

## OVID'S USE OF LUCRETIUS IN *METAMORPHOSES* 1.67–8

haec super inposuit liquidum et gravitate carentem  
aethera nec quicquam terrenae faecis habentem. (Ovid, *Met.* 1.67–8)

Here Ovid treats the demiurge's disposition of weightless *aether* over the other elements.<sup>1</sup> This section of the cosmogony follows one that is devoted to the sphere of *aer* (52–66) where the creator settles the turbulent winds and other threatening meteorological phenomena. Recently Denis Feeney has suggested that Ovid's demiurge 'does not act in a very epic manner' by placing weightless *aether* on top of the winds.<sup>2</sup> He argues: 'The oddness of the control is caught in a moment of comparison with Vergil's universe: Vergil's Jupiter controls the winds by putting on top of them a mass of mountains (*Aen.* 1.61), while Ovid's *mundi fabricator* places above them the *aether*, explicitly "liquid and lacking weight, containing nothing of earthly sediment" (*liquidum et gravitate carentem / aethera nec quicquam terrenae faecis habentem*, 1.67–8)'. Feeney's observation has much to recommend it. To begin with, Ovid's excursus on the cardinal winds (57–66) evokes Vergil's set piece on the cave of Aeolus in *Aeneid* 1.<sup>3</sup> And the demiurge's subsequent placement of *aether* ('*haec super inposuit liquidum et gravitate carentem / aethera*') seems to echo the action of the Vergilian Jupiter ('*hoc metuens molemque et montis insuper altos / inposuit*', *Aen.* 1.61–2). However, Feeney's conclusion that the demiurge's action is 'redolent of anti-epic allegiances' needs some adjustment.<sup>4</sup> For his reading neglects an important verbal and structural allusion to the cosmogony of Lucretius (*D.R.N.* 5.495–501). Accordingly, the conclusion to be drawn from lines 67–8 may be, not that Ovid momentarily reveals his Callimachean colours in an epic context, but that he plays Lucretius off against Vergil and so establishes his own position in the epic tradition of cosmological poetry.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The text followed is the Loeb edition, F. J. Miller (ed., trans.), *Ovid: 'Metamorphoses'*, rev. by G. P. Goold, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA and London, 1977).

<sup>2</sup> D. C. Feeney, *The Gods in Epic* (Oxford, 1991), p. 190.

<sup>3</sup> P. R. Hardie, *Virgil's 'Aeneid': Cosmos and Imperium* (Oxford, 1986), p. 93 n. 23, observes in particular that Ov. *Met.* 1.57–60 is a variation upon Verg. *Aen.* 1.58–9; cf. also U. Schmitzer, *Zeitgeschichte in Ovids Metamorphosen* (Stuttgart, 1990), p. 38. It may not be accidental that Ovid treats the topic of the winds as potential destroyers of the universe in precisely the same book and lines as the *Aeneid*; for another 'book and verse' citation of the *Aeneid* by Ovid (*Met.* 10.475 ~ Verg. *Aen.* 10.475), see R. A. Smith, *Gymnasium* 98 (1990), pp. 458–60.

<sup>4</sup> Feeney, above (n. 2), 189–90, admits that the cosmogony is 'more epic than neoteric' (the basic arguments for the epic affiliations of Ovid's cosmogony are presented by S. Hinds in his review of P. E. Knox, *Ovid's 'Metamorphoses' and the Traditions of Augustan Poetry*, *CP* 84 [1989], pp. 269–70), but adduces the demiurge's action as an example of the subversion of epic norms. Yet his distinction between an 'epic' universe under divine control and a 'neoteric' universe, undesigned and random, does not consider the influence of the Lucretian universe, which is undesigned and random, but scarcely 'neoteric'. Indeed, the distinction between 'epic' and 'neoteric' cosmogonies may be a false one: see J. Farrell, *Virgil's 'Georgics' and the Traditions of Epic* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 276–8 and 291–314, who shows that natural philosophical epic may not be incompatible with a Callimachean program rejecting heroic epic. For the usual association of natural philosophy with the epic genre, cf. D. C. Innes, 'Gigantomachy and Natural Philosophy', *CQ* N. S. 29 (1979), 165–71; Hardie (above n. 3) *passim*.

<sup>5</sup> At issue here is the degree to which Lucretius is an important model for Ovid. P. E. Knox, *Ovid's 'Metamorphoses' and the Traditions of Augustan Poetry* (Cambridge, 1986), 11, dismisses Lucretian echoes as conventional ('how else could a poet of this time approach the topic?');

To begin with, the words 'haec super inposuit ... aethera' constitute a self-reference to Ovid's 'quasi-Lucretian' cosmogony in *Ars Amatoria* 2.469ff. (cf. 'mox caelum impositum terris', 2.469).<sup>6</sup> More significant still are direct allusions to the cosmogony in *De Rerum Natura*, and specifically to the passage in which Lucretius recapitulates the spatial position of the elements according to their relative weight:

Sic igitur terrae concreto corpore pondus  
constitit atque omnis mundi quasi limus in imum  
confluxit gravis et subsedit funditus ut faex;  
inde mare inde aer inde aether ignifer ipse  
corporibus liquidis sunt omnia pura relictā,  
et leviora aliis alia, et liquidissimus aether  
atque levissimus aerias super influit auras. (D.R.N. 5.495–501)

The parallels between the two texts have long been recognized in annotated editions of *De Rerum Natura* but are oddly ignored in available commentaries to *Metamorphoses* Book 1 (e.g. Haupt-Ehwald, Lee, Bömer, Hill). The reader may notice that Ovid's enjambed line 'haec super inposuit liquidum et gravitate carentem / aethera' comes very close to the Lucretian verses treating the same theme: 'et liquidissimus aether / atque levissimus aerias super influit auras' (5.500–501).<sup>7</sup> Similarities of diction (*liquidus aether* and *super inposuit/influit*) are clear. Further, like Lucretius, Ovid uses a dactylic rhythm to reflect the lightness of his subject matter. Still, these contextual links could be coincidental, given the limited possibilities for handling the theme of *aether*. In the remainder of line 68, however, Ovid clarifies the connection to the Lucretius passage quoted above, by varying the theme of ethereal weightlessness: 'nec quicquam terrenae faecis habentem'. The antithetical image of earthy dregs and the heavy spondaic rhythm cannot but recall the famous simile and weighty double monosyllable in the Lucretian description of the sinking weight of earth: 'terrae...pondus...subsedit funditus ut faex' (5.495–7).<sup>8</sup> This reminiscence also constitutes a classic example of *oppositio in imitando*, whereby Ovid employs the theme of *faex* to characterize *aether*, quite the reverse of its original use. Thus, in lines 67–8, Ovid touches upon different points of the same *locus* in *De Rerum Natura*, correspondences that invite the reader to find more than chance parallelism or superficial didactic colour.

One further piece of evidence strongly suggests, nay even proves, that Ovid is concerned to impress upon the reader the aforementioned passage in *De Rerum Natura*. In the preceding section, he introduces *aer* by relating its position and, more importantly, its weight to the other elements: 'inminet his aer, qui, quanto est pondere terrae / pondus aquae levius, tanto est onerosior igni' (52–3).<sup>9</sup> These lines

M. Helzle, 'Ovid's Cosmogony: *Metamorphoses* 1.5–88 and the Traditions of Ancient Poetry', *PLLS* 7 (1993), 129, argues that Ovid merely uses Lucretian terminology 'to give his narrative the appearance of scientific expertise'. But there is no reason to treat Lucretius as a special case among Ovid's sources. For a sensible reappraisal of Lucretius' influence upon Augustan poetry and specifically the Vergilian *deductum carmen* of Silenus (*Ecl.* 6.31–40), an important model for Ovid's cosmogony, see Farrell (above n. 4), 171–2, 300–307; cf. also Hinds (above n. 4), 269–70.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. W. S. M. Nicoll, *CQ* N.S. 30 (1980), 182. On the Lucretian character of the cosmogony in the *Ars*, see A. S. Hollis, 'Ars Amatoria and Remedia Amoris' in J. W. Binns (ed.), *Ovid* (London, 1973), pp. 108–10.

<sup>7</sup> The parallelism is noted by A. Zingerle, *Ovidius und sein Verhältnis zu den Vorgängern und gleichzeitigen römischen Dichtern I–III* (Innsbruck, 1869–70), vol. 2, p. 46; cf. Munro *ad* *Lucr.* 5.500. <sup>8</sup> Ovid's imitation is noted by Wakefield, Merrill, and Bailey *ad* *Lucr.* 5.497.

<sup>9</sup> In line 53, it is worth observing that Goold, like the majority of editors, accepts the correction of Constantius Fanensis, 'pondus aquae levius', instead of the corrupt paradoxos 'pondere aquae levior', whereas Anderson's Teubner edition adheres to the manuscripts and

clearly approximate the way Lucretius arrays the elements by weight, beginning with 'terrae...pondus' (*D.R.N.* 5.495) and continuing: 'inde mare inde aer inde aether ignifer ipse / corporibus liquidis sunt omnia pura relict / et leviora aliis alia' (498–500). Ovid's allusion to this part of the cosmogony in *De Rerum Natura* supports his subsequent use of the same passage to detail the qualities of *aether*. In view of Ovid's sustained reference to Lucretius in lines 52–3 and 67–8, it is reasonable to consider the demiurge's imposition of *aether* over the winds as a structural feature of the Lucretian cosmos that contrasts with the model of Jupiter's imprisonment of the winds in the *Aeneid*. What is more, the juxtaposition or conflation of Vergilian and Lucretian backgrounds in lines 67–8 may be understood as a learned 'double allusion' in which Ovid points out that Vergil's passage on the winds is based upon *De Rerum Natura*.<sup>10</sup>

As is well known, Vergil's description of the cave of Aeolus owes much to Lucretius—in particular to his illustrations of winds pent-up either in mountain-like masses of clouds (*D.R.N.* 6.189–203) or in subterranean caves (6.535–607).<sup>11</sup> The former passage (cf. 6.191–4) is the source for Vergil's crucial phrase 'molemque et montis insuper' (*Aen.* 1.61), whereby he transforms the Lucretian cloud-mountain into an actual mountain. The latter passage (on the cause of earthquakes) exemplifies the Epicurean outlook of Lucretius that Vergil seeks to contradict in his myth of Jupiter's control over the winds. According to Lucretius, the deleterious effects of subterranean winds attest to the perishability of the cosmos and to the absence of divine providence (cf. *D.R.N.* 1.273–9). Vergil, on the other hand, uses the same Lucretian example to demonstrate precisely the opposite principle: the divine maintenance of cosmic order.<sup>12</sup>

Ovid in turn corrects Vergil's 'subversive quotation' of Lucretius, by referring to another passage of *De Rerum Natura*, in which *aether*—the opposite of 'molemque et montis'—is set over the winds, but does not control them.<sup>13</sup> The allusion to Lucretius is too pointed a reversal of the Vergilian model to be accidental. Undoubtedly, Ovid recognizes Vergil's polemical imitation of Lucretius in the description of the cave of the winds and turns it upside down. In this context, Feeney would still be right to underscore the difference between the 'light' control of the demiurge and the 'heavy' control of the Vergilian Jupiter. Yet the point of the contrast is surely not that the demiurge 'does not act in a very epic manner'. Rather, by a paradoxical twist of philosophical eclecticism, Ovid's demiurge takes a page from the book of Lucretius.<sup>14</sup>

omits the superior Renaissance reading from its apparatus. As *CQ*'s anonymous referee pointed out to me, this textual matter was settled by Housman in his preface to Lucan (*M. Annaei Lucani Belli Civilis Libri Decem* [Oxford, 1970], pp. xxvii–xxix); cf. also R. J. Tarrant's review article of Anderson's Teubner, 'Editing Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: Problems and Possibilities', *CP* 77 (1982), 353.

<sup>10</sup> On 'double allusion' in Ovid, see J. C. McKeown, *Ovid: 'Amores', Volume I, Text and Prolegomena* (Liverpool, 1987), pp. 37–45, and S. Hinds, *The Metamorphosis of Persephone* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 56 and 151 n. 16; cf. R. F. Thomas, 'Virgil's *Georgics* and the Art of Reference', *HSCP* 90 (1986), 188, on 'window reference'.

<sup>11</sup> For more detailed analyses of Vergil's complex conflation of literary models in this scene, see Hardie (above n. 3), 90–93, 180–83, and 237–40.

<sup>12</sup> On the polemics of Vergil's imitation of Lucretius here and in general, see Hardie (above n. 3), 180–3 and 233–7.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *D.R.N.* 5.502–4 *nec liquidum corpus turbantibus aeris auris / commiscet: sinit haec violentis omnia verti / turbinibus, sinit incertis turbare procellis*.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. E. J. Kenney, 'Ovid', in E. J. Kenney (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature, Volume II, Latin Literature* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 440, who observes that Ovid's treatment of religion is much nearer in spirit to Lucretius than to Vergil.

A similar closeness to Lucretius can also be detected in the way Ovid treats the winds' potential destructiveness. It has been noted that the lines on the destructive power of the winds ('vix nunc obsistitur illis, / cum sua quisque regant diverso flamina tractu, / quin lanient mundum; tanta est discordia fratrum', 58–60) are a variation upon Vergil's treatment of the same theme ('ni faciat, maria ac terras caelumque profundum / quippe ferant rapidi secum verrantque per auras', *Aen.* 1.58–9). One of the points of variation is that very little prevents the winds from destroying the universe in the *Metamorphoses* ('vix nunc obsistitur illis'), whereas in the *Aeneid* king Aeolus maintains a strong, if not oppressive, rule over them ('hic vasto rex Aeolus antro / luctantis ventos tempestatesque sonoras / imperio premit, *Aen.* 1.52–4).<sup>15</sup> To be sure, the Ovidian demiurge does not allow the winds to take over the sky ('his quoque non passim mundi fabricator habendum / aera permisit', 57–8), but they do 'rule' their own blasts ('regant... flamina', 59). This looser form of control over the winds approximates the Lucretian rationale that the winds would destroy the world if they should not cease to blow by themselves: 'quod nisi respirent venti, vis nulla refrenet / res neque ab exitio possit reprehendere euntis' (*D.R.N.* 6.568–9).

To sum up, Ovid's use of Lucretius in lines 67–8 represents a learned commentary upon and revision of the passage on the winds in *Aeneid* 1, in which Vergil imitates Lucretius to demonstrate the anti-Lucretian principle that the winds, and hence the universe, are under divine control. While the greater part of the Ovidian cosmogony appears to realize the divinely ordained, universal stability that is the goal of Vergilian epic,<sup>16</sup> the passages on *aer*, the winds, and *aether* suggest that beneath the surface of divine providence lies the potentially unstable structure of the Lucretian cosmos described in *De Rerum Natura*. Ovid thus strikes a tension momentarily between teleological and anti-teleological views of the universe, opening the difficult, and perhaps unanswerable, question of the 'philosophy' of the *Metamorphoses*.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ovid also deviates from Vergil by treating the winds as inhabitants of the sky rather than of the Aeolian cave, and so appears to follow and expand upon the Homeric catalogue of cardinal winds at *Od.* 5.295–6 (cf. Verg. *Aen.* 1.85–6, 102); later, however, in the flood episode (1.262), he adopts the Vergilian motif of the cave of the winds.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. P. Hardie, *The Epic Successors of Virgil* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 60–1.

<sup>17</sup> The opposing philosophical perspectives of Vergil and Lucretius are, of course, illustrated by the *Metamorphoses'* cosmological frame: the teleological creation episode in Book 1 and the anti-teleological speech of Pythagoras in Book 15.

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