

Dreams and Poets in Lucretius

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The power of the dead to visit us in dreams and visions haunts the Western imagination from Homer's Achilles to Shakespeare's Hamlet and Macbeth, and beyond. Although as early as Homer the ancients distinguish between true and false dreams (Zeus' deception of Agamemnon by οὔλος ὄνειρος in *Iliad* 2 is a famous instance of a deceptive dream), there is a strong belief that dreams are prophetic, that they have a divine source, and that they contain a privileged knowledge to which we would not otherwise have access. Many of the dreams in Virgil and Ovid, for example, are of this latter type.¹ Even today Freud's *Traumdeutung* remains an accepted tool of psychoanalysis, founded on the theory that dreams speak a hidden language of truth that is closed off to our conscious mind.

Accounting for dreams is central to Lucretius' ethical purpose because they feed our fears about the afterlife and about monstrous creatures like centaurs and chimaeras. Like all mental phenomena, however, they have a rational explanation. All bodies are continually throwing off an external film of atoms; these impinge on the *anima* through the pores of the body as we sleep and set the fine, sensitive soul-atoms into motion, thus creating the visions and the sensations that we experience as dreams. The same process also accounts for waking visions, which Lucretius frequently pairs with dream-visions. He sets forth his detailed explanation in Book 4 (722–1036),² where, of course, the basic theory closely follows Epicurus, who in turn is deeply indebted to the atomistic psychology of Democritus.³

At the beginning of Book 4 Lucretius brings together the fear of nocturnal visions and the fear of death and the afterlife (4. 33–41):

¹ For example, Aeneas' dreams of Hector (*Aen.* 2. 270 ff.), or the elaborately designed dream of Alcyone in Ovid, *Met.* 11. 583–695, in which she learns of the death of her husband Ceyx. But cf. the dangerously emotional dream of Tumus, *Aen.* 7. 413 ff. Even before Artemidorus' handbook, dream-interpretation is of course well developed in the Greek world: e.g. Soph. *OT* 980–82 or Hdt. 6. 107, 7. 12–18, especially 7. 16β. 2.

² For recent discussion and bibliography see P. H. Schrijvers, "Die Traumtheorie des Lukrez," *Mnemosyne* 33 (1985) 128–51, especially 133 ff., 138 ff.

³ See Epicurus, *Letter to Herodotus* in D.L. 10. 51; also 10. 80 and Epicur. fr. 326 Usener; Democritus 68 A 77 (= Plut. *Quaest. Conv.* 734 f); also 68 A 136–37 Diels-Kranz.

atque eadem nobis vigilantibus obvia mentis
 terrificant atque in somnis, cum saepe figuras
 contuimur miras simulacraque luce carentum, 35
 quae nos horrifice languentis saepe sopore
 excierunt, ne forte animas Acherunte reamur
 effugere aut umbras inter vivos volitare
 neve aliquid nostri post mortem posse relinqui,
 cum corpus simul atque animi natura perempta 40
 in sua discessum dederint primordia quaeque.

This concern with the emotional disturbance caused by dreams recurs in the detailed discussion later, particularly in the explanation of how these images (*simulacra*) continue to impinge on the soul even when we are asleep (4. 757–61):

nec ratione alia, cum somnus membra profudit,
 mens animi vigilat, nisi quod simulacra lacessunt
 haec eadem nostros animos quae cum vigilamus,
 usque adeo, certe ut videamur cernere eum quem 760
 relicta vita iam mors et terra potitast.

Lucretius' ethical aims, in his humanitarian concern for mankind's well-being, however, also pervade his poetics. The theory of dreams, like everything else in Epicureanism, is absorbed and transformed by the poetic imagination of a great literary artist. This combination of ethical concern and imaginative transformation is particularly clear in the poem's first account of dreams, namely Ennius' vision of Homer early in Book 1. Here Lucretius associatively shapes a complex of themes—poetry, dreams, sleep, death, the afterlife—which help him to link the moral content of his philosophy to the traditions of hexameter poetry that stretch from Homer through Ennius.

Ennius' vision of Homer evokes the two major literary points of origin, one Greek, one Roman, in which the dead have a shadowy existence after death and visit us in dreams. As the most famous poetic dream in Latin letters hitherto, Ennius' poem is important for Lucretius' view of his place in the history of epic and didactic poetry. But viewed in its context, it is also of a piece with his Epicurean explanation of the nature of dreams. It forms part of a careful progression in which specific *exempla* from the Greek and Roman literary past introduce some of the main points of Epicurean moral philosophy. Placed at the beginning of the work, it suggests how pervasive and erroneous is the poets' influence and how beneficial will be Lucretius' antidote. Indirectly, it enables Lucretius to assert his superiority over his poetic predecessors—a superiority that rests on superior knowledge of dreams, visions, and death. He overcomes his "anxiety of influence," to use Harold Bloom's term, by defeating the anxiety about death that his poetic "fathers" have bequeathed to their "sons" and heirs.

First, Lucretius shows us the victorious journey of Epicurus himself, both hero and *triumphator*, to the limits of the world, crushing the *religio* that oppresses mankind (1. 62–79).⁴ The next tableau reveals the crimes that were perpetrated in the name of just that *religio*, the sacrifice of Iphigeneia (1. 82–101). Finally, in the third passage, Lucretius turns to the fears that may disturb human life. These include the *somnia* (1. 105) that men make up because they lack the truth about life's limits and so are a prey to the *religionibus atque minis . . . vatium* (1. 109). Those who are ignorant of the atomic theory, and thus of the materiality and mortality of the soul, imagine a possible survival in the afterlife. This mistaken notion is then exemplified in Ennius' vision of Homer in tears, as the Greek bard returns from Hades to lament over his miserable existence there (1. 112–27). Lucretius thus mingles praise of his great poetic predecessors with criticism of their false doctrine.

Viewed as moral illustrations, the two latter passages complement one another. The sacrifice of Iphigeneia shows the folly into which the fear of the gods leads men. The account of Homer and Ennius exemplifies the fear of the traditional, poetic views of Hades, which in turn leads men to fear death. *Somnia* in 1. 105 does not just mean "silly tales," as Bailey and others take it;⁵ it also implies the false "visions" that men "imagine" for themselves because they are "overcome by the fear-speaking utterances" of *vates*, here probably "poets" as well as "prophets" (*vatum terrioloqua dicta* 1. 102 f.).⁶ These *somnia* thus prepare for and are analogous to the visions that Ennius had of Homer in the proem of the *Annales* (1. 115–26). In both cases the fear can be dispelled by the superior perspective of Epicurus' grandiose vision (1. 72–79).⁷ Hence the transition between the two passages echoes Epicurus' journey (cf. *religionibus atque minis obsistere vatium* 1. 109, and *obsistere contra . . . minitanti* 1. 66–67).⁸ As Epicurus stands to ordinary, unenlightened men, so Lucretius stands to the

⁴ For the triumphal imagery of this passage see V. Buchheit, "Epikurs Triumph des Geistes," *Hermes* 99 (1971) 303–23.

⁵ C. Bailey (ed.), *T. Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura Libri Sex* (Oxford 1947) *ad loc.* For the *somnia* and the connection of poet and prophet see J. J. O'Hara, "Somnia Ficta in Lucretius and Lucilius," *CQ* 37 (1987) 517–19, with further bibliography.

⁶ This double reference to both poetic and prophetic vision is all the more likely because of the notion of poetry that may be implied in the *-loquis* of *terrioloquis* (103) and *fingere somnia* of 1. 104–05. Cf. also Lucretius' scornful reference to the poets, especially the Greek poets, elsewhere: 2. 600 and 655–60, 3. 629–30, 4. 590–94, 5. 405–06.

⁷ It is a further connection between these passages that the people, obedient to the *vates* (= prophet of *religio*) "pours forth tears" (*lacrimas effundere civis* 1. 91), while in the equally false and harmful vision of another *vates* (= poet) a shade seems to "pour forth tears" (*lacrimas effundere salsas* 1. 125). The former scene of submission to *religio* (*muta metu terram genibus summissa petebat*, of Iphigeneia, 1. 92) recalls Epicurus' victory over *religio* (*pedibus subiecta* 1. 78; cf. also 1. 63 *in terris oppressa*). *Horribili super aspectu* in 1. 65 may also be taken up in the submissive fear of the weeping citizens, *aspectuque suo* 1. 91.

⁸ *Victus* in 1. 103 also harks back to the triumphal language used of Epicurus in 1. 62–79 (*pervicit, victor, victoria*).

unenlightened poets who preceded him, for, like Epicurus, as 1. 102–35 imply, he understands the true nature of the soul and hence the true origin of dreams.

The intervening sacrifice of Iphigeneia is also relevant to this complex of themes, for she is not only pressed down to earth, on her knees, like “human life” generally in 1. 62 f., but is also struck dumb in terrified silence. The poets and prophets here have “speech” (1. 102 f.), while their human victim is mute with fear: *muta metu terram genibus summissa petebat* (1. 92). The passage ends with *religio*’s persuasive power (*potuit suadere* 1. 101). In the next lines, Lucretius is now continuing Epicurus’ work in the realm of language, replacing this evil persuasion and the terrifying utterances it breeds (*vatum terriiloqua dicta* 1. 102 f.) with a discourse of truth and peace. In this way he also brings Epicurus’ *victoria* to the reader who has been *victus* by words (1. 79, 103).

Ennius, for all his fame among the peoples of Italy, nevertheless perpetuated in his “eternal verses” the fears of “eternal punishments” that destroy happiness (cf. *aeternas quoniam poenas in morte timendumst* 1. 111 and *Ennius aeternis exponit versibus edens* 1. 121). Venerable as he is, he lends credence to the deleterious belief in *simulacra modis pallentia miris* in Hades, from which the shadowy image (*speciem* 1. 125) of Homer appeared to him in tears and expounded on “the nature of things in his words” (*rerum naturam expandere dictis* 1. 126). To correct such views, Lucretius will himself give the true account of things human and divine, of the nature of the soul, and of the visions that men have both by day and by night, in dreams (1. 132–35):

et quae res nobis vigilantibus obvia mentis
terrificet morbo adfectis somnoque sepultis,
cernere uti videamur eos audireque coram,
morte obita quorum tellus amplectitur ossa. 135

The language of this last passage anticipates the direct discussion of fearful visions and dreams in Book 4, cited above. We may note particularly the resemblances between this passage of Book 1 and 4. 33–37:

atque eadem nobis vigilantibus obvia mentis
terrificant atque in somnis, cum saepe figuras
contuimur miras simulacraque luce carentum, 35
quae nos horrifice languentis saepe sopore
excierunt . . .

Lucretius returns to the same point in fuller detail later in his exposition of dreams (4. 760 f.):

usque adeo, certe ut videamur cernere eum quem
relicta vita iam mors et terra potitast.

The language of 1. 134 f., especially *quorum tellus amplectitur ossa*, is an appropriately "poetic" equivalent, using Homer's own diction, of the more prosaic *relicta vita iam mors et terra potitast* in 4. 761, and for the still more prosaic *quem mens vivum se cernere credit* in 4. 767.⁹ The phrase *figuras / contuimur miras simulacraque* in 4. 38 f. stresses the same "wondrous" quality of these visions as Ennius' *simulacra modis pallentia miris* in 1. 123; and Lucretius loses few opportunities to make fun of these miraculously moving or living *simulacra* (especially 4. 788 ff.; cf. also 4. 455 ff., 721 ff., 768 ff., 980 f.).¹⁰

His own task is to expose the falsehood behind the terrors that dreams inspire. Thus his transition to Ennius stresses the absence of true knowledge about the soul, which will be balanced later by his own positive determination to provide just that understanding (*ratio*):

- 110: nunc *ratio nulla* est restandi, *nulla* facultas;
127 f.: quapropter bene cum superis de rebus habenda
 nobis est *ratio* . . .

The other side of his task is obviously to provide an alternative explanation. This he does, for example, not only in the case of ghosts from Hades but also for the real gods enjoying tranquil eternity in the spaces between worlds. Modern man's false visions, both awake and in dreams, of the dead contrast with early man's true visions of the gods that gave rise to religion (5. 1169–82). Men saw the extraordinary forms of the gods both awake and in sleep: *egregias animo facies vigilante videbant / et magis in somnis mirando corporis auctu* (5. 1170 f.). These divine movements, the sign of the gods' extraordinary powers and their freedom from effort, are calmer than the extravagant gestures of the *simulacra* of ghosts: cf. *membra movere videbantur* (5. 1173); *et simul in somnis quia multa et mira videbant / efficere et nullum capere ipsos inde laborem* (5. 1181 f.). The true images of the gods are not necessarily a source of superstitious fear (cf. 5. 1165); such fear arises only because men attribute human passions to the gods, out of their own ignorance of the real causes of natural phenomena (cf. 5. 1183–1240).

Even a brief examination of these passages reveals how closely Lucretius connects dreams with the falsehoods of the poets, religious superstition, and the fear of death. In Book 1, as elsewhere, Lucretius anticipates in imagistic, poetical terms arguments that he will later develop

⁹ Lucretius repeats 1. 135 also just before his explanation of dreams in Book 4, where he accounts for the related phenomenon of false imaginings of monstrous creatures like Centaurs, Scyllas, Chimaeras (4. 722 ff.). He includes in this group of waking visions *simulacraque eorum / quorum morte obita tellus amplectitur ossa* (4. 733 f.). This last phrase, *tellus amplectitur ossa* (= 1. 135) is modelled on Homeric formulas like ἔχεν κατά γαῖα μέλαινα (Il. 2. 699) or κατά γαῖα καλύπτει (Il. 6. 464, etc.). Cf. also 3. 1035 *ossa dedit terrae*.

¹⁰ See P. H. Schrijvers, *Horror ac divina Voluptas. Etudes sur la poésie et la poésie de Lucrèce* (Amsterdam 1970) 101.

with more technical Epicurean arguments.¹¹ Thus Ennius' dream of Homer receives its full "scientific" explanation only in Book 4. But the allusive, literary approach to dreams here, through the vivid narrative of Ennius' vision, shows how deeply rooted are men's false and disturbing notions of what dreams are and what truths, if any, they contain.

Just as the preceding account of Iphigeneia is carefully framed by the repetition of the word *religio* (*religio scelerosa* l. 83; *religio . . . malorum* l. 101), so here the detailed account of the visions of the underworld is framed by "fictions" or "figments" of the mind, whether from poet or dreamer: *vatum / terriloquis victus dictis . . . fingere possunt / somnia* l. 102–05; *terrificet . . . somno sepultis* l. 133. By thus framing the passage on Ennius and Homer with the repeated terms for "fear," "dream," or "sleep," Lucretius associates the empty fears from dreams with the fearful *somnia* that come from *religio*.

The full significance of the framing device becomes clear only in the light of the following verses, which describe the kind of nights that an Epicurean poet will enjoy. The hoped-for pleasure of Epicurean friendship, he says,

. . . inducit noctes vigilare serenas
 quaerentem dictis quibus et quo carmine demum
 clara tuae possim praepandere lumina menti,
 res quibus occultas penitus convisere possis. (l. 142–45)

This passage, to be sure, uses the conventions of literary patronage (cf. *amicitia* here and the *philia*-motif of Pindar); but it is none the less reflective of central philosophical issues in the poem.¹² Unenlightened men, victims of the poets, spend troubled, fearful nights of bad dreams; the philosopher, on the other hand, enjoys *serenas noctes* of meditation on the truth—an activity that, Epicurus says at the end of his *Letter to Menoeceus*, gives man a life like to that of the blessed gods (D.L. 10. 135). In place of the darkness of the poets' Hades (*tenebras Orci . . . vastasque lacunas* l. 115), Lucretius sets the luminous vision of truth that will enable his reader to see what has previously been hidden, *res quibus occultas penitus convisere possis* (145). This vision will, once more, dispel "fear" (*terrorem animi* 146; cf. *terriloquis* 103 and *terrificet* 133):

¹¹ See in general C. Bailey, "The Mind of Lucretius," *AJP* 61 (1940) 278–91. Schrijvers (above, note 2) 141 f. remarks, "Alle Phänomene, die irgendwo in De rerum natura als sekundäre Exempla im Dienst einer anderen Beweisführung angewendet sind, werden selbst zu gelegener Zeit primäre Objekte einer selbständigen Auseinandersetzung."

¹² On the language of patronage here see the sensible remarks of D. P. Fowler, "Lucretius and Politics," in M. Griffin and J. Barnes (eds.), *Philosophia Togata: Essays on Philosophy and Roman Society* (Oxford 1989) 121.

hunc igitur terrorem animi tenebrasque necesest
 non radii solis neque lucida tela diei
 discutiant, sed naturae species ratioque. (1. 146–48)¹³

Lucidly and reassuringly, the poet's "true vision of nature," *naturae species ratioque* (1. 148), counters that misleading and potentially frightening "vision of Homer," *Homeri . . . species*, that Ennius reported in his dream of 124 f. This luminous truth, better than the *lucida tela diei*, will be particularly effective against the *simulacraque luce carentum* that may terrify us in our bad dreams of the life after death (4. 38 ff.).

A later passage in Book 4 confirms the thematic significance of this contrast between troubled nights of false dreams and the philosopher's serene nights. In explaining dreams as the result of our occupations during the day, Lucretius cites his own case.¹⁴ While lawyers, generals, and sailors dream of their respective activities, he dreams of expounding Epicurean thought in his Latin poem (4. 969–72):

nos agere hoc autem et *naturam quaerere rerum*
 semper et inventam *patriis exponere chartis*. 970
 cetera sic studia atque artis plerumque videntur
 in somnis animos hominum frustrata tenere.

The Epicurean's dreams of his philosophical work contrast both with the troubled activities of which the general and the sailor dream here (4. 967–68) and with Ennius' misleading dream of Homer's shade (cf. 1. 126 *rerum naturam expandere dictis* and 4. 969 f., above).¹⁵

Lucretius does not explicitly label Ennius' vision of the shade of Homer a dream, which is rather surprising in the light of his close verbal imitation of Ennius throughout this passage.¹⁶ Lucretius calls Homer's shade *semper florentis Homeri / speciem* (1. 124–25). The flower-imagery may derive from Ennius, but *species* is probably Lucretius' own word, chosen to emphasize the immateriality of this vision. The contrast between

¹³ Lucretius repeats these lines several times: 2. 59–61, 3. 91–93, 6. 39–41. Cf. also the related passage on the analogy of what children fear in the dark and what we (adults) fear "in the light": 2. 55–58 = 3. 87–90 = 6. 35–38. On the clear vision of "hidden things" in Epicurus see also Cicero, *Nat. Deor.* 1. 18. 49.

¹⁴ This explanation of dreams is not original with Lucretius, or Epicurus: cf. Hdt. 7. 16β. 2.

¹⁵ The echo between 1. 126 and 4. 969 is noted by Schrijvers (above, note 2) 141, though for a different purpose. The immediate juxtaposition of the generals' battles and the sailors' struggles (4. 967 f.) with Lucretius' philosophical dreams probably also strengthens the contrasts in the *content* of the dreams, especially when one compares the account of the general in the midst of a storm in 5. 1226–32.

¹⁶ For the echoes see the discussion in O. Skutsch, *The Annals of Quintus Ennius* (Oxford 1985) 147–57, with the bibliography, p. 150 n. 12; also P. Aicher, "Ennius' Dream of Homer," *AJP* 110 (1989) 227–32. The surviving fragment of Ennius' poem does not explicitly mention a dream (*visus Homerus adesse poeta* 6 Vahlen = 2 Skutsch); but cf. schol. ad Pers. 6. 9–11: Ennius in *Annalium suorum principio . . . dicit se vidisse in somnis . . .* So too fr. 5 V = 2 Sk *somno leni placidoque revinctus*, echoed by Lucr. 1. 133, *somnoque sepultis*. See Skutsch 155 f.

“ever-flowering” and “appearance” suggests the seductive but insubstantial quality of this “vision”; it is like the *simulacra* of the previous line (123). The unreality of a *species* that “rises forth” and “pours out salt tears” thus serves as an antidote to Ennius’ account of the *Acherusia templa* of Hades where only “certain wondrously pale images” of the dead dwell (*quaedam simulacra modis pallentia miris* 1. 120–23).

Lucretius’ own comment on Ennius’ vision is to point out the need for “seeing whence the nature of soul and mind exists” so that we are not frightened by visions of the dead in illness and in dreams (1. 131–35):

unde anima atque animi constet natura videndum
 et quae res nobis vigilantibus obvia mentis
 terrificet morbo adfectis somnoque sepultis,
 cernere uti videamur eos audireque coram,
 morte obita quorum tellus amplectitur ossa. 135

As we have noted, this point is repeated even more clearly in Book 4. The propaedeutic function of the passage here is, once more, enhanced by a framing device. Lines 130–35 answer 112–16, the introduction to Ennius’ vision:

ignoratur enim quae sit natura animai,
 nata sit an contra nascentibus insinuetur,
 et simul intereat nobiscum morte dirempta
 an tenebras Orci visat vastasque lacunas 115
 an pecudes alias divinitus insinuet se,
 Ennius ut noster cecinit . . .

In both cases, understanding the nature of the soul is necessary to free us from “fear” in dreams, and specifically dreams of the dead that may give us erroneous and terrifying ideas about a life after death (cf. also *terrificet* 133 and *aeternas . . . poenas in morte timendumst* 111).

Lucretius clearly means us to recognize the literary genealogy of Ennius’ vision. The adversative structure of the sentence that introduces it,

quo neque permaneant animae nec corpora nostra,
 sed quaedam simulacra modis pallentia miris, (1. 122 f.)

may also go back beyond Ennius to the most famous dream in epic, Patroclus’ appearance to the sleeping Achilles in *Iliad* 23. 103 f.:

ὦ πόποι, ἦ ῥά τίς ἐστι καὶ εἰν Ἀΐδαο δόμοισι
 ψυχῇ καὶ εἰδῶλον, ἀτὰρ φρένες οὐκ ἔνι πάμπαν.

Indeed, Lucretius’ phrase for such images of the dead in Book 4, *simulacra luce carentum* (4. 39), may be indebted to Patroclus’ description of the dead as εἰδῶλα καμόντων in this passage (23. 72), possibly via Ennius’ own “translation” of Homer. And of course Lucretius’ passage is a complex

intertextual allusion to another famous literary dream, Callimachus' dream in the proem to the *Aitia*, which Ennius had adapted in his *Annales*.¹⁷

The poetic fame of Ennius and the hold of that continuous tradition that his vision of Homer embodies obviously constitute a provocation for Lucretius' own work. By recreating the epic tradition about the afterlife, therefore, Lucretius gives an even clearer justification for his poem, with its "correct" views of dreams, the soul, and death.¹⁸ His *dicta* and his *Latini versus*, he suggests, are more useful than Ennius' (cf. 126 and 143, 121 and 137). As the "second proem" will imply, he is in fact more worthy of the fame that Ennius has won (1. 921 ff., especially 928–30). The contrast between Ennius' "eternal verses" and their content of "eternal punishments" (111, 121) is replicated in the ironical contrast between the life-filled *effect* of Ennius' poetry, with its *perenni fronde coronam* (118) and its *content* of frightening darkness, ghosts, and punishments forever. Later in the poem, Lucretius will show not only that Hades does not exist (3. 978 ff.) but also that nothing is in fact "eternal" except atoms and void. For the purpose of the individual human life, only death is eternal, the *mors aeterna* that ends Book 3 (1091).

Ennius' poetic assimilation of Greek lore—Homer, Pythagoras, Callimachus—to which Lucretius alludes in 1. 117–26 is presumably one reason for his fame *per gentis Italas* (119). Lucretius answers this claim with his own struggles to put the "Greeks' dark discoveries" into "Latin verses" (1. 136–39). In the proem to Book 3 he offers a very different mode of assimilating Greek poetry, adapting the Homeric Olympus to the serene life of the Epicurean gods (3. 19 ff.; cf. *Odyssey* 6. 42–46). This true vision, like Epicurus' in Book 1, out over the limits of the universe counterbalances Ennius' false vision of the underworld there. It specifically disproves the existence of those Homeric *Acherusia templa*:

etsi praeterea tamen esse Acherusia templa, (1. 120)

at contra nusquam apparent Acherusia templa. (3. 25)

Thus Lucretius fulfils his promise there to give a "good" treatment of the things above (*bene cum superioribus de rebus habenda / nobis est ratio* 1. 127 f.).

¹⁷ Callim. *Aitia* I, fr. 2, with the schol. Flor. and testimonia in R. Pfeiffer, *Callimachus* (Oxford 1949) I 11. The importance of Callimachean elements in Lucretius has often been noted: see, e.g., E. J. Kenney, "Doctus Lucretius," *Mnemosyne* 23 (1970) 366–92; R. D. Brown, "Lucretius and Callimachus," *ICS* 7 (1982) 77–97, with the bibliography, p. 92 n. 16; J. K. Newman, *The Classical Epic Tradition* (Madison, WI 1986) 108–15. See also my "Poetic Immortality and the Fear of Death: The Second Proem of the *De Rerum Natura*," *HSCP* 92 (1989) 193–212.

¹⁸ Lucretius' use of Ennius' dream may also allude to mistaken philosophical views too, if he means us to think of the Pythagorean doctrine of metempsychosis that Ennius seems to have incorporated into his dream.

At the conclusion of Book 3, refuting the possibility that the soul can survive the body at death, Lucretius returns to Homer and the poets (3. 1036–38):

adde repertores doctrinarum atque leporum,
adde Heliconiadum comites; quorum unus Homerus
scepra potitus eadem aliis sopitu' quietest.

Homer, along with the other poets, has a very "unHomeric" death, a peaceful Epicurean death, in repose (*sopitu' quietest*).¹⁹ This tranquil quietus, in turn, takes up the comforting recognition, shortly before, that death is but a quiet sleep (3. 910 f., 977). In Book 1 Homer's shade "wept salt tears" (*lacrimas effundere salsas*), presumably at its unhappy fate in the gloomy underworld. Such weeping is chastized and rebuked, at least indirectly, by the view of death set forth in Book 3:

. . . quid sit amari
tanto opere, *ad somnum* si res redit *atque quietem*,
cur quisquam *aeterno* possit *tabescere luctu*. (3. 909–11)
numquid ibi horrible apparet, num triste videtur
quicquam, non omni *somno securius* exstat? (3. 976 f.)

Had Homer known the peaceful end that awaits him, he would have expounded his *rerum naturam* not in sadness (1. 125 f.) but, like Lucretius, in joy (*voluptas* 1. 140, 3. 28, 6. 94, etc.).

Epicurus' death, mentioned almost immediately after Homer's, belongs completely to the philosophical, not the epic world. It follows on the end of Democritus, which comes entirely as an intellectual act, a decision of mature wisdom and mind (3. 1039–44):

denique Democritum postquam matura vetustas
admonuit memores motus languescere mentis, 1040
sponte sua leto caput obuius obtulit ipse.
ipse Epicurus obit decurso lumine vitae,
qui genus humanum ingenio superavit et omnis
restinxit stellas exortus ut aereus sol.

Epicurus' end, furthermore, is glorified in lines that are adapted from an epigram of Leonidas of Tarentum in honor of Homer (3. 1043 f.; *Anth. Pal.* 9. 24).²⁰ His "rising like the sun of the heavens" here (*exortus* 1044)

¹⁹ We may also compare 3. 904, in which the foolish man addresses the dead relative: *tu quidem ut es leto sopitus*, but does not fully grasp the implication of what it is to be *leto sopitus*.

²⁰ On other aspects of this passage see my *Lucretius on Death and Anxiety* (Princeton University Press, forthcoming), chap. 10. The Homeric borrowings throughout this passage, of course, add to the contrasts of philosophical and epic death: see, e.g., G. B. Conte, "Il trionfo della morte e la galleria dei grandi trapassati in Lucrezio III, 1024–1053," *SIFC* 37 (1965) 114–32.

reminds us again of Ennius' false vision of Homer's shade that "rose forth" (*exortam*) from Hades (1. 124).²¹ As the peaceful death of Lucretius' Homer in 3. 1037 f. replaces Ennius' weeping shade of Homer in Book 1, so the fame of Epicurus that eclipses all other mortals absorbs and replaces the fame of Homer. Lucretius thus continues his Epicurean assimilation of poetic fame and poetic conventions that he began in Book 1.²²

The following lines, however, extend Epicurus' "superiority to the whole human race" (3. 1043) in a slightly different direction, for Lucretius adapts the heroic encounter between Homer's Achilles and Lycaon in *Iliad* 21 to a philosophical encounter between the sage and the ordinary man. This person, addressed in the second person, after the manner of the diatribe, "spends the greater part of his life in sleep" and never "ceases to see dreams," whether waking or sleeping, so that his mind is always disturbed by "vain terror" (3. 1045-49):

tu vero dubitabis et indignabere obire?	1045
mortua cui vita est prope iam vivo atque videnti,	
cui somno partem maiorem conteris aevi	
et vigilans stertis nec somnia cernere cessas	
sollicitamque geris cassa formidine mentem.	

We thus return from heroic epic, parody, and diatribe to the association of dreams, death, and fear that Lucretius will treat in the following book. The notion of both waking and sleeping dreams here in 3. 1048, *et vigilans stertis nec somnia cernere cessas*, is repeated in the introduction to the formal treatment of dreams in Book 4 (37 f.):

atque eadem nobis vigilantibus obvia mentis
terrificant atque in somnis . . .

It harks back, in turn, to the first mention of this theme in 1. 132 f.:

et quae res nobis vigilantibus obvia mentis
terrificet morbo adfectis somnoque sepultis.

Lucretius has not only replaced these dangerous *somnia* with the truth; he also makes the old epic material speak to the man in the street, as it were. This ordinary, somnolent person of 3. 1045 ff. has nightly visions that may not be those of poets or heroes, like those of Ennius or of Homer's Achilles, but they are no less real to him and no less a source of the fear that troubles his life and destroys his happiness (cf. also 3. 1066 *aut abit in somnum gravis atque oblivia quaerit*).

²¹ Note too that the following line, 3. 1045, *tu vero dubitabis et indignabere obire*, is an intentional echoing of a famous Homeric verse, *Il.* 21. 106.

²² The device is analogous to Epicurus' claim to divinity and heroic status in 5. 7-54.

The contrast between the dream-visions of the poetic tradition and the truth of Lucretius' Epicurean poetry early in the poem thus emerges as part of a larger, programmatic contrast wherein Lucretius is challenging the entire course of Graeco-Roman poetry, from Homer through Callimachus and Ennius. He takes over conventional literary motifs from Callimachus and Ennius, but bends them to his ethical aims as an Epicurean poet. When Ennius tells how Homer's shade expounds the "nature of things" (*rerum naturam expandere dictis* 1. 126), we know that it is only a living man, i.e. Lucretius himself, not a ghost, who writes the true poem *de rerum natura* (1. 25).²³

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