READERS IN THE UNDERWORLD: LUCRETIUS, *DE RERUM NATURA* 3.912–1075

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I

Readers have always acknowledged the comparatively clear macrostructure of *De rerum natura* 3.[1] It begins with a *prooemium* in which is described the terrifying impact which the fear of death has on human lives, as well as the fact that Epicurus has provided a cure against this fear, namely his physical doctrines (1–93). Particular attention is paid to fears of an afterlife in which we have to suffer pain and grief in the underworld; cf., for instance, the programmatic lines 3.37–40 (translation by Ferguson Smith, which will be used throughout):

> . . . et metus ille foras praeceps Acheruntis agendus,
> funditus humanam qui vitam turbat ab imo,
> omnia suffundens mortis nigrore, neque ullam
> esse voluptatem liquidam puramque relinquit.
>
> . . . *and the fear of Acheron be sent packing,*
> which troubles the life of man from its deepest depths,
> suffuses all with the blackness of death,
> and leaves no delight clean and pure.

This *prooemium* is followed by a long passage (94–829) in which Lucretius explains the basics of Epicurean psychology and tries to show that the soul is (like the body) material and hence mortal; this last point is driven home with particular force in ll. 417–829 where Lucretius lists twenty-five proofs for the mortality of the soul.

The final part of the book (ll. 830–1075), frequently referred to as the diatribe against the fear of death, starts off by drawing an inference from the proof of the soul's mortality:

> Nil igitur mors est ad nos neque pertinet hilum,
> quandoquidem natura animi mortalis habetur.
>
> Therefore death is nothing to us, it matters not one jot,
> since the nature of the mind is understood to be mortal.

The narrative then returns to the topic of the horrors of hell only once, in ll. 978–1023, where the stories of the mythical sinners in the underworld are explained as allegorical interpretations of terrifying events in the world around us. This has been found surprising, given that the topic of fear of the underworld looms large in the *prooemium*.[2] What we do get in this final part of the book is a seemingly very loosely organized set of passages which addresses various other aspects of the fear of death, such as fear of what might happen to our body once we are dead or fear of forfeiting pleasures through death.[3] Scholars have found the microstructure of this last quarter of the book wanting. Giussani, for instance, continuously brackets and transposes single verses and larger units in this section, and while Bailey would not want to follow him all the way, he is clearly intrigued by some of Giussani's suggestions.[4] What certainly contributes to the

[1] cf., for example, E. J. Kenney, *Lucretius – De rerum natura Book 3* (1971), at 30: 'Of all the books of the *D.R.N.*, Book III appears to be the most highly finished, neatly constructed, and the best able to stand on its own.'

[2] cf. Kenney, op. cit. (n. 1), at 222 on ll. 978–1023.

[3] On the complexity of the notion of fear of death see G. Striker, 'Commentary on Mitsis', *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium for Ancient Philosophy* 4 (1988), 323–8.

[4] cf. their editions and commentaries on this section (1896–8 and 1947 respectively).

impression of diversity and 'lack of structure' is the marked difference in tone and register between the various sections. In connection with this feature, it is difficult to develop an intuition as to how the particularly diverse array of potential models could inform our reading of the passage. Is it possible to make a case for a hierarchy of models in which some are more relevant or powerful than others? Of course there have been attempts to impose some form of order on this section, either by reading the whole book against the scheme of the *partes orationis* known from rhetorical handbooks or by viewing 3.830–1094 as dialogical in the sense that it could be set out in a coherently progressing exchange in question-and-answer form;[5] but these readings focus on Lucretius' arguments to the exclusion of what we might for the time being (i.e. before we hint at our own reasons for unease about this conceptual distinction) call the literary aspects of the text.

II

In this article I want to look more closely at 3.912–1075 and suggest a way in which reference to a particular literary motif ('topos') and to a particular text allows us to see a hitherto unnoticed structure emerging. Further, since the motif is literary while the text is philosophical (according to conventional categories), I want to develop from my reading of this passage some reflections on the different ways in which a text may refer to literary and philosophical models.

I begin with a survey of the section in question. In 3.912–30, the passage preceding the celebrated speech of Nature, Lucretius envisages the participants in a banquet contemplating how brief life is as a time for sensual enjoyment and that this sort of enjoyment cannot be experienced again after death. Lucretius reproaches this attitude, on the grounds that it fails to take into account that in death there no longer exists a subject endowed with perception which could miss this sort of pleasure. He illustrates this point with a comparison of sleep and death: when we are in deep and dreamless sleep, we likewise do not have sensual perception and hence do not miss pleasures we could have enjoyed while awake. Immediately before the speech of Nature, he drives home this view about death as 'nothing to us' with an argument *a fortiori* (3.926–30):

> multo igitur mortem minus ad nos esse putandumst,
> si minus esse potest quam quod nil esse videmus [i.e. sleep];
> maior enim turba et disiectus materiai
> consequitur leto nec quisquam expergitus exstat,
> frigida quem semel est vitai pausa secuta.
>
> Death therefore must be thought of much less moment to us,
> if there can be anything less than what we see to be nothing;
> for a greater dispersion of the disturbed matter takes place at death,
> and no one awakens and rises
> whom the cold stoppage of life has once overtaken.

After the symposiast complaining about the loss of sensual pleasure through death and after the comparison of dreamless sleep to death, Nature makes a sudden appearance (l. 931: 'denique si vocem rerum natura repente | mittat . . .'), addressing before the reader's eyes *aliquis nostrum* who is complaining about the fact that loss of life will mean the curtailment of his ability to experience pleasure. There are two important points which I would like to note with regard to the speech of Nature.

First, the situation envisaged in the speech is such that the addressee is facing *imminent* death, i.e. that Nature's words apply to a time when continuing life is not an

[5] E. K. Rand, 'La composition rhétorique du troisième livre de Lucrèce', *RPh* 60 (1934), 243–66; C. Rambaux, 'La logique de l'argumentation dans le *De Rerum Natura*', *REL* 58 (1980), 201–19.

option. This is especially obvious in what one might call the argumentative core of the speech (ll. 935–43):

> nam si grata fuit tibi vita anteacta priorque
> et non omnia pertusum congesta quasi in vas
> commoda perfluxere atque ingrata interiere,
> cur non ut plenus vitae conviva recedis
> aequo animoque capis securam, stulte, quietem?
> sin ea quae fructus cumque es periere profusa
> vitaque in offensast, cur amplius addere quaeris,
> rursum quod pereat male et ingratum occidat omne,
> non potius vitae finem facis atque laboris?
>
> For if your former life now past has been to your liking,
> if it is not true that all your blessings have been gathered
> as it were into a riddled jar,
> and have run through and been lost without gratification,
> why not, like a banqueter fed full of life, withdraw
> with contentment and rest in peace, you fool?
> But if all that you have enjoyed has been spilt out and lost,
> and if you have a grudge at life, why seek to add more,
> only to be miserably lost again and to perish
> wholly without gratification?
> Why not rather end life and trouble? (translation Ferguson Smith, adjusted)

This rhetorical dilemma:

(i) Either you have enjoyed life or you have not enjoyed life.
(ii) If you have enjoyed life, then part with it gratefully.
(iii) If you have not enjoyed life, why not end it now?

only makes sense if it applies to a time when the right attitude about an imminent and inevitable death is the issue. Otherwise we would miss a suggestion to change and reform one's way of living, if one has lived wrongly in the past; after all, this is the business Epicureans and Lucretius in particular are involved in.[6]

The second point that needs to be highlighted is the consistent legal stylization of the speech, whose full import has not been appreciated by critics so far. In ll. 963–4 this stylization might be seen to be vague ('iure, ut opinor, agat, iure increpet inciletque'); however, the sense of *agere* ('to act in court') is secured by *iure* and hence differentiated from non-legal uses of the term (cf., e.g. Cic., *Cael.* 33, where Appius Claudius Caecus' speech is introduced by 'sic aget et sic loquetur'). In ll. 950–1, too, where the epic narrator is commenting on Nature's speech ('quid respondemus, nisi iustam intendere litem naturam et veram verbis exponere causam?'), 'litem intendere' may in itself be taken to be vague, although *lis* is normally used specifically of private cases when it is applied to trials.[7] That the legal stylization is specific not vague is strongly suggested by the famous line 971: 'vitaque mancipio nulli datur, omnibus usu', which forms the cap to an argument that, for the world to go on, living beings have to hand on the matter they consist of to the generations succeeding them (ll. 967–71); l. 971 hence disambiguates other legal terminology in the passage:

> materies opus est ut crescant postera saecla;
> quae tamen omnia te vita perfuncta sequentur;
> nec minus ergo ante haec quam tu cecidere, cadentque.

[6] I discuss this passage at length in my 'The speech of Nature in Lucretius' *DRN* 3.931–971', *CQ* 52 (2002), 291–304; on the soul-vessel metaphor in this speech and its use to convey the idea of Epicurean 'katastematic pleasure' see ibid. and below.

[7] See H. G. Heumann and E. Seckel (eds), *Handlexikon zu den Quellen des römischen Rechts* (9th edn, 1906), s.v. *lis* no. 1, give as its meaning 'Rechtsstreit, Prozess in Zivilsachen, bürgerliche Rechtsstreitigkeit'; but cf. Th. Mommsen, *Römisches Strafrecht* (1899), 392 n.4.

sic alid ex alio numquam desistet oriri
vitaque mancipio nulli datur, omnibus usu.

Matter is wanted, that coming generations may grow;
and yet they all, when their life is done, will follow you,
and so, no less than you, these generations have passed away
before now, and will continue to pass away.
So one thing will never cease to arise from another,
and man possesses life in freehold — all as tenants.

So in Roman terms this is an identifiable legal situation, with Nature not as the judge in a criminal court but as one of two quarrelling parties in a trial.[8] Seneca makes all this explicit in an interesting way (*Consol. ad Polyb.* 10.4–5), thus testifying to the fact that a Roman reader would have given the passage this more specific meaning:[9]

Rerum natura illum tibi sicut ceteris fratres suos non mancipio dedit sed commodavit; cum visum est deinde repetit nec tuam in eo satietatem secuta est sed suam legem. Si quis pecuniam creditam solvisse se moleste ferat, eam praesertim cuius usum gratuitum acceperit, nonne iniustus vir habeatur? Dedit natura fratri tuo vitam, dedit et tibi: quae suo iure usa si a quo voluit debitum suum citius exegit, non illa in culpa est, cuius nota erat condicio, sed mortalis animi spes avida, quae subinde quid rerum natura sit obliviscetur nec umquam sortis suae meminit nisi cum admonetur.

Nature gave him to you, just as she gives to others their brothers, not as a permanent possession, but as a loan; when it seemed best to her, then she took him back, nor was she guided by your having had your fill of him, but only by her own law. If anyone should be angry that he has had to pay back borrowed money — especially that of which he had the use without paying interest — would he not be considered an unfair man? Nature gave your brother his life, she has likewise given you yours. If she has required from him from whom she wanted it an earlier payment of her loan, she has but used her own right; the fault is not with her, for her terms were known, but with the greedy hopes of mortal minds that often forget what Nature is, and never remember their own lot except when they are reminded. (translation by Basore)

In the next section (3.978–1023), Lucretius goes through the list of mythical sinners who according to tradition suffer in the underworld. These sinners, we are told, are in fact allegorical representations of types of misguided behaviour in the world we live in: Tantalus is the man who is afraid of death and the gods; Tityus corresponds to the frustrated lover; Sisyphus to the politician who is time and again rejected in the elections; and the Danaids to the insatiable pursuers of sensual pleasure. Towards the end of the section (ll. 1014–23) the connection is made with specific punishment that men fear for deeds they have done,[10] and it is argued that they extrapolate from punishments they witness being carried out 'in the upper world', thus 'creating' creatures like Cerberus or the Furies which represent even graver horrors.

Then there is a section in which a parade of outstanding men of the past is given, cast in direct speech as 'what the reader should at times tell himself' and thus addressing

[8] cf. M. Kaser and K. Hackl, *Das römische Zivilprozessrecht* (1996), at 60: 'Als Parteien stehen sich der Kläger (*actor, petitor, is qui agit*) und der Beklagte (*reus, is cum quo agitur, is a quo agitur*) regelmässig mit kontradiktorischen Behauptungen gegenüber. Bei der streiteinsetzenden *legis actio in personam* behauptet der Kläger ein Recht zum Zugriff auf die Person des Beklagten aus dessen Haftung; der Beklagte bestreitet dieses Recht. Auch bei der *actio in rem* schliessen sich die Behauptungen der Parteien über das Recht, den Streitgegenstand für sich haben zu dürfen, gegenseitig aus. Da bei all diesen Klagen der Kläger etwas vom Beklagten oder eine Partei etwas von der anderen begehrt, kann der Sachentscheid nur dahin lauten, ob dieses Begehren berechtigt oder unberechtigt ist. Im ersten Fall wird der Kläger — bei der *actio in rem* einem Prätendenten — ein Weg freigegeben, der zu seiner Befriedigung führt, im zweiten wird ihm der Weg versagt.' It is compatible with this trial-like situation that Nature's words are characterized as invective (l. 932 *increpet,* l. 963 *incilet*); a glance at Cicero's *Pro Caecina* may convey an impression of the tone of proceedings in Roman private trials of the period.

[9] See the commentary on this section in Th. Kurth, *Senecas Trostschrift an Polybius* (1994), 124–30, and A. Schiesaro, 'Lucrezio, Cicerone, l'oratoria', *MD* 19 (1987), 29–61, at 60–1.

[10] On the very Roman colouring of the descriptions of punishment see H. D. Jocelyn, 'Lucretius, his copyists and the horrors of the Underworld', *AClass* 29 (1986), 43–56.

a 'you' (3.1024–52).[11] It includes the Roman king Ancus, the Persian king Xerxes, Scipio Africanus, Homer, Democritus, and Epicurus. About all these the reader is supposed to tell himself that they had to die too, and thus to realize how inappropriate and preposterous his wish for eternal life is. Conte and Segal have shown that a motif typically associated with diatribe or *consolatio* — the list of 'great men' who could not escape death, cf. e.g. Plut., *Consol. ad Apoll.* 110d — is here modified through various allusions to texts belonging to higher genres of literature, so as to give it a grand epic tone.[12] However, while some of the purposes of this transformation have been identified, there has been no suggestion so far as to how the passage, given these features, could be seen in its wider context.

Finally (in 3.1053–75), Lucretius analyses a type of restless behaviour which we are accustomed to viewing as one of the diseases of the fast-living modern world (1060–7):

> Exit saepe foras magnis ex aedibus ille,
> esse domi quem pertaesumst, subitoque <revertit>,
> quippe foris nilo melius qui sentiat esse.
> currit agens mannos ad villam praecipitanter,
> auxilium tectis quasi ferre ardentibus instans;
> oscitat extemplo, tetigit cum limina villae,
> aut abit in somnum gravis atque oblivia quaerit,
> aut etiam properans urbem petit atque revisit.
>
> The man who has been bored often goes forth from his great mansion,
> and then suddenly returns because he feels himself no better abroad.
> Off he courses, driving his Gallic ponies to his country
> house in a headlong haste,
> as if he were bringing help to a house on fire.
> The moment he has reached the threshold of the house, he yawns,
> or falls into heavy sleep and seeks oblivion,
> or even makes haste to get back and see the city again.

Lucretius assumes that this type of behaviour is ultimately caused by fear of death, of which fact, however, the individual concerned is unaware (l. 1070). And he recommends the study and understanding of the physical world as a cure for it (ll. 1071–5).

The sequence as it presents itself to the reader and as it has emerged in the course of this survey is this:

(i) Symposiasts at a banquet, their mood determined by fear of death (912–30).
(ii) Nature, in a trial-like situation, addressing a person who is facing imminent death (931–77).
(iii) The sinners allegedly suffering in the underworld (978–1023).
(iv) The great and good of past times who had to die too (1024–52).
(v) Patterns of misguided behaviour caused by fear of death, to be observed in the world we live in (1053–75).

When set out in this way, the idea imposes itself, I believe, that in this section the reader undertakes a symbolic *katabasis* and subsequent return to the upper world.[13] On this reading, section (ii) would come to stand parallel to a 'judgement of the dead', a correspondence first and foremost highlighted by the legal stylization of the speech of Nature; section (iii) would correspond to an actual viewing of the sinners in Tartarus; section (iv) to what in an epic context we would call a show of heroes; and section (v) to the return to the upper world, in the sense that the reader, while previously surveying

[11] On this kind of narrative device, its use in the tradition of diatribe, and its rôle in the wider scheme of psychagogics see B. Wehner, *Die Funktion der Dialogstruktur in Epiktets Diatriben* (2000), at 79–105.

[12] cf. G. B. Conte, 'Il trionfo della morte in Lucrezio', *SIFC* 37 (1965), 114–32; C. Segal, *Lucretius on Death and Anxiety* (1990), ch. 8, at 180. The final section of Book 3 is full of arguments which were originally devised for consolatory contexts but then transformed by Lucretius so as to apply to other concerns, e.g. fear of one's own death. A convenient list of consolatory topics is in J. H. D. Scourfield, *Consoling Heliodorus: a Commentary on Jerome, Letter 60* (1993), 253.

[13] I suggested this in passing in my earlier article (op. cit. (n. 6)), at 300 n. 29.

scenes which were underworldly in some way, is now presented with events in the world we live in.[14]

III

I trust that no reader would want to object that it is absurd to assume that an Epicurean writer who is vigorously arguing against the very existence of an underworld would create a text in which the reader undertakes a symbolic *descensus* to and *ascensus* from it (inverting the principle that the devil can cite scripture, as it were). On reflection, it is a very effective argumentative strategy, which creates a powerful subtext to the surface meaning of the text, thus enhancing and complementing the latter. To name, for the moment, just the most obvious function of this subtext: its implied message is that 'There is nothing frightening in the underworld — you, as a reader, have been there'. The underworld is exploded from inside. So the very purpose of this *katabasis* is, paradoxically, to assure us of the non-existence of the underworld, by way of explanation or reinterpretation of some of the stages a visitor of the underworld would go through.

But before I go into more detail, I want to consider the question whether the 'entrance' to this textual underworld is in any way marked. How would an Epicurean, who believes that death completely ends a human life because both body and soul are dispersed after it, go about marking the entrance to a symbolic underworld in the sense outlined above, an underworld whose non-existence he intends to prove? He would need to send mixed signals — some which suggest to the reader that he is entering underworld territory (for only in this way can the author create the conceptual space in which to perform his demolition work in the first place), and some which undermine or reformulate the conventional view about entry to the underworld (and thus convey what we may call *his* argument about it). Note also that traditional views of the underworld in themselves include suggestive ambiguities: the dead, whether conceived as shadows, souls or whatever, usually retain many features of the living (e.g. they are identifiable by visitors to the underworld, may retain their memory and faculty of speech, do not 'accept' that they are dead etc.). With this in mind, let me turn to the possible signposts, to which I assign an assisting function, given that the primary correspondence between the motif of a final judgement and the speech of Nature is created by the latter's legal stylization.

I quoted above ll. 926–30, i.e. the lines immediately preceding the speech, and I now reproduce the whole paragraph from which they come (ll. 919–30):

> nec sibi enim quisquam tum se vitamque requirit,
> cum pariter mens et corpus sopita quiescunt:
> nam licet aeternum per nos sic esse soporem,
> nec desiderium nostri nos adficit ullum.
> et tamen haudquaquam nostros tunc illa per artus
> longe ab sensiferis primordia motibus errant,
> cum correptus homo ex somno se colligit ipse.
> multo igitur mortem minus ad nos esse putandumst,
> si minus esse potest quam quod nil esse videmus:
> maior enim turba et disiectus materiae
> consequitur leto nec quisquam expergitus exstat
> frigida quem semel est vitai pausa secuta.

[14] A precedent in the epic tradition for such a 'virtual *katabasis*' (and perhaps one source of inspiration for Lucretius) is to be found in the *Argonautica* of Apollonius of Rhodes; in the *Argonautica*, the heroes do not undertake a *katabasis*, but rather their whole voyage to the Black Sea is likened to one through a wide range of devices: see R. L. Hunter, *The Argonautica of Apollonius: Literary Studies* (1993), 182–9; P. Kyriakou, 'Katabasis and the underworld in the *Argonautica* of Apollonius of Rhodes', *Philologus* 139 (1995), 256–64; D. Nelis, *Vergil's Aeneid and the Argonautica of Apollonius Rhodius* (2001), 228–55. One crucial difference in *De rerum natura* is of course that here it is the reader (or so I argue) who undertakes the *katabasis*.

In fact, no one feels the want of himself and his life
when both mind and body alike are quiet in sleep;
for all we care that sleep might be everlasting,
and no craving for ourselves touches us at all;
and yet those first-beginnings dispersed through our body
are not straying far from sense-giving motions
at the time when a man, startled from sleep, gathers himself together.
Death therefore must be thought of much less moment to us,
if there can be anything less than what we see to be nothing;
for a greater dispersion of the disturbed matter
takes place at death, and no one awakens and rises
whom the cold stoppage of life has once overtaken.

I would take the presence of *sopor* and *letum* as one marker that we are moving into underworld territory. The brothers Sleep and Death appear as a pair first in Homer, where they transfer the body of Sarpedon to Lykia (*Il.* 16.454f.; 671f.), already operating in the borderline area between this world and the next. More to the point, they appear as two of the children of the Night in Hesiod, *Theog.* 756ff., where they are situated in the depths of Tartarus. I believe that a marked reference to this obviously very well known passage in Hesiod would suffice to create the aura of 'underworld' I am envisaging.[15] Yet a further text immediately springs to mind: when Aeneas makes his way to the underworld in *Aeneid* 6, he finds an odd collection of demons at its entrance; among them are the brothers Sleep and Death (*Aen.* 6.277–9):

. . . terribiles visu formae, Letumque Labosque;
tum consanguineus Leti Sopor et mala mentis
Gaudia . . .

There is, to my knowledge, no extant description or depiction of the underworld earlier than Vergil where Sleep and Death are located at the entrance of the underworld; but it seems very likely that Vergil was not the first poet to place them there, and tradition certainly provided more than enough opportunities for doing this.[16] Following up the introductory considerations above, I conclude that the presence of sleep and death is a feature which may invite a connection with traditional underworld imagery.

Given this build-up to the speech of Nature and its being geared to a situation of imminent death, it is very tempting to interpret the *denique* at the beginning of l. 931 not as a co-ordinating 'then again' but as an emphatic 'finally', which would further contribute to an atmosphere of 'endgame':

Denique si vocem rerum natura repente
mittat . . .

Finally, if Nature suddenly uttered a voice . . .

[15] Hesiod was an important model for the philosophical didactic tradition from Parmenides onwards, for obvious reasons: he was the most prominent representative of non-philosophical attempts to explain the world in verse. → W. Burkert, 'Das Proömium des Parmenides und die Katabasis des Pythagoras', *Phronesis* 14 (1969), 1–30, at 16–17; on the wider aspects of pre-Socratic philosophers positioning themselves within the didactic tradition see S. Broadie, 'Rational theology', in A. A. Long (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy* (1999), 204–24.

[16] Apart from the references already given, any poet who has read Aristophanes' *Frogs* may be tempted to place some shadowy creatures at the entrance to the underworld. That allegorical representations of Curse, Envy and Riot (and similar 'creatures') featured in pictorial representations of the underworld in the Hellenistic era emerges from [Dem.] 25.53; cf. also the description of Polygnotus' painting of the underworld in Paus. 10.25–31.12, especially the characters at the entrance to Hades (10.29.1), and C. Robert, *Das Hadesbild des Polygnot*, 16. Hallesches Winckelmannsprogramm (1892). G. Wöhrle, *Hypnos der Allbezwinger* (1995), at 34, points out that in statues Hypnos is sometimes represented as holding a jar filled with water from the underworld stream Lethe, and that the bat's wings he is sometimes said to have suggest an underworld association as well (e.g. Lucian, *ver. hist.* 2.32–3; cf. *Od.* 24.6–9 where the souls of the dead suitors are likened to bats; surely the etymology of νυκτερίς plays a role here); on representations of Hypnos as a demon of death see ibid., 32. A very comprehensive survey of ancient underworld descriptions is A. Dieterich, *Nekyia – Beiträge zur Erklärung der neuentdeckten Petrusapokalypse* (1893); see esp. 46–62 for a survey of minor characters located there.

The technique of letting the reader undertake a *katabasis* to show him that there can be no such thing as an underworld has, of course, its corollary in certain measures Lucretius takes to battle against the second major opponent to human happiness, the fear of the gods. The way in which the hymn to Venus opens up *De rerum natura* 1 and is then deconstructed in the further course of the work is the most obvious example of this typical Lucretian strategy.[17]

Further, in an epic (which *De rerum natura* of course is on one level of description), the motif of a *katabasis* is bound to have certain connotations: it always has an inbuilt reference to Book 11 of the *Odyssey*. *Katabaseis* can never help being Odyssean in some sense.[18] Now a *katabasis* read in this way would not be an erratic Odyssean intrusion in the wider context of *De rerum natura*. Studies like those by Hardie and Gale have shown how consistently epic and in particular Odyssean imagery is employed in the poem. The sea-storm as a metaphor for the kind of psychic turmoil in which men have to live if they lead a life unreformed by the teachings of Epicurean philosophy (2.1–13) plays an important rôle in establishing the Odyssean theme, and provides a background for certain ways of representing Epicurus, the poet, and the reader. For Epicurus may be assimilated to Odysseus, which adds a mythical dimension to his achievement. Further, the reader himself may also be likened to Odysseus.[19] The image transfer involved in this second step — from Odysseus to Epicurus to the reader — can be viewed as an oblique form of parainesis, as an attempt to boost the reader's morale, because his voyage to the underworld puts him on a par with Odysseus and also makes him relive the insights of Epicurus.[20]

With enquiry into the question of how a *katabasis* would fit the more immediate context in *De rerum natura* 3, there arises another motif associated with the theme of the journey (and spiritual journey in particular) which is so prominent in the Odyssean reading of some of the *De rerum natura*'s imagery, namely that of initiation. This motif has a long history in philosophical didactic poetry going back to Parmenides and

[17] See, for example, D. Clay, *Lucretius and Epicurus* (1983), at 87–95 and 109–10. Cf. P. Hardie, *Vergil's Aeneid — Cosmos and Imperium* (1986), at 196: 'In Lucretius one may also distinguish internal and external aspects of inversion; the external inversion by which Epicurus brings man from oppression to supremacy is matched by the continuous upsetting of received ideas and hierarchies in the poem, a didactic device intended to lead the reader gradually from illusion to clear vision. Irony and allegory are the verbal equivalents of the narrative device of inversion.'

[18] M. Burnyeat, 'First words: a valedictory lecture', *PCPS* 43 (1997), 1–20, at 5–8 shows that in his *Republic* Plato uses the *katabasis* motif to highlight a crucial aspect of his enterprise of outlining the ideal city, and that a reference to the *Odyssey*, which effectively makes the *katabasis* 'Odyssean', plays a crucial role in this. I believe this further strengthens the case for the possibility of an 'Odyssean reading' of the *katabasis* in *De rerum natura* 3, given the broader context of Lucretian interaction with Platonic dialogues (see below).

[19] For full details cf. M. Gale, *Myth and Poetry in Lucretius* (1994), 119–25, who at p. 124 writes: '[the reader] . . . even makes a katabasis in 3.978–1023', which is the only (partial) anticipation of the katabasis idea I could find. I sample some of the material Gale has collected. Passages connected with Epicurus ~ Odysseus: (i) metaphor of the journey, imposed on the image of the 'flight of the mind': 1.62–79; (ii) 1.66 Epicurus introduced as *Graius homo* cf. ἀνὴρ πολύτροπος *Od.* 1.1–2, with names delayed until 3.1042 and 1.21, respectively; (iii) 6.8 '[Epicurus] cuius . . . iam ad caelum gloria fertur', cf. *Od.* 8.74, οἴμης τῆς τότ' ἄρα κλέος οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν ἵκανε, and 9.20. Passages connected with reader ~ Odysseus: (i) he is on a voyage towards the *sapientum templa serena* (2.8), guided by the poet and divine Epicurus. Cf. F. Buffière, *Les Mythes d' Homère et la pensée grecque* (1956), 365–91, for allegorical readings of the *Odyssey* as a spiritual voyage, from the late Hellenistic era onwards; (ii) Epicurus brings the reader rescue from the storm (5.8–12); cf. Ino in *Od.* 5.333ff.; (iii) various characters try to hinder the reader, e.g. a *vates* in 1.102 or *quidam* in 1.371; (iv) the reader is subject to many *errores*, cf. 1.332, 1.393, 2.82, 2.132, 3.105, 4.824 and *passim*; for Odysseus' wanderings as *errores* cf. Cic., *Off.* 1.113, Manil. 2.4 (e.g.). On a polemical association of Odysseus and Epicurus, made by opponents of the Epicureans, see E. Kaiser, 'Odysseee-Szenen als Topoi', *MH* 21 (1964), 109–36 and 197–224, at 220–3; P. Gordon, 'Phaeacian Dido: lost pleasures of an Epicurean intertext', *CA* 17 (1998), 188–211.

[20] *De rerum natura* is pitched as a novice's introduction to Epicureanism. See K. Kleve, 'What kind of work did Lucretius write?', *SO* 54 (1979), 81–5; G. B. Conte, *Generi e lettori* (1991), ch. 1.; Clay, op. cit. (n. 17), 212ff.; P. Mitsis, 'Committing philosophy on the reader: didactic coercion and reader autonomy in de Rerum Natura', in *Mega Nepios. Il destinatario nell' epos didascalico*, *MD* 31 (1993), 111–28.

Empedocles,[21] and later on was extensively employed not only by Plato and Academic philosophers but also by Epicurus and Epicureans;[22] clearly the latter too wanted to make a claim to provide true illumination, and in doing this they were quite happy to appropriate for themselves the connection Plato had made between rational philosophical argument and spiritual purification.[23] For my purpose, two points are primarily of interest: the general presence of the imagery of initiation in *De rerum natura* 3 and its coherence with a *katabasis*. Before these can be addressed, it may not be entirely superfluous to remark that the relationship between actual ritual practice and its 'depiction' in works of literature or art may be expected to be indirect,[24] in more than one respect. Quite apart from the point that we are dealing with arcane mystery cults, the relationship of the literary motif 'initiation' to actual cult practices would always be selective and syncretistic. There are certain aspects of cult practice which capture an artist's imagination more than others, and these are not unlikely to develop a life of their own once they have entered a literary tradition. Fritz Graf has shown that through Plato we know of epic poems presenting themselves as Eleusinian texts which described cult practices that are very difficult to reconcile with the archaeological evidence we have of Eleusis.[25] Later we find evidence for rhetorical exercises on themes broadly pertaining to mystery cults, which incidentally in itself represents good grounds for believing that the initiation motif is something to which an educated first-century B.C. reader would be sensitive.[26] One may also want to compare the use of this kind of imagery in ancient novels, although few scholars follow Merkelbach's view that these novels should be read as sacral texts which can be decoded so as to reveal direct insights into actual cult practice.[27]

As has been observed by Fauth, Gale, and others,[28] at the beginning of *De rerum natura* 3 (ll. 1–6) Epicurus is represented as a mystagogue who guides the poet from *tenebrae* to *lumen*, illuminating the *commoda vitae* only the Epicurean can see. The imagery is continued in ll. 14–17, 'simul ac ratio tua [sc. Epicurus'] coepit vociferari naturam rerum', which has been likened to the shout of the hierophant.[29] In reaction to this, the poet experiences a vision (l. 17 'totum video per inane geri res'), which is then followed up by a cluster of words belonging to the semantic field of seeing; ll. 29–30 'sic natura tua vi|tam manifesta patens ex omni parte retecta est' is a particularly striking example. And while these lines show Epicurus as mystagogue and the poet as initiand, we also find in other passages a shift of rôles by which the poet is the mystagogue and the reader the initiand; compare, for instance, the end of Book 1 (1.1114–17):

[21] Parmenides: cf. Burkert, op. cit. (n. 15), at 28: 'Um nun aber nochmals auf Parmenides zurückzukommen: die Fahrt — auf dem Weg zur Sonne? — ins Jenseits zur geheimnisvollen Göttin, die Verkündigung der Göttin über die Wahrheit von Sein und Nichtsein, dies hat sein Vorbild nicht nur bei Hesiod, Epimenides, Sibylle, sondern gerade auch in der Katabasis des Demeter-Hierophanten Pythagoras, des Verkünders der Seelenwanderungslehre.' Empedocles: frg. 110.2DK, which may lie behind *De rerum natura* 1.1114–17 (to be quoted below); and see P. Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic* (1995), 230–2.

[22] cf. *Ep. ad Hdt.* 36.83; *SV* 52; Metrod. frg. 37 (Clem. Alex., *Strom.* 5.138) and 38 (Plut., *Adv. Col.* 1117a); a full survey of the vocabulary of initiation in general is to be found in C. Riedweg, *Mysterienterminologie bei Platon, Philon und Klemens von Alexandrien* (1987).

[23] See Riedweg, op. cit. (n. 22), 17–21 and in particular *Soph.* 230b4 and *Phd.* 69b8; C. Schefer, 'Platons Lysis als Mysterieneinweihung', *MH* 58 (2001), 157–68.

[24] On the depiction on vases see pls 70–3 and the commentary in U. Bianchi, *The Greek Mysteries*, Iconography of Greek Religions xvii.3 (1976).

[25] F. Graf, *Eleusis und die orphische Dichtung Athens in vorhellenistischer Zeit* (1974), 138 and 140.

[26] The evidence is collected in Riedweg, op. cit. (n. 22), 122–3 with nn. 32–3; see also idem, 'Die Mysterien von Eleusis in rhetorisch geprägten Texten des 2./3. Jahrhunderts nach Christus', *ICS* 13 (1988), 127–33.

[27] R. Merkelbach, *Roman und Mysterium in der Antike* (1962), esp. 37–53, with the review by R. Turcan, 'Le roman initiatique: à propos d'un livre récent', *RHR* 163 (1963), 149–99; see also R. Beck, 'Mystery religions, aretalogy and the ancient novel', in G. Schmeling (ed.), *The Novel in the Ancient World* (1996), 131–50.

[28] W. Fauth, 'Divus Epicurus: zur Problemgeschichte philosophischer Religiosität bei Lukrez', *ANRW* I.4 (1973), 205–25, esp. 220–4; Gale, op. cit. (n. 19), 193–6; D. Fowler, 'The didactic plot', in M. Depew and D. Obbink (eds), *Matrices of Genre: Authors, Canons, and Society* (2000), 205–19 and 299–302, at 212–17. On the subject of mystery language in Lucretius in general see E. Norden, *Agnostos Theos: Untersuchungen zur Formengeschichte religiöser Rede* (1913), 100–1.

[29] cf. Fowler, op. cit. (n. 28), at 301 n. 36, and Hippolytus, *Ref. omn. haer.* 5.8.40.

Haec sic pernosces parva perductus opella;
namque alid ex alio clarescet, nec tibi caeca
nox iter eripiet quin ultima naturai
pervideas: ita res accendent lumina rebus.

So you will gain a thorough understanding of these matters,
led on with very little effort;
for one thing will become clear by another, and blind night
will not steal your path and prevent you from seeing
all the uttermost recesses of nature:
so clearly will truths kindle light for truths.

Here it is the reader who is to gain access to privileged knowledge by a quasi-revelation performed by Lucretius.[30] It is this second mode of the initiation motif which we would have to see in the *katabasis* at the end of Book 3, if it can be integrated in the initiation.

So how would the *katabasis* fit this scheme? Various texts make an explicit connection between the initiation ritual and what one might call a *katabasis* experience, which means either that the ritual actually included such a descent in a quasi-theatrical form or at least that writers and artists likened the experience of the initiand (or the effects of the initiation) to it. One well-known text which makes this connection is Plut. fr. 178 Sandbach (from the *De anima*; translation Sandbach):

> In this world it [the soul] is without knowledge, except when it is already at the point of death; but when that time comes, it has an experience like that of men who are undergoing initiation into great mysteries; and so the verbs τελευτᾶν (die) and τελεῖσθαι (be initiated), and the actions they denote, have a similarity. In the beginning there is straying and wandering, the weariness of running this way and that, and nervous journeys through darkness that reach no goal, and then immediately before the consummation every possible terror (τὰ δεινὰ πάντα), shivering and trembling and sweating and amazement. But after this a marvellous light meets the wanderer, and open country and meadowlands welcome him; and in that place there are voices and dancing and the solemn majesty of sacred music and holy visions. And amidst these, he walks at large in new freedom, now perfect and fully initiated, celebrating the sacred rites, a garland upon his head, and converses with pure and holy men; he surveys the uninitiated, unpurified mob here on earth, the mob of living men who, herded together in murk and deep mire, trample one another down and in their fear of death cling to their ills, since they disbelieve in the blessings of the other world.

The status of this piece of evidence is not exactly clear,[31] but it is obvious enough that, for Lucretius' *katabasis* to be contextualized by a reader with the initiation imagery at the beginning of Book 3, a perception of an initiation ritual as displayed in this fragment would perfectly suffice. It goes without saying that there is plenty here for Lucretius to submit to his inversion techniques; quite apart from τὰ δεινὰ πάντα, the reader's return to the upper world and the viewing of the ever-restless aristocrat (3.1053–67) can neatly be read against the description of the uninitiated at the end of the fragment. That some kind of descent formed part of Dionysiac cult practice is certain for the Hellenistic era

[30] Note that this shift of rôles is analogous to the one observed in connection with the Odyssean theme above: Epicurus may be likened to Odysseus, and the reader to Odysseus.

[31] Graf, op. cit. (n. 25), 137 ends his discussion of the passage in this way: 'Damit stellt sich uns der Mysterienvergleich aus "De anima" dar als eine Schilderung des Aufstiegs der Seele, welche lediglich in dem Sinne auf das Mysterienerlebnis Bezug nimmt, daß der Stimmungsverlauf während der Initiation mit demjenigen während des Todes zusammengestellt wird, ohne daß die einzelnen Riten, welche einen solchen Erlebnisverlauf bewirken, konkretisiert würden.' Even if the reference was to mysteries strictly speaking, we could not tell if it was to specific rituals like, e.g., those of Eleusis.

and probable for the fifth century B.C.,[32] and scholars have identified the pattern of initiation with *katabasis* in Virgil's *Georgics* and his *Aeneid*.[33] As to the meaning of all this, it is clearly supposed to question the mystery cults' purpose and to assert Epicurean authority over them as the only way to a happy life, which seems an unsurprising move, given Lucretius' addressee and the late Republican aristocracy's obsession with mystery religions.[34] After all, the Epicureans must have felt that they were, as it were, competing for the same customers with mystery cults; cf., for instance, Plut., *Non posse* 27.1105B:

> Not very many men fear those things [stories about the mythical sinners in the underworld], as they are teachings of mothers and nurses and fabulous tales, and those who do fear them believe that mystic initiations and purifications help us against them.[35]

Reading the end of the first triad of *De rerum natura* in the suggested way is bound to influence our perception of the composition of the whole work. Units of text with an identifiable and complex internal structure are usually centres of gravity in their larger context. In the present case the passage in question already stands in a privileged position[36] and obviously in some way refers to the end of the second triad, the plague description, in virtue of its subject matter.[37] So here in particular it does make a difference if we view the end of Book 3 as a disparate set of passages whose striking incoherence is not really concealed by labelling it 'the diatribe against the fear of death',

[32] Relevant evidence is gathered and analysed in M. P. Nilsson, *The Dionysiac Mysteries of the Hellenistic and Roman Age* (1957), 116–32, esp. 122ff.; F. Graf, 'Katabasis', in *Der Neue Pauly* 6 (1999), 327–30, at 328. For the classical period see R. Seaford, 'Dionysiac drama and the Dionysiac mysteries', *CQ* 31 (1981), 252–75, esp. 261–2 and earlier literature ibid.; on the probable rôle of an Orphic ἱερὸς λόγος περὶ τῶν ἔν Ἅιδου or περὶ τῆς ἐν Ἅιδου καταβάσεως see C. Riedweg, 'Initiation – Tod – Unterwelt. Beobachtungen zur Kommunikationssituation und narrativen Technik der orphisch-bakchischen Goldplättchen', in F. Graf (ed.), *Ansichten griechischer Rituale* (1998), 359–98, at 378–9, with R. Parker, 'Early Orphism', in A. Powell (ed.), *The Greek World* (1995), 483–510, at 484–7, and W. Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (1987), at 70, on the use of books in such initiations. A testimony from the imperial era is Lucian, *Catapl.* 22, where a man newly arrived in the underworld remarks that his experience closely resembles initiation at Eleusis (he is suddenly faced with Tisiphone); on the passage see C. G. Brown, 'Empousa, Dionysus and the Mysteries: Aristophanes, *Frogs* 285ff.', *CQ* 41 (1991), 41–50, at 46. On the *katabasis* in the oracular cult of Trophonius and its relation to mysteries see P. Bonnechere, 'Trophonius of Lebadea: mystery aspects of an oracular cult in Boeotia', in M. B. Cosmopoulos (ed.), *Greek Mysteries: the Archaeology and Ritual of Ancient Greek Secret Cults* (2003), 169–92, at 174.

[33] *Georgics*: P. Scazzoso, 'Riflessi misterici nelle Georgiche di Virgilio', *Paideia* 11 (1956), 5–28; L. Morgan, *Patterns of Redemption in Virgil's Georgics* (1999), 184–97; A. Hardie, 'The Georgics, the Mysteries and the Muses at Rome', *PCPS* 48 (2002), 175–208. *Aeneid*: G. Luck, 'Virgil and the mystery religions', *AJPh* 94 (1973), 147–66. Note that it is possible to read the whole of *De rerum natura* 3 as mapped onto an initiation ritual. I observed above that, while at the beginning of the book it is Lucretius who assumes the rôle of the initiand, with Epicurus as mystagogue, in 3.930ff. one would have to assume a shift of rôles: there Lucretius becomes the mystagogue, and the reader the initiand. Accordingly, the journey from darkness to light, perhaps the most significant single theme of initiation imagery, is performed twice, once by Lucretius in the *prooemium*, and once by the reader in the course of the *katabasis* which finally releases him to the upper world. Entirely in keeping with this is the fact that the first half of the book includes extensive instruction on Epicurean psychology; for there is good evidence that in various mystery cults the initiand had to undergo preparatory learning (παράδοσις); on this see Burkert, op. cit. (n. 32), at 69 with n. 14; Riedweg, op. cit. (n. 22), 6–19. So there would be another way to read Lucretius' invitation to apply the knowledge acquired in the first part of the book to one's fear of death (3.830 *igitur*).

[34] cf. K. Clinton, 'The Eleusinian mysteries: Roman initiates and benefactors, second century BC to AD 267', *ANRW* II.18.2 (1989), 1499–1539.

[35] cf. also Cic., *Leg.* 2.36: 'Nam mihi cum multa eximia divinaque vide<a>ntur Athenae tuae peperisse atque in vitam hominum attulisse, tum nihil melius illis mysteriis, quibus ex agresti immanique vita exculti ad humanitatem et mitigati sumus, initiaque, ut appellantur, ita re vera principia vitae cognovimus, neque solum cum laetitia vivendi rationem accepimus, sed etiam cum spe meliore moriendi', 'For among the many excellent and divine institutions which your Athens has brought forth and contributed to human life, none, in my opinion, is better than those mysteries. For by their means we have been brought out of our barbarous and savage mode of life and educated and refined to a state of civilization; and as the rites are called 'initiations', so in very truth we have learned from the beginnings of life, and have gained the power not only to live happily, but also to die with a better hope' (translation Keyes). And earlier Plato, *Rep.* 364b–365a.

[36] Privileged in more than one sense: one would expect a *katabasis* close to the middle of an epic.

[37] There are many other such correspondences, e.g. in the progression and development of themes from Books 2 to 3 and 5 to 6 respectively; see also J. Mewaldt, 'Eine Dublette im Buch IV des Lucrez', *Hermes* 43 (1908), 186–95, who argued that Lucretius originally intended to place Books 3 and 4 in reversed order, a view which still finds some supporters.

or as a unity in the sense outlined above, by allowing the various models to structure the passage. Yet I do not intend to pursue this question further here.[38]

IV

I stated above that I would read the speech of Nature (ll. 931–77) against the background of a final judgement. And I argued that this would have to be read as a 'private trial' about the matter we consist of, not a criminal trial in which we are judged for our sins. I think Lucretius highlights this correspondence when he contrasts the necessity to pass on one's matter in 3.966 with 'nec quisquam in barathrum nec Tartara deditur atra'. For 'Tartarus' or 'Tartara' is here not coextensive with 'Hades' or 'underworld'; while the term may also be used metonymically to denote the underworld in general,[39] it normally denotes the deepest part of the underworld (cf. Hom., *Il.* 8.13–14 βάθιστον βέρεθρον, echoed by the Attic βάραθρον = *barathrum* here) where the souls of the sinners are sent after their judgement.[40]

Now, given the correspondence of final judgement and the speech of Nature, one cannot fail to realize that it fits the initiation motif rather better than the attempt to read the *katabasis* against the wider background of Odyssean imagery in *De rerum natura*. For while judgement scenes are likely to have featured in any ritual *katabasis* undertaken by Eleusinian and Dionysiac initiands, there is no proper judgement of the dead in Homer's *Odyssey*, and the one that is there is not 'located' at the beginning of the *katabasis* and is crucially different from the one we would view as a reference point and Epicurean target. Cf. 11.568–71:

> Ἔνθ' ἦ τοι Μίνωα ἴδον, Διὸς ἀγλαὸν υἱόν
> χρύσεον σκῆπτρον ἔχοντα, θεμιστεύοντα νέκυσσιν,
> ἥμενον: οἱ δέ μιν ἀμφὶ δίκας εἴροντο ἄνακτα
> ἥμενοι ἑσταότες τε, κατ' εὐρυπυλὲς Ἄιδος δῶ.
>
> There then I saw Minos, the glorious son of
> Zeus, golden sceptre in hand, giving judgement
> to the dead from his seat, while they sat
> and stood about the king through the wide-
> gated house of Hades, and asked of him judgement. (translation Murray)

[38] On the interpretation of *De rerum natura* 6 *fin.* as a test whether the conversion to Epicureanism was successful see Clay, op. cit. (n. 17), 257–66; Gale, op. cit. (n. 19), ch. 6. *Alii alia.*

[39] cf. two of the three other occurrences of *Tartar-** in *De rerum natura* (3.42 where *Tartara* is tellingly qualified by *leti*; 5.1126 where the contrast with *summum* indicates that the underworld in general is at issue; at 3.1012 Lucretius refers to the creature *Tartarus*) and, e.g., Verg., *Aen.* 11.396–8 (Turnus speaking): 'haud ita me experti Bitias et Pandarus ingens | et quos mille die victor sub Tartara misi, | inclusus muris hostilique aggere saeptus.'

[40] See the material collected by O. Scherling, 'Tartaros', *RE* II.8 (1932), 2440–5 and the references in J. N. Bremmer, *The Rise and Fall of the Afterlife* (2002), at 136 n. 39. Kenney, op. cit. (n. 1), notes on 'barathrum nec Tartara . . . atra': '. . .''the black pit of Tartarus'', a hendiadys'. It seems *barathrum* here serves to disambiguate *Tartara*. D. N. Sedley, *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom* (1998), at 60–1, has an interesting digression on this passage. He starts off by observing that in 3.955, where Nature is haranguing an old man who is unwilling to die, *baratre* seems problematic, given its meaning (Ammonius, *De diff. adf. voc.* B3.29 βάραθρος μὲν γὰρ ὁ βαράθρου ἄξιος ἄνθρωπος); as he says, 'hardly a productive way of conveying Lucretius' principal message, that there is no pit of hell to fear'. So he suggests as a conjecture the objective genitive *barathri*, i.e. 'aufer abhinc lacrimas, barathri et compesce querellas' ('Away with your weeping, and curb your complaining about the pit of hell'). Sedley continues: 'The proposal has one immediate advantage. It supplies a piece of information which is otherwise left unstated, that the old man — whose words were not actually quoted — has been complaining partly about the prospect of hell. And without an indication to that effect, one might be left wondering why Lucretius, at 966–7, should offer his rationalistic denial of hell as directly confirming Nature's rebuke.' *Baratri* in 3.955 seems an intriguing suggestion, but, as I have argued, we do not need it to make sense of what Lucretius says in 3.966–7. For an alternative suggestion concerning 3.955 see M. F. Smith, 'Lucretius 3.955', *Prometheus* 26 (2000), 35–40.

Obviously Minos is moderating quarrels between souls of dead men about, as it were, issues that have arisen in the underworld.[41] What we need for all this to make sense is correspondence with a final judgement which is essentially about retribution for sins we have committed in our lives.

Observing this does not amount to 'weakening' the Odyssean reading, nor is it to give the initiation motif priority over the Odyssean motif, or — worse — make the two incompatible.[42] It is just that, with respect to this particular section of *De rerum natura* 3, meaning cannot be constructed by reading it as alluding to *Odyssey* 11. Of course one could argue that, once the Odyssean theme has been established, the reader himself can supply the reference to the literary topos or even popular belief of a final judgement (as opposed to a particular version of this motif to be found in a particular work of literature); I noted above some of the features of the speech which might invite this kind of move.

But if we take into account the fact that the models referred to structure a text, we may feel that there should be a more specific reference here, not to some vague understanding of the final judgement, but to a particular actualization of this motif, which would account for the prominence given to the final judgement as a point of reference. Further, while I have so far been happy to refer vaguely to 'traditional views' on a final judgement and on the underworld, it is now time to point out that 'traditional views' is in itself a generic expression for a whole range of ideas about how the underworld may look, as a glance at any two texts coming from the period we are dealing with may illustrate (cf. e.g. Verg., *Aen.* 6 and Prop. 4.11). My suggestion is that *De rerum natura* 3 *fin.* refers to the Platonic *Gorgias* and that the relationship between these two texts is extensive and complex in such a way that one could call *De rerum natura* 3 *fin.* a commentary on (certain aspects of) *Gorgias*.

This dialogue must be taken to be a conspicuous target for Epicurean attack.[43] It ends with an underworld myth which evidently draws on a *katabasis* tradition[44] and which features at its beginning an elaborate description of the judgement of the dead, the aim of which is to set punishments for what we did in our lives. The dialogue thus describes exactly the understanding of the afterlife which the Epicureans are bound to reject, because it fuels fear of death on their view. But, what is more, the *Gorgias* represents a particular danger for the Epicureans because it fashions a link between two doctrines which the Epicureans need to dissociate at all costs, that is, a view of pleasure which is very close to the Epicurean position (for if one has the correct view of pleasure, one will not fear death *qua* potential curtailment of pleasures) *and* a view of an afterlife (with some form of continued personal existence, punishments etc.) which is the exact opposite of the Epicurean position. Finally, the *Gorgias* is one of those Platonic dialogues in which the Socratic position is backed up by being likened to the privileged knowledge initiates enjoy over the uninitiated; the initiation motif can thus be seen as a marker of the connection between the two texts.[45]

[41] Strictly speaking, Hades is not envisaged in *Od.* 11 as being under the surface of the earth; but there are passages in the *Iliad* suggesting that the alternative view was also familiar (3.276, 19.258).

[42] Indeed, the notion that the two Homeric epics reveal privileged knowledge of the kind made accessible through initiation rites (or the different notion that Odysseus' voyages can be read as a kind of initiation) can itself be found in antiquity; see Buffière, op. cit. (n. 19), 36–9, 49, 413–18.

[43] In general, Platonic dialogues can often be identified as targets of Epicurus and Epicureans, notably the *Timaeus*; cosmology and physics are of course areas where Epicureans and Platonists disagree sharply. Cf. Sedley, op. cit. (n. 40), 75–81; idem, 'Epicurus and his professional rivals', in J. Bollack and A. Laks (eds), *Etudes sur l'épicurisme antique* (1976), 119–59; and earlier F. Solmsen, 'Epicurus and cosmological heresies', *AJPh* 72 (1951), 1–23 and 'Epicurus on the growth and decline of the cosmos', *AJPh* 74 (1953), 34–51; P. De Lacy, 'Lucretius and Plato', in G. P. Carratelli (ed.), ΣΥΖΗΤΗΣΙΣ– *Studi sull' Epicureismo Greco e Romano offerti a Marcello Gigante, vol. i* (1983), 291–307.

[44] Indeed Neo-platonic commentators were to call Platonic myths like this one *Nekyia* later on, if they were concerned with the soul; see H. Tarrant, R. Jackson and K. Lycos (eds), *Olympiodorus: Commentary on Plato's Gorgias* (1998), at 294–5; M. Vorwerk, 'Mythos und Kosmos: zur Topographie des Jenseits im Er-Mythos des Platonischen Staates (614b2–616b1)', *Philologus* 146 (2002), 46–64, at 46 n. 2.

[45] Some of the relevant passages are to be quoted below (notably 492e7–493d3), on which see E. R. Dodds, *Plato – Gorgias* (1959) and Graf, op. cit. (n. 25), at 108, 120, 140.

A presence of the *Gorgias* in our passage has of course been noted by the commentators, but there has not so far been an attempt to *interpret* the correspondence between the two texts.[46] I shall highlight the various points of contact between *De rerum natura* 3 *fin.* and the *Gorgias*, paying attention to points of detail as well as broader thematic assonances.

The *Gorgias* has since antiquity been read as having two main themes, rhetoric and justice (which is not to say that there are no alternative interpretations).[47] The two issues of rhetoric and justice are connected in that on Socrates' view true rhetoric has to be informed by and acting on a clear idea of human virtue, in particular justice. The need to form a view on what pleasure is arises in Socrates' exchange with Callicles' notion of the 'strong man' who lives a life of pleasure in exercising his superiority over weaker men and thus commits injustice in the conventional sense. At this point Socrates asks for clarification (492d5–e1; translation Irwin):

> τὰς μὲν ἐπιθυμίας φῂς οὐ κολαστέον, εἰ μέλλει τις οἷον δεῖ εἶναι, ἐῶντα δὲ αὐτὰς ὡς μεγίστας πλήρωσιν αὐταῖς ἀμόθεν γέ ποθεν ἑτοιμαζειν, καὶ τοῦτο εἶναι τὴν ἀρετήν;
>
> Do you say that a man must not restrain his appetites, if he is to be as he should be, but should let them grow as great as possible, and find fulfilment for them from anywhere at all, and that virtue is this?

Callicles confirms that this is exactly his opinion, and he rejects the notion that happiness consists in not requiring anything at all, on the grounds that on this view stones and corpses would be happiest. Socrates, however, has doubts that a life as envisaged by Callicles could be called a happy one (492e7–493d3; translation Irwin):

> Ἀλλὰ μὲν δὴ καὶ ὥς γε σὺ λέγεις δεινὸς ὁ βίος. οὐ γάρ τοι θαυμάζοιμ' ἂν εἰ Εὐριπίδης ἀληθῆ ἐν τοῖσδε λέγει, λέγων—
>
> τίς δ' οἶδεν, εἰ τὸ ζῆν μέν ἐστι κατθανεῖν,
> τὸ κατθανεῖν δὲ ζῆν;
>
> καὶ ἡμεῖς τῷ ὄντι ἴσως τέθναμεν: ἤδη γάρ του ἔγωγε καὶ ἤκουσα τῶν σοφῶν ὡς νῦν ἡμεῖς τέθναμεν καὶ τὸ μὲν σῶμά ἐστιν ἡμῖν σῆμα, τῆς δὲ ψυχῆς τοῦτο ἐν ᾧ ἐπιθυμίαι εἰσὶ τυγχάνει ὂν οἷον ἀναπείθεσθαι καὶ μεταπίπτειν ἄνω κάτω, καὶ τοῦτο ἄρα τις μυθολογῶν κομψὸς ἀνήρ, ἴσως Σικελός τις ἢ Ἰταλικός, παράγων τῷ ὀνόματι διὰ τὸ πιθανόν τε καὶ πειστικὸν ὠνόμασε πίθον, τοὺς δὲ ἀνοήτους ἀμυήτους, τῶν δ' ἀνοήτων τοῦτο τῆς ψυχῆς οὗ αἱ ἐπιθυμίαι εἰσί, τὸ ἀκόλαστον αὐτοῦ καὶ οὐ στεγανόν, ὡς τετρημένος εἴη πίθος, διὰ τὴν ἀπληστίαν ἀπεικάσας. τοὐναντίον δὴ οὗτος σοί, ὦ Καλλίκλεις, ἐνδείκνυται ὡς τῶν ἐν Ἅιδου — τὸ ἀιδὲς δὴ λέγων — οὗτοι ἀθλιώτατοι ἂν εἶεν, οἱ ἀμύητοι, καὶ φοροῖεν εἰς τὸν τετρημένον πίθον ὕδωρ ἑτέρῳ τοιούτῳ τετρημένῳ κοσκίνῳ. τὸ δὲ κόσκινον ἄρα λέγει, ὡς ἔφη ὁ πρὸς ἐμὲ λέγων, τὴν ψυχὴν εἶναι. τὴν δὲ ψυχὴν κοσκίνῳ ἀπῄκασεν τὴν τῶν ἀνοήτων ὡς τετρημένην, ἅτε οὐ δυναμένην στέγειν δι' ἀπιστίαν τε καὶ λήθην.
>
> But the life you speak of is a strange one too. For I tell you, I wouldn't be surprised if Euripides speaks the truth in those verses where he says, 'Who knows if being alive is really being dead, and being dead being alive?' And perhaps we too are really dead. For once I heard from some wise man that we are dead now, our body is our tomb; and that our soul with appetites in it is liable to be persuaded and to sway back and forth. And a subtle man, perhaps some Sicilian or Italian, who told this story, played on the name, and because it was persuadable (πίθανον) and impressionable called it a jar (πίθος), and called the foolish the uninitiated, and said that in the foolish men that of the soul with appetites, the foolish, the intemperate, and insatiable in it, was a leaking jar, because it couldn't be filled. This man indicates — contrary to you, Callicles — that of all those in Hades — speaking of the unseen this way — these are the most wretched, the uninitiated, and that they carry water to this leaky jar with another leaky thing, a sieve. And so he's saying — so the man who told me said — that the sieve is the soul; and he likened the soul of the foolish to a sieve because it was leaky, since it could hold nothing, from its unreliability and forgetfulness.

[46] Apart from the commentators see W. Görler, 'Storing up past pleasures', in K. A. Algra, M. H. Koenen and P. H. Schrijvers (eds), *Lucretius and his Intellectual Background* (1997), 193–207; De Lacy, op. cit. (n. 43).

[47] See Dodds, op. cit. (n. 45), 1–5 and 58–66; H. Tarrant, *Plato's First Interpreters* (2000), ch. 9: 'From False Art to True. A Neoplatonist History of the Interpretation of *Gorgias*'.

And when Callicles hints that he is unimpressed by what Socrates says, the latter continues (493d5–494a5; translation Irwin):

> Φέρε δή, ἄλλην σοι εἰκόνα λέγω ἐκ τοῦ αὐτοῦ γυμνασίου τῇ νῦν. σκόπει γὰρ εἰ τοιόνδε λέγεις περὶ τοῦ βίου ἑκατέρου, τοῦ τε σώφρονος καὶ τοῦ ἀκολάστου, οἷον εἰ δυοῖν ἀνδροῖν ἑκατέρῳ πίθοι πολλοὶ εἶεν καὶ τῷ μὲν ἑτέρῳ ὑγιεῖς καὶ πλήρεις, ὁ μὲν οἴνου, ὁ δὲ μέλιτος, ὁ δὲ γάλακτος, καὶ ἄλλοι πολλοὶ πολλῶν, νάματα δὲ σπάνια καὶ χαλεπὰ ἑκάστου τούτων εἴη καὶ μετὰ πολλῶν πόνων καὶ χαλεπῶν ἐκποριζόμενα: ὁ μὲν οὖν ἕτερος πληρωσάμενος μήτ' ἐποχετεύοι μήτε τι φροντίζοι, ἀλλ' ἕνεκα τούτων ἡσυχίαν ἔχοι. τῷ δ' ἑτέρῳ τὰ μὲν νάματα, ὥσπερ καὶ ἐκείνῳ, δυνατὰ μὲν πορίζεσθαι, χαλεπὰ δέ, τά δ' ἀγγεῖα τετρημένα καὶ σαθρά, ἀναγκάζοιτο δ' ἀεὶ καὶ νύκτα καὶ ἡμέραν πιμπλάναι αὐτά, ἢ τὰς ἐσχάτας λυποῖτο λύπας ἆρα τοιούτου ἑκατέρου ὄντος τοῦ βίου, λέγεις τὸν τοῦ ἀκολάστου εὐδαιμονέστερον εἶναι ἢ τὸν τοῦ κοσμίου;
>
> Come on then, I'll tell you another comparison, from the same school as that one. See now if you're saying something like this about the life of each of the two men, the temperate and the intemperate: Suppose for instance that each of two men has a lot of jars, and one has sound and full jars, one full of wine, another of honey, another of milk, and many others full of many things. And suppose the sources for each of these things are scarce and hard to find, provided only with much severe effort. Now when one man has filled up, he brings in no more, and doesn't care about them, but is at rest as far as they are concerned. The other man has sources like the first man's that can be drawn on, though with difficulty. But his vessels are leaky and rotten, and he is forced to be always filling them day and night, or else he suffers the most extreme distresses. Now if this is how each man's life is, do you say the intemperate man's life is happier than the orderly man's? . . .

But Callicles merely restates his view that the happy life Socrates has in mind is that of a stone or a corpse. Let us survey the affinities between these passages in *Gorgias* and *De rerum natura* 3 *fin.* There is the metaphor of the soul as a vessel, which appears in the two longer passages I have quoted from *Gorgias* and in what I have dubbed above the 'argumentative core' of the speech of Nature (3.935–7); it is there used to describe in a negative way the attitude of those who have lived with a wrong understanding of pleasure and as a consequence crave immortality:

> Nam si grata fuit tibi vita anteacta priorque
> et non omnia pertusum congesta quasi in vas
> commoda perfluxere atque ingrata interiere,
> cur non ut plenus vitae conviva recedis
> aequo animoque capis securam, stulte, quietem?

This metaphor, which is not to be found in any other Epicurean text[48] and which is to be distinguished from more common metaphors like that of the body as a vessel for the soul, is one distinctive point of contact between the two texts. But perhaps more importantly, the two texts agree in their use of the metaphor: both texts acknowledge that the fulfilling of desire should be the determination of pleasure, but they insist that what fulfilment of human desires consists in is a state of contentment and unperturbedness which can be pointedly illustrated with the image of the soul as a filled vessel.[49] Further, both texts make it clear that a life devoted to the satisfaction of ἐπιθυμίαι in the Calliclean sense amounts to hell on earth. In the *Gorgias* Socrates quotes

[48] cf. Görler, op. cit. (n. 46), at 196.

[49] On the Epicurean theory of pleasure and the distinction between katastematic pleasure and pleasures in motion cf. A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley (eds), *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (repr. 1997), sec. 21; K. Algra *et al.* (eds), *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy* (1999), 648–66; G. Striker, 'Epicurean hedonism', in idem, *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (1996), 196–208.

his authority, 'perhaps Italian or Sicilian',[50] who says that living to satisfy our appetites means that we are dead while alive, which can only mean that life is hell if it is a never ending struggle to satisfy ἐπιθυμίαι. And Socrates likens this struggle to the suffering of the Danaids, thus reinforcing the point (493b5–c1):

> . . .καὶ φοροῖεν εἰς τὸν τετρημένον πίθον ὕδωρ ἑτέρῳ τοιούτῳ τετρημένῳ, κοσκίνῳ. τὸ δὲ κόσκινον ἄρα λέγει, ὡς ἔφη ὁ πρὸς ἐμὲ λέγων, τὴν ψυχὴν εἶναι . . .
>
> . . . and that they carry water to this leaky jar with another leaky thing, a sieve. And so he's saying – so the man who told me said – that the sieve is the soul . . .

In Lucretius, the point that the life of pleasure as commonly understood is hell on earth is made by this passage from the allegorical survey of the mythical sinners in the underworld (3.1003–10):

> Deinde animi ingratam naturam pascere semper
> atque explere bonis rebus satiareque numquam,
> quod faciunt nobis annorum tempora, circum
> cum redeunt fetusque ferunt variosque lepores,
> nec tamen explemur vitai fructibus umquam,
> hoc, ut opinor, id est, aevo florente puellas
> quod memorant laticem pertusum congerere in vas,
> quod tamen expleri nulla ratione potestur.
>
> Then to be always feeding an ungrateful mind,
> yet never able to fill and satisfy it with good things —
> as the seasons of the year do for us when
> they come round bringing their fruits and manifold charms,
> yet we are never filled with the fruits of life —
> this, I think, is meant by the tale of the damsels in the flower of their age
> pouring water into a riddled urn,
> which, for all their trying, can never be filled.

Here, too, the life of pleasure is likened to the suffering of the Danaids, the soul-vessel metaphor makes its reappearance, and — just as in Plato — there is a significant omission: the Danaids are not mentioned by name.[51]

If one takes into account the fact that the *Gorgias* seems to have been a popular dialogue around the middle of the first century B.C.,[52] the contemporary readership may well be considered competent to identify these correspondences and thus to read *De*

[50] Dodds, op. cit. (n. 45), 297: 'Socrates does not claim to know, and we cannot know, the identity of the κομψὸς ἀνήρ. He is not a philosopher but a teller of myths (μυθολογῶν, a5); this rules out Olympiodorus' suggestion of Empedocles.' As the Strasbourg papyrus shows, in particular by placing Empedocles frg. 139DK in the *prooemium* of the *Physika*, demonology had a firm place in Empedocles' physical theory (see O. Primavesi, 'Editing Empedocles', in W. Burkert *et al.* (eds), *Fragmentsammlungen philosophischer Texte der Antike* (1998), 62–88, esp. 80–6); so Dodds seems to rule him out on what appear now to be insufficient grounds. While we should perhaps be hesitant to see a reference to Empedocles here (cf. Graf, op. cit. (n. 25), 108), it seems quite probable that Lucretius would have seen it. For in Empedocles there are of course ideas which fit the general context of our passage rather well; frg. 115DK, for instance, where Empedocles talks about his fate as a fallen demon who has been forced to return to earth, may be considered a predecessor to the 'hell on earth' motif we find in *Gorgias* and *De rerum natura*. For the Empedoclean theory of transmigration of the souls as a target of Epicurean criticism see Diog. Oen. frg. 42.ii.7–14 Ferguson Smith.

[51] cf. Kenney, op. cit. (n. 1), at 227–8.: '. . . the Danaids must be taken as a type of behaviour rather than of suffering . . . It is suggested by Heinze that this is Lucretius' reason for not naming them, but it is a curious fact that they are not named by Plato in the *Gorgias* (493a–d), where the allegory of the leaky jar first occurs, though they are clearly alluded to.' For further suggestions as to which features of the Danaids' description in *Gorgias* and Lucretius connect the two, against other instances of this image, see E. Keuls, *The Water Carriers in Hades: A Study of Catharsis Through Toil in Classical Antiquity* (1974), at 106.

[52] In Cicero's *De orat.* 1.47 (written in 55 B.C.; dramatic date 91 B.C.) one of the protagonists (L. Licinius Crassus) claims to have studied it under the supervision of the Academic philosopher Charmadas (admittedly with particular attention to the critique of rhetoric); in the following fifty paragraphs the discussion is largely about topics raised in *Gorgias*, and it is clear that familiarity with the dialogue on the part of the reader is assumed. How widely read the *Gorgias* became in the imperial era can be gleaned from the index of testimonia in Dodds, op. cit. (n. 45), 397–8.

rerum natura 3 *fin.* as referring to *Gorgias*. But my original suggestion was more complex: that we can read the speech of Nature and the survey of mythical sinners as alluding to the final myth of the dialogue. That is, I believe that the reader is supposed, as it were, to blend together the section I have just looked at *and* the final myth (which comes some twenty-five Stephanus pages later in *Gorgias*). This seems a natural next move, once the *Gorgias* has been identified as a model. For what may induce the reader to do this is that, in the end-myth, Plato develops further — and in a fashion very uncongenial to Epicureanism — precisely the considerations on which Lucretius and the *Gorgias* agreed in the passages surveyed above.

In Plato the life of pleasure as conceived by Callicles is identified with the life of conventional injustice. It is a life of τρυφή which the strong man lives because he *can*. When Socrates stresses in the end-myth that injustice and the excessive giving in to one's ἐπιθυμίαι which goes with it would result in a deformation of the soul (524e1–525b7), which the judges in the underworld could spot right away and for which they would set severe punishment, he indirectly underpins his earlier statements about pleasure as having one's jars filled as opposed to filling them constantly. For a life of temperance — which would for Plato be a life of virtue in general because one cannot have one virtue but not the others — would be the safest way to avoid punishment in the underworld. By contrast, the Epicureans teach their theory of pleasure so as to rid us of our fear of death *qua* curtailment of pleasures, and it would defeat their purpose entirely if the advertising of this theory involved playing on their audience's fear of punishments in the underworld.

Thus alluding to the final myth of *Gorgias* would for *De rerum natura* 3 *fin.* mean to contest this link between pleasure conceived as contentment and the prospect of getting away lightly in a final judgement. And, even more elementary, the Epicureans would want to contest strongly that there is any connection between morality and a theory of pleasure which defines the latter as contentment; for the Epicureans, having the right attitude about pleasure is vital for not caring about how long one's life is going to be, this in turn leads to ἀταραξία, and that is all there is to it.[53]

I am interested in describing how Lucretius refers to literary and philosophical models, and I believe the concept of commentary has potential in that connection. There has been a lot of interest recently in the scholarly practice of writing commentaries and in particular in the ancient beginnings of this practice, and among the questions addressed are how one could define the sub-literary genre 'commentary' and what the ancient commentators' concerns were as opposed to those of their modern successors. Two different ways of grasping the essence of commentary have emerged, which Glenn Most describes as 'indicating certain modes of secondariness which are characteristic of one text with reference to another one' and as 'focusing upon the cultural institutions involved in their production and consumption and inquiring into just what social and

[53] I relegate to a footnote a selective survey of correspondences between *De rerum natura* 3 *fin.* and the final myth. Most conspicuous is of course the general structure of both texts, i.e. the sequence 'judgement of the dead' followed by a survey of the 'mythical sinners'; it is remarkable that neither Homer nor any other epic prior to Lucretius nor the end myths in Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Republic* share this feature (*Phaed.* has a reference to the judgement in 107d–e, but no detailed treatment). Further, both Plato and Lucretius underline the truthfulness of their account, Plato by having Socrates stress that he believes the myth to be true and not a μῦθος, as Callicles would term it (523a1–3), Lucretius by commenting as epic narrator on the harangue of Nature (3.951); in a situation where Lucretius may be seen as trying to assert Epicurean authority over a powerful Platonic tradition, this seems significant. By the same token, both texts emphasize the eternal validity of their accounts; in Plato, it is said that a judgement of the dead καὶ ἀεὶ καὶ νῦν ἔτι ἔστιν ἐν τοῖς θεοῖς (523a6), in Lucretius the same is said about the exchange process of matter which, on Lucretius' view, as I have argued, could be the only subject of contention in any final judgement (3.967–71). In the *Gorgias* Socrates goes on to emphasize the Homericness of his underworld description, a somewhat obfuscating move, given that Plato diverges considerably from Homer and follows him only on minor details (cf. Dodds, op. cit. (n. 45), at 373); for a reader of Lucretius, however, this may facilitate the integration of the model *Gorgias* into the reading of *De rerum natura* 3 *fin.* as an Odyssean *katabasis*. And it is interesting that at *Gorg.* 524b2–4 Socrates says: 'Death, it seems to me, is in fact nothing other than the separation of two things, the soul and the body, from each other' — a view Lucretius has argued for in Book 3 as a whole and which he is driving home in the speech of Nature, but which in *Gorgias* obviously implies the continued existence of the soul; so this could be seen as a clever example of recontextualization (cf. n. 17 above on Lucretian inversion techniques).

psychological aims they serve and what functions they fill'.[54] Both approaches work very well for the case in hand: just as a scholarly commentary has little in the way of internal textual logic of its own but, in following 'the text' and dividing it up into lemmata, receives its structure in virtue of its being a commentary *on* something, so the end of Book 3 would appear as a less-than-coherent jumble of passages unless the reader provides one by reading it against a certain model. And in obvious analogy to scholarly commentaries ancient and modern, we can identify the social and psychological aims this commentary serves:[55] the final part of Book 3 acknowledges the impact made by Platonic dialogues and the *Gorgias* in particular in the Hellenistic era, attempts to police the persuasive vigour of this work, gives the reader guidance so that he may not misinterpret the *Gorgias* but rather see what makes sense in it and what should be rejected, and, finally, is one element in Lucretius' broader strategy of inviting and manipulating the reader to become a member of the kind of close-knit, sect-like community which distinguishes the Epicureans from the other Hellenistic schools.

If, when investigating correspondences like the ones discussed above, we look to modern commentaries in search of some descriptive categories, we may be able to make statements about how these relationships work (but we may also have difficulties in distinguishing them from other instances of intertextuality). If we consider, by contrast, ancient commentary practice and its pragmatics, we may get a glimpse of the author's inspiration for engaging with a text like a Platonic dialogue in precisely the way Lucretius does in *De rerum natura* 3 (on my argument). By extension, we may also get a glimpse of the contemporary readership's ways of processing such complex allusions. For clearly it would make a difference if this readership felt positively reminded to call on their familiarity with scholarly genres of literature like the commentary in making sense of *De rerum natura*. I give one example of what I have in mind: there was an Epicurean tradition of writing what Knut Kleve has called anti-commentaries against Platonic dialogues (including the *Gorgias*), i.e. treatises which closely engaged with the argument of a dialogue from an Epicurean point of view, quite possibly following the actual format of a commentary.[56] It seems not particularly likely that the subject of rhetoric attracted much interest from the first generations of Epicureans immediately after Epicurus;[57] but surely the particular connection between pleasure and morality which is made in *Gorgias* would have deserved a comment.[58] In this connection it seems reasonable to assume that an Epicurean anti-commentary on the *Gorgias* did more or less the same as Lucretius does in our passage; they may well have shown first how close

[54] The quotations are from p. vi of Most's preface in G. W. Most (ed.), *Commentaries – Kommentare* (1999), but similar analytical categories are employed by I. Sluiter in her article in the same volume: 'Commentaries and the didactic tradition', 173–205. See also I. Sluiter, 'The dialectics of genre: some aspects of secondary literature and genre in antiquity', in Obbink and Depew, op. cit. (n. 28), 183–203. And further J. Assmann and B. Gladigow (eds), *Text und Kommentar* (1995); R. K. Gibson and C. S. Kraus (eds), *The Classical Commentary: Histories, Practices, Theory* (2002).

[55] cf. Most, op. cit. (n. 54), xi, on 'empowerment' as the essential function of commentary.

[56] The work against *Gorgias* was by Metrodorus; Zeno (*Pap. Herc.* 1005 col. 2) knew reasons for suspecting the attribution of its second book to Metrodorus. See K. Kleve, '*Scurra Atticus* — the Epicurean view of Socrates', in ΣΥΖΗΤΗΣΙΣ, op. cit. (n. 43), 227–53, at 229 (mistakenly assigning the *Against Gorgias* to Zeno himself); D. Obbink, *Philodemus on Piety* (1996), 379–89 on col. 25.701–8.

[57] We have knowledge of books by Epicurus against rhetoric (and other arts; cf. D. L. Blank, *Sextus Empiricus: Against the Grammarians* (1998), at xxx–xxxi), but given the *Gorgias*' overt hostility towards rhetoric in its conventional form, I find it difficult to believe that it is the topic of rhetoric which made Epicureans turn to the *Gorgias*.

[58] For reconstructions of the Epicurean view of virtue and justice in particular see P. A. Vander Waerdt, 'The justice of the Epicurean wise man', *CQ* 37 (1987), 402–22; A. Alberti, 'The Epicurean theory of law and justice', in A. Laks and M. Schofield (eds), *Justice and Generosity – Studies in Hellenistic Social and Political Philosophy* (1995), 161–90.

Plato got to the 'truth' in his discussion of pleasure — and how it all went wrong after that.[59]

V

We are now in a position to draw some conclusions and formulate some general observations. The first one brings me back to the very beginning of this article, and to some readers' surprise at the fact that the fear of the underworld is singled out as a particularly pressing problem in the *prooemium* of Book 3, but is seemingly treated as rather unimportant in the later part of the work. One can observe that there is a sense in which the underworld discourse is sustained in *De rerum natura* 3 *fin.*, and that this is easily compatible with the text's *prima facie* addressing of different aspects of the fear of death. Intertextuality here becomes a device which allows Lucretius to solve compositional problems, i.e. to balance the need to address the whole range of anxieties comprised by the generic expression 'fear of death' (fear of what happens to our body after death, fear of death *qua* curtailment of pleasure, or *qua* curtailment of plans and projects) and at the same time not to lose sight of the fear of an afterlife in the underworld.

Further, Plutarch and many later classical scholars have accused Epicurus of an *ignoratio elenchi*, of dealing with comparatively less violent aspects of fear of death, and ignoring others. In particular, there is no lack of evidence in which ancient writers ridicule the Epicurean obsession with the underworld, on the grounds that only children are scared of such things.[60] Quite apart from the fact that one might question the value of this evidence on general grounds (one tends to see such things rather differently in moments of crisis), it is tempting to assume that the target of the Epicureans' arguments has not been properly identified: they could be attacking not the stories about the underworld which we would assign to the area of popular belief, but versions of it which formed part of the ritual in mystery cults and, in particular, intellectualized versions of it like those in the *Gorgias* or other Platonic dialogues.[61] Note that Cicero, who is among those making fun of the Epicureans for the reasons given, wrote something like the *Somnium Scipionis*, which is of course strongly influenced by the final myth of Plato's *Republic*, and that in practice the possible stances one can take on these matters cannot be neatly divided into the two classes 'believing something religiously' and 'not believing it at all'.

Some readers of this article may be tempted to object that I have not provided a satisfactory argument by which the end-myth of the *Gorgias* in particular should be seen as a model for our passage. In response I would refer to the discursive nature of the correspondence with the *Gorgias*. On the account given above, Lucretius blends into one two thematically connected passages which are separated in their original context, by making the sequence 'speech of Nature' and 'allegorical review of mythical sinners' refer to both the discussion of pleasure (492d–494c) and the final myth. Incidentally, by

[59] Another text which suggests itself for comparison is the Derveni Papyrus, on which see A. Laks and G. W. Most, *Studies on the Derveni Papyrus* (1997). In this text the speaker, who is obviously concerned with physical theory, provides an allegorical explanation of an Orphic theogony, which includes a section on punishments in the underworld; see R. Janko, 'The physicist as hierophant: Aristophanes, Socrates and the authorship of the Derveni Papyrus', *ZPE* 118 (1997), 61–94. The author attempts an allegorical explanation of this theogony and likens himself to an hierophant. I have no intuition whether the Derveni text or something like it was available in Rome in the first century B.C. (on the question of its earlier distribution see D. Obbink, 'A quotation of the Derveni Papyrus in Philodemus' *On Piety*', *CE* 24 (1994), 111–35), but surely the similarities are remarkable. On the actual format of the commentary section see A. Lamedica, 'Il Papiro di Derveni come commentario. Problemi formali', in A. H. S. El-Mosalamy (ed.), *Proceedings of the XIXth International Congress of Papyrology, Cairo 2–9 Sept. 1989* (1992), vol. i, 325–33.

[60] cf. the Roman epigram in *IG* XIV 1746; Cic., *Tusc.* 1.10–14; Sen., *Ep.* 24.18; Juv. 2.149–52; Plin., *N.H.* 2.158.

[61] The revival of Pythagoreanism in first-century B.C. Italy plays a rôle here too; Neo-Pythagoreans often claimed that Plato (and Aristotle) had stolen their doctrines from Pythagoras, and the subject matter of the *Gorgias* will have secured it additional attention in that connection. See e.g. C. H. Kahn, *Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans: a Brief History* (2001), ch. 7: 'The Pythagorean Tradition in Rome'.

doing this, Lucretius makes the two arguably connected passages from *Gorgias* stand out in a relief-like fashion in the narrative of the dialogue, thus favouring a particular interpretation of *Gorgias*; a reader of *Gorgias* who does not share the Epicurean preoccupation with pleasure may pay less attention to the fact that crimes we are punished for in the underworld are predicated on a wrong understanding of pleasure.[62] It is the discursive structure of the correspondence which makes it preferable to see the end of *De rerum natura* 3 as referring to *Gorgias*, rather than the extensive eschatological myths at the end of the *Phaedo* or the *Republic*. Not that these should be ruled out altogether as influences, but because they do not make the connection between a particular view of pleasure and a particular view of the afterlife, I would rather assign to the correspondences with these two texts (and a range of others concerned with matters underworldly)[63] the rôle of background noise.[64]

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[62] Lucretius' reading of *Gorgias* is tendentious in the sense that, by highlighting the connection between the pleasure passage and the end myth, he neatly pushes into the background a reading of *Gorgias* which would take into account that the discussion of pleasure is in Plato intertwined with a discussion of the good. Clearly, that is an aspect of the Platonic argument which an Epicurean must want to avoid.

[63] cf. e.g. M. Marincic, 'Der "orphische" Bologna-Papyrus (Pap. Bon. 4), die Unterweltsbeschreibung im Culex und die lukrezische Allegorie des Hades', *ZPE* 122 (1998), 55–9.

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