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Antonomasia, Anonymity, and Atoms: Naming Effects in Lucretius' *De rerum natura*

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Abstract:

This essay argues that selected proper names within Lucretius' *De rerum natura*, rather than pointing deictically or referring with clear historical specificity, instead render Lucretius' poem vaguer and more anonymous. To make this case, the essay first briefly surveys Roman naming practices, ultimately focusing upon a specific kind of naming, deictic naming. Deictic naming points (or attempts to point) to a given entity and often conjures up a sense of the reality of that entity. The essay then studies the role of deictic naming within Epicureanism and the relationship of such naming to instances of naming within *De rerum natura*. Through analysis of the nominal disappearance of Memmius, the near nominal absence of Epicurus, and the deployment of *Venus* (and other names) within the conclusion to Lucretius' fourth book, the essay demonstrates how selected personal names in *De rerum natura*, in contrast to the ideal of deictic naming, become more general, more anonymous, whether by the substitution of other terms (Memmius, Epicurus), by referential wandering (*Venus*), or by still other means.

The conclusion briefly studies the political significance of this phenomenon, suggesting that there is a certain popular quality to the tendency towards nominal indefiniteness traced in the essay.

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Poet, patting more nonsense foamed
From the sea, conceive for the courts
Of these academies, the diviner health
Disclosed in common forms. Set up
The rugged black, the image. Design
The touch. Fix quiet. Take the place
Of parents, lewdest of ancestors.
We are conceived in your conceits.

– Wallace Stevens, “Prelude to Objects”

nomen est, quod uni cuique personae datur, quo suo quaeque proprio et certo vocabulo appellatur. – Cicero *De inventione* 1.24 [34]

What is in a name? Or what effects arise from acts of naming? According to one line of thinking, naming may encompass any act of verbal designation. Certain theories thus attempt to understand all language use as little more than a series of naming acts.¹ At its broadest, then, naming may be nearly synonymous with speaking, or any language act. Whatever the validity of such theories, the present essay has a narrower focus: the subject under study is not all names or the act of naming in general but the proper name and more specifically, the effect of certain central personal names in Lucretius' *De rerum natura*. Of course, separating proper names from other sorts of words and names is a tricky business, a point exemplified by an anecdote about the Hellenistic philosopher Diodorus Cronus. The story records that Diodorus named his slave “However” (Ἀλλὰ μὴν), an appellation for which context alone can make clear whether it is proper or not.² Yet even if it is in some instances elusive, the notion of a proper name remains crucial to any sense of individual,

¹ Such theories bear mentioning within the present discussion, as it has been argued that Epicurus himself authored one. Within extant scholarly discussions, Glidden 1983 most strongly takes this line. This sort of theory views language as a behavior and tries to account for that behavior (rather than, say, trying to define how each language user arrives at meaning).

² For this anecdote, cf. e.g. Ammonius *In Ar. De int.* 38.17-20. (This Ammonius passage and other related materials are collected at Diodorus fr. 6-7 Giannantoni [SSR, vol. 1].)

personal identity.³ If names are – to paraphrase Cicero in the second epigraph above – the proper, fixed terms by which each person is called, their study is, on some level, occasion for reflection about the notion of personhood and its linguistic representation. While the present discussion hardly claims to be a thorough treatment of personhood and identity in Lucretius, it nonetheless suggests that a careful analysis of certain passages in *De rerum natura* tells us something of value about the interplay between personal names and identity within the poem as a whole.⁴

The selection of naming as an object of study is, in some respects, quite arbitrary. But, as a reading of both the conclusion to the fourth book and several other passages scattered throughout *De rerum natura* will show, the results of such study can be related thematically to central tropes of Lucretius' poem. Scholars of the *De rerum natura* have noted numerous instances of the intermingling, at least on the level of figuration, of humans and atoms.⁵ Atoms take on human characteristics, while humans, at various turns in the *De rerum natura*, assemble and dissipate like atomic compounds. The present essay suggests that Lucretius' use of proper names – the fixed, proper markers of personal identity – subtly continues this intermingling of human and atomic attributes. Specifically, the argument contends that Lucretius' use of certain proper names tends towards anonymity, creating a kind of quality-less faceless-ness reminiscent, at least in some respects, of atoms. Anonymity

³ It is perhaps worth noting in this context that “identity” does not have a proper Latin ancestor (*identitas*) prior to the fourth century CE. Cf. Souter 1949 s.v. *identitas*. One should hardly take this fact to mean, though, that there was no sense of personhood in classical Latin.

⁴ Although not for his use of proper names, Lucretius is often located at the beginning of historical narratives of personal identity theory. Cf. e.g. Alberti 1990.

⁵ Cabisius 1985 is a seminal essay for tracing this phenomenon. Davies 1931-32 in some ways anticipates her claims by exploring some ways in which Lucretius depicts the natural world in political terms. Kennedy 2002: 78-85 and Fowler 1989: 146-47 both discuss the ways in which agency is (at least on a linguistic level) attributed to atoms. The textual evidence for this phenomenon is extensive. For atoms depicted in human terms, cf. DRN 2.116-22, 2.569-76 (atoms at war); 2.549-51 (atoms forming an assembly [*conciliare*]). For humans depicted in atomic terms, cf. DRN 5.958-65, 6.1278-81. The comments at DRN 1.915-20, which try to cancel the implication that atoms manifest in miniature properties we see in larger (esp. human) compounds, are remarkable, as they imply, if only in dismissal, a line of thinking that views atoms like miniature humans.

here combines at least two senses: first, central personal names in Lucretius are often absent or suppressed, thus rendering their bearers properly nameless; second, when they do appear, these names often create absence and distance rather than immediacy and presence, thus rendering their bearers less concretely known or knowable.

We shall turn shortly to the study of Lucretian personal names, a study located between tropes of Latin poetry and tenets of Epicurean philosophy. First, however, following a famous *dictum* of Lucretius himself – that nothing comes from nothing⁶ – we need to gain a sense of the cultural background (that is, the culture of Roman naming) against which his use developed. A brief survey of Roman naming practices, while inevitably partial and selective, will prepare our study of Lucretius' own practice.

I. Roman Names, Identity, and Deictic Naming

On any account, it is hard to deny that personal, proper names were of great significance in Roman society. While a full examination of Roman naming would take us far from Lucretius and the poetic topics central to this essay, it is nonetheless easy to note that names – and questions of how, when, and in what fashion they were used – are intimately bound up with questions of identity.⁷ Without moving beyond terrain familiar to almost any student of ancient Roman culture, we can easily see issues of identity creeping into the ways in which Romans figured their relationship to names, specifically their elaborate system of forenames (*praenomina*), family names (*nomina gentilicia*), surnames (*cognomina*), as well as the

⁶ Cf. DRN 1.150: *nullam rem e nilo gigni divinitus umquam*. (“Nothing ever comes divinely from nothing.”)

⁷ For a recent overview of Roman naming practices within a broad historical timeframe, cf. Salway 1994 (with the comments in the following notes). The literature on Roman names and naming practices is vast and diverse. Recent treatments (mostly from a linguistic or historical standpoint) include (in addition to Salway 1994) Gallivan 1992, Nicolet 1977, Salomies 1987, and Dickey 2002: 41-76. For a larger (if still incomplete) list of relevant works, cf. Dickey 2002: 46n9.

occasional “added names” or “nicknames” (*agnomina*).⁸ Quintilian, for one, remarks (7.3.27): “...those things are proper to the free man – what no one has unless he is free – forename, family name, surname, tribe...” (...*propria liberi, quod nemo habet nisi liber, praenomen nomen cognomen tribum...*), thus linking the possession of a full set of names with free status.⁹ Juvenal, speaking of the parasite Trebius, comments similarly (5.125-27): *duceris planta velut ictus ab Hercule Cacus/ et ponere foris, si quid temptaveris umquam/ hiscere tamquam habeas tria nomina...* (“you’ll be dragged by your heel like Cacus, when he was stricken by Hercules, and you’ll be placed outside, if you ever try to open your mouth to speak anything as if you had three names...”). In her recent commentary, Susanna Braund glosses these final words – *tamquam habeas tria nomina* (here translated by “as if you had three names”) – as follows: “i.e. as if you were free, ironically, since Trebius is... A free man had a *praenomen*, *nomen*, and *cognomen*..., whereas a slave had only one name.”¹⁰ In other words, for Juvenal the connection between the mere possession of names and social status was so strong that even the off-hand mention of *tria nomina* conjured up one’s place in the social hierarchy.¹¹

⁸ The comments here allude briefly to the system of *tria nomina* (“three names”), which (according to recent scholarly opinion) was only in effect for a relatively brief period during late republican and early imperial times. Cf. Salway 1994, which aims to place the practice of *tria nomina* within a broader timeframe (and therefore show its relatively limited importance, despite its prominent position in traditional historical accounts). (Compare, too, the remarks of Kajanto 1977: 64-67 on the chronological development of the *cognomen*, the last of the “three names” to take hold in official usage.) For Lucretius, as he lived during the late Republic, the system of *tria nomina* remains of importance.

⁹ Following the suggestion of Salway 1994 (cf. the discussion in the previous note), I treat in the present context a range of evidence (mainly from the late Republican and early imperial periods) that, while not strictly contemporaneous with Lucretius, nonetheless characterizes naming practices in effect during the composition of his poem.

¹⁰ Braund 1996: 297.

¹¹ As Florence Dupont remarks (1992: 6), “[i]f you were a citizen, the city acknowledged it by giving you a title – your name.” It is a certain irony of the Roman system of nomenclature that the *tria nomina*, at least in their earlier instances, belonged to aristocrats as well as to former slaves and new citizens (who often took two of their names, the *praenomen* and the *nomen gentilicium* from the aristocrat granting citizenship). Cf. the discussion at Dickey 2002: 47-8.

Names were not merely markers of status. As Quintilian notes, many traditional Roman names record (or at least at some point recorded) physical attributes or the circumstances surrounding birth:

Scrutabitur ille praeceptor acer atque subtilis origines nominum: quae ex habitu corporis **'Rufos'** **'Longos'**que fecerunt...et ex casu nascentium (hic **Agrippa** et **Opiter** et **Cordus** et **Postumus** erunt) et ex iis quae post natos eveniunt, unde **'Vopiscus'**. (Quintilian 1.4.25)

The keen and exact teacher will study the sources of names: which ones they coined from appearance (*habitu corporis*), e.g. **'Rufus'** and **'Longus'**...which from the circumstance of those being born (here will belong **Agrippa** and **Opiter** and **Cordus** and **Postumus**) and which from events after birth, whence **'Vopiscus'**.

Rufus = “red, tawny; red-haired”

Longus = “tall”

Agrippa = “born in breech-position (feet-first)”

Opiter = “born with a deceased father but a living grandfather”

Cordus = “born late, out-of-season”

Postumus = “born after the father’s death”

Vopiscus = “a twin surviving (in womb) after the death of the other twin”

Although Quintilian provides here no simple equation between name and identity – at times names designate physical features, at times events – in the passage there remains a certain implicit faith that name and identity are, or readily can be, linked. In fact, the larger context surrounding the passage shows that Quintilian took the recognition of such linkage as a fairly basic component of Roman linguistic education. Perceiving the *origines nominum*, “the origins of names,” was viewed, at least in Quintilian’s presentation, as a somewhat more advanced extension of learning one’s nominal declensions, a lesson that all boys should take in with their early education (*in primis*, Quintilian says).¹²

Given Quintilian’s easy (if not uncomplicated) association of name and identity, it is hardly surprising that negotiation between the two was a frequent poetic topic as well. The fourth-century poet Ausonius provides but one example (in plaintive elegiacs) that the name

¹² Quintilian 1.4.22-25.

could, at least in some contexts, not only commemorate the circumstances of birth, but it could also tell the entire life path, even forecasting death. The *nomen*, that is, could be an *omen*.¹³

Tu quoque maturos, puer immature, dolores
 irrumpis, maesti luctus acerbus avi,
Pastor, care nepos, spes cuius certa fuit res,
 Hesperii patris tertia progenies.
**Nomen, quod casus dederat, quia fistula primum
 pastorale melos concinuit genito,
 sero intellectum vitae brevis argumentum,
 spiritus afflatis quod fugit e calamis.**
 Occidis emissae percussus pondere testae,
 abiecit tecto quam manus artificis.
 Non fuit artificis manus haec: manus illa cruenti
 certa fuit fati, suppositura reum.
 Heu, quae vota mihi, quae rumpis gaudia, Pastor!
 Illa meum petiit tegula missa caput.
 Dignior o nostrae gemeres qui fata senectae
 Et querere meas maestus ad exsequias. (Ausonius *Parentalia* 11)

You, too, young boy, interrupt the sufferings
 of old age, harsh pain for your sad grandfather,
Pastor, dear grandson, whose promise was sure,
 third offspring of a Hesperian father.
**Your name, which chance had given, because a pan-pipe
 first played a shepherd's hymn at your birth,
 too late was understood as proof of a short life,
 since breath flees reeds when played.**
 You perish, stricken by the weight of a hurled tile,
 which the hand of a craftsman cast from the roof.
 This hand was not the craftsman's: that hand was the
 sure hand of bloody fate, underlying the culprit.
 Alas, what wishes, what joys you destroy for me, Pastor!
 I wish that roof-tile, thrown, had sought my head.
 Would that you, who are more worthy, bemoaned the end
 of my old age and protested sadly at my funeral!

¹³ Similar in some respects is Horace *S.* 1.7, a poem that turns around the significance of two personal names, *Rex* and *Brutus*. Some of the force of that poem arises from the historical association of *Bruti* with getting rid of kings (*reges*). Persius, one of the characters of the poem, suggests in his closing remarks that this historical association should be an omen for Brutus in the poem: Brutus, that is, should kill Rex. (1.7.33-35: *Persius exclamat 'per magnos, Brute, deos te/ oro, qui reges consueris tollere, cur non/ hunc Regem iugulas? operum hoc, mihi crede, tuorum est.'*) On the *Rex*/*rex* pun, cf. Henderson 1998: 89-90.

Ausonius thus further enlarges our sense of how proper names may be tied to identity. As we have seen, names may signify status through their mere presence and number. Now we also see that the details of names – that is, their ability to at once fulfill and transcend a simple deictic function, their ability to pick out a specific person and, at the same time, to describe that person – matter for personal identity.¹⁴

This briefly-drawn sketch of Roman naming practices makes the claim, frequently reiterated to this point, of a perceived connection between names and identity, however defined, relatively uncontroversial, even if the details of that connection remain far from simple.¹⁵ Against this backdrop, I would like to develop a naming effect that will help locate more specifically Lucretius' own engagement with proper names. This effect, which I call deictic naming, takes advantage of the ways in which names can pick out and point to a specific individual, whether real or imaginary, and seemingly conjure up a sense of the reality of that individual.¹⁶ To gain a fuller sense of this notion, let us turn to Duncan Kennedy, who in the course of his study of the discourse of Roman love elegy, describes one function of the proper noun, a description that – without naming it as such – captures much of what is meant by deictic naming:

¹⁴ Intriguing for the modern who considers the complexities of Roman names are the remarks of Plutarch in the first chapter of his *Marius*, where he puzzles over what he once calls “the unevenness of custom” (ἡ τῆς συνηθείας ἀνωμαλία) within Roman nomenclature. Trying to identify the “chief name” (κύριον ὄνομα) amongst the three (or more) names in the Roman system seems to have been a source of frustration for Plutarch (no less than his *auctor* Poseidonios). This frustration should perhaps encourage caution in modern attempts to explain Roman naming, even ones that do not (like Plutarch) attribute undue importance to one name.

¹⁵ This sketch could, of course, be expanded in several directions. Much of the evidence used here to develop a connection between names and identity could be nuanced through comparison with the rich selection of material at Corbeill 1996: 57-98, which is assembled to examine the role of names, especially *cognomina*, in political humor of the late Roman Republic but also examines the significance of Roman names, or presumptions about the significance of Roman names, in a quite broad fashion. In particular, the sections “Names As Indicators of Character,” “Living Your Name,” and “Reading Names” show – in uncovering the presuppositions that allowed certain “nominal” humor – that there was a general, commonly supposed (if often incorrectly) correspondence between name and identity, or name and “character,” as Corbeill often has it.

¹⁶ Deictic naming is, in a sense, a version of the common Roman presumption that names are, in various ways, tied to identity, but with deictic naming, names identify through their action, through their act of reference, rather than by description, as is often the case in traditional practice.

A so-called 'proper' noun seems to demand a single point or object of reference in a way that a 'common' noun does not. The derivation of the grammatical term from *proprius* ('one's own') seems to guarantee that the noun is an (or the) exclusive property of the person to whom it refers.

The concept of the proper noun is also indicative of the way in which the body is so often represented as a closure on the processes of signification, taken to be undeniably a 'thing-in-itself', an embodiment, indeed, of the notion that identity is at some level immanent. The use of a proper noun, a name, especially invites the kind of reading of a text that looks through it to a reality behind it.¹⁷

While all uses of proper nouns may not conform to Kennedy's description, he nonetheless effectively characterizes a particular function of names that has often captured the attention of students of Roman culture. That names can point to and pick out a specific individual has encouraged many, whether through prosopography or mere speculation, to seek out the "history" behind poetic (and other) texts. Indeed, with Lucretius himself, readers from Jerome to Cyril Bailey have been taken with constructing the poet's biography, a project that – at least on one level – may be seen as an attempt to uncover the entity, the "thing in itself," indicated by the name "Lucretius" (or more specifically and fully, the names "Titus Lucretius" or "Titus Lucretius Carus").¹⁸

Part of Kennedy's point in presenting the apparent ability of proper nouns to point to and pick out specific, embodied objects is to challenge a way of reading Roman love elegy – a way of reading hardly foreign to Lucretian studies – that depends upon an easy identification of the names (e.g. Cynthia [in Propertius], Corinna [in Ovid], Lycoris [in Gallus], et al.) of that poetry with some historical reality. Lucretius' contemporary Catullus is one author who frequently has enjoyed such reading. The Catullan corpus, often noted for the feeling of intimacy it creates,¹⁹ is replete with proper names, often the names of Catullus' contemporaries, and above all with the name of Lesbia, his fictional or not-so-fictional

¹⁷ Kennedy 1993: 83.

¹⁸ On Lucretian biography, cf. Holford-Strevens 2002.

¹⁹ Fitzgerald 1995: 212-15 discusses Catullus' history of conjuring up a sense of intimacy amongst his readers.

beloved. Lesbia, once identified (as she so often has been) with the “historical” Clodia, is the name around which entire biographies of Catullus have been constructed, and we may go so far as to say that the use of Lesbia’s name in an intimate and confessional way has inspired, at least in part, the whole industry of biographical criticism surrounding Catullus.

The plaints of Catullus *c.* 72 provide one example of this poetic intimacy, this intimate usage of proper names:

Dicebas quondam **solum te** nosse **Catullum**,
Lesbia, nec prae me velle tenere Iovem.
Dilexi tum te non tantum ut vulgus amicam,
sed pater ut gnatos diligit et generos.
Nunc te cognovi: quare etsi impensius uror,
multo mi tamen es vilior et levior.
Qui potis est, inquis? Quod amantem iniuria talis
cogit amare magis, sed bene velle minus. (Catullus *c.* 72)

Once you used to say that **you** knew **Catullus alone**,
Lesbia, and you did not wish to hold Jupiter before me.
Then I loved you not only as the crowd loves its girl,
but as a father loves his children and sons-in-law.
Now I know you: that’s why – even if I burn more vehemently –
nevertheless, for me, you are much cheaper and more trifling.
How is this possible, you say? Because such insult compels
the lover to love more, but less amicably.

The intimate tone of this lament, an effect perhaps not entirely due to personal address, nonetheless draws much of its strength from the identification of the deictic “you,” the *te* of the poem’s first line, with the proper name of Lesbia. The power of such identification no doubt goaded Roland Austin (in his commentary on Cicero’s *Pro Caelio*) into the following matter-of-fact assessment:

That Lesbia’s real name was Clodia is stated by Apuleius (*Apol.* 10). Most scholars have agreed that this Clodia was Metellus’ wife, the second sister of P. Clodius.... One of the main points in the argument...is the identification of M.

Caelius Rufus as a rival of Catullus, with the result that Cicero's speech becomes valid evidence for the character and personality of Lesbia.²⁰

Following this chain of identification, Lesbia points to Clodia (evidence of Apuleius²¹), Clodia is identified with the Clodia of Cicero's *Pro Caelio* (the same proper name), and we begin to have the makings of a steamy biography, all of which is buttressed ("one of the main points in the argument") by the appearance of a "Caelius" in two poems of Catullus, *cc.* 58 and 100.²²

While it may seem somewhat easier for present-day scholars to resist the sins of (overly) biographical criticism (and while it may seem that – in dredging up such concerns – the present discussion persists in beating a scholarly dead horse), Kennedy, after providing the above characterization of proper names, also cautions against a position (one he attributes to Paul Veyne²³) that too easily presumes a boundary between naming and history,

²⁰ Austin (ed.) 1960: 149-50. For a recent exploration of Austin's practices, concerns, and influences in the composition of the commentary, cf. Henderson 2006: 9-36.

²¹ The Apuleius passage to which Austin refers runs as follows:

hic illud etiam reprehendi animadvertisti, quod, cum aliis nominibus pueri vocentur, ego eos Charinum et Critian appellarim. eadem igitur opera accusent C. Catullum, **quod Lesbiam pro Clodia nominarit**, et Tigidam similiter, quod quae Metella erat Perillam scripserit, et Propertium, qui Cynthia dicat, Hostiam dissimulet, et Tibullum, quod ei sit Plania in animo, Delia in versu. (Apuleius *Apol.* 10)

Here (*sc.* in my poems) you have noticed that this, too, was criticized, namely, that – although the boys are called by other names – I repeatedly named them Charinus and Critias. Let them accuse Catullus, then, for these same deeds, **since he used the name Lesbia for Clodia**; and Tigidam likewise, since he wrote Perilla for her, who was really Metella; and Propertius, since he says Cynthia, concealing Hostia; and Tibullus, since he has Plania in his mind, but Delia in his verse.

It should be noted, of course, that this passage, although it has been used traditionally to support "historical" readings of the sort offered by Austin, appears in Apuleius as part of a defense that emphasizes the speaker's (that is, Apuleius' or "Apuleius'"s) own modesty in withholding the "real" names of his addressees in his erotic poetry. Pointing to a "truer" historical reality not represented in his poetry is thus advantageous for a speaker – one on trial for practicing magic but also for living immodestly – who is trying to minimize the perception of his own behavior as outlandish.

²² Fordyce (ed.) 1961: xiv-xviii (a much maligned, expurgated text of Catullus – cf. Henderson 2006: 70-110) gives a fuller assessment of the evidence available for the identification of Lesbia with Clodia.

²³ The work Kennedy discusses is Veyne 1988. Specifically, Kennedy charges that Veyne "collapse[s] the historical into the aesthetic, and abandon[s] contingency for a metaphysical master term." (Kennedy 1993: 99) That is, Kennedy criticizes the fact that Veyne ultimately reads history as something "invented" rather than reading art as something that happens (within the course of history).

however defined.²⁴ That is, although modern scholars may not wish to follow Austin in his all-too-easy movement from Lesbia to (some) Clodia to the Clodia of the *Pro Caelio*, in simply and finally shutting off any interpretive link between Catullus and his historical circumstance (as mediated through Cicero) they would not only eliminate the possibility of any truly historical discourse, but they would also reify history (as that which is not behind Catullus' poetic discourse) just as much as Austin's equation of Lesbia with Clodia.

To put this point more concretely, we may note that Catullus' extensive use of proper names is not far from the usage of supposedly more historical genres:

Sed quoniam emersisse iam e vadis et scopulos praetervecta videtur esse oratio mea, perfacilis mihi reliquus cursus ostenditur. Duo sunt enim crimina una in muliere summorum facinorum, auri quod sumptum a **Clodia** dicitur, et veneni quod **eiusdem Clodiae** necandae causa parasse **Caelium** criminantur. Aurum sumpsit, ut dicitis, quod **L. Luccei** servis daret, per quos **Alexandrinus Dio** qui tum apud Lucceium habitabat necaretur. Magnum crimen vel in legatis insidiandis vel in servis ad hospitem domini necandum sollicitandis, plenum sceleris consilium, plenum audaciae! (Cicero *Pro Caelio* 21 [51])

Now, since it seems that my speech has already emerged from the shallows and passed by the rocks, the rest of my course appears ahead, quite easy; for on the head of a single woman there are two charges of the greatest misdeeds: for gold (which it is reported was taken by **Clodia**) and for poison (which they accuse **Caelius** of having prepared for the purpose of killing this same **Clodia**). She took the gold, as you say, to give it to the slaves of **Lucius Lucceius**, through whom **Alexandrinus Dio** (who was then living at the home of Lucceius) was to be killed. A serious charge, whether for setting legates to lie in ambush or for inciting slaves to slay the guest of their master, a plan full of treachery, full of recklessness!

Without claiming that the usage of proper names here is entirely the same as in the Catullan example (*c.* 72) cited above, we may nonetheless note that both Catullus and Cicero – in part through their detailed usage of proper names, names that seem to point to reality, whether or not they actually do – allow us to imagine a historical narrative. In this way, the study of deictic naming, a study of the perceived effects of the text rather than its truth, privileges

²⁴ Cf. Kennedy 1993: 96-100.

neither the historical nor the aesthetic, instead leaving both in play. That is, the pointing effect under study is neither one that is “really there” and truly historical nor merely a meaningless, playful aesthetic effect but rather a perceived function of language, however and wherever we see that language functioning.

II. Epicurean Naming and Lucretian Anonymity

Having identified this naming effect, I would now like to use it, along with other relevant evidence, to help us read Lucretius, particularly (although not exclusively) the conclusion to his fourth book and the so-called diatribe against love found there. What I hope to show, as indicated at the outset, is that the use of proper names in Lucretius, at least in the passages I shall read, tends towards anonymity. Lucretius' text, that is, often resists the use of personal names, whether in address or referentially, and when names do appear, they often fail to create any (deictic) sense of historical reference, a fact that is striking both, as we have seen, in light of Roman naming practices (that suggest a connection between name and identity) and, as we shall see, in light of Epicurean thinking about names. Furthermore, as we shall discuss in conclusion, the tendency of certain portions of Lucretius' text to present anonymous or vaguely named figures has point: it resonates not only with features of atomism (and, more specifically, the representation of atoms in Lucretius) but also with certain political aspects of the Roman literary tradition as exemplified by Cato's *Origines*.

While the conclusion of Lucretius' fourth book will serve as the centerpiece of the present discussion, to gain a fuller sense of Lucretius' practice, it will be useful to surround that centerpiece with other evidence concerning his use of proper names. We shall thus include both theoretical discussion of names within Epicureanism as well as discussion of

Memmius, Epicurus, and the role that their names play within Lucretius' poem. It is important to note that this essay will not present a comprehensive treatment of every proper name in the *De rerum natura*. The focus instead is upon the effect of select passages (and therefore upon the effect of select instances of naming) as well as upon locating these passages within an Epicurean framework. The argument does contend, however, that the passages of *De rerum natura* under consideration create a consistent effect, an effect of distance and anonymity. Furthermore, the consistency of this effect suggests that a fuller reading of other proper names throughout the poem would, if not re-iterate the details of the readings presented here, nonetheless unearth many similar concerns.²⁵

(i) Epicureanism and Deictic Naming

To begin, then, let us consider a comment attributed to Epicurus, a comment that has a surprising amount to say about Epicurean thinking on proper names:

Ἐπίκου[ρ]ος τὰ ὀνόματ' ἀφ' ἑσ[τ]ιν σαφέστερα εἶναι ἢ τῶν ὀρων, καὶ μέντοι καὶ γελοῖον εἶναι, εἴ τις ἀντὶ τοῦ εἰπεῖν “χαῖρε Σώκρατες” λέγοι “χαῖρε ζῶπιον λογικὸν θνητόν.” (Anon. *In Plat. Theaet.* 22.39-47 = Long-Sedley 19F)

Epicurus says that names are clearer than definitions, and moreover, that it is ridiculous if anyone should say – instead of “Hail Socrates” – “Hail rational, mortal animal.”

These words, preserved by the anonymous commentator on Plato's *Theaetetus*, contrast “names” with definitions, commenting that “names” are clearer than definitions. The fragmentary state of the papyrus makes it difficult to judge precisely why and in what context

²⁵ As the analysis focuses on naming *effects* rather than names *per se*, the failure to consider every proper name in the text should in no way vitiate the interpretation given here, although consideration of further passages no doubt would enrich and complicate the present discussion. To provide only a rapid gesture towards a larger reading in line with some of the present concerns, there are a few lists – the mention of Homer and Ennius (*DRN* 1.102-26), the catalogue of pre-Socratic philosophers (*DRN* 1.635-920), the list of “heroic deaths” (*DRN* 3.1024-52) – of proper names that figure importantly in the poem. Each of these lists, however, focuses upon a cast of characters that is long dead (in fact, that is the point of *DRN* 3.1024-52) and the names appear more for their renown than to conjure up any physical or historical reality. It is thus, at least in a limited sense, striking that a materialist poet, whose focus often falls upon describing the fundamentals of the phenomenal world, nonetheless resists taking advantage of deictic naming, more than occasionally frustrating any attempt to give a sense of historical reference to his text.

Epicurus made this remark, if indeed he made it at all;²⁶ but the ridiculous anecdote of greeting Socrates with “Hail rational, mortal animal” suggests that one of the advantages the name holds over the definition is a referential one. That is, names can more easily pick out and point to referents, while definitions, at least on one interpretation, merely or primarily relate words to other words, making clear that Socrates is neither irrational nor immortal but not (the perhaps more important point) that he is Socrates.²⁷ In other words, names here perform a function we identified previously as deictic naming, whereas definitions – even if they do not fail to refer – seemingly struggle to refer uniquely.²⁸

On this interpretation of the fragment, proper names are barely, if at all, distinguishable from other names. Names, whether proper or common, are judged not for their truth or propriety (i.e. their “proper-ness”) but for their ability to refer successfully. In a comment on the above passage, A. A. Long and David Sedley point to this difficulty, focusing on the translation of *δνόματα* (a term that may be rendered variously as “words,” “names,” or “proper names”):

δνόματα One would expect this to be ‘words’, rather than ‘(proper) names’. If so, the example, ‘Socrates’, is unfortunate.²⁹

Long and Sedley here suggest that *δνόματα* may be interpreted readily as either words or proper names, themselves preferring to understand *δνόματα* as words. Yet, if the line of

²⁶ Whether or not Epicurus ever uttered the exact words preserved in this fragment is of little concern for the present discussion. As further evidence in this essay suggests, the general tenor of the comment made here fits well with Lucretius’ own attitude toward names and naming, for which reason it matters little whether this fragment is of Epicurus himself or merely Epicurean.

²⁷ In this instance, “rational, mortal animal” could perhaps refer – going beyond relating mere words – but it might refer to anyone within earshot, anyone in possession of *logos*, rather than to Socrates alone.

²⁸ To be clear, unlike our earlier Catullan example, this single reference to Socrates does not necessarily conjure up a sense of his entire history; but it does – through effective, if limited, conjuring – succeed in providing a legitimate “historical” context, the greeting. The use of language in the fragment invites us to presuppose a Socrates with a minimum of human attributes, although it is entirely possible to say “Hail Socrates” in any number of contexts.

²⁹ LS: 2.102 (19F, comment *ad loc.*).

interpretation indicated above is correct, if *ὀνόματα* are clearer than definitions because they engage in deictic naming, then words and proper names are perhaps indistinguishable not because Epicurus has given us a bad example but because both words and proper names, on this view, aim at the same function – attaining pure reference.

The sense provided by this fragment – that deictic naming holds a central place in Epicurean linguistic thinking – is bolstered by a quick glance at the origins of language (as described in Lucretius' fifth book), where language seems designed to take the place of deictic pointing. There the *nomina rerum*, the “names for things,” are expressly linked to the pointing of the child, and to the presence of the objects to which the child points:

At varios linguae sonitus natura subegit
mittere, et utilitas expressit nomina rerum,
non alia longe ratione atque ipsa videtur
protrahere ad gestum pueros infantia linguae,
cum facit ut **digito** quae sint **praesentia** **monstrent**. (DRN 5.1028-32)

And nature subdued the varied sounds of the tongue
and sent them out; utility coined names for things.
For a reason not far different, the very speechlessness of the tongue
seems to draw children forward to gesture,
when it brings about that **they show** what is **present** with their **finger**.

What is described here is hardly full-blown language, but the juxtaposition of the pointing child and the coining of “names” (*nomina*) is striking. Though this evidence could scarcely be used to prove that Lucretius held a view of language as purely deictic, it nonetheless invites the reader to assume that deixis is one of the primary functions assumed by newly developed language.

Together with the earlier statement of the *Theaetetus* commentator, Lucretius' “primal scene” of language constructs a version, perhaps idealized, of language as functioning deictically in Epicurean thinking. What I want to note now is how often scenarios that resemble (at least in a generic fashion) this primal scene of deictic naming lurk in Lucretius'

poem. If deictic naming depends upon a recreation of presence, a recreation of an originary moment of physical pointing in the full presence of a referent, it is striking how often this problem of presence recurs in various guises throughout *De rerum natura*. To choose but one example, *simulacra*, the thin films that constantly bombard us and provide us with visual knowledge of the world, are famously insubstantial, present but absent. One of Lucretius' most arresting images is that of the frustrated lover, left unsatisfied by *simulacra*:

Ut bibere in somnis sitiens quom quaerit et umor
 non datur, ardorem qui membris stringere possit,
 sed laticum simulacra petit frustra laborat
 in medioque sitit torrenti flumine potans,
 sic in amore Venus simulacris ludit amantis,
 nec satiare queunt spectando corpora coram
 nec manibus quicquam teneris abradere membris
 possunt errantes incerti corpore toto. (*DRN* 4.1097-1104)

Like a thirsty man when he seeks to drink in his dreams and water is not given, water that could extinguish the burning in his limbs, but he seeks *simulacra* of water and toils in vain, thirsting as he drinks in the middle of a raging river, so in love Venus teases lovers with *simulacra*, and they are unable to satisfy their bodies with face-to-face regard, and they are unable to scrape away anything from tender limbs with their hands, wandering uncertain over the entire body.

This passage, as Philip Hardie notes, “teaches a lesson about the vanity of desire,” and in so doing, it reminds us of the importance of the presence-absence dichotomy we already have identified in our discussion of deictic naming: *simulacra*, though accessed through the eyes or fingertips, are simply not present enough ever to satisfy desire.³⁰ This scene, of course, represents a noticeable departure from the pointing child, but *simulacra* seem, in many ways, to operate like language (at least on one, rather deictic understanding), standing for and

³⁰ Hardie 2002: 151.

conjuring up full presence at the same time as they frustrate attempts to enjoy that presence.³¹

Simulacra, moreover, stand in a strange relation to language, as it seems that general concepts (*prolepseis*), to the extent that Epicureanism tolerated them, were imagistic and were therefore built upon repeated perception of *simulacra*, built, that is, upon repeated viewing of a ghostly (absent) presence.³² However we understand this relationship, though, Lucretius – in his explorations of sense perception within the fourth book – manifests a fascination with the ways in which sense perception functions and breaks down. In the case of language and voice specifically, Lucretius offers the following explanation of the ways in which voice can splinter and variously communicate, disintegrate, and deceive:

Praeterea verbum saepe unum perciet auris
 omnibus in populo, missum praeconis ab ore.
 in multas igitur voces vox una repente
 diffugit, in privas quoniam se dividit auris,
obsignans formam verbis clarumque sonorem.
 at quae pars vocum non auris incidit ipsas,
 praeterlata perit frustra diffusa per auras;
 pars solidis adlisa locis, reiecta sonorem
 reddit et interdum frustratur imagine verbi. (DRN 4.563-71)

Moreover, often a single word, sent forth from the mouth of a herald,
 will excite the ears of everyone in a crowd.
 A single voice thus splinters straightaway
 into many voices, since it divides itself for individual ears,
stamping its form and clear sound onto words.
 But that part of the voices which does not fall upon the ears themselves,
 perishes, carried past and scattered in vain through the air;
 part, having crashed against solid ground, is thrown back
 and returns its sound and sometimes it deceives with the image of a word.

The mechanical operation of language described here, one of voice stamping and disseminating its physical form for mass consumption, reads like a dispatch of official letters

³¹ Indeed, although *simulacra* lie at the heart of all visual perception, Lucretius seems obsessed with *simulacra* that frustrate and mislead. Cf. DRN 4.26-44 (ghosts), 4.129-42 (*simulacra* with no originals), 4.436-42 (images distorted in water), 4.962-1036 (dreams). Cf. Gordon 2002: 91-94.

³² Cf. Fowler 1986: 299 on the imagistic nature of *prolepseis*, the much-debated Epicurean “concept.”

rather than a typical description of voice falling upon a crowd.³³ Lucretius' particular use of *obsignans*, the present participle that here characterizes the activity of *vox* ("voice"), receives its own entry in the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* as "to stamp, impress, imprint," though all other classical instances of the term are there united under the heading "to affix a seal to." If we surmise that Lucretius' use of this term is in fact not so different from other instances, we may suggest that the passage raises not only the issue of the mechanical reproduction of voice but also of the authenticity of that voice. A function of seals, though hardly the only one, is to authenticate and mark letters as genuine, to act, that is, as deictic signifiers that point (or seek to point) unambiguously to their particular, authentic origin, recreating and verifying their originary moment of stamping. Seals thus, in a particular way, return us to the same problematic (the problematic of the absent originary moment) as deictic naming more generally.

These various episodes in Lucretius' poem, taken together with the other, more theoretical moments (both in Lucretius' text and in the Epicurean tradition more generally), help create a sense of the importance of deictic naming in the Epicurean imagination. While one need not understand all Epicurean thinking on language as consistently voicing the centrality of deictic naming, the passages considered above show that – both implicitly and explicitly – it contributed, and contributed importantly, to Epicurean linguistic discussion.

(ii) Memmius, Epicurus, and Anonymous Lovers

Given the prominence of the pair presence-absence for our theoretical discussion of Epicurean naming, we perhaps may suspect that now, in turning to a closer examination of the actual use of proper names in *De rerum natura*, this same pair will retain an important position. This section considers in some detail Lucretius' mentions and invocations of his

³³ Cf. Holmes 2005: 541-43 for an insightful discussion of the voice (*vox*) and seal imagery in this passage.

addressee, Memmius, and of his master, Epicurus, as well as the use of proper names within the famous diatribe against love that concludes Lucretius' fourth book. In each of these instances, the pair presence-absence recurs, specifically in trying to understand the presence or, more often, the absence of *proper* names.³⁴ This investigation is thus not, like the preceding section, a direct investigation of deictic naming, nor does the pair presence-absence obviously carry the same sense of invoking an originary scene of deictic pointing. Nonetheless, bearing in mind the role that deictic naming carries in evidence examined to this point, we shall have occasion to read Lucretius' text against an ideal of deictic naming, and Lucretius' text, moreover, often will invite such reading.

(a) Memmius

Turning, then, to Lucretius' addressee, Gaius Memmius, we must remark his empirical absence from the poem. His name occurs only ten times (in over seven thousand hexameter lines of poetry), not appearing at all in half the books of the work. Even at the outset of the poem, where one might expect a greater mention of a patron (or a would-be patron, as Memmius is sometimes thought to be), Memmius is relatively absent.³⁵ He does not appear for the first twenty-five lines of the poem, and when he does appear, his appearance is rather indirect:

Quae quoniam rerum naturam sola gubernas,
 nec sine te quicquam dias in luminis oras
 exoritur neque fit laetum neque amabile quicquam,
 te sociam studeo scribendis versibus esse
 quos ego de rerum natura pangere conor
Memmiadae nostro, quem tu, dea, tempore in omni
 omnibus ornatum voluisti excellere rebus. (DRN 1.22-27)

³⁴ I emphasize the word "proper" here, as the absence at stake is sometimes a question of the utter absence of a name, other times of the absence of a proper name.

³⁵ Compare, for example, the practice of Horace. The *Satires* (S. 1.1.1), *Odes* (C. 1.1.1), *Epodes* (I. 1.4), and *Epistles* (E. 1.1.3) all begin with invocations of Maecenas. (Maecenas' name, as these line numbers indicate, occurs within the first four lines of each of these opening poems.)

You [*sic* Venus] – since you alone direct the nature of things – and without you
 neither does anything arise upon the divine shores of light,
 nor does anything fertile or capable of love come to be,
 you I seek as my ally in writing verse,
 which I try to expound on the nature of things
for our member of the clan of Memmius, whom you, goddess,
 have wished at all times to excel and be adorned with all things.

Here Memmius enters, named not specifically but generically by *gens* (clan, family).³⁶ The tone of this reference is hardly what one would expect for the introduction of the primary addressee of the poem: this passage, together with the rest of the first fifty lines of the poem, forms an elaborate hymn to Venus, a hymn that makes Memmius seem a secondary concern at best. It is true that Venus – in the form of Venus Genetrix (here invoked) – was affiliated with the *gens Memmia* and even appeared on its coinage, but this fact at best only tangentially conjures up the addressee of the poem, who, resting in an oblique case, seems almost a tacked-on afterthought.³⁷

Whatever one thinks of this particular mention of Memmius, the rest of the poem provides little support for the notion that he or his name is of central concern. While we may, by inference, read Memmius into countless vague second-person imperatives or an occasional mention of *tibi*, it is hard to make much of occasional remarks such as: *quae tibi posterius, Memmi, faciemus aperta*. (DRN 2.182: “We shall make these things clear **to you** later, **Memmius**.”) Neither particularly deictic nor entirely frustrating of deixis,³⁸ this act of

³⁶ In describing *Memmiades noster* – the term here used to refer to Memmius – as a generic reference, we should note that it is difficult to refer to Memmius uniquely by name within the confines of the hexameter. Any vocative address to *C. Memmi*, for example, would be unmetrical, at least if the *praenomen* is included in the count of syllables. (Aside from this single referential mention of *Memmiades noster*, the remaining instances of Memmius’ name occur in the vocative form of his *nomen gentilicium*, *Memmi* [DRN 1.411, 1.1052, 2.143, 2.182, 5.8, 5.93, 5.164, 5.867, 5.1282] or as a genitive, *Memmi* [DRN 1.42]. According to Dickey (2002: 60), the *cognomen* is most common in poetic, single-name address, although Lucretius’ contemporary, Catullus, also prefers the *nomen gentilicium*. Cf. Fordyce (ed.) 1961: 342.)

³⁷ On the connection between the *gens Memmia* and Venus Genetrix, cf. Wissowa 1912: 292.

³⁸ On the face of it, a reference like this one could be deictic, yet Lucretius does little to develop such a connection. Memmius is invoked multiple times (particularly in the first and fifth books), but the invocations

naming does little to challenge the thesis, asserted by G. B. Townend in his article "The Fading of Memmius," that Memmius effectively disappears and morphs into a general reader.³⁹ But –whether or not we follow Townend⁴⁰ – Memmius, even when he is nominally present (that is, conjured up by direct address) is a rather thin, absent ghost of an addressee.⁴¹

Yet, if there is ample empirical evidence for Memmius' absence from Lucretius' text, the interpretation of his absence remains less than empirically obvious. One effect, though, of Memmius' nominal (and general) absence from the poem is that *De rerum natura* draws relatively little attention to its own (textual – that is, written and read – but also potentially oral and aural) performance.⁴² While much has been written about the ways in which the poet figures his relationship to the reader – Philip Mitsis, for example, focuses on Lucretius' portrayal (at *DRN* 1.926-50; 4.1-25) of himself as analogous to a doctor duping children into drinking their wormwood and thus develops an argument about Lucretius' not entirely good-natured "didactic coercion"⁴³ – such interpretations tend to focus on Lucretius' explicit pronouncements about his poem to the neglect of the actual experience of reading *De rerum*

are always bare invocations, which do nothing to provide a sense of the reality of the addressee. One gets the sense that invocations of Memmius do point, but they point at nothing.

³⁹ To be more precise, Townend (1978: 283) presents himself as offering a refinement of a thesis first offered by Ivo Bruns (in Bruns 1884). Bruns "argued that the change to the general reader was already taking place well before the end" of the first book, whereas Townend views the general reader as only fully present (and Memmius, therefore, effectively absent) in books three, four, and six. (Townend also, for similar reasons, believes – along with Bailey and others – that the first, second, and fifth books were written before the third, fourth, and sixth.) Cf. the opinions expressed at Johnson 2000: 6-11.

⁴⁰ Resistance to Townend's thesis would center, at least in part, around critique of his notion of the general reader: can we – in an age of feminist, post-colonial, and other genres of reader – still support the idea that there is a "general" reader?

⁴¹ Memmius' status as a ghostly addressee no doubt helps account for the wild diversity in interpretations of his role. He is sometimes considered a (desired) patron, at other times a negative example, at still other times (as we have just noted) a general or exemplary reader.

⁴² One could imagine a more extended reading of Memmius (following the lead of Culler 1981: 135-54 [esp. 152] on apostrophe) as little more than a reminder of the "now" of the poem.

⁴³ Mitsis 1993. Cf. also Keen 1985, which presents a less insidious Lucretius. Fowler 2000, in the context of discussing his notion of the "didactic plot," considers the different metaphors (esp. path metaphors) that govern Lucretius' depiction of the student-teacher relationship.

natura. A full analysis of that experience would demand a more extensive treatment than the present discussion can provide;⁴⁴ but Lucretius' general reluctance to point (deictically, that is) to his addressee forms part of a larger project of rendering the space in which his text operates nebulous and indistinct, a project of anonymity that we shall continue to examine through the window of further proper names.

(b) Epicurus

Turning our attention from Lucretius' addressee to his philosophical master, we observe that Memmius is hardly alone in his nominal absence from Lucretius' text. Epicurus, the great master who haunts nearly every page of the poem, occurs by name only once.⁴⁵ Of course, his nominal absence differs from that of Memmius. At least in terms of his influence, Epicurus is almost omnipresent, and his name seems to hold, if anything, the status of a *nomen sacrum* ("holy name").⁴⁶ Although Epicureanism's relationship with divinity (and anything we could call sacred) is complex, it is well-known that Lucretius, at least on occasion, elevates his master to the status of a god, proclaiming most famously (at *DRN* 5.8) *deus ille fuit, deus* ("that man was a god, a god"). And it seems that Lucretius, at least within the Epicurean sect, may not have been alone: in his *Tusculan Disputations*, for example, Cicero remarks that he is "...often accustomed to wonder at the arrogance of some philosophers [*sc.* Epicureans], who admire the study of nature and exultingly pay thanks to its founder and chief, honoring him as a god" (1.21 [48]: ...*soleo saepe mirari nonnullorum insolentiam*

⁴⁴ Fowler 1995, with its discussion of the segmentation of Lucretius' text and the manner in which the poet writes and groups arguments, perhaps makes the greatest strides in studying the phenomenology of reading Lucretius.

⁴⁵ Cf. the comment at Bailey (ed.) 1947: 611: "[t]here is no doubt a feeling of taboo about mentioning the name of this *deus*..."

⁴⁶ Such an observation, although not entirely familiar in Epicureanism, is hardly foreign to ancient philosophical discourse more generally. The name of Plato, for example, often takes on a divine, or quasi-divine, status in the history of Platonism. Cf. Lucretius' contemporary Cicero, who speaks of *deus ille noster Plato* ("our Plato, that god") at *ad Att.* 16.3 (a letter that dates to a time (mid-54 BCE) near the traditional date of composition assigned to the *De rerum natura*) and mentions Plato as *quasi quidam deus philosophorum* ("a certain god, so to speak, among philosophers") at *ND* 2.12.32.

philosophorum, qui naturae cognitionem admirantur enisque inventori et principi gratias exultantes agunt eumque venerantur ut deum...).⁴⁷ While it may be too strong to accuse Lucretius of engaging in a version of negative theology,⁴⁸ it is striking that the only instance in which Epicurus' name appears is an instance that emphasizes the great master's mortality (as opposed, that is, to his divinity): *ipse Epicurus obit decurso lumine vitae...* (DRN 3.1042: "Epicurus himself perished, his life run out...").⁴⁹

However we parse this one nominal intrusion into the poem, if we look more closely at Lucretius' direct references to Epicurus, we note that it is Epicurus' Greekness – rather than any other attribute of Lucretius' great master – that repeatedly surfaces in *De rerum natura*. At DRN 1.62-79, for example, where Epicurus first appears, championed as one who "traveled far beyond the flaming walls of the world" (1.72-3: *...extra/processit longe flammantia moenia mundi...*), he appears not by name but as *Graius homo* ("a Greek man"). Or again, when Lucretius praises his master's accomplishments at the beginning of his third book, he appears as a "you," "a Greek":

O tenebris tantis tam clarum extollere lumen
 qui primus potuisti inlustrans commoda vitae,
 te sequor, o **Graiae gentis decus**... (DRN 3.1-3)

⁴⁷ Although it can only serve as a distant suggestion of Lucretius' own attitude towards Epicurus (and his use of the master's name), it is attested in the time of Epicurus that the Garden conducted itself as a religious society with its own festivals and rules of life. Cf. Plutarch *Adv. Col.* 18 (1117D), where Epicurus seems to refer to the Garden as a "holy body" (ἱερὸν σῶμα), and the evidence in Clay 1986. A brief account may be found at Bendlin 2002: 9, with further secondary references in his n1; a fuller account is available in Koch 2005 (reviewed by Gaulin 2007).

⁴⁸ To be clear, I use "negative theology" to refer to the linguistic practices commonly associated with speech about an ineffable deity. Cf. Sells 1994 for a study of some of the linguistic practices of negative theology; his first chapter (14-33) on Plotinus is particularly relevant for students of ancient philosophy.

⁴⁹ Lucretius' practice in using or (more commonly) in not using Epicurus' name is difficult to locate against traditional Roman religious practice. It is familiar in Roman (but not only Roman) religious contexts to allow for the possibility of having mistaken or omitted a divinity's name; cf. Macrobius *Sat.* 3.9.10 (a *devotio*): *...sive vos quo alio nomine fas est nominare...* ("...or by whatever other name it is right to call you..."). Additional evidence may be found at Appel 1909: 75-79 and Wissowa 1912: 37n4. The suppression of a name – which seems to be occurring in the DRN – is in some ways more reminiscent of the Roman defense against *evocatio*, a ritual in which a tutelary deity was "called out" of a besieged city by name. The name of this deity was kept secret to protect the city. Cf. Macrobius *Sat.* 3.8.9; Basanoff 1947.

O, who from such great darkness first was able
to raise up such shining light, illuminating the benefits of life,
you I follow, **ornament of the Greek race...**

Finally, in the sixth book, Lucretius makes a similar move, emphasizing the (Greek) location of Epicurus' philosophizing:⁵⁰

Primae frugiparos fetus mortalibus aegris
dididerunt quondam praeclaro nomine **Athenae**
et recreaverunt vitam legesque rogarunt,
et primae dederunt solacia dulcia vitae,
cum genere virum tali cum corde repertum,
omnia veridico qui quondam ex ore profundit;
cuius et extincti propter divina reperta
divulgata vetus iam ad caelum gloria fertur. (*DRN* 6.1-8)

Athens of famous name first brought forth
fruit-bearing crops for sick mortals in the past,
and regenerated life and brought laws,
and first gave sweet solace for life,
when it bore a man possessed of such wisdom,
who once poured forth everything from his truth-speaking mouth;
because of his divine discoveries, even with him dead,
his glory, long widespread, now is raised to the heavens.

Lucretius' relationship to Greekness (including the Greek language), which must in some way figure in the repeated depiction of Epicurus as a Greek we see in these passages, has been much discussed in recent years.⁵¹ While full treatment of this topic would exceed the bounds of the present discussion, it is worth noting briefly the opinions of those who have studied the question in greater detail. David Sedley, for example, remarks:

Lucretius considers Greek culture artistically and philosophically superior, and yet at the same time deeply alien. He floods his poem with Greek words, but scrupulously avoids them in the course of doctrinal exposition....[i]t is precisely by drawing attention to the culture divide between the Greek and the Roman,

⁵⁰ While the three passages cited here could hardly represent the total effect of Epicureanism on the poem, they do nonetheless represent (together with the already mentioned opening to the fifth book, where Epicurus is proclaimed a god) all the most significant direct references to the founder of the philosophy.

⁵¹ Two notable treatments that focus primarily upon Lucretius' relationship to the Greek language are Sedley 1998: 35-61 and Farrell 2001: 28-51. Their bibliographies collectively cover most extant literature on the question, particularly Lucretius' treatment and translation of Greek technical terminology.

while making Epicurean philosophy nevertheless thoroughly at home in his own native language, that he proves to us its true universality.⁵²

Joseph Farrell, writing only a few years later than Sedley, is not as willing to grant the superiority of Greek culture in Lucretius' eyes, commenting that "...there is no reason to assume that he [*sc.* Lucretius] sees the poem he has labored to write as second best."

Instead, "...Epicurus, forced to contend with the luxuriance of the Greek tongue, could not find a form adequate to his message; this task was left to his greatest disciple, who was also one of the greatest masters of Latin speech."⁵³

Wherever one falls on the issue of Lucretius' perception of Greek cultural superiority, what is perhaps most striking (and at least implicitly agreed upon by both Sedley and Farrell) is the mere perception of and emphasis upon cultural difference, the sense – as Sedley phrases it – that Greek culture is “deeply alien.”⁵⁴ This point may appear, in some ways, rather obvious, but there is an Epicurean (and Roman) sentiment behind the emphasis. If we return to the passage cited above from the sixth book of Lucretius' poem, we see a certain displacement, at least on the level of the name, of Epicurus by Athens, the place that “bore” (*genuere*) him. The articulation of the period, with its initial hyperbaton and repeated *primae* (“first”), creates a constant focus upon the grammatical subject, Athens, rendering Epicurus, though certainly not an afterthought, a product of the city in the sequential movement of the sentence.⁵⁵ This displacement, an effect that emphasizes both Epicurus'

⁵² Sedley 1998: 58-59.

⁵³ Farrell 2001: 51.

⁵⁴ To some extent, the difference in opinion between Sedley and Farrell may be traced to the projects of their respective works: Sedley treats the Greek philosophical tradition received and transformed by Lucretius, while Farrell writes on various myths and presumptions about the Latin language, defending, in Lucretius' case, the well-known pronouncement of the “poverty” of the Latin tongue (*DRN* 1.139, 1.832, 3.260) as something other than a linguistic inferiority complex.

⁵⁵ In many ways, this passage is reminiscent of *DRN* 1.714-33, where Lucretius praises not only Empedocles but also – and in fact much more extensively – his home island of Sicily for having “carried” (*gesvit*) him. On this passage, cf. Farrell 2001: 43-45, who notes (44) how “Lucretius' respect for Empedocles...is expressed...through *geography* and language...” (Emphasis added.)

Greekness and Athens as the place of his philosophizing, makes a certain sense within an Epicurean framework. If we recall not only the Epicurean origins of language presented in the *Letter to Herodotus* (75-76)⁵⁶ but also Lucretius' comment on *res gestae* ("deeds; history") articulated in the first book of his poem – that "you could deservedly call them (*sc. res gestae*) *eventa* ["accidents"] of the body and of the place in which each occurred" (DRN 1.481-82: *merito possis eventa vocare/ corporis atque loci, res in quo quaeque gerantur*), then the focus upon Athens (and upon Epicurus' Greekness) seems almost expected. Epicurus' accomplishments are *eventa*, accidents, of Athens, the place where his philosophizing transpired.⁵⁷

If this analysis is correct, then Epicurus' nominal displacement is mirrored by, if not a material displacement, a material contextualizing that calls into question a simple deictic understanding of the proper noun. If, materially speaking, Epicurus is not a purely autonomous agent but a product of Greece, a product of Athens, then calling him *Grains homo* rather than *Epicurus* – even as it fails to identify Epicurus uniquely – nonetheless captures something of the material situation suggested by Epicurean doctrine. Nothing comes from nothing, not even the father of Epicurean doctrine himself, and the problem of how names accurately represent this fact is one that troubles an easy notion of individual, "proper" reference. Names may perhaps pick out individuals, but this may be a misrepresentation when those individuals are understood as not entirely individual.

⁵⁶ "...names (τὰ ὀνόματα) did not arise originally by coinage (θέσει), but the very natures of men experienced particular impressions and grasped particular images; and they expelled in a particular way air sent by each of the impressions and images, so that there would be difference among the races *across their locales* (ἢ παρὰ τοὺς τόπους τῶν ἐθνῶν διαφορά)." (Epicurus *Letter to Herodotus* 76)

⁵⁷ Moreover, as Lucretius hints with the words *et extincti* ("even with him dead"), there seems to be some concern how, materially speaking, we understand the existence of Epicurus' teaching and renown now, in the absence of his physical presence. Athens, of course, remains; and we may perhaps say that Epicurus' fame and philosophy are accidents of the place.

To put this point more formally, the trope through which Epicurus' name is displaced in *De rerum natura* is known as antonomasia, "which," as Quintilian says, "puts something in place of a proper name" (*IO* 8.6.29: ...*quae aliquid pro nomine ponit...*).⁵⁸ The rhetorical handbook addressed to Herennius explains the trope somewhat more fully, using the Latin term *pronominatio* in place of antonomasia:

Pronominatio est, quae sicuti cognomine quodam extraneo demonstrat id, quod suo nomine non potest appellari; ut si quis, cum loquatur de Gracchis: 'at non **Africani nepotes,**' inquit, 'istiusmodi fuerunt.' item si quis de adversario cum dicat: 'videte nunc,' inquit, 'iudices, quemadmodum me **Plagioxiphus iste** tractarit.' hoc pacto non inornate poterimus, et in laudando et in laedando, in corpore aut animo aut extraneis rebus dicere sic, uti cognomen quod pro certo nomine collocemus. (*Ad Herennium* 4.42)

Pronominatio (Gk. ἀντονομασία) is a trope that – just as with a certain extra *cognomen* – indicates that which cannot be designated by its own proper name. For example, someone, when he speaks concerning the Gracchi: 'the **grandsons of Africanus** were not of this sort,' he will say. In a similar fashion, someone, when he speaks concerning his adversary: 'see now, judges,' he says, 'how **this Plagioxiphus** has regarded me.'⁵⁹ In this manner, we shall be able, both in praising and in blaming, to speak not without ornament, on the body or the soul or external matters in the same fashion as a *cognomen* that we confer instead of a certain (proper) name.

Taken together, these two definitions point up not only the way in which antonomasia acts substitutively – calling Epicurus *Gravius homo* instead of employing his name, for example – but also how these substitutions replicate the function of proper nouns. The author of the *Ad Herennium* in particular emphasizes, re-iterating the point twice, that *pronominatio* functions in the same fashion as giving an additional *cognomen*, an observation that serves to reduce the distance between common and proper nouns. We have already seen numerous instances within the Roman tradition – names such as Rufus, Agrippa, or Cordus – where the distance

⁵⁸ On antonomasia, cf. Lausberg 1990: 300-02 (§§ 580-81). For an insightful, theoretical discussion of this trope (primarily focusing on the work of Leibniz), cf. Fenves 2001: 13-79; 215-19.

⁵⁹ "Plagioxiphus" here appears to be a fictitious name meaning "Bruiser." Cf. Lewis-Short s.v.

between a proper noun and an adjective seems slight, defined, at least in a significant way, by the editorial practice of capitalization.

This point, that antonomasia both replaces proper nouns and verges on creating new proper nouns, is not only reminiscent of the fragment of Epicurus preserved by the *Theaetetus*-commentator (where common and proper nouns are rendered indistinguishable) but also provides the nominal analogue of the material interaction that at once produces a unique Epicurus and yet undermines his status as a singular, autonomous agent. (In some ways, this predicament is perfectly captured by the term *pronomination*, which always names in place of [*pro-*] a proper name but never is genuinely proper itself. This process, if projected backwards, creates an infinite regress, where we must always presume a prior proper name and nonetheless wonder how any name ever became “proper” in the first place.) Indeed, to specify and develop this parallel between the trope antonomasia and a materialist conception of causation, I would like to speak of a certain atomology, by which I mean not what is often meant by this term – that as Lucretius himself points out there is a similarity between the *elementa*, or atoms, that structure the world and the *elementa*, or letters, that structure his poem⁶⁰ – but instead that words, specifically the proper names that identify (and seemingly point to) individuals, interact like – and manifest properties of – atoms.

⁶⁰ To be clear: it has long been recognized that a strong current of etymological wordplay runs through much early and classical Latin poetry. Studies such as Ahl 1985 and, in a somewhat more cautious vein, O’Hara 1996 have investigated both the ancient theoretical underpinnings of such wordplay and have catalogued numerous instances of it, especially in Virgil (O’Hara) and Ovid (Ahl). Somewhat similar, though more interested in semantics than phonetic wordplay, is Paschalis 1997 (on Virgil’s *Aeneid*). In Lucretian studies, a related vein of criticism has grown up under the rubric of atomology, a term first coined by Friedländer 1941. Atomology, as traditionally understood, points to an analogy, or perhaps something more than an analogy, between letters and atoms first remarked by Lucretius himself, most notably at DRN 1.907:

iamne vides igitur, paulo quod diximus ante,
permagni referre eadem primordia saepe
cum quibus et quali positura contineantur
et quos inter se dent motus accipiantque,
atque eadem paulo inter se mutata creare
ignes et lignum? quo pacto verba quoque ipsa

(c) Atoms and Anonymous Lovers

The point already has been made that there is extensive overlap in the manner in which atoms and human agents are characterized.⁶¹ Atoms congregate and show emotions like humans, while humans band together and disperse like atoms. The present examination extends this realization by pointing to the similarities between the proper names that characterize human agents and the depiction of atoms in Lucretius' text. These similarities, the intermingling between atoms and names, perhaps push us along a path towards a materialism of language: as the material origins of language in Epicurean thinking condition difference from place to place, the material analogy between name and atom allows us, as we shall see, to think the anonymity and disappearance of names that we have already seen in our study of Lucretius' use of the names of Epicurus and Memmius within *De rerum natura*.⁶²

To be more specific, I would like to read the conclusion to Lucretius' fourth book, the so-called diatribe against love, as a window upon one set of Lucretian naming practices. However strange it may sound to read a discourse on love as writing about names, the final sections of Lucretius' fourth book not only permit such a reading but invite it, at once extensively employing names and explicitly contemplating – in ways we shall take care to

inter se paulo mutatis sunt elementis,
cum ligna atque ignes distincta voce notemus. (DRN 1.907-14)

Do you now see – what we said a bit before –
that it often matters quite a bit with which things
and with which arrangement the same elements are
held together and which movements they create and incur
among themselves and that the same elements, a bit rearranged
among themselves, make fire (*ignes*) and wood (*lignum*)?
In which way, too, are the words themselves when their
letters have been changed a bit among themselves,
although we note wood (*ligna*) and fire (*ignes*) with distinct words.

There has long been debate about the scope and nature of the comparison suggested by these lines. Relevant works (a much abbreviated list) include: Snyder 1980, Dionigi 1988, Armstrong 1995; and (against Snyder, Dionigi, and atomology more generally) West 1982 and 1991.

⁶¹ Cf. n5 (*supra*).

⁶² Cf. n56 (*supra*).

examine – naming practices. One of the most explicit (and historically most puzzling) statements on names runs as follows:

Haec Venus est nobis; hinc autemst nomen Amoris;
 hinc illaec primum Veneris dulcedinis in cor
 stillavit gutta, et successit frigida cura.
 nam si abest quod ames, praesto simulacra tamen sunt
 illius, et nomen dulce obversatur ad auris. (DRN 4.1058-62)

This is “Venus” for us; from here arises the name “Amor”;
 from here first that drop of the sweetness of “Venus” fell
 into the heart, and icy care came, too;
 for if what you love is absent, nonetheless visions (*simulacra*) of it
 are present, and its sweet name flitters about our ears.

The latter part of this statement articulates a now familiar sentiment about *simulacra* that links them with names, or at least with names that function in a deictic sense: the *simulacrum* and the “sweet name” (*nomen dulce*), themselves quite present, both point to an absent lover. Intriguing as these lines are, the initial lines of the statement, more puzzling and ambiguous, have attracted greater scholarly attention. The words *Haec...hinc...hinc* (“This...from here...from here”) form a sequence that, appropriately enough for the questions we have been investigating, relies upon deixis: each of these terms points, although it is unclear precisely where. Moreover, *nomen Amoris* – or *nomen amoris*, as a different editor may have it – is a puzzling phrase, permitting of several translations. The above rendering “the name ‘Amor’” presents only one interpretation; others include “the name of [the god] Amor” and “the word ‘amor’.”

To better grasp where these lines point as well as their possible meanings, it is necessary to read backwards and consider the passage that immediately precedes the present lines. The above passage comes immediately on the heels of one of Lucretius’ more famous

descriptions, that of the wounded lover, an image that juxtaposes love and war, seemingly drawing upon (among other things) the traditions of Greek erotic epigram.⁶³

...omnes plerumque cadunt in vulnus, et illam
 emicat in partem sanguis unde icimur ictu,
 et si comminus est, hostem ruber occupat umor.
 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;
 namque voluptatem praesagit muta cupido. (DRN 4.1049-57)

In general, all fall into a wound, and blood spurts
 out into that direction whence we are struck with a blow,
 and if the combat is hand-to-hand, red fluid covers the enemy.
 So, then, whoever accepts a blow from the weapons of Venus,
 whether a boy strikes him with his feminine limbs
 or a woman, tossing lust from her entire body,
 whence he is smitten, to that spot he extends and strives to go
 and to toss his gathered fluid from body to body;
 for dumb lust presages pleasure.

Reading this entire passage together with the lines cited above has allowed Paul Friedländer to produce the following reading:

Interpreters usually refer *haec* [*sc.* at 1058] to *voluptatem*, *hinc* to *cupido* of the preceding verse.⁶⁴ But *haec...hinc...hinc...* refer to the whole preceding process and *nomen Amoris* is not Cupido but just “the name Amor.” By *hinc est nomen Amoris* the poet points to the twice-repeated *umor* (1051, 1056), as a few lines later he will again put side by side *umorem* – *amore* (1065-6).⁶⁵

This reading is, in some ways, underwritten by Friedländer’s focus upon reading Lucretius aloud and paying attention to the ways in which the words and sounds in the poem resonate materially. Such a focus explains, in part, the attention to the nearly homophonic pair *amor-umor*. Yet a second issue raised, perhaps more prominently, by Friedländer’s interpretation,

⁶³ For discussion of some parallels and antecedents to Lucretius’ presentation here – particularly parallels to the “wounded lover” – cf. Kenney 1970: 380-92 and Brown 1987: 191.

⁶⁴ These “interpreters” include both of the major multi-volume commentaries on Lucretius from the first half of the twentieth century. Cf. Ernout-Robin 1926: 2.284; Bailey 1947: 416-17.

⁶⁵ Friedländer 1941: 18. Cf. Brown 1987: 201-2, who follows Friedländer.

an issue that will be of importance for the present discussion, is the question of scope of reference. This question is first posed in terms of the deictic sequence *haec...hinc...hinc*: does this sequence refer merely to the line (1057) immediately preceding the declaration that “This is Venus for us” (*Haec Venus est nobis*)?⁶⁶ Or does this sequence refer to “the whole preceding process,” as Friedländer insists? Any answer to these questions depends, at least in part, upon whether we view each of the terms (*Haec, hinc, hinc*) as having a specific or a more generic scope.

A somewhat different variation on this same theme plays out with regard to the phrase *nomen Amoris*, which could, on an alternative interpretation, be written *nomen amoris*. The distinction between these two possibilities, although it may seem an editorial choice of trifling significance, again concerns the perceived scope of reference: does *umor* (“fluid”) – in the statement of the text – underlie the name of a specific divinity, Amor (“Love”), or a general, common noun (“love”)?⁶⁷ Indeed, this question is itself a variation on a question we considered with regard to the functioning of the trope antonomasia, which shuttles between proper nouns and other appellatives. “Antonomasia,” as Heinrich Lausberg reminds us, “is synecdoche for personal names: to the *genus pro specie* (‘genus for species’) of synecdoche corresponds a *species pro individuo* (‘species for individual’) in antonomasia.”⁶⁸ This action, described by Lausberg, of placing the ‘species for <the> individual’ is, in a way, the entire problem of the *Amor/ amor* distinction: *Amor* is an *individual* divinity that embodies and stands for a whole *species* of experiences. And while this problem, the problem of *species pro individuo*,

⁶⁶ On this interpretation, as Ernout-Robin suggest (1926: 2.284), *haec* refers to *voluptas* (“pleasure”); *hinc* means *ex cupidine* (“from *cupido* [‘lust’]”).

⁶⁷ Cf. Feeney 1998: 87-92, esp. 88, where he discusses how “any imposing abstract word can indeed look awfully like a divinity in the right context.”

⁶⁸ Lausberg 1990: 301: “Die Antonomasie ist eine Synekdoche für die Eigennamen: dem *genus pro specie* der Synekdoche entspricht in der Antonomasie eine *species pro individuo*.”

may, at first glance, seem rather insignificant, it seems to recur continually and even to dominate Lucretius' diatribe against love.

A question analogous to that posed by the *Amor/amor* distinction is asked repeatedly throughout the concluding sections of the fourth book by the appearance of (the name) *Venus*. In the final two hundred fifty lines of the book, the name of Venus appears twenty-three times, demanding various creative translations from those who attempt to render the poem in English and thus constantly calling into question how one proper name can cover this range (that is, this species) of phenomena.⁶⁹ To take but one major, published translation, the Loeb edition of W. H. D. Rouse (revised by Martin Ferguson Smith⁷⁰) offers the following renderings for *Venus*, as it is employed in its various forms at turns throughout the concluding lines of the fourth book: "Venus" (repeatedly⁷¹), "Venuses" (a plural, 1185), "wedlock" (1235), "sexual" (1248), "penis" (1200, 1270), "intercourse" (1276). Another recent edition – that of Robert D. Brown – translates *Venus* at every turn with "Venus,"⁷² a practice that preserves some of the flavor of the original Latin but also produces innovative turns of phrase like "the Venus of the mounting males" (1200: *Venerem salientum*).⁷³ The review of these translations aims not so much to criticize one or the other effort at bringing Lucretius' poem into English, but to attempt to understand the phenomenon of designating (or trying to designate) a wide range of phenomena with a single proper name. The

⁶⁹ The density of usage of *Venus* is, of course, not surprising, given the subject matter treated. Nonetheless, it is striking that *Venus* occurs only thirty four (34) times total (in DRN), including the hymn introducing the first book.

⁷⁰ I refer here to the 1992 edition of the Rouse-Smith work, which – while not claiming to be a third edition – is a revision of the 1982 edition (that already called itself a "revised second edition").

⁷¹ DRN 4.1052, 1058, 1059, 1071, 1073, 1084, 1101, 1107, 1113, 1128, 1148, 1157, 1172, 1204 (1205), 1215, 1223, 1278.

⁷² Making various accommodations for number and case usage, of course: for example, he renders the Latin plural *Veneres* (at 1185) with a plural "Venuses."

⁷³ In Latin, Lucretius – at least judging from the surviving record – seems to pioneer this euphemistic usage of *Venus* (apparently meaning "penis"), although it is picked up by several later authors, e.g. Martial 1.46.2, 3.75.6; Juvenal 11.167. Cf. Adams 1982: 57 and Brown 1987: 315 (*ad loc.*).

referential scope of *Venus* changes constantly throughout the final lines of Lucretius' fourth book, a fact that not only – as many scholars have realized – problematizes the relationship of these lines to the benevolent *Venus* invoked as an “ally” (1.24: *socia*) in the first book of the poem⁷⁴ but also calls into question the function of *Venus* as a proper noun.

There is, in Latin, no “common” version of the noun *Venus* – a hypothetical *venus* – that corresponds to *amor* in our earlier pair. *Venus* is thus left to play the role of both common and proper nouns, and – perhaps as a partial consequence – is passed around metonymically throughout the final lines of the poem, not entirely unlike the *umor* (“fluid”) that, within a Lucretian framework, motivates sexual desire.⁷⁵ While in the scene that concludes Lucretius' fourth book, *Venus* begins as a recognizable agent who acts with weapons (1052: *telis*) – and indeed continues as an agent who offers pleasure (1085), teases lovers (1101), even enjoys propitiation (1157) – the term becomes increasingly more material, referring first to women (1185: *Veneres*) who conceal the “behind-the-scenes activities of their lives” (1186: *postscaenia vitae*) and then (apparently) to the male genitalia (1200, 1270). It would no doubt be a mistake to read *Venus* simply and straightforwardly as a term that, over the course of a few hundred lines, descends from describing a quasi-divine⁷⁶ agent to referring to the materiality of bodily organs.⁷⁷ For one, Lucretius interrupts

⁷⁴ On the issue of reconciling the Venus of the initial proem with that of the end of the fourth book, cf. Brown 1987: 91-100.

⁷⁵ Cf. DRN 4.1063-65: *...debet.../.../et iacere umorem conlectum in corpora quaeque*: “...it’s fitting to toss the gathered fluid into any body whatsoever...”

⁷⁶ The divinity of Venus is difficult in an Epicurean context. A famous Epicurean *dictum* proclaims οὐδὲ θεόπεμπτον εἶναι τὸν ἔρωτα (Diogenes Laertius 10.118: “that love is not divinely sent”), but this statement is tempered, at least in part, by Lucretius' own invocation of Venus to begin his poem.

⁷⁷ In his materialist depiction of Venus (emphasizing bodily and sexual aspects), Lucretius may have drawn inspiration from his forebear Ennius (cf. DRN 1.116-26), who depicts Venus as the founder of the art of prostitution in his *Euhemerus*. Ennius *Var.* 142-45 Vahlen [*Euhemerus*]: *Venus prima artem meretriciam instituit auctorque mulieribus in Cypro fuit, uti vulgo corpore quaestum facerent: quod idcirco imperavit, ne sola praeter alias mulieres impudica et virorum adpetens videretur*. (“Venus first established the art of the prostitute and was an *auctor* for women in Cyprus, that they might commonly pursue gainful occupation with their bodies: which thing she commanded lest she alone – beyond other women – seem shameless and desirous of men.”)

this descent, framing his discussion that began from the *telis Veneris* (1052: “weapons of Love”) with a reference to the *sagittis Veneris* (1278: “arrows of Love”), an image that conjures up at least a fleeting sense of an arrow-wielding agent. And, while it is true that the sentiment expressed in Lucretius’ diatribe is often understood as dislodging love (that is, Love) from a divine perch, the phenomenon played out with the name *Venus* seems better characterized by one of the adjectives Lucretius gives it himself. At line 1071 Lucretius speaks of a *volgiva Venus* (“free-wandering love/sex”), a description usually taken to reflect the more or less atomic conception of love he advocates, but *volgiva* could just as easily characterize the word *Venus* and its promiscuous wandering amongst a whole range of referents.

The atomic quality of this referential wandering should be stressed, not only because one of the primary metaphors for describing atomic motion, a martial one,⁷⁸ resonates well with descriptions we have seen already of “love” (e.g. the wounded lover falling into his wound) but also because the substitution *species pro individuo* (“species for individual”) continually exploited by Lucretius is itself, in many ways, atomic. *Venus* (the name), as we have seen, functions throughout the conclusion of the fourth book as a metonymy for a whole range of entities (“penis,” “intercourse,” etc.) connected with the sphere of love, but it also – in a somewhat different sense – functions as a frustrated antonomasia: *Venus*, the specific, individual (proper) name, is constantly describing a more general range (i.e. a *species*) of experiences, but without, of course, the substitution of expressly more general terms.

⁷⁸ Above all, we should recall the description of atomic motion via the comparison of atoms to motes in a sunbeam. Cf. DRN 2.116-122: *multa minuta modis multis per inane videbis/ corpora misceri radiorum lumine in ipso/ et velut aeterno certamine proelia pugnas/ edere turmatim certantia nec dare pausam,/ conciliis et discidiis exercita crebris;/ conicere ut possis ex hoc, primordia rerum/ quale sit in magno iactari semper inani.* (“You will see many tiny bodies variously mixed/ through the void in the very light of the sun’s rays/ and, as if with endless struggle, they produce,/ in attacking throng by throng, battles and fights,/ and do not cease, occupied with constant assemblies and discord;/ so that from this you could guess of what sort are/ the constant tossings about in the great void.”)

Venus, that is, becomes *species pro individuo* in itself, no longer functioning (if it ever did) merely as a deictic marker for (the perhaps imagined *simulacrum*⁷⁹ of) a divine agent. And this function, *species pro individuo*, is a function of the atom itself.

One of the notable facts about atoms, although in combination they form the myriad wonders of the natural world, is that they have no secondary qualities.⁸⁰ Lucretius is adamant about this point. At DRN 1.830-920, for example, Lucretius combats Anaxagoras' theory of the *homoeomeria* of things, which, our poet reports, supposes that bones "arise from tiny, minute bones" (1.835-37: *...e paucillis atque minutis/ ossibus.../ ...gigni...*), flesh from tiny flesh (836-37), blood from drops of blood (837-38), and so forth. He refutes this claim by giving examples where the elements that contribute to a larger structure seem undeniably different from that structure, i.e. food (*cibus*) increases and nourishes the body (*corpus*), even as it is scarcely of the same nature (859-74). Lucretius continues on, eventually telescoping this line of argumentation to the following conclusion (916-20): if we suppose that the elements of matter (*corpora materialia*) are endowed with a nature similar to larger entities they form, then it will come about that (*fiet uti*) atoms shake with laughter and soak their cheeks with salt tears.

These arguments and examples suggest Lucretius' reluctance to allow atoms any secondary qualities, although they do not necessarily make the point entirely explicit. Elsewhere, after Lucretius has informed us not only of the existence of atoms but also of the complexities of their movement, he states more emphatically the absence of secondary properties. Atoms, for example, have no inherent color:

⁷⁹ It is difficult to know what material existence to give to the notion of Venus as a divinity, but as Centaurs and Scyllas are given the existence of combinations of images (that is, *simulacra*), it seems safe to presume that we may have a *simulacrum* of Venus as a divine agent, if nothing more. Cf. DRN 4.732-48.

⁸⁰ I use "secondary property" (the standard term) in recognition of the fact that atoms do, of course, have some properties, not least their status as indivisible *corpora* ("bodies") that move.

Nunc age dicta meo dulci quaesita labore
percipe, **ne forte haec albis ex alba rearis**
principiis esse, ante oculos quae candida cernis,
aut ea quae nigrant nigro de semine nata;
nive alium quemvis quae sunt imbuta colorem,
propterea gerere hunc credas, quod materiai
corpora consimili sint eius tincta colore.
nullus enim color est omnino materiai
corporibus, neque par rebus neque denique dispar. (DRN 2.730-47)

Come now, know my words, sought out by
my sweet toil, **lest perhaps you think these white things,**
which you perceive shining before your eyes, are from white atoms,
or these, which are black, arose from a black seed;
or which things have been imbued with some other color,
lest you believe that they do this because the atoms of matter
are tinged with a similar color; for there is no color at all for
the atoms of matter, neither like nor again unlike things themselves.

Nor do they possess heat, carry sound, or emit scent:

Sed ne forte putes solo spoliata colore
corpora prima manere, etiam secreta teporis
sunt ac figoris omnino calidique vaporis,
et sonitu sterila et suco ieiuna feruntur,
nec iaciunt ullum proprium de corpore odorem. (DRN 2.842-64)

But – lest by chance you think first bodies abide,
deprived of color alone – they also are separated utterly
from warmth and cold and hot vapor,
and they are borne without sound and deprived of juice,
and they do not emit any scent of their own from their bodies.

These examples do not enumerate (in an impossible, comic gesture) *all* the qualities that atoms lack, but one infers inductively the strange absence of defining features that characterizes atoms. The absence of secondary properties creates a situation in which atoms – even as they are the most basic, indivisible elements of matter – are not the most basic instantiations of all properties; that is, atoms, even as they underlie all things, cannot, taken individually, explain the diversity of those things.⁸¹ Atoms are thus, not wholly unlike the

⁸¹ “Explain” here must be understood in a particular sense. Lucretius puts forth the notion that atoms can combine and produce – without divine intervention – qualities not inherent in atoms themselves. (Cf. e.g.

term *Venus* (at least as we have studied it in Lucretius' lexicon), *species* and *individuum* in one: *individuum* (literally, "not divisible," like the Greek *atomos*⁸²) in so far as they are basic and primary; *species* in so far as they are generic and common.⁸³

This characterization of the atom – if we again take the atom as an analogue for the name⁸⁴ – perhaps fits best with the characterization of *Venus* just presented, but it also resonates with the characterization of Lucretius' use of the names of Memmius and Epicurus presented earlier. The names of Epicurus, the specific, individual founder of Lucretius' philosophical faith who is nominally displaced by his own ethnicity, and of Memmius, the addressee who is largely replaced by a vague series of second-person imperatives and pronouns (*te, tibi*, etc.), are both atomic in so far as they represent *loci* of tension between a specific, distinct individuality and a broader generality (of ethnicity or of readership). And this nominal tension (that is, a tension located within the name) between individuality and generality represents, we may suggest, Lucretius' response to the intimacy of Catullan deictic

DRN 2.973-90, on sensation.) In this sense, Lucretius feels that atoms do explain the material world. Yet the functioning of atoms, *how* they create and generate qualities beyond themselves, remains as mysterious as any reference to divine miracle.

⁸² It is worth noting in this context that Cicero used the Latin term *individuum* to translate the Greek *atomos*. Cf. Cicero *De Fin.* 1.17 (*corpus individuum*).

⁸³ Cf. e.g. DRN 1.894-96: .../ *scire licet non esse in rebus res ita mixtas, / verum semina multimodis inmixta latere / multarum rerum in rebus communia debent.* ("...we may know things are not thus [*sc.* as Anaxagoras thinks] mixed up in things, but **seeds, common** to many things, ought to lurk variously mixed into things.") The notion of common – indistinct and indistinguishable – seeds conjures up the generality characteristic of a species, whose unity is based upon ignoring individual differences.

⁸⁴ The connection I have been making here between atoms and names is largely an associative one; that is, I have suggested that, not unlike the way(s) in which the depiction of atoms in Lucretius' text bears a certain similarity to that of human agents, atoms and names are represented similarly. But, as David Sedley (1996: 87) makes clear, there may be a fairly deeply rooted philosophical connection between atoms and names (a connection that would thus seem to confirm some of the connections I have noted on the level of figuration): "Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics are teleologists, who regard the whole as ontologically prior to the part: the part can only be fully understood by reference to its function within the whole. Epicurus by contrast is an atomist. He standardly treats parts as discrete items which, in coming together, generate larger complexes – be they atoms forming phenomenal bodies, or humans forming societies – but which in no sense have that as their pre-existing nature or function. Even bodily parts like hands and tongues came into being before any functions – including their communicative functions – were found for them. On this same anti-teleological model, Epicurus regards the central core of language as an original set of naturally uttered 'names'..., correlated to individual objects or contents of experience, and only at a later stage supplemented and inflected into a full-scale language."

naming that served as one of our points of departure. Lucretius does not fully abandon the Catullan deictic gesture that conjures up a real personal agent but his pointing always seems somewhat vaguer, more general, and more anonymous than Catullan practice.

This observation is perhaps best captured by a striking passage within Lucretius' diatribe against love, a passage where Lucretius runs through a catalogue of names that lovers, deluded by love, may give the (in this case, female) objects of their affections:

atque alios alii inrident Veneremque suadent
 ut placent, quoniam foedo adflitentur amore,
 nec sua respiciunt miseri mala maxima saepe.
 nigra "Melichrus" est, inmunda et fetida "Acosmos,"
 caesia "Palladium," nervosa et lignea "Dorcas,"
 parvula pumilio, "Chariton Mia," "Tota Merum Sal,"
 magna atque inmanis "Cataplexis Plenaque Honoris."
 Balba loqui non quit – "traulizi"; muta "Pudens" est;
 at flagrans odiosa loquacula "Lampadium" fit;
 "Ischnon Eromenion" tum fit, cum vivere non quit
 prae macie; "Rhadine" verost iam mortua tussi;
 at tumida et mammosa "Ceres" est "ipsa ab Iaccho,"
 simula "Silena ac Saturast," labeosa "Philema."
 cetera de genere hoc longum est si dicere coner. (DRN 4.1157-70)

And some lovers mock one another, and they urge that
 they propitiate Venus, since they suffer with shameful love,
 and, wretched, they do not look upon their own ills, often great ones.
 A swarthy woman is "Melichrus," a dirty, smelly one is "Acosmos,"
 blue-eyed is "Palladium," tough and muscular is "Dorcas,"
 itsy-bitsy dwarf is "Chariton Mia," "Tota Merum Sal,"
 great and savage is "Cataplexis Plenaque Honoris."
 Balba (the stutterer) who cannot speak – "traulizi"; the mute is "Pudens";
 and the hateful, feisty, talkative one becomes "Lampadium";
 then she becomes "Ischnon Eromenion," when she cannot live
 from her wasting away; truly she is "Rhadine," who is already dead with her
 cough; swollen and busty, she's "Ceres ipsa ab Iaccho,"
 snub-nosed is "Silena ac Satura," full-lipped "Philema."
 It's a lengthy task if I should try to name other things of this sort.⁸⁵

While there are no doubt many ways to parse these lines,⁸⁶ perhaps the most striking feature within the context of the present discussion is how difficult it is to assign a status to the

⁸⁵ In the translation offered here, I have capitalized all the "names" of the list, primarily as a spur to debate. As the ensuing discussion makes clear, not all scholars follow this practice.

names, or “names,” listed here. Is “Dorcas” (i.e. “antelope” or “gazelle” in Greek) a name, a nick-name, or a descriptor? Or is it perhaps several of these at once? The passage suggests that each of these names is a way of re-naming – and potentially misnaming – reality, but this fact certainly does not exclude these appellations from functioning as “proper” names in the manner of many Roman *cognomina*. A glance at R. D. Brown’s recent commentary provides some sense of the range of scholarly views on the “names” in this passage:

Pierre Boyancé...has argued that the Greek words in Lucretius are all nicknames and should be printed with a capital letter. The fact that *Dorcas*, *Rhadine*, *Silene*, *Satura*, and *Philema* are attested as personal names undoubtedly illustrates the hypocoristic value of the words selected by Lucretius and may suggest that some were inspired by actual nicknames.... Many of the words, however, cannot be interpreted in this way (*acosmos*, *Chariton mia*, *cataplexis*, *traulizy*) and to impose a uniform status on the others is artificial. It is better to regard them as a miscellaneous collection of sentimental terms which differ in background and function. Some are literary, others colloquial; some laudatory descriptive terms, others casual endearments, which happen to overlap with the repertoire of formal names and quasi-permanent nicknames. None, however, needs to be interpreted as a fixed appellation.⁸⁷

There are at least two competing, if not conflicting, impulses in this description. On the one hand, Brown resists the conclusion (a claim that he attributes to Boyancé⁸⁸) of proclaiming all the “names” in Lucretius’ catalogue “proper” (that is, editorially speaking, he resists the choice of capitalizing them), insisting instead that some of these terms simply “cannot be interpreted in this way.” Brown thus, at a minimum, shies away from understanding these names as proper deictic markers pointing to specific individuals. On the other, Brown notes what he calls the “hypocoristic value” of the terms within the list, observing that some of

⁸⁶ One particular avenue that demands fuller treatment than the present discussion can provide is the gendering of Lucretius’ reading of love. Gordon 2002, a relatively brief article that explores how Lucretius plays with a traditional, Roman male gaze, is the most extensive treatment of this topic to date.

⁸⁷ Brown 1987: 281-82 (commentary *ad loc.*).

⁸⁸ But Boyancé is not alone in his view. Cf. Colin 1955: 866: “*Pour chacun de ces mots grecs, nous sommes en présence d’un surnom personnel, accepté avec orgueil par l’intéressée et tiré – comme Βοῶπις pour Clodia – d’un détail de ses avantages physiques et de sa beauté...*” (Emphasis original.) For references to Clodia as Βοῶπις, cf. e.g. Cicero *Ad Att.* 2.9.1; Colin suggests that the names are originally those of courtesans.

these terms were “inspired by actual nicknames.” This gesture (that is, searching for the reality of the names in the passage), even if it does not mark a conflict with the first impulse, manifests a contrasting interest in the intimacy (and reality) created by names, in the ability of the names to conjure up (and point to) a genuine romantic context. In trying to assess the extent to which the “names” offered here could point to a possible historical “reality,” Brown’s critical stance thus resonates with the traditional interpretation of our first instances of deictic naming (e.g. searching for the reality of Catullus’ “Lesbia”).

But, as these two impulses within Brown’s commentary begin to show, there is a clear distance between Lucretius and Catullus. Whereas Catullus’ deictic naming creates a genuine (even if misleading) sense of presence and intimacy, Lucretius’ list – in part because it is so obviously a list, a set of examples – fails to mimic this effect.⁸⁹ These names – *Dorcas*, *Rhadine*, and others – hover between proper and common nouns, conjuring up the terms of our earlier discussion of *Amor*: they are specific “names,” but they are defined and motivated by an entire class of qualities (e.g. *Dorcas* could name, and its appearance in the catalogue depends upon its ability to name, all “wooden, muscular” objects of affection). Each of these names at best points awkwardly and indistinctly to an individual, an individual whose only known feature is, we infer, shared by an entire class.⁹⁰

Moreover, it is impossible not to note the obvious Greekness of the names. This fact has been variously interpreted, with some suggesting that it indicates Lucretius here follows a Greek original, while others simply maintain that Greek was (during the Roman Republic) “the natural vehicle for elegant or witty expression.”⁹¹ Whatever the case, within

⁸⁹ Nor, I suspect, does it try to mimic the Catullan effect.

⁹⁰ The *general* scope of the names (i.e. the fact that these names fit several people and several contexts) within the list is suggested by many features, most prominently by *alios alii* (1157: “some...one another”) but also by the generic character of each of the attributes described.

⁹¹ Brown 1987: 281.

the present discussion, we cannot but be reminded of the way in which Epicurus' own Greekness (*Græius homo*) displaces his proper name in Lucretius' poem. Any author writing under the influence of a theory that language – language origins but also diversity among languages – is heavily conditioned by physical place cannot but be aware of a string of more than a dozen Greek “names” in his text. These names disguise “reality,” mischaracterizing a set of less-than-charming attributes, perhaps in part because they are, quite physically, out of place.

This suggestion is somewhat speculative, but David Sedley has remarked, in a quite general fashion, “that the creation of a Greek context tends, in Lucretius' hands, to emphasise the remote and the exotic.”⁹² If correct, this reading would fall, in its own way, within the general pattern we have been tracking in this essay, that is, how names in Lucretius become more remote, distant, and anonymous. While the terms of this list hardly disappear like Memmius' name, they nonetheless create a sense of remoteness through their almost euphemistic Greek cloaking of a fault more baldly stated in Latin. (Indeed, the contrast with the list of descriptors – actually a list of genuine Roman *cognomina* – at Horace *S.* 1.3.44-62 is instructive, as it makes clear how often Roman *cognomina* did *not* describe faults euphemistically.) Moreover, the general sense of substitution (the action, we might say, of antonomasia) – the Greek for the Roman, the common for the proper, the proper for the common – that surrounds discussion of the list continues the atomic qualities, or lack of qualities, we found in *Venus* (and *Epicurus* and *Memmius*). Despite or perhaps because of the

⁹² Sedley 1998: 51. Perhaps Greek words are remote and exotic in part because they are, physically, from elsewhere.

lure of deictic naming,⁹³ it seems that names, like atoms, possess in practice no essential properties – beyond the simple fact that they are names.

III. Conclusion: Anonymity and Popular Politics

Taking our point of departure from a selective consideration of Roman naming practices (and the connection of those practices with identity), we first developed in this essay a notion of deictic naming, a naming that points (or attempts to point) to a given entity and often conjures up a sense of the reality of that entity. We then turned to examine the appearance of deictic naming within Epicureanism and studied its relationship to various instances of naming within Lucretius' *De rerum natura*. Through a study of the nominal disappearance of Memmius (or his metamorphosis into a “general” reader), the near nominal absence of Epicurus, and the deployment of *Venus* and other names within the conclusion to Lucretius' fourth book, we observed the ways in which various personal names in *De rerum natura*, even if they do not entirely fail to function in a deictic fashion, nonetheless become more general, more indefinite, whether by the substitution of other terms (Memmius, Epicurus), by referential wandering (*Venus*), or by still other means.

Having thus examined the ways in which a select group of names in Lucretius becomes more anonymous – vaguer, more general – we now turn briefly to the significance of this phenomenon. Why would Lucretius so strongly resist deictic naming with the three proper names most central to *De rerum natura* (his philosophical master, his addressee, and the “goddess” who opens his poem)? A recent author, who studies catalogues of names rather than naming effects, suggests that “Lucretius allows little textual ground for the

⁹³ What I mean is that – as we saw with the comment preserved by the anonymous commentator on Plato's *Theaetetus* – deictic naming (an act of pure pointing) can in fact obscure distinctions between proper and common names. In other words, as deixis is an act (rather than an intrinsic feature of a word) it places an emphasis not upon the word itself but upon what the word does. It is nonetheless true, though, that deixis butts up against concerns of presence and intimacy, a fact that often makes the specific name seem important.

treatment of proper names” for two reasons: “first, they are not important to him for the development of his subject; and second, his work contains a limited amount of mythological material, which is an abundant source of proper names.”⁹⁴ The second of these reasons is certainly true: the Epicureans famously combated the fear and anxiety inspired by traditional religious and mythological explanations of the world; and scholars have much exerted themselves to justify even Lucretius’ limited use of Venus.⁹⁵ The first reason, however, is less clearly on target. While Lucretius undoubtedly does use a limited number of proper names, as this essay has endeavored to show, some of these – certainly the name of Epicurus – are of incredible, quasi-religious importance to him and his poem. To say that proper names are “not important to the development of his subject” is also to ignore both the poetic and philosophical traditions handed down to Lucretius: Roman epic to his day was largely about particular historical figures, and philosophy – both earlier and later – often used proper names precisely as the poles around which speculative opinions revolved.⁹⁶

Instead, we should consider the widespread absence of proper names and the tendency towards anonymity traced in this paper as a powerful effect of Lucretius’ doctrinal commitments. In tracking – among other evidence – the near nominal absence of Epicurus, the disappearance of Memmius, and the referential wandering of Venus, we have suggested that there are certain similarities between the material (absence of) qualities characteristic of atoms and the referential qualities of certain names. I would like to suggest in conclusion that there is a certain popular, everyman quality to the atomic tendency towards nominal

⁹⁴ Kyriakidis 2007: 87.

⁹⁵ Cf. n76 (*supra*); Gale 1994 and Gigandet 1998 provide recent scholarly takes on Lucretius’ use of myth.

⁹⁶ For epic, if one thinks of Naevius and Cicero (e.g. *De consulatu suo*) in addition to Ennius, the Roman genre of epic seems to have been primarily historical (and about *named* historical agents) prior to Lucretius and Virgil; for philosophy, one need only look to Lucretius’ contemporaries Cicero (e.g. *De natura deorum*, where we find Brutus, Protagoras, Diagoras Melius, and Theodorus Cyrenaicus already in the first chapter of Book 1) and Philodemus (e.g. his *Peri poematon*, where almost all of his opinions are developed agonistically with other named philosophers).

anonymity, which we have been following. This suggestion is, on one level, merely to extend the comparison between atoms and names, since there is an ancient tradition of the democratic, egalitarian “community of atoms.”⁹⁷ In other words, by rendering his poem less particular, less clearly stamped by the detail of deictic naming, Lucretius packages his salvific message in terms that are more broadly applicable and more generally accessible to even a moderately educated audience.⁹⁸ It is not merely names, after all, that are presented in general terms in *De rerum natura*; figures like the ploughman (*arator*: *DRN* 2.1164), who toils in vain at the conclusion to the second book, are depicted so sparsely that he could be many a Roman male.

Further, the popularization generated by Lucretius' nominal practice has other possible resonances among his Roman literary forebears, particularly in Cato the Elder's *Origines*. It is reported that *Origines* were written without giving credit to the leaders of the Punic wars:

Senex historias scribere instituit. Earum sunt libri septem. Primus continet res gestas regum populi Romani, secundus et tertius unde quaeque civitas orta sit Italica, ob quam rem omnes Origines videtur appellasse. In quarto autem bellum Poenicum est primum, in quinto secundum. Atque haec omnia capitulatim sunt dicta. Reliquaque bella pari modo persecutus est usque ad praeturam Servii Galbae, qui deripuit Lusitanos: **atque horum bellorum duces non nominavit, sed sine nominibus res notavit.** (Cornelius Nepos *Cato* 3.3-4⁹⁹)

⁹⁷ Cf. e.g. the remarks – part sarcastic, part serious – of Dionysius of Alexandria:

θαυμαστή γὰρ τῶν ἀτόμων ἡ δημοκρατία, δεξιουμένων τε ἀλλήλας τῶν φίλων καὶ περιπλεκομένων, εἰς μίαν τε κατασκηνοῦν συνοικίαν ἐπειγομένων... [Dionysius of Alexandria (apud Eusebium *PE* 14.25 776D)]

Quite wondrous is the democracy of the atoms: they greet one another as friends, and they embrace, hastening to encamp together in a single settlement...

This statement is no doubt inspired, at some level, by the material equality of atoms, an equality underwritten, at least in part, by their lack of secondary qualities.

⁹⁸ We may consider Epicurus' own demand for linguistic clarity (*sapheneia*; cf. Diogenes Laertius 10.13) to have a similar popularizing force.

⁹⁹ Cf. the similar description at Pliny *NH* 8.11.

As an old man, he began to write *historiae*. There are seven books of these. The first book contains the deeds of the kings of the Roman people; the second and third books treat whence each Italic state arose, for which reason, it seems, the whole work was called *Origines* ("Origins"). In the fourth book, moreover, appears the first Punic war; in the fifth, the second Punic conflict. And these things were all told under headings (*capitulatim*).¹⁰⁰ He also, in like fashion, gave an account of the remaining wars up until the praetorship of Servius Galba, who plundered Lusitania: **he did not name the leaders (*duces*) for these wars, but he recounted things (*res*) without names.**

There are no doubt many possible explanations for Cato's pointed omission of what must have been well-known names, but one suggestion that has been voiced within recent scholarship on the *Origines* corresponds in certain ways to the line of explanation we have pursued in this conclusion:

The concentration upon the history of a people, specifically upon the life of the *populus*, shifts the focus within the work. When the people itself becomes the primary actor, whence its origin, its birth, and its assembly become of central interest. And exactly this may be seen in Cato's *Origines*.¹⁰¹

Ulrich Gotter's description here indicates one reason why Cato may have suppressed the names of leaders from recent wars: his interest fell upon the species (that is, the *populus*) rather than the individual.

Any thematic connection between Cato and Lucretius may be entirely coincidental, yet the fact that Cato suppresses the names of the primary agents in his tale of origins provides a literary precedent, if not for all Lucretian naming practices, at least for the virtual omission of Epicurus' name from *De rerum natura*. The *Origines* may seem generically distant from Lucretius' poem, but Lucretius certainly drew upon earlier historical epic (cf. DRN 1.117, 121), so it is not much of a leap to suppose some familiarity with the tropes of earlier

¹⁰⁰ *capitulatim* ("under headings") is often taken to indicate a contrast with annalistic (year-by-year) narrative. Cf. Gotter 2003: 116.

¹⁰¹ Gotter 2003: 126: "Die Konzentration auf die Geschichte eines Volkes, gewissermaßen auf den Bios des *populus*, verschiebt die Gewichtung innerhalb des Werkes. Wenn das Volk selbst zum maßgeblichen Akteur wird, rücken seine Herkunft, seine Genese und seine Zusammensetzung ins Zentrum des Interesses. Und genau das lässt sich in Catos *Origines* beobachten."

historical writing. While there is no doubt more to be said on the connection between Cato and Lucretius, for the present purpose it suffices to observe the popular focus of Cato's anonymous narrative, or – more correctly – the popular focus of his narrative marked, we could say, by the figure of antonomasia, where Romanness seems to take the place of any specific, individual identity. We need not urge that Lucretius' focus was likewise on Romanness (or the “atomic” Roman people), but it has long been noted that Lucretius' natural world has a Roman coloring. Over seventy-five years ago, Hugh Sykes Davies pointed out how Roman the machinery of the world becomes in Lucretius' hands.¹⁰² If the observations of this study are broadly correct and names are “atomized” through anonymity, then this process may indeed lay the groundwork for the depiction of the *populus Romanus* not only in benignly general terms but even as a faceless mass. This, then, is a double-edged populism: vaguely depicted, general agents are no doubt more equal, but a people without qualities is scarcely a people at all.

¹⁰² Davies 1931-32: 37-8: “‘Coetus,’ ‘congressus,’ ‘foedus,’ ‘imperium,’ ‘indicium,’ ‘reddo,’ ‘usurpo,’ all these are political and legal expressions that occur more or less frequently in Lucretian metaphors.... It is just possible that Lucretius may have attempted to represent the machinery of the universe – the ‘machina mundi’ – by symbols drawn from the legal and political machinery of the Republic. Such an idea is at least very typically Roman; they felt profoundly, throughout their history, that the Roman system of government had the same validity, the same unquestionable sanction that they found in the realm of Nature; sometimes it seems to them that their system was the direct outcome of the working of the natural world, that the Roman ‘Imperium’ was no more to be questioned than the heavens, its operation no more than the mutations of the seasons.”

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