

Quali Positura: The power of position in Lucretius' De Rerum Natura

Much of Lucretian scholarship today focuses on Lucretius' re-writing of Epicurean philosophy through a Roman lens, and not on Lucretius' poetic appropriation of that philosophy. There is a deficiency of the type of scholarship we typically associate with Augustan poetry done with Lucretius. With this in mind, there is need for scholarship which seeks to understand the poetry underneath the philosophy. This paper describes one aspect of Lucretius' metapoetics through an exploration of the usages of the substantive form of the word *positura* throughout the *De Rerum Natura*. My research uncovered the substantive form of the word to be unique to Lucretius at the time of composition in extant Latin literature and seeks to identify the reasoning behind its coinage and repetition throughout the *DRN*. This paper exposes a patterning of language surrounding the use of *positura* throughout the poem. Further analysis of this patterning indicates that Lucretius' poetry is generically mixed under the surface of his didactic, revealing a self-conscious imaging of the poet that further enhances the force of said didactic.

The inspiration behind this research was found in a brief section of text toward the end of *DRN* 2 (1013-1022). In these lines, Lucretius refers quite explicitly to his own poetic process with the predominant theme being the effect *placement* has on *meaning*. On a broad scale, this idea concludes Lucretius' chapter on the physical properties of atoms and how those properties serve to create the conceivable universe. In particular, the placement and meaning described in these lines refer to the creation of meaning in language (and by extension, poetry) through the placement of letters and words on a page. Lucretius' metalinguistic passage is also powerfully intratextual— these lines as we have them refer both backward and forward to identical and nearly identical lines throughout the poem; all of which are connected through the repetition of the word *positura*. This paper explores how verbal echoes of this metalinguistic passage call

attention to the thesis of the poem as a whole strictly in terms of its poetry and not necessarily its philosophy.

This paper seeks to present a consideration of Lucretius' metapoetics and intratextuality through the use of verbal echoes. A close reading of the passages in which the substantive *positura* is found presents a multiplicity of generic modalities present in Lucretius' *DRN*. Thus in Lucretius, as in other Classical poets, it is necessary to read a plurality of meanings into the work rather than stopping short at an acknowledgment of Epicurean didactic.

While much ink has been spilled regarding repetition in Lucretius, very little of that discussion has been matched with a conception of Lucretius' poetic self-fashioning. On repetition in Lucretius, Kyriakidis (2006) proves useful in his interpretation of the repetition of *DRN* 1.926-950 in the proem to *DRN* 4. His analysis of those two passages carries as its underlying assumption that the repetition of phrases is necessarily self-referential; this assumption is supported by Kyriakidis' brief mention of Lucretius' metapoetics in *DRN* 2 at lines 1013-1022. Ingalls (1971) provides a more comprehensive study of repetition in the *DRN* in general, and the various conclusions regarding the scholarship in this realm (the poet repeats himself for didactic purposes, the poet repeats himself in order to highlight philosophical themes). In no way does this author disagree with the conclusions espoused in Ingalls; however, more can be said about the poet's agency in light of these conclusions, challenging generic preconceptions about the *De Rerum Natura*.

Bibliography

Ingalls, Wayne B. (1971) "Repetition in Lucretius." *Phoenix* 25.3: 227-236.

Kyriakidis, S. (2006) "Lucretius' *DRN* 1.926-50 and the Proem to Book 4." *Classical Quarterly* 56.2: 606-610.