

Page, Stage, Image: Confronting Ennius with Lucretius' On the Nature of Things

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Introduction

Manuscripts containing the works of Quintus Ennius (239–169 BC) appear not to have survived much beyond the fourth century AD,¹ so scholars interested in the *disiecti membra poetae* (“limbs of a scattered poet,” Hor. *Sat.* 1.4.62) have long been focusing on later authors who engaged with his oeuvre. That group includes the late-Republican writer Lucretius, whose Epicurean poem *On the Nature of Things* is steeped in archaic language and metrical constructions reminiscent of Ennian poetry. It also contains a prominent reference to the earlier poet’s views on the afterlife (1.112–135). In revisiting the intertextual connection between the two authors in this paper, I do not seek to contest the typical conclusion that Ennius ranked next to Homer and Empedocles among those literary predecessors whom Lucretius revered but with whose worldview he often disagreed.² Rather, I will reassess a number of familiar points of contact between the two writers in Book 1 of *On the Nature of Things* – which is where Lucretius first sets up his poem’s sustained allusive conversation with Ennius – in pursuit of a twofold thesis.

Throughout, I cite the fragments of Ennius from Goldberg and Manuwald: 2018. I also follow their editorial practice of using the numbering of Skutsch: 1985 when referring to the *Annals* and Manuwald: 2012 for the tragedies. Quotations from Lucretius are based on the OCT edition. For all other authors, I follow the Teubner. Translations from the Latin and Greek are my own. My sincere thanks go to Erin M. Hanses and Jason Nethercut for their helpful suggestions and bibliographical assistance, to Katharina Volk for commenting on a much earlier version of this paper and to Sergio Yona and Gregson Davis for including my contribution in this volume.

¹ See Suerbaum: 2002, 139–142, for a survey of the evidence.

² See, e.g., Kenney: 1970, 309; Harrison: 2002, 2; Gale: 2007, 61. Taylor: 2016 is more nuanced, noting that when it comes to tragic (i.e., mythological) material, Lucretius does not in fact discard the content of Ennius’ poetry entirely. Rather, he tends to play competing versions of a story against each other. A particularly thorough discussion of Ennian allusion in Lucretius is Nethercut: 2012. See also Nethercut: 2014 and 2018, esp. 79–82. For tragedy in Lucretius, see also Schiesaro: 1990, 111–122; Fowler: 2000: 138–155; Marcović: 2008; and Cowan: 2013.

First, I posit that in those passages where Lucretius is known to engage with Ennius – not just in the discussion of life after death, but also in the encomium of Epicurus (1.62–79), the sacrifice of Iphigenia (1.82–101) and the brief narration of the Trojan War (1.464–482) – the Epicurean poet repeats more key terminology from his Ennian source passages than has previously been recognized. The depth and number of these references to Ennius suggest that throughout Book 1, Lucretius tends to contest not just common worldviews in a general sense, but common worldviews as expressed – more specifically – by Ennius. This thorough engagement with Rome’s first “national” poet shows that Ennius’ compositions provided more than engaging accounts of classical mythology and vivid narrations of historical events on which to hinge Roman identity. Rather, the cosmology of his poetry could count as religion or even philosophy.

Second, I posit that Lucretius’ need to refute Ennius is so urgent because the earlier poet’s works continued to be included at the Roman *ludi* and hence contributed to the spectators’ mass-indoctrination in what, to an Epicurean, would constitute a harmful ideology. In an attempt to counter this potentially detrimental effect, Lucretius alludes specifically to those parts of Ennius’ epic and dramatic output that, as writers from Cicero to Aulus Gellius consistently report, remained popular in recitations and revival performances. What is more, where Lucretius describes mythological events in particularly Ennian language and imagery, his versions correspond closely to the same stories’ portrayal in the visual arts. This phenomenon hints at a rich cross-pollination between stagings of Ennius’ works and depictions of classical myth in Roman painting. In engaging with both at the same time, Lucretius provides his readers with a guidebook on how to deconstruct commonly held misconceptions wherever they encounter them, be it in their studies of classical literature, while attending Ennian performances in the theater or while glancing at pictorial representations of mythological scenes on the walls of Roman houses.

Pyrrhus and Epicurus

Lucretius’ engagement with Ennius begins well before he actually mentions the older poet in Book 1 (at line 117). After the opening hymn to Venus (1.1–43) and an initial explication of the vocabulary he will be applying to atoms (1.49–61), Lucretius introduces the reader to his idol, Epicurus (1.62–79). The philosopher remains unnamed, but it is commonly understood that he is the Greek man who, back “when life lay

fouly on the earth, oppressed by heavy superstition” (*foede cum vita iaceret | in terris oppressa gravi sub religione*, 1.62–63), first dared to look up at the sky (*primum Graius homo mortalis tollere contra | est oculos ausus*, 1.66–67) and challenged the reign of *religio*. His intellect “proceeded far beyond the burning walls of the world” (*extra | processit longe flammantia moenia mundi*, 1.72–73) and brought back actual knowledge of what can and cannot happen, and thereby dispelled irrational fears of the gods and brought us closer to ἀτραξία.

In this context, the phrase *Graius homo* – used to describe Epicurus at 1.66 – connects back to, and establishes a firm intertextual connection with, Ennius’ *Annals*.³ The sixth book of this epic narrated Pyrrhus’ campaign against Rome, and it seems to have made its author’s admiration for the Hellenistic king readily apparent.⁴ Ennius describes the Epirote invader as “from the highest stock” (*a stirpe supremo*, fr. 166 Sk) and as “a vigorous man . . . , a Greek man with a Greek father, a king” (*navos repertus homo, Graio patre, Graius homo, rex*, fr. 165 Sk). Throughout the rest of the book, which foregrounded its martial interests from its very first lines,⁵ Ennius explored what such terms as *virtus* (“manly valor”), *vis* (“force”) and *vincere* (“to be victorious”) come to mean when they are applied to a general who famously won every battle but at such a cost that he might as well have lost. It is this key vocabulary that, I posit, was of particular interest to Lucretius. In Ennius, Pyrrhus is said, for example, to have dedicated an inscription in the temple of Jupiter in Tarentum, which noted that “men who previously were undefeated, best father of Olympus, I have defeated with force in battle and I have, in turn, been defeated by the same men” (*qui antehac | invicti fuere viri, pater optume*

³ Bailey: 1947, 2.609 notes the phrase’s Ennian origin but does not explore this observation further. Gale: 1994, 72–74 posits a different intertext, suggesting that *primum Graius homo* reflects Empedocles’ description of Pythagoras (fr. 129.1). For Empedocles in Lucretius, see more generally Sedley: 1998, 15–34 and Garani: 2007. Harrison: 2002, 8–11 explores similarities between Epicurus and Pyrrhus as contemporaries and fellow “invaders” of Italy. Nethercut: 2012 adds that in putting Ennian language to “un-Ennian” uses, Lucretius might be making Epicurus resemble an epic hero like Hector, Achilles or Odysseus (72, 96 and 143–147). Additional allusions to Book 6 of Ennius’ *Annals* feature in Lucretius’ fifth book, on which see Gale: 2009, 201 and Nethercut: 2012, 95–102.

⁴ For Book 6 of the *Annals* and its function as a Pyrrhus encomium, see, e.g., Suerbaum: 1995; Fantham: 2006; and Fabrizi: 2012, 119–150. Goldberg: 1995, 101–102; Elliott: 2013, 167–169; and N. Goldschmidt: 2013, 160–161, discuss the book’s afterlife in Vergil. Goldberg and Manuwald: 2018, 1.198–214 collect and contextualize the fragments.

⁵ A fragment from *Annals* 6 notes the composition’s intent “to unfurl the edges of vast war” (*ingentis oras evolvere belli*, fr. 164 Sk). For its placement at the start of the book, see Skutsch: 1985, 328–329. Farrell: 2008, 17 n. 21 remains skeptical.

Olympi, | *hos ego vi pugna vici victusque sum ab isdem*, fr. 180–182 Sk).⁶ Words derived from *vincere* (*in-victi . . . vici victusque*) here alternate and alliterate with forms of *vir* (“man,” hence *virtus*) and *vis* in an evaluation of the paradox that is a Pyrrhic victory. The source that contains the fragment (Oros. *Hist.* 4.1.14) goes on to say that, when asked “why he called himself defeated although he had won” (*cur se victum diceret qui vicisset*), Pyrrhus responded “truly, if I win another time in this same manner, I will return without a single soldier to Epirus” (*ne ego si iterum eodem modo vicero sine ullo milite Epirum revertar*). Presuming this wording echoes the king’s presentation in the *Annals*, it seems that vocabulary derived from *vincere* (*victum . . . vicisset . . . vicero*) predominated not just in the fragment itself, but also in its immediate surroundings.⁷

As far as Ennius’ use of the term *virtus* is concerned, it also stands at the center of Pyrrhus’ assertion that he has no interest in riches but wants to challenge the Romans in the area of “manly valor” (*virtute experiamur*, fr. 187 Sk.). Those who retain their *virtus* will be spared, even if they end up captured (*quorum virtuti belli fortuna pepercit | eorundem me libertati parcere certum est*, fr. 188–189 Sk.). The sentiment serves not only to praise the king’s own manliness, but also to declare his martial *virtus* more important than the decisive kind of victory that so famously eluded him.⁸

In repeating the epithet *Gravius homo*, then, from Ennius’ depiction of Pyrrhus, Lucretius evokes memories of the earlier poem but proceeds to paint an altogether different picture of what constitutes a Greek hero. In particular, he employs the same key vocabulary that Ennius had used in the *Annals* but re-purposes it for a celebration of the human mind.⁹ The world’s depressing state awakens Epicurus’ *virtus*, but, in notable contrast to Ennius’ Pyrrhus, his is a *virtus* of the intellect (*acrem | irritat animi virtutem*, 1.69–70). Similarly, the phrase “the vigorous force of [Epicurus’] mind prevails” (*vivida vis animi pervicit*, 1.72) is as alliterative as the Ennian source passage it recalls, and it relies on the same terminology (*vis . . . per-vicit*). Yet the philosopher’s victory, unlike Pyrrhus’, is never in

⁶ For the complicated history of this fragment’s attribution to Ennius, see Skutsch: 1985, 344–346 and Fantham: 2006, 566.

⁷ In addition to the examples adduced here, fr. 167 Sk. likewise centers on the verb *vincere*.

⁸ Compare, e.g., Suerbaum: 1995, 38, who calls this fragment “programmatisch.”

⁹ Cf., e.g., West: 1969, 57–63 and Buchheit: 1971, who examine the passage’s triumphal language. Gale: 1994, 117–128 considers Lucretius’ militaristic similes and metaphors borrowings from Homeric and Ennian epic.

doubt. Indeed, his *victoria* raises all of us up to the sky (*nos exaequat victoria caelo*, 1.79).¹⁰

Lucretius thus issues a challenge to traditional conceptions of heroism as propagated, in particular, in the sixth book of Ennius' *Annals*. Since Cicero refers to the Ennian Pyrrhus' aforementioned speech on the subject of *virtus* as "those famous [words]" (*illa praeclara*, *Off.* 1.38),¹¹ it seems that access to the text would have been readily available to Lucretius' readers.¹² Yet that is not to say that they would have necessarily studied the poem in a scroll. After all, Latin epics were also recited at the Roman *ludi* in the first century BC,¹³ and Aulus Gellius still witnessed a public reading from Book 6 of the *Annals* as late as the second century AD.¹⁴ The event occurred when "there was rest on a certain day at Rome in the forum from business" (*otium erat quodam die Romae in foro a negotiis*) amid a "certain happy celebration of a festival" (*laeta quaedam celebritas feriarum*, Gell. 16.10.1). It seems likely, therefore, that Lucretius' readers would have encountered Ennius' views on *virtus*, *vis* and *vincere* at official celebrations of city-wide holidays. On these occasions, anyone steeped in *On the Nature of Things* would have been ready to critique the *Annals*' use of the relevant terms, and to advance the counter-model provided by Epicurean philosophy. This multi-mediality of Ennian reception – occurring, as I contend it would have, both through reading and through performance – is particularly relevant to the next section, where I discuss an intertextual connection that relies even more directly on non-written media.

Iphigenia

Having completed the encomium of Epicurus, Lucretius segues into his famous description of the sacrifice of Iphianassa/Iphigenia. The account of Agamemnon's ritual murder of his daughter on what she thought was to be

¹⁰ At Sil. *Pun.* 12.411, the god Apollo remarks that Ennius "will raise leaders up to the sky" (*attollet . . . duces caelo*). If that line is based on Ennius' own poetry, then Lucretius' *nos exaequat victoria caelo* might constitute another reversal of Ennian language (and priorities) in the younger poet's description of Epicurus.

¹¹ Cf. Elliott: 2013, 167–169.

¹² For Ennius' role in Roman education, see Bonner: 1977, 213, 215 and 223; N. Goldschmidt: 2013, 17–28.

¹³ For early public performances of Ennian epic at the *ludi Romani*, see Wiseman: 2015, 63–70. For similar recitations of the works of Vergil in the theater, see Tac. *Dial.* 13.2; Donat. *Vit. Verg.* 26; Serv. *Ecl.* 6.11.

¹⁴ For the placement of the relevant fragment in Book 6 of the *Annals*, see most recently Goldberg and Manuwald: 2018, 1.202–203.

her wedding day – meant to ensure the Greek fleet’s passage out of the Bay of Aulis – constitutes a prime example of Lucretius’ thesis that superstition in the guise of reverence will sway people toward terrible deeds (*tantum religio potuit suadere malorum*, 1.82–101 at 101). The passage has also long been recognized as richly intertextual.¹⁵ Depending on their respective backgrounds and interests, different modern critics have foregrounded certain allusions at the expense of others, as would no doubt have been the case among the varied readership(s) of the Roman Republic. There are, for example, clear echoes of the *parodos* of Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* in Lucretius’ focus on the pollution incurred through human sacrifice, the theme of a wedding perverted into a funeral and in the fact that, as in the *Oresteia*, Iphigenia has to be carried to the altar and actually dies (rather than being replaced with a deer and spirited away by Diana at the very last second). In particular, Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* notes the horror of “soiling a father’s hands with streams of a young woman’s blood right by the altar” (μιαίνων παρθενοσφάγοισιν | ρείθροις πατρῷους χέρας | πέλας βωμοῦ, Aesch. *Ag.* 209–211). Similar language recurs in Lucretius’ lament that “at Aulis, the leaders of the Greeks, the first among the men, foully soiled the altar of Diana with the blood of a young woman, Iphigenia” (*Aulide . . . Triviai virginis aram | Iphianassai turparunt sanguine foede | ductores Danaum delecti, prima virorum*, 1.84–86).¹⁶

To these Aeschylean resonances has been added the observation that in Euripides’ *Iphigenia at Aulis*, the young woman “was first to call [Agamemnon] father” and to “attach [her] body to [his] knees” (πρώτη σ’ ἐκάλεσα πατέρα . . . | πρώτη δὲ γόνασι σοῖσι σῶμα δοῦσ’ ἐμόν, Eur. *IA* 1220–1221). In Lucretius, Iphigenia is “silent with fear” and, “having fallen to her knees, she sought the ground. And it did not help the miserable woman at such a time that she had been first to bestow the name of father on the king” (*muta metu terram genibus summissa petebat. | nec miserae prodesse in tali tempore quibat | quod patrio princeps donarat nomine regem*, 1.92–94).¹⁷ Based on the similarities between these passages, Barnaby Taylor (2016, 145–150) has argued that Lucretius alludes to competing dramatic versions of the myth, including some where

¹⁵ In addition to what I adduce below, Furley: 1970, 62 and Gale: 1994, 72 discuss echoes of Empedocles’ fr. 137, which describes a father sacrificing an animal that – due to metempsychosis – used to be his son. Cf. also Gale: 2007, 64 and 67.

¹⁶ For Lucretius’ varied allusions to the *Agamemnon*, see Perutelli: 1996; Harrison: 2002, 5; Panoussi: 2009, 20–25; Nethercut: 2012, 126; and Taylor: 2016, 147.

¹⁷ See Bailey: 1947, 2.614–615; Nethercut: 2012, 126–127; and Taylor: 2016, 147–148, for this and potential further echoes of Euripides’ *Iphigenia at Aulis*.

Iphigenia is saved (as, apparently, she was in Euripides' *IA*) and others where she is not (e.g., Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*). In doing so, Lucretius endorses the latter in an attempt to "correct" or rationalize the former and underlines the true horror of the event.

This argument is convincing, but it is nevertheless necessary to account more fully than Taylor does for Stephen Harrison's (2002, 4–6) observation that the passage's entire style is markedly Ennian, even and especially at the start (the episode's first lines, 1.84–86, are quoted above). This suggests that the main – though certainly not the only – author whose work Lucretius employs to exemplify the noxious beliefs on display in many tragedies is Ennius. Harrison himself points to the use of *indugredi* at 1.82 as reminiscent of Ennius' favored term *induperator*; to the archaic genitives *Triviai* (1.84; the noun also occurs in Ennius' fr. 171 M.) and *Iphianassai* (1.85); to Ennius' phrases *duxit delectos* (fr. 331 Sk.) and *delecti viri* (fr. 89.5 M.), which fuse into Lucretius' *ductores . . . delecti* (1.86); and to the fact that the construction *prima virorum* (1.86) in its combination of a neuter plural with a genitive is recognizably Ennian as well.¹⁸ To these linguistic echoes, I would add that Iphigenia wears an *infula* at 1.87–88. This noun describes the headband of a priestess, particularly a Vestal Virgin,¹⁹ which reinforces the passage's specifically Roman ring. In turn, the phrase *muta metu* at 1.92 is not attested in Ennius, but its alliteration does contribute to the passage's archaizing tone and recalls the earlier author's penchant for this stylistic feature. Most importantly, the phrase used to describe Iphigenia's murder (*aram . . . turparunt sanguine*, 1.84–85) is lifted directly out of Ennius' *Andromacha*, where – looking back to the night she was captured – the titular character uses the same words to describe the slaughter of Priam at the altar of Jupiter (*aram sanguine turpari*, fr. 23.17 M.).²⁰ Occurring as it does at the outset of the Lucretian episode, and providing a summary of it, the quote sets an emphatically Ennian tone for Lucretius' entire narration of the sacrifice. Other intertexts are certainly active as well, but the reader has to pass through Ennian Latin, as it were, in order to reach them.

A further example of this latter phenomenon is provided by an additional echo of Ennius' tragedies that has, to my knowledge, not previously been discussed. As the sacrifice begins, Lucretius' *Agamemnon* stands

¹⁸ Compare fr. 84 Sk. (*infera noctis*) and fr. 264 Sk. (*caeli vasta*). Pace Taylor: 2016, 147 with n. 40, who finds that the construction mirrors Greek syntax.

¹⁹ Cf. Bailey: 1947, 2.614.

²⁰ For this observation, see also Jocelyn: 1967, 251; Harrison: 2002, 6; Goldberg: 2000, 56–57; Panoussi: 2009, 39–41; Nethercut: 2012, 127–129 and Taylor: 2016, 149–150.

motionless at the altar and is despondent (*maestum . . . ante aras adstare parentem*, 1.89), but he does not cry. By contrast, “the citizens shed tears at the sight of [Iphigenia]” (*aspectu . . . suo lacrimas effundere civis*, 1.91). Ennius points to this difference between rulers and their subjects in fr. 194 M., likely from his *Iphigenia*: “The *plebs* in this regard is preferable to the king: The *plebs* is allowed to cry, the king is not allowed to do so honorably” (*plebes in hoc regi antestat loco: licet | lacrimare plebi, regi honeste non licet*). Lucretius echoes this Ennian passage in both sentiment and wording (note the correspondence between *lacrimas effundere* and *lacrimare*, *adstare* and *antestat*). At one step’s further remove, one also notices similar lines in Euripides’ *Iphigenia at Aulis*, where Agamemnon complains that those of low birth “are allowed to cry readily” (δακρῦσαι ῥαιδίως αὐτοῖς ἔχει, 447) while “to a high-born man these things are wretched” (τῶι δὲ γενναίωι φύσιν | ἄνολβα ταῦτα, 448–449). This similarity between Euripides’ and Ennius’ lines has given rise to the suspicion that the Roman tragedian’s *Iphigenia* may have been based at least in part on the Greek *Iphigenia at Aulis*. Yet while the additional, Euripidean intertext would have been readily detectable to the learned, the road there leads through Ennius’ *Iphigenia*.²¹

In alluding to this particular Latin play, and to Ennius more broadly, Lucretius notably does not attack the earlier poet outright. It is apparent from the fragments of the plays as much as from the Ennian language preserved in *On the Nature of Things* that the relevant tragedies would have been critical of Iphigenia’s murder as well.²² Lucretius may – I submit – even be appropriating a voice from within Ennius’ own oeuvre. In one fragment from the *Iphigenia*, Achilles complains that “nobody looks at what is in front of their feet, instead they study the expanses of the sky” (*quod est ante pedes nemo spectat, caeli scrutantur plagas*, fr. 82.3 M.). This condemnation of astrological superstition is compatible with Lucretius’ depiction of Iphigenia’s sacrifice, where excessive contemplation of the supernatural leads to a horrible atrocity. Perhaps, then, the play contained a scene where Achilles rejected his bride-to-be’s murder in almost proto-Lucretian terms. Either way, Lucretius uses some of tragedy’s own insights against itself. He activates vivid reminiscences of Ennius’ plays and uses

²¹ That Ennius’ *Iphigenia* is the main model for Lucretius’ account of the sacrifice is the thesis of Harrison: 2002, 4–6, but he does not point out these particular parallels.

²² See, e.g., Jocelyn: 1967, 251, who discusses the *Andromacha*’s focus on the polluting effect of human sacrifice.

them to undermine the religious beliefs that motivate many of the genre's most memorable characters.

This observation brings us back to the question of how Lucretius' readership would have become familiar with the relevant intertexts. The Iphigenia passage's most overt allusion to Ennian drama occurs in the aforementioned quotation from the *Andromacha* (*aram ... turparunt sanguine*, Lucr. 1.84–85 ~ *aram sanguine turpari*, Ennius fr. 23.17 M.). Like Ennius' other works, this play would have been available for perusal in written form, but the tragedies of the Middle Republic also continued to be re-performed with great frequency.²³ In the repertoire of dramatic classics, the *Andromacha* featured prominently. At *Acad.* 2.20, Cicero observes that many are able to recognize this tragedy as soon as the accompanying piper plays his first notes. At *Att.* 4.15.6, he mentions a specific revival of the play at the *ludi Apollinares* of 54 BC.²⁴ Cicero thus delivers firm evidence that the *Andromacha* was staged in the very decade of the original publication of *On the Nature of Things*,²⁵ perhaps routinely so. This provides further support for the thesis that, as I posited was the case with Lucretius' earlier reliance on Book 6 of the *Annals*, the Epicurean poet preferred to employ those parts of Ennius' oeuvre that were most readily recognizable from performances at Roman festivals. Elsewhere in *On the Nature of Things*, Lucretius imagines his fellow Romans assembled in a theater and bathed in the varied colors cast off by the awnings that protect the spectators against the sun (4.72–83). He notes that after attending such *ludi*, spectators for days “seem to perceive ... the glitter of the varied marvels of the stage” (*videantur | cernere ... | scaenai ... varios splendere decores*, 4.979–983).²⁶ In picking his Ennian quotations, Lucretius relies on these lasting memories of dramatic festivals, but he deconstructs the value systems that underlie the shows and provides his readers with a toolkit for confronting the plots the next time they encounter them at the *ludi scaenici*.²⁷

To a reader, then, whose first language was Latin, who was well-versed in the Roman classics and/or who attended the *ludi*, Lucretius'

²³ Goldberg: 2000 and Manuwald: 2011, 112–113 collect a plethora of evidence.

²⁴ Cf. also the performances described at Cic. *Sest.* 118–123, where a tragic actor inserts lines from Ennius' *Andromacha* into Accius' *Eurysaces* to make a contemporary point.

²⁵ Cicero's famous letter about the *Lucreti poemata* (*QFr.* 2.10.3) likewise dates to 54 BC, so perhaps it was even in the very year of this revival that *On the Nature of Things* saw publication.

²⁶ For further references to the realities of the Roman theater, see 2.416–417, 3.58, 4.296–299 and 6.109–110.

²⁷ See now also Hanses: 2020, 61–62, 344–349 for similar deliberations regarding Lucretius' engagement with comic performances.

condemnation of the sacrifice of Iphigenia would have conjured especially strong reminiscences of Ennius' Trojan plays (including the *Iphigenia* and *Andromacha*), familiar as they continued to be from the stage. Yet I submit that there would have been a further, non-textual component to a late-republican reader's understanding of Lucretius' Iphigenia passage that likewise relates to the reception of Ennius. It has long been noted that the relevant lines of *On the Nature of Things* correspond closely to the sacrifice's depiction in a fresco from the House of the Tragic Poet in Pompeii (Figure 9.1).²⁸ In Lucretius, Iphigenia "perceived that her father was standing despondent by the altars and that the servants were hiding the iron on his account" (*et maestum . . . ante aras adstare parentem | sensit et hunc propter ferrum celare ministros*, 1.89–90). In the image, Agamemnon likewise sorrowfully veils his head on the left while his daughter looks at him, and a priest conceals a dagger on the right. Furthermore, the young woman's lips are closed in the fresco, which suggests that she is "silent with fear" (*muta metu*, 1.92), and in both painting and poem, "she was lifted up by the hands of men and, shivering, she was brought to the altars" (*nam sublata virum manibus tremibundaque ad aras | deductast*, 1.95–96).

The Pompeian fresco likely stems from the Neronian era,²⁹ and it therefore postdates Lucretius' poem by about a century. Yet the motif itself harks back to a painting by the fourth-century BC artist Timanthes,³⁰ variations of which were popular already in the Roman Republic.³¹ It strikes me as significant that Lucretius' description of the sacrifice of Iphigenia is simultaneously so rich in Ennian language and so similar to the story's typical depiction in the visual arts. The resemblances suggest that tragic actors could have taken cues from images portraying the sacrifice of Iphigenia. In turn, the myth's visualizations on the walls of Roman houses could themselves be partially informed by dramatic (re-) performances of classic plays, including those of Ennius. We may imagine, for example, that his *Iphigenia* contained a scene where the young woman is carried off stage to be sacrificed while Agamemnon veils his head, or that a different play, like the *Andromacha*, narrated the event (as we know it did the sacrifice of Priam). Witnessing such a moment in the theater could

²⁸ For the fresco, its date, its similarity to Lucretius' description of the sacrifice and its place in the history of the Iphigenia motif, see Hourticq: 1946, 122; Morisset and Thévenot: 1950, 97; Schefold: 1957, 4; Croisille: 1963, esp. 218–219; Peters: 1963, 143; and Bragantini and Sampaolo: 2013, no. 149.

²⁹ See previous note. ³⁰ Described at Cic. *Orat.* 74 and Plin. *HN* 35.73.

³¹ See in detail Croisille: 1963.



Figure 9.1 *Sacrifice of Iphigenia*, Pompeii, House of the Tragic Poet (VI.8.3), Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, inv. 9112. Photo credit: Scala / Art Resource, NY

have influenced a painter, even if he was also imitating Timanthes. Cicero, for one, hints at such mutual cross-pollinations at *Orat.* 74, where he notes that in portraying the sacrifice of Iphigenia (*immolanda Iphigenia*), a painter (*pictor ille*) will portray varied characters in different gradations of sadness, culminating in Agamemnon with his head veiled (*obvolvendum caput Agamemnonis esse*) as in the Pompeian fresco, and that similar observations apply to an “actor” (*histrion*).

On this reading, Lucretius would be using specifically Ennian language to activate memories of the tale’s portrayal on the Roman stage and in the visual arts, that is, in different media that exerted a noticeable influence on

each other. For a full appreciation of this triangular relationship, it is significant that the fresco includes Diana on the top right and Iphigenia with a deer on the upper left. The painter has emphasized that the young woman escaped her painful death through the goddess' intervention, as she likely did in Ennius' plays as well, considering his *Iphigenia* was based in part on Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*. In alluding only to the painting's lower register and ignoring the top, Lucretius urges his readers to assume the same kind of "selective ambivalence" (Taylor: 2016, 143–144 and 150) toward the visual arts that they are to bring to bear on tragedy. They are to accept certain parts of the story (i.e., condemnations of the violence inherent in Iphigenia's sacrifice) but reject any supernatural components, because the gods do not in fact meddle in human affairs.

Pergama partu

For a further example of Lucretius' multi-medial intertextuality, we now jump ahead a few hundred lines in Book 1 of *On the Nature of Things*. Moving beyond the prologue and into a more thorough discussion of Epicurean physics, Lucretius first establishes the duality between atoms and void. The next step is to distinguish between *coniuncta* and *eventa*. According to 1.451–454, *coniuncta* are concrete, palpable properties that are inseparably tied to the objects that display them. Stones have weight, fire has heat and water is a liquid because of these elements' specific atomic structures. Everything else is an *eventum*, a mere accident, including "slavery . . . poverty and riches, freedom, war, concord, everything else by whose arrival and departure Nature herself remains unimpaired" (*servitium . . . paupertas divitiaeque, | libertas bellum concordia, cetera quorum | adventu manet incolumis natura abituque*, 1.455–457). Even time does not exist independently (1.459) but only in the observation of physical objects. This juxtaposition between *coniuncta* and *eventa* contains an overt value judgment. As Monica Gale (1994, 109–110) has argued, Lucretius declares his own subject matter, *natura*, more lasting and significant than the transitory topics that concern other writers, especially those who focus on epic, tragedy or history.³² It makes sense, therefore, that he would employ the language of earlier authors in providing an example of one such "insignificant" *eventum*, namely, the Trojan War (1.464–477):

³² For Lucretius' understanding of epic as history, see Nethercut: 2014.

denique Tyndaridem raptam belloque subactas
Troiu genas gentis cum dicunt esse, videndumst
ne forte haec per se cogant nos esse fateri,
quando ea saecula hominum, quorum haec eventa fuerunt,
irrevocabilis abstulerit iam praeterita aetas.

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...

denique materies si rerum nulla fuisset
nec locus ac spatium, res in quo quaeque geruntur,
numquam Tyndaridis forma conflatus amoris
ignis, Alexandri Phrygio sub pectore gliscens,
clara accendisset saevi certamina belli,
nec clam durateus Troianis Pergama partu
inflammasset equus nocturno Graiugenarum.

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Finally, when they say that the daughter of Tyndareus (Helen) was really taken and the Trojan peoples were subdued by war, we have to see to it that they do not by chance make us grant that these things actually exist, since the irrevocable past has taken away those ages of men to which these events belong . . . What is more, if there had been no matter, nor space and place, in which each deed is done, never would the fire of love, fanned by the beauty of Tyndareus' daughter, blazing up in the Phrygian chest of Alexander (Paris), have kindled the brilliant struggles of savage war, nor would the wooden horse, unbeknownst to the Trojans, have set Pergamon (the citadel of Troy) on fire with its nocturnal birthing of Greeks.

Lucretius here flags the presence of various intertexts in the background of his own composition. After all, the verb *dicunt* (1.465) provides a prime example of an Alexandrian footnote³³; that is, it constitutes a self-reflexive marker of allusivity that encourages the reader to contemplate which earlier writers may have spoken about Troy. One obvious answer is Homer, and the adjective *durateus* ("wooden," 1.476, transliterated from the Greek *δουράτειος*) indeed underlines Lucretius' debts to this earlier poet, who had likewise applied the word to the Trojan Horse in his account of the city's sack (*Od.* 8.493 and 8.512).³⁴ As far as the metaphor of the horse's pregnancy is concerned, it also features in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (ἵππου νεοσσός, "the offspring of the horse," 825) and Euripides' *Trojan Women* (ἔγκύμον ἵππων τευχέων, "the horse pregnant with weapons," 111). These varied Greek intertexts would all have been readily detectable to the more learned members of Lucretius' readership.

³³ The most influential discussion of Alexandrian footnotes is Hinds: 1998, 1–16. For their presence here and elsewhere in Lucretius, see Nethercut: 2018.

³⁴ See Nethercut: 2012, 84.

Nevertheless, as was the case in Lucretius' description of the sacrifice of Iphigenia, the passage is again especially rich in the language of Ennian drama. Prior studies have noted the presence of the archaizing noun *Tyndaris* (1.464 and 1.473) to describe Helen, of *Troiugeniae* (1.465) to refer to the Trojans and of *Graiuigenae* (1.477) to describe the Greeks.³⁵ Even more notable, because demonstrably based in Roman tragedy, is Lucretius' observation that the Trojan horse "set Pergamon (*Pergama*) on fire with its nocturnal birthing (*partu*) of Greeks" (1.476–477). The words *Pergama* and *partu* are lifted directly out of Ennius' *Alexander*,³⁶ a play dealing with young Paris' expulsion from Troy and his eventual rediscovery. According to this tragedy "the horse pregnant with armed men has jumped over (the walls) with a huge leap to destroy harsh Pergamon with its birthing" (*nam maximo saltu superavit gravidus armatis equus | qui suo partu ardua perdat Pergama*, fr. 22 M.). This Latin expression of the pregnant-horse motif would likely have been most easily detectable to Roman readers, while its Aeschylean and Euripidean versions would have required a bit of extra intellectual effort. I would add that the above quotation from Ennius' *Alexander* has to be part of a prophecy, since the play was set before the destruction of Priam's kingdom. Accordingly, the relevant lines must belong to Cassandra, who in this same play prophesies the fall of Troy and exclaims with reference to her brother that "the torch is here, is here, covered in blood and fire" (*adest, adest fax obvoluta sanguine atque incendio*, fr. 151a M.).³⁷ Ennius' Hecuba is similarly said to have envisioned "that she was birthing a firebrand, and then she produced Paris, who was the cause of the conflagration" (*haec se facem parere vidit et Parin creavit, qui causa fuit incendii*, fr. 200 M.). In a context already rich in allusions to Ennius, Lucretius is picking up on this fire imagery as well, and his reference to the fire "blazing up in the Phrygian chest of Alexander" (1.474) echoes the *Alexander*'s depiction of Paris as a torch that will destroy the city.³⁸

It turns out, then, that we are dealing with a passage that is remarkably similar to the two we have already examined. Lucretius' *Iliupersis* engages with a variety of different intertexts, but Ennian language is especially conspicuous. As before, the lines even contain one clear instance of direct citation (*Pergama partu*, 1.476; compare *Graius homo* at 1.66 and *aram . . . turparunt sanguine* at 1.84–85). It also seems, yet again, that Lucretius has

³⁵ See, e.g., Bailey: 1947, 2.677–679; Nethercut: 2012, 84. ³⁶ See Bailey: 1947, 2.680.

³⁷ For this latter fragment's ascription to the *Alexander*, see Jocelyn: 1967, 204–205.

³⁸ Compare Bailey: 1947, 2.679 and Marcović: 2008. For similar fire imagery in Euripides' Trojan Trilogy, on which Ennius' *Alexander* was partially based, see Scodel: 1980, 78.

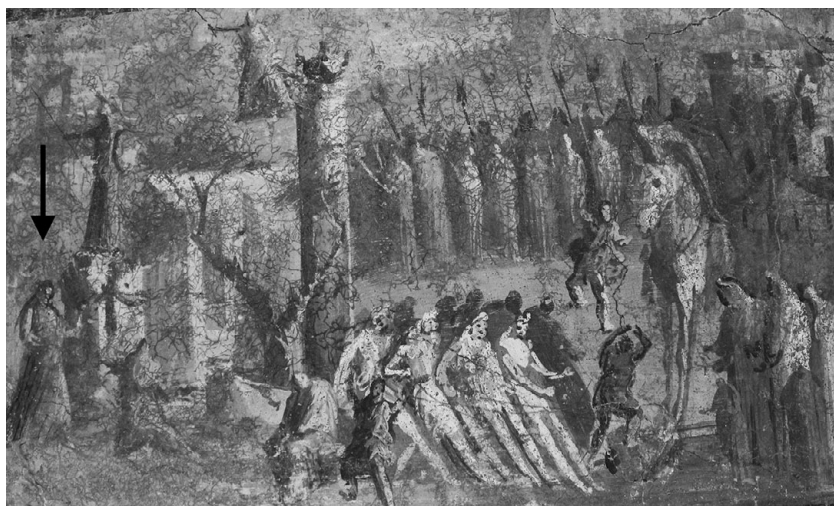


Figure 9.2 *Trojan Horse*, Pompeii, House of Cippius Pamphilus (VII.6.38), Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, inv. 9010. Photo credit: Mathias Hanses

picked a motif that was popular with theatrical audiences. We admittedly do not have any direct attestations for performances of the *Alexander* in the 50s BC, but we do know from a letter of Cicero's (*Fam.* 7.7) that a luxurious revival of an *Equus Troianus* tragedy was put on at the spectacular inauguration of the Theater of Pompey in 55 BC. The show was a great success with the people (*Fam.* 7.7.2), though the orator himself disapproved, and it occurred only briefly before the aforementioned staging of the *Andromacha* in 54 BC. In alluding to the *Alexander*'s narration of the fall of Troy and the Trojan Horse, Lucretius is thus gesturing toward a moment that his readers would have experienced in one form or another at the late Republic's increasingly sensational *ludi scaenici*, perhaps even on multiple occasions.

The visual record likewise provides parallels to my prior discussion, in that rediscovered Roman houses on the Bay of Naples have yielded multiple depictions of the Trojan Horse. Like Ennius' plays, these images foreground the prophecies of Cassandra, who stands apart on the bottom left (Figure 9.2) and top left (Figure 9.3) of two early-Imperial Pompeian frescos, predicting the city's downfall as it is about to occur.³⁹ In a third,

³⁹ For these frescos and their interpretation, see Schefold: 1957, 206; Peters: 1963, 78 and 134; Bragantini and Sampaolo: 2013, nos. 157, 158 and 235b.

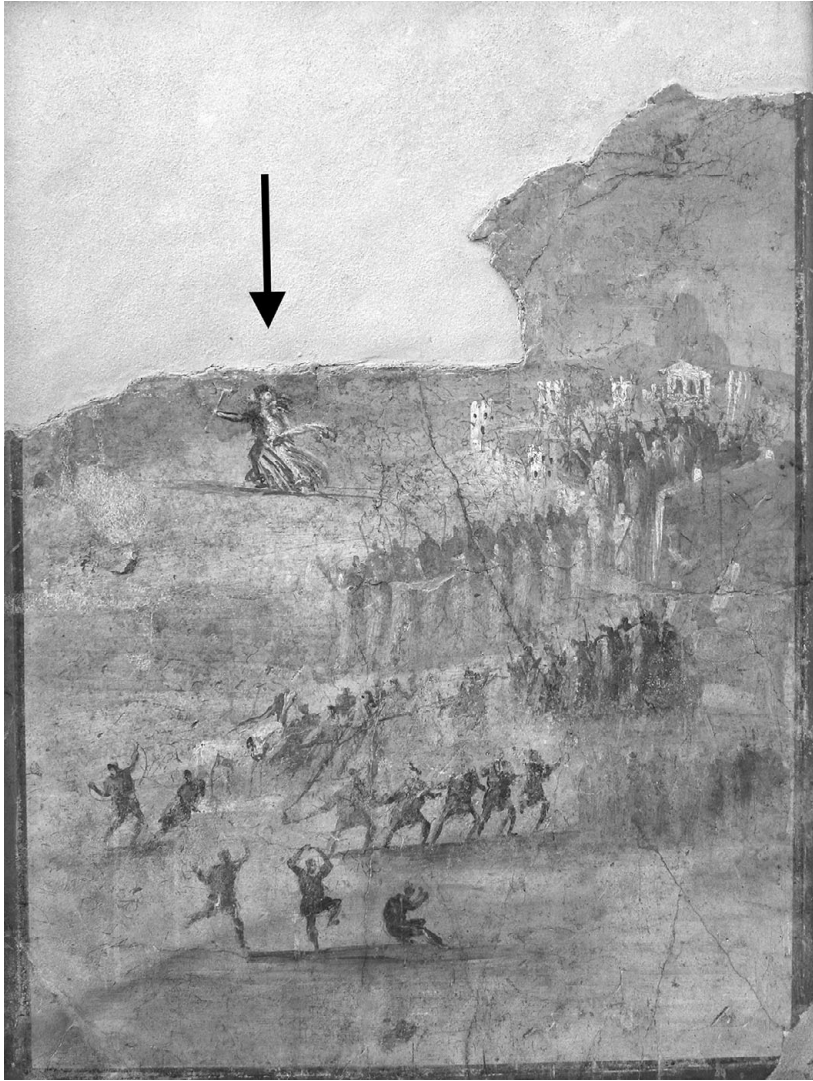


Figure 9.3 *Iliupersis*, Pompeii, House IX.7.16, Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, inv.120176. Photo credit: Mathias Hanses

now badly damaged, from the Villa Arianna in Stabiae, the artist emphasized the horse's "birthing" of enemy combatants through the prominent inclusion of a ladder.⁴⁰ Given the aforementioned consistency in the visual record from the Republic to the Empire, the frescos – though later than the works of Ennius and Lucretius – could provide further support for a triangular connection of reciprocal inspiration between *On the Nature of Things* on the one hand and memorable portrayals of mythological events in paintings and in tragedy on the other. In alluding to multiple media at the same time – which would, in turn, have influenced each other – Lucretius is instructing his readers on how to respond if they are wowed by impressive displays related to the Trojan War, be it at the opening of the city's first permanent theater or in their studies or while glancing at frescos on a dining-room wall. In the end, the plots portrayed are only *eventa*. They are long gone, and they could never have happened in the first place if it were not for the *rerum natura*. What counts, therefore, is the philosophical instruction provided by a poem like Lucretius', which will teach the reader about the far more significant *coniuncta* of Epicurean physics.

Ennius noster

There is one final way in which Lucretius' Trojan-War episode highlights its engagement with Ennius, and that is in its use of the archaic verb *cluere* ("to be said to be," "to be reckoned as existing"; cf. *OLD* s.v. *clueo*). Two occurrences of the word bookend the relevant lines in *On the Nature of Things*. At the start, Lucretius uses it in his definition of *eventa* and *coniuncta* (*nam quaecumque cluent, aut his coniuncta duabus | rebus ea invenies aut horum eventa videbis*, "for all things that are reckoned to exist, you will either find them to be properties of these two [i.e., of atoms and void] or you will see that they are accidents that result from them," 1.449–450). At the end, *cluere* recurs in Lucretius' assertion that *eventa* do not exist in the same manner as atoms and void (*nec ratione cluere eadem qua constet inane*, 1.480). I would suggest that in repeatedly employing *cluere* to deny that mere "accidents" such as the Trojan War maintain an independent presence in the universe, Lucretius inverts Ennius' own use of the same verb in expressing the hope that his "subject matter and poems will be reckoned famous broadly among the peoples" (*latos <per> populos*

⁴⁰ Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, inv. 9893. See Allroggen-Bedel: 1974, 27–89, for discussion.

res atque poemata nostra | <... *clara*> *cluebunt*, fr. 12–13 Sk.). Lucretius paraphrases these same lines of the *Annals* in his rejection of Ennius' views on metempsychosis, which I mentioned briefly at the outset of this chapter. Here, he refers to *Ennius noster* as “the one who first brought a crown of perennial foliage down from delightful Mt. Helicon for it to be reckoned famous throughout the Italic tribes of men” (*Ennius ut noster cecinit qui primus amoeno | detulit ex Helicone perenni fronde coronam, | per gentis Italas hominum quae clara clueret*, 1.117–119). The fact that Lucretius' *clara clueret* echoes the *Annals'* *cluebunt* is often adduced in tentative reconstructions of the Ennian source passage but has not been factored into interpretations of *On the Nature of Things*.⁴¹ I submit that Lucretius intended the verb to have an Ennian ring, both here and in its recurrence in the Trojan-War episode, thereby undermining the earlier poet through the use of his own vocabulary.

Since I have now mentioned Lucretius' explicit naming of Ennius at 1.117, the surrounding lines can lend themselves to some concluding reflections on the role the earlier poet plays in *On the Nature of Things*. At 1.102–135, Lucretius targets Ennius' eschatological views and, as in the other passages I have examined, uses Ennius' own words against him. For example, Ennius had dismissively referred to a preceding generation of poets (and especially to Naevius) as “fauns and soothsayers” (*fauni vatesque*, fr. 207 Sk.). Lucretius now lumps Ennius himself in with the *vates*, whose “fearmongering words” (*vatum | terriloquis . . . dictis*, 1.102–103), “superstitions and threats” (*religionibus atque minis . . . vatum*, 1.109) will cause people to stray from their commitment to Epicurean philosophy and hence to lose their peace of mind.⁴² In particular, Ennius propagates misleading but long-lived (*Ennius aeternis exponit versibus edens*, 1.121) views about the nature of the soul.⁴³ As a result, there is widespread “ignorance” (*ignoratur enim*, 1.112) as to whether the “soul” (*anima*) is born with the body or, on the contrary, inserted into the body at the moment of birth, whether it perishes together with us at death or “sees the darkness of Orcus and the vast emptinesses” or, finally, whether it “inserts itself in a divine manner into other animals,⁴⁴ as our Ennius sang”

⁴¹ For example, Gale: 2001 focuses rather on allusion to Empedocles, noting that like *clara clueret*, the poet's name means “eternally renowned.”

⁴² Cf. Kenney: 1970, 378.

⁴³ For the related pun on *Ennius* and *perennis* at 1.117–118, see Friedländer: 1941, 20; Snyder: 1980, 31 and 107; Gale: 2001.

⁴⁴ Bailey: 1947, 2.621 prefers the translation “beasts other than men,” thereby excluding humans from the animal kingdom.

(*an tenebras Orci visat vastasque lacunas, | an pecudes alias divinitus insinuet se, | Ennius ut noster cecinit, 1.115–117*). The latter claim about the transmigration of souls is puzzling even to Lucretius, especially in light of Ennius' own view that "there do in fact exist Acherusian expanses . . . where neither our souls abide nor our bodies, but certain images pale in wondrous ways" (*etsi praeterea tamen esse Acherusia templa | . . . | quo neque permaneant animae neque corpora nostra | sed quaedam simulacra modis pallentia miris, 1.120–123*). Lucretius dismisses this tripartite division – soul, body and a pallid ghost-like image – as distracting from Epicurus' calming insight that our existence ceases with death.

I have been making a case throughout that Lucretius' need to deconstruct Ennius' harmful perceptions arose specifically from the continued inclusion of the latter's works at the Roman *ludi* (shows that, in turn, had an impact on contemporary painting, and vice versa). This argument is also borne out by the passage quoted immediately above. It has not, to my knowledge, been previously emphasized that Lucretius' description of misconstrued ideas about the underworld once again reflects key lines of the popular *Andromacha*.⁴⁵ In fr. 24 M., one of this play's characters, perhaps Andromache herself, greets "the Acherusian expanses and the vast depths of Orcus" (*Acherusia templa alta Orci salvete infera*). The fragment is preserved in Varro's *On the Latin Language* (7.6), but Cicero quotes what may be a longer version of the same passage (omitting *salvete*) at *Tusc.* 1.48: *Acheru[n]sia templa alta Orci, pallida leti, nubila tenebris loca* ("the deep Acherusian fields of Orcus, pale places of death clouded in darkness").⁴⁶ At 1.115–123, Lucretius is thus reusing at least three (*Acherusia templa . . . Orci*) and possibly five words (*tenebris/tenebras . . . pallida/pallentia*) from the *Andromacha*'s address to the Acherusian realm of Orcus. It seems, therefore, that the responsibility Lucretius ascribes to Ennius' works for perpetuating harmful ideas about the afterlife connects directly, here as elsewhere, to plays we know to have been frequently performed at Roman festivals. In other words, Lucretius addresses a threat that emanates from the *ludi*, where a dangerous ideology undermines the ἀτραξία of Roman audiences. Lucretius is warning his readers against these perilous beliefs and tells them how to respond the next time they encounter them in their reading or in the theater.

⁴⁵ Jocelyn: 1967, 256 notes the recurrence of *Acherusia templa* in both passages but does not posit a connection. Prinzen: 1998, 50–58 at 50–51 mentions the parallel briefly. Goldberg and Manuwald: 2018, 2.33–35 speak only of "similar phrasing."

⁴⁶ Jocelyn: 1967, 255–256 rejects this suggestion.

Similar observations apply to Lucretius' paraphrase of Ennius' views on the transmigration of souls. When he ascribes to his predecessor the statement that the soul "inserts itself in a divine manner into other animals" (*[anima] pecudes alias divinitus insinuet se*, 1.116, see above), he is basing this claim on the first book of the *Annals*, where Ennius maintained that "the race adorned with feathers is in the habit of producing eggs, not a soul . . . the soul itself comes afterwards from there (i.e., the sky) in a divine manner to the chicks" (*ova parere solet genus pennis condecoratum, | non animam . . . post inde venit divinitus pullis | ipsa anima*, fr. 8–10 Sk). We can note here both the overlap in content and the recurrence of *anima* and *divinitus*, a parallel that has not been previously observed. Furthermore, Lucretius' dismissal of Ennius' claim that the soul of Homer came to live in him after a chain of Pythagorean transmigrations, and that the Greek poet's ghost-like *simulacrum* visited him in a dream to explain this development (1.124–126), is well known likewise to be based on Book 1 of the *Annals* (e.g., *visus Homerus adesse poeta*, "the poet Homer appeared to be present," fr. 3 Sk.). The same is true of Lucretius' reference, at 1.117–119, to Ennius' hope that his "subject matter and poems will be reckoned famous broadly among the peoples" (fr. 12–13 Sk.), with which I started this section. All of these paraphrases and quotations engage with the same part of Ennius' epic. Of course, we do not in this case have any evidence testifying to later recitations of the book in question. Yet the plethora of fragments that survive from Book 1 of the *Annals* show beyond a doubt that it too was among the best-known parts of Ennius' works,⁴⁷ even though we can no longer tell if it was familiar through public recitations or private reading (or both).

Lucretius thus engages yet again with a part of Ennius' oeuvre that would have been of central importance to the literary, dramatic and artistic scene of late-Republican Rome. The Trojan tragedies (certainly the *Andromacha*, and possibly the *Iphigenia* and the *Alexander* as well) were a staple at the *ludi's* increasingly impressive shows, which evidenced some cross-contamination with the visual arts. In turn, the *Annals'* book on Pyrrhus would have been comparably well known from public recitations at the same events. Whatever the preferred medium may have been for the distribution of Book 1, it too exerted a formative influence on many Romans' (faulty) understanding of the workings of the cosmos. Lucretius

⁴⁷ For a recent critical assessment of the fragments relating to the proem of the *Annals*, see Elliott: 2013, 115–117 and 144–151. Goldberg and Manuwald: 2018, 1.108–115 provide ample evidence for the "powerful impression" that Ennius' dream of Homer made on later Roman authors.

engages with these Ennian compositions in greater detail than has been previously shown and confronts them specifically in their capacity as works that communicate ideas of a philosophical, religious and even scientific nature to large audiences.⁴⁸ He makes the latter element clear by noting that in Ennius' dream, Homer's ghost proceeded "to expound upon the nature of things" (*rerum naturam expandere dictis*, 1.126). Ennius continued to pass this information on to Lucretius' contemporaries even and especially in the first century BC. This made Ennius an adversary to be reckoned with and a direct competitor in asserting a hold on the understanding of the *rerum natura*. Accordingly, Lucretius equips his readers with the necessary gear to confront Ennius' supposedly harmful ideas wherever they next encounter them, be it in a well-stocked library, at a literary recitation, on the walls of a *domus* or at the late-Republican *ludi*'s exceptionally lavish revivals of classic tragedies.

⁴⁸ For Epicurean views of scientific or natural phenomena such as the sun, see Gellar-Goad's chapter (10) in this volume.