



Sexing Nature:

Lucretius' Construction of Misogyny in the *De Rerum Natura*



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Rosner

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
<i>Sexing Nature: Lucretius' Construction of Misogyny in the De Rerum Natura</i>	10
Early Depictions of Creation: Venus, Mars, and Epicurus' Conquering of Religion	10
Epicurus' Domination over Venus	17
Mother Earth	19
Venus and Female Sexuality: Deceit and Falseness	22
The Three Elemental Substances: Matter, Seed, and Void	33
Feminine Matter's Subordination	45
Mind and Movement: masculine domination	52
Contesting Arguments	65
Conclusion on De Rerum Natura	71
Bibliography	73

Introduction

In book 5 of Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* (*DRN*, *The Nature of Things*) the poet tells us: "the entire species of men is superior in skill by a great length and is much more intelligent" (*DRN*, 5.1355-56).¹ In a narrative dedicated to the discovery of the nature of the world, this supposition is profound for its misogynistic implications concerning the foundations of humankind. How is the blatant misogyny understood in the context of the *DRN*? What can his misogyny tell us about Lucretius' views on creation? Do such views influence his Epicureanism?

To consider the stem of his misogyny, let us begin our exploration with the man himself. Titus Carus Lucretius was a Roman poet whose didactic epic poem, the *De Rerum Natura*, monumentally introduced Greek Epicurean Philosophy to Latin literature and Rome at large. His work, contemporaneous with Cicero's literary output, helped

¹ *Longe praestat in arte et sollertius est multo genus omne virile*

Rosner

popularize Greek philosophical content in the period of the Late Republic.²

Problematically, our knowledge of Lucretius' life, social status, place of residence, activities, private life, and social appearance is paltry; particularly when compared to his near contemporaries, like Cicero, Catullus, Virgil, Horace, or Ovid. However, a few precious details may be gleaned; for instance, Lucretius' mastery over the Latin language indicates his familiarity with Rome, suggests that Latin was likely his native tongue, and that he arose from an aristocratic background.³ Chronologically, our knowledge of Lucretius' life derives from *the Chronicon* of Eusebius,⁴ which states that Titus Lucretius Carus was born in 94 BC and died at the age of 44. Additionally, Aelius Donatus' *Life of Virgil* places Lucretius' death in 55 BC, on the same day that Virgil assumed the *toga virilis*. In reference to the *DRN*, Cicero wrote his brother a letter dated in February 54 BC referencing the poem, calling it a genius work of art. Therefore, it seems likely that the *DRN* was published not long before.⁵

Recalling how Cicero praised the *DRN* in his letter to his brother, Lucretius' significant influence on Roman literature in the first century emerges. Further, there is evidence supporting the notion that Lucretius may have been read and considered by other writers and poets of this period. For example, Virgil (in *Eclogues* and *Georgics*) dances between his own piety and his empathetic acknowledgement of the *DRN's* denial of godly influence and punishment after death as well as its appeal toward a suffering class of Romans.⁶ Similarly, in *Tristia*, Ovid praises Lucretius by name as the prophet of

² Gillespie, 2007, 2

³ Hadzsits, 1963, 4-5

⁴ Written by Jerome of Stridon, and drawn from the writings of Suetonius (120 AD)

⁵ The Oxford classical dictionary, 2012, 863

⁶ Clay, 1983, 31-35; see *Georgics*, II. 475-482

Rosner

the world's ultimate destruction, an ode to Lucretius' ideas about mortality of beings and nature itself.⁷ Further, Horace's acknowledgement of Lucretius' grand ideas in the *DRN* indicate not that his mind was enraptured within the likes of Lucretius' ideas, but rather that those ideas had found their way to his eyes. Lucretius' *DRN* was certainly notable enough to be read and well-received by highly regarded poets and figures in Rome.⁸

Thus, Lucretius lived during the late Republic; a period when Roman women were gaining greater civic freedoms than ever before. One of the most important privileges women were afforded during this time was free marriage, and divorce was also attainable for women. Nevertheless, most marriages—especially among the upper class and politically dominant families—were arranged. No doubt, their fates were intimately bound to their husbands. Indeed, in cases where a husband may face exile from Rome, there are several instance where women made suicide pacts with their husbands.⁹ Additionally, women experienced status diminution if divorced by their husbands, whereas if the women divorced the husbands, the men maintained their social and political capabilities.¹⁰ No doubt misogyny and societal pressure formed from a woman's identity relative to her husband must have played a critical role in this behavior.

The majority of married women were forced to content themselves with the duties and responsibilities of domestic life. Women were raised, married, and conceived children, and are often seen chiefly through this lens, as they are even referred to in some scholarship merely as “breeding women.”¹¹ It was only in the upper classes where greater

⁷ Clay, 1983, 56-57

⁸ Clay, 1983, 38-41

⁹ Baldson, 1962, 58

¹⁰ Baldson, 1962, 54

¹¹ Baldson, 1982, 53

Rosner

freedom, education, and power attended women. For example, there were many iconoclastic women from the period such as Sempronia (an interest for Sallust) and Cornelia the daughter of Metellus Scipio, who were well-read, highly educated, and seemingly great conversationalists. Nevertheless, in correspondences from prominent political and literary figures the mentions of their wives are couched in terms of their beauty and physical attributes. It can also be observed how Roman satirists of the period regularly depict women indulging in vanity, extravagance, immorality and superstitious addiction to religious cult.¹² Whatever social gains at Rome women enjoyed, it is clear they were facing strong headwinds in their society's latent misogyny.

In order to better contextualize Lucretius' misogyny in his poetry let us turn to what is known of his relationship to Epicureanism. The *DRN* praises Epicurus as an almost godly figure—casting epicureanism as verging on religious devotion. Epicureanism and Stoicism were the two major authoritative post-Aristotelian schools of philosophy in antiquity.¹³ Approximately 200 years had elapsed between the foundation of the school by Epicurus and the birth of Lucretius. When Lucretius was born, Zeno of Sidon was the head of the school in Athens.¹⁴ The main source of Epicurean doctrine is *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, written by Diogenes Laertius in the third century C.E.¹⁵ In the tenth book, which is entirely dedicated to Epicurus and Epicureanism, Diogenes quotes letters Epicurus sent to Herodotus, Pythocles, and Menoeceus as well as Epicurus' last will and testament. The letters provide a synopsis of Epicurus' philosophy on physics,

¹² Baldson, 1962, *Female Emancipation*, 45-62

¹³ Gillespie, 2007, 2

¹⁴ Hadzsits, 1963, 15

¹⁵ Konstan, 2018

Rosner

astronomy, and ethics.¹⁶ Lucretius' *DRN* is also cited as an important surviving work of Epicurean philosophy due to his adamant dedication to Epicurus and Epicureanism in the *DRN*. He explains the relationship of Epicurean atomic and ethical theory with his interpretation of the successive evolution of the world – and the *DRN* is also cited as the main source of Epicurean social philosophy.¹⁷ Many of Lucretius' conjectures about physics and ethics are similar to Epicurus', detailed in his letter to Herodotus and Menoeceus. Such similarity makes sense, as Lucretius describes his aim of the *DRN* to enlighten his readers with Epicurean philosophy.

The Epicurean school of philosophy encompassed a doctrine of atomism that would substantiate its ethical philosophy; it regarded pleasure as the greatest good, denied immortality, and interpreted the gods as being far removed from this world and far from exercising power over humankind in their everyday lives – as they were indifferent to humankind's happiness or suffering. Thus, in the Epicurean school of philosophy, study of physics or the natural sciences were not pursued for their own sake, but rather to escape superstition and fear of angry gods: to demonstrate the mortality of the soul and to secure release from fear of death. In other words, Epicurean philosophy centered around the individual pursuit of happiness and tranquility: its atomic theory supporting this endeavor by basing nature and truth in mortality – releasing those individuals from the bounds of fear of punishment in the afterlife by gods and encouraging students to seek pleasure in their lifetimes. Pleasure and happiness were unthinkable in Epicurean philosophy without wisdom and virtue; being held accountable to one's actions through

¹⁶Clay, 1983, 169

¹⁷Konstan, 2018

Rosner

rationality and nobility were vital aspects of an Epicurean life in happiness. This idealist philosophy, whatever its flaws may be, was a popular and long-lasting school of philosophy – flourishing even after the third century CE.¹⁸ It was this philosophy and lifestyle that Lucretius was zealously and faithfully bringing to Rome.¹⁹

Fascinatingly, the philosophical schools' treatment of women may show us a unique status for women in the ancient world. While many Athenian philosophical schools did not welcome women and slaves, a wide range of authors, ancient and modern, assure us that Epicureanism was different. Despite an appreciable belief that women were able to engage in philosophy, evinced by surviving correspondences between Epicurus himself and his mother in which philosophical dialogue is present²⁰, the overwhelming representation in the late Republic of Epicurean women in ancient Greece revolves around sexual debauchery.²¹ Indeed, most Epicurean women are cited with highly sexualized names: Hedia ('Sweet'), Mammarrion ('Tits'), Boidion ('Ox-eyes'), Demetria ('Ceres'), and Erotion ('Sexy'). Thus, the critics of Epicureanism in antiquity, like Plutarch's *Moralia* and the rhetorical and philosophical works of Cicero, often relied on the inclusion of women to illustrate Epicurean immorality.²² Accordingly, women's presence in Epicurean philosophical communities was enough of a threat to

¹⁸Clay, 1983, 12

¹⁹It is true that during the Second Punic War, the exaggerated superstition among the lower classes, induced apparently by a series of military disasters, led a profound revolt against religion. Lucretius' DRN proved helpful and inspiring in this endeavor. However, when Lucretius was writing, the Romans' had not yet truly developed an eschatological system of beliefs; they were more so absorbed inside their own dedication to their cities and piety without a heavy focus on the afterlife. Some authors assume that Lucretius must have had a personal experience with a religious group as a child, like the Etruscans, that focused on punishment after death which must have ignited his endeavor of dispelling the afterlife (Frank, 2015/1930, 234-235).

²⁰Gordon, 2004, 238

²¹Gordon, 2004

²²Gordon, 2004, 224

Rosner

external and internal critics that they felt compelled to reduce their presence to being no more than *hetairai*.

Having scrutinized Epicureanism, it is curious why Cicero would signal his favor towards the *DRN* in his letter to his brother despite being an ardent critic of Epicureanism? I would argue that the answer is likely a combination of Lucretius' mastery of, and complex use of the Latin language coupled with his exclusion and condemnation of parts of Epicureanism which Cicero out-rightly disputed - namely Epicurean inclusion of women. Thus, Lucretius' misogyny recasts Epicureanism so as to counteract Roman critiques of it.

With the *DRN*'s heavy focus on the anxiety of death, scholars often overlook the text's misogynistic undertones. While some examples can be marshaled where scholars have focused on the text's misogyny,²³ and particularly noteworthy is *the Feminine Symptom: aleatory matter in the Aristotelian cosmos* by Emanuela Bianchi, in most works dedicated to Lucretius, the notion of misogyny in the *DRN* is an afterthought.²⁴ This might be because the cultural misogyny at Rome is proffered as an excuse - an underlying reality that exonerates Lucretius from personal fault due to his societal bias, yet this argument is faulty in two ways.

Firstly, creation stories and cosmology in Lucretius' time were heavy in religious dedication and language; therefore, creation stories and cultural norms lent themselves to cultural misogyny being embedded within the nature of the world by the simple matter of the religious and cultural systems they were based on. However, Lucretius' *DRN* was

²³See bibliography: Anderson, Betensky, Nugent, Pope, Gordon

²⁴For example, it is not mentioned at all in Hadzsits *Lucretius and his Influence: our debt to Greece and Rome*, and plays a subliminal role in the Cambridge Companion (Stuart Gillespie and Philip Hardie).

Rosner

entirely dedicated to the pursuit of dispelling religion and such cultural norms to arrive at the science/truth of the world.²⁵

Secondly, even if it was societal bias that influenced his misogyny, Lucretius' *DRN* is so blatant and egregious in its animus towards female sexuality in Book 4 that it should not be ignored or excused, as most authors do (following a sentence in Eusebius/Jerome), to a fit of insanity that caused Lucretius' demise.²⁶ Viewing Lucretius' misogyny simply as a result of his insanity or contemporary cultural norms excuses his misogyny as a negligent whim instead of acknowledging the central role it plays in the *DRN*. Indeed, I suggest that Lucretius' misogyny is not merely bound to Book 4, but consciously and complexly woven into the entirety of the *DRN*, including in his atomic theory.

The *DRN* is packed with magnificent descriptions of the beginnings of the world. Many of those descriptions are brilliant in their insight to modern ideas of atomic physics and natural phenomena. His work encourages Romans to abandon religion and adopt a type of atheism. However, embedded within these descriptions is also a successive misogynistic narrative that is woven between the lines – from Lucretius' discussion of godly influence on the creation of things to his atomic theory, his hierarchical associations of masculinity with mobility and authority rings.

²⁵Frank, 2015, 237

²⁶Frank, *Life and Literature in the Roman Republic* (231), references this phenomenon by quoting a “noted” physician Dr. Osler on how love overcame and drove Lucretius mad. The Oxford Classical dictionary references the theory that Lucretius went insane due to a love interest and may have killed himself (from Eusebius written by Jerome). The Brills New Pauly encyclopedia entry on Lucretius also mentions this. However, is it history that inspired this insinuation? Or book 4 itself, embedded with such jarring misogyny and seemingly ludicrous insinuations about female sexuality that drive historians to arrive at this conclusion? It would seem as though the assertion that love drove him mad supports the misogynistic undertones of his words, more on this at the end of [Venus and Female Sexuality: deceit and falseness](#).

Rosner

In the first section, Early Depictions of Creation: Venus, Mars, and Epicurus' conquering of Religion, I will show that Lucretius begins his narrative with a grand tribute to a female god, Venus, the goddess of love, sex, fertility, and beauty. However, there is a persistent devolution of feminine power originally associated with Venus as he moves towards his dedication to Epicurus. Venus starts as a powerful source of inspiration and changes into a symbol of deceit: an enemy to rational thought. Similarly, Mother earth's status as *the* source of procreation undergoes a transvaluation over the course of the *DRN*: leaving her passive and less fertile than she begins. Venus' and Mother Earth's diminution parallels the successive undermining of feminine power in Lucretius' descriptions of atomic theory. The action, essentially, justified his concluding misogynistic assertions at the close of the *DRN*.

In the first two books of the *DRN*, Lucretius sets the stage for a lengthy depiction of the beginnings of the world, in which he suggests there are three elemental substances that work together to constitute the world: seed, matter, and void. Over the course of *De Rerum Natura*, Lucretius genders the Void and the seed masculine, matter feminine. In the second section, The Three Elemental Substances: Matter, Seed, and Void, I will show that the poet characterizes matter as an immobile source of turf which the seed fertilizes; their union begets new things. The void is the movement causing substance. When bodies are created and made of both seed and turf, mind is also created. Mind, however, is made of material associated with masculinity through its association with movement. The exclusion of femininity from reason is complex and layered throughout the poem, but in the end the *DRN* is left with a powerless and deceitful feminine and a transcendent brilliant masculine.

Rosner

This thesis will explore Lucretius' dedications to Venus and Epicurus, how they relate to his gendering of the three elemental substances, and how those aspects of *De Rerum Natura* influence the poet's understanding of the mind and society.

Sexing Nature: Lucretius' Construction of Misogyny in the *De Rerum Natura*

Early Depictions of Creation: Venus, Mars, and Epicurus' Conquering of Religion

In Greek and Roman mythology, Venus not only represented the Empedoclean principle of Love, but she was also a symbol of traditional religion and mythology. Indeed, in view of her genealogical function, Aeneas, who was an ancestor of Romulus and Remus, was the son of Venus. Accordingly, Venus was regularly characterized as the divine ancestress of Rome.²⁷ Indeed, one could argue that Venus represented the religious and cultural foundation of Rome as well. Looking to the period of the late Republic, there was tremendous investment in this notion, as the temple of *Venus Victrix*, "giver of victory," was dedicated in 55 B.C. in Pompey's temple and theatre-complex on the Campus Martius in Rome.²⁸ *Venus Genetrix*, who was considered the divine ancestress of the family of Julius Caesar through descent from her grandson *Iulus*, also enjoyed considerable attention in the period, and Caesar himself went so far as to established a Roman cult in honor of her, which gave himself a religious standing in the state and Rome under his Rule.²⁹ The *Iulii* expanded their familial connection to Venus during

²⁷Balsdon, 1901, 21; "Caesar's family, the Iulii, however, claimed direct descent from Venus through Iulus, the son of Aeneas, and apparently honored her as their particular ancestral deity. In establishing his cult of Venus Genetrix, Caesar was for all practical purposes giving a public form to this family cult, and thereby expressing in religious terms his unique standing in the state."

²⁸Beard, 1998, 122

²⁹Rives, 1994, 294; The night before the battle of Pharsalus (48 B.C.), Julius Caesar (100-44 B.C.) vowed a temple to Venus Genetrix, the mythical ancestress of his family. It was inaugurated in 46 B.C. Caesar ruled from 46-44 BC, however in the later years of Lucretius' life (50-55 BC) Caesar was a prominent authority in linguistics (Krebs, 2013, 772-773)

Rosner

Lucretius' lifetime; however, Caesar's cult and the temple of *Venus Genetrix* were erected after Lucretius' death. Nonetheless, Venus' standing as divine ancestress of Rome and a symbol for religious and cultural values in Rome when Lucretius was writing was still prominent.³⁰ Lucretius even gives an homage to her standing in relation to Rome in his opening line of the *DRN*; "Mother of Aeneas and his race, source of pleasure for gods and men, nurturing Venus..." (*DRN*, 1.1-2).³¹ Aeneas' race being especially the Julii, Lucretius, here, is recognizing her importance to the creation *and* the religion and mythology of Rome. If there is any doubt about whether religion is associated with Venus and femininity in the *DRN*, take the following quotes into account. In the beginning of Book 4, Lucretius states his goal; "I attempt to free the spirit from the bonds (*nodis*) of religion (*religionum*)" (*DRN*, 4.7).³² Then later in book four he expands on this metaphor;

1147 *nam vitare, plagas in amoris ne iaciamur,*
non ita difficile est quam captum retibus ipsis
exire et validos Veneris perrumpere nodos.

"for to avoid, lest we fall into love's hunting-nets, is not so difficult as for a captive to escape from the bonds (*nodos*) themselves and to break apart the strong bonds of Venus" (*DRN*, 4.1147-1148).

In a book completely dedicated to love and images of love, it is understandable why he might use Venus as such a symbol. However, it is interesting to say his goal is to free his readers from religion in the very beginning of the book if the two (religion and love/Venus) are not correlated in his mind and work.

³⁰Beard, 1998, 116

³¹*Aeneadam genetrix, hominum divomque voluptas, alma Venus,*

³²*religionum animum nodis exsolvere pergo,*

Rosner

In the beginning of Book 1, nevertheless, Lucretius characterizes Venus further. He associates her with earthly creations through poetic description of the winds, the clouds, the earth, and the ocean. He says that Venus is,

*caeli subter labentia signa
 quae mare navigerum, quae terras frugiferentis
 concelebras, per te quoniam genus omne animantum
 5 concipitur visitque et lumina solis:
 te, dea, te fugiunt venti, te nubila caeli
 adventumque tuum, tibi suavis daedala tellus
 summittit flores, tibi rident aequora ponti
 placatumque nitet diffuso lumine caelum.*

“who beneath the gliding constellations of the sky, makes the sea ship-bearing, who makes the earth fruit-bearing; through you, every species of animals is conceived (*concipitur*), and, having arisen, looks upon the light from the sun; from you, goddess, from you the winds flee, and the clouds of the heavenly sky flee you and your arrival, for you the skillful earth sends forth sweet flowers, for you the surfaces of the sea gladden and the heavens having been calmed gleams with light all over” (*DRN*, 1.2-9).

He assigns to the goddess generative qualities, as she is responsible for bearing crops and conceiving (*concipitur*) all living things. Interestingly, as he also assigns her the powers of making the sea ship-bearing, it seems as though Lucretius is characterizing Venus by not only productive qualities, but as a life-giving source.

Additionally, Lucretius ascribes seductive powers to Venus;

*14 ... ita capta lepore
 te sequitur cupide quo quamque inducere pergis.
 denique, per maria ac montis fluviosque rapacis
 frondiferasque domos avium camposque virentis,*

“and so when your charm is received, lustily (*cupide*) they [wild animals] follow you [Venus], to wherever you set dighn to lead them” (*DRN*, 1.14-17).

Lucretius continues this sexualization of the beginning of the world by depicting how Mars, in his ghastly feuding life is tranquilized by her:

nam tu sola potes tranquilla pace iuvare
 mortalis, quoniam belli fera moenera Mavors
 armipotens regit, in gremium qui saepe tuum se
 35 reicit aeterno devictus vulnere amoris,
 atque ita suspiciens tereti cervice reposta
 pascit amore avidos inhians in te, dea, visus,
 eque tuo pendet resupini spiritus ore.

“For you alone are able to assist mortals with tranquil peace, because Mars, powerful in his arms, rules over the feral gifts of war, who often throws himself into your lap, having been conquered by the eternal wound of love, and so who, looking upon your supple neck, feeds upon the love that is placed in front of him, gaping greedily gazing upon you, goddess, and just as much the breath of him reclining hangs upon your lips” (DRN, 1.32-38).

It is clear that Lucretius begins to describe Venus’ powers of pacification with her sexual ability to conquer the god of war, Mars.³³ By attenuating the aforementioned characteristics and descriptions of Venus, Lucretius begins his poem with emphasis on feminine power in the aspects of birth, sexuality, female fertility.

It is also important that he assigns her the power of controlling all things,

21 Quae quoniam rerum naturam sola gubernas,
 nec sine te quicquam dias in luminis oras
 exoritur neque fit laetum neque amabile quicquam,

“because it is you [Venus] who alone governs the nature of things, nor without you does anything arise into the shining shores of light” (DRN, 1.21-23).

Lucretius invokes Venus as an assistant in her function as a source of creation:

24 te sociam studeo scribendis versibus esse
 quos ego de rerum natura pangere conor

³³However, when Venus becomes contextualized in book 4 it becomes clear that the tranquility Venus instills is not the tranquility Lucretius is pining for his readers to adopt. His view of female sexuality is condemned as an enemy to rational thought, her religious influence and seemingly sweet image is, to Lucretius, revealed as deceitful and base - an enemy to reason and the truth of life. More on this in Venus and Female Sexuality: deceit and falseness

Rosner

“I am eager for you to be a companion to the writing of verses, which I myself am attempting to compose about the nature of things” (*DRN*, 1.24-25).

The ascription of creation to a female deity, who is afforded the status of symbolizing religion, sheds valuable insight on the significance of feminine generative capacity in the first lines of *De Rerum Natura*.

Nevertheless, Lucretius quickly transitions to a description of how a man conquered religion,

64 *in terris oppressa gravi sub religione,
quae caput a caeli regionibus ostendebat
horribili super aspectu mortalibus instans,
primum Graius homo mortalis tollere contra
est oculos ausus primusque obsistere contra,*

“When human life cast their eyes to the ground, oppressed under heavy superstition, under burdensome religion, which extended its head from the regions of heaven, standing over mortals with a terrifying appearance, it was a Greek man who dared to lift mortal eyes against it, and first dared to stand against it” (*DRN*, 1.64-68).

In these verses, Lucretius is referring to the Greek philosopher Epicurus. He is also tying religion and Venus. Venus being the main symbol for religion in the *DRN*, as he follows the religious tradition of attributing his knowledge to a religious figure³⁴ with her name, is thus being overcome by Epicurus in these lines. It is also no coincidence that these verses follow his dedication to Venus directly. He narrates how fables and creation myths did not suffice to answer or persuade Epicurus on his quest to find the nature of things.

He says,

69 *quem neque fama deum nec fulmina nec minitanti
murmure compressit caelum, sed eo magis acrem
inritat animi virtutem, effringere ut arda*

³⁴like the muses,

Rosner

naturae primus portarum claustra cupiret.

“a man whom the reputation of the gods, nor the lightning, nor the sky, with its threatening murmurs, restrained him but rather all the more instigated the sharp (*acrem*) prowess of his soul, with the result that he first desired to rupture the doors (*portarum*) of nature’s gates through his art” (*DRN*, 68-71).

Firstly, it is important to note that *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* by J.N. Adams references how “the external female *pudenda* may be likened to a door...”.³⁵ Specifically, Adams references the word *porta* as a symbol of female *pudenda*, which Lucretius uses in line 1.71.³⁶ There is sexual imagery employed here, whereby *naturae portarum* implies the genitalia of Venus and the *acrem animi virtutem* represents Epicurus’ phallus and *inirrat* his engagement in the sexual encounter. Such positions Epicurus (because he is the subject of these lines) and Venus (due to her association with nature) in a sexual battle through which Epicurus is able to overcome her with his intellect. Therefore, this section of Book 1 outlines how Lucretius subverts his feminine symbols of power with Epicurus and his relative association with reason. In these verses, specifically, Lucretius seems to make Epicurus a parallel to Anchises (founder of the Aeneadae, father of Aeneas) by his sexual encounter with Venus: i.e., Epicurus is breaking through the closed “doors” of Venus and his offspring will be the Epicureans. He is undermining her power as the founder of Rome and creating a hierarchy by which religion settles far below the power of Epicurus’ intellect.³⁷

³⁵Adams, 1982, 89

³⁶*Pudenda* is a generic description of genitals; Adams, 1982, 55

³⁷On this note, however, there is mixed imagery that points out a particularly misogynistic imperative. In the lines above, I do not believe Lucretius is referencing the religious powers of Venus as *fama deum*. Rather, he seems to be referencing Zeus’ *fama deum* through the description of lightning and thunder (*minitanti murmure*), which do not impede Epicurus on his battle *against* Venus but rather bolster him. It

Rosner

Proceeding further, Lucretius details how the conquering of religion in pursuit of knowledge about the world's creation prevailed. He says man desired to "rupture the doors (*portarum*) of nature's gates through his art..." (*DRN*, 1.71) and

72 *ergo vivida vis animi pervicit, et extra
processit longe flammantia moenia mundi
atque omne immensum peragravit mente animoque,
unde refert nobis victor quid possit oriri,
quid nequeat, finita potestas denique cuique
quanam sit ratione atque alte terminus haerens.*

"Therefore, the vivid force of his spirit conquered (*pervicit*), and he proceeded far beyond the blazing walls (*moenia*) of the universe, and he wandered the entire immensity with his mind and his spirit from which he returns to us a victor grasping what is able to arise (*oriri*), what is not, the boundaries and with what rationality and depth the end is" (*DRN*, 1.72-77).

These quotes vividly illustrate man's conquest over nature through his intellectual capacities. On this reading, the feminine association of nature with Venus and negative religion is supported by the sexual reference to man penetrating the gates of nature. Through man's conquest over such, the effects of the mind's superiority over nature become valent. Nature is depicted as confining, restricted, and closed; while, by contrast, thought is expansive, mobile, and transcendent. Accordingly, this representation serves as an early depiction of masculine mobility, reason, and space unlimited by body, and creates a connection between religion, earthly nature, and femininity. Lucretius emphatically highlights the stakes of his representation by demonstrating how, in his

seems as though when religion is associated with a masculine deity, Lucretius characterizes its power as positive, but when feminine godliness is employed they undergo a negative villainization.

Rosner

view, masculine thought has dominated nature; “that’s why religion, having been conquered, has in turn been trampled under foot,” (*DRN*, 1.78-79).³⁸

The narrative on lines 1.62-79 is distinctly different from his earlier depiction of Mars and Venus, wherein even the god of war seems mitigate by Venus, as though the two are comingled together in a sexual manner, Mars gaping upon her beauty and power. This later passage, however, is a battle story - wherein Epicurus overcomes the religious, earthly nature through his mind in pursuit of knowledge; therefore, judging religion and nature oppositional to knowledge - dishonest and/or base. The two contrasting narratives and their relationship to one another mark the first dichotomy in the poet’s description of the interactions between male and female symbols in *De Rerum Natura* as they relate to nature and creation. Specifically, these verses indicate that Lucretius is beginning a devolution of feminine power in nature and his own creation story through the mutual exclusion of mind and nature, followed by nature’s subversion to mind. Such isolates femininity from the power of thought and situates her power within her body alone. Nugent alludes to this in her article *Matter Matters: the Female in Lucretius’ De Rerum Natura*; “...the narrated body (i.e., the object) often seems implicitly gendered as feminine.”³⁹

Epicurus’ Domination over Venus

In Book 3, Lucretius attenuates the powers he granted to the goddess Venus as his focus shifts to the philosopher Epicurus. The juxtaposition of the two encomia is especially stark:

³⁸ *quare religio pedibus subiecta vicissim obteritur,*

³⁹Nugent, 1994, 4

Rosner

1 *O tenebris tantis tam clarum extollere lumen
 qui primus potuisti inlustrans commoda vitae,
 te sequor,*
 “I follow you, you who first were able to lift clear beautiful
 light from such great darkness illuminating the appropriate
 methods for life,” (*DRN*, 3.1-3).

This dedication is interesting compared to Venus who originally was attributed with the powers of *dias in luminis oras exoritur* (*DRN*, 1.22-23). He is seemingly replacing her power of illuminating life with Epicurus’ overwhelming dedication. He continues with this sentiment, that although Venus may provide the actual foundations and produce the nature of the world, the person who is attributed with enlightening the truth of it is Epicurus. He says, “You are the father, the discoverer of things, you make available to us a father’s precepts,” (*DRN*, 3.9-10).⁴⁰ This quote furthers Epicurus’ dedication as the discoverer of truths, but also introduces him as the father of the world. While some might see in this representation a role for both mother and father figures in the depictions of Venus and Epicurus, Lucretius’ relegation of feminine influence to qualities he defines as harmful to mankind undercuts this interpretation. According to the way he describes Epicurus’ role as the enlightener and following along Venus’ role as an influence for production and governor of the beginning of things as nature is within her (Lucretius’ original dedication to Venus attributed her with having control over and having within her most aspects of nature, earth, sea, ships etc.), the mother must be that which provides the thing which is to be understood, and the father is that which uncovers it and brings it forth into the understanding of others. In this way, nevertheless, the power of the two parents is unequal – one holding an existence incapable of being understood, the other

⁴⁰ *tu pater es, rerum inventor, tu patria nobis
 suppeditas praecepta*

Rosner

being the avenue through which the mother's existence is brought forth. How can one have authority over its own existence if they cannot present themselves to others - if by some way are secluded from others— unable to show themselves?

Taken into consideration with Lucretius' prerogative of dispelling the fear of death and dependence religion inspires, the diminution and vilification of Venus in these passages can seem unrelated to a misogynistic imperative.⁴¹ However, Venus is not the only female figure of power Lucretius details.

Mother Earth

Venus is not seen by Lucretius to be the mother of all. Instead, she occupies the same role as Epicurus – an enlightener of the world through her role in overseeing production.⁴² The earth itself, also tied to femininity, rather is seen as the mother of all things. As Lucretius says, “It remains that the earth has rightly acquired a maternal name, because from the earth everything is created” (*DRN*, 5.795-796).⁴³ Venus, rather, is an inspiration; a goddess to which he asks to help him write about the nature of things. Epicurus by contrast serves the same role, yet he is also attributed a parental function and enjoys a stronger dedication.

Nonetheless, the narrative of Epicurus as a father figure, who uncovered the ambiguous truths that earth and nature subvert, challenges the earth's authority, and casts the earth more as an obstacle than as a parent. In his dedication to Epicurus at the

⁴¹However, in book 4 (discussed in the section Venus and Female Sexuality: Deceit and Falseness) Venus' vilification is intensified in Lucretius' depiction of love and sexuality, which is misogynistic in his objectification of Venus' power and then his blatant condemnation of it.

⁴²As seen earlier, he had originally attributed Venus with the qualities of *exoritur* (*DRN*, 1.20-21) nature into the *dias in luminis oras* (*DRN*, 1.20-21), but now he is dedicating this power to Epicurus

⁴³ *Linguitur ut merito maternum nomen adepta terra sit, e terra quoniam sunt cuncta creata.*

Rosner

beginning of book 3, wherein he is describing how Epicurus is a provider of truth he says, “nor does the earth prevent everything from being seen [for you],” (*DRN*, 3.26).⁴⁴ The clause of prohibition indicates that the earth, in her nature, serves as a source of hindrance, but the power of Epicurus overcomes that and enlightens the world. Further, he says “...because nature has thus become so manifest through your power it is lying open exposed from every part” (*DRN*, 3.29-30).⁴⁵ Once again the poet employs sexual allegory, the unclothing of nature by Epicurus, to assert the masculine domination of thought over feminine earth. Further, Lucretius alludes to this discovery having originated from a place of darkness and temptation when he says in his dedication to Epicurus in book 5,

9 *qui princeps vitae rationem invenit eam quae
nunc appellatur sapientia, quique per artem
fluctibus e tantis vitam tantisque tenebris
in tam tranquillo et tam clara luce locavit.*

“you who first discovered the rationality of life, that thing which we now call Wisdom, and who, through his skill, relocated life from such waves and in so much darkness (*tenebris*) into such immense tranquility and such clear light.” (*DRN*, 5.9-15)⁴⁶

Lucretius is asserting that life is elucidated, or even actualized through its elucidation, by Epicurus, not by nature. So, once again, the question presents itself: how is a being supposed to have authority over its own existence if it needs to be “laid out” or “illuminated” by another in order to be understood or actualized? It cannot. The fatherly

⁴⁴ *nec tellus obstat quin omnia dispiciantur,*

⁴⁵ *quod sic natura tua vi*

tam manifesta patens ex omni parte resecta est.

⁴⁶ It's worth noting that Lucretius uses language already seen, on line 1.32 he ascribes venus the power of affording mortals with tranquility, here he is ascribing Epicurus those same powers, furthering her diminution as compared to Epicurus

Rosner

role in the beginning of things— Epicurus’ role—is not just in tandem with the motherly role—earth as nature—it is the conduit through which Earth must come to be understood. Bringing the passage on lines 1.62-79 into dialogue with this later dedication reveals a prerogative that Lucretius has in undermining the, arguably, most powerful female figure in the entirety of *De Rerum Natura*. On this note, Georgia Nugent illustrates how there is a successive denigration of mother earth’s generative power as Lucretius’ narrative moves on. She discusses how the earth’s polymorphic generative abilities are undermined and taken away from her by book five. Also, she discusses how *pater aether* is a dominating force that assumes the life-giving responsibilities - more on this point in The three Elemental Forces: Matter, Seed, and Void.⁴⁷

Not only does Epicurus’ dedication overpower femininity and earth as the mother of all things, but Lucretius’ dedication to Epicurus also surpasses Venus’. Is it lengthier in script, appearing in the beginning of two books, more fully developed, and attributes the concepts in those books to him – but Lucretius’ language also suggests that Epicurus surpasses Venus’ role as a deity. He says, “For at the same time, your thought began the process of the nature of things being shouted out, revealed (*coortam*) by your by your divine mind ...” (*DRN*, 3.15-17)⁴⁸ and “that man was a god...a god he was” (*DRN*, 5.8).⁴⁹ Now Lucretius has asserted Epicurus as not only a father, dominating the earthly mother figure, but also as a god to whom he attributes his own knowledge of the inner workings of nature. In this act, the dedication to Epicurus supersedes that of Venus and assumes the role of the chief source of inspiration and responsibility of the poetic project. By doing

⁴⁷Nugent, 1994, 4-8, 16-18

⁴⁸ *nam simul ac ratio tua coepit vociferari naturam rerum, divina mente coortam,*

⁴⁹ *dicendum est, deus ille fuit,*

Rosner

so, Lucretius rededicates the whole of *De Rerum Natura* to Epicurus. Correspondingly, it is curious why he chose to undercut his vivid and poetically rich representation of Venus and Mother Earth with the later celebration of Epicurus and *pater aether*. As the text is a philosophical project aimed at destroying religion's influence on Romans, Epicurus' role in providing wisdom offers society a superior contribution than Venus's raw erotic power. Accordingly, noticing how Lucretius directs his text's focus towards the value of individual thought and philosophy, it may be seen how he actively rejects the feminine power of creation—as expressed by Venus—and structures misogyny into his work from beginning to end.

Venus and Female Sexuality: Deceit and Falseness

Lucretius begins Book 4 with a force of misogyny against Venus. In order to appreciate the severity of the misogyny, I must first begin with his discussion of where dreams come from. Book 4 is dedicated to understanding images, building on previous principles of atomic theory and movement, and furthering his agenda to move away from religion. In this discussion, he talks about where truth comes from and how dreams are images of deceitful sensation. This is due to his description of the way dreams come to be. He describes how:

453 *Denique cum suavi devinxit membra sopore
somnia, et in summa corpus iacet omne quiete,
tum vigilare tamen nobis et membra movere
nostra videmur, et in noctis caligine caeca
cernere censemur solem lumenque diurnum,*

“Finally when sleep binds up the limbs with sweet rest, and the entire body lies in the deepest rest, then however we seem to ourselves to be awake and our limbs are in motion and in the blind mist of night we judge that we are able to discern the sun and daytime light” (*Lucretius*, 4.453-457).

Rosner

Essentially in his description of dreams, which is associated with a falsehood within *noctis caligine caeca*, he is saying that dreams are deceitful because they are based in senses that are not real. Further, directly after the previous quote he expounds on this principle, saying “you will come to find that recognition of the truth is created through your fundamental senses themselves and the senses are not able to be refuted” (*DRN*, 4.478, 4.479).⁵⁰ This associates truth with what you experience and what your senses tell you. However, false senses, those which come to you not rooted in your experience, are in your dreams. This leads him to say that “therefore all things are betrayed by foundational false judgements, and so therefore it follows that your judgment of affairs be perverted” (*DRN*, 4.520-521).⁵¹ Once again, the assertion here is not that your senses are at fault during dreams, but rather that the dreams themselves are false sensations corrupting your judgment. The source of deceit is the dreams.

Lucretius is describing male nocturnal emission, which relates to how images are portrayed to them in dreams. He says,

1033 *conveniunt simulacra foris e corpore quoque,
nuntia praeclari voltus pulchrique coloris,
qui ciet inritans loca turgida semine multo,
ut quasi transactis saepe omnibu' rebu' profundant
fluminis ingentis fluctus vestemque cruentent.*

“the images also convene externally from the body, a messenger of an exceptional face and beautiful color, which, causing excitement, arouses places swollen with much seed, with the result that, as if all of these things having been often transacted, a flow of an immense stream pours out and fouls the cloths” (*DRN*, 4.1033-1036).

⁵⁰ *Invenies primis ab sensibus esse creatam
notitiam veri neque sensus posse refelli.*

⁵¹ *prodita iudiciis fallacibus omnia primis,
sic igitur ratio tibi rerum prava necessest*

Rosner

It is clear then that images in dreams are the source of the excitement which causes nocturnal emission. However, Lucretius does not want to attribute the male ejaculation to a feminine existence in a powerful way, for he says directly thereafter, “different things excite and harm different things; only the force of man expels human seed from man” (*DRN*, 4.1039-1040).⁵² Therefore, the excitement is what causes the actual production of “seed,” not the image or *praeclari voltus pulchrique coloris* itself.⁵³ On Lucretius’ view, the feminine image eliciting a physical response in the sleeping male is not only denied the agency for the action, but castigated for its falsehood. This deprivation of feminine power, even where it would seem the image has the capacity to corrupt the male mind, supports the assertion that Lucretius has a misogynistic prerogative.

Next in his discussion of nocturnal emission he says,
 1045 *inritata tument loca semine, fitque voluntas*
ei cere id quo se contendit dira libido,
idque petit corpus, mens unde est saucia amore;
namque omnes plerumque cadunt in vulnus, et illam
emicat in partem sanguis unde icimur ictu,
et si comminus est, hostem ruber occupat umor.

“Thus places that have been excited swell with seed, and thus the desire arises to ejaculate that thing by which a hard desire struggles with itself, it seeks out a body, from which the mind is wounded by love; for in fact all fall towards a wound, and blood mixes in that part where we are struck by a wound and if it is in close contact, red liquid strikes at the enemy” (*DRN*, 4.1045-1051).

The characterization of desire and love as a wound, and its deployment in a narrative about conflict or war, is reminiscent of the earlier story on lines 1.32-79. What began as a

⁵² *namque alias aliud res commovet atque lacessit;*
ex homine humanum semen ciet una hominis vis.

⁵³ Such description associates seed with masculine sexuality and masculinity in general, which will be important in The Three Elemental Substances: Matter, Seed, and Void

Rosner

tranquil, joining force, has now been transformed into a violent, harmful enemy which wounds and maims the innocent.⁵⁴

Directly after the discussion of how nocturnal emission comes about, Lucretius says,

1052 *sic igitur Veneris qui telis accipit ictus,
sive puer membris muliebribus hunc iaculatur
seu mulier toto iactans e corpore amorem,
unde feritur, eo tendit gestitque coire
et iacere umorem in corpus de corpore ductum;*

“So thus, whoever receives the strike from the spear of Venus, whether its a boy who strikes with his feminine limbs, or whether it is a woman throwing out love from her entire body, the wounded person stretches towards from which point the person struck and begins to thrust and ejects fluid towards a body having been let out from the body” (DRN, 4.1051-10557).

This passage is the first direct mention of Venus since the dedication to her in book one, so what Lucretius says about her role in sexual desire is significant for her function as an influence on the nature of things. Venus being an enemy to rational thought and reason is actualized in these verses via her sexual corruption of the mind *and* senses of a man, resulting in his cowering towards her. It paints love as a harmful state which deceives and wounds the unwitting man. Through this passage, he continues the narrative that sexual desire from a man conflicts with the feminine and also insinuates that the masculine desire is based in a war scene. After considering his discussion of truth as it relates to images and dreams being false sensations that bring about false reasoning, it becomes even clearer that the feminine association with religion highlights how feminine power is grounded in deceit and subversion.

⁵⁴specifically the tranquility afforded to venus as she conquered mars. Venus' power was seen as great, in lines 1.32-38, but now she is corrupted.

Rosner

However, the previous discussion concerns images of women and dreams of women, what of the women themselves? Later in Book 4 on Venus, Lucretius says,

1107 *atque in eost Venus ut muliebria conserat arva,
adfigunt avide corpus iunguntque salivas
oris et inspirant pressantes dentibus ora—*

“And so Venus is in that point so as to sow the feminine fields, avariciously (*avide*) they engage (*adfigunt*) their bodies together, and unite the saliva of the mouths, and the women breathe pressing mouth to their teeth” (*Lucretius*, 4.1107-1109).

This is a description of female sexuality and female attractiveness. As the *Latin Sexual Vocabulary* cites 4.1107 from the *DRN* as an example of the sexual metaphor for sowing. Similarly, Adams supports that *arva* represent female reproductive organs.⁵⁵ Additionally, Adams notes how *futuo, futere, futui*⁵⁶ is a synonymous sexual obscenity to *fingo, fingere, finxi* which was often used in a particularly egregious and offensive manner to describe the movements of a woman makes during intercourse.⁵⁷ This description of female sexuality is thus damning and guilt ridden, enclosing it within greed and violence, Venus, and feminine sexuality is clearly seen here to be *from* and *for* a man’s perspective, and female sexuality is not described as favorable. It is not doting or beautiful, it is filled with animalistic imagery (“their watering mouths” and “deep breaths pressing teeth on lips”) and negative association.

Additionally, Lucretius situates women within an untruthful prerogative.

1185 *nec Veneres nostras hoc fallit; quo magis ipsae
omnia summo opere hos vitae postscaenia celant
quos retinere volunt adstrictosque esse in amore—
nequiquam, quoniam tu animo tamen omnia possis*

⁵⁵Adams, 1982, 84;154

⁵⁶used by Lucretius here with *adfingerunt*

⁵⁷Adams, 1982, 2;138

Rosner

*protrahere in lucem atque omnis inquirere risus,
et, si bello animos et non odiosa, vicissim
praetermittere et humanis concedere rebus.*

“Nor does this slip past our Venus’ whereby the more they themselves hide the mysteries of life with the greatest exertion (*summo opere*) from those whom they wish to retain (*retinere*) to be bound up in love in vain since you however are able to draw all things into the light through your soul, and able to discover all joy, and if women are not hateful in their spirit, you are able to by contrast exceed and withdraw from human weakness” (*DRN*, 4.1185-1191).

This passage makes several assertions, the glaring one is how Venus, now becoming synonymous with female sexuality and the male interpretation of female attractiveness, is, itself, confining and false. Female sexuality is seen in these passages to cheat men of their senses and deprive them of rationality. Considering Lucretius’ high praise of knowledge and truth, this quote positions women’s sexuality in a deeply negative light. The strength to overcome this desire in pursuit of truth and overcoming darkness, is associated with overcoming Venus and female sexuality.⁵⁸ Furthermore, he says that “Our Venuses” or women and their sexuality are aware of their deceitfulness, proclaiming them manipulative and a source of harm from within their nature and being. This is a powerful condemnation of female sexuality. He is also calling love which is associated with Venus⁵⁹, restrictive – an association that positions women as a threat to masculine power.

⁵⁸The language Lucretius uses here about the mind of men bringing truth into “the light of day” because Venus “hides” (*celant*) the truth of life from him draws back into dialogue the earlier mentioned quote, “nor does the earth prevent everything from being seen [for you],” (*DRN*, 3.26), Mother earth as positioned as an impediment to knowledge and clarity intensifies the association of femininity with obscurity and falseness.

⁵⁹ Haec Venus est nobis; hinc autemst nomen amoris, “This is Venus for us; from which, in turn, is the name of love” (*DRN*, 4.1058)

Rosner

Consequently, in Book 4, when talking about dreams and their images which are of false sense, he says, “thus, that entire force of words you have is in vain (*cassa*), which have been marshaled against the senses” (*DRN*, 4. 511-512).⁶⁰ This quote from earlier in the *DRN* supports the narrative that truth not only lies in correct sensation, but that *dreams* are sources of falsehood that man has to *fight* against. However, in the preceding quote from lines 4.1185-4.1191, it is clear Lucretius is actually discussing the love from real women - as they are compared to false sensations by their nature in deceit. Women, according to Lucretius, just as dreams, portray false images of themselves and wound men and their minds. Calling love towards a woman futility (*nequiquam*, *DRN*, 4.1188) is a following of his earlier association of vanity with falsehood, and furthering this inclination is language implying that female attractiveness is situated in darkness and untruthfulness – and if you give into it, you would be giving into human weakness. Such a clever development of logic, comparing dreams to vanity, dreams to false sensation and deceit, and then real women to vanity and deceit, develops a strong misogynistic narrative that demonizes women and their sexuality.

Following this, Lucretius details the threat posed by Venus even further:

1153 *nam faciunt homines plerumque cupidine caeci
et tribuunt ea quae non sunt his commoda vere.
multimodis igitur pravas turpisque videmus
esse in deliciis summoque in honore vigere.
atque alios alii inrident Veneremque suädent
ut placent, quoniam foedo adflictentur amore,
nec sua respiciunt miseri mala maxima saepe.*

“For often men, blinded by love, act this way, and assign women those things which are not truly fitting to them. Therefore we see that they are vicious (*pravas*) in many

⁶⁰*illa tibi est igitur verborum copia cassa
omnis, quae contra sensus instructa paratast.*

Rosner

ways and they're ugly (*turpis*) and depraved, but they strive to be held in affection and the highest honor. So therefore some mock others and urge on Venus so that they be pleasing, because they are instigated by a foul love, and often the pathetic men look over at their own evils." (*DRN*, 4.1153-1159).

This passage furthers the allegation that female sexuality is threatening, calling it a danger. But even more so it calls out that women are inherently faulty, and their desirability based on untruthfulness. He blatantly says that the attraction to them is often wrong and false, by saying love often corrupts men to characterize women as what they are not. Women are rather seen as *pravas* and *turpis*. To be sure, women have faults, but none of them justify the overwhelming and negative assertion that Lucretius is not only making onto them but onto Venus, a representation of their innate sexuality and being. This gets to the root of the problem. Venus is mentioned as a source of inspiration in the beginning of the *DRN* but she is constantly sexualized, her contribution being reproductive in nature; not only is such characterization objectifying to women, but by Book Four Venus' nature has turned sour and negative. It is turned into a deceit from the truth, an alluring, capturing, restrictive force which distracts men and masculinity from its powers and focus of mind. As he says,

1173 *cui Veneris membris vis omnibus exoriatur:
nempe aliae quoque sunt; nempe hac sine viximus
ante;
nempe eadem facit—et scimus facere—omnia turpi,
et miseram taetris se suffit odoribus ipsa,*

“Let the power of Venus arise throughout every part of the body, certainly there are others also; certainly we have lived before without which; certainly the very same one does this - and we know that she does all things with ugliness, and the very same woman perfumes her miserable self with foul smells” (*Lucretius*, 4.1173-1175).

Rosner

Here, Lucretius acknowledges the power of Venus, and the power he originally afforded her. He has attributed her with production and copulation, essential characteristics for the creation of the world – powers associated with her body and sexuality. He says that even though she may have such powers, those powers are not useful. Even further, when discussing these forces as they relate to her sexuality, Lucretius has corrupted her powers entirely. Thus, Venus has undergone a transvaluation; as Aya Betensky says in her article, *Lucretius and Love*, Lucretius' description of Venus in book 4 is a "...punning reduction of the mythology of Venus to physiology."⁶¹ Additionally, William Anderson, in his article *Discontinuity in Lucretian Symbolism*, recognizes the abrogation of Venus and female sexuality in the DRN and succinctly organizes the argument;

“...indeed the instinct to obey Venus seems to negate the noblest possession of Man, his *ratio*. Therefore, the more central the role of Man becomes in Lucretius' poem, the less attractive Venus is, until at the end of Book 4 she has reversed her associations and symbolizes ruin. Once the epitome of true *voluptas*, she has degenerated to *libido* or *cupido* (represented as fire, wound, sickness, poison, blindness, flood, ect.), each ending in *dolor*...Venus has abased herself to a deceiving, ensnaring female, the archenemy of reason.”⁶²

Lucretius has taken his imperative of dispelling religion and enforcing the superiority of rationality beyond their meaning and has instilled a misogynistic undertone to his whole argument. Lucretius stripped Venus of her original power as an inspiration in creation, an illuminator of the truth, and replaced her with Epicurus. In so doing, he has crafted her new associations on lines of baseness and a corrupt, harmful vision of female sexuality.

⁶¹Betensky, 1980, 292

⁶²Anderson, 1960, 19-20; adding onto Anderson's interpretation, *Dolor* being pain/anguish also ties in how Lucretius' constructs feminine figures to be an enemy to tranquility, a state Lucretius clearly endeavors to enlighten his readers with as he is arguing Epicureanism and illustrating how to not fear death.

Rosner

Venus is what the bad woman does – corrupt, deceive and drive man from the fruits of his mind. Therefore, when a woman inserts herself in a man’s affairs, she is deemed base. By contrast, a good woman, to Lucretius, must enjoy a passive nature. Betensky takes on Lucretius’ voice, summarizing his statements about Venus in book 4; “this is our Venus, this is how we Romans know her, and this is how she functions for us, devoid of personality or divinity, causing only waste and destruction.”⁶³

Lucretius’ vehement condemnation and villainization of femininity is clear in these passages. His adversity towards femininity comes into focus when considered against Epicurus’ narrative and linguistic domination of Venus and Mother Earth. As Lucretius defines such two dominant female figures’ power in creation only through their bodily contribution, whereas his exclamation of Epicurus as a fatherly symbol of masculine power is through thought. The problem with all this is threefold. Firstly, as discussed, Lucretius substantiates feminine power in female bodily contribution to creation (birth). Secondly, he roots all his suppositions in the nature of the entire world – positioning women in a *nature* bound by the limitations of their bodily contributions. Thirdly, Lucretius’ blatant reduction of women to their role in sex (birth), followed by his *condemnation* of female sexuality creates a trap for women: if feminine power is within

⁶³Betensky, 1980, 292; Betensky’s article largely argues that Lucretius’ condemnation of female sexuality in Book 4 is due to the misogyny of the time and when taken in consideration under “his own terms” (pg 295) Lucretius’ insinuation about love is not total rejection of its meaning but rather that it should be followed more like a friendship. The obsessive nature of love is what Betensky argues Lucretius is rejecting. This may be the take away Lucretius is driving forward, however the misogyny within is still blatant, and taken in consideration with the jarring switch from praise of Venus in book 1 to the villainization of her character in book 4 - as well as her replacement with Epicurus, I insinuate the construction of misogyny is intentional rather than a subset of his time. Betensky argues that the switch in Venus’ characterization is due to Lucretius asserting the difference between an Epicurean ideal vs. the reality of femininity – which I think supports the conclusion that Lucretius’ view of femininity is misogynistic *in reality*.

Rosner

her sexuality, but that power is not seen as good or beneficial, how are women perceived as anything but bleak to Lucretius?

The Oxford Classical Dictionary cites how Jerome of Stridon, who wrote most of what is known about Lucretius' birth and death, also wrote that Lucretius had been writing the *DRN* in brief intervals of sanity after having been driven mad by a love-potion given to him by his wife, eventually committing suicide.⁶⁴ The Brill's New Pauly encyclopedia also references this piece of history.⁶⁵ It is interesting to consider how such a story may have been constructed to excuse or undermine the extravagance of Lucretius' misogyny and adversity towards women in Book 4. It indicates that Lucretius' take here may have been held to be radical; even radical enough for others to believe he was in a fit of madness when he wrote it. Whatever the actual reason for Lucretius' death, the story of a love-potion driving Lucretius mad and inciting his misogyny was received by late Republican readers and many thereafter. The misogyny embedded in book 4 needs to be taken seriously and considered when reading this text. It subverts femininity so radically even the Romans could not believe it the work of a sane mind, and thus had to fabricate a story of a love-potion to rationalize it.

Lucretius continues to underline and support his misogyny in his *atomic theory* through his association of mind with Epicurus, and pronouncements that mind is more powerful than body. For there is much more text to consider. These verses depict female subordination in nature through the characterization of seed and void as masculine, earthly turf as feminine. Through which, motion is valued as the strongest and most

⁶⁴The Oxford classical Dictionary, 2012, 863; The story was later made famous by Tennyson, an English poet, who wrote the poem *Lucretius* in 1868.

⁶⁵Schnieder, 2005, 861

Rosner

influential character a particle can have, as it is the basis of intellect. Such motion is masculinized through its association with Ether and seed.

The Three Elemental Substances: Matter, Seed, and Void

To appreciate the significance of Lucretius' reorientation of generative power, it must be discovered what he is saying about how the world was created from Generative Matter/bodies, Seed, and Void. Early on in Book 1 Lucretius says that the first beginnings of things are

58 *quae nos materiem et genitalia corpora rebus
reddunda in ratione vocare et semina rerum
appellare suemus et haec eadem usurpare
corpora prima, quod ex illis sunt omnia primis*

“[all things] which we, in our reason, are accustomed to call matter and generative bodies that are returned into things and to name them the seeds of things and we are accustomed to use these very same bodies first, because all things come from these first bodies.” (*DRN*, 1.58-61)

In Duncan Kennedy's *Making a Text of the Universe: Perspectives on Discursive Order in the De Rerum Natura of Lucretius* from *The Oxford Readings in Classical Studies*, Kennedy describes this passage to have all but one elemental force; that matter consists of atoms and atoms refer to seed, bodies, and first bodies - as atoms are what make up all things. However, like Kennedy mentions, Lucretius does not refer to the elemental forces of the world as *atomi*, which would infer a Greek interpretation of atoms. Rather he distinguishes between seed (first bodies) and matter.⁶⁶ Therefore, in my interpretation, there are two main categories here; the seeds of things (the first things/the things bodies

⁶⁶Gale, 2007, 385-387

Rosner

return to) and the matter they are from: generative bodies. Thus, those bodies make new bodies and all other things. This mirrors what is observable from procreation.

Lucretius's first theorem is that: "nothing is ever by divine power produced from nothing" (*DRN*, 1.150).⁶⁷ In the larger context of the quote, the poet details how every specialized being must come from a specialized *semine*, "seed."⁶⁸ In other words, Lucretius says that if anything could come from anything, the world would not have the diversity nor the heritage that is seen in life: men do not "...arise from the sea, from earthly scaly tribes, and birds..."⁶⁹ do not "...hatch from the sky."⁷⁰ Because the opposite of "nothing can arise from nothing" is "anything must arise from *something*," Lucretius is arguing that the specific *something* all things derive from is its seed. Whereas matter composes things, the seed determines what shape the matter will assume when it is born. In other words, the seed is the source of specialization. Taking the previous two quotes into consideration, Lucretius is asserting a role for the seed not only in its power of specialization, but also as the first source of matter from which all things, including things that make other things, arose. As Kennedy dictates in *Making a Text of the Universe: Perspectives on Discursive Order in the De Rerum Natura of Lucretius* from *The Oxford Readings in Classical Studies*,

"Calling atoms 'seeds' serves to suggest a reassuring degree of order in the universe. The properties of atoms mean that the phenomena of the universe are strictly demarcated; not everything can happen and what does follow fixed patterns of growth and decay..."⁷¹

⁶⁷ *nullam rem e nilo gigni divinitus umquam.*

⁶⁸ *DRN*, 1.160

⁶⁹ Rouse & Smith; *DRN*, 1.161-162; e mare primum homines, e terra posset oriri squamigerum genus et volucres erumpere caelo;

⁷⁰ *ibid* 69

⁷¹ Gale, 2007, 386-387;

Rosner

Once again, although I agree with the analytic argument that seeds represent the specializing force involved with Lucretius' view of creation, I do not see the connection of the two elemental forces (generative bodies and seed) to atoms. Therefore, on my interpretation, even though generative matter (or generative bodies) is seen as necessary for production, the seed is described as the source from which things are the way they are.⁷²

Within the same section detailing his theorem of how nothing is created from nothing, where he is describing earthly matters like the sea, the earth itself, birds, and cattle, Lucretius asks if anything could be created from anything, "That's why if there were no generative bodies present to each and every thing, how could there be a constant unchanging mother (*mater*) able to establish certain things for things" (*DRN*, 1.167-168).⁷³ In this quote, two major positions are proposed. First, because of the parallel between generative bodies to a constant and unchanging mother, femininity is implied within the purview of generative bodies. The notation of a constant unchanging mother of things marks the beginning of his next addition to feminine characteristics – passivity and immobility – thereby further adding unchanging to his list of feminine characteristics. Second, the quote implies that feminine generative bodies are unspecialized - they hold universal properties in all things - the simple power of gestation. Therefore, in Lucretius' presentation, the divergence must be attributed to the seed; seed is thus seen as the source of action and change. One may ask what power does one have in procreation if they

⁷²This is similar to the way he originally attributed Venus with the power of creation, and later supplied his assertion that it was actually Epicurus and thought that actualized the creation of the world.

⁷³*quippe ubi non essent genitalia corpora cuique, qui posset mater rebus consistere certa?*

ties generative bodies (*corpora genitalia*) to femininity and motherhood, "mater is widely reflected in Romance in the sense 'womb'" (Adams, 1982, 106)

Rosner

cannot contribute to creating anything specific and are only seen useful in their gestational abilities?

As follows, there is now an association of femininity with the immobile producing source of life, also cast as divine through copulations' association with Venus and Superstition. He says he is seeking to understand "both the source from which each thing can be made and the manner which everything is done without the working of gods"⁷⁴; due to the previously explored connotations of masculinity and femininity this quote is loaded with gendered association. The "manner which everything is done" must be referring to the feminine earthly creator, Venus, from which everything is made, for in the opening it is *Venus Genetrix* (the creator) who is invoked. Furthermore, the "manner which everything is done without the working of gods" must be referring to the masculine thought. This statement positions the reader to understand the beginning of things to be twofold. On one side, the poet offers procreative earthly matter: fixed, unchangeable, divine, and capable of gestation. On the other, a source of action and change.

Lucretius then details the second aspect of nature's duality: the light and mobile aspect of creation. He begins this section of *De Rerum Natura* by discussing how cultivated land is better than uncultivated land and it

210 *esse videlicet in terris primordia rerum
quae nos, fecundas vertentes vomere glebas
terraique solum subigentes, cimus ad ortus.*

"It is obvious that the first-things of affairs are in the earth which, by turning over the fertile clods with a plowshare

⁷⁴ Rouse & Smith, 1924; *DRN*, 1.157-158; ...*et unde queat res quaeque creari et quo quaeque modo fiant opera sine divom.*

Rosner

(*vomere*) and turning under the soil of the earth, we incite to render forth (*ortus*)” (*DRN*, 1.210-212).

The literal description of growth sourcing from the action put upon land insinuates that the unchanging, fixed turf, that is earthly and feminine needs additional action to beget fruits. Lucretius uses the term birth (*ortus*) to describe how the land can produce fruits, however it is the act of the plowing (*vertentes vomere*) that causes this birth, not necessarily the land itself. The ploughing of mother earth is a sexual inuendo for intercourse by the male genitalia, creating more fruitful production. Supportingly, “*Vomer* (‘plowshare’) is used of the *mentula*”⁷⁵ and “The basic obscenity for the male organ was *mentula*.”⁷⁶ In this way, Lucretius’ representation of the male responsibility for agricultural production parallels the narrative of the male nocturnal emission demonstrated above. In both, the seemingly natural, feminine, candidate for the act is deprived of agency, while the action of the male force is awarded full responsibility for the outcome.⁷⁷ Such delimitation of earth and Venus, as they relate to mothering and influencing creation, is a contradiction that highlights Lucretius’ slow devolution of female power in this creation narrative.

This light, mobile, action based aspect to creation becomes further masculine in Book 1 on line 250, where he says “Lastly, the raindrops pass away, when father Ether

⁷⁵Adams, 1983, 24; “...at *Lucr.* 4.1273 ‘eicit enim sulcum recta regione uiaque / uomeris” This adds an interesting contrast between male and female *vomer*. In the verses detailed in book 1, male *vomer* is referred to as positive and fruitful, however, when Lucretius describes female *vomer* in the later stages of the earth’s evolution she is unable to create, as in the lines Adams sites as reference to how ploughshare is used sexually.

⁷⁶Adams, 1983, 9

⁷⁷The sexual undertones to this passage is recognized by P.H Schrijvers in the article *Seeing the Invisible: A Study of Lucretius’ Use of Analogy in the De Rerum Natura*; “I have already demonstrated that the first proposition of Book 1, the universally applicable physical doctrine that ‘nothing can be created from nothing’ (*nil posse creari de nihilo*), is reinforced and developed with the assistance of the biological analogy of seeds and associated commonplaces drawn from the life of plants, animals, and human beings” (Gale, 2007, 264).

Rosner

has cast them into the lap (*gremium*) of Mother Earth;...” (*DRN*, 1.250-251).⁷⁸ In this metaphor, the raindrops are the action based external force referenced in the earlier quote. The rain acts as father Ether’s “seed” seeping into the earth, which the earth uses to beget things. Supportingly, “*Gremium* is sometimes used of the uterus or vagina.”⁷⁹ The sexual context of this quote signals the active nature of masculinity to the audience.⁸⁰ Accordingly, Kennedy also recognizes this sexual metaphor in reference to these lines; “Father sky casting raindrops into the lap of Mother Earth figures rain as semen...”⁸¹ By attributing the role of growth and movement to masculine symbols, Lucretius undermines earth’s role in production. Father Ether controls growth and production by his overpowering contribution: his seed. As the quote continues directly into

252 *at nitidae surgunt fruges ramique virescunt*
 arboribus, crescunt ipsae fetuque gravantur;
 hinc alitur porro nostrum genus atque ferarum;
 hinc laetas urbes pueris florere videmus
 frondiferasque novis avibus canere undique silvas;

“but brilliant crops arise (*surgunt*), and the trees’ branches grow green, and they themselves (the trees) also grow and are weighed down with fruit; from this, too, our race is nourished and as is the tribe of beasts; hence we behold happy cities blooming with children and the leaf-bearing woods sing all around with the young birds...” (*DRN*, 1.252-255)

⁷⁸ Rouse & Smith, 1924; *Postremo pereunt imbres, ubi eos pater aether in gremium matris terrae praecipitavit;*

⁷⁹ Adams, 1983, 92

⁸⁰ This quote also needs to be taken in context with the earlier depiction of the “seasons of rain” (*Lucretius*, 1.192), without which, the “earth cannot put forth her cheering fruits” (*Lucretius*, 1.193-104).

⁸¹ Gale, 2007, 391

Rosner

It becomes evident that in explaining his postulate, seemingly unrelated to gender⁸² by concept alone, his diction and gendered language implies a masculine role in supplying the “X factor” in creation. As Kennedy insinuates,

“...the raindrops do not disappear into nothingness, but are dispersed, and it is their dispersal and recombination into different compounds which produces the phenomena that at the level of our perception we call ‘life’ and ‘growth.’”⁸³

The masculine contribution to creation is characterized as agility, weightlessness, and light to creation, as Ether refers to the uppermost part of the atmosphere. Therefore, although Lucretius had originally described the power of his most prominent feminine figures as generative and copulative, his atomism illustrates how the force behind efficient production is a masculine nature.

Besides matter and seed, there is one last elemental force that Lucretius details: void. The poet then describes how, besides the earthly matters of the world, there must be void in all things. Void is directly tied to movement, as, without it, nothing could move:

329 *Nec tamen undique corporea stipata tenentur*
330 *omnia natura; namque est in rebus inane.*

335 *quod si non esset, nulla ratione moveri*
res possent; namque officium quod corporis exstat,
officere atque obstare, id in omni tempore adesset
omnibus; haud igitur quicquam procedere posset,
principium quoniam cedendi nulla daret res.

“nor however are the bodies tightly packed together for there is void in things.

But if it were not the case, things would not be able to move with any reason; because in fact what need exists for the body—namely to impede and obstruct—that need exists in all things for all time; for nothing is able to proceed, because no

⁸²and more so to Epicurus’ testament to the senses,

⁸³Gale, 2007, 391

Rosner

thing is able to give a beginning for proceeding” (*DRN*, 1.329-330, 1.335-339).

Here Lucretius builds on his atomic theory by detailing how things could not move if they did not have void in them. If things were solely made of matter, everything would be too compact. It is because of the void that particles are able to move around and bump into one another—causing creation. In fact, another translation for *procedere* is to produce, and thus Lucretius is insinuating that without void, generative matter could produce nothing. Accordingly, the masculine associations with movement and action I have already observed predominate in the passage—tying void to the masculine contribution of creation.⁸⁴

Particularly, I also recognize how the notion of sameness has such a strong feminine association. Following this logic, then, the feminine aspect of nature, body/matter, is seen as obstructive and preventative of movement. Movement causes change, stagnation denies it. Masculine mobile seed and void cause specialization and movement; feminine earthly matter obstructs it. Lucretius clearly states, *namque officium quod corporis exstat*. This quote helps develop the narrative of a fixed, immobile, passive feminine earthly part to creation that is obstructive to the dynamic, mobile masculine project. Kennedy goes as far as to say, ““the bodies that generate things”⁸⁵are atoms, the minute, lifeless particles that fly about in the void...”⁸⁶ The chronicle Lucretius is constructing follows accordingly – the force that is attributed the sustenance in creation,

⁸⁴ Further, father Ether, being the upper-most part of the atmosphere also ties in void to the masculine, as there must be much void in ether.

⁸⁵The feminine contribution to creation

⁸⁶Gale, 2007, 386; once again I disagree with the notion that generative bodies are the same as atoms to Lucretius.

Rosner

that conquers the obtrusive and passive female, is the masculine, active, movement sourcing void.

Therefore, Lucretius posits that the world is made up of two basic aspects of nature: void, matter/body: relatively gendered masculine and feminine. Hence,

418 *Sed nunc ut repetam coeptum pertexere dictis,
omnis ut est igitur per se natura duabus
constitit in rebus; nam corpora sunt et inane,
haec in quo sita sunt et qua diversa moventur.*

“But now, so therefore, all nature is established through itself in two parts; for there are bodies and there is void, these things are located and are moved in opposing directions” (DRN, 1.418-421).

However, Seed is positioned as a masculine aspect of body. Body is broken up into two categories: matter and seed. The seed is distinguished from the feminine aspect of matter in its designation as that which causes specialization from matter and as the *first* body – although the two are both made of particles, as he says, they serve inherently different roles. Feminine matter is qualified as capable of gestation and birth but is only useful in creation for those qualities, it does not contribute to any specificity or change. Such is why this paper distinguishes the seed from his use of the word matter.⁸⁷ Supporting the assertion that seed is a masculine aspect of body, Lucretius says, “Lastly, we are all sprung from celestial seed (*caelesti semine*); that same thing (*idem*) is the father (*pater*) for all,” (DRN, 2.991-992).⁸⁸ *Caelesti semine* is an ablative of source and serves

⁸⁷Bianchi insinuates that *semina* is associated with *materiem* in Lucretius, thus conflating both seed and matter, which would give Lucretius a more gender neutral or equalizing undertone, however for the reasons discussed, I do not agree with this connection being continuous throughout the DRN. These insinuations also confuse her earlier conjectures about the source of swerve and motion. Nonetheless, in her footnote 230n29 she does mention Nugent and Fowler’s articles and how she agrees that Lucretius might not construct a feminist narrative.

⁸⁸ *Denique caelesti sumus omnes semine oriundi;*

Rosner

as the antecedent of *ille*, *idem*, and *pater* in the next line. The grammatical device indicates that the seed is associated with the father, therefore deeming it masculine. The quote continues into,

992 *omnibus ille idem pater est, unde alma liquentis*
umoris guttas mater cum terra recepit,
feta parit nitidas fruges arbustaque laeta
 995 *et genus humanum, parit omnia saecla ferarum,*
pabula cum praebet quibus omnes corpora pascunt
et dulcem ducunt vitam prolemque propagant;
quapropter merito maternum nomen adepta est.

“That same thing is the father for all, from who the fostering mother receives the liquid spots of rain, along with the earth, pregnant (*feta*), she births gleaming fruit and healthy trees and the human race, she births all generations of wild beasts when she supplies food on which all things feed their bodies and conducts a sweet life and issue offspring and it is on account of this she has rightly acquired the name mother” (*DRN*, 2.992-998).

When Lucretius depicts Father Ether as giving liquid drops—seeds—to the earth, he divests earth of her power as the creator. In this representation, the seed is not only necessary for creation, but it is the active aspect of it—providing the impetus for creation. Consequently, due to the previous depiction of Father Ether dropping rain onto mother earth’s lap, this quote further supports the association of seed with the masculine. Ether is again established as the uppermost part of the atmosphere and characterizes the void as masculine, seeing as the sky and atmosphere is the place on earth that has the most void, movement, and space. Void is always used as a distinguishable elemental substance in Lucretius’ atomic theory, and it is tied to seed and masculinity through Ether’s fatherly

omnibus ille idem pater est...

Rosner

domain. Therefore, in Lucretius' atomic theory, there are three elemental substances: seed, matter, and void which are gendered masculine, feminine, masculine respectively.

Lucretius says that because nothing seems to be completely solid in the world, everything must be created from the solid and everlasting matter and the great void, which together create the ephemeral things seen in every-day life. He says,

510 *sunt igitur solida ac sine inani corpora prima.*
Praeterea quoniam genitis in rebus inanest,
materiem circum solidam constare necessest,
nec res ulla potest vera ratione probari
corpore inane suo celare atque intus habere,
 515 *si non, quod cohibet, solidum constare relinquo.*
id porro nil esse potest nisi materiai
concilium, quod inane queat rerum cohibere.
materies igitur, solido quae corpore constat,
esse aeterna potest, cum cetera dissoluantur.

“Moreover, since there is a void in generative things (*genitis in rebus*), it is necessary to position solid material all around, nor is anything able to be judged true through calculation to conceal void in its own body and to have it within, if not what it contains you should allow it to be solid. Moreover, that is able to be nothing if not the purpose of matter that it is able to confine (*cohibere*) the void of things. Matter therefore, by which are in accordance with a solid body, are able to be eternal, when other things dissolve.” (*DRN*, 1.510-519)

This argument adds to feminine earthly matter another characterization which is solidness and an everlasting immortality. It appears Lucretius is attributing authority to the female aspect of creation – “mighty by their solid singleness...and show[ing] hard strength”⁸⁹.

This gives matter and femininity a strength to it - in its everlasting immortality and in its sheer strength.⁹⁰

⁸⁹*DRN*, 1.574; *pollentia simplicitate*, 1.576; *validasque ostendere viris*

⁹⁰ Further, even though throughout *De Rerum Natura* the Latin words for Body (*Corpora*) are consistently neuter, it is clear that Lucretius is gendering them feminine due to the explicit association of these words with female characters like mother earth and Venus. Also, in this previous quote matter (*Materiae*, line 1.516) is feminine. Even though the body (*Corpora*) is neuter, *Materiae* (f) conceptually consists of it.

Further, the previous quote is reminiscent of the way he describes Venus in the first few lines of *De Rerum Natura*. On lines 1.44-49 he prays to Venus

44 *omnis enim per se divom natura necessesit
immortali aevo summa cum pace fruatur
semota ab nostris rebus seiunctaque longe;
nam privata dolore omni, privata periclis,
ipsa suis pollens opibus, nil indiga nostri,
nec bene promeritis capitur neque tangitur ira.*

“For it is necessary that the entire nature of the gods enjoy immortal life with the greatest peace through itself, separately removed from our affairs and divided by far from them, for it had been stripped of all grief, stripped of perils, and the very thing rules through its own power, it lacks nothing of ours nor is it captured by those well merited things, nor is it touched by anger.”

Firstly, this quote demonstrates that the gods, by their eternal nature, enjoy a self-sufficiency that estranges them from human affairs. These lines come directly after he prayed to Venus, which is a strange dichotomy that sets the reader to understand the power of Venus to be mighty in her self-sufficiency. If our bodies are to perish because of their dependency on other things, then perishing is a human and mortal affair that the gods do not partake in - they lack suffering. Therefore, her power mirrors Lucretius' representation of generative bodies and matter itself: mighty in their solidness and eternal strength. However, immortality is blatantly rejected in the *DRN*, and the power of immortality is not seen as very powerful at all. In this context, simply, if the gods and humans are oppositional to one another, and the gods have no influence or power over us - how could their eternal powers affect humanity? They do not. They may have created

There is an argument to be made about this association of body and matter of the beginning of things being feminine.

Rosner

us, but they act in the way generative matter does in Lucretius' atomism: they are general gestative bodies - not a source of specialized life, change, or motion.

This quote ties body and matter in the *DRN*'s atomic theory to Venus and thus feminine characterization more strongly in concept, but it also affords us a more complex understanding of how he places women in a passive nature. It is not without giving them space to exist, nonetheless without giving them any aspect of power. Similarly, when directly juxtaposing void and body, Lucretius is careful to make sure he uses equalizing language. As mentioned earlier, he describes them as working together to create. For example he says, "(nature) which forces the body to be bounded by void and that which is void is forced to be bounded by the body," (*DRN*, 1.1009-1010).⁹¹ How could he not afford femininity (in their association with nature) power in creation and discuss how feminine and masculine come together, when it is clear from even a basic biological understanding that the two make children and women do so greatly contribute to creation in a profound and beautiful manner – gestation and physical birth. It would be an abomination to nature itself and is something Lucretius cannot ignore. However, the aspect of power notated in lines 1.44-1.49 is within its solidness and therefore its stagnation. Is this really a power in creation? How does Lucretius contextualize her immobility?

Feminine Matter's Subordination

The power attributed to femininity is much more about its role as an immobile substance; objectified and endowed with passive "power." To be sure, it is not

⁹¹ *quae corpus inani
et quod inane autem est finiri corpore cogit,*

Rosner

empowering for women or femininity when compared to the power afforded to masculinity and the void. In Book 2 Lucretius continues his discovery of the nature of things, elaborating how objects are dispersed in the world and how they move:

62 *Nunc age, quo motu genitalia materiai
corpora res varias gignant genitasque resolvant,
et qua vi facere id cogantur, quaeque sit ollis
reddita mobilitas magnum per inane meandi,
expediam:*

“Come now, and I will expound by what manner generative bodies produce various things and dissolve the things brought forth, and by what power they are compelled to do that and what swiftness of movement has been given to them to wander through the immense void” (*DRN*, 2.62-65).

Lucretius begins this book with an homage to the void, for the first time calling it *magnum*. Although he calls the bodies of matter (*materiai*, which is again feminine) “generative,” it is through motion that these bodies generate things. Further, it is through motion that they are even willed to create, as they move through the great void, giving away the autonomy over creation to the masculine. Lucretius will then continue with this sentiment as he moves into deeper discussion of how particles move throughout the world. He will start with a somewhat empowering description of the generative body/matter of the beginnings of things, but as he progresses through his narrative, he will devalue the role that matter plays in creation itself.

At first it seems as though Lucretius is allowing generative matter to have its own autonomy in motion:

83 *nam quoniam per inane vagantur, cuncta necessest
aut gravitate sua ferri primordia rerum
aut ictu forte alterius.*

“Since once they have wandered through the void, it is necessary that all foundations of things be brought forth

Rosner

either by its own gravity or by the strike of another”(DRN, 2.83-85).

The attribution of movement here is to the matter itself, colliding against other particles of matter through the void, which allowed it to bounce back by the nature of the married forces as Lucretius has previously described. This indication suggests that matter has some role in movement itself. However, when examining the quote closer, it becomes evident that *generation* requires movement, attributed to the void rather than the “strike of another”. Just before the aforementioned quote, Lucretius says,

2.80 Si cessare putas rerum primordia posse
 cessandoque novos rerum progignere motus,
 avius a vera longe ratione vagaris.
 nam quoniam per inane vagantur,

“If you should think that the foundations of things are able to yield and by yielding to produce a new movement of things then truly you have wandered far from true reason, since once they have wandered through the void,” (DRN, 2.80-83).

It is now clear that what Lucretius is saying is that *since* the first-beginnings of things, i.e., the matter/body, are suspended in void, they are allowed to move and thus collide against one another. Consequently, it is this collision that begets new motions and new things. All mentions of motion are tied to void; as such, motion is inseparable from a masculine characterization although it is a separate force from the matter/bodies of the beginning of things. Bianchi argues in her novel, *the Feminine Symptom: aleatory matter in the aristotelian cosmos*, that Lucretius’ *clinamen* or swerve is a random force which comes from nowhere, and contrasts such theory with Aristotle, who finds this swerve to

Rosner

come from within matter itself.⁹² Such distinction signifies how Lucretius might regard motion and swerve as originating from a source outside stagnant matter. This quote reveals that the outside source of movement, the “swerve,” is void.

Similarly, Lucretius says, “You may be sure that all take their restlessness from the first beginnings of things... Thus the movement ascends from the first-beginnings...”.⁹³ From this language it may seem that Lucretius is yet again attributing motion to the powers of the first-beginnings of things (i.e., the body, matter, feminine earthliness). However, I argue that once again, upon closer inspection it becomes clear that the substantive result of such motion or even how such motion begins is attributed to the void, or light, which is also associated with maleness.⁹⁴ Just before the lines above, Lucretius says, “You will see that many things that have been hastened by unseen blows in that place change their path and have been driven back” (*DRN*, 2.129-130).⁹⁵ Therefore, while Lucretius is attributing motion to the first-beginnings, it is clear that it is because of the void or because of some other *caeca* motion (random swerving motion) that causes the first-beginning to move: they cannot move on their own.

Lucretius’ atomic misogyny develops into depriving feminine matter their productive and life-giving powers by defining this “swerving” motion as the generative force behind new things. In doing so, Lucretius excludes matter from the sustenance of birth. He is keen on gravity, in that he understands that “the first bodies are being carried

⁹²Bianchi, 2014, 66

⁹³ Rouse & Smith; *DRN* 1.33: *prima moventur enim per se primordia rerum*; *DRN* 1.39: *sic a principiis ascendit motus et exit*

⁹⁴ Lucretius says that movement ascends from the “first beginnings,” which are referenced earlier in Book 1 as the seeds of things, not generative matter. However, this is a contented argument. Even if you believe he is referring to matter itself in these lines I will continue to argue Lucretius subverts feminine power.

⁹⁵ *multa videbis enim plagis ibi percita caecis commutare viam retroque repulsa reverti,*

Rosner

downwards by their own weight in a straight line through the void...”⁹⁶ However, it is by motion through which these first beginnings beget anything. He says, “...they repel a little from their course, just so much as you might call a change of motion...”⁹⁷ for if not,

221 *quod nisi declinare solerent, omnia deorsum
imbris uti guttae caderent per inane profundum
nec foret offensus natus nec plaga creata
principiis; ita nihil umquam natura creasset.*

“because if they were not accustomed to fall all things would fall like raindrops downward through the profound void nor would offspring arise or be created nor wounds created from the beginnings so and so nature then would have created nothing ever” (*DRN*, 2.221-224).

We have previously observed that motion is used as the action force that causes movement of particles. However, in these quotes, motion, sourced from somewhere outside the matter itself - namely the void - all things are produced. The conjecture is reminiscent of the way Lucretius has described copulation from the raindrops from Father Ether as providing the “x-factor” for efficient creation; matter has its general capacity for copulation, but only when influenced and moved by a male force is it actually able to produce.

Further, just after the lines 2.129-130 Lucretius says,

138 *sic a principiis ascendit motus et exit
paulatim nostros ad sensus, ut moveantur
illa quoque in solis quae lumine cernere quimus,*

“Thus movement rises from the foundation and little by little falls upon our senses with the result that they are also moved which we are able to discern in the light of the sun”(*DRN*, 2.138-40).

⁹⁶ Rouse & Smith, *DRN* 2.217-218

⁹⁷ *DRN*, 2.219-220, adapted from Rouse & Smith

Rosner

Lucretius has set motion, and thus creation, in place significantly *from* forces other than matter itself. Consequently, he has called the resulting creations, which thereby do involve matter itself - for matter is the source of turf which motion ensues and allows creation between - only noticeable and therefore only significant in its ability to be perceived through sunlight. Sunlight has also previously been attributed to maleness; Recalling our earlier analysis of how Epicurus serves as the illuminator of nature's mysteries, effectively disabusing earth of her ability to be seen on her own, the atomic indication that matter or bodies are important so far as they are illuminated is unsurprising.

The sun is further deemed masculine by Lucretius' positioning of him in a sexual manner towards earth:

210 *sol etiam caeli de vertice dissipat omnis
ardorem in partis et lumine conserit arva;
in terras igitur quoque solis vergitur ardor.*

“For from the summit of the entire sky, the sun distributes its force into all parts and sows (*conserit*) the plough-fields (*arva*) with its light; and therefore the force of the sun is also sloped towards the lands” (*DRN*, 2.210-213).

This passage offers the previous quote an explanation and context, wherein once again

Lucretius is using a male symbol – the sun – to explain how it propagates and adds generative force to (and thus propagates) an earthly (previously deemed feminine) symbol – the fields – to create. In this way, the sun's heat is his seed. Lucretius has gendered the true reproductive force behind creation male in its role to fertilize and propagate the stagnant and unchanging earth. This depiction of the light “sowing,” meaning planting a seed into, the fields of earth is a sexual inuendo that alludes to the sun's masculine role in creation. As mentioned earlier, Latin literature often used sowing

Rosner

as a sexual metaphor. Similarly, Adams supports that *arva* represent female reproductive organs;

“The frequency (in Latin and other languages) of the metaphor of the field, garden, meadow, etc. applied to the female *pudenda* reflects in part the external appearance of the organ, and in part the association felt between the fertility of the field and that of females. The metaphor complements the verbal metaphors of sowing and ploughing used of the male role in sexual intercourse.”⁹⁸

The sun, seed, and masculinity are further defined as connected in this quote. Moreover, he also mentions how the product of creation is perceived through the sunlight, and maleness is therefore ascribed not only the basis of generative force, but also the way in which you recognize the successive creations; thus, leaving what room but passivity for the power of the feminine “generative bodies” in creation?

It is certain that this discourse is incredibly brilliant, in an age without crystallography or the technology society has today to confirm and study atomic physics, his suppositions of science are incredibly profound - from ideas like density to gravity, the poet’s representation is astonishingly accurate for his time. However, the gendering of certain aspects of this inevitable nature of things is where Lucretius lands in hot water. Even though Lucretius begins the narrative by describing an empowering feminine force for generative matter and earth over the course of his discourse, it becomes clear that the power and basis to life and creation is within the random swerve, movement, and void, ascribed to masculinity.⁹⁹ Specifically, the feminine atomic power of particles and generative bodies is subverted to passivity in movement and creation.

⁹⁸Adams, 1983, 82-83

⁹⁹Nugent alludes to this subordination of the feminine life giving source by *pater aether*, but she does not delve into the atomic theory as to why this is. Her only reference to seed is in a gender neutral manner when discussing ejaculation and copulation from book 4 of the DRN. It is clear now, that *pater aether*

Rosner

Mind and Movement: masculine domination

Lucretius has directly characterized the beginning movements of particles as deriving from the power of the void and a random swerve, both tied to masculinity. Directly thereafter, in the next section of Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*, the poet ties this "swerving" (*declinando primordia motus*, *DRN*, 2.253) of the first beginning of things (body/matter) with motion of the mind. He says that "...by swerving a beginning of motion...whence comes this free will in living creatures all over the earth."¹⁰⁰ He then ties the free will to intelligence, as he says,

269 *ut videas initum motus a corde creari*
 ex animique voluntate id procedere primum,
 inde dari porro per totum corpus et artus.

"As you can see the beginning of movement arises from intellect (*corde*) and the will of the spirit to create that first and from there further on is given to the entire body and limbs" (*DRN*, 2.269-271).

First, this is the first direct association of movement with mind and therefore void with intelligence. Second, Lucretius is saying that the body moves only because it is willed to by the intellect and spirit of a person. Such is reminiscent of the way Lucretius attributes movement directly to the void, as he says,

381 *aut igitur motu privandumst corpora quaeque,*
 aut esse admixtum dicendumst rebus inane,
 unde initum primum capiat res quaeque movendi.

"Either then all bodies must be deprived of movement, or we must say that void is intermingled in things, as a result of which each thing may begin to move."¹⁰¹

being associated with seed and void is the underlying atomic rationalization of the transvaluation of feminine power in creation to mere feminine existence.

¹⁰⁰Rouse & Smith; *DRN*, 2.253-256

¹⁰¹Rouse & Smith; *DRN*, 1.381-383

Rosner

We have already discussed how Lucretius' atomic theory supports this conclusion in that matter and void make up bodies, and matter is inherently stagnant only moved by void. In comparing these two quotes, however, it is revealed that there is an association of movement with mind. If bodies are willed to move by the intellect and spirit and they are actually moved by the presence of void, then the two must be tied together in some way. These quotes outline what I will show: that the masculinization of atomic movement leads to the masculinization of intellect and reason.

Lucretius continues into Book 3 by stating

94 *Primum animum dico, mentem quem saepe vocamus,
in quo consilium vitae regimenque locatum est,
esse hominis partem nilo minus ac manus et pes
atque oculi partes animantis totius extant.*

“I mention first of all the spirit, which we often call the mind, in which place the intelligence of life and order is located [the mind], that place is no less a part of the human than the feet and hand and eyes are of the entire animal” (*DRN*, 3.95-97).

The supposition that comes from this quote is that intelligence is parallel with the mind. It also lays out how the mind is in control of understanding (intellect) and governing life (control over life itself, movement of the body), the two being “situated” *within* the mind. The power of governing life was originally attributed to Venus, but now Lucretius has relocated it within the mind. This marks an overcoming of Venus' power that mirrors Epicurus' and requests his atomic theory as a basis to it.

Spirit is also associated with mind, Lucretius says,

3.155 *verum ubi vementi magis est commota metu mens,
consentire animam totam per membra videmus
sudoresque ita palloremque existere toto
corpore et infringi linguam vocemque aboriri,
caligare oculos, sonere auris, succidere artus,*

3.160 *denique concidere ex animi terrore videmus
saepe homines; facile ut quivis hinc noscere possit
esse animam cum animo coniunctam, quae cum animi vi
percussa est, exim corpus propellit et icit.*

“But where the mind is more moved by fear and excitement we see that the entire spirit accords through the limbs and expresses sweat and pallor throughout the entire body and the tongue is broken, the voice fails, and the eyes are covered in mist, there is sound in the ears, the limbs are slack and we see that often men collapse from the terror of their soul, so then it is easy to recognize from this that the soul is joined with the mind when which is struck with the force of the soul, thereupon it moves and strikes the body” (*DRN*, 3.152-160)

Mind is in control of the body; this passage directly associates mind with spirit, but it also invites discussion of Venus and female sexuality as a source of danger to the mind. This quote shows that when the mind is “moved by fear”¹⁰² it “strikes back.” Similarly, in Book 4, sexuality is villainized and seen as a threat to man, thus being a source of fear - the “striking back” was defined as the ejaculation or bleeding toward the source of the wound (*DRN*, 4.1045-1051); the connection here is a grounding example of how Lucretius uses similar language to describe the way his atomic theory interacts with and substantiates his misogynistic suppositions about women and Venus.

Further, the quote from lines 3.95-2.97 also describes the mind as a part of man “no less” than his body, his earthly substance. The association questions whether the body can be deemed less important or less powerful than the mind. Further, he says,

117 *Nunc animam quoque ut in membris cognoscere
possis
esse neque harmonia corpus sentire solere,
principio fit uti detracto corpore multo
saepe tamen nobis in membris vita moretur;
atque eadem rursum, cum corpora pauca caloris*

¹⁰² as man is in sexual interaction it

*diffugere forasque per os est editus aer,
deserit extemplo venas atque ossa relinquit;
noscere ut hinc possis non aequas omnia partis
corpora habere neque ex aequo fulcire salutem,
sed magis haec, venti quae sunt calidique vaporis
semina, curare in membris ut vita moretur.
est igitur calor ac ventus vitalis in ipso
corpore qui nobis moribundos deserit artus.*

“Now you would be able to recognize that the spirit lay also in the limb and that not through harmony the body is able to feel, and in the first place it happens when much of the body is taken away, often no the less life remains in our limbs, and so the very same thing that that when the small bodies of heat have dissipated and the air has issued out of the mouth, immediately it deserts the veins and abandons the bones with the result that you are able to recognize from this that not all bodies have equal parts nor does each particle play an equally significant role in life, but all the more those things which are the seeds of the winds and warm vapors see to it that life remains in the limbs” (*DRN*, 1.117-129)

It is important to observe that the harmony Lucretius mentions in this passage is not that between body and mind/spirit, but rather the harmony between the body and the world as it relates to religion. This is Lucretius furthering his attempt to dispel the hold religion has over the minds of the Roman people. Lucretius *does* argue that mind and body are entangled. For, when body perishes, so does mind and this dispels the fear of death that conquers over man and makes them live their lives according to religion – as they fear the afterlife. However, what this quote accomplishes for Lucretius’ atomic theory is it offers a distinction between discrete *functions* of particles and how they operate in the building blocks of life. Not only is this supposition explicitly stated in relation to mind and body, *non aequas omnia partis corpora habere neque ex aequo fulcire salutem...curare in membris ut vita moretur*,¹⁰³ but it is also mirrored in how he differentiates between the air

¹⁰³*DRN*, 3.125-26; 3.27

Rosner

and heat itself in contrast with the seeds of air and heat. He says that death occurs when the particles of air and heat (breath) leave the body; air and heat being forms of the body themselves. Eventually, it is the seeds of those things, co-mingled in their bodies, that are life-bearing. This point further expands the misogynistic narrative woven into the lines of Lucretius' atomic theory by defining the foundations of life and explicating the function of seed—the masculine entity—in creation. Doing so, in turn, excludes the feminine matter/body—that makes up limbs and flesh—from sourcing creation.

Accordingly, he says when talking about the atomism of death,

701 *quod permanat enim dissolvitur, interit ergo.
dispertitur enim per caulas corporis omnis;
ut cibus, in membra atque artus cum diditur omnis,
disperit atque aliam naturam sufficit ex se,*

“Therefore, what penetrates is dissolved and therefore mixed together for it is dispersed through all the pores of the body; with the result that food, when it is given to the limbs and every joint, disperses and sustains another nature by itself,”
(*DRN*, 3.701-704).

This quote furthers the idea that the spirit acts as a source of nourishment for the body.

However, this nourishment is not the same provided by body or material. For, the natures of the two – the particles of each – are different. Spirit supplies the nourishment that is life and animation; body supplies physical growth. Furthering the atomic theory Lucretius has developed, the stagnant aspect of the body remains in its role of creating things, but not giving life. Giving life is deemed a facet of the mind and spirit. Moreover, he says,

161 *Haec eadem ratio naturam animi atque animai
corpoream docet esse; ubi enim propellere membra,
corripere ex somno corpus mutareque vultum
atque hominem totum regere ac versare videtur,*

“This same consideration teaches that the nature of a spirit in animals is bodily; for where it propels the limbs it rips the

Rosner

body from sleep and changes the appearance and guides and turns the entire body”(DRN, 3.161-164).

Quite literally, what develops in this quote is the notion that the body would not even move without the mind or spirit. The body would be lifeless.¹⁰⁴ This continues to show that although the body and spirit perish and live together, they occupy different roles. A clear hierarchy emerges through the implication that the masculine mind and spirit provide mortal beings with life more than feminine matter.

All these conclusions have been drawn from text before he even begins his true discussion of how the atomic structures of spirit and mind as they relate to body and matter. He now says,

177 *Is tibi nunc animus quali sit corpore et unde
constiterit pergam rationem reddere dictis.
principio esse aio persubtilem atque minutis*

“What spirit you have I will undertake in what body it is and from where it establishes to render thought to words. At first I will say that through very delicate and very small bodies it comes together” (*Lucretius*, 3.177-179).

¹⁰⁴Schrivers, in *Seeing the Invisible: A Study of Lucretius' Use of Analogy in the De Rerum Natura*, acknowledges that Lucretius' imagery suggests the smallest particles of the mind are what controls the larger body; “The image of the body as the habitation of the soul constitutes a root analogy widely used in a range of applications in ancient psychology, ethics, and physiology. The image of the ship was similarly widespread and popular: the representation of the world as a ship piloted by God found in teleological visions of the world, notably amongst the Stoics; the soul as helmsman of the body in Plato's Phaedrus; the relationship between soul and body compared to the relationship between pilot and vessel, in the psychology of Aristotle and later writers; the comparison between the body and a ship, found both in medical literature and in ethical texts Lucretius too uses this popular image to illustrate the way in which the human body is put in *motion ut ac navis velis ventoque feratur* ('as a ship is carried along by its sails and the wind', 4.987), and how the tiny particles of the soul can manoeuvre a body as big as our own: *quippe etenim ventus subtili corpore tenvis | trudit agens magnam magno molimine navem | et manus una regit quantovis impete euntem | atque gubernaculum contorquet quolibet unum* ('for indeed, the insubstantial wind with its delicate substance drives and pushes along the great bulk of a large ship, and one hand controls it however fast it sails, and one rudder turns it in any direction', 4.901–4). Since Lucretius is in the habit of exploiting ancient traditions, it is entirely probable that in 2.257 ff. the image of the soul as charioteer of the body has contributed to the choice of the horse as example, as well as, more specifically, to the metaphorical use of the verbs *refrenare/refrenari* ('rein in') and *residere* ('settle back'; 2.276, 283) in the description of the relationship between soul and body” (Gale, 2007, 284-285).

Rosner

The inference that mind is made of exceedingly small particles leads Lucretius to conclude that they contain more void within them and between them and other particles, allowing them to move more easily, he says

199 *...igitur parvissima corpora proquam
et levissima sunt, ita mobilitate fruuntur;
at contra quaecumque magis cum pondere magno
asperaque inveniuntur, eo stabilita magis sunt.
nunc igitur quoniam est animi natura reperta
mobilis egregie, perquam constare necessest
corporibus parvis et levibus atque rutundis.*

“So therefore the bodies that are smallest and are the lightest thus enjoy movement, but on the other hand the more weight and unevenness the stabler they are. now therefore sense the nature of the soul has found to be particularly mobile it is necessary to establish in what ways it is in small bodies that are light and circular” (*DRN*, 3.199-205).

This quote furthers the assertion that mind is made of small and mobile particles, however it also posits that larger particles are more “stable” or stagnant, which will be an important supposition when he talks about the structure of bodily matter: “for since the elements of the spirit are smaller by far than those by which our innards are composed of in our body” (*Lucretius*, 3.374-375).¹⁰⁵ The proclamation that spirit and mind are smaller than body and flesh asserts that body and flesh are less moveable and active by their nature – they are inherently motionless.

Moreover, he says,

216 *ergo animam totam perparvis esse necessest
seminibus, nexam per venas viscera nervos,
quatenus, omnis ubi e toto iam corpore cessit,
extima membrorum circumcaesura tamen se
incolumem praestat nec deficit ponderis hilum.*

¹⁰⁵ *nam cum multo sunt animae elementa minora
quam quibus e corpus nobis et viscera constant,*

Rosner

“So therefore it is necessary that the entire spirit be connected through extremely small seeds, throughout our veins, innards, and nerves, retained in which place, when everything now departs from the entire body, the external shape of the limbs nevertheless presents itself as intact, nor does it lack a tiny little bit of weight” (*DRN*, 3.216-220).

The consensus of Lucretius’ thought here is that mind and spirit must be exceedingly small because when a being dies, the mind departs the body: there is no change in weight or shape. All the flesh and blood are still present. Nonetheless, embedded in this quote is the concrete characterization of those small particles which makeup mind and body as seeds. This associates masculinity with mind, and even further with mobility, will, and intelligence. He says,

228 *quare etiam atque etiam mentis naturam animaeque
scire licet perquam paucillis esse creatam
seminibus, quoniam fugiens nil ponderis aufert.*

“that’s why it is proper to know the nature of the mind and spirit, through which it is created through very small seeds, since when leaving, no weight is removed (*DRN*, 3.228-230).

Making the mind consist of seed, Lucretius ties masculinity to movement, mind, and intelligence. The act brings together his misogynistic assertion that Epicurus, as a beacon of knowledge, has overpowered Venus’ and Earth’s contribution to creation. Not only are seeds now characterized as the life-giving substance in his atomic theory, but they are glorified as the basis to intelligence. Bianchi concurs with this misogyny as it relates to Aristotelian philosophy on physics;

“I have traced throughout these texts an insistence on Aristotle’s part that the motive cause or the source of motion is always accounted for in nature by a recourse to some telos

or another, the paternal motive cause exemplified by the logos in the sperm...”¹⁰⁶

Nevertheless, Lucretius’ atomic theory expands, and his structuring of mind is not complete yet. He says that air and heat are also categories of body that makeup mind and spirit – both being quick and weightless forms of body – casting the atomic structure of mind as threefold.

239 *nil horum quoniam recipit mens posse creare*
sensiferos motus et quaecumque ipsa volutat.
quarta quoque his igitur quaedam natura necessest
adtribuat. east omnino nominis expers;
qua neque mobilius quicquam neque tenuius exstat,
nec magis e parvis et levibus ex elementis;
 245 *sensiferos motus quae didit prima per artus,*
prima cietur enim, parvis perfecta figuris;
inde calor motus et venti caeca potestas
 248 *accipit, inde aer; inde omnia mobilitantur:*

“yet all these three together are not enough to produce feeling, since the mind cannot admit that any of these can produce sense-bringing motions and the thoughts which it itself revolves. A fourth nature must therefore be added to these; this is entirely without name; nothing exists more easily moved and more thin than this, or made of elements smaller and smoother; and this first distributes the sense-giving motions through the limbs; For this is first set in motion, being composed of small shapes; after that, heat takes on the movement, and the unseen power of wind, then the air; after which all is set in movement, ” (*DRN*, 3.239-248)

¹⁰⁶ Bianchi, 2014, 66; such discussion of the masculine role in motion of matter follows through from Aristotle to Lucretius, having been focused on traversing Greek philosophy (particularly Epicureanism, which relies on Democritus’ atomic theory which is in dialogue with Aristotelian critique of it). Such observation supports the themes and symbolism I observe in Lucretius. However, as previously mentioned, Bianchi argues that Aristotle affords the subset of motion that is *clinamen* or random swerve to power within matter itself. Even this subset is afforded to masculinity in Lucretius, indicating an even stronger misogynistic undertone in Lucretius’ atomism which I have argued in the section Feminine Matter’s Subordination.

Rosner

There are many conclusions to be drawn from this passage. The first is that although mind and spirit is not solely made of seeds, it is made of substances entirely characterized by Lucretius as mobile. The ambiguous fourth substance is one that is as close to the void as a particle can get – it is the smallest most mobile particle in all of nature. Therefore, it is both seed and the closest thing to void a particle can get that constructs soul, intelligence, and mind - all thus tied to masculinity. Further, air and heat are characteristics of previous masculine symbols employed by Lucretius. Specifically, the seeds of which are employed as breath and the substance of spirit. Further, Ether is the uppermost part of the atmosphere: air. The sun produces heat which propagates the earth.¹⁰⁷ Both of those characters have dominated feminine domain in a literal and/or figurative sense. The hierarchical relationship between movement and masculinity and stagnation and femininity remains.

The second aspect is that not only is the mind what moves the body in a literal, physical sense, but it is the mind that produces “sense giving motions.” It is almost as if he is describing neurons, the type of somatic cells which constitute our nervous system. This is a great inclination, however, its gendered association causes problems. By making the masculine mind govern both physical motion and sensation, Lucretius has endowed it with a disproportionate degree of power over living beings. The question is posed: how can matter have a powerful contribution to the creation of beings if it cannot produce literal movement or sensation, which are arguably the most basic aspects of life, within the thing it creates?

¹⁰⁷Schrijvers recognizes the connection between soul, heat, and air; “The soul—the vital heat and breath (calor ac ventus vitalis, 3.128)68 which quits the body at the moment of death—...” (Gale, 2007, 281)

The lines after 3.239-246 invites into colloquy the contrasting ways Lucretius describes feeling caused by a masculine force;

249 *concutitur sanguis, tum viscera persentiscunt
omnia, postremis datur ossibus atque medullis
sive voluptas est sive est contrarius ardor.
nec temere huc dolor usque potest penetrare neque
acre
permanare malum, quin omnia perturbentur
usque adeo ut vitae desit locus atque animai*
255 *diffugiant partes per caulas corporis omnis.*

“...the blood is agitated, the flesh is all thrilled with feeling, last is communicated to bone and marrow it may be the pleasure, it may be the opposite excitement. Nor is it easy for pain to soak through thus far, or any violent mischief, without throwing all into so great a riot that no place is left for life, and the particles of spirit fly abroad through all the pores of the body” (*DRN*, 3.249-255).

When describing the effect of Venus’ image and women on men, Lucretius is violent in his description emphasizing the anguish, deception, and despair it causes. He posits that Venus projects these sexual desires onto men. Yet, if sexual desire is rooted in bodily reaction and sensation, how does that not involve the mind, since the mind produces these sensations and movements in the first place? The discussion of male sexual desire and female sexuality was rooted in the images men see in their nocturnal emissions. Dreams were characterized as false sensations, and as such the sexual dreams that cause the desire in that passage are false sensations because they weren’t based in actual stimuli. Furthering this, when he gets into not just images but actual women, he deems their nature as deceitful and so the feelings of lust men have towards women are also false sensations, corrupting the mind. Here, in lines 3.239-257, even though he is discussing an array of sensations from pleasure to being wounded, which should indicate violence and negativity, his description is light. He says the body is “thrilled with

Rosner

feeling” (*persentiscunt*) and the spirit “flies” (*diffugiant*). This is because the cause of these sensations is masculine due to them being rooted in true stimuli and the motions of the mind responding “correctly” to stimuli. By furthering the association of feminine deceit, the contrasting descriptions of sensation illuminate how Lucretius favors the masculine even when it might not follow logically.

Subsequently, lines 3.239-257 indicate that the body restrains the mind; “But usually there is an end to the movement almost at the surface of the body; on this account we are strong enough to retain life” (*DRN*, 3.256-257).¹⁰⁸ W.H.D Rouse translates the word *retinere* as “retain”, however some other translations of which are to restrain, hold back, or delay. As mind is associated with movement, the supposition that matter is inherently obstructive to movement must be retrieved – this is the basis of Lucretius’ assertion that femininity is obstructive from rational thought: *namque officium quod corporis exstat, officere atque obstare* (*DRN*, 1.336-337). The indication that the body is holding back and delaying the mind is a negative association projected onto femininity and encapsulates the way Lucretius talks about women in his later verses. He continues with this prerogative, calling the body a “in a way its [the mind’s] vessel (*vas*)...”¹⁰⁹ As the feminine aspect of the atomic structure of beings is characterized by body and matter, women are situated within this atomic dialogue as vessels for the mind, which is made of the seed. Such is how Lucretius must see women, simply as a means of procreation

¹⁰⁸ *sed plerumque fit in summo quasi corpore finis motibus; hanc ob rem vitam retinere valemus.*

¹⁰⁹ Rouse & Smith; *DRN*, 3.440; *quod vas quasi constitit eius*; Schrijvers concurs, “In 3.440, the human body is represented as the vessel (*vas*) of the soul” (Gale, 2007, 282)

Rosner

without any substantial contribution to their own intellect, nor the life their offspring's hold.¹¹⁰

In detailing the atomic theory behind mind, intellect, and spirit, Lucretius subverts feminine matter to a passive existence in sensation, movement, and especially its power as a life-giving source. He begins by detailing how the body deprived of spirit is also deprived of motion, and correspondingly that the body deprived by void is deprived of movement. By associative properties, void and spirit must be connected. From earlier discussed passages, it is clear that movement and void have been masculinized. Overall, the most glaring assumption to be made is that the body does not have agency in its own movement or mind - it acts as a vessel for it. Nevertheless, once Lucretius continues to detail exactly how these properties of life function on an atomic level, it becomes clear that the substantive source for life, motion, change, and mind is seeds - particles which have been continuously characterized as life-giving sources and have continuously overpowered matter. It thus is clear that Lucretius' misogynistic assertions from previously explored passages are substantiated by his atomic theory of masculine mind and seeds. He isolates femininity from power as a life-bearing source and autonomy over herself.

¹¹⁰Schrijvers acknowledges the notion that there is a long tradition of philosophers, specifically Plato and Cicero, implicating that "...the body is represented as the worthless and perishable receptacle of the immortal soul" (Gale, 2007, 282). This theory is dualistic, but in Lucretius and Epicureanism the soul and the body are perishable together. As such, their theory is monist. However, Lucretius does indicate that he waffles on the importance of this harmony, as Schrijvers details how Lucretius "...adds that there is nothing to prevent us from imagining another object even more intimately linked with it [the soul]..." (Gale, 2007, 283). Therefore, the importance of the body as the vessel of the soul is not even specific to feminine matter - it could be anything.

Rosner

Contesting Arguments

Nevertheless, some authors argue that Lucretius' atomic theory, in some cases, suggests rather the opposite of what I have proposed. In *Ocular Penetration, Grammatical Objectivity, and an Indecent Proposal in De Rerum Natura*, Michael Pope argues that men are depicted as subjects of female violent penetration in Lucretius' discussion of the atomism of sight and images, flipping Roman ideas of masculinity¹¹¹ on their heads and subverting men into a typically female role. He concludes with the sentiment that because eyes are depicted as penetrated by images which can be from either male or female sources, one must be penetrated in order to see or observe anything - by which is the foundation of Epicurean philosophy, to follow your senses. Thus, the feminine, in some regard, must be held in a positive and powerful outlook.

Pope's first argument is how Lucretius defines the atomism of sight as particles, which fly off things which hit our eyes and thus seeing occurs; Pope describes the particles emitted of things as atomic "effluences."¹¹² According to Pope, these effluents are like Venus' "spears,"¹¹³ because they "shoot out" (*iaculentur*).¹¹⁴ These particles can "penetrate anything" (*quavis penetrare*)¹¹⁵. He supplements this conclusion with how bright things can "pierce eyes" (*feriunt oculos*)¹¹⁶ and goes into a lengthier verse from the *DRN*; "Moreover, whatever brightness is piercing often burns eyes due to the fact that it holds many seeds of fire, which by penetrating begets discomfort for the eyes."¹¹⁷ Pope

¹¹¹and sight, as

¹¹²Pope, 2018, 206

¹¹³Ibid 112

¹¹⁴ibid 112; *DRN*, 4.146; translation by Pope

¹¹⁵Pope, 2018, 207; *DRN*, , 4.197; translation by Pope

¹¹⁶Pope, 2018, 207; *DRN*, 4.328; translation by Pope

¹¹⁷Pope, 2018, 207; *DRN* 4.329-32, translation by Pope

Rosner

argues that this imagery represents a Phallus which is “...bright, pointed (*acer*)”¹¹⁸ and “...contains semen (*semina*)”¹¹⁹

Before I explain Pope's connection to Venus and female power, I must stop to analyze this particular argument against mine. One of the largest contesting arguments here is that *semina* or seed (as referred to in this paper) or semen (as Pope refers to it) is possessed by everyone. It may well be possessed by both man or woman¹²⁰, but the question I consider is whether seed has a particularly *masculine* or *feminine* connotation. I argued that it has a particularly *masculine* association vehemently in previous discussion, and I will continue to argue that Pope might agree.

Seed, light, heat, and air all have been demonstrated as masculine aspects of creation and these images follow through into the passages Pope references above; as Pope notes how Lucretius describes the seeds of sight as bright and he also encourages a phallic interpretation of those atomic effluences. Such tropes have gained a positive connotation through their association with Epicurus by their implication in reason and rationality during Lucretius' discussion of mind and spirit. Specifically, seed has been depicted as exceedingly small, smooth, and fast; when seed was not referenced directly as the atomic makeup of particles in the mind and spirit (that which allows for reason), the

¹¹⁸Pope, 2018, 207

¹¹⁹ibid 118

¹²⁰ Rouse & Smith, *DRN*, 5.851-854; *genitalia deinde per artus | semina qua possint membris manare remissis; | feminaque ut maribus coniungi possit, habere | mutua qui mutent inter se gaudia uterque*: “...the life-giving seeds throughout the frame to flow out from the slackened body; and that male and female be joined, they must both have the means to exchange mutual pleasures.” This quote may suggest that male and female seeds are joined upon copulation, however, in my interpretation, the male is the seed and the female is the generative matter, the body from which the new thing is made to grow physically - as is indicated by *genitalia semina* giving life through the *artus*. Even though my interpretation holds that *semina* is a particularly masculine thing, Pope argues differently. I will continue to argue that even if this contented supposition is the way he suggests, there is still a hierarchy between masculine and feminine characterizations in the sections Pope highlights.

Rosner

particles had those same qualities. Images, being “rapid” (*brevi*)¹²¹ and “so much smaller” (*tantoque minora*)¹²² are categorized under these associations, not only by their phallic representation that Pope references, but also by their atomic makeup.¹²³

Matter then, particularly feminine, has been depicted as large and obtrusive. Her negative association comes from being described as an enemy both physically through its obtrusiveness and also through Venus’ discussion of sexuality and images. Supportingly, the reference Pope makes for the “shooting out” of atomic effluences to cause vision is shortly followed by these lines;

147 ... *sed ubi aspera saxa*
 aut in materiam ligni pervenit, ibi iam
 scinditur, ut nullum simulacrum reddere possit.
 at cum splendida quae constant opposta fuerunt
 densaque, ut in primis speculum est, nil accidit horum;

“but when it should come either to rough rocks or into the matter of wood, there then it is torn apart such that it is able to emit no image. But when what stands against it is bright, then as there is in a mirror, it weakens none of them”(DRN, 4.146-151).

Images are not able to reflect off large and rough matter because the atomic effluences of other things are broken on them. Whereas, in mirrors, which are bright and small, the atomic effluences from other things are only seen because the other objects’ atomic effluences bounce off the mirror. Mirrors—characterized by bright and small, masculine imagery—are impenetrable, large bodies are not. Additionally, when atomic effluences from feminine things—large and rough bodies—hit other feminine things, they are broken or penetrated. Only things made of bright and small particles can be transient and reflect

¹²¹DRN, 4.161

¹²²DRN, 4.111-112; *quoniam primordia tantum sunt infra nostros sensus tantoque minora*

¹²³Further, even in book 4 and in reference to images Lucretius brings up the sun, who has been masculinized previously on numerous occasions; *Lucretius*, line 4.183-188

Rosner

atomic effluences of bodies. Such mimics the way the body—made of large and obtrusive particles—acts as a passive force in sensation, whereas mind and spirit—made of the smallest particles/seeds—can act transiently to observe and reason.¹²⁴ Small bright particles and large bodies, as they relate to images, are relatively masculinized and feminized in a sexual manner shortly after the preceding quote, where Lucretius details how the sun’s rays are made of light (*levis*)¹²⁵ and minute (*minutis*)¹²⁶ particles which can “pass through” (*transire*)¹²⁷ anything. By comparison to previous reference to the sun, the inclination that bright, less weighty, and small particles that have penetrating abilities are a masculine characterization in the *DRN* comes into colloquy here.¹²⁸ Next he compares these characteristics to images, bringing images under the masculine purview as well;

191 *quapropter simulacra pari ratione necesse est*
 ...
 196 *deinde quod usque adeo textura praedita rara*
mittuntur, facile ut quasvis penetrare queant res
et quasi permanare per aeris intervallum.

“Therefore it is necessary that images should be with the same consideration...because of this the texter is endowed with such a sparse texture that they can easily penetrate anything and as if it were to ooze (*permanare*) through the space of the air” (*DRN*, 4.191; 4.196-198)

Here is a depiction of images moving through the air as though it were a male ejaculation being received by a female. The undescribed, the *anything*, the air is seen as obtrusive and is penetrated. In Lucretius’ discussion of images unrelated to Venus or human sex,

¹²⁴Further, as mentioned earlier, this relates to how Mother Earth cannot show herself unless illuminated by the sun’s light - masculine reason is by which the feminine is actualized

¹²⁵*DRN*, 4.183

¹²⁶ *ibid* 125

¹²⁷ *DRN*, 4.189

¹²⁸ See 4.176-4.188

Rosner

the gendered imagery typically used in the DRN continues into Lucretius' description of the atomism of images.

However, as Pope points out, this is confusing. Where the discontinuity, for Pope, comes in is how everyone has eyes, even men, and by making man the subject of a seed-like penetrating force Lucretius is feminizing them. On my interpretation, this argument is less potent because Lucretius has described the role of bodies in sensation as passive; the eyes being part of the body are no different. It is the mind that interprets and acts transiently to reason. Thus, the eyes receive penetration as part of the body and the mind interprets it - as a mirror, made of small and bright particles, can reflect the images the mind is able to reflect the images and thus perceive. Since mind and mirrors have been demonstrated as masculine and body as feminine this follows my argument.

Nevertheless, I must observe Pope's argument as it relates to Venus in order to grasp Lucretius' positive and negative associations with his relative masculine and feminine descriptions in his discussion of images. Pope uses the following quote to illustrate how men can be objects of female penetration,

“Therefore whoever receives blows by the spears of Venus, whether a boy with feminine limbs strikes him or a woman hurling love from her entire body, from the direction he is pierced, to that direction he strives.”¹²⁹

Previously, I employed this quote to demonstrate the villainization of female sexuality against masculine reason. When diving deeper, I can acknowledge where Pope sees the empowering of the feminine; in this instance, the penetrating force is truly released by a female or a feminine person, Venus or a feminine boy, and man is wounded by them.

¹²⁹ Pope, 2018, 208; *DRN*, 4.1052-55; translation by Pope

Rosner

Flipping the physicality of sexual imagery, it can seem as though Lucretius is empowering the feminine. However, most of the violent imagery used in Lucretius is to demonstrate the danger of the feminine. This is not an exception; these lines come from Lucretius' blatantly misogynistic description of female sexuality, in which he details women as harmful and made of false sensations, a threat to the highest of ideals in the DRN: reason. In this way, the masculinization of the woman is harmful. No matter what gender a person is doing what, the subject of pain is always the masculine, and the actor of harm is always the feminine throughout the DRN.

Bringing this discussion into atomism, the only time the seeds are seen as an enemy is when the gender dynamics are flipped. When seeds of females are penetrating a man, as Venus' image does, they are seen as false sensations and harmful. Supportingly, as mentioned, atomic effluences of feminine objects cannot be interpreted or reflected by feminine matter. Only the masculine can act transiently. This is a double standard that Lucretius holds and reveals the misogyny in this narrative which Pope neglects to point out.

Lastly, seeds are typically masculine; in the objective, what Lucretius is doing is making females masculine by their action in forceful penetration of things and men feminine by being penetrated. In these instances, when women are actors of penetration, man is seen as at fault and corrupt by false sensation. Is this truly empowering for women? or is it subverting femininity more? When men are positioned in the feminine, they become faulty and threatened. When women take on the role of the masculine, they are deemed evil. The hierarchy between the masculine and the feminine is still present, even when the roles of male and female are reversed, since the way by which Lucretius

Rosner

insinuates fault and power devolution of men is by feminizing them and the only power women have over men is their masculinization. The hierarchy supports a powerless feminine no matter what the female or male are doing.

Conclusion on De Rerum Natura

In *De Rerum Natura*, femininity began as a symbol of influence and power in creation. Between her representation as Venus and Mother Earth her presence in the text was commanding. However, it became evident in his description of Venus in later books that the symbol of female creation was diluted to deceitfulness and a source of corruption: a threat to man's mind. Mind and intelligence overpower her in their association to Epicurus, whose dedication is not only lengthier but dominating in concept as well. Not only does the juxtaposition of Epicurus' dedication against Venus' conquer her as a character, but what Venus represents, feminine power in creation is also dominated by masculine contribution.

The themes discussed about Epicurus and Venus are not secular, they are deeply embedded throughout the discourse of *De Rerum Natura*, especially in his atomic theory. His atomic theory substantiates male superiority as it makes up the life-giving source to creations, taking full control of feminine contribution – deeming her simply a vessel to carry the man's seed. This metaphor remains true in sexual reproductive imagery of earlier dedications to earth and matter, being a general generative force only useful in its gestational properties. Additionally, the imagery of the feminine aspect of creation as a vessel for the man's seed follows through into Lucretius' depiction of intellect; since mind is made of seed, and positioned inside the body as its vessel, the feminine body is isolated from playing a significant role in reason. His atomic theory then proceeds to

Rosner

justify the misogynistic claims he makes more blatantly in later books, for example, the quote this thesis began with, “the entire species of men is superior in skill by a great length and is much more intelligent” (*DRN*, 5.1355-56).¹³⁰ Having undergone a serious attempt to understand Lucretius’ misogyny in the context of the *DRN*, it can now be understood that there is a purposeful narrative and linguistic subversion of feminine power in both her skill and intelligence, especially in how they relate to creation. In other words, these are not just unexplained and ingrained biases floating amongst the poem and only related to human beings, even the earth is cast into a subordinate role in creation from Lucretius. He says,

*his igitur rebus retractis terra repente,
maxuma qua nunc se ponti plaga caerula tendit,
succidit et salso suffudit gurgite fossas.
inque dies quanto circum magis aetheris aestus
et radii solis cogebant undique terram*

5.485 *verberibus crebris extrema ad limina fartam
in medio ut propulsa suo condensa coiret,
tam magis expressus salsus de corpore sudor
augebat mare manando camposque natantis,
et tanto magis illa foras elapsa volabant*

5.490 *corpora multa vaporis et aëris altaque caeli
densabant procul a terris fulgentia templa.*

“Therefore when these affairs were withdrawn, the earth crawled down, the greatest part which now stretches itself towards the blue flat of the sea, it withdrew and produced ditches with salty springs. More day by day the blaze of ether and rays of the sun compressed the earth with frequent lashes on all sides to the farthest shore, the earth widened by frequent blows to its extreme shores and all around the earth, struck by blows to extreme part, widened in the middle, with the result that it was coerced, condensed into itself, the more that salt was expressed, like sweat from the body, it grew with the sea oozing and the fields swimming in it, all the more those bodies having slipped all around the earth, the

¹³⁰ *longe praestat in arte et sollertius est multo genus omne virile*

Rosner

bodies of heat and air were flying and thickening from upper-space afar from the earth”(DRN, 5.483-4.491).

With all the contexts now given, to explain the gendered and misogynistic associations in this passage, it is clear to see that Lucretius has structured the entire earth and nature to reflect these misogynistic undertones.

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