials, characterized by certain properties, but as distinct features of the cosmos, characterized not only by their properties but also by their position in the cosmos.”⁴¹ The significance of this comparison is to show that Lucretius from the very beginning of his poem established an indelible link to Empedocles. This link is strengthened later in the proem where Lucretius prayed for Venus to intercede for him:

effice ut interea fera moenera militiai
per maria ac terras omnis sopita quiescent;
nam tu sola potes tranquilla pace iuvare
mortalis, quoniam belli fera moenera Mavors
armipotens regit, in gremium qui saepe tuum se
reiicit aeterno devictus vulnere amoris,
atque ita suspiciens tereti cervice reposta
pascit amore avidos inhians in te, dea, visus
eque tuo pendet resupini spiritus ore.
hunc tu, diva, tuo recubantem corpore sancto
circum fusa super, suavis ex ore loquellas
funde petens placidam Romanis, incluta, pacem;
nam neque nos agere hoc patriai tempore iniquo
possumus aequo animo nec Memmi clara propago
talibus in rebus communi desse saluti. (29-43)

Make while (I write) all the wild works of war,
Through sea and land having been lulled to sleep be at peace;
For you alone are able to grant to mortals public peace,
Since powerful Mars who rules the wild works of war,
So often in your breast flings himself conquered by the eternal wound of love,
And there looking up with smooth neck thrown back
Feeds on love breathing you in, O goddess, with greedy sight
His breath hangs upon your cast down lips.
This one reclining, O goddess, fill with your holy body
Around and above, pour from your lips soft words
Seeking peace for Romans, Illustrious one, peace;
For neither am I able in a terrible time for the fatherland lead with a level mind,
Nor can the famous offspring of Memmius in such events neglect the communal
health.

⁴¹ Furley, David. “Variations on Themes from Empedocles in Lucretius’ Proem.” *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, 1970. No. 17. Pg. 55-64.

Although the allusion to the adulterous love affair between Venus and Mars is a common feature in Classical poetry, in a cosmological poem the allusion carries with it a heightened resonance especially coming after, as it does, Lucretius' repetition of the Empedoclean elements. The note of Empedocles is unmistakable here because of the contrast that Lucretius drew between the two gods, with Venus being the goddess of peace and Mars being the god of war. Although it is certainly true that these are typical aspects of both divinities, given the context it seems clear that Lucretius signalled Empedocles here and also the adjective qualifying Venus in the hymn. Lucretius stated that Venus alone has the power to give tranquil peace to mortals (*nam tu sola potes tranquilla pace iuvare mortalis*, 31-2). What this shows is his emphasis on placing Venus as the preeminent deity in relation to humans as well as other living things. This also fits into Empedocles' cosmology. Indeed, for Empedocles the universe was governed by two contrary forces, Love called Aphrodite and Strife called Ares. The precise relationship of the two in the creative act is not entirely clear, but it is evident that Empedocles gave Aphrodite the primary role as illustrated in another fragment:

οὐδέ τις ἦν κείνοισιν Ἄρης Θεὸς οὐδὲ Κυδοιμός
οὐδὲ Ζεὺς Βασιλεὺς οὐδὲ Κρόνος οὐδὲ Ποσειδῶν
ἀλλὰ Κύπρις Βασίλεια (122:1-3)

Nor amongst them was the god Ares nor Battle-din,
Nor Zeus the king nor Cronos nor Poseidon,
But Cupris [Aphrodite] the queen.

A lacuna follows the third line, and the fragment picks up with a description of the bloodless sacrifices that were made to Aphrodite in that time. Lucretius likewise stressed the supremacy of Venus when he echoed Empedocles' description of her role in the life of plants and animals. As Lucretius said: "Since through you [Venus] every race of living things is conceived" (*per te quoniam genus omne animantum concipitur*, 3-4) or as he said earlier in the proem, "you alone govern the nature of things (*rerum naturam sola gubernas*, 21). This is

parallel to when Empedocles stated that trees, fish, and humans are all sprung from the power of Love (δένδρα τ' ἐβλάστησε καὶ ἄνδρες ἠδὲ γυναῖκες / θῆρες τ' οἰωνοί τε καὶ ὕδατοθρέμμονες ἰχθῦς, 26:10-11). This is not to suggest that Lucretius as an avowed Epicurean would have accepted the idea that a god participates in the act of creation. Indeed, the Epicureans asserted a totally mechanistic account of creation. Moreover, it is also true that later in Book 4, Lucretius spoke of Venus in very unflattering terms. Yet, this undoubtedly creates a great deal of ambiguity in Lucretius' project as the Empedoclean aspects of the proem would have been clear to the original readers. This is in addition to the conceptual issues the Empedoclean figures of the proem introduce into the rest of the poem, but I will show this is not the only place where Empedocles' influence destabilised the purported Epicureanism of the poem.

B. Philosophic Hymns

Moreover, when the invocation to Venus is put in the context of the tradition in which it interacts, it will further highlight the relationship with Empedocles that Lucretius was claiming. Why did Lucretius choose to compose a hymn to Venus to open his cosmological poem? Typically asking for one of the Muses to intercede for the poet is the common thing to do. This is of course ignoring the thorny issue of why an Epicurean in an Epicurean poem would address any deity, let alone ask that deity to do something for him. Nonetheless, there was a tradition in more philosophically oriented poems to address instead of a Muse one of the Olympian gods. The important poems for this discussion are Hesiod's *Works and Days* Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus*, and some of the fragments of Empedocles that have been already quoted. As Empedocles came before Cleanthes and Lucretius lived after all of them, it will be shown how Lucretius in his invocation to Venus placed himself with Empedocles against Hesiod and Cleanthes who asserted in their poems the supremacy of Zeus.

Hesiod evidently began the tradition in his poem *Works and Days*. One of the earliest surviving poets in Greek literature, Hesiod is the first example of a didactic poet. Thus, he became the model for all subsequent exercises in the form. Given Empedocles was also writing a didactic poem, it is natural that there would have been some connection between the two poets.

μοῦσαι Πιερίηθεν ἀοιδῆσιν κλείουσαι
 δεῦτε, Δί' ἐννέπετε, σφέτερον πατέρ' ὑμνείουσαι:
 ὄντε διὰ βροτοὶ ἄνδρες ὁμῶς ἄφατοὶ τε φατοὶ τε,
 ῥητοὶ τ' ἄρρητοὶ τε Διὸς μέγαλοιο ἔκητι.
 ῥέα μὲν γὰρ βριάει, ῥέα δὲ βριάοντα χαλέπτει,
 ῥεῖα δ' ἀρίζηλον μινύθει καὶ ἄδηλον ἀέξει,
 ῥεῖα δέ τ' ἰθύνει σκολιὸν καὶ ἀγήνορα κάρφει
 Ζεὺς ὑψιβρεμέτης, ὃς ὑπέρτατα δώματα ναίει. (1-8)⁴²

Pierian Muses, come making famous with song,
 Tell of Zeus, your father, make hymns for him:
 Through whom mortal men are alike unspoken of and spoken of,
 Famous and unknown on account of the will of great Zeus.
 For easily he makes strong and easily he crushes the great,
 And easily he curtails the remarkable and increases the unseen,
 And easily he straightens the crooked and dries up the manly-
 Zeus the high thundering, who dwells in the highest domains.

It is interesting that although the Muses are the deities addressed in the invocation, they in fact receive no praise in this work of Hesiod's. Instead, Hesiod described Zeus and his role in the world, but in many ways, it was a peculiar description of the god. Indeed, the picture of Zeus that Hesiod presented is rather ambiguous. It is clear from the passage that Zeus is the supreme deity. It, moreover, seems clear that this supremacy is based on his power, not based on any moral or ethical superiority, but only on his strength as the fourth line indicates: Διὸς μέγαλοιο ἔκητι, "on account of the will of great Zeus". But his actions, as Hesiod explained them, seem rather arbitrary: he raises and he lowers, he makes famous, and

⁴² Hesiod. *Theogony. Works and Days. Testimonia*. Ed. Glen Most. Cambridge, MA: HUP. 2018. Pg. 86.

he makes obscure. Yet the justification for this behaviour is lacking. It is not explained why Zeus acts in this way, nor if those who suffer because of Zeus are deserving of their fate. As Campbell says, “Hesiod in his opening hymn to Zeus addresses Zeus as the embodiment of cosmic justice but struggles in the rest of the poem to explain or understand why Zeus is so grudging and even hostile to mortals.”⁴³ In other words, Hesiod’s assertion of Zeus’ supremacy was part of his theodicy, but, as the quotation from Campbell illustrates, he failed to present a viable theological position in his poem. In placing Zeus as the supreme deity, Hesiod claimed that masculine power and its association with judgement as the controlling force of the universe.

Empedocles took issue with this idea and attempted to correct Hesiod’s vision. This is evident in one of the fragments quoted earlier:

οὐδέ τις ἦν κείνοισιν Ἄρης Θεὸς οὐδὲ Κυδοιμός
οὐδὲ Ζεὺς Βασιλεὺς οὐδὲ Κρόνος οὐδὲ Ποσειδῶν
ἀλλὰ Κύπρις Βασίλεια (122:1-3)

Nor amongst them was the god Ares nor Battle-din,
Nor Zeus the king nor Cronos nor Poseidon,
But Cupris [Aphrodite] the queen.

What Empedocles was doing here was both critiquing Hesiod’s vision as well as establishing his own theodicy. Not only is Aphrodite the true supreme deity, but her worship was first amongst the gods and the time in which she was worshipped exclusively was in fact the golden age, as Empedocles said later in the fragment:

ταύρων δ’ ἀκρήτοις φόνοις οὐ δεῦτο βωμός
ἀλλὰ μύσος τοῦτ’ ἔσκεν ἐν ἀνθρώποισι μέγιστον
θυμὸν ἀπορραΐσαντας ἐέδμεναι ἠέα γυῖα (122:8-10)

No staining her altar with the pure blood of bulls,
But this uncleanness was the greatest amongst men:
Ripping out the heart to devour their fair limbs.

⁴³ Campbell, Gordon. “Lucretius, Empedocles and Cleanthes.” In *The Philosophizing Muse: The Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry*. Ed. Garani and Konstan. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2014. Pg. 59.

Mankind during the true golden age, according to Empedocles, followed Aphrodite and did not engage in any violent activity united as they were by love. Empedocles then revised Hesiod's masculine vision and placed the feminine principle in the figure of Aphrodite as the strongest operating force in the universe. But he did not end with a simple revision of Hesiod. Instead, his connection of Ares with both Zeus and Cronos formed a total subversion of Hesiod as Hesiod both placed, as we saw, Zeus as the supreme deity, but also claimed that the golden age occurred in the reign of Cronos as he said:

χρύσειον μὲν πρότιστα γένος μερόπων ἀνθρώπων
 ἀθάνατοι ποίησαν Ὀλύμπια δώματ' ἔχοντες.
 οἳ μὲν ἐπὶ Κρόνου ἦσαν, ὅτ' οὐρανῷ ἐμβασίλευεν:
 ὥστε θεοὶ δ' ἔζων ἀκηδέα θυμὸν ἔχοντες (109-12)

The deathless ones having Olympian homes made
 First a golden race of articulate men.
 Who were in the age of Chronos when he ruled in heaven:
 So that they lived as gods having a carefree heart.

Empedocles' connection of Zeus and Cronos with Ares then links the two gods not with justice and the golden age of man but with death, murder, and the negative qualities found in life today. What this shows is that in didactic poetry, two rival cosmological claims developed: On the one hand, Hesiod's vision of the single figure of Zeus who metes out justice upon mortals with unclear motives; and on the other hand, Empedocles' idea of two figures, Aphrodite who as the source of good once ruled in the "prelapsarian" state of man and Ares, who is identified as strife and is therefore the source of evil in the world. This tradition continued throughout later didactic poetry.

For example, one may observe the interaction with tradition in the figure of the Stoic Cleanthes, who also wrote a hymn to Zeus and attempted to reassert Hesiod's vision insofar as it would be acceptable to Cleanthes' Stoicism. Cleanthes did not present, as may be expected, a symbolic Zeus representing an abstract principle, but instead a very personal god. As Thom said, "Zeus is not treated as some abstract, philosophical principle; on the contrary,

he is presented in rather personalist and theistic terms as the king and ruler of the world; a divine father from whom all human beings have their origin and to whom they can turn for help; a god who can correct our mistakes; someone with whom we can communicate, and to whom we have an obligation.”⁴⁴ What this means is that Cleanthes presented a Zeus who is very involved in human affairs and who cares for mortals. This can be seen in the affectionate opening of his hymn:

κύδιστ' ἀθανάτων, πολώνυμε, παγκρατὲς αἰεὶ,
 Ζεῦ, φύσεως ἀρχηγέ, νόμου μέτα πάντα κυβερνῶν,
 χαῖρε· σὲ γὰρ πάντεσσι θέμις θνητοῖσι προσαιδᾶν.
 ἕκ σου γὰρ γενόμεσθα † θεοῦ μίμημα λαχόντες
 μοῦνοι, ὅσα ζῶει τε καὶ ἔρπει θνήτ' ἐπὶ γαῖαν· (1-5)

Noblest of the deathless ones, many-named, ever omnipotent,
 Zeus, first cause and ruler of nature, governing all with your law,
 Hail! For it is right for all mortals to praise you.
 For from you we are born bearing the image of a god,
 Alone of all mortal things that live and crawl upon the earth.

Although the correlation to Hesiod’s Zeus is clear, Cleanthes added an important innovation. After the conventional feature of praising the power of Zeus, he discussed the relationship between Zeus and humankind: because of our special connection with Zeus, distinct from all other living things (ἕκ σου γὰρ γενόμεσθα † θεοῦ μίμημα λαχόντες μοῦνοι), we have an obligation to praise Zeus (σὲ γὰρ πάντεσσι θέμις θνητοῖσι προσαιδᾶν) and, following Cleanthes’ example to praise Zeus always (αἰὲν ἀείσω, 6). As Thom says in his commentary on the poem, “because of our kinship with God and our privileged position in nature, it is our duty and right to address Zeus and always praise his power.”⁴⁵ Moreover, Cleanthes’ opening epithet helps to situate his hymn in relation to Empedocles: Zeus is the

⁴⁴ Cleanthes. *Cleanthes’ Hymn to Zeus: Text, Translation, and Commentary*. Ed. Johan Thom. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005. Pg. 20.

⁴⁵ Ibid. Pg. 43.

most honoured of the gods (κύδιστ' ἀθανάτων). Thom has an important note about this as he says that Stoicism, in its emphasis on monotheism, viewed Zeus as “the culmination of deity” and thought that the other gods were not eternal like Zeus but were subject to the same cycle of death and rebirth as the universe.⁴⁶ This emphasis on a single deity may serve as a response to the duality in Empedocles’ system. The response to Empedocles becomes clearer later in the hymn as Cleanthes said of Zeus’ activity:

ὣδε γὰρ εἰς ἓν πάντα συνήρμοκας ἐσθλὰ κακοῖσιν,
ὥσθ' ἕνα γίγνεσθαι πάντων λόγον αἰὲν ἕόντα,
ὄν φεύγοντες ἐῶσιν ὅσοι θνητῶν κακοί εἰσιν, (20-3)

For you have joined together thus all things into one, the good with the bad,
So that there comes to be one order ever existing for all things,
Which however many of mortals that are bad flee and avoid.

Cleanthes’ Zeus was able to link the good with the bad, not in the sense of being responsible for the bad, but that he was capable of making good from the bad. As Thom says, “the good and the bad are not equal partners, but they are blended in such a way (ὣδε) that the end product is a restored rational order.”⁴⁷ Thus Cleanthes was able to eliminate the duality of Aphrodite and Ares that Empedocles posited. Yet, Cleanthes never mentioned Empedocles, nor explicitly engaged with his ideas, so how does this connection between the two make sense?

Campbell significantly argues that the connection is observable in Cleanthes’ choice of similar phrasing for a key idea. “Empedocles’ universe is governed by two cosmic forces, Love (or Aphrodite) and Strife (or Ares). They both have creative and destructive powers and

⁴⁶ Ibid. Pg. 45.

⁴⁷ Ibid. Pg. 108.

rule alternately: Love draws all things together to create a world, and then destroys it as all the elements are completely joined in the Sphere.”⁴⁸ Empedocles expressed the situation in this way:

ἄλλοτε μὲν Φιλότητι συνερχόμεν’ εἰς ἓν ἅπαντα
ἄλλοτε δ’ αὖ δίχ’ ἕκαστα φορέυμενα Νείκεος ἔχθει (25:7-8)

At one time all things coming together into one because of Love,
But at another time again everything being torn away by the hatred of Strife.

He expressed the idea of Aphrodite joining everything together in another fragment as well:

τόσσ’ ὅσα νῦν συναρμοσθέντ’ Ἀφροδίτη (74:4)

As many as have now come to be fitted together by Aphrodite

The connection here rests upon Cleanthes’ choice of verbs to describe Zeus’ similar action. As we saw to describe Zeus’ ability to unite the good with the bad Cleanthes used an inflected form of the verb συναρμόζω, meaning “to fit together”. In the above fragment of Empedocles, the same verb is used (συναρμοσθέντ’) to describe the action of Aphrodite. Moreover, the first fragment of Empedocles quoted and the lines (20-3) of Cleanthes relate remarkably similar activity. For Empedocles, Aphrodite is the sole source of good bringing things together; whereas Ares is the source of evil that drags things apart. But in Cleanthes Zeus is capable of using both good and evil to produce right order by himself. As Campbell says, “there are not two separate forces that alternate, one, Aphrodite, combining into harmony and creating the good, the other, Ares, separating into disorder and creating the bad, but a single force, Zeus, that blends both good and bad into a single cosmic order.”⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Campbell, Gordon. “Lucretius, Empedocles and Cleanthes.” In *The Philosophizing Muse: The Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry*. Ed. Garani and Konstan. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2014. Pg. 56.

⁴⁹ Ibid. Pg. 57.

Cleanthes' Zeus then becomes a revision of Empedocles' duality of deities. The linguistic similarity and parallelism evident here, although admittedly a subtle argument, help to show the didactic tradition of invoking a god and how it developed through the history of Greek literature.

Lucretius positioned himself in this tradition by both reformulating Cleanthes and by reasserting the high place Empedocles gave to Aphrodite. He reformulated Cleanthes by shifting the divine quality that Cleanthes emphasised. As we have seen, following after Hesiod, the quality of Zeus that Cleanthes continued to emphasise was his power:

κύδιστ' ἀθανάτων, πολώνυμε, παγκρατὲς αἰεὶ, (1)

Noblest of the immortals, many named, ever omnipotent,

τῷ σε καθυμνήσω, καὶ σὸν κράτος αἰὲν αἰείσω. (6)

Therefore, I will constantly hymn you, and I will always sing of your power.

Lucretius, however, in reclaiming Venus as the supreme ruler, radically shifted the quality emphasised away from power to pleasure (as one would expect from an Epicurean) as in the first line when described Venus as the pleasure of men and gods (*hominum divomque voluptas*, 1). Unlike Zeus the dispenser of justice, Lucretius characterized Venus, as was typical, as being pleasant, bountiful (*alma*, 2), and associated with light. As Asmis says, “However, Lucretius presents this function [the traditional attributes of Venus] under a wholly different aspect from Cleanthes: suffused as it is with light, the creation of living beings by Venus is an act of pleasure, and her bounty is a gift of joy.”⁵⁰ Indeed, the repetition of light (*lumine*, 5,9) in the invocation also served an important contrast between the two deities. Near the end of the *Hymn*, Cleanthes referred to Zeus as “cloud wrapped, ruler of the thunderbolt” (ἀλλὰ Ζεῦ πάνδωρε, κελαινεφές, ἀργικέραυνε, 32). The nuance of the

⁵⁰ Asmis, Elizabeth. “Lucretius’ Venus and Stoic Zeus.” *Hermes* 110, no. 4 (1982): 458–70.

contradiction here is quite rich. Previous interpretation of these epithets has understood Cleanthes to have been alluding to Zeus' ability to bring light to the darkness and metaphorically to bring knowledge to the ignorant.⁵¹ This, however, does not work as Thom says, "Suggestive as this interpretation may be, the *Hymn* does not in fact refer to understanding and ignorance in terms of light and darkness, and in the previous reference to the thunderbolt in vv. 9-12 the latter was cited as a symbol of Zeus' power over the world-order, not as an instrument of illumination."⁵² Zeus then is meant to be the creator of a rational order and therefore the source of reason, but is described as being obscured by clouds (commonly associated with ignorance as in fragment 31 of Empedocles) and is called the ruler of the thunderbolt, which was a symbol of power, these two aspects together complicate the intention of a rational Zeus that Cleanthes was trying to convey. Lucretius moreover in his association of Venus with light was his attempt to correct the failure of Cleanthes' poetics.

It is true, as Asmis showed, that part of what Lucretius was doing in choosing Venus as the goddess of his hymn was to critique the Stoic ethical system that banished pleasure as an evil.⁵³ But this is an insufficient explanation because in revealing the tradition of the philosophic hymn in Greek literature, I have demonstrated a deeper understanding of Lucretius' intentions. It is again true that for a philosophy asserting pleasure as the highest good the figure of Venus was a reasonable choice, but as Asmis herself says, "Lucretius [departed] so far from Epicurean orthodoxy as to resort to an all-mighty ruling goddess to

⁵¹ Neustadt, E. "Der Zeushymnos des Kleanthes", *Hermes* 66. 387-401. 1931.

⁵² Cleanthes. *Cleanthes' Hymn to Zeus: Text, Translation, and Commentary*. Ed. Johan Thom. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005. Pg. 145.

⁵³ Asmis, Elizabeth. "Lucretius' Venus and Stoic Zeus." *Hermes* 110, no. 4 (1982): 458-70.

introduce a poem designed to expel the gods from this world.”⁵⁴ But what is missing from her analysis is the relationship between Lucretius and Empedocles as was illustrated in the previous section. What the examination of the tradition of philosophic hymns shows is that in the proem the figure of Venus stands not only as a critique of Stoicism, but as an open support of Empedocles.

C. Empedocles amongst the Pre-Socratics

Later in the first book of Lucretius’ poem he launched into an extended critique of previous Greek philosophers. Curiously the list of philosophers he criticised were not contemporaries of Epicurus nor were they the important philosophers living in Lucretius’ own time. Instead, he went back to some of the earliest Greek philosophers. The philosophers he chose to evaluate were Heraclitus, Empedocles, and Anaxagoras, but Lucretius certainly did not approach the three philosophers in quite the same way. As Brown says of his attack on Heraclitus, “Towards Heraclitus he adopts an aggressively satirical tone and deftly mocks his style, which he judges to be all show, devoid of content. Using the techniques of Heraclitus himself, Lucretius cleverly parodies aspects of his antithetical, figurative, euphonious, rhythmical and enigmatic manner, which he characterizes by the phrase *inversa verba* (642).”⁵⁵ This hostile attitude to a progenitor of a rival system is not surprising, nor is the less aesthetically engaging criticism of Anaxagoras and his theory of *homoeomeria*. The surprise comes, however, in Lucretius’ discussion of Empedocles (for it would be a mistake to call it only a critique when it is so full of praise) and the lofty language he used to talk about Empedocles. As Brown says, “The inspiration and breadth of Empedocles’ work are

⁵⁴ Ibid. Pg. 458.

⁵⁵ Brown, Robert. “Lucretian Ridicule of Anaxagoras” *The Classical Quarterly*. Vol. 33. No. 1 (1983), pp. 146-160.

justly conveyed by Lucretius' imagination and poetic language, in homage to the one whose importance to him as a paradigm was hardly, if at all, exceeded by that of Epicurus himself."⁵⁶ In light of this remarkable situation, this section will argue that Lucretius' high praise of Empedocles is another indication of his strong and abiding influence on Lucretius' poem. The entire portion of Lucretius' praise of Empedocles is quite lengthy, but the most relevant passage for the purpose of this section are lines 716-733:

quorum Acragantinus cum primis Empedocles est,
 insula quem triquetris terrarum gessit in oris,
 quam fluitans circum magnis anfractibus aequor
 Ionium glaucis aspargit virus ab undis
 angustoque fretu rapidum mare dividit undis
 Aeoliae terrarum oras a finibus eius.
 hic est vasta Charybdis et hic Aetnaea minantur
 murmura flammaram rursus se colligere iras,
 faucibus eruptos iterum vis ut vomat ignis
 ad caelumque ferat flammai fulgura rursus.
 quae cum magna modis multis miranda videtur
 gentibus humanis regio visendaque fertur
 rebus opima bonis, multa munita virum vi,
 nil tamen hoc habuisse viro praeclarius in se
 nec sanctum magis et mirum carumque videtur.
 carmina quin etiam divini pectoris eius
 vociferantur et exponunt praeclara reperta,
 ut vix humana videatur stirpe creatus.

Foremost among whom is Empedocles of Acragas,
 Whom the island bore within the three-cornered coasts
 Of its lands around which the Ionian deep, flowing with
 Its vast windings, sprinkles the salt brine from its green
 Waves, and the swift-moving sea in its narrow strait divides
 With its waves the shores of the Aeolian land from the
 Boundaries of that island. Here is the destructive Charybdis,
 And here Etna's rumblings threaten that the angry flames are
 Gathering again, that once more its violence may belch fires
 Bursting forth from its throat, and once more shoot to the sky
 The lightnings of its flame. This mighty region while
 It seems wonderful in many ways to the nations of mankind
 And is famed as a place to see, fat with good things,
 Fortified with mighty store of men, yet seems to
 Have contained in it nothing more illustrious than
 This man, nor more sacred and wonderful and dear.

⁵⁶ Ibid. Pg. 149.

Moreover, the poems of his divine mind utter a loud
Voice and declare illustrious discoveries, so that he
Seems hardly to be born of mortal stock.⁵⁷

Sedley would have it that this passage only shows Lucretius admitting to a poetic, not philosophical influence because, for the Epicureans, Empedocles “did, after all, radically misconceive the underlying nature of the world”⁵⁸, although he subsequently revised his view concerning the lack of philosophical influence.⁵⁹ It is certainly true that the Epicureans did not hold Empedocles in high esteem generally as the title of one of Hermarchus’ works, *Letters on Empedocles*, may attest. Yet there seems little in the way of reservation here as Lucretius praised Empedocles as an ostensibly divine figure: “Moreover, the poems of his divine mind utter a loud/ Voice and declare illustrious discoveries, so that he, seems hardly to be born of mortal stock” (*carmina quin etiam divini pectoris eius/ vociferantur et exponunt praeclara reperta, / ut vix humana videatur stirpe creatus*. 731-3). Aside from this passage the only other time Lucretius conferred divinity on someone was in his praise of Epicurus in the fifth book when he called him a god (*ille, ille deus fuit* 5.8) and that Lucretius spoke of them in a similar way served to “connect his two great predecessors.... By describing them with language appropriate to divinities.”⁶⁰ Indeed, as Montarese says, this passage “[is] one of the points of Lucretius’ poem that comes closest, in content and style, to encomium.”⁶¹

⁵⁷ Translation taken from Campbell’s previous quoted article.

⁵⁸ Sedley, David. *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom*. Cambridge: CUP. 1998. Pg. 13.

⁵⁹ Sedley, David. “Lucretius and the New Empedocles.” *Leeds International Classical Studies* 2.4. 2003. Pg. 1-12.

⁶⁰ Castner, Catherine J. “‘De Rerum Natura’ 5.101-103: Lucretius’ Application of Empedoclean Language to Epicurean Doctrine.” *Phoenix* 41, no. 1 (1987): 40–49.

⁶¹ Montarese, Francesco. *Lucretius and his Sources: A Study of Lucretius, De Rerum Natura I 635-920*. Berlin: de Gruyter. 2012. Pg. 222.

Aside from the praise given to Empedocles, Lucretius also repeated his reference to the four elements as witnessed in the proem. In his description of Sicily there is earth (*terrarum*, 717, 721), water (*aequor*, 718), fire erupting from Mt. Etna (*ignis*, 723), and sky around the island (*caelum*, 725). In a discussion of Empedocles, the inclusion of the elements would be natural, but given that this passage is the third listing of the elements in book one so far, it seems likely that this inclusion was meant to recall to the reader the proem and the many Empedoclean features observable there to create an intratextual linkage with both passages further highlighting the sustained influence of Empedocles on the work.

Yet what is more interesting about this passage is the mythological allusion found in it and its implication for Lucretius' relationship with Empedocles. The lines devoted to Mt. Etna, "And here Etna's rumblings threaten that the angry flames are/ Gathering again, that once more its violence may belch fires/ Bursting forth from its throat, and once more shoot to the sky/ The lightnings of its flame." (722-725), recall the Gigantomachy.⁶² In the myth the Giant Enceladus was trapped under Mt. Etna as a consequence of the war with the Olympians and the eruptions of Etna were a result of his subterranean attempts to free himself, while the lightning directed toward the sky (which given the close connection of lightning with Zeus, as the *Hymn* of Cleanthes shows, is an astonishing reversal) relates to his assault upon the heavens.⁶³ There is a great deal bound up in this allusion. First, that the legend of Empedocles jumping into Mt. Etna is being signaled here is unmistakable given the context. What this seems to suggest is that Lucretius tied the two figures together in these lines. Therefore, Empedocles becomes a kind of philosophical Giant at war with the heavens, or in Epicurean

⁶² Hardie, P.R. *Virgil's Aeneid: Cosmos and Imperium*. Oxford: OUP. 1986. Pg. 212.

⁶³ Campbell, Gordon. "Lucretius, Empedocles and Cleanthes." In *The Philosophizing Muse: The Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry*. Ed. Garani and Konstan. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2014. Pg. 36.

language at war with superstition and wrong worship of the gods. This casts Empedocles as a Giant in a heroic role against the traditional religious dogma, thereby on Lucretius' part overturning the typical interpretation of the myth. As Gale says, "Lucretius' use of the myth is deliberately aimed to shock, by reversing its traditional moral implications."⁶⁴ In changing the implications of the Gigantomachy in such a radical way, Lucretius clarified both how he viewed Empedocles while also acknowledging how important he was for Lucretius. As stated above, the quest to overthrow the Olympian gods becomes a philosophical war against impiety and superstition. Thus, Empedocles becomes the hero in the myth who fought against that impiety and superstition. Placing him in this role reveals how highly Lucretius considered Empedocles. As Montarese says of the whole passage, "Praising Empedocles' achievements as a poet writing philosophy was high on Lucretius' agenda, and perhaps his main reason for introducing lines 716-41. The description of Empedocles' *reperta* as *praeclara* suggests that poetry is an acceptable medium- or, perhaps *the* medium- to communicate broadly the truths of philosophy."⁶⁵ In other words, for Lucretius not only was Empedocles a Giant that is, a great and brave hero, but he was also the predecessor to whom Lucretius felt the strongest connection (one thinks here about the apparent absence of Parmenides, who likewise wrote philosophy in verse, from the *De Rerum Natura*).

The next part of the passage continued in a similar spirit of praise:

Hic tamen et supra quos diximus inferiors
partibus egregie multis multoque minores,
quamquam multa bene ac divinitus inveniendes
ex adyto tam quam cordis responsa dedere
sanctius et multo certa ratione magis quam
Pythia quae tripodi a Phoebi lauroque profatur,
principiis tamen in rerum fecere ruinas
et graviter magni magno cecidere ibi casu. (734-41)

⁶⁴ Gale, M.R. *Myth and Poetry in Lucretius*. Cambridge: HUP. 1994. Pg. 43.

⁶⁵ Montarese, Francesco. *Lucretius and his Sources: A Study of Lucretius, De Rerum Natura I 635-920*. Berlin: de Gruyter. 2012. Pg. 221.

Nonetheless this one and the others whom I mentioned inferior
To the eminent one by many degrees and lesser by much,
Although many beneficial and divine discoveries
Responding from the holy heart as it were gave
More sacred and with more certain reason than
The Pythia who speaks from the tripod and laurel of Apollo,
Nonetheless these came to ruin about the beginnings of things
And solemnly great herein fell because of this great cause.

There is some debate about the full context as to whom or what Lucretius was specifically addressing here. Sedley thought Lucretius referred to all Pre-Socratic philosophers⁶⁶, but given the context the discoveries (*invenientes*) are more likely referring to Empedocles. As Montarese says, “The subject of *invenientes* in 736, *dedere* in 737 and *facere* in 740 being the same it seems logical to read *invenientes* as referring primarily to Empedocles. It seems limiting to assume that the reference here is solely to Empedocles’ clarity, his use of poetry for revelation, and fusion of philosophy and poetry; it seems more likely that we have praise here of some of Empedocles’ theories.”⁶⁷ This fact is highly significant in that it shows how Lucretius’ evaluation of Empedocles remained distinct from the other philosophers discussed and how his tone of respect and admiration for Empedocles did not shift in the later passage, even as Lucretius moved into his critique.

It is true that here Lucretius admitted to a failure on the part of Empedocles (*magno cecidere ibi casu*), yet the language of the passage is not celebratory. It does not contain the vituperation evident in the passage on Heraclitus, nor the distant tone in the passage on Anaxagoras, instead it feels quite melancholy. There is a sense that Lucretius was not simply cataloguing the errors of an earlier philosopher, but begrudgingly allowing that his hero had made some mistakes. Lucretius made that admission, but nonetheless the passage is still full

⁶⁶ Sedley, David. *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom*. Cambridge: CUP. 1998. Pg. 21.

⁶⁷ Montarese, Francesco. *Lucretius and his Sources: A Study of Lucretius, De Rerum Natura I 635-920*. Berlin: de Gruyter. 2012. Pg. 225-6.

of praise for Empedocles. The discoveries he made came from his holy heart (*ex adyto cordis*), presumably meaning both that his intentions were virtuous and that he was morally pure. Lucretius called his discoveries divine (*divinitus*) echoing the description earlier of Empedocles' divine mind (*divini pectoris*). Furthermore, Lucretius called his discoveries as more holy and far more reasonable than the oracles that Apollo's priestess would utter. This is a bold comparison given the reverence associated with Apollo's oracles, but it also shows the consistent pattern of language that Lucretius used to talk about Empedocles. As in the above quoted material, Lucretius stressed the religious significance of Empedocles. He was holy and wonderful (*sanctum magis et mirum*, 730), scarcely human (731-33), like a Giant (722-25), and as seen here a holier figure than even the priestess of Apollo.

Perhaps the best evidence to make sense of Lucretius frequent religious imagery when he discussed Empedocles lies in Empedocles' own words. There are two interesting fragments in which Empedocles mentioned oracles and divination. In the first line of fragment 24 Empedocles said:

οὐκ ἂν ἀνὴρ τοιαῦτα σοφὸς φρεσὶ μαντεύσαιοτο (1)

A wise man would not presage such in his mind

The fragment itself elucidates the contrast between the Empedoclean wise man and the way in which the unenlightened live. The verb used (*μαντεύομαι*) is a confusing one. Generally, the meaning is to foresee or anticipate something (and thus contrasted with actual knowledge). Importantly the root of the verb (*μάντις*) means seer or prophet. Given that the context of the fragment is to contrast two ways of life, it is probably not without significance that Empedocles employs the word for a wise man (*σοφὸς*) and a verb with the root of an apparently opposed quality. What this means is that for Empedocles the wise man must not behave in the way a prophet would and he is, moreover, superior to him because he follows the right way to live. If this interpretation is correct, Lucretius' own contrast between

Empedocles and the prophethood of Apollo becomes not only an assertion of Empedocles' greatness for Lucretius but also further highlights the thorough familiarity Lucretius had with Empedocles' work.⁶⁸

Empedocles used similar language in the notorious fragment 1 (in Inwood's edition). In this fragment, Empedocles described himself as a god no longer mortal (θεὸς ἄμβροτος οὐκέτι θνητός, 4). Whether this assertion Empedocles intended to be a literal claim to divinity or simply as a comment on how the masses see him given his wisdom is not clear. But later in the fragment, while he was describing the various needs of the people coming to him, he said some come to him in need of divination (οἱ μὲν μαντοσυνέων κεχρημένοι, 10). What this seems to confirm is that the Empedoclean wise man, or at least Empedocles himself, will assume the role of prophet in his community because as the previous fragment illustrates are inferior to the wise man.

Thus, one may observe that Lucretius' consistent religious imagery was drawn directly from Empedocles' work. That Lucretius was willing unironically to promulgate in his poem the self-presentation that Empedocles espoused for himself again highlights the respect Lucretius had for Empedocles as is clear from the unflattering portraits of the other Pre-Socratic philosophers. Yet perhaps more significantly in book five one finds Lucretius taking on this same imagery in another passage recalling Empedocles, but this time with the religious associations applied to himself.

Qua prius adgrediar quam de re fundere fata
sanctius et multo certa ratione magis quam
Pythia quae tripode a Phoebi lauroque profatur,
multa tibi expediam doctis solacia dictis;
religione refrenatus ne forte rearis
terras et solem et caelum, mare sidera lunam,
corpore divino debere aeterna manere,
proptereaue putes ritu par esse Gigantum
pendere eos poenas inmani pro scelere omnis,
qui ratione sua disturbent moenia mundi

⁶⁸ Kranz, W. "Lukrez und Empedokles": *Philologus* 96. 1944. 68-107.

praeclarumque velint caeli restinguere solem
inmortalia mortali sermone notantes; (5. 110-21)

But before I begin to utter my oracles on this matter, more solemnly and with more certain reason than those which the Pythia declares from the tripod and laurel of Phoebus, I will expound to you many consolations in words of wisdom; lest by some chance bitted and bridled by superstition you think that earth and sun and sky, sea, stars, and moon are of divine body and must abide forever; and should therefore believe it right that, like the Giants, all they should suffer punishment for a monstrous crime, who with their reasoning shake the walls of the world, and would quench the shining light of the sun in heaven, tarnishing things immortal with mortal speech;⁶⁹

In this passage one can see Lucretius took on the mantle of Empedocles. Like Empedocles, he will pronounce oracles (*fundere fata*, 110). These oracles are, again in a repetition from the passage about Empedocles, holier and with more certain reason than the Pythia who speaks from the tripod and laurel of Apollo (*sanctius et multo certa ratione magis quam/ Pythia quae tripode a Phoebi lauroque profatur*, 111-12). The repetition of this couplet in a distinctly Empedoclean passage also corroborates the claim made previously about the passage 1.734-41 referring to Empedocles and his discoveries, not the other philosophers mentioned in the critique. Further Empedoclean notes in this passage include another listing of the four elements (*terras et solem et caelum, mare*, 115) as well as another allusion to the Giants that recalls the discussion about Mt. Etna in 1. 723-5. What the features in this passage add up to is Lucretius' attempt to cast himself in the role of the new Empedocles, his attempt to assume the role of philosopher-poet that Empedocles can give to him, but Epicurus denied.

In examining Empedocles' place in Lucretius' critique of Pre-Socratic philosophers, what this section has shown is the high respect and indeed exaltation that Lucretius gave him. As previous said only Epicurus was comparably, though perhaps not more highly, praised. Furthermore, even when Lucretius did in fact attack some of Empedocles' doctrines it was done not in a spirit of mockery, but rather with a feeling closer to sorrow about the errors of

⁶⁹ Translation taken from Lucretius. *On the Nature of Things*. Trans. W. H. D. Rouse. revised by Martin F. Smith. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1924. Pg. 387-9.

one he so admired. However, although some of Empedocles' doctrines did receive censure from Lucretius, at no point did Lucretius follow with a total rejection of his philosophy. On the contrary, he extolled several of Empedocles' beliefs as in 1.734-41. Indeed, such was his love, it may be fair to say, of Empedocles that as the above passage indicates he wished to take on Empedocles' role in a Roman environment.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has demonstrated two things. First, that Epicurus and later Epicureans, both by their own admission and by the reports of others, did not accept poetry to have any pedagogic role for the spreading of philosophical ideas and, insofar as the Epicurean should occupy himself with poetry, it should only be an activity for leisure and the subject of the poem should aim only to give pleasure. Given the conservative nature of Epicureanism, this shows Lucretius at odds with the whole tradition of the school to which he said he adheres. Lucretius was thus without a model and without a justification in this tradition.

The fact of Epicurean disdain for educational poetry leads to the second point of this paper, the influence of Empedocles. This paper has shown, although by no means in an exhaustive study, the deep intertextuality between Lucretius' poem and the poetry of Empedocles. Yet Empedocles' influence was not simply limited to poetic tropes as Lucretius' praise of him clearly speaks of some of his philosophical doctrines as well as Lucretius' assumption of Empedocles' concept about the social role of the philosopher-poet as one who takes the role of the prophet in his community, but instead of superstitious ideas dispenses philosophical wisdom. Further research should concentrate on thorough examination of Lucretius' borrowings and echoes from Empedocles such as analogies, metaphors, and compound words as well as searching for any other occasions where Lucretius used Empedoclean language to refer to himself or his purpose in writing his poem.

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