

## Vergil's Deceptive Dream: Lucretian Visions in Aeneid 6

Book 6 of the Aeneid has drawn the attention of scholars for quite some time and has been the focus of many comparisons. While its obvious connection to Homer's journey to the underworld seems the most obvious target for comparison there have been no shortage of scholars to look instead at the works of an author more contemporary to Vergil and one who was an innovator of Latin elegy. This paper will focus on connections between Lucretius and Vergil that have been well documented in the past and then argue for a different interpretation of the two gates and for book 6 overall. Specifically I will focus on *somnia* and *insomnia* as they are used by Vergil and Lucretius with loaded meanings with regard to Epicurean philosophy. I will show how this interplay suggests that book 6 be considered not as a refutation of Lucretius but as an episode that confirms his condemnation of dreams.

Many scholars have looked at connections between Vergil's poetry and Lucretius's poetic interpretations of Epicurean philosophy. Frequently this investigation focuses on the Lucretian philosophy that is present in Georgics or Eclogues, but there is no shortage of comparison between book 6 of the Aeneid and the Epicurean view of the afterlife expressed by Lucretius in *De Rerum Natura*. While Dyson sees the whole of the Aeneid as an extended response to Lucretius positing gods without passion, and Warden develops a careful analysis of just how much Vergil may have been looking at or thinking about Lucretius in writing his underworld, they both cast Vergil as a critic refuting the works of Lucretius. Warden even carefully shows how Vergil uses Lucretius's own arguments inverted to try to argue the opposite. All of these well considered papers do an excellent job of building a very compelling argument supporting Vergil as responding to Lucretius. Verstraete picks up on a note in Michels about the

two gates of the underworld and creates an argument for how the hero's departure through the gate of false dreams can be reconciled with the truth of the things that he has seen. This has been an ongoing source of debate among scholars and while many excellent readings have been proposed, this paper proposes a new consideration which presents a more direct explanation.

The focus of that explanation will center on the use of the term *somnia* and also *insomnia*. While the term *veris umbris* seems to refer to the spirits of the underworld the term *falsa insomnia* seems to define a much broader category. It is the one through which Aeneas passes. It is my argument that with so many obvious Lucretian notes that this term would recollect what Lucretius calls *somnia ficta*. To strengthen this in the early section of the book we have Vergil's description of a tree covered with *somnia vana* at the entrance of the underworld. Further consideration of Vergil's earlier treatment of *somnia* in Eclogues 8 creates a possible linguistic pattern. I propose that what Vergil is concealing here is not a criticism of Roman history, which has been suggested by others. I am proposing that the way that these dreams become *falsa*, since they are known to be the factual history of Rome, is that the part of book 6 that is being labelled as false is neither Aeneas nor the history of Rome, but the traditional Homeric view of the underworld. Everything from the initial plucking of the branch to the return to the world above is being labelled as a *somnia ficta* or a *insomnia falsa*. This additionally makes all of the careful inversion of Lucretius that Warden observes into a sort of extended litotes, where Vergil presents a scathing criticism of Epicurean philosophy that he then negates to show his support for this philosophical view. In this paper I will look at these uses of *somnia* and *insomnia* in Vergil and Lucretius to develop the connections between the two authors and how they serve as a sort of code word for those intimately familiar with Lucretius to cast this underworld journey as an example of how false dreams drive men.

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