

# The Philosophising Muse: the Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry

## Lucretius, Empedocles, and Cleanthes<sup>1</sup>

Lucretius is so well known to be an *Epicurean* poet that it may seem pointless to investigate his philosophical influences. The situation should be straightforward, but many un-Epicurean influences have been noticed in *De rerum natura*, and there has been considerable argument over whether, or to what degree, these are philosophical or simply poetic influences. The fact that Lucretius uses the medium of verse for his philosophical exposition complicates the picture. He has a marked tendency to appropriate the language and imagery of his “opponents” and use them to argue against their world view. So we can say, for example, that he is an Ennian poet, because of his use of Ennius as a poetic source, while he disagrees fundamentally with Ennius’ Pythagoreanism, and that he is a Homeric poet despite, or because of, his mission to combat the Homeric world view of gods intervening in human affairs. He also makes little distinction between poetic and philosophical sources, and this makes the question of his philosophical influences even more complicated. Further, his most important poetic influence is Empedocles, and Empedocles is a *philosopher* poet; because of this aspects of the Empedoclean world view tend to be imported into *DRN* along with poetic influence.<sup>2</sup> As well as this, Lucretius actively embraces parts of Empedocles’ vision, in particular the figure of Aphrodite as a governing principle of the universe. I argue that Stoic sources are also appropriated and “turned” by Lucretius, especially Cleanthes’ *Hymn to Zeus*. Cleanthes, as I see it, had already used Empedocles as a source for his hymn, replacing Aphrodite, the Empedoclean “feminine principal”, with the Stoic masculine controlling principle Zeus. Lucretius topples the usurper Zeus from his throne and puts Aphrodite/Venus back in her rightful place. In the first section I look at the ways in which Lucretius himself speaks of his poetic and philosophical sources.

### 1. Lucretius on his Poetic and Philosophical Sources

---

<sup>1</sup> I am very grateful to Myrto Garani and David Konstan for their perceptive suggestions and criticisms of this paper. The mistakes that remain are my own.

<sup>2</sup> On the ways in which Lucretius’ intertextual borrowings carry over something of their former connotations into *DRN* see Fowler 2000, 138-155.

## The Philosophising Muse: the Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry

It is well known that Epicurus was suspicious of poetry on the grounds that it told false stories about the gods, and that he also rejected verse as a medium of philosophical instruction on the grounds that poets used words in wrong ways for effect when, according to him, words have real meanings and so should be used very carefully in order to avoid words simply being “empty” or an endless regression of argument over what words mean.<sup>3</sup> Put briefly, Epicurus thought that poets such as Homer had been guilty of spreading a false religion in which the gods involved themselves in human affairs, rewarded and punished them, and thus caused people to fear the gods, removing their *ataraxia* or “mental calm”.<sup>4</sup> Lucretius clearly had quite different ideas about the use and value of poetry for philosophical persuasion. Accordingly, Lucretius seems to feel the need to defend his choice of verse as a medium and tells us why he is writing in verse (*DRN* 1.921-930):

Nunc age quod superest cognosce et clarius audi.  
nec me animi fallit quam sint obscura; sed acri  
percussit thyrsos laudis spes magna meum cor,  
et simul incussit suavem mi in pectus amorem  
Musarum, quo nunc instinctus mente vigenti  
avia Pieridum peragro loca nullius ante  
trita solo. iuvat integros accedere fontis  
atque haurire, iuvatque novos decerpere flores  
insignemque meo capiti petere inde coronam  
unde prius nulli velarint tempora Musae.

Come now, mark and learn what remains and  
hear a clearer strain. Nor am I unaware how  
obscure these matters are; but high hope of  
renown has struck my mind sharply with holy wand,  
and at the same time has struck into my heart sweet  
love of the Muses, thrilled by which now in lively  
thought I traverse the pathless tracts of the Pierides  
never yet trodden by any foot. I love to approach  
virgin springs and there to drink; I love to pluck  
new flowers, and to seek an illustrious chaplet for  
my head from the fields whence before this the Muses  
have crowned the brows of none.<sup>5</sup>

Lucretius wanders territory familiar to us from Hesiod onwards, the valley beneath holy Helicon where the Muses appeared to him while he was herding his goats and

---

<sup>3</sup> See Asmis 1995, 15-34.

<sup>4</sup> See Obbink 1995, 189-209.

<sup>5</sup> Texts and translations of Lucretius are by Rouse/Smith, with some alterations.

## The Philosophising Muse: the Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry

gave him a sceptre of laurel and a divine voice, instructed him to sing the truth about the holy gods, and granted him the three-fold oracular knowledge that had once been given to Calchas in the *Iliad*.<sup>6</sup> Lucretius here also claims quasi-divine Bacchic inspiration which has instilled in him a sweet love of the Muses.<sup>7</sup> He will be first to wander the Epicurean sector of the valley of the Muses, “the pathless tracts of the Pierides never yet trodden by any foot”.<sup>8</sup> Not the road less travelled, but never travelled. These are the virgin springs of Epicurean philosophical poetry. Not for him the well-sampled waters of the Aganippe and the Hippocrene. The flowers that he finds there will be woven into a victory crown just like the one already awarded earlier in the poem to his epic predecessor, Ennius (*DRN* 1.102-126). Ennius he says, although he spread false stories of the fate of the soul, “first brought down from pleasant Helicon a chaplet of green foliage to win a glorious name through the nations of Italian men” (... *qui primus amoeno | detulit ex Helicone perenni fronde coronam | per gentis Italas hominum quae clara clueret. DRN* 1.117-19). But, Ennius was so confused about the nature of the soul that while, as a Pythagorean, he believed in the transmigration of souls, and indeed claimed to be Homer himself reborn, he also said that the ghost of Homer had risen from the underworld, appeared to him, and unfolded for him the nature of the universe (*rerum naturam, DRN* 1.126). As M. R. Gale well explores, in this passage Lucretius places himself in a line of poetic inheritance from Homer to Ennius, but also presents these two as poets of *De rerum natura*, and thus as rivals in natural philosophy. Embedded in the praise of Ennius Gale also discovered a pun, unmistakable once seen, on the name of Empedocles, adding in a true poet of natural philosophy to his line of inheritance.<sup>9</sup> My point here is that Lucretius appears to see no great problem in inviting the reader to view Homer and Ennius as rivals in philosophical poetry, and even works hard to establish a line of succession that we, as modern readers, might find rather surprisingly eclectic in its mix of philosophy and

---

<sup>6</sup> On oracles and Epicurean philosophy see further below 000.

<sup>7</sup> Kyriakidis 2006, argues that the exclusion of lines 1.921-5 from the repetition of this passage in the poem to book four (4.1-25) is a Lucretian illustration of the Epicurean principle of the impossibility of *metathesis*: the transposition of words or letters must make a fundamental change to the meaning of a word or passage. In this instance Kyriakidis sees the dropping of the claim of divine inspiration as significant (608): ‘Lucretius now has a free hand to form his own poetry by not being *instinctus* any more.’

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Gale 1994, 146-7; Volk 2002, 87-88.

<sup>9</sup> Gale 2001, 168, and note 2: “Ennius’ *corona* – the mark of his poetic distinction – is both ‘everlasting’ (*perenni fronde*, 1.118) and destined to bring him ‘bright fame’ (*quae clara clueret*, 1.119). The two phrases taken together suggest the name of Empedocles, literally ‘eternally renowned.’” I.e. ~ ἔμπεδο- (“steadfast,” “lasting”) + ~ κλέος (“fame,” “glory”).

## The Philosophising Muse: the Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry

epic poetry.<sup>10</sup> In the Epicurean context the presence of Homer as forerunner is particularly surprising given Epicurus' attitude to him as purveyor of falsehoods.

So, Lucretius presents his main poetic influences as if they were natural philosophers, and conversely he presents Epicurus in terms highly suggestive of a poetic source: in the proem to book three we see Lucretius following in his master's footsteps across a landscape reminiscent of the valley of the Muses (*DRN* 3.1-13):

O tenebris tantis tam clarum extollere lumen  
qui primus potuisti inlustrans commoda vitae,  
te sequor, o Graiae gentis decus, inque tuis nunc  
ficta pedum pono pressis vestigia signis,  
non ita certandi cupidus quam propter amorem  
quod te imitari aveo: quid enim contendat hirundo  
cycnis, aut quidnam tremulis facere artibus haedi  
consimile in cursu possint et fortis equi vis?  
tu pater es, rerum inventor, tu patria nobis  
suppeditas praecepta, tuisque ex, inclute, chartis,  
floriferis ut apes in saltibus omnia libant,  
omnia nos itidem depascimur aurea dicta,  
aurea, perpetua semper dignissima vita.

O you who amid so great a darkness were able to  
raise aloft a light so clear, illuminating the blessings  
of life, you I follow, O glory of the Grecian race,  
and now in the marks you have left I plant my own  
footsteps firm, not so much desiring to be your rival,  
as for love, because I yearn to copy you: for why  
should a swallow vie with swans, or what could a kid  
with its shaking limbs do in running to match himself  
with the strong horse's vigour? You are our  
father, the discoverer of truths, you supply us with  
a father's precepts, from your pages, illustrious man,  
as bees in the flowery glades sip all the sweets,  
so we likewise feed on all your golden words, your  
words of gold, ever most worthy of life eternal.

Epicurus is characterised as bringer of light in darkness, using his torch to illuminate the blessings of life.<sup>11</sup> He is clearly labelled as a Greek source, and quite unambiguously Lucretius presents himself, in contrast to his eclectic wanderings through the pathless tracts of the Pierides in search of sources, as following a trodden

---

<sup>10</sup> See further Volk 2002, 105-118.

<sup>11</sup> On the light-bringer theme see further below 000.

## The Philosophising Muse: the Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry

path of philosophy, treading indeed in his master's footsteps.<sup>12</sup> This metaphor places Lucretius as simply a follower in philosophy, carefully tracing the signs made by his precursor, and a Roman follower as well, unable to compete with the Greeks.<sup>13</sup> This might invite us to see Lucretius as eclectic in his use of poetic sources, while being a "fundamentalist" in that Epicurus is his only philosophical source.<sup>14</sup> However, the metaphors he uses to illustrate his inability to compete in philosophy with Epicurus complicate the matter since they are *poetic* contest metaphors. Katharina Volk argues that this strongly suggests that Lucretius is thinking here of Epicurus in a similar way to Ennius, Homer and Empedocles in book 1.<sup>15</sup> Then Lucretius presents Epicurus in very Roman terms as a father instructing Lucretius as his son with, "a father's precepts" (*patria praecepta*). As Alessandro Schiesaro says this puts Lucretius in the same relation to Epicurus as a Roman son of the middle Republican period to his father who instructs by his absolute personal *auctoritas*. Cato's didactic writings to his son Marcus provide the model, with Cato's precepts to be followed without question. To complete the parallel, Cato's work was called a *carmen* or an *oraculum* by later writers and he referred to himself as a *vates*.<sup>16</sup> So Lucretius places himself very much in the territory of early Roman didacticism and parental instruction. The authority of Epicurus' words is underlined in the next lines, *aurea dicta, aurea, perpetua semper dignissima vita*, ("your golden words, your words of gold, ever most worthy of life eternal", *DRN* 3.13): these are words to last forever, imperishable, unquestionable, inscribed in gold. Parallels have often been drawn with the golden sayings of Pythagoras, whose words had unquestionable authority within his school. But then again, between the *patria praecepta* and the *aurea dicta* the analogy of Epicurus' followers feeding on his words as bees in flowery glades brings us back into the territory of the Muses and poetry, and the image of bees, eclectic as they are

---

<sup>12</sup> On the Greekness of this passage see Sedley 1998, 57-59 who argues that Lucretius is drawing attention to the alien nature of Greek culture while stressing the universality of Epicureanism.

<sup>13</sup> See Sedley 1998, 58. Konstan 1988, 65-66 reads *ficta* (3.4) as the past participle of *fungo* ('form', 'fashion') as well as the usual interpretation from *figo* ("plant", "fix"), and interprets *signis* as referring to Epicurus' words rather than to the content of his doctrine: "In the signs, then, that the master had set down, Lucretius leaves traces (*vestigia*) that he has fashioned. On this reading, *ficta* would not necessarily mean 'fashioned to', that is, adapted to the teachings of Epicurus, but would point to the way in which Lucretius' own words have been shaped and composed. In the metaphor of superimposing footprints on the signs planted firmly by the founder, both terms refer to language. The *ficta vestigia* are precisely Lucretius' poetry fashioned according to his art."

<sup>14</sup> See Sedley 1998, 62-93, "Lucretius the Fundamentalist".

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Volk 2002, 108-111.

<sup>16</sup> See Schiesaro 2007, 65-69. Cato's title is lost, but as Schiesaro says, *Praecepta ad filium* is one of the suggestions.

## The Philosophising Muse: the Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry

in their browsing on flowers, subtly subverts the monolithic authority of Epicurus, and at the same time assimilates him once again to Lucretius' poetic sources.<sup>17</sup> In all this I wish to establish that, just as Volk argues, in important programmatic passages like these Lucretius does not make a clear distinction between his poetic and philosophical sources, but tends to try to blend them, and while he presents himself as a *pius* Roman son absorbing the *patria praecepta* of Epicurus he also treats Epicurus as if he were a didactic poet, one of a range of poets he cites as influences.

As Lucretius' justification for his use of verse continues in book one<sup>18</sup> the un-Epicurean seeming impression of Lucretius' poetics grows (*DRN* 1.931-934):

primum quod magnis doceo de rebus et artis  
religionum animum nodis exsolvere pergo,  
deinde quod obscura de re tam lucida pango  
carmina, musaeo contingens cuncta lepore.

First because my teaching is of high matters, and I proceed  
to unloose the mind from the close knots of superstition;  
next because the subject is so dark and the lines I write so  
clear, as I touch all with the Muses' grace.

High matters demand exposition in the highest mode and so Lucretius assimilates Epicurus to the epic mode. Epicurus' doctrines will be granted the authority of Homer and Ennius by being rendered in their metre. Next his stated purpose is to loosen the knots of superstition; the best tool to untie these knots would be the same one that tied them—epic verse, according to Epicurus.<sup>19</sup> Then, a surprising claim that verse can illuminate difficult subjects, rather than, as Epicurus would have it, make them more obscure. Verse here serves a similar light-bringing function to Epicurus lifting his torch in 3.1-2.<sup>20</sup> Next comes the famous passage in which Lucretius uses the analogy of doctors smearing honey on the rim of a cup of bitter wormwood in order to entice children to drink their medicine and so be cured. Just so he uses poetry as honey to

---

<sup>17</sup> On the bees as poets here see Konstan 1988, 68, who also discusses the nectar they gather as the precursor of the "honey of the Muses", the symbol of Lucretius' verse. The parallel between the bees and Epicurus' followers is strengthened by the repetition of *omnia*: the bees feed on *all* of the flowers, the followers feed on *all* Epicurus' words. Lucretius perhaps attempts to play down the eclecticism of the bees' wanderings by insisting they feed on all (rather than just sampling some) of the flowers.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. 4.1-25.

<sup>19</sup> Lucretius plays on a traditional etymology of *religio* as from *religare*, "to bind down/back", cf. Maltby (1991) s.v. *religio*, Servius on Verg. *Aen.* 8.349. Lactantius quotes line 932 approvingly (*Div. Inst.* 4.28) in support of this derivation and against the alternative Stoic derivation from *relegere*, "to read over and over again" (cf. Cic. *ND* 2.72).

<sup>20</sup> See further Volk 2002, 92-93.

## The Philosophising Muse: the Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry

entice us as readers to drink down the sometimes bitter medicine of Epicurean philosophy. Like the children we are to be cured by being deceived, he tells us, but not betrayed. If poetry was originally the carrier of the virus that infected people's minds with false religion, then it can be used as a carrier of the *vera ratio* that will cure them.

Lucretius' doctrines have a therapeutic function. That this is not simply part of the vehicle of Lucretius' medical analogy is shown by Epicurus (fr. 221 Us.):

κενὸς ἐκείνου φιλοσόφου λόγος, ὕφ' οὗ μηδὲν πάθος ἀνθρώπου  
θεραπεύεται· ὥσπερ γὰρ ἰατρικῆς οὐδὲν ὄφελος μὴ τὰς νόσους τῶν σωμάτων  
ἐκβαλλούσης, οὕτως οὐδὲ φιλοσοφίας, εἰ μὴ τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ἐκβάλλει πάθος.

Empty are the words of that philosopher who offers therapy for no human suffering. For just as there is no use in medical expertise if it does not give therapy for bodily diseases, so too there is no use in philosophy if it does not expel the suffering of the soul. (trans. Long & Sedley).

The Epicureans saw the purpose of their philosophy as to heal sick souls.<sup>21</sup> The patient is to be vaccinated by Epicurean *vera ratio* disguised in the attractive form of mythological poetry. We are more likely to swallow the medicine if presented in attractive verse than if presented in dry, difficult prose. It may seem surprising that Lucretius tells us he is trying to trick us into swallowing his message, but even though he addresses us as “you”, we feel he must really be talking to someone else, someone in need of this surreptitious treatment. We, we pride ourselves, are not so easily fooled by such snake-oil salesmen's tricks. In this way, by explaining his subterfuge and giving us privileged esoteric information, we feel we are being addressed as if already initiated into the cult. So Lucretius tricks us into siding with him as the instructor, and separating us from the ‘children’ to be tricked by the honeyed cup.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Epicurus *KD* 11: Εἰ μηθὲν ἡμᾶς αἱ τῶν μετεώρων ὑποψίαι ἠνώχλουν καὶ αἱ περὶ θανάτου, [...μήποτε πρὸς ἡμᾶς ἦ τι, ἔτι τε τὸ μὴ κατανοεῖν τοὺς ὄρους τῶν ἀλγηδόνων καὶ τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν,] οὐκ ἂν προσεδεόμεθα φυσιολογίας. “if we were not disturbed by celestial phenomena and the fear of death, [...] we would have no need of natural philosophy”; *Ep. Men.* 122: the purpose of studying philosophy is the health of the soul. The medical analogy was a favourite with Epicurus (e.g. *Sent. Vat.* 54, *Ep. Men.* 122), and also with his followers, e.g. Philodemus' famous “fourfold remedy” (τετραφάρμακος, Philod. *Πρὸς τοὺς*-, PHerc 1005, col. IV, 9-14), and Diogenes of Oinoanda fr. 3.VI 2-4 Smith: ὧν δὴ φαρμ[άκων] / πεῖραν ἡμε[ῖς] π[άντως] / εἰλήφαμεν. “these medicines (φάρμακα) we have put [fully] to the test”. See further Nussbaum 1994, 13-47.

<sup>22</sup> Mitsis 1993 sees the relationship between Lucretius and his reader as coercive, but see Gale 2005, 178-181 on the ways that Lucretius shifts the relationship between himself as authoritative teacher, the pupil, and the unenlightened, sometimes aligning himself with the pupil against the unenlightened, as he implicitly does here, and sometimes aligning the pupil with the unenlightened.

## The Philosophising Muse: the Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry

Lucretius' therapeutic technique is to appropriate language and imagery from epic poetry, the sort of things that are normally associated with spreading false ideas about the gods, and turn them against themselves. For example, he translates Homer's description of Olympus almost word for word when claiming that Epicurus' philosophy enables him to visualise the entire universe (*DRN* 3.14-22):

nam simul ac ratio tua coepit vociferari  
naturam rerum, divina mente coortam,  
diffugiunt animi terrores, moenia mundi  
discedunt, totum video per inane geri res.  
apparet divum numen sedesque quietae  
quas neque concutiunt venti nec nubila nimbis  
aspergunt neque nix acri concreta pruina  
cana cadens violat semperque innubilus aether  
integit, et large diffuso lumine ridet.

For as soon as your reasoning begins to proclaim the nature of things revealed by your divine mind, away, flee the mind's terrors, the walls of the world open out, I see action going on throughout the whole void: before me appear the gods in their majesty, and their peaceful abodes, which no winds ever shake nor clouds besprinkle with rain, which no snow congealed by the bitter frost mars with its white fall, but the air ever cloudless encompasses them, and laughs with its light spread wide abroad.

Epicurus' doctrines grant Lucretius the ability to "see" through the walls of the world, and behold, the abodes of the gods are exactly the way Homer describes them in *Odyssey* 6.42-5.<sup>23</sup> The important difference is that they are beyond our world rather than within it. By recontextualising Homer's description of Olympus Lucretius seeks to invert the Homeric world view; the gods live beyond the walls of the world and not on a mountain within it, from which they can visit the earth below and hurl thunderbolts down onto it. Homer is thus used against himself. He was partly correct, though; the gods do live in perfect peace in a perfect setting beyond the vicissitudes of our world. Philip Hardie speaks of:

Lucretius' peculiar tactic of getting inside his opponents' positions and then evacuating them of their prior content to refill them with Epicurean doctrine;

---

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Gale 1994, 56.



## The Philosophising Muse: the Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry

the emotional and aesthetic appeal of a Cleanthes is parasitically diverted to the ends of an areligious materialism.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, as I have said elsewhere, he presents the reader as if with a brightly coloured sugared pill, the outer coating of the myth intact and attractive, but with Epicurean medicine inside.<sup>25</sup> It looks like Homer and tastes like Homer, so we are happy to swallow it, but it contains the anti-Homer vaccine. When we re-read Homer's description of Olympus after reading Lucretius we can enjoy the poetry while being protected from superstition by *vera ratio*.

### 2.1 DRN 1.716-741: Praise of Empedocles

In his critical catalogue of early physicists in book one, Lucretius lavishes particular praise upon Empedocles, in terms otherwise reserved only for Epicurus himself. Empedocles is the “foremost” of the four-element theorists (1.716-733):

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

---

<sup>24</sup> Hardie 1986, 11.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Campbell 2003, 182.

## The Philosophising Muse: the Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry

with its waves the shores of the Aeolian land from the boundaries of that island. Here is 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. 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.

As has often been noticed this description of Sicily is full of references to the four elements in their macroscopic form,<sup>26</sup> thus illustrating that Sicily was the birthplace of the four-element theory, and also providing an aetiology for the theory itself. Pointedly the island is "three-cornered" (*triquetris*, 1.717) containing three of the four elements within itself or surrounding it: earth (*terrarum*, 1.717), water (*aequor*, 1.718) that intrudes its presence upon the observer by splashing him with salt brine from its green waves, and is clearly separate from earth as can be seen from its function in separating Sicily from Italy. Fire is provided by the eruptions of mount Etna, and the fourth element air is contained within sky (*caelum*, 1.725). It is hardly surprising if a philosopher from such an island realised these were the elemental masses of nature. Although Sicily is full of wonders, it contains nothing more illustrious, holy, wonderful and dear (*carum*, 1.730). It has often been noticed that *carum* may well be a pun upon Lucretius' own cognomen Titus Lucretius *Carus*: Sicily holds nothing more Lucretian than Empedocles. This has been taken as an acknowledgement of his poetic debt to Empedocles.<sup>27</sup> His poems come from his 'divine mind' (*divini pectoris*, 1.731), his discoveries are 'illustrious' (*praeclara reperta*, 1.732), and he seems, "hardly to be born of mortal stock". Only Epicurus is more highly praised in 5.8: *deus ille fuit, deus, inclute Memmi*, ("he was a god, a god, noble Memmius"). The motif of Etna shooting lightning at the sky has been recognised as a reference to the myth of the Giants and their assault upon the Olympians. In myth the Giant Enceladus is trapped under Aetna as punishment for the Gigantomachy and causes the eruptions by

---

<sup>26</sup> See Mackay 1955; Snyder 1972; Sedley 1998, 13-15; Piazzzi 2005 *ad loc.*

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Sedley 1998, 14 note 61.

## The Philosophising Muse: the Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry

his struggles; the heaven-borne lightnings symbolize his assault upon the heavens.<sup>28</sup> The story of Empedocles' leap into Aetna must also be implicitly present here, and so assimilates the philosopher to the Giant.

The Gigantomachy was a frequent target of allegorical interpretation, with the assault of the Giants viewed as an assault of chaos upon harmony, of barbarism upon civilization, and of the passions upon reason. Lucretius makes use of the myth in 5.110-25: he will offer words of consolation in case we think that the earth and heavenly bodies are divine and immortal and that by arguing they are mortal bodies we are “shaking the walls of the world”, like the Giants, and should suffer the same penalty for our crime. As Gale puts it: “Lucretius’ use of the myth is deliberately aimed to shock, by reversing its traditional moral implications.”<sup>29</sup> The Epicureans are indeed engaged in a “Gigantic assault upon the heavens”, but this time it is the assault of reason and piety upon the superstitious and impious interpretation of the heavens as divine. Epicurus himself had made such an assault upon the heavens, but one that rescued humanity from religion rather than destroying the world, in his “flight of the mind” in 1.62-79.<sup>30</sup> Hardie also notes that unlike the mythical Gigantomachy, Epicurus’ assault actually succeeds: “It was the previous dominance of the gods that was closer to a state of chaos. In fact it turns out that the true monsters are the old gods, who must be recognized for what they are (*tollere contra | est oculos ausus*, *DRN* 1.66-67) prior to their rightful destruction.”<sup>31</sup> Empedocles and the other early physicists had already made Gigantomachic assaults but, unsuccessful, they fell back to earth. Their discoveries were excellent and divinely inspired (*divinitus*, *DRN* 1.736), and were “holier and with much more certain reason than those which the Pythia declares from the tripod and laurel of Phoebus” (*sanctius et multo certa ratione magis quam | Pythia quae tripodi a Phoebi lauroque profatur*, *DRN* 1.738-739). But their ideas about the elements of matter let them down: “they came to a crash about the beginnings of things: great they were, and herein great was their fall.” (*principiis tamen in rerum fecere ruinas | et graviter magni magno cecidere ibi casu*, *DRN* 1.740-741). Lucretius sees physics as a long-term project aimed at destroying the monster *Religio* (cf. *DRN* 1.62-65). Earlier physicists were ultimately unsuccessful but they were forerunners of the atomists and, as part of the anti-religious project of

---

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Hardie 1986, 211-213.

<sup>29</sup> Gale 1994, 43.

<sup>30</sup> See Edwards 1990, 465-466; Gale 1994, 43-45; Clay 1998, 174-186.

<sup>31</sup> Hardie 1986, 210-211.

## The Philosophising Muse: the Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry

physics (as Lucretius sees it), are deserving of praise. Sedley would prefer to read this passage as Lucretius' praise of Empedocles as only a poetic source since Empedocles, according to Lucretius, "did, after all, radically misconceive the underlying nature of the world",<sup>32</sup> but on my reading, the fact that Empedocles' physical theories are "wrong" does not condemn his whole philosophy in Lucretius' eyes. He ultimately failed and fell, but he was a philosophical, as well as a poetic, Giant.

### 2.2 Oracular Philosophy

Lucretius' comparison in *DRN* 1.737-739 of the discoveries of the early physicists to the utterances of the Delphic oracle is also open to different readings. Sedley reads an ironic contrast between religious oracles and 'the philosopher's rational alternative': "On this reading, Lucretius' words distance him from approval of (literal) oracles as effectively as the way in which, for example, those who praise the "university of life" distance themselves from approval of (literal) universities".<sup>33</sup> But again, Lucretius seeks to replace just such religious "truths" as those uttered by the oracles with Epicurean truth, and so Epicurus' doctrines become more directly, and unironically, the new "oracles". He says that he himself will utter oracles, repeating his words from the praise of the early physicists in book one: "utter my oracles holier and with much more certain reason than those which the Pythia declares from the tripod and laurel of Phoebus" (*fundere fata | sanctius et multo certa ratione magis quam | Pythia quae tripode a Phoebi lauroque profatur*, *DRN* 5.110-112). Further, as Lucretius tells us, Epicurus was a god (*DRN* 5.8), his words are sacred teachings (*DRN* 3.14-15), and so may reasonably be regarded as oracular. In this way Lucretius really is the *προφήτης* of Epicurus, just as the Pythia is of Apollo.<sup>34</sup>

Lucretius also has direct Epicurean authority for the comparison to the Delphic oracle: in *Sent. Vat.* 29 Epicurus himself says that he would rather employ the openness of a φυσιολόγος and "give oracles" (χρησμοδεῖν), even if he is not understood, than pander to popular opinion and so win the praise of the mob.<sup>35</sup> Philodemus (*De piet.* 71.2044-45 Obbink) also says that he and other Epicureans ἐχρησμο[ι]δήσαμεν ("uttered oracles") about the gods, and Cicero, picking up ironically on this Epicurean *topos*, criticises Epicurus' *Kyriai Doxai* as the work "in

---

<sup>32</sup> Sedley 1998, 13.

<sup>33</sup> Sedley 1998, 13, and note 59.

<sup>34</sup> Both "interpreter" and "prophet", *LSJ* s.v. I a3 & I a4.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Obbink 1996, 568-569; Warren 2002, 186.

## The Philosophising Muse: the Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry

which he utters condensed weighty opinions as if they were oracles” (*in quo breuiter comprehensis grauissimis sententiis quasi oracula edidisse*, *Fin.* 2.20.12-14). Further, as James Warren says, the title of Epicurus’ supposed master Nausiphanes’ work, the *Tripod*, that Epicurus was charged with plagiarizing for his epistemological work the *Canon*, invokes the triplicity of the tripod upon which the Pythia sat to utter her oracles, and this triplicity can reasonably be seen as a reference to “ancestors of the three criteria of truth which are used in Epicureanism: *prolēpseis*, perceptions, and *pathē*.”<sup>36</sup> The triplicity of the Pythian tripod was certainly associated “with knowledge of the trinity of past, present, and future” (*Suda* s.v. τρίπους) and Epicurus also refers to the gaining of this threefold knowledge in *Sent. Vat.* 10 [=Metrodorus fr. 37], implicitly associating his doctrine with the Delphic oracle: “Remember that as a mortal by nature and receiving a finite time you have ascended through natural philosophy to the infinite and have looked down upon “what is, will be, and was before” (trans. Warren). Warren comments: “Epicureanism thought it was able to claim this Pythian knowledge because its natural philosophy offered a method of comprehensive knowledge, of the infinity of atoms and void, of the infinite variety of combinations. Any Epicurean knows all of what was, is, and will be, just like the Homeric seer Calchas.”<sup>37</sup> The oracular utterances of Empedocles and the early physicists, then, are, along with the Epicureans, part of a tradition of oracular philosophy that seeks to replace divinely inspired knowledge with knowledge gained from observation and reason. Lucretius enlists Empedocles as fellow opponent of *religio*, particularly because of his discoveries in physics; he was “wrong” in his four element theory, but he and the other Presocratic physicists were Giants engaged in an assault on superstition, and their discoveries were the new oracles, truer and more holy than the utterances of the Delphic oracle. Lucretius takes on Empedocles’ mantle as prophet and Giant.

### 3. The Hymn to Venus

#### 3.1 *Aeneadum genetrix*

*De rerum natura* begins with two words which are perhaps the most difficult to explain in the whole poem: *Aeneadum genetrix*, “Mother of the race of Aeneas”

---

<sup>36</sup> Warren 2002, 183-184.

<sup>37</sup> Warren 2002, 185. Cf. Homer *Il.* 1.68-71.

## The Philosophising Muse: the Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry

(*DRN* 1.1). Lucretius invokes a goddess, Venus, and this is unexceptional for the beginning of a didactic or epic poem,<sup>38</sup> but he invokes her in a role that, as an Epicurean, he cannot possibly believe in; the gods cannot involve themselves in this world and so the myth of Venus' seduction of Anchises and their offspring Aeneas as the founder of the future Roman race cannot be true. There are, on the other hand, great advantages for Lucretius in invoking her in the role of *Venus Genetrix* and evoking the dominant Roman foundation myth: this is to be a patriotic Roman poem even though it espouses Greek philosophy and the least Roman of all philosophies, Epicureanism, a philosophy that denies fate and destiny, and discourages people from involvement in public affairs. It is open to us to interpret Venus allegorically as Stephen Harrison has "Rome does indeed go back to Venus, but in the sense of the Venus of *DRN* 1.40, Venus as the generative principle which runs through the universe",<sup>39</sup> but Lucretius offers us no explanation to help us achieve this reading. It would indeed seem to be just the sort of allegorisation that he rejects in the palinode to the description of the Magna Mater in book two.<sup>40</sup> Further, in the context of composing a hymn, it is important to specify the particular attributes of the god being invoked. Gods have many different names, functions, attributes, spheres of influence and geographical locations and so care in naming and listing attributes is important in a hymn. As Furley and Bremer say, "the precise naming of the god addressed was important both from the point of view of politeness and courtesy, so as not to offend a sensitive power, and from the point of view of establishing the precise channel along which one wished divine succour to flow."<sup>41</sup> Just so, the importance of addressing the goddess in her role as *Venus Genetrix* becomes clear later in the hymn when Lucretius prays to the goddess to grant peace specifically to the Roman people (*DRN* 1.40). Her status as the founder of the Roman race is thus crucial; she is able to grant peace to the Romans not only because she is the embodiment of peace but also because she has a direct link to them as their ancestress. The title *Aeneadum genetrix* is thus not simply a decorative adding of a gloss of *Romanitas* to Lucretius poem, but is

---

<sup>38</sup> See Wheeler 2002.

<sup>39</sup> Harrison 2002, 4.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. *Lucr.* 2.600-660 on the rites of the Magna Mater, and 5.392-415 on the myths of Phaethon and the flood. See Gale 1994, 26-38. I agree with her that Lucretius only grudgingly accepts that the names of the gods can be used as labels for corn, wine etc., and does not really approve of this sort of allegorisation.

<sup>41</sup> Furley and Bremer 2001, 52.

## The Philosophising Muse: the Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry

functional within the hymn as it establishes the attributes of the goddess that the prayer will pick up on.

A non-Epicurean reader would of course have no problem with Lucretius' use of myth in his hymn, a reader who knew something about Epicureanism would be perhaps rather puzzled by it, but an Epicurean would be quite taken aback, especially because of the nature of the myth invoked. In *De pietate* Philodemus has a long critical catalogue of poets who relate impossible, unsuitable and inconsistent myths about the gods; among these are stories of the deaths of gods, gods having occupations, imprisonment and punishment of gods, conflicts, labours, and gods having affairs with humans. Aphrodite's affair with Anchises is one that he singles out (Philodemus *De Pietate* Part 2 Obbink, 60 P.Herc. 243.4):<sup>42</sup>

### TEXT

... [Hesiod?] says that she, although she was his mother, had sex with her son Orthus; and furthermore that Aphrodite engaged in shameless love with mortal men, with Adonis according to Antimachus, Panyassis, Epimenides and many others, with Anchises according to Homer and Hesiod .... (trans. Obbink)

So Philodemus would certainly not approve of Lucretius' use of the myth of Venus and Anchises.<sup>43</sup> But it is just the sort of thing other philosophers, such as the Stoics, who make heavy use of the allegorisation of myth, would be quite happy with.<sup>44</sup>

In *De pietate* the catalogue of poets is followed by a critical catalogue of philosophers who accommodate the mythological ideas of the poets into their doctrines and allegorise them, saying, for example, that air is a god, or that Zeus is fire. Compare Philodemus *De Pietate* Part 2 Obbink, 113 P.Herc. 1428 fr.17:<sup>45</sup>

### TEXT

... and the opposite in the things in which he says: 'The thunderbolt itself and Zeus steer all things.' And he [Heraclitus] claims that opposites are gods, like night ... (trans. Obbink).

Cf. also *Philodemus De Pietate Part 2 Obbink*, 114 P.Herc. 1428 fr. 18:<sup>46</sup>

### TEXT

---

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Schober 1988.

<sup>43</sup> I do not have space here for a discussion of whether Lucretius knew Philodemus and his school at Herculaneum, although I think it is likely he did. See Obbink 2007.

<sup>44</sup> See Gale 1994, 19-26; *Cicero* ND 2.63-72.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Henrichs 1974.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Henrichs 1974.

## The Philosophising Muse: the Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry

... Diogenes praises Homer for having spoken not fantastically about the divine: for he asserts that he considers the air to be Zeus himself, since he says that Zeus knows everything and that ... (trans. Obbink).

As Dirk Obbink has said, the poets and the other philosophers may be Philodemus' target in *De pietate* but the Stoics are his goal, and especially their allegorisation of myths of the gods.<sup>47</sup> In the following passage he attacks the Stoic Chrysippus for allegorising the nature of Zeus (*De pietate* Part 2 Obbink 126-7 P.Herc. 1428 col. 4-5 [part]):<sup>48</sup>

### TEXT

But indeed Chrysippus too referring everything to Zeus in the first book of his *On the Gods* says that Zeus is the principle of reason that rules over everything and is the soul of the universe and that through sharing its life all things live (several words missing) even the stones, on account of which he is call Zen, and Dia because he is the cause and the ruler of all things. And that the universe is a living thing and a god, and also the steering element of the cosmos and the soul of the whole and thus quite reasonably encompass Zeus and the common nature of things and Fate and Necessity. And that the same is also Eunomia and Dike and Homonoia and Eirene and Aphrodite and everything of this sort. (trans. Obbink).

In *De pietate* Philodemus defends Epicureanism against charges of atheism levelled by the Stoics: it is not the Epicureans who are atheists, but the Stoics, since by saying that Zeus is fire or reason they deny his existence as a god. Similarly, the other gods, including Aphrodite, are treated simply as personified aspects of Zeus. For the Epicureans, in contrast, the gods exist in human form and have distinctive appearances.<sup>49</sup> Epicurus entirely rejected myth and so Lucretius' usage cannot be properly Epicurean, but for the Stoics the allegorisation of Venus as the generative principle of the universe would be quite acceptable and familiar. So Lucretius seems to have deliberately begun his poem with an un-Epicurean or even anti-Epicurean motif.<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> Obbink 1995, 206-209.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Obbink 2002, 183-221.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Cicero *ND* 1.43-49.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Sedley 1998, 16: "To respond that the poem's treatment of Venus is allegorical is not in itself a solution to the puzzle. As Lucretius himself warns at 2.655-60, allegorical use of divinities' names, e.g. 'Neptune' for the sea and 'Ceres' for corn is permissible only if one avoids any false religious implications. Although Venus might, on this principle, get away with symbolising nature, or even



## The Philosophising Muse: the Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry

Lucretius would also be criticised by Philodemus in another way. As his own poetry shows, he considers that there is nothing wrong with writing hymns to the gods, as long as what is said about them is fitting to their natures. He defends the notorious atheist Diagoras for writing hymns to the gods on the grounds that he says nothing unbecoming of the gods in his verse.<sup>51</sup> Lucretius' reference to the affair between Venus and Anchises can hardly be regarded in the same light. As Ovid writes to Augustus defending his work against charges of indecency, you can find insalubrious material even in the most respectable poets (*Tristia* 2.255-62):

nil igitur matrona legat, quia carmine ab omni  
ad delinquendum doctior esse potest.  
quodcumque attigerit, siqua est studiosa sinistri,  
ad vitium mores instruet inde suos.  
sumpserit *Annales*—nihil est hirsutius illis—  
facta sit unde parens Ilia, nempe leget.  
sumpserit 'Aeneadum genetrix' ubi prima, requirit,  
Aeneadum genetrix unde sit alma Venus.

Let a wife read nothing then, since she can learn  
about how to do wrong from any poem.  
If she's keen on vice, then she'll equip  
her character for sin, whatever she touches.  
Let her take the *Annals*—nothing's more old-fashioned than them—  
she'll surely read how Ilia was made a mother.  
Let her take the "*Aeneadum genetrix*", she'll ask first  
how nurturing Venus became "mother of the race of Aeneas". (my translation)

Lucretius then, is not simply skating on thin philosophical ice by addressing Venus as *Aeneadum genetrix*, he is going directly against the Epicurean doctrines on myth, and embracing Stoic allegorisation.

### 3.2 Lucretius and Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus*

As I say above, it is quite normal for a didactic poem to begin with a hymn to a god, and the question of what model Lucretius used for his hymn to Venus has produced some widely differing answers. David Sedley in his book *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom* (1998) has argued cogently that Lucretius follows the pattern of a lost hymn to Aphrodite that opened Empedocles' *Physics*, and

---

perhaps Epicurean pleasure, the opening address to her as ancestress of the Romans can hardly be judged equally innocent...".

<sup>51</sup> Philodemus P.Herc. 1428 cols. xi.5-xii 10 (??Henrichs ???). See Obbink 1995, 206-209.

## The Philosophising Muse: the Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry

Elizabeth Asmis had, in an earlier article (1982), suggested the Stoic Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus* as a model, pointing out some striking similarities between the two hymns. She argues that Lucretius has systematically replaced the Stoic Zeus, the masculine controlling force of the universe with Venus, the personification of Epicurean pleasure and freedom:

Venus, I suggest, was conceived in part as an allegorical rival to Stoic Zeus: she stands for pleasure and a world ordered by its own spontaneous impulses, as opposed to Stoic Zeus who stands for divine might and a world bound by an inexorable divine will. As a rival to Stoic Zeus, moreover, Venus offers a challenge to all religious and philosophical systems that would impose divine tyranny upon the world.<sup>52</sup>

In what follows I shall follow Asmis' arguments, adding in some new points that I hope will put Lucretius' debt to Cleanthes beyond reasonable doubt, but I shall also complicate the matter by partly agreeing with Sedley on Empedoclean influence in Lucretius' hymn, and by showing that Cleanthes in turn used Empedocles as a source for his *Hymn to Zeus*. Cleanthes had indeed substituted the Stoic masculine cosmic force Zeus for Empedocles' feminine cosmic force Aphrodite, and Lucretius restores her to her former throne. This complex intertextual relationship should not surprise us, since, as M. R. Gale has 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'." Further: "the most obvious place to look for such echoes is the proem, the usual location for reflexion on poetics and the writer's relationship with his predecessors ...".<sup>53</sup>

### Philosophical Hymns

Lucretius' *Hymn to Venus* and Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus* may be classed as philosophical hymns in that they are both written by philosophers and are part of their exposition of their respective philosophies. Furley and Bremer, unfortunately, exclude philosophical hymns from their collection of Greek hymns, saying, "Since most of these texts are not cult texts in the true sense we omit them ...". This may be reasonable for Lucretius' *Hymn to Venus*, but less so for Cleanthes since his *Hymn to*

---

<sup>52</sup> Asmis 1982, 458.

<sup>53</sup> Gale 2005, 185-186.

## The Philosophising Muse: the Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry

*Zeus* may well have had an important cult function in the Stoic school.<sup>54</sup> In other ways as well both hymns are more than simply philosophical hymns since they are not addressed to personified abstractions such as Health, Fortune, Virtue etc., as are most philosophical hymns, but to real gods that the two philosophers believe in and worship, and they both include specific prayers for aid; Menander Rhetor says that prayers are not necessary in philosophical hymns, presumably because they are not addressed to gods who could respond to prayers but to abstractions.<sup>55</sup> Indeed there are similar problems to be faced by both Lucretius and Cleanthes in this matter of prayer. They have both been criticised over the efficacy of prayer according to their own doctrines. A traditional charge levelled at Lucretius is of the apparent pointlessness, and even hypocrisy, of addressing and praying to a god who is quite deaf to human prayers and is unable to intervene in human affairs. This may be addressed by appealing to the fact that, as I say above, Philodemus also was happy to write hymns to gods and defends even the atheist Diagoras on the grounds that he says nothing unfitting to the nature of the gods in his poems. Clearly concerns over the deafness of the gods to human prayers were not felt so keenly by the Epicureans themselves as by their critics.<sup>56</sup> Lucretius also, if we except the reference to Venus as *Aeneadum genetrix*, is careful to say only things fitting to Venus' nature, and is careful to ask in his prayer things that may well be in Venus' gift, to lend "eternal charm" (*aeternum ... leporem*, *DRN* 1.28) to his verses, which she certainly does by her very presence, and as a personification of *voluptas* she may well bring *lepos*, a fundamental principle of poetry for Lucretius,<sup>57</sup> and to grant peace to the Roman people. She cannot grant peace directly, of course, but as the embodiment of peace, calm contemplation and correct worship of her will lead to the calming of the storms in the soul that lead to the storms of warfare, and so war will come to an end.<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> See Thom 2005, 7-13.

<sup>55</sup> Menander Rhetor 1.337.25-6. Cf. Thom 2005, 10-11.

<sup>56</sup> For Epicurean cults and worship see Clay 1998, 75-102, "The Cults of Epicurus".

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Gale 1994, 149-151.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Lucr. *DRN* 5.43-44: *At nisi purgatumst pectus, quae proelia nobis | atque pericula tunc ingratis insinuandum!* ('But unless the mind is purged what battles and dangers must then find their way into us against our will!', or, 'what battles and dangers must we get involved in against our will!'. Nussbaum (1994, 269-70) explains: "In fact, it is impossible to tell, here, whether the "battles" and "dangers" are external or internal . . . but since we are well aware, too, that here lies the source of external war and slaughter, we are encouraged to give the words a double reference." Fr. 56 of Diogenes of Oinoanda looks forward to a time when all have achieved wisdom and there will be universal peace, "καὶ οὐ γενήσεται τειχῶν / ἢ νόμων χρεία καὶ πάν-/των ὅσα δι' ἀλλήλους / σκευωρούμεθα" ("there will come to be no need of fortifications or laws and all the things which we contrive on account of one another." trans. M. F. Smith).

## The Philosophising Muse: the Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry

Cleanthes has also been criticised on similar grounds of the possibility or efficacy of prayer. Seneca (*Quaest. Nat.* 2.35) argues that prayer is pointless since it is to ask Zeus to alter what is already fated. Zeus cannot change fate with his thunderbolt since the thunderbolt is part of fate itself, he says. It has also been argued by some critics that praying to Zeus as a traditional deity is pointless since, as Johan Thom says, “He is in fact often identified with the aspects of the physical world, such as nature, reason, providence, fate, or the law of nature, or even with the world itself. Because human beings participate in this universal reason which permeates the world, it is not meaningful for them to petition Zeus as if were a separate transcendent deity.”<sup>59</sup> As Thom also says, Seneca and Cleanthes are often seen as representatives, respectively, of “strict” and “liberal” Stoic attitudes towards prayer, but Seneca is elsewhere much more positive about prayer. He quotes Marcel Simon, “Stoic prayer is a paradox but a reality”.<sup>60</sup> So, just as with the Epicureans, the Stoics do engage in prayer and are not necessarily unorthodox if they do. And further, just like Lucretius, Cleanthes is careful to ask Zeus only for what may be reasonably considered to be within his gift; he asks for him to grant insight to humanity so that we may understand Zeus’ rule of the world and make correct moral choices. Thom explains how he thinks this is a reasonable request:

There is a sense that the god immanent in, and identical with the cosmos, in a way transcends the rational element within human beings, and he is thus able to come to their assistance. We therefore find a “dissociation of the human and the divine”; something or someone *other* than the sage himself is needed to help him become good. God has created a rational world-order in which humans should participate in order to be happy, but their ignorance blinds them to it. Cleanthes therefore requests that Zeus save people from their ignorance and replace it with insight into the way he administers the world.<sup>61</sup>

Cleanthes’ prayer is possible because of the gap between us and God, and at the same time his request is that Zeus closes that gap by granting us insight. Cleanthes therefore

---

<sup>59</sup> Thom 2005, 10

<sup>60</sup> Thom 2005, 24-27. Simon 1980, 212.

<sup>61</sup> Thom 2005, 27. Cf. Asmis’ (2007, 426) explanation: “... humans exercise a capacity that has been given by god. By bestowing the capacity for virtue, god guides humans to virtue, even though humans fail to heed this guidance. Cleanthes chooses to contrast human failure, for which he holds humans responsible, with the perfection that Zeus can bestow. One might equally appeal to humans to realize their full capacity. In doing so, however, one appeals to a divine force that extends beyond humans to the entire world. By invoking this cosmic force, Cleanthes both shows humans the full measure of their separation from god and encourages them by the prospect of help.”

## The Philosophising Muse: the Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry

has been careful to limit his prayer to what is achievable, just like Lucretius' requests to Venus for "charm" and "peace".

### First address the god

One feature of Lucretius' hymn that may so far have gone unnoticed by commentators is that, unusually, Venus is not addressed by name until the beginning of the second line. Normally the name of the god is one of the first words of a hymn.<sup>62</sup> As Furley and Bremer say (54):

The name(s) should normally come as one of the first elements of the hymnic text; and sometimes the worshippers show themselves aware of this 'duty', cf. Soph. *OT* 158-159: "First I call on you, daughter of Zeus, almighty Athena . . .

The god is named first in all of the *Homeric Hymns* which retain their first lines except for in two cases where the name is near the end of the first line: *Hymn 3* to Apollo (μνήσομαι οὐδὲ λάθωμαι Ἀπόλλωνος ἐκάτοιο, 'I will remember and not be unmindful of Apollo who shoots afar'), and in *Hymn 5* to Aphrodite (μοῦσά μοι ἔννεπε ἔργα πολυχρύσου Ἀφροδίτης, 'Muse, tell me the deeds of golden Aphrodite').<sup>63</sup> Hesiod in *Works and Days* delays Zeus' name to the second line but really the hymn is orthodox in the matter of address since it is the Muses who are addressed first, and they are granted an epithet while he is not (*Op.* 1-2):

Μοῦσαι Πιερίηθεν ἀοιδῆσιν κλείουσαι  
δεῦτε, Δι' ἐννέπετε, σφέτερον πατέρ' ὕμνειουσαι

Muses from Pieria who glorify by songs, come to me, tell of Zeus your father in your singing. (trans. West).

Similarly Aratus in his Hymn to Zeus, in the proem to the *Phaenomena*, begins by immediately naming the god (*Phaen.* 1.1-2):<sup>64</sup>

ἐκ Διὸς ἀρχώμεσθα, τὸν οὐδέποτ' ἄνδρες ἐῶμεν  
ἄρρητον

From Zeus let us begin; him do we mortals never leave unnamed... (my translation)

Cicero also follows the proper convention (*Aratea* 1.1):

---

<sup>62</sup> One exception is the extreme delaying of the address to Aphrodite until line 13 in Sappho fr. 2 Voigt, but there is some conjecture that the opening line or lines may be lost.

<sup>63</sup> See Faulkner 2008 *ad loc.*; Janko 1981, 10)

<sup>64</sup> For the dating of the two hymns and discussion of which came first and which may have influenced the other see Thom 2005, 2-7.

## The Philosophising Muse: the Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry

*A Ioue Musarum primordia.*

From Jove are the beginnings of the Muses. (my translation)

Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus* is a nearly exact parallel to Lucretius, with the god addressed at the beginning of the second line and with an epithet (*Hymn to Zeus* 1-3):

Κύδιστ' ἀθανάτων, πολυώνυμε, παγκρατὲς αἰεὶ,  
Ζεῦ, φύσεως ἀρχηγέ, νόμου μέτα πάντα κυβερνῶν,  
χαῖρε. σὲ γὰρ πάντεσσι θέμις θνητοῖσι προσαυδᾶν.

Noblest of immortals, many-named, always all-powerful  
Zeus, first cause and ruler of nature, governing everything with your law,  
greetings! For it is right for all mortals to address you. (trans. Thom).

I suggest Lucretius' choice to address Venus at the beginning of the second line was influenced by Cleanthes, the better to point the substitution of one god by the other, of Ζεῦ, φύσεως ἀρχηγέ ("Zeus, first cause and ruler of nature") by *alma Venus* ("nurturing Venus", *DRN* 1.2).<sup>65</sup> As Elizabeth Asmis has argued, Lucretius replaces the Stoic controlling Zeus with the Epicurean nurturing Venus in his hymn.<sup>66</sup>

This reading, she argues, provides the only sufficient explanation for why Lucretius departs from Epicurean orthodoxy by using an all-powerful ruling goddess to introduce a poem designed to remove the gods from this world. This substitution of a feminine nurturing goddess for a masculine controlling god is in one way strikingly radical but, as Asmis shows, is actually invited by Stoic theology: according to Philodemus' criticism of Chrysippus' *On the Gods* in *De Pietate* quoted above,<sup>67</sup> Aphrodite is a personified aspect of Zeus' creative function, just one of the traditional gods that the Stoics tended to subsume under the name of Zeus. This is referenced by Cleanthes in the first line: Zeus is πολυώνυμε ("many-named").<sup>68</sup> This is characteristic of Lucretius' technique of the appropriation of his opponents' language and imagery, turning them against their original meaning and usage. This technique

---

<sup>65</sup> Sedley 1998, 24 argues that Lucretius' *alma Venus* could be a translation of an address to Κύπρι φυτάλμει at the beginning of a lost *Hymn to Aphrodite*.

<sup>66</sup> Asmis 1982, 458.

<sup>67</sup> Asmis 1982, 460. *De Pietate* Part II Obbink cols. 126-7 P.Herc. 1428 col. 4-5.

<sup>68</sup> See Thom 2005 *ad loc.* for various different interpretations including this one. He quotes S. Price, 1999, 138 who refers to: "the Stoic interpretation of the traditional Olympian gods as aspects of the Stoic immanent deity."

## The Philosophising Muse: the Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry

mirrors his poetics as a whole: just as he goes beyond Epicurus' rejection of poetry on the grounds that it conveys false stories of the gods and turns poetry and myth against itself, so he seizes upon Cleanthes, one of the most egregious examples of the sort of thing Philodemus complains of in *De pietate*—the Stoics who allegorise myths of the gods in their philosophy in order to retail false religion—and turns the tables on him.

Apart from their differing views on the gods, Lucretius and Cleanthes would seem to agree closely on the value of poetry as a medium of philosophy. Certainly Lucretius' ideas seem much closer to Cleanthes than to Philodemus (*De mus.* 4.28.1-22 Neubecker = *SVF* 1.486 part):

Philodem. *de musica* col. 28, 1 p. 79 Kemke: εἰ μὴ τὸ παρὰ Κλεάν(θ)ει λέγειν (τάχ)α θελήσουσ(ι)ν, ὅς φησιν (ἀ)μείνο(νά) τε εἶναι τὰ ποιητικὰ | καὶ μ(ουσ)ικὰ παραδείγματα | καί, τοῦ (λόγ)ου τοῦ τῆς φιλοσοφίας ικανῶ(ς) μὲν ἐξα(γ)έλλειν δυναμένου τὰ θε(ῖ)α καὶ | ἀ(ν)θ(ρ)ώ(πι)να, μὴ ἔχον(τ)ος δὲ | ψειλοῦ τῶν θεῶν μεγεθῶν | λέξεις οικείας, τὰ μέτρ(α) καὶ | τὰ μέλη καὶ τοὺς ῥυθμοὺς | ὡς μάλιστα προσικνεῖσθαι | πρὸς τὴν ἀλήθειαν τῆς τῶν | θεῶν θ(ε)ωρίας.

... if they do not wish to make statements similar to that of Cleanthes, who says that poetic and musical examples are better, and that even though philosophical discourse is able to express divine and human matters adequately, it does not as prose have expressions proper to sublime divine objects, while meters and melodies and rhythms come closest to the truth of the contemplation of the divine—a more ridiculous statement than which is not easy to find. [Cleanthes says]: 'It is not that ideas [alone] are not helpful, but when they are set to music, the stimulus comes from both sides; for while there comes a more than just moderate stimulus from the thoughts themselves, accompanied by melodies it is even greater.'<sup>69</sup>

For Cleanthes, verse is most suitable for divine subjects and gives stimulus to the thoughts. Another report of Cleanthes' ideas would seem to bring him even closer to Lucretius (Seneca *Ep.* 108.10 = *SVF* 1.487):

“nam,” ut dicebat Cleanthes, “quemadmodum spiritus noster clariorem sonum reddit, cum illum tuba per longi canalis angustias tractum patentiore novissime exitu effudit, sic sensus nostros clariores carminis arta necessitas efficit.”

for, as Cleanthes used to say, just as our breath gives a louder [*clariorem*] sound when it passes through the long and narrow opening of a trumpet and pours out by a wider exit, thus the narrow necessity of poetry renders our sense clearer [*clariores*]. (my translation)

---

<sup>69</sup> Quoted from Thom 2005, 5.

## The Philosophising Muse: the Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry

So, both Cleanthes and Lucretius agree that verse clarifies meaning rather than obscuring it as Epicurus argued, and this brings Lucretius closer to the Stoics in his poetics than to his own school.

Lucretius' Venus is thus a Stoic influenced creation and at the same time an anti-Stoic figure. As Asmis says, Cleanthes' stress throughout his hymn is on the power of Zeus and the absoluteness of his cosmic rule, beginning with *παγκρατὲς αἰεὶ* ("always all-powerful") in line 1. Lucretius, in contrast, stresses the nurturing and creative powers of Venus, replacing Zeus' all powerfulness with *hominum divomque voluptas* ("pleasure of men and gods", *DRN* 1.1). Venus too is omnipotent but she achieves her universal rule by enticing pleasure rather than dominant force. Pointedly pleasure, the Epicurean ethical ideal, is presented as the ruling force of nature. The universality of Zeus' and Venus' rule is stressed in both hymns by the use of universalising formulae (*Hymn to Zeus* 15-17):

οὐδέ τι γίγνεται ἔργον ἐπὶ χθονὶ σοῦ δίχα, δαῖμον,  
οὔτε κατ' αἰθέριον θεῖον πόντον οὔτ' ἐνὶ πόντῳ,  
πλὴν ὅποσα ῥέζουσι κακοὶ σφετέραισιν ἀνοίαις·

not a single deed takes place on earth without you, God,  
nor in the divine celestial sphere nor in the sea,  
except what bad people do in their folly (trans. Thom).

Cleanthes is content with three terms, earth, the heavens, and the sea, beginning with earth as it is the site of the human action that Cleanthes is concerned with.<sup>70</sup> As often air, the fourth of the Empedoclean elements used commonly in such formulae is absent, subsumed within the heavens. Similarly Lucretius uses three terms (*DRN* 1.2-4):

alma Venus, caeli subter labentia signa  
quae mare navigerum, quae terras frugiferentis  
concelebras ...

nurturing Venus, who beneath the smooth-moving heavenly signs  
fill with your presence the ship-bearing sea, the crop-bearing lands

Venus' sphere of influence is beneath the heavens, just as in Cleanthes air is omitted and the land and sea specified. The four elements are again specified as Venus' sphere of influence in lines 6-9, and here air is added: line 6 *venti*; 7 *tellus*, 8 *aequora ponti*,

---

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Thom 2005 *ad loc.*



## The Philosophising Muse: the Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry

9 *caelum*. Lucretius is more specific than Cleanthes about the effects of his goddess, she fills the world with her presence, causing the lands to be productive of crops and the sea to be filled with ships bearing plenty. Venus is bringer of light and calmer of storms, and her role as bringer of calm and light is assumed by Epicurus elsewhere in the poem (cf. 2.15, 3.1-2, 5.11-12). This assimilation of Epicurus to Venus begins early in the poem with the pun on Epicurus' name during the invocation of the goddess at 1.24, *te sociam studeo scribendis uersibus esse* (*socia* = ἐπίκουρος).<sup>71</sup> Venus calms storms and scatters clouds, bringing the brightness of spring, flowery meadows, the “laughing” ocean, and the fruitful warm west wind. She arrives on the day of her festival, the first of April, calming the storms of March, whose god she will seduce and defeat later in the hymn. Although the storms are of Mars' month, it is not difficult to see a pointed reference to Zeus' original role as a storm god, with Venus' arrival removing the attributes of the “Thunderer” and replacing them with her own. This impression may be strengthened by a motif from Cleanthes' hymn. He prays to Zeus to grant humans insight in order to remove our ignorance (*Hymn to Zeus* 32-35):

ἀλλὰ Ζεῦ πάνδωρε, κελαινεφές, ἀργικέραυνε,  
ἀνθρώπους <μὲν> ῥύου ἀπειροσύνης ἀπὸ λυγρῆς,  
ἦν σὺ, πάτερ, σκέδασον ψυχῆς ἄπο, δὸς δὲ κυρῆσαι  
γνώμης, ἧ πίσυνος σὺ δίκης μέτα πάντα κυβερνᾷς,

But all-bountiful Zeus, cloud-wrapped (κελαινεφές) ruler of the thunderbolt, deliver human beings from their destructive ignorance; disperse it from the souls; grant that they obtain the insight on which you rely when governing everything with justice; (trans. Thom).

As Thom says *ad loc.* κελαινεφές (“shrouded in dark cloud”, “cloud-wrapped”) Zeus is an epithet familiar from Homer (cf. *Il.* 2.412; 22.178) and derives from his role as weather god. The image has created a certain confusion about its function here in the hymn, however. According to Neustadt κελαινεφές and ἀργικέραυνε suggest Zeus' power to shed light on the darkness of human ignorance, but, as Thom says, the *Hymn* does not refer to understanding and ignorance in terms of light and dark: the thunderbolt in the *Hymn* is an instrument of power which Zeus uses to steer the universe, and not to illuminate anything. This traditional epic usage stresses Zeus' power as ruler of the universe. Zeus is somewhat hampered in his role as giver of insight by the dark clouds that traditionally hang around him. We *want* the image to

---

<sup>71</sup> See Gale 1994, 137.

## The Philosophising Muse: the Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry

be of him granting insight illuminating the darkness of ignorance, but his dark clouds get in the way. In fact the image of Zeus swathed in cloud while granting insight is awkward, and even paradoxical, since darkness and clouds are commonly images of ignorance and error, at least as far back as Parmenides and Empedocles (DK31 B132):<sup>72</sup>

ὄλβιος ὃς θεῶν πραπίδων ἐκτίσατο πλοῦτον,  
δειλὸς δ' ᾧ σκοτόεσσα θεῶν πέρι δόξα μέμηλεν.

Blessed is he who obtained wealth in his divine thinking organs,  
and wretched is he to whom belongs a darkling (σκοτόεσσα) opinion about the gods.  
(text and trans. Inwood).<sup>73</sup>

Darkness, clouds, and blindness are also commonly the metaphors Lucretius uses to describe the state of those not yet saved by Epicurus' healing doctrine (darkness: cf. *DRN* 2.15, 2.55-56, 3.1-2, 3.87-88, 6.35-36; blindness: cf. 2.14, 3.59, 6.67) and are closely associated with storm imagery. Although the darkness of philosophical ignorance is a common trope, it has particular point in Epicureanism; as Lucretius argues, just as children fear everything in the darkness, so we fear things in the light of day (*DRN* 2.55-61, 3.87-93, 6.35-41). Hence, fears must be dispelled not by the light of day, but by the "light" provided by the application of Epicurean *ratio* to nature (*naturae species ratioque*, *DRN* 2.61).<sup>74</sup>

Venus, on the other hand, is the ideal shedder of light on darkness; she is *Lucifer* indeed, the morning star, and bringer of the light of Epicurean reason.<sup>75</sup> As Asmis says: "The symbol of light ... acquires the same importance in Lucretius' invocation as the symbol of the thunderbolt and clouds in Cleanthes *Hymn*."<sup>76</sup> Because of the awkwardness of the image it is tempting to suggest that Cleanthes has substituted Zeus as giver of insight for a light-bringing god(dess) in one or more of his sources, and spotting this, Lucretius replaces him with Venus as light-bringer.

### ***DRN 1.21: Quae quoniam rerum naturam sola gubernas***

---

<sup>72</sup> See Fowler 2002, 70.

<sup>73</sup> See Wright 1995, *ad loc.* Cf. Democritus DK68 B11: γνώμης δὲ δύο εἰσὶν ἰδέαι, ἡ μὲν γνησίη ἡ δὲ σκοτίη ('There are two kinds of judgement: the well-informed, and the darkling.')

<sup>74</sup> See Clay 1998, 132-137.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Verg. *Aen.* 8.589.

<sup>76</sup> Asmis 1982, 464.

## The Philosophising Muse: the Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry

However, paradoxically, in line 21 Venus alone, she is told, governs the nature of the universe: *rerum naturam sola gubernas*, (“you alone govern the nature of the universe”). Just as with *Aeneadum genetrix* in line one, this is particularly unexpected in an Epicurean work, especially since Lucretius’ crucial ethical task in *DRN* is to convince the reader that the gods *do not* rule the universe! In this case, however, he does give an explanation in the lines following. She governs the universe since without her nothing comes forth into the shores of light and nothing joyous and lovely is made.<sup>77</sup> We are instructed, then, to interpret Venus allegorically. As Asmis argues, the motif of Venus governing the universe closely parallels Cleanthes’ image in lines 10-11 of Zeus guiding the works of nature with his thunderbolt: “ἀμφίκη, πυρόεντα, ἀειζώντα κεραυνόν· τοῦ γὰρ ὑπὸ πληγῆς φύσεως πάντ’ ἔργα <τελειῖται>” (the two-edged, fiery, ever-living thunderbolt | For by its stroke all works of nature <are guided>, trans. Thom). Heraclitus is unmistakably Cleanthes’ source for this image: Cf. fr. 79 Marcovich (B64 DK): τὰ δὲ πάντα οἰακίζει Κεραυνός (‘Thunderbolt steers all things’). Lucretius has appropriated the image of a governing god from Cleanthes, but this is one of the philosophical accommodations of myth that the Epicureans were so keen to combat. Compare Philodemus *De Pietate* part 2 Obbink 113 P.Herc. 1428 fr. 17:<sup>78</sup>

... and the opposite in the things in which he says: ‘The thunderbolt itself and Zeus steer all things.’ And he [Heraclitus] claims that opposites are gods, like night ... (trans. Obbink).

Again, Lucretius can be seen to be turning the tables on the Stoics but at the same time using a Stoic technique of allegorising, one that was a specific target of other Epicureans. As often Lucretius’ technique of appropriating his enemies’ language and imagery leads him into conflict with the Epicurean doctrines of his contemporaries.

### Empedocles and Cleanthes

---

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Cleanthes’ *Hymn to Zeus* 15: “οὐδέ τι γίγνεται ἔργον ἐπὶ χθονὶ σοῦ δίχα, δαῖμον” (Not a single deed takes place on earth without you, God). As Thom notes *ad loc.* this is a traditional hymnic formula. Cf. Pindar *Ol.* 14.4-9; *Nem.* 7.1-6; Ariphron *Paeon to Hygieia* fr. 6.3 Furley-Bremer. Thom also notes Lucretius’ use here.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Henrichs 1974,

## The Philosophising Muse: the Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry

Asmis interprets the prayer to Venus to grant peace and the ecphrasis of Venus' seduction of Mars as a direct response to Stoic allegorisations of Zeus as source of cosmic order; just like Zeus, Venus grants peace by defeating disorder and discord: "In his second prayer, then, Lucretius completes the process of exalting Venus to a position which is fully equivalent to that of Stoic Zeus. Venus is now viewed as the cosmic law who adjusts all things into perfect order."<sup>79</sup> In his *Hymn* Cleanthes has a particular take on the cosmic order: Zeus is the principle of universal reason that brings the universe into order, but he is not responsible for the deeds of bad people. They commit bad deeds because they, "flee and avoid", the rational order of Zeus (15-22). They, "οὐτ' ἐσορῶσι θεοῦ κοινὸν νόμον, οὔτε κλύουσιν, | ᾧ κεν πειθόμενοι σὺν νῶ βίον ἐσθλὸν ἔχοιεν." (24-25: neither see nor hear God's universal law, | obeying which they could have a good life with understanding"; trans. Thom). Hence Cleanthes prays to Zeus to grant insight into his rule. Zeus' order comprises both good and bad (*Hymn to Zeus* 20-21):

ᾧδε γὰρ εἰς ἔν πάντα συνήρμοκας, ἐσθλὰ κακοῖσιν,  
ᾧσθ' ἕνα γίγνεσθαι πάντων λόγον αἰὲν ἔόντα.

For you [Zeus] have thus joined everything into one, the good with the bad, so that there comes to be one ever-existing rational order for everything. (trans. Thom).

As Thom notes *ad loc.* Heraclitus is often cited as the source of this concept of the *logos* as a unity of opposites, but he argues that, "Cleanthes does not focus on the unity of good and evil, but rather on Zeus' ability to change disorder into order." In particular it is Zeus' method of joining the good along with the bad that is productive of the single rational order. As Thom says (108): "This harmony is made up of both good and bad, but this does not mean that good and bad are evenly balanced ... the good and the bad are not equal partners, but they are blended in such a way (ᾧδε) that the end product is a rational order." Thom cites Hesiod *Op.* 179 and Theognis 1.192 as possible influences on these lines, but one intertext seems to have been missed. Empedocles' universe is governed by two cosmic forces, Love (or Aphrodite) and Strife (or Ares). They both have creative and destructive powers and rule alternately: Love draws all things together to create a world, and then destroys it as all the

---

<sup>79</sup> Asmis 1982, 467.

## The Philosophising Muse: the Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry

elements are completely joined in the Sphere. Then Strife draws the elements apart, another world is created, and again destroyed in the Whirl of elements. Although they are both creative and destructive, in ethical terms Strife is always described negatively as, “raving Strife” (νεϊκεῖ μαινομένῳ, B115.14), ‘baneful Strife’ (νεϊκεῖ λυγρῷ, B109.3), and “pernicious Strife” (νεϊκος...οὐλόμενον, B17.19), and Love in contrast is always presented in positive terms. Disorder and evil in human life are attributed to an increase in the power of cosmic Strife.<sup>80</sup> Love draws the elements into a harmonious whole, while Strife causes separation and discord. Empedocles elides the distinction between the elements and humans under the effects of Love and Strife. In fr. 17 the effects on the elements are described (DK31 B17.7-8):

ἄλλοτε μὲν φιλότῃτι συνερχόμεν’ εἰς ἓν ἅπαντα  
ἄλλοτε δ’ αὖ δίχ’ ἕκαστα φορεύμενα νεϊκεος ἔχθει.

at one time everything coming by Love together into one,  
at another time again being borne apart separately by the hostility of Strife.  
(text by Wright)

While in Strasbourg fr. a(i) 6 “we” come together:<sup>81</sup>

συνερχόμεθ’ εἰς ἓνα κόσμον

We come together into one cosmos.

The similarity of Cleanthes’ and Empedocles’ phrasing is striking. For Cleanthes Zeus has joined all things into one (εἰς ἓν πάντα συνήρμοκας, 20), while in Empedocles this is the task of Love (Aphrodite), “everything coming by Love together into one” (φιλότῃτι συνερχόμεν’ εἰς ἓν ἅπαντα, B17.7). Further, Zeus’ and Love’s joining is described by the same verb συναρμόζω (DK31 B71.4):

τόσσ’ ὅσα νῦν γεγάασι συναρμοσθέντ’ Ἀφροδίτῃ

[the forms and colours of mortals] that have now come to be, fitted together by Aphrodite.<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Strasbourg ensemble d 2-10.

<sup>81</sup> See Trépanier 2003.

<sup>82</sup> On Aphrodite joining things together in Empedocles see Garani 2007, 156-161. As she says Aphrodite is represented as a carpenter riveting the elements together with dowels, and Plato has taken up this image in the *Timaeus* where we see his demiurge riveting souls and bodies together (*Timaeus* 43a).

## The Philosophising Muse: the Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry

I suggest that Cleanthes implicitly corrects Empedocles in these lines: 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. It seems that this technique of correcting Empedocles by imitating him (*oppositio in imitando*) was not confined to Cleanthes alone. As M. R. Gale argues, the Stoicising Aratus does the very same thing to Empedocles in his hymn to Zeus in the proem of the *Phaenomena*. As she says: “Aratus’ all-pervasive, Stoicised Zeus replaces the Empedoclean Love and Strife as the supreme force in control of the universe.”<sup>83</sup>

Another example from Philodemus’ criticism of the Stoics may help us to see what Cleanthes is doing here. Compare *De Pietate* part 2 Obbink 123 P.Herc 1428 col. 1: “... that Aphrodite is really a force which fittingly joins the parts with one another and out of ...”. (trans. Obbink). For the Stoics, Aphrodite is a personification of the harmonizing function of the universal reason, which is of course Zeus, as in 126-7 P.Herc. 1428 col. 4-5, quoted above, where Aphrodite is listed as an aspect of Zeus. So for Cleanthes it is only a small step to replace Aphrodite with Zeus as the power that creates universal harmony, as in this function they are interchangeable, and it is very likely that Empedocles was the original source for the Stoics’ allegorisation of Aphrodite as a force that fittingly joins the parts with one another.

### **Empedocles, Hesiod, and Cleanthes**

So, Lucretius, in replacing Cleanthes’ Zeus with Venus, was simply putting her back in her place of honour where Empedocles had placed her before Cleanthes had in turn replaced her with Zeus. But this is only part of the history of the substitutions of gods by philosophical poets in their hymns, since Empedocles had already deposed Zeus from his throne and replaced him with Aphrodite. This process may be seen B128:

οὐδέ τις ἦν κείνοισιν Ἄρης θεὸς οὐδὲ Κυδοιμὸς  
οὐδὲ Ζεὺς βασιλεὺς οὐδὲ Κρόνος οὐδὲ Ποσειδῶν,  
ἀλλὰ Κύπρις βασιλεία.  
τὴν οἱ γ’ εὐσεβέεσσιν ἀγάλμασιν ἰλάσκοντο  
γραπτοῖς τε ζῶοισι μύροισι τε δαιδαλεόδομοις  
σμύρνης τ’ ἀκρήτου θυσίαις λιβάνου τε θυώδους,  
ξανθῶν τε σπονδὰς μελίτων ῥίπτοντες ἐς οὐδας,

---

<sup>83</sup> Gale 2005, 186-7.

## The Philosophising Muse: the Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry

ταύρων δ' ἀκρήτοισι φόνους οὐ δεύετο βωμός,  
ἀλλὰ μύσος τοῦτ' ἔσκεν ἐν ἀνθρώποισι μέγιστον,  
θυμὸν ἀπορραΐσαντας ἐέδμεναι ἠέα γυῖα.

They had no god Ares or Battle-Din,  
nor Zeus the king nor Kronos nor Poseidon;  
but Kupris the queen [Aphrodite]...  
her they worshipped with pious images,  
painted pictures and perfumes of varied odours,  
and sacrifices of unmixed myrrh and fragrant frankincense,  
dashing onto the ground libations of yellow honey

...  
[her] altar was not wetted with the unmixed blood of bulls,  
but this was the greatest abomination among men,  
to tear out their life-breath and eat their goodly limbs.

[text and trans. by Inwood]

This is a radical piece of theology, quoted by Porphyry (*De abstinentia* 2.20-22, p. 150.9-151.13 Nauck) as coming from Empedocles' "discursive account of the birth of the gods" (περὶ τῆς θεογονίας διεξιῶν).<sup>84</sup> Porphyry says that the first libations were of water, then honey, and then of wine, quoting these lines of Empedocles as authority. Then he goes on to speak of a subsequent decline into slaughter and meat-eating: when Love was in control no-one killed any animal, but then when Ares and Kydoimos took control, people killed not only animals but humans as well, including their relatives. Fr. 128 describes prehistory, a sort of golden age of peace under Love, in which the people worshipped only Kypris. They did not have Ares or Kydoimos, as Porphyry says, but remarkably they did not have Zeus, Kronos (usually king of the gods during the golden age), or Poseidon. Zeus, Kronos and Poseidon are thus associated by Empedocles with Ares and Kydoimos as agents of the decline into slaughter and murder. The decline from a golden age of peace and harmony into an age of strife and violence, even against relatives, is highly reminiscent of Hesiod's account of the five ages in *Works and Days*. Indeed, Empedocles' denial of Kronos may well be pointed, as Hesiod is specific that the Golden Race lived under Kronos.<sup>85</sup> So, Empedocles corrects Hesiod: there was indeed a golden age from which we have declined into an age of strife and violence, but it was not a decline from the rule of Kronos but from that of Aphrodite. Empedocles' theodicy is also more coherent than

---

<sup>84</sup> Quoted from Inwood 2001, 145.

<sup>85</sup> Hesiod *Op.* 111.

## The Philosophising Muse: the Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry

that of Hesiod. 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. Empedocles, on the contrary, attributes evil in the world to the growing power of Strife as he takes over in turn from Love.<sup>86</sup> All the good in the world is caused by the influence of Aphrodite; all the bad by Strife. A neat “Manichaean” explanation. For Empedocles Zeus is not the god of justice and harmony, Aphrodite is. Thus Empedocles rewinds the history of religion and deposes the masculine usurper Zeus, re-establishing Aphrodite as what Don Fowler, speaking of Lucretius, has called a, “feminine principal”. Cleanthes, in turn, restores the Hesiodic order, only for Lucretius, in his turn, to grant control of the universe to his new Epicurean goddess, or indeed goddesses: the trio Venus, Natura, and the Earth Mother. This is just as the nature of things demands; as Don Fowler has said, these figures are too powerful to fit into schemes of masculine-enforced passivity.<sup>87</sup>

---

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Strasbourg ensemble d 3-10: Φιλίην δὲ [καὶ Εὐν]οίην νυν ἔχουσιν / [Ἄρ]πυιαι θανάτοιο πάλοισ [ἡμῶν παρέσ]ονται. / [Οἴ]μοι ὄτ(ι) οὐ πρόσθεν με διώλεσε νηλεὲς ἡμαρ, / [πριν] χηλαῖς σχέτλι' ἔργα βορᾶς πέρι μητίσασθαι. / [νῦν δ]ὲ μάτη[ν ἐν] τῷιδε νότ[ωι κατέδ]ευσα παρειάς. / [ἐξ]ικ]νούμε[θα γὰρ] πολυβενθ[έα Δῖνον], ὄϊω, / μυρία τ(ε) οὐκ] ἐθέλουσι παρέσσε[ται ἄλγ]εα θυμῶι / [ἀνθ]ρώποις. “And whereas we now have Love and Goodwill, the Harpies with the lots of death will be with us (hereafter). Alas that the merciless day did not destroy me sooner before I devised with my claws terrible deeds for the sake of food. But now in this storm I have in vain drenched my cheeks: for we are approaching the very deep Whirl, I perceive, and, though they do not wish it, countless griefs will be present to men in their minds ...”. (text and trans. Martin & Primavesi).

<sup>87</sup> See Fowler (1996) 2002, 449.



# The Philosophising Muse: the Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry

## Bibliography

- Asmis, E. 1982. "Lucretius' Venus and Stoic Zeus." *Hermes* 110: 458-470.
- . 1995. "Epicurean Poetics", in D. Obbink (ed.), 15-34. Oxford/New York.
- . 2007. "Myth and Philosophy in Cleanthes' Hymn to Zeus." *GRBS* 47: 413-429.
- Campbell, G. L. 2003. *Lucretius on Creation and Evolution: A Commentary on DRN 5.772-1105*. Oxford.
- Clay, D. 1998. *Paradosis and Survival: Three Chapters in the History of Epicurean Philosophy*. Ann Arbor, Michigan.
- Edwards, M. J. 1990. "Treading the Aether: Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* 1.62-79." *CQ* NS 40.2: 465-469.
- Faulkner, A. 2008. *The Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*. Oxford.
- Fowler, D. 1996. "The Feminine Principal: Gender in the *De rerum natura*", in G. Giannantoni and M. Gigante (eds.), 813-822, reprinted in Fowler, D. 2002. 444-452. Oxford.
- . 2000. "Philosophy and Literature in Lucretian Intertextuality", in *Roman Constructions: Readings in Postmodern Latin*, 138-155. Oxford.
- . 2002. *Lucretius on Atomic Motion: A Commentary on Lucretius De rerum natura 2.1-332*, Oxford.
- Frede, D. and Laks, A. (eds.), 2002, *Traditions of Theology: Studies in Hellenistic Theology, Its Background and Aftermath*, Leiden.
- Furley, D. 1970. "Variations on Themes from Empedocles in Lucretius' Proem." *BICS* 17: 55-64.
- Furley, W. D. and Bremer, J. M. 2001. *Greek Hymns*. 2 vols. Tübingen.
- Gale, M. R. 1994. *Myth and Poetry in Lucretius*. Cambridge.
- . 2001. "Etymological Wordplay and Poetic Succession in Lucretius." *CPh* 96.2: 168-172.
- . 2005. "*Avia Pieridum loca*: Tradition and Innovation in Lucretius", in M. Horster and C. Reitz (eds.), 175-191.
- Garani, M. 2007. *Empedocles Redivivus: Poetry and Analogy in Lucretius* London/New York.
- Giannantoni, G. and Gigante, M. (eds.), 1996. *Epicureismo greco e romano*, Naples.
- Gillespie, S. and Hardie, P. (eds.), 2007. *The Cambridge Companion to Lucretius*, Cambridge.
- Hardie, P. 1986. *Virgil's Aeneid. Cosmos and Imperium*. Oxford.
- Harrison, S. 2002. "Ennius and the Prologue to Lucretius *DRN* 1 (1.1-148)." *LICS* 1.4. (April, 2002), online at <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/classics/lics/index.html>
- Henrichs, A. 1974. "Die Kritik der stoischen Theologie im P.Herc. 1428." *Cronache Ercolanesi* 4 (1974): 5-32.
- Horster, M. and Reitz, C. (eds.), 2005, *Wissensvermittlung in dichterischer Gestalt*, Stuttgart.
- Inwood, B. 2001. *The Poem of Empedocles*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Toronto.
- Inwood, B. (ed.), 2003. *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, Cambridge
- Janko, R. 1981. "The Structure of the Homeric Hymns: a Study in Genre." *Hermes* 109: 9-24.
- Konstan, D. 1988. "Lucretius on Poetry: 3.13." *Colby Quarterly* 24.2: 65-70.
- Kyriakidis, S. 2006. "Lucretius' *DRN* 1.926-50 and the proem to Book 4." *CQ* 56.2: 606-610.

## The Philosophising Muse: the Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry

- Limot, H. and Ries, J. (eds.), *L'expérience de la prière dans les grandes religions*. Actes du colloque de Louvain-la-Neuve et Liège (22-3 novembre 1978), Louvain-la-Neuve.
- Mackay, L. 1955. "De rerum natura 1.717 sqq." *Latinitas* 3: 210.
- Maltby, R. 1991. *A Lexicon of Ancient Latin Etymologies*. Leeds.
- Martin, A. and Primavesi, O. (eds.). 1998. *L'Empédocle de Strasbourg (P. Strasb. gr. Inv. 1665-1666)*. Berlin/Strasbourg.
- Mitsis, P. 1993. "Committing Philosophy on the Reader: Didactic Coercion and Reader's Autonomy in *De Rerum Natura*", in P. Mitsis, A. Schiesaro, and J. Strauss Clay (eds.), 111-128
- Mitsis, P. and Schiesaro, A. and Strauss Clay, J (eds.), 1993. *Mega nepios: il destinatario nell'epos didascalico*, Pisa. *Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici* 31.
- Neustadt, E., 1931, "Der Zeushymnos des Kleantes." *Hermes* 66: 387-401.
- Nussbaum, M. 1994. *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics*. Princeton.
- Obbink, D. 1995. "How to Read Poetry about Gods", in D. Obbink (ed.), 189-209. Oxford.
- . 1996. *Philodemus On Piety Part 1*. Oxford.
- . 2002. "'All Gods are true' in Epicurus", in D. Frede and A. Laks (eds.), 183-221
- . 2007. "Lucretius and the Herculaneum Library", in S. Gillespie and P. Hardie (eds.), 33-40.
- Obbink, D. (ed.), 1995. *Philodemus and Poetry: Poetic Theory and Practice in Lucretius, Philodemus and Horace*, Oxford/New York.
- Osborne, C. 2007. *Dumb Beasts and Dead Philosophers: Humanity and the Humane in Ancient Philosophy and Literature*. Oxford.
- Piazzini, L. 2005. *Lucrezio e i Presocratici: Un commento a De rerum natura I, 635-920*. Pisa.
- Price, S. 1999, *Religions of the Greeks*. Cambridge.
- Rouse, W.H. 1992. *Lucretius*, edited and translated; revised by M.F. Smith (first edition 1924), London/Cambridge.
- Schiesaro, A. 2007. "Lucretius and Roman Politics and History", in S. Gillespie and P. Hardie (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Lucretius*, 41-58. Cambridge.
- Schober, A. 1988. "Philodemi peri eusebeias libelli partem priorem restituit Adolf Schober." (Diss. ined. Königsberg, 1923) = *Cronache Ercolanesi* 18: 67-125.
- Sedley, D. 1998. *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom*. Cambridge.
- Simon, M. 1980. "Prière du philosophe et prière chrétienne", in H. Limot and J. Ries (eds.), *L'expérience de la prière dans les grandes religions*. Actes du colloque de Louvain-la-Neuve et Liège (22-3 novembre 1978), 205-224. Louvain-la-Neuve.
- Smith, M. F. 1993. *Diogenes of Oenoanda, the Epicurean Inscription* (with translation). Naples.
- Snyder, J. M. 1972. "Lucretius' Empedoclean Sicily." *CW* 65: 217-218.
- Thom, J. C. 2005. *Cleantes' Hymn to Zeus*. Tübingen.
- Trépanier, S. 2003. "'We' and Empedocles' Cosmic Lottery: P. Strasb. gr. Inv. 1665-1666, ensemble a." *Mnemosyne* 56.4: 385-419.
- Voigt, E.-M. (1971), *Sappho et Alcaeus. Fragmenta*, Amsterdam.
- Volk, K. 2002. *The Poetics of Latin Didactic: Lucretius, Virgil, Ovid, Manilius*. Oxford.

## The Philosophising Muse: the Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry

Warren, J. 2002. *Epicurus and Democritean Ethics: an Archaeology of Ataraxia*. Cambridge.

Wheeler, G. 2002. "Sing, Muse ...: The Introit from Homer to Apollonius." *CQ NS* 52.1: 33-49.

Wright, M. R. 1995. *Empedocles the Extant Fragments*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London.