

### *Ennius Perennis* in Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*

It is well known that Latin poets use the adjective *perennis* in ways that suggest a pun on Ennius' name. The clearest instances of this pun are found in the concluding passages of two famous masterpieces, Horace's three-book collection of *Odes* (3.30.1) and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (15.875). Before these two famous examples, however, Lucretius connected the adjective *perennis* with Ennius in the proem to the *DRN* (1.117-118). This paper argues that this connection in the *DRN* is programmatic and that Lucretius uses the adjective *perennis* throughout his poem to direct the reader's attention to intertextual allusions he makes to the poetry of Ennius.

Divided into two parts, this paper first briefly surveys the evidence for the pun of *Ennius perennis* in Latin poetry, concluding that the most economical hypothesis regarding the origin of this pun is that Ennius himself made it in the *Annales* (cf. Feeney 1999, 17). All subsequent uses of it, therefore, must respond in some way to Ennius' own poetic gesture. The second part of this paper demonstrates that every use of *perennis* in Lucretius occurs in a context in which the influence of Ennius can be detected (the adjective appears only five times: *DRN* 1.118, 3.804, 5.79, 5.262, 5.463).

Focus is given to the occurrence of *perennis* in Lucretius' description of the water cycle at *DRN* 5.261-272, which appears to recycle Ennius' own description of the phenomenon in his Dream of Homer (cf. *Annales* fr. 5 Skutsch and *DRN* 5.269-271). Given that the main purpose of Homer's discourse in the *Annales* was the exposition of the principle of metempsychosis, Ennius must have had Homer adduce the water cycle as an analogy for the transmigration of souls, water taking different forms as it moves from one place to another in the same way as souls take on different bodies. But Lucretius alludes to Ennius' discussion of the water cycle in order to empty

the phenomenon of the misguided metaphysical ideas that Homer puts forward in the *Annales*. According to Lucretius, water is just water. In the end, therefore, Lucretius' uses the adjective *perennis* to cite, yet polemically to correct, Ennius.

Such polemical poetic gestures are characteristic of the *doctus poeta*, whose *doctrina* often is displayed through direct engagement with his sources. As a result of the arguments put forward in this paper about the use of *perennis* in the *DRN*, it will emerge that — perhaps paradoxically — Lucretius signals his allusions to Ennius with a gesture that would seem to align him with the Callimachean neoterics. This situation is in keeping with a dormant controversy in the scholarly literature on Lucretius. On the one hand, some have seen Lucretius as an Ennian poet out of touch with the *avant garde* “new poets” (see the discussion in Farrell 1991, 276-277); others, however, have stressed that Lucretius announces himself as a Callimachean poet in prominent poetological passages throughout the *DRN* (Kenney 1970 and Brown 1982). Therefore, this paper further complicates how we are to understand Lucretius' place in literary history, demonstrating how with his singular use of the adjective *perennis* Lucretius presents himself simultaneously as an Ennian *and* a learned Callimachean poet.

#### Works Cited

Brown, R.D. (1982) “Lucretius and Callimachus” in *ICS* 7: 77-97.

Farrell, J. (1991) *Vergil's Georgics and the Traditions of Ancient Epic: The Art of Allusion in Literary History*, Oxford.

Feeney, D. (1999) “*Mea Tempora*: Patterning of Time in the *Metamorphoses*” in Hardie, P, A. Barchiesi and S. Hinds (eds.) *Ovidian Transformations: Essays on the Metamorphoses and its Reception. Cambridge Philological Society Suppl. 23*, Cambridge, 13-30.

Kenney, E.J. (1970) “Doctus Lucretius” in *Mnemosyne* 23: 366-392.