

## Friendship, Pleasure, and Poetry in Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*

In *De Rerum Natura*, Lucretius famously proposes his view that poetry is the honey on the cup which sweetens the bitter precepts of Epicureanism. In stark contrast to Lucretius' chosen medium, Diogenes Laertius reports that Epicurus adamantly disapproved of poetry (DL 10.6; 10.120). Scholars have argued that Lucretius successfully shows that an Epicurean can in fact compose poetry (Konstan, 1988; Gale 1994). Verse allows Lucretius to unambiguously present Epicurean philosophy in a way that will be readily accepted by his Roman audience (Asmis, 1995; Marcovic 2008). Thus, Lucretius finds pleasure in his task as philosopher-poet (1.927-30). However, a programmatic passage at the end of the proem to Book 1 (vv. 136-45) complicates the issue. Here Lucretius presents a more ambiguous view on poetry, stating that the composition of philosophical verses is in fact difficult and painful. This contradiction must be explained: how can Lucretius, the proud Epicurean, find pleasure in the markedly painful task of poetic composition?

This paper will argue that Lucretius is able to justify the painful task of poetry because it ultimately leads to the greater pleasure of friendship. Through a close reading of the passage at 1.136-45, in which the philosopher-poet outlines his authorial intent, we see that Lucretius intimately connects poetry, pleasure, and friendship. Poetry is pleasurable to his addressee, which leads them to adopt the Epicurean life (1.949 ff.). In turn, Lucretius finds the composition of poetry pleasurable, in spite of its inherent pains and difficulties, because it allows him to pursue true Epicurean friendship (*suavis amicitiae* 1.141). Therefore, the anticipated pleasure (*sperata voluptas* 1.140) of friendship eclipses the present labor of composition and justifies Lucretius' choice of poetic medium.

By focusing on this often-neglected passage, we get a fuller understanding of Lucretius' poetic-philosophical project. *De Rerum Natura* is thus to be viewed as Lucretius' attempt to gain the friendship of his addressee, the undertaking of a true Epicurean.