Materiam superabat opus: Lucretius Metamorphosed*

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ABSTRACT

Ovid's narrative of Phaethon's failed attempt prematurely to emulate his father in his unique expertise can be read as a reflection on the virtues and limits of Lucretius' philosophical poetry. The paper suggests that, while he gives much credit to the De Rerum Natura*'s literary quality and its striving for the sublime, Ovid also critiques the hubristic connotations of Lucretius' rejection of divine authority and agency from the workings of nature. The second part of the article explores how this particular version of the myth touches upon issues of poetic authority, political positioning, and Oedipal competition.*

Keywords: Ovid; Lucretius; Epicurus; didactic poetry; sublime

I INTRODUCTION

The past two or three decades have witnessed a wealth of scholarship on Ovid, and substantial progress in the study of Lucretius. However, the relationship between Ovid and Lucretius in the *Metamorphoses* has been explored less than one might expect, perhaps because the Ovidian renaissance has by and large opted for a different angle.[1] This paper aims to add to our understanding of the creative relationship between the two poets, focusing on the story of Phaethon, which straddles the end of the first book of the *Metamorphoses* and the first half of the second. This was an old and distinguished theme, to which Lucretius had given unexpected pride of place in Book 5 of the *De Rerum Natura*. Lucretian words and turns of phrase abound in the whole of Ovid's episode. Some do not seem to extend their impact beyond the immediate choice of wording, but are nonetheless important in signposting the *DRN* as a text which we should reckon with as we read on. Others, on which I will mostly focus,

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[1] Hardie 1988, Lecocq 1999 and Segal 2003 offer stimulating readings of, respectively, Narcissus, the cosmogony of Book 1 and Iphigenia in connection with Lucretius. Myers 1994, Fowler 1995 and Wheeler 1995 are important contributions about the relationship between the two poets. Zingerle 1869–71 provides a list of verbal parallels; see also Hadzsits 1963 and Korpanty 1990.

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establish an intertextual dialogue between the two poems, along the lines already developed in the cosmological section of Book 1. I will endeavour to show that Ovid is engaging here in a strategy of active confrontation and pointed contrast with his predecessor. In this allusive sparring he marks once again his doctrinal difference, while also offering a clever critique of key aspects of the *DRN*'s poetic and philosophical programme.

The sophistication of Ovid's take on this mythic episode and the important position he assigns to it in his poem suggest that Phaethon's story signals a key stage in his reflection on his own approach to epic and to poetry in general. The second part of this paper will accordingly extend the discussion beyond Lucretius and touch upon related issues in Ovid's construction of his poetic persona and programme.

II PATERNITY AND TRUTH

At the beginning of Ovid's narrative, Phaethon plans his journey as a means of finding out whether he is actually the progeny of Sol (1.773–9):[2]

> 'nec longus patrios labor est tibi nosse Penates;
> unde oritur domus est terrae contermina nostrae.
> si modo fert animus, gradere et scitabere ab ipso.'
> emicat extemplo laetus post talia matris
> dicta suae Phaethon et concipit aethera mente,
> Aethiopasque suos positosque sub ignibus Indos
> sidereis transit patriosque adit impiger ortus.

> 'It won't be too much of an effort for you to find your father's Penates. The home where he rises from is close to our land. If your mind leads you to do so, go and ask him yourself'. Happy at his mother's words Phaethon immediately darts off and imagines the heavens in his mind, and crosses his Ethiopia and the land of the Indians, who live under the sun's fire, and with no delay reaches his father's place of origin.

'Fert animus', harking back to the poem's opening line, 'in nova fert animus mutatas dicere formas/ corpora' ('my mind leads me to tell of bodies changed into new forms'), hints at the metapoetic dimensions of the story,[3] which are also suggested by the comparable treatment of the Daedalus myth in the *Ars*[4] and further strengthened by the contiguity between Sol and Apollo.[5] But Phaethon's ascent to the sky in search of the truth follows in the footsteps of a distinguished series of thinkers and philosophers who, metaphorically or otherwise, had embarked on the quest for extra-terrestrial knowledge.[6] Prominent among them is Pythagoras, who at *Met.* 15.63 'approached the gods with his mind' ('mente deos adiit'[7]), but 'concipit aethera mente' (which reappears at 2.76–7 'concipias

[2] *Met.* are quoted according to R. Tarrant's OCT text; for *DRN* I adopt M. F. Smith's Loeb text and translation.
[3] On Phaethon as a failed artist, unwilling to trust language and thus unable 'to achieve the sort of cosmic overview available to the artist', see Wise 1977. On 'fert animus': Holzberg 1998: 90–1.
[4] See Sharrock 1994: 87–195 for a detailed and insightful treatment of the *Ars* episode. Lucretius paves the way by making Phaethon the passive agent of the horses' strength: 'avia cum Phaethonta rapax vis solis equorum/ aethere raptavit' (5.397–8 'when far from his course the furious might of the sun's horses whirled Phaethon throughout the sky and all over the earth').
[5] Fontenrose 1940 shows that Ovid, just as other first-century poets (Fontenrose 1939) does distinguish between the two characters, but syncretism was already attested in Hellenistic sources and plays an important rôle in Virgil (Hardie 1986: 355–6 with n. 64).
[6] A survey in Jones 1926. On Horace's original take on the Epicurean flight of mind see Ferri 1993: 120–5.
[7] This initial statement is expanded upon by Pythagoras himself at 143–52, with discernible Lucretian overtones, see especially 147–52: 'iuvat ire per alta/ astra, iuvat terris et inerti sede relicta/ nube vehi validique umeris insistere Atlantis,/ palantesque homines passim et rationis egentes/ despectare procul trepidosque obitumque timentes/ sic

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animo') arguably evokes the most recent and most daring of such attempts at superhuman knowledge: Epicurus' flight of mind in search of the ultimate truths about the universe as described in the first book of *DRN* (1.72–7):

> ergo vivida vis animi pervicit et extra
> processit longe flammantia moenia mundi
> atque omne immensum peragravit mente animoque,
> unde refert nobis victor quid possit oriri,
> quid nequeat, finita potestas denique cuique
> quanam sit ratione atque alte terminus haerens.

> Therefore the lively power of his mind prevailed, and forth he marched far beyond the flaming walls of the world, as he traversed the immeasurable universe in thought and imagination; whence victorious he returns bearing his prize, the knowledge of what can come into being, what cannot, in a word, how each thing has its powers limited and its deep-set boundary-mark.

'Concipit aethera mente' recalls a similar, striking metaphor in *DRN* 3.15, where Lucretius extols 'the philosophy to which Epicurus' superhuman intellect gave birth' ('divina mente coorta'),[8] while Cic., *fin.* 2.102 also employs 'mente peragrare' in connection with Epicurus, whose epistemology assigns considerable importance to ἐπιβολὴ τῆς διανοίας ('apprehension by intellect').[9] We soon realize that the intertextual connection between this part of the *Metamorphoses* and Lucretius transcends this initial point of contact. In fact my contention is that Phaethon's journey towards the sky should be comprehensively read as a probing comment on Epicurus' metaphoric flight, and by extension on Lucretius' poetic and philosophical project.[10]

A couple of initial clues already set the tone. Phaethon is introduced as 'magna loquentem' (1.751), a direct take on Lucretius' 'magnanimum Phaethonta' (5.400 'ambitious Phaethon'), but, as we will see, not without an interesting spin. A few lines later the youth doubts whether he is 'caelesti stirpe creatus' (1.760), a turn of phrase which echoes Lucretius' praise of Empedocles, a thinker so extraordinary 'that he seems hardly to be born of mortal stock' (1.733 'ut vix humana videatur stirpe creatus').[11] Both contexts deal with the superhuman, indeed divine nature of exceptional philosophers, to which a long tradition (witness Plato) connects the power to fly with their own minds.[12] While Empedocles, the author of 'illustrious discoveries' (1.732

exhortari seriemque evolvere fati' ('it is a delight to take one's way along the starry firmament and, leaving the earth and its dull regions behind, to ride on the clouds, to take stand on stout Atlas' shoulders and see far below men wandering aimlessly, devoid of reason, anxious and in fear of the hereafter, thus to exhort them and to unroll the book of fate'). See especially Setaioli 1999, who at 501–2 also parallels 'nube vehi' with an Orphic katabasis in hexameters from the Bologna Papyrus (text now in Lloyd-Jones and Parsons 1978, who regard it as post-Virgilian rather than Hellenistic) where poets are said to be 'transported over the aerial clouds' (line 105 ἠερίων ἐφύ[π]ερθεν ὀχησάμεναι ν[εφελάων, with Snell's and Wyss' integration). On Pythagoras' speech, Hardie 1995 and Segal 2001 are also important. The Pythagorean Archytas is credited with a similar failed accomplishment in Horace's *Ode* 1.28, see lines 3–5 with Nisbet-Hubbard: 'nec quicquam tibi prodest/ aerias temptasse domos animoque rotundum/ percurrisse polum morituro' ('nor is it any help to you that you once explored the gods' aethereal homes and traversed in thought the circling vault of heaven, since you were born to die'). *Temptare*, like *scandere* at *carm.* 2.19.22, 'suggests audacity', see later Section VII.

[8] I accept, with Bailey and Kenney, Orelli's emendation of the problematic *coortam*.

[9] Admittedly a complex and controversial concept, see Long 1986: 25–6.

[10] The *DRN* suggests 'a strong and deliberate parallelism between the mental energy of Lucretius the poet and that of … Epicurus' (Hardie 1986: 21) through, for instance, the shared use of the verb *peragrare* to describe both Epicurus' flight of mind (1.74) and Lucretius' poetic programme (1.926).

[11] The clausula 'stirpe creatus', first found in poetry in *DRN*, retains its epic flavour in its subsequent, limited use by Virgil (*Aen.* 10.543), Ovid (*Met.* 1.760; 3.543; 14.699), and Statius (*Th.* 1.463).

[12] In general see Jones 1926; on Lucretius, Schrijvers 1970: 260–2; on Manilius, Landolfi 2003.

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'praeclara reperta') is endowed with a 'divine mind' (1.731 'divini pectoris'), Epicurus is an outright god — 'deus ille fuit, deus' (5.8) — who has been able to understand the one form of majesty that really matters, (5.7 'maiestas … rerum'), and thus transports mankind out of darkness into bright light (3.2 'inlustrans commoda vitae' 'illuminating the blessings of life'; 5.12 'in tam tranquillo et tam clara luce locavit' 'settled [life] in such a calm and in light so clear').[13] Lucretius plans to trace Epicurus' steps (3.3–4 'inque tuis nunc/ ficta pedum pono pressis vestigia signis' 'and now on the marks you have left I plant my own footsteps firm'; 5.55 'ingressus vestigia' 'his steps I trace') in search of fatherly instruction (9–10 'patria …/ praecepta'), Phaethon actually to visit his father's abode (1.779 'patrios ortus'), in order to find out for himself the 'true signs of his father' (1.764 'veri … signa parentis').

Both journeys are in different ways highly ambitious,[14] and — to different degrees — redolent of the Giants' hubristic challenge to the skies (Phaethon's journey is not an hubristic act in itself, but it eventually turns into one).[15] The parallel between Epicurus' attack on heaven and the Gigantomachy was pointed out long ago by Bignone,[16] who also suggested a comparison with a passage of Plato's *Sophist* (246 a–b) where a contrast is drawn between idealists and materialists (though not necessarily of the atomistic variety), and the latter are said to be bent on 'bringing down to earth everything from the sky and the non-visible'. Phaethon, also, looks up too closely at his divine father (contrast the pious looking up of his mother at 1.767), and cannot stare at him directly because of an excess of light (2.21–3).[17] He finally succeeds, not unlike Epicurus, the first mortal man capable of facing religion, which showed its *caput* from the 'regions of the sky' (1.64), and of staring upwards at it, like an epic warrior,[18] without being deterred by the very thunderbolts which will eventually seal Phaethon's fate:[19] 'primum Graius homo mortalis tollere contra/ est oculos ausus primusque obsistere contra,/ quem neque fama deum nec fulmina nec minitanti/ murmure compressit caelum' (1.66–9 'a man of Greece was the first that dared to uplift mortal eyes against her, the first to make stand against her; for neither fable of the gods could quell him, nor thunderbolts, nor heaven with menacing roar'). Phaethon's success, however, is short-lived, and Lucretian connections spotlight the troubling connotations of his *audacia*. A key point in Sol's attempt to dissuade his son is compressed in the pointed contrast between *poena* and *munus* at line 99 — 'poenam, Phaethon, pro munere poscis!' ('Phaethon, you ask for punishment as your reward') — for which a parallel is offered by *DRN* 5.118, in a context where the Giants are explicitly mentioned and to which we will turn again later (5.114–21):

> religione refrenatus ne forte rearis
> terras et solem et caelum, mare sidera lunam,
> corpore divino debere aeterna manere,

[13] About Lichtsymbolik in *DRN* see Fowler 2002: 134–6, and, in a different sense, later n. 52.
[14] In spite of Clymene's insistence on how short the journey is going to be (774 'unde oritur domus est terrae contermina nostrae' 'the home where he rises from is close to our land'), a detail which probably reflects the setting of Euripides' *Phaethon*, where the god lives in the neighbourhood (*hyp*.9). On Ovid's use of tragic models see Ciappi 2000.
[15] Innes 1979 explores the function which Gigantomachy and natural philosophy, both sublime themes, interchangeably play in Augustan *recusationes*.
[16] Bignone 1936: 2.417–18.
[17] See later n. 53.
[18] A defining characteristic of human beings, as Ovid points out at *Met.* 1.85–6: 'os homini sublime dedit caelumque videre/ iussit et erectos ad sidera tollere voltus' ('he gave to man an uplifted face and bade him stand erect and turn his eyes to heaven').
[19] Conte 1966: 356 n. 43, comparing *Il.* 17.166, but also suggesting that Epicurus' bursting of the *claustra naturae* may be compared with Hector's breaking down the gate which protects the Greek ships at 12.457–9. Overall, 'Lucrezio sottost[à] alla suggestione di un'interpretazione epica dell'impresa di Epicuro'.

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proptereaque putes ritu par esse Gigantum
pendere eos poenas inmani pro scelere omnis,
qui ratione sua disturbent moenia mundi
praeclarumque velint caeli restinguere solem
inmortalia mortali sermone notantes

... lest by some chance bitted and bridled by superstition you think that earth and sun and sky, sea, stars, and moon are of divine body and must abide for ever; and should therefore believe it right that, like the Giants, all they should suffer punishment for a monstruous crime, who with their reasoning shake the walls of the world, and would quench the shining light of the sun in heaven, tarnishing things immortal with mortal speech.

As a consequence of his daring flight of mind, Epicurus breaks 'the confining bars of nature's gates' (1.71 'naturae ... portarum claustra'), Phaethon enters the richly carved doors of the Sun's palace,[20] a distant but recognizable relation — I would like to argue — to the archetypical doors of knowledge leading into the Kingdom of Light described by Parmenides[21] in considerable detail.[22] The palace[23] itself is a triumph of anti-Epicureanism: everything is gold and silver, in spite of Lucretius' intimations at 2.24–8, and geared towards the celebration of divine craftsmanship.[24] Vulcan's work of art establishes once again, this time at a remove, the gods' comprehensive rôle in creating a cosmos which is unapologetically replete with mythological creatures rather than with natural laws. Indeed, both in Vulcan's relief and in the extensive account of the world's beginnings offered in Book 1 of the *Metamorphoses*, as, later, in Manilius' emphatic eulogy of 'the force of a divine spirit' (1.250 'vis animae divina') which rules the whole fabric of the world (1.247 'opus ... constructum corpore mundi'), the god's creative agency far surpasses the properties of the raw matter, in direct contrast with Lucretius' warning at 5.158 that the 'world's nature' (5.157 'mundi naturam') should not be regarded as the 'admirable work of the gods' ('opus divom'). 'Materiam superabat opus' (2.5 'the workmanship surpassed the material'), in its epigrammatic density, neatly encapsulates the ideological and aesthetic conflict between Ovid and Lucretius.

III THE LIMITS OF DIDACTIC

Phaethon's journey to the fountain of knowledge is rewarded with an education of sorts. Predictably, his attitude as he enters the Sun's palace is marked by wonder and fear at 'rerum novitas' (2.31), emotions he shares with the disciple who confronts for the first

[20] Perhaps it is just a coincidence that the *pyropus* ('bronze') mentioned at line 2 finds a direct poetic precedent only in Prop. 4.10.21 — which describes its absence from the rough shield of Romulus — and in *DRN* 2.803, admittedly with a possibly different meaning, but joined to the adjective *clarum*, 'bright' (note *clara* at *Met.* 2.2), and in a context in which Lucretius discusses the effect of light on colours, specifically the shade the neck of the dove acquires when hit directly by sunlight, *in sole* (2.801).

[21] Kranz 1916 argues that Phaethon is the model for Parmenides' proemial journey, with a reversed trajectory. For a qualified critique of Kranz's thesis and its subsequent developments see Havelock 1958: 134–5. On the Odyssean motif behind Parmenides' journey see Havelock 1958, followed by Mourelatos 1970: 16–25.

[22] Both sets of doors are two-leaved, 'bifores ... valvae' in Ovid (2.4), μεγάλοισι θυρέτροις in Parmenides (B1 13 DK). Αἰθέριαι (13) referred to πύλαι (11) may be echoed by *sublimibus* at 2.1. On the parallel between Lucretius' 'claustra naturae' and Parmenides' doors see Schrijvers 1970: 258.

[23] See Brown 1987 about the implications of Ovid's description, and Barchiesi 2009, who interestingly suggests a connection between the Ovidian narrative and the visual relationship between the Circus Maximus and the Palatine, where both Augustus' home and the Temple of Apollo are located.

[24] The negative moral connotations of this display of conspicuous consumption are drawn out by Seneca (*ep.* 115.10), who quotes *Met.* 1.1–2a and 107–8.

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time the revelations of Epicureanism.[25] *Rerum novitas* is a recurrent concern — and point of pride — in *DRN*.[26] As early as 1.139, in the context of his programmatic statement about the nature of his project, Lucretius underlines the difficulties arising from the 'paucity of language' and the 'novelty of the subject matter' ('egestas linguae' and 'rerum novitas'). A more intriguing parallel can be established with Lucretius' extensive reformulation of the concept at the end of Book 2. First of all he warns readers that a 'nova res' (2.1024) is shortly to be announced, a 'nova ... species rerum' (2.1025 'a new aspect of creation'). But they should not fear, nor reject a new theory (2.1040–1), because even the most wondrous aspects of nature come gradually to be accepted and regarded as normal, even, he adds, 'the bright light of the dazzling sun' (2.1032 'solis preclara luce nitorem'). Even the notion that the world is doomed to destruction, a 'novel and strange revelation' (5.97 'res nova miraque'), will eventually gain acceptance.

While removal of fears and worries ranks highest among Lucretius' objectives, Sol does his best to emphasize the dangers Phaethon faces. Midway into its journey, the chariot will touch the highest point in the sky. The vista above lands and seas is exceptional — we are reminded of Lucretius' own view from above in 4.410–13 — but frightening even for a seasoned traveller: 'unde mare et terras ipsi mihi saepe videre/ fit timor et pavida trepidat formidine pectus' (2.65–6 'whence to look down on sea and earth often scares even me, and my heart trembles with terror and fear'). The association of *formido*, *timor* and *pavor* echoes *DRN* 5.1218–23, where Lucretius discusses the existence and nature of the gods, but a similar train of thought and choice of words recur again at the beginning of Book 6, where *formido* arises from the contemplation of what men see happening on earth and in the sky (6.50–5), which in turn echoes the first formulation of the concept at 1.151–4. In the Ovidian context not only should men stand in fear of forces and phenomena they cannot comprehend, let alone control, but even gods, we gather, acknowledge firm limits to what each of them can or cannot do. Thus Phaethon's Lucretian-sounding request that his father remove him from *error* (2.39 'hunc animis errorem detrahe nostris' 'take away this uncertainty from my mind') actually draws readers' attention to the fact that the *errores* Lucretius had repeatedly warned against stand here as undoubted truths. Gods not only do exist: they also regulate their own existence and that of men according to unfathomable and unchangeable designs.

A large section of the episode is devoted to astronomical instruction, suitably dotted with Lucretian suggestions, even leaving aside the use of 'adde, quod' (2.70 'consider, too ...') as a nod in the direction of the *DRN*'s didactic formulas. Sol, unable to persuade Phaethon that his request is unreasonable, tries at least to offer some practical instructions on how to steer the chariot in the right direction. Phaethon's obstinacy is hubristic. Sol's statement 'magna petis .../ munera' (2.54–5 'the gift you are asking for is enormous'), while expressing paternal worries, turns Lucretius' *magnanimum* and Ovid's *magna loquentem* into a charge of unruly excess, especially when coupled with *adfectas* just a few lines later (2.58)[27] and with the explicit 'sors tua mortalis; non est mortale quod optas' (2.56 'your lot is mortal, but what you wish for is not'). This latter statement turns on its head Empedocles' boast that he is 'an immortal god, not a mortal man' (B 112.4 DK ἐγὼ δ' ὑμῖν θεὸς ἄμβροτος, οὐκέτι θνητός), but also Ovid's own claim to fame in *Amores* 1.15, where in his opening address to Livor he contrasts

[25] Climene's use of *novus* at 1.771–2 conveys tragic irony: 'si ficta loquor, neget ipse videndum/ se mihi, sitque oculis lux ista novissima nostris!' ('if I lie, may he forbid me from seeing him ever again, and may this be the last time my eyes look upon the light of day').

[26] As well as a key marker of sublimity: Hardie 2009: 107–9.

[27] Virg., *Georg*. 4.562 'viamque adfectat Olympo' ('essays the path to heaven') may be heard in the background (the combination of *fulmina* and *victorque volentis* at 4.561 sets up the image of Caesar as a cosmic ruler whose mission is parallel to Virgil's poetic enterprise as described in *Georg*. 3.8–9, where 'victorque virum volitare per ora' underlines the connection, see later Section V).

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earthly occupations like the army and the law with the immortality of poetic renown to which he aspires: 'mortale est, quod quaeris, opus; mihi fama perennis/ quaeritur, in toto semper ut orbe canar' (1.15.7–8 'the work you ask of me is mortal, but I am seeking eternal fame, to be forever known in song all over the world').[28]

The path (2.79 *via*), which Phaethon plans to navigate is thus no less unholy than the 'path of crime' (*DRN* 1.81–2 'viam …/ sceleris') which Memmius may wrongly be afraid of entering because of Epicurean teaching. Lucretius assuages Memmius' worries by pointing out that religion itself 'brought forth criminal and impious deeds' (1.83 'scelerosa atque impia facta') and by telling the story of a young woman slain in the name of *Realpolitik* and its religious underpinnings, a story which Ovid evokes in *Met.* 13 and, indirectly, in this book as well.

Sol's extensive and detailed astronomy lesson actively engages the *DRN*, as we should expect, both in specific points and in its general outlook. The overall import of this intertextual dialogue is of course critical. Following on from Virgil's debunking of Lucretian epistemic certainties, Ovid offers a dazzling view of the sky and its workings which is far removed from the dry certainties of natural law.[29] In good Epicurean fashion Phaethon must follow the right *vestigia* (2.133), to be sure, but these turn out to be, quite literally, no more than the tracks left by the chariot's wheels, in a scaled down, literal variation on Lucretius' ambition to follow Epicurus' footsteps.[30] These *vestigia* are *manifesta*, as they often are *certa* in the *Georgics*, not because of the explanatory powers of the pupil or the teacher's doctrine, but simply because they are guaranteed by divine authority[31] — in this case, as it happens, with no intermediary involved. These *vestigia*, moreover, are firmly and strictly material. They do not lead to generalization and abstraction, but can at best keep Phaethon on course: neither he nor his father are interested in a general theory of the skies, let alone the universe, but in sturdy practical advice on how to drive safely. Sol points out the correct *iter* (2.133) while Epicurus 'pointed the way, that straight and narrow path by which we might run without turning (*recto … cursu*)' (6.27–8)[32] towards the *bonum summum* (6.26).

This process of the materialization and literalization of Lucretius' theoretical ambition is particularly evident in the second section of Sol's speech, after he has given up trying to dissuade Phaethon and combines a compressed description of the theory of the five zones with an implicit explanation of how the sun moves across the sky. In his account, a natural phenomenon turns into a tale of animal unruliness and weak human control which seems to make a mockery of Lucretius' position on the matter. In Book 5 of *DRN* we are told that 'pilot nature'('natura gubernans') steers the course of the sun and the moon without any divine intervention (5.76–81):

> praeterea solis cursus lunaeque meatus
> expediam qua vi flectat natura gubernans;
> ne forte haec inter caelum terramque reamur
> libera sponte sua cursus lustrare perennis,

[28] cf. *Met.* 15.875–6 'parte tamen meliore mei super alta perennis/ astra ferar, nomenque erit indelebile nostrum' ('still in my better part I shall be borne immortal far beyond the lofty stars and my name will be undying'). In this final pre-exilic sublime flight, as Philip Hardie suggests, Ovid may finally be seen to be shedding anxiety and aggression.

[29] Lucian's *Icaromenippus* will take this contrast to the extreme: Menippus, sceptical of the multifarious philosophical theories he has heard, decides to seek out the truth for himself by journeying to the sky, where he witnesses the gods' very Ovidian pursuits.

[30] A shift already effected at line 21: 'protinus ad patrios vertit vestigia vultus' ('he immediately turns his steps towards his father's face').

[31] Further discussion on this point in Schiesaro 1997.

[32] The contrast between 'recto cursu' and Ovid's 'lato curvamine' (2.130 'with a wide curve') is suggestive: Sol explicitly discourages Phaethon from using the straighter, but more dangerous route (129).

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morigera ad fruges augendas atque animantis,
neve aliqua divom volvi ratione putemus.

besides, I will explain by what force pilot nature steers the courses of the sun and the goings of the moon; lest by any chance we think that these between heaven and earth traverse their yearly courses free, of their own will, and obliging for the increase of crops and of animals, or deem them to revolve by some plan of the gods.

This Nature is a competent pilot, perfectly capable of steering (*flectere*) the sun along the right path, unlike Ovid's Phaethon, who at 2.169–70 'does not know where to steer the reins' ('qua flectat habenas/ nec scit'). His horses do move *sponte sua* (2.128), or *arbitrio* (2.234), in a show of free will which is at odds with the well-regulated laws of the Epicurean universe, yet actually harks back to the vivid image Lucretius employs when describing the strength of volition at 2.263–5. Indeed, when they have overcome Phaethon's weak attempts once and for all, his horses run wild (2.204 'sine lege'). In his own Phaethon episode Lucretius had polemically paved the way for this subversion by transferring the epithet 'cuncta gubernans' (5.404) to Sol as he restores order after his son's demise, but he had immediately qualified it in the very next line with the sceptical caveat: 'that, you know, is the tale which the old Grecian poets have sung' (5.405 'scilicet ut veteres Graium cecinere poetae').

The contrast between the two poets' assumptions is even more marked if we look at the lines which immediately follow this passage in *DRN* Book 5. The ordered, natural movement of sun and moon is proof that the gods have no business interfering in any aspect of the natural world, since they lead a 'carefree existence' (5.82 'securum … aevom'). On the contrary, *curae* (worries) overcome Sol, as a god in charge of the sun and now as a father. He wishes Phaethon could perceive his 'patrias … curas' (5.94) and mixes words with sighs since his heart is full of anxiety (5.125 'pectore sollicito repetens suspiria dixit'). Even before this tragic turn of events his had been a long, hard and unrewarding *labor*, the very opposite of ataraxia: 'sors mea principiis fuit inrequieta, pigetque/ actorum sine fine mihi, sine honore laborum' (2.386–7 'from the beginning of time my lot has been unrestful, and I am weary of toils without end and without honour').

The nature of Sol's teaching is in itself a denial of Lucretian aspirations and objectives, for it turns out to be utterly ineffectual. Ovid stages here a model of instruction which was central to the Roman tradition, a model based on the authoritative transmission of ethical and practical principles from father to son.[33] While Lucretius also casts Epicurus in the rôle of a metaphorical father-figure, he then proceeds to offer a largely impersonal, objective form of knowledge which is essentially anti-authoritative in so far as it promises to raise pupil and teacher to the same open-ended level of understanding, 'exaequat victoria caelo' (1.79 'victory exalts us as high as heaven'). Sol's teachings are practical and specific, similar to the 'technical' instructions Virgil's *Georgics* parade in their pointed distancing from the Epicurean tradition. But they are also a spectacular failure. Phaethon's request is too bold, if not altogether impious, and the price for this transgression of boundaries is nothing short of death. Riding the sun's chariot cannot be taught because what is ultimately at stake is not how to master the relevant *techne*. What matters is not how it is done, but who tries to do it, and in this respect even the father of the gods, as Sol bitterly points out, would fail miserably should he try to steer the chariot (2.59–62).[34] Phaethon lacks — literally — the required *gravitas* (2.162), the chariot feels empty (2.166), and the horses do as they please.

33 See Schiesaro 2007: 68–9.
34 cf. also 2.389–93.

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Ovid reflects a model of knowledge where the personal qualities and authority of the teacher and pupil count for far more than the contents of the technical instruction imparted, casting severe doubts in the process, as he had already done in the *Ars*, on the very foundations of Lucretius' approach to didactic poetry. In this hierarchic model allotted rôles cannot be modified and epistemic distances cannot be bridged. The implications are relevant both on a scientific and a political level. The world of metamorphosis stands as the ultimate denial of a doctrine built upon the premise that nothing comes from nothing and nothing returns to nothing. If things could come out of nothing, then 'all kinds of thing could be produced from all things' (*DRN* 1.159–60), and 'men could arise from the sea, from the earth scaly tribes, and birds could hatch from the sky' (1.161–2): we would end up, that is, in the kind of world that Ovid's *Metamorphoses* triumphantly explore.

The contrast between fact and fiction is encoded in an apparent diversion from the main business at hand. Sol warns Phaethon that as he travels across the sky he should not expect to see sacred groves, cities[35] of the gods or temples full of offerings (2.76–8): rather, he should worry that he will have to negotiate a path 'per insidias … formasque ferarum' (2.78 'amid lurking dangers and fierce beasts of prey'). Sure enough, at 2.194 Phaethon 'sees marvels scattered everywhere in the sky, the figures of huge wild animals, and he trembles' ('vastarumque videt trepidus simulacra ferarum') as he loses his grip, literally and metaphorically — 'quidque agat ignarus stupet' (2.191 'as in a daze, he does not know what to do'). The notion of a sky alive with worryingly realistic, or even real, creatures, is patently non-Epicurean, and turns on its head a specific point which Lucretius had made *exempli gratia* when discussing his own, very different, *simulacra* (4.129–42):[36]

> sed ne forte putes ea demum sola vagari,
> quaecumque ab rebus rerum simulacra recedunt,
> sunt etiam quae sponte sua gignuntur et ipsa
> constituuntur in hoc caelo, qui dicitur aer,
> quae multis formata modis sublime feruntur;
> ut nubes facile interdum concrescere in alto
> cernimus et mundi speciem violare serenam,
> aera mulcentes motu; nam saepe Gigantum
> ora volare videntur et umbram ducere late,
> interdum magni montes avolsaque saxa
> montibus anteire et solem succedere praeter,
> inde alios trahere atque inducere belua nimbos.
> nec speciem mutare suam liquentia cessant
> et cuiusque modi formarum vertere in oras.

> But that you may not think these images which pass off from things to be the only ones that move about, there are others which arise of themselves and are formed by themselves in this part of the sky called the air; which formed in many ways are carried aloft: as we sometimes see clouds quickly massing together on high and marring the serene face of the firmament, while they caress the air with their motion. For often giants' countenances appear to fly over and to draw their shadow afar, sometimes great mountains and rocks torn from the mountains to go before and to pass by the sun, after them some monster

[35] Kovacs 1994: 246–7 suggests that at 2.76 'sedesque deorum' should be read instead of the manuscripts' 'urbesque'.

[36] At 6.96–107 Lucretius discusses the clash of the clouds, which causes thunder, resorting to military metaphors (98 *pugnantibus ventis*; 100 *agmine*; 101 *fremitus*), as if they were opposing armies. In Ovid the features of the sky are literally, not metaphorically, aggressive.

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> pulling and dragging other clouds; they never cease to dissolve and change their shapes and turn themslves into the outlines of figures of every kind.

Turning innocuous chance images into terryifing reality, Ovid seems to be commenting here on a central tenet which Lucretius repeats three times[37] in his poem (2.55–61):

> nam veluti pueri trepidant atque omnia caecis
> in tenebris metuunt, sic nos in luce timemus
> interdum, nihilo quae sunt metuenda magis quam
> quae pueri in tenebris pavitant finguntque futura.
> hunc igitur terrorem animi tenebrasque necessest
> non radii solis neque lucida tela diei
> discutiant, sed naturae species ratioque.

> for just as children tremble and fear all things in darkness, so we in the light fear, at times, things that are no more to be feared than what children shiver at in the dark and imagine to be at hand. This terror of the mind, therefore, and this gloom must be dispelled, not by the sun's rays nor the bright shafts of day, but by the aspect and law of nature.

Don Fowler rightly suggests that 'fingunt … futura' at 58 may be playing on the etymology of *figura* (for which he compares Varro, *LL* 6.78),[38] a term which may also be evoked by *futura* itself. The reference here is to a specific aspect of the Epicurean theory of *simulacra* as discussed at 4.26–41: we can 'see' 'figuras … miras' which scare us, for instance the *simulacra* of the dead, because particles of torn film let loose by objects fly around in the sky and can be reconfigured into different shapes which can also impact our mind as we sleep (34–5). Phaethon experiences this theory in a terrifyingly literal fashion: the *aurae* he is journeying across are actually full of the *simulacra* of animals, except that these are not innocuous mental concoctions of atomic particles, but, we are led to believe, live and dangerous *simulacra*.[39] 'The sun's rays and the bright shafts of day' (2.60 'radii solis neque lucida tela diei') thanks to which Lucretius had optimistically enjoined men to dispel vain fears and terrors become here, in a pointed reversal, rather part of the problem, not of the solution. And the only 'tela diei' which have any effect are Iuppiter's thunderbolts, the very ones which Lucretius himself labels 'patris … telum' (6.398). Divine thunderbolts, unlike the workings of nature, can truly aspire to sublimity.

Both Sol and Phaethon have a go at teaching and learning in Epicurean fashion, with abysmal results. Midway through his journey Phaethon falls into a sort of epistemic daze. Significantly, this follows from a revelation which is close enough, in wording at least, to Epicurean notions about the vastness of the sky. Epicurus' flight yields as its most significant result a firm knowledge of the universe: indeed, undeterred by the frightful sight of *religio* displaying its head from heaven, he 'traversed the immeasurable universe in thought and imagination' (1.74 'omne immensum peragravit mente animoque'). Phaethon's *animus*, alas, is not up to the task, and the very size of the sky makes him lose his bearings (2.187–90):

> quid faciat? multum caeli post terga relictum,
> ante oculos plus est. animo metitur utrumque
> et modo quos illi fatum contingere non est
> prospicit occasus, interdum respicit ortus

[37] At 2.55–61, 3.87–93 and 6.35–41 and, partially (just the last two lines), at 1.146–8.
[38] Fowler 2002: 139.
[39] Galasso on *Met.* 2.31–46.

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> what can he do? Much of the sky is now behind his back, but more is before his eyes. He measures both in his mind and now he looks forward to the west, which he is not fated to reach, now to the east.

The paralysing, rather than liberating, effect of the privileged viewpoint Phaethon attains is remarked upon more than once, and allusions to Lucretius abound again. Let us take first 2.178–80: 'ut vero summo despexit ab aethere terras/ infelix Phaethon penitus penitusque patentes,/ palluit' ('when the unlucky Phaethon looked down from the heights of the sky at the earth far, far below he grew pale'). The immediate, antiphrastic model here is *Aen.* 1.223–4, a reference to Iuppiter's visual control over the world, but we are also reminded, again by contrast, of the image of visual control from on high at *DRN* 2.8–10:

> edita doctrina sapientum templa serena,
> despicere unde queas alios passimque videre
> errare atque viam palantis quaerere vitae

> lofty sanctuaries serene, well fortified by the teachings of the wise, whence you may look down upon others and behold them all astray, wandering abroad and seeking the path of life

A reference we should combine once more, encouraged by the shared presence of the verb *pateo*, with the final result of Epicurus' revelation as told in 3.28–30:

> his ibi me rebus quaedam divina voluptas
> percipit atque horror, quod sic natura tua vi
> tam manifesta patens ex omni parte retecta est

> thereupon from all these things a sort of divine delight gets hold upon me and a shuddering, because nature thus by your power has been so manifestly laid open and uncovered in every part.

We should also remember a second description of how much and how far Phaethon can now see at lines 2.227–8: 'tum vero Phaethon cunctis e partibus orbem/ aspicit accensum' ('then indeed does Phaethon see the earth on fire from all sides').

Ovid resorts again to literalism as a means to attack and deflate Lucretian aspirations to comprehensive rational knowledge. In the same passage from *DRN* 3 'the walls of the world open out' (16–17) as a consequence of Epicurus' revelation, and all of nature, gods included, can be clearly discerned. Yet, even as the earth does not hinder our ability to see what lies in the depths, 'nowhere appear the regions of Acheron' (25–6), since of course they do not exist. But the ambition to be able to 'look inside' is crucial to Lucretius' project from the very beginning, when he promises Memmius a poem 'whereby [he] may see into the hearts of things hidden' (1.145 'res quibus occultas penitus convisere possis'). Since Phaethon causes the earth to burn and rip open (2.210–11), he, too, can see what lies beneath it,[40] but what can be seen is precisely what Lucretius had ruled out: 'dissilit omne solum, penetratque in Tartara rimis/ lumen et infernum terret cum coniuge regem' (2.260–1 'everywhere the ground breaks apart, light penetrates through the cracks down into Tartarus, and terrifies the king of the underworld and his queen').

A similar contrast is set up shortly after. The father of the gods is at a loss as to how he could rescue the earth from burning, since 'at that moment he had no clouds to bring over the earth, nor rain to send down from the sky' (2.309–10). Again, this can be regarded as a literal twist on Lucretius' description of the abodes of the gods (3.18–22):

[40] A hubristic gesture, if in his oath Sol, who can see everything, points out that he cannot see the infernal Styx (2.46).

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apparet divum numen sedesque quietae
quas neque concutiunt venti nec nubila numbis
aspergunt neque nix acri concreta pruina
cana cadens violat semperque innubilus aether
integit, et large diffuso lumine ridet

before me appear the gods in their majesty, and their peaceful abodes, which no winds ever shake nor clouds besprinkle with rain, which no snow congealed by the bitter frost mars with its white fall, but the air ever cloudless encompasses them and laughs with its light spread wide abroad.

IV PHAETHON'S TWO EPITAPHS

Knowledge, then, is either impossible, or lethal, or both. Phaethon's reckless audacity does raise him to the stars ('exaequat victoria caelo') but only so as to make his fall more grandiose — at the same time a tragic and epic event. Rather than revealing the pervasive rationality of the universe and freeing mankind from superstition, religion, and subservience to mythological explanations, his attempt comes very close to causing the return of primeval chaos (2.299 'in Chaos antiquum confundimur'), as if Phaethon's intellectual *hybris* could be regarded as a moral equivalent and a narrative pendant to Lycaon's — and the Giants' — crimes in Book 1.[41] Only a harsh taskmaster's recourse to force can actually prevent such an extreme scenario, and then only at the price of Phaethon's death. As Chaos threatens to return — hardly an impossibility given the fact that the flood had already been cast as a reassertion of chaos over order — it is not knowledge, but power, which prevails. Tellus begs Iuppiter to intervene with an exhortation — 'rerum consule summae' (2.300 'take charge of the safety of the universe') — which mischieviously blends Lucretius' 'rerum ... summa' (5.368) with a nod to Roman political terminology.[42]

Moreover, Ovid stages the last scenes of Phaethon's story as a near-miss *ekpyrosis* shot through with Lucretian images of the end of the world.[43] The choice is apt, for Lucretius in Book 5 turns his attention to the Phaethon myth precisely in the context of a wider discussion about the inevitable or, as we gather at the end of Book 2 (2.1150–74), even imminent death of our world (5.324–95). Epicurus had been able to exit unscathed the 'flaming walls of the world' (1.73 'flammantia moenia mundi') only to come back as *victor* (1.75). Phaethon does go up in flames, while the walls of the sky (2.401 'moenia caeli') resist thanks to Iuppiter, who promptly inspects them for damage (2.402–3 'ne quid labefactum viribus ignis/ corruat explorat' 'he checks whether anything has been set loose by the power of the fire'). As he does so, the father of the gods reasserts his providential rôle in the ordered life of the universe, and, again turning metaphor into

[41] cf. 1.151–62 (the Giants' attack on heaven) and 165 (Lycaon). The gods make their way to Iuppiter's Palace (170 'iter est') and its open doors 172 ('valvis...apertis', cf. 2.4 'bifores...valvae') through a 'via sublimis' (168), a positive model for Phaethon's similar journey.

[42] On *summa rerum* as 'the fortunes or interests of the whole body, the state, etc.', see OLD s.v. 6 c. With *consulere* cf. Caes., *Civ.* 3.51.4 '[sc. imperator] libere ad summam rerum consulere debet' ('the general must look after the overall situation with complete freedom').

[43] Phaethon's final conflagration mirrors Empedocles' jump into Aetna, a gesture which Horace attributes to his hubristic ambition: 'deus immortalis haberi/ dum cupit Empedocles, ardentem frigidus Aetnam/ insiluit' (*ars* 464–6 'and wishing to be regarded as an immortal god Empedocles coolly leaped into burning Aetna'). Canfora 1993: 100–2 rightly suggests that Horace may be modelling his Empedocles on Lucretius, cf. Hardie 2009: 198. Note also the close of *am.* 1.15 (and *Amores* 1 as a whole, lines 41–2: 'ergo etiam cum me supremus adederit ignis,/ vivam, parsque mei multa superstes erit' 'I, too, when the final fires will have consumed my body, will still live on, and the great part of me will survive my death'). In this densely programmatic poem Ovid envisages his own death as a Phaethontian conflagration, which will pave the way to immortal glory.

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reality, responds to *DRN* 5.114–21, where the materialistic thinkers, like impious Giants, are seen as potentially 'shaking the walls of the world' (5.119 'disturbent moenia mundi'). Had Iuppiter not intervened, everything would have perished 'because of a harsh destiny' (2.305–6 'nisi opem ferat, omnia fato/ interitura gravi'), thus fulfilling Lucretius' prediction that 'the walls of the mighty world ... shall be stormed all around, and shall collapse into crumbling ruin' (2.1144–5 'sic igitur magni quoque circum moenia mundi/ expugnata dabunt labem putrisque ruinas'). *Fatum* may not be the most Lucretian of concepts, but it is used four times in the *DRN*, and at 5.309, where there is a clear effort to coordinate 'fati ... finis' with the more orthodox 'naturae foedera',[44] the context is especially relevant (5.306–10):

> denique non lapides quoque vinci cernis ab aevo,
> non altas turris ruere et putrescere saxa,
> non delubra deum simulacraque fessa fatisci
> nec sanctum numen fati protollere finis
> posse neque adversus naturae foedera niti?

> again, do you not see that even stones are conquered by time, that tall turrets fall and rocks crumble, that the gods' temples and their images wear out and crack, nor can their holy divinity carry forward the boundaries of fate, or strive against nature's laws?

Finally, the Phaethon episode contains not one, but two epitaphs. The most evident, which we will discuss shortly, is the inscription which carves in stone Ovid's comment on the youth's fate. But a striking comment can be found earlier on, at line 181, where 'suntque oculis tenebrae per tantum lumen obortae' ('and over his eyes came darkness through so much light') proleptically sums up the various aspects of Phaethon's forthcoming loss of understanding. There is more to this line than the exploitation of paradox we expect in Ovid, at least if we accept that a confrontation with Lucretian and Epicurean themes has been a recurrent concern throughout the episode. Here the reference is, I would argue, to one of the most famous and important lines of the *DRN*, the opening of Book 3 'o tenebris tantis tam clarum extollere lumen,/ qui primus potuisti inlustrans commoda vitae' (3.1–2 'o you who first amid so great a darkness were able to raise aloft a light so clear, illumining the blessings of life'). Phaethon falls not because of darkness, but because of light, an excess of light which, far from securing salvation, hastens his downfall. Lucretius presents the doctrine of Epicurus, who in *de finibus* (2.70) is polemically labelled 'vestrum lumen', as the light which removes the obscurity of superstition, and suitably conveys it in his 'enlightening song', (1.933–4 'lucida/ carmina'). The concept recurs in the proem to Book 5. Epicurus is undoubtedly a god, because 'per artem/ fluctibus et tantis vitam tantisque tenebris/ in tam tranquillo et tam clara luce locavit' (5.10–12 'by his skill he brought life out of those tempestuous billows and that deep darkness, and settled it in such a calm and in light so clear'). Regrettably, a remark of Colotes in Philodemus' *Pragmateiai* quoted by Usener[45] is a misreading,[46] or we would have a direct invocation to Epicurus as the sun which should come to enlighten darkness, yet we can still rely on Lucretius 3.1043–4, where, admittedly in a sombre context, the master is said to have outshone all mortals by the measure the sun outshines all other stars: 'qui genus humanum superavit et omnis/ restinxit stellas exortus ut aetherius sol' ('he, whose intellect surpassed humanity, who quenched the light of all as the risen sun of heaven quenches the stars').[47]

[44] Fowler ad loc.
[45] Note 2 on fr. 141, p. 145.
[46] Fowler on 2.15, following Diano 1946: 45.
[47] See Kenney ad loc. for further references about the panegyristic use of similar expressions, with Doblhofer 1966: 86–9. Sen., *clem.* 1.3.3 is a good case in point: 'sed tamquam ad clarum ac beneficum sidus certatim advolant' ('but they rush eagerly forward as towards a bright and beneficent star'; see Malaspina ad loc.).

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V STRIVING FOR THE SUBLIME

Phaethon's journey is indeed a sublime attempt, or, better, an attempt at sublimity.[48] Longinus himself points us in this direction, both explicitly, in a sharp analysis of the chariot's rush in Euripides' play (ch. 15), already attuned to the metapoetic implications of the chariot's journey,[49] and implicitly in ch. 35, where he discusses man's natural aspiration to transcend the boundaries of his own mind and the ability of great literary talents to rise well above the rest of mankind, for 'the sublime raises them close to divine wisdom' (36.1). Appropriately, Phaethon's epitaph at 2.327–8 can be seen to echo a similar statement in *Peri Hypsous* 3.3, where Longinus reports approvingly the notion that 'to slip from a high place is after all a noble fault'.[50]

The perceptible metapoetic dimension of Phaethon's story, which Longinus himself highlights, invites a parallel reading with the story of Daedalus and Icarus, whose metaliterary components, especially in its Ovidian versions, have been very well analysed.[51] Some key pointers discussed above are worth mentioning again:[52] *fert animus* with its programmatic tenor and Dionysiac overtones at 1.775; the elaborate metapoetic implications at the beginning of Book 2; the chariot's journey (a much-used metaphor for poetry) through Callimachean[53] and indeed Lucretian — even Parmenidean[54] — *avia* (2.205) after it has abandoned a well-trodden path, *tritum* (2.167).[55] The proem to *Georgics* 3 already shows that the imagery Lucretius employs to describe Epicurus' victorious intellectual flight can be referred to a poetic programme: 'temptanda via est, qua me quoque possim/ tollere humo victorque virum volitare per ora' (3.8–9 'I must attempt a path whereby I, too, may rise from earth and fly victorious on the lips of men'). Virgil vows to join Ennius and Lucretius among the poets who can fly high, with *victor* nodding in the direction of the *DRN*'s first proem (1.75 *victor*, cf.1.72 *pervicit*, 1.79 *victoria*) and *tollere humo* significantly picking up *tollere contra* just a few lines before (1.66).[56] A central objective of Virgil's georgic project, as articulated most intensely in the diptych comprising the conclusion of Book 2 and the beginning of Book 3, lies in the attempt to decouple Lucretian sublimity from lack of *pietas*, to make sure that his own *via* (3.8) to poetic glory is not Lucretius' 'viam .../

[48] The journey of the Sun's horses was called a 'sublime iter' already in Ennius tr. 169 Jocelyn.

[49] Longinus argues that Euripides is not naturally μεγαλοφυής, rather that he forces himself to become tragic, as in the passage from *Phaethon* he is about to quote (fr.779 N. = 168–77 Diggle). Interestingly, the passage showcases Phaethon's misguided attempt at sublimity — while he rides the boy is followed step by step by his father shouting directions in vain.

[50] Russell ad loc.; Barchiesi on *Met.* 2.326–8; Hardie 2009: 216 (with the whole of 214–17).

[51] Sharrock 1994: 87–195; Davisson 1997. On the Lucretian background of Daedalus' story see Hoefmans 1994: especially 148–56.

[52] It might also be relevant, in connection with the emphasis on light in the description of Sol's palace (see lines 2, 3, 4, 17) that, starting with *Rhet. Her.* 4. 32, *lumina* is used in Latin in the sense of the Greek *schemata*, or 'rhetorical figures'. In the context of his important comparison of literary and artistic style, Longinus will compare *hypsos* to light, and the excessive use of *schemata* to shade (17.2), and state that 'beautiful words are truly the light of thought' (30–2).

[53] Barchiesi ad loc.

[54] D'Alessio 1995.

[55] 5.397–8 'avia cum Phaethonta rapax vis solis equorum/ ... raptavit'. *Avia* activates a connection with the fundamental programmatic passage at 1.926–50 and 4.1–25 (4.1–2 'avia Pieridum peragro loca nullius ante/ trita solo' 'a pathless country of the Pierides I traverse, where no other foot has ever trod'; it may also be noted that 'rapax vis ... equorum' parallels 'fortis equi vis' at 3.8). Lucretius' use of *avius*, however, already encapsulates the dialectic between originality and error which will prove central to Ovid's Phaethon narrative: while at 1.926 (and 4.1), but also at 5.1386, *avius* is connected with creative originality (the invention of music; cf. the birds' song at 2.145), in a didactic context it signifies the disciple's abandonment of 'the right track' (cf. 1.81 *via*) and his falling into error, as in the quasi-formulaic 'avius a vera longe ratione vagaris' (2.82, also at 2.229 with *recedit*) and 'avius erras' (2.740, 3.463 *errat*).

[56] I return to this section of the *Georgics* in Section VII.

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sceleris' (*DRN* 1.81–2 'path of crime'), while retaining as much as possible of its daring and sublimity, of its *audacia* (*Georg* 1.40 'audacibus adnue coeptis' 'assent to my bold enterprise'). Ovid builds upon this crucial distinction, much as we could argue, of course, about the nature and import of his *pietas*.

At this stage I would want to go a step further and argue that Ovid's commentary on Phaethon's hubristic — and sublime — attempt at reaching a divine level of knowledge should be read as a specific critique of the *Lucretian* sublime,[57] which is at the same time an epistemic, aesthetic and ideological strategy.[58] In the *DRN* sublimity advertises the enormity of the Epicurean revelation, unprecedented in scope and reach; it raises often mundane topics into complex poetry where *hypsos* joins forces with Callimachean sophistication and Dionysiac enthusiasm; ideologically, it impresses upon readers the exhilarating power of liberation from 'proud masters' (2.1091 'dominis ... superbis') which this kind of poetry makes possible thanks to Epicurus' boldness (1.67 *ausus*). In Ovid's eyes, a recipe for disaster, were it not for its enormous poetic appeal.

A specific reference to Lucretian sublimity can be read as soon as Phaethon is introduced at the end of *Met.* 1. Lucretius' *magnanimus* (5.400)[59] turns here into *magna loquens* (1.751). A clear marker of sublimity, *magnanimus* translates μεγαλόφρων (9.2 'high-minded'); sublimity, according to Longinus, is τὸ μεγαλόφρον, or μεγαλοφροσύνης ἀπήχημα (9.2), 'the echo of a great soul', rooted in 'the greatness of conceptions', τὸ μεγαλοφυές (9.1). While *magnanimus* is repeated *verbatim* at 2.111, *magna loquentem* incorporates in this case a meaningful reference to verbal expression. The claim that he teaches 'major things', *magnae res*, is central to Lucretius' poetic programme in Books 1 and 4. He deserves his laurels first and foremost because his 'teaching is of high matters' (4.6 'magnis ... de rebus'), an ambition which he does not see as contradicting, but rather necessitating the Callimachean 'labor limae' he also aspires to take credit for. Thus Ovid's epitaph mourns together Phaethon's *hybris* and Lucretius' sublimity, with 'magnis tamen excidit ausis' (2.328 'yet he fell in a heady endeavour'), certifying failure while recognizing the importance of the attempt: the double-edged evaluation of the *DRN*'s ambitions sealed in the concessive is a recurrent feature, as we will see, of both Ovid's and Virgil's attitude towards their larger-than-life predecessor.

VI AUREA MEDIOCRITAS

Phaethon and his extraordinary journey are bound to inspire both admiration and concern, *divina voluptas* alongside *horror* — Ovid's *cecidit* materializes the fear of falling inscribed in the Lucretian vision of a cosmos which suddenly breaks open under our very feet (3.17), thus offering a critique of the exhilarating sense of empowerment extolled in the *DRN*.[60]

[57] Thus contributing to the exciting story which Philip Hardie discusses in Hardie 2009. On Lucretian sublime see Schrijvers 1970: 264–5 and Conte 1990.

[58] A comparable use of the Icarus plot as a reflection on literary history can be paralleled in Goethe's *Faust*, where Euphorion, an Icarus-like youth, is usually regarded as an embodiment of Byron, and his admirable demise as a comment on Goethe's part about the bygone appeals of the Romantic aesthetics (*Faust* 2, act 3, 9711–9900): see La Penna 2001: 554–5.

[59] On μεγαλοψυχία ('greatness of soul') as a characteristic of the Epicureans see Knoche 1962: 52.

[60] As a subtle reader of both Lucretius and Ovid, it is up to Seneca to explore this potentially paradoxical evaluation more fully. Phaethon's myth and its Ovidian narrative in fact play an important rôle in Seneca's philosophical works at several junctures. *De providentia* 5.9–11 offers the most intriguing engagement with the myth in the context of a sustained discussion of *virtus* and the virtuous man's willful embracing of fate. See Degl'Innocenti Pierini 2008: 121–2, with further bibliography. La Penna 2001 explores the switch, from the fifteenth century onwards, to a positive appreciation of Icarus and Phaethon's bold enterprise. On Phaethon in Dante see Mercuri 2009; in Milton, with a rich Lucretian background, Quint 2004. Boitani 2004 offers a wide ranging discussion of Icarus and, incidentally, of Phaethon in connection with the theme of flying.

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Phaethon's story, a cautionary tale about the risks implicit in the pursuit of the sublime, doubles up as a more general indictment of any attempt to subvert power relations. This interconnectedness is already central in Lucretius, since, as we have seen, the sublime is the style of choice for a comprehensive attack on 'proud masters', whose impotence to intervene in a universe regulated by impersonal laws finally sets nature free (2.1090–1). Inevitably, Ovid's notion of 'proud masters' is more inclusive than Lucretius' criticism of the gods at the time of the Republic, albeit in its dying days. Now those masters occupy not only the metaphoric 'Palatine of the sky', but the very real palaces of Rome's imperial power, and the link between style and power which already plays a central rôle in Lucretius' poem acquires new implications.

Sol's main piece of advice to his unruly son, once he has given up hope that Phaethon may settle for a different token of his affection, is that he steer a middle course between opposite extremes (2.135–7):

> nec preme nec summum molire per aethera cursum.
> altius egressus caelestia tecta cremabis,
> inferius terras; medio tutissimus ibis.

> do not go too low, nor direct your ride to the upper sky. If you go too high you will burn up the dome of heaven, if too low, the earth. In the middle you'll go safest.

The epiphonematic conclusion 'medio tutissimus ibis' is normally connected with the praise of *mesotes* in its proverbial Horatian rendering 'auream … mediocritatem' (*carm.* 2.10.5 'the golden mean'), but before we turn to the ethical implications of Sol's admonition and its Horatian background, it is important to recognize further ramifications of this statement.

Sol contrasts a safe middle course with two extremes, *altius* and *inferius*, thus creating a tripartite distinction which echoes the division of style, both in poetry and in prose, into 'high', 'low' and 'middle', *medius*. Cicero offers a valuable discussion of the relative merits of the three styles in the *Orator*, and his description of the middle style is especially relevant (98):

> medius ille autem, quem modicum et temperatum voco, si modo suum illud satis instruxerit, non extimescet ancipites dicendi incertosque casus; etiam si quando minus succedet, ut saepe fit, magnum tamen periculum non adibit: alte enim cadere non potest.

> the orator of the middle style, whom I call moderate and tempered, once he has drawn up his forces will not dread the doubtful and uncertain pitfalls of speaking. Even if not completely successful, as often happens, he will not run a great risk; he has not far to fall. (trans. Hubbell)

The last sentence is very close in wording and train of thought, albeit with a different twist, to Ovid's Longinian exculpation of the high style; this, for Cicero, is indeed fit for the *princeps oratorum*, but it should be used sparingly, since the inability to resort to the other two would create a relentless excitement which would appear insane, indeed Bacchic (99).

While he recognizes the psychagogic importance of the high style (97 *amplus*, *copiosus*, *gravis*, *ornatus* 'magnificent, opulent, stately and ornate'), and recommends a judicious alternation of the three styles according to the subject matter or their blending even in the same work, Cicero reserves his most convincing praise for the middle style, which he regards as safe yet elegant, refined yet accommodating. The key words here are *temperatus* and its cognates, which occur seven times in sections 95–103, but especially *mediocritas* (96), a term which sums up all the positive features of the *genus orationis* which is 'restrained and temperate' (95 'modica ac temperata'). Phaethon is told very early on that Sol 'temperat orbem' (1.770), i.e. he manages to regulate the world thanks

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to his skills — he is able, after all, to control the steeds which would rashly carry him away while he accomplishes his daily feat (an achievement which cannot really be considered *humile*). *Mediocritas* defines here a style which allows for much richness (95 'verborum ... lumina omnia, multa etiam sententiarum' 'all figures of language, and many of thought') yet avoids dangerous pitfalls, rises high but not so much as to risk a disastrous fall. Importantly, the middle style is not a compromise, a *faute de mieux* average between the pedestrian and the sublime, but a capacious, inclusive concept that we may be tempted to identify with Ovid's versatile and inclusive brand of epic.

In another detailed discussion of the three styles, Cicero effectively compares the orator's ability to mix them according to the topic at hand with the perfect, immutable structure of the universe, which, for the survival and safety of us all (*de or.* 3.177) cannot be modified even in the slightest without endangering the whole fabric of the cosmos.

Horace, following in Aristotle's footsteps, transposes this praise of *mediocritas* to the field of ethics, without losing sight of its aesthetic dimension, in *Ode* 2.10, a poem which for all its proverbial memorability[61] poses a number of difficult questions, not least because of the tantalizing uncertainties regarding its addressee.

The (meta)literary aspect of the poem is under-estimated but perceptible. Horace conveys the three standard options — excessive caution, rashness, and the 'right' middle course — through nautical metaphors which not only implicate a well-known poetological dimension, but specifically evoke the contrast mapped out in *Ars* 28: 'serpit humi tutus nimium timidusque procellae' ('creeps along the ground, overcautious and fearful of the gale'). The word *altum* in the opening line of the ode, whose primary spatial reference is horizontal, neatly suggests a vertical movement as well, with *premendo* at line 3 also contributing the accessory notion of 'pressing down'. The tale of dangerous excess which occupies the first three stanzas admonishes against stylistic extremes just as it cautions against immoderate behaviour.

Upon closer observation, the points of contacts between the ode and a key section of Ovid's Phaethon story are more extensive than is usually remarked. The link between *tutus* (6) and *aurea mediocritas* paves the way for a sustained intertextual dialogue which is particularly intense in the closing section of Sol's admonitory speech, when he reluctantly must yield the chariot to his son: 'ne dubita, dabitur (Stygias iuravimus undas)/ quodcumque optaris -sed tu sapientius opta' (2.101–2 'have no doubt, it will be given to you (we have sworn by the waves of the Styx), whatever you choose; but do choose with more wisdom!'). 'Sapientius opta' – Sol's last words for now — mirrors Horace's opening 'rectius vives' ('you'll live more honestly') in a ring-composition of sorts which echoes *sapienter* in the last stanza (line 22), an unlikely coincidence given, among other factors, the relative rarity of the adverb in poetry.[62] *Premit* (2.104) and *altos* (2.105)[63] pick up two key words of the first stanza, with *aureus* at 2.107 gesturing towards *auream* at the beginning of the second line (5). In his second set of injunctions, when he tries at least to limit the damage, at 2.135–40, Sol resorts again to Horatian concepts and words.[64]

The connection between Ovid's text and its Horatian model is all the more intriguing if the addressee of *Ode* 2.10, Licinius, is the politician who joins Fannius Caepio's conspiracy against the Princeps in 22 B.C., i.e. either the consul designate for 23 B.C., A. Terentius

[61] Quint 1988: 72.
[62] In Horace it appears twice more, at *carm.* 4.9.48 and *ep.* 1.10.44.
[63] *Altos* refers here to *currus*, but underlines the enormity of the task and Phaethon's inadequacy. Cf. also '[sc. via] altissima' at 2.64 and 'altius egressus' at 2.136.
[64] The disjunctives *nec ... nec* (2.135) and *neu .../ neve* (138-9) are modelled on *neque .../ ... neque* (lines 1–2), while *preme* (2.135) and *altius* (2.136) hark back once more to the first stanza of the ode before *tutissimus* (2.137) picks up *tutus* of line 6. *Premere* reappears once more shortly after at line 2.148, again in connection with *tutus* (2.149).

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Varro Licinius Murena[65] or his brother L. Licinius Varro Murena[66] – their sister, Terentia, was married to Maecenas.[67] Dio's detailed chronicle of the conspiracy is suggestive. The *casus belli* appears to have been the prosecution brought against Marcus Primus, on whose behalf Licinius acted as counsel. When Augustus himself intervened in court, unasked (Dio 54.3.2), to testify against the defendant, Licinius reacted with strong words, questioning the emperor's right to appear in this capacity (54.3.3). He was apparently true to form, since Dio remarks that he was notoriously 'unrestrained and violent in his outspokenness (παρρησίᾳ) towards all alike' (54.3.4), and this very outspokenness (his 'Republican candour')[68] may have been the reason why he was thought to have been involved in the conspiracy, a fact about which Dio remains non-committal.

If Horace's Licinius is the champion of παρρησία vividly described by Dio, the ethical advice proffered in the first half of *Ode* 2.10 would acquire a distinctive political overtone, with 'excess' redefined to include an imprudent exposure to dangerous, oppositional politics. Παρρησία is a loaded word in this (admittedly uncertain) context, because the Epicureans had championed it not only as the golden rule of interpersonal exchange and debate within their school, but also as 'the right to speak freely to everybody, even to monarchs'[69] – Philodemus' περὶ παρρησίας (*On Freedom of Speech*) is eloquent about this point.[70] A reckless speaker, who would not refrain from haranguing Augustus himself when he felt it necessary, Licinius would be the ideal recipient of admonitions, dwelling 'with calculated caution'[71] on the necessity to avoid the lightnings which are apt to strike 'the tops of the mountains' (11–12 'summos/ … montes'), while stressing that Iuppiter and Apollo –gods who cannot fail to evoke Augustus' own power[72] – alternate between benevolence and anger.[73]

The issue of Licinius' identity cannot be settled beyond a reasonable doubt, but the political subtext of the Phaethon story is nonetheless perceptible, and raises bigger questions about the episode as a whole. Iuppiter appears in the story as the supreme guarantor of order, and a very Roman one at that, as emphasized by Tellus' use of the verb *consulo* in her appeal.[74] In fact, Tellus' request for help in her emotional *prosopoeia* is a strong pointer, because its most direct model, as far as I know unnoticed, is arguably the speech delivered by a personified Patria in Cicero's first Catlinarian. Patria, whose definition of 'communis … parens omnium nostrum' ('shared

[65] Syme 1939: 325 n. 5, followed by Nisbet and Hubbard 1978: 155 (but see Watkins 1985).
[66] Sumner 1978 is prepared to accept that the conspirator and the addressee of *Odes* 2.10, but not the consul designate, are the same person, arguing however that another good candidate as addressee would be M. Licinius Crassus, the proconsul to Macedonia (Dio 51.24.4, 51.25.2); see also Woodman on Vell. 2.91.2.
[67] Nisbet and Hubbard 1978, arguing that the conspirator and the consul designate are the same person, suggest that the *Ode* is 'skilfully adapted to an intermediate stage' in A. Terentius Varro Licinius Murena's downfall, which would have taken place in two stages: early troubles can be dated to 23 B.C., when perhaps he fell out of line in the complicated phase coinciding with Augustus' illness, which spurred discussions about his succession; then, a year later, he conspired against Augustus, thus sealing his fate.
[68] Nisbet and Hubbard 1978: 155.
[69] Momigliano 1960 (1941): 387.
[70] Philod. coll. xxii–xxiii Olivieri, with Momigliano 1960 (1941): 387 and Gigante 1983: 55–113.
[71] Quinn 1980: 216.
[72] Quinn 1980: 217.
[73] It may be significant that a comparable train of thought is expressed in a fragment of Maecenas' prose work *Prometheus* (probably 27 B.C.), as reported by Seneca, *ep.* 19.9 : 'ipsa enim altitudo attonat summa' ('there is a thunder even on the loftiest peak'), which Seneca glosses with a gesture towards Horace's words in *Ode* 2.10: 'hic te exitus manet nisi iam contrahes vela, nisi, quod ille [sc. Maecenas] sero voluit, terram leges' ('an end like his awaits you also, unless you shorten sail and, as Maecenas was not willing to do until it was too late, you hug the shore').
[74] *Consul* is a key word in Cicero's *First Catilinarian*, which revolves around the issue of what his duties and reponisibilities are precisely as holder of the office. Both *consul* and cognate words are repeated very frequently, with *consul* itself appearing four times in the first three paragraphs of the speech alone.

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mother of us all') at *Cat.*1.17 paves the way for Ovid's compact (and Lucretian) 'alma tellus' (2.272 'nourishing earth'), is evoked twice,[75] first (ch. 18) in a quasi-hymnic[76] *deprecatio* of Catiline, and shortly after (chs 27–9) as the author of a direct appeal to the consul, Cicero, spurring him to take action before it is too late. The conclusion of Patria's second speech is particularly relevant, because her final words on that occasion point out that Cicero's failure to act may well result in his being damaged by the *incendium* himself: 'an, cum bello vastabitur Italia, vexabuntur urbes, tecta ardebunt, tum te non existimas invidiae incendio conflagraturum?' (29 'or when Italy is laid waste by war, when her cities are destroyed, her dwellings in flames, do you not think that then you will be consumed by a blaze of unpopularity?'). Tellus will close on a similar note (2.294–300): the final *ekpyrosis* caused by Phaethon now threatens even the 'regia caeli' (298), just as Sol had feared in his useless explanation to his son (136 'altius egressus caelestia tecta cremabis' 'if you go too high you will burn up the dome of heaven'). Both Cicero and Iuppiter (the *First Catilinarian* ends with the former's appeal to the latter)[77] must protect their city and its walls against the risk of complete annihilation, because if Phaethon materially threatens a final *ekpyrosis*, Catiline's conspiracy is no less terminal in its potential consequences, aiming 'at nothing less than a wholesale collapse of cosmic order'.[78] Both Catiline and Phaethon threaten the *exitium* of the whole world, as Cicero (1.9 'hic, hic sunt in nostro numero … qui de huius urbis atque adeo de orbis terrarum exitio cogitent!' 'here, here in our very midst there are men who plan the destruction of this city and even that of the whole world') and Tellus point out (2.290 'sed tamen exitium fac me meruisse' 'but, grant that I have deserved destruction …').

VII OVID'S ASTRONOMY

A 'proemio al mezzo' in *Fasti* 1 offers a useful point of reference for the complexities of Ovid's attitude towards Lucretius with specific reference to some of the issues raised in our reading of the Phaethon episode (1.295–8):

> quid vetat et stellas, ut quaeque oriturque caditque,
> dicere? promissi pars fuit ista mei.
> felices animae, quibus haec cognoscere primis
> inque domus superas scandere cura fuit!
> credibile est illos pariter vitiisque locisque
> altius humanis exseruisse caput.
> non Venus et vinum sublimia pectora fregit
> officiumque fori militiaeve labor;
> nec levis ambitio perfusaque gloria fuco
> magnarumque fames sollicitavit opum.
> admovere oculis distantia sidera nostris
> aetheraque ingenio subposuere suo.
> sic petitur caelum, non ut ferat Ossan Olympus
> summaque Peliacus sidera tangat apex.

[75] Tzounakas 2006 discusses the different emphases of Patria's double appearance.
[76] Ratkowitsch 1981.
[77] 2.214 'magnae pereunt cum moenibus urbes' ('great cities perish with their walls'); at 401 Iuppiter inspects the 'moenia caeli' for damages. Cf. Cicero's final appeal to Iuppiter in *Cat.* 1.27: 'hunc et huius socios a tuis ceterisque templis, a tectis urbis ac moenibus … arcebis' ('you will keep him [sc.Catilina] and his confederates from your temple and those of the other gods, from the houses and the walls of the city').
[78] Gildenhard 2011: 276.

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nos quoque sub ducibus caelum metabimur illis
ponemusque suos ad vaga signa dies.

> What is to stop me if I should tell also of the stars, their risings and their settings? That was part of my promise. Ah happy souls, who first took thought to know these things and scale the heavenly mansions! Well may we believe they lifted up their heads alike above the frailties and the homes of men. Their lofty natures neither love nor wine did break, nor civil business nor the toils of war; no low ambition tempted them, nor glory dyed in purple, nor lust of great riches. The distant stars they brought within our ken, and heaven itself made subject to their wit. So man may reach the sky: no need that Ossa on Olympus should be piled, and that Pelion's peak should touch the topmost stars. Under these leaders we, too, will plumb the sky and give their own days to the wandering signs. (trans. Frazer-Goold)

Ovid has devoted a significant portion of the book so far — the question-and-answer session with Janus is just over — to an outline of the aetiological and antiquarian programme of the poem. Now he pauses to discuss a different course of action, one which, if pursued, would significantly alter the nature of his project, aligning him much more closely with a distinguished tradition of didactic poetry. Nothing, on the face of it, 'forbids' (*vetat*) more ambitious undertakings such as the exploration of astronomical themes, an expansion of his Callimachean blueprint into Aratean territory.

Lucretius is evoked repeatedly in this passage, both directly and indirectly, and so is Virgil.[79] Indeed many references work in both directions at once: 'perfusaque gloria fuco' (303) recalls 'purpura regum' ('the purple of kings') at *Georg.* 2.495 as well as the polemical implications brought out by 'ostro … rubenti' ('blushing purple') at Lucretius 2.35, which in turn lurks behind Virgil's 'Sarrano … ostro' ('Tyrian purple') just a few lines later in the same passage (2.506).[80] 'Magnarumque fames … opum' (304) develops the theme of political ambition mixed with greed of *DRN* 2.9–14 and *Georg.* 2.495–9 while echoing specifically *DRN* 2.31 'magnis opibus' and *Georg.* 2.507 'condit opes' ('hoards wealth'). The folly of political and material ambition which besets the philosophically ignorant is an unrewarding *labor* (302), a keyword in the proem to *DRN* 2 (lines 2 and 12), but also a risk eschewed by the followers of Virgil's georgic project at *Georg.* 2.496–9. Specifically Lucretian imagery, however, is predominant, especially in lines 305–6, where these early astronomers are said to be replicating Epicurus' feat, that of 'bringing back to us in his victory' (*DRN* 1.75 'refert victor') the understanding of distant and otherwise unknowable phenomena. Moreover, 'aetheraque ingenio subposuere suo' also subverts a key programmatic image in Lucretius' praise of the master in *DRN* 1: whereas before his revelation *religio* 'displayed her head from the regions of heaven, lowering over mortals with horrible aspect' (64–5), here the intellectual prowess of these natural philosophers succeeds in reversing the spatial and hierarchic positioning and actually 'submitting the sky to their mind', a twist on Lucretius 1.78–9 'quare religio pedibus subiecta vicissim/ obteritur' (306), which is also picked up at *Georg.* 2.491–2 'metus omnis et inexorabile fatum/subiecit pedibus strepitumque Acherontis avari' ('has cast beneath his feet all fear and fate's implacable decrees'). The central rôle of Lucretius in this programmatic passage is clinched by the reference to 'sublimia pectora' at 301, a pointed echo of Ovid's fulsome — if ultimately mischievious — praise of 'sublimis Lucretius' in *Amores* 1.15.23–4 ('carmina sublimis tunc sunt peritura Lucreti,/ exitio terras cum dabit una dies' 'the verses of sublime Lucretius will perish only then, when a single day will give the earth to doom').

[79] Palla 1983: 180–1; Landolfi 2003: 21–2.
[80] Lucretius 2.36 'cubandum est' resurfaces in the following line, 2.507: 'condit opes alius defossoque incubat auro' ('another hoards wealth and watches over buried gold').

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The *makarismos* at lines 297–8,[81] therefore, is liable to be taken at first sight as a straightforward statement of admiration for Lucretius. Clearly Ovid is echoing Virgil's own comments about the *DRN* in *Georgics* 2, but this is a rather problematic gesture given the fact that 'felix qui potuit' refers there to an impossible aspiration, one immediately abandoned for the safer option of devoting oneself to the care of rural gods. Nor is *animae*, to be sure, the most obvious term one would use to refer to a materialistic philosopher. In the famous close to Book 2 Virgil has just explained that Aratean-Lucretian astronomy is an attractive but terrifying theme, which guarantees *gloria* at too high an emotional, and theological, price. Fright takes on a physical dimension, and 'cold blood around the *praecordia*' (2.484 'frigidus … circum praecordia sanguis') paralyses the poet — a clever twist given the Empedoclean origin of this notion[82] — in the same way that 'gelida formido' seals Phaethon's descent into mental paralysis at *Met.* 2.200. Only Lucretius' 'sublimia pectora' had proved able to withstand this sudden drop in temperature caused by the revelation of sublimity, a heady combination of 'divina voluptas/ … atque horror' (3.28–9 'divine delight and shuddering').

We are entitled to wonder, at this stage, to what extent Ovid's apparently generous praise can remain unaffected by its Virgilian model, and, as a consequence, whether the *Verneigung* at lines 307–8 ('sic petitur caelum, non ut ferat Ossan Olympus/ summaque Peliacus sidera tangat apex') does not actually give the whole game away. Didactic poetry of an astronomical kind is ostensibly set up as a positive way of 'reaching for the sky', as opposed to the Giants' impiety and, by implication, epic poetry, but the opposition is further blurred by the use, just a few lines later, of military language in 'sub ducibus' and 'ponemus … signa' (309–10), picking up on the strong *subposuere* of line 306, but also reiterating the triumphal metaphors already at work in Lucretius' 'refert victor', which are in turn modelled on Alexander the Great's myth-historical exploits (line 305 already combines Lucretius 1.66 and 67).[83] We might also note, incidentally, that *scandere* (1.298) is the verb Horace employs to describe the Giants' ascent to heaven in *carm.* 2.19.22. Overall, it would appear that the Epicurean-Lucretian project is no less aggressive than the Giants', or, in principle, than Phaethon's.[84] Nor, we might add, ultimately less bound to failure, for all its apparent ability to overcome the boundaries of the human condition: it does manage to attain sublimity, but is nonetheless perishable, since, as Lucretius would have been the first to admit, one day will indeed witness the demise of our world and thus the end of his poem's renown.

Ovid's rather unexpected, if energetic, declaration of interest in astronomical themes at this juncture remains isolated. Astronomical themes do not loom large in the *Fasti*, which are devoted to a vast number of gods, rural and otherwise, and the many stories associated with their origin and cult. While at first sight 'nos quoque' at line 309 appears to diverge from Virgil's 'fortunatus et ille' (2.493 'happy, too, is the man …') by suggesting agreement with the project he has just praised, it actually ends up fulfilling the same contrastive function: *vis à vis* Lucretius' brand of natural philosophy the form of instruction championed by the *Fasti* shares a lot of common ground with the *Georgics*. Occasional references to astronomical events are scattered here and there, mostly by way of chronological indication, but no section of the poem discusses them with anything like the breadth and depth we find in Aratus or Lucretius. Actually, in the other most extended *Fasti* passage on the topic the same ambivalent attitude persists. Romulus did get his year all wrong, but for some very understandable reasons, and in any event the

[81] Alfonsi 1978: 281.
[82] Gowers 2007.
[83] Salemme 1978.
[84] The impious aggressiveness of Lucifer's attempt to ascend the sky ('qui dicebas in corde tuo in caelum conscendam' 'you, who said in your heart "I will ascend the sky …"'), and his subsequent fall from grace is clearly drawn out in Isaiah 14.11–15.

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Romans had weightier matters at hand than advanced astronomical research. This was a task better left to the Greeks, an 'eloquent but hardly brave people' (3.102 'facundum sed male forte genus'). Since the Romans' *ars* (valour) eventually encompasses all other *artes*, it was only a matter of time until Greece was conquered and handed over its knowledge to the winners (101–2). The contrast between military and astronomical *signa* this time is explicit and so is the reference to Lucretius, with 'caelo labentia signa' at 113–4 ('non illi [sc. ancient Romans] caelo labentia signa tenebant,/ sed sua, quae magnum perdere crimen erat' 'heaven's gliding ensigns were beyond their reach, not so their own, to lose which was a great crime') contrastively picking up the second line of *DRN* ('caeli subter labentia signa' 'beneath the smooth-moving heavenly signs').

To return to Book 1 of the *Fasti*, it is perhaps just a coincidence, but nonetheless an intriguing one, that the first practical application of Ovid's new and short-lived programmatic ambition ends with a factual mistake which thus also stands as an encrypted *recusatio* of sorts: we are told that in the third night before the January *Nonae* the constellation of Cancer cannot be seen because it has set into the West (1.311–14). However, this phenomenon actually takes place in June, not in January.[85] It is not just the constellation, it appears, that falls head first, *praeceps*, into the horizon.

VIII THE REMYTHOLOGIZATION OF LUCRETIUS

Phaethon's story exemplifies Ovid's 'remythologization' of Lucretius,[86] a category that applies as well to the creative dialogue between the *Metamorphoses* and its Epicurean model as it does to the interaction between Virgil and Lucretius. Turning a few lines of the *DRN* into an emotional story about troubled ancestry and Oedipal competition between father and son interspersed with tragic intertexts marks quite clear generic, ideological and stylistic distances. This is, however, just part of the picture. Ovid is always an incisive and often subtly polemical reader, as we know full well from his attitude towards Virgil. Rather, he shows an uncanny ability to direct his attention — and ours — to problematic aspects of his chosen models, and Lucretius' Phaethon is no exception to the rule.

At a general level it is of course relevant that Ovid's target for 'remythologization' is in this instance an explicitly mythical passage in the *DRN*, albeit one which Lucretius carefully edits for his purposes. As I mentioned above Lucretius is at pains to distance himself, as he usually does in similar circumstances, from the truth value of the myth he is narrating, but he does so in a fairly tortuous fashion, and the fact remains that the disruptive force of myth in the texture of an Epicurean poem can never be entirely contained, even — perhaps especially — when we are dealing with a myth which has already been involved in the vicissitudes of philosophical interpretation at least from Plato.[87] This does not mean that we should rush back to *anti-Lucrèce* theories, only that we should heed the nuanced methodological lesson set out by Don Fowler in his posthumous paper on 'Philosophy and Literature in Lucretian Intertextuality'.[88] Although he points out that he is taking 'a conservative view of the effect … of the intertexts' he discusses, with an 'emphasis on the way in which they contribute to the master argument of the *DRN* rather than on their potential for disruption', Fowler does actually highlight the dialectical consequences for Lucretius' argument entailed by the appropriation of mythical texts.

[85] Bömer on 1.313.
[86] Hardie's 1986: 178 term, see further Myers 1994: 54–7 (on Phaethon) and Gale 2000: 116–23 and *passim*.
[87] Jones 1926.
[88] Fowler 2000.

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There is, however, a more specific reason why Ovid's abundant references to Lucretius in his Phaethon narrative are pointed. In his searching analysis of the logical texture of the whole section spanning lines 380–415 Carlo Giussani pointed out long ago a number of logical shortcuts and *non sequiturs* which led him to a forceful conclusion: 'Poetic reasoning is not enough to justify what we should call, rather than agility, looseness of thought [*sbrigliatura del pensiero*], which moves forward by hiding logical connections so much that it is not always easy to divine them.'[89] I cannot rehearse Giussani's argument about *Gedankengang* in full, nor analyse the previous part of the book, where the sequence of arguments is, according to both Bailey and Giussani, 'not very logically constructed',[90] but a couple of examples can be illuminating.[91] The overall structure of the passage in which the Phaethon passage is inserted is in itself doctrinally unimpeachable. Lucretius embarks at line 235 on an exposition of the tenet that the world is native and mortal, and focuses first and foremost on the mortality of all the constitutive elements of our world; indeed we must wait until line 416 before switching from destruction to an account of how the world actually came into being. The immediate context of Phaethon's story, however, is more nuanced. Already at 338–44 Lucretius refers in general terms to ancient beliefs about the destruction brought about by flooding or scorching heat. Now, at 394–5, he brings up flood and fire again as real events: 'ut fama est' ('as the story goes') at 395 is corroborative, as once more at 412, this time referring to the flood only. The association of Phaethon's story with the apparently uncontested tradition of the flood thus weakens at least in part the forceful — if predictable — disclaimer at 405–6.

Phaethon's ill-fated ride brings about disasters all over the world, as Ovid details in a sort of un-Lucretian aetiological catalogue which spans over thirty lines. This is a list of momentous events, which explain among other things why Aethiopians are dark-skinned, Lybia is largely a desert or the sources of the Nile cannot be found, and generally paints a picture of near-final catastrophe, a foreshadowing of what a real *ekpyrosis* might look like. There are few immediate victims, though, apart from some beached seals and the swans crowding the banks of the river Caystros in Maeonia: 'et quae Maeonias celebrabant carmine ripas/ flumineae volucres medio caluere Caystro' (252–3 'and the river birds which thronged with their song the banks of Maeonia were scorched in the middle of the Cayster').

These lines notoriously evoke Lucretius at 2.344–5: 'et variae volucres, laetantia quae loca aquarum/ concelebrant circum ripas fontisque lacusque' ('and the different birds which throng the joyous regions of water around bank and spring and lake …'). I am almost tempted to think that Ovid's combusted swans may suggest that what is ending up in flames here is also Epicurus-the-swan as mentioned — again — in the proem to Book 3 of *DRN* (3.7) and his dream of a poetry which can be both precious and all-revealing.[92] At the very least, we should wonder whether Lucretius' association between Epicurus and the Giants, which Ovid expands into a wider comparison of Epicurus and Phaethon, can be handled with complete safety even with the help of Lucretius' careful caveats and distinctions which he interposes at several points.

[89] Giussani 1897–8: 4.43.

[90] Bailey on 380–415, following up on similar remarks in relation to 247–60, 261–72, 318–23.

[91] Ovid's Phaethon episode is also invested in inconsistency: Zissos and Gildenhard 1999: 39–42, O'Hara 2007: 114–15.

[92] While Lucretius' lines do not mention either *Caystros* or *Maeonia*, Ovid's specific geographic references strengthen the literary implications of the text. Ovid is fond of using *Maeonides* to designate Homer and is the first to do so in Latin (McKeown on *Am.* 1.15.9–10), but Horace already has *Maeonius* at *carm.* 1.6.2 and 4.9.5. At *Tr.* 5.21.11 the *Caystrius ales* is the symbol of Ovid's languishing poetry, exhausted by his long exile. Lucretius' lines are also active in the background of Virg., *Georg.* 1.383–4 (cf. 383 *variae … volucres*; *circum*), which, in the context of an Aratean passage, specifically engage Hom., *Il.* 2.461 (for the Homeric reference see Thomas ad loc.).

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Lucretian poetry and philosophy are a central concern in the Phaethon episode, a highly ambitious programmatic passage on several different counts. On this reading, Ovid approaches the *DRN* with the same complex strategy — a mixture of admiration and somewhat ironic criticism — which we are accustomed to detect in his approach to Virgil and especially to the *Aeneid*. As in that case, Ovid's critique is enormously important for what it tells us both about his own project and about the model he is interpreting. Few critics can claim his eye for spotting the fault-lines which make poetry great, and enriching a text with telling suspicions. Allusion always involves, to a degree, disruption and subversion,[93] subversion being understood, of course, as a bidirectional process, since a later reading can do much to destabilize and problematize its model. In the case of the *Metamorphoses* and the *DRN*, however, we face a rather unusual instance of this phenomenon, because of the marked asymmetry in what the two texts have at stake. The *Metamorphoses*' broad church, with its post-modern exuberance, makes no great claim to orthodoxy, while Lucretius (like Iuppiter) must exercise a careful watch over his own doctrinal ramparts. Lucretian subtexts in the *Metamorphoses* enrich and vary its conceptual texture, but can hardly jeopardize, by and large, a non-existent theoretical coherence — although it is fair to say that in a story such as Phaethon's allusions to the *DRN* do add to a view of divine agency as unpredictable or at times even cruel. Ovid's searching reading, on the other hand, may retroactively destabilize, or even disrupt, those parts of the *DRN* where he spots ideological hesitations which Lucretius would have been hard-pressed to account for.

IX OEDIPAL COMPLICATIONS

Reading Phaethon's disaster as a cautionary tale against the risks of sublimity, with its disregard for epistemological and aesthetic boundaries, does nothing to erase the profound appeal of the poetic programme it advertises. Pursuing *avia* may well be dangerous, but can we really expect Ovid to forsake *nova*[94] and opt for the safety of a highly un-Callimachean beaten path, as Sol recommends (2.167 *tritum*)? Can *divina voluptas* be forsaken just in order to eschew the attending *horror*? The key *tamen*[95] of the epitaph (2.328) carries much weight, with the concessive troping the tension between divergent, equally irresistible drives: *recusatio*, a *Verneigung* of sorts, always leverages its allegiances.

From this different angle we can read the Phaethon episode as a more comprehensive reflection on the nature and objectives of epic poetry — a constant focus of attention of Ovidian poetics. But the emphasis placed by the narrative on Iuppiter's political rôle and the ever-looming overlap between the father of the gods and the Princeps also deepen the political implications of the episode beyond those already suggested by the Lucretian scenario.

A crucial aspect of the Phaethon episode, in fact, is represented by Sol's venting his rage at Iuppiter both by momentarily depriving the world of light, and by shouting his criticism at the harsh punishment of what he regards as a youthful and understandable mistake, one which even the king of the gods himself could have committed (392–3). This different allocation of responsibilities allows for the development of two distinct but intertwined

[93] Lyne 1994.

[94] The first two words of the poem not yet modifying *corpora* identify the tension towards *nova* at this stage as a general programme; Wheeler 1999: 12–14 offers a stimulating analysis of the line and its implications.

[95] No less intense than the one doing much work in Cicero's judgement on Lucretius in *Ad Q. Fratr.* 2.10.3: 'Lucreti poemata ut scribis, ita sunt multis luminibus ingeni, multae tamen artis' ('what you say in your letter is quite right: Lucretius' poetry displays great originality, but also very careful workmanship' (trans. Kenney)). Ovid applies the contrast between *ingenium* and *ars* to Callimachus in less flattering terms at *Am.* 1.15.13.

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narrative strands, one focused on the issue of paternity and succession, the other on the dialectics between creativity and power.

Phaethon's story is both a tale of contested paternity and of failed succession. The Oedipal overtones of this compact *Bildungsroman* are intense, for Phaethon, mixing up self-doubt and aggression, is equally eager to gain his father's recognition and to hasten his replacement in the masterful steering of the chariot.[96] Already in Lucretius the interaction between Sol and his son is shot through with the imagery of succession, neatly reversed. We are left to surmise Phaethon's objectives, but after Iuppiter restores order Sol reappropriates the 'lampada mundi' (literal and metaphorical) which had been seized by his son with a gesture that subverts the orderly generational flow inscribed in 'traditio lampadis': 'Solque cadenti/ obvius aeternam succepit lampada mundi' (5.401–2 'and the Sun, meeting his fall, caught up from him the everlasting lamp of the world').

In his desire for reunion with, and acknowledgement from, his absent father, Phaethon follows the archetypal steps of young Telemachus. Telemachus engages in a chariot journey in *Odyssey* 3 as he moves from Pylos to Sparta in order to establish his credentials as Odysseus' worthy successor and, at a more fundamental level, to ascertain his true lineage, about which he harbours some lingerings doubts, as he confesses to Athena in disguise: 'my mother claims that I am his [sc. Odysseus'] son, but I do not know: in fact no one really knows his engendering' (1.215–16). He undertakes his journey of discovery at the goddess' suggestion (*Od.* 1.279–83), just as Phaethon departs heeding his mother's advice (1.773–5).[97]

The Homeric model is particularly challenging because it weaves together a story of coming of age and a reflection on the evolving nature of poetry.[98] Telemachus' *quête* is less tragic than Phaethon's, but he is still bound to play 'the inherently contradictory role of the unsucceeding successor'.[99] The youth does find his father and puts to rest any doubt about his legitimacy, but in doing so he also reaffirms his subordination and youth. He may actually be doing more than that: he may also be attesting, as Richard Martin has suggested,[100] the end of a poetic tradition, the impossibility of emulating and carrying forward the age of heroes and the epic that revolves around them. Telemachus does survive his journey, but he will not be able to grow into a new Odysseus.

By shifting the murder of Phaethon from Sol onto Iuppiter, and expanding upon Sol's compassion and anger in the closing moments of the story, Ovid allows multiple emotional alignments between characters and readers and signals the complexity of the signifying strategies mobilized by the (failed) Oedipal plot.[101] The father's rôle as

[96] The sexual implications of this symbolic appropriation are favoured by the metaphoric use, in Latin, of images of riding, see Adams 1982: 166, with further bibliography. Sophocles' *Oedipus*, to which we will turn presently, exploits standard metaphors related to navigation (1208) and agriculture (260), with πατρῷαι … ἄλοκες (1210–11) suggesting the intersection between the furrow realized through ploughing and the 'Callimachean' path trodden by carriages. On the textual and semantic issues raised by 1210 see Dawe ad loc.

[97] Slaveva-Griffin 2003 explores the connection between the chariot rides in Homer and Parmenides: as she well shows (237–8), the Telemachean model is very relevant to Parmenides' proem as well, where the philosopher-charioteer is described as an inexperienced youth carried by the mares.

[98] A comparable situation is found in the Ascanius-Apollo episode of *Aen.* 9.638–63: see Hardie ad loc., who discusses both the Homeric intertexts and the metapoetic implications of the narrative.

[99] Murnaghan 2002: 139, cf. 142–5.

[100] Martin 1993. On Telemachus and Odysseus see now also Lentini 2006.

[101] Although I employ the term 'Oedipal' in its general Freudian sense, some thematic connections between Ovid's and Sophocles' texts are worth noting. Oedipus, too, is seeking out his true father, albeit with opposite hopes than the ones spurring Phaethon into action. A drunkard calls him 'a fabricated son for his father' (780 καλεῖ παρ' οἴνῳ πλαστὸς ὡς εἴην πατρί), the same accusation with which Phaethon is taunted (753–4 'matri … omnia demens/ credis et es tumidus genitoris imagine falsi' 'you foolishly believe all your mother tells you and you are swelled up with false notions about your father'). Oedipus, too, 'wants to know his origin' (1077 σπέρμ' ἰδεῖν βουλήσομαι) and his questions to Jocasta (732–70) flesh out in detail the dialogue which Ovid summarizes

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guarantor of authority is diffracted:[102] Sol does not relinquish his power, but nor does he kill his own offspring directly. As Phaethon fails to equal his father in a much more gruesome fashion than Telemachus, he nonetheless attests to the impossibility of succeeding Sol (let alone Iuppiter), not just, as we have seen in the first part of this paper, as purveyor of sublimity, but more broadly of (epic) poetry.

This impossibility, we may add, stems from self-doubt as much as from external causes. Phaethon is not prepared to accept at face value his mother's reassuring words about his lineage, and Telemachus takes for granted that such doubts are part and parcel of the human condition. This 'Phaethon complex'[103] translates anxiety about legitimacy into inadequacy to succeed, effectively morphing into a self-fulfilling prophecy: even after these young men have put to rest their genealogical doubts, they are shown to be more or less tragically unable to equal their imposing fathers.[104]

The Oedipal masterplot doubles up as Sol's and Iuppiter's actions and reactions diverge, with the latter portrayed as an exceedingly harsh, almost tyrannical ruler. Both the concessive force of Phaethon's epitaph and Sol's expostulations conspire to elicit sympathy for the youth. This is not the first or only occasion when the *Metamorphoses* debate the appropriateness of divine punishment, though the element of *force majeure* strongly invoked by Tellus adds a different twist.

As discussed earlier, Iuppiter's actions are presented as distinctly political, an element that reinforces the overlap, frequent in Ovid, between Iuppiter and Augustus. The god's wielding of the fatal thunder which causes Phaethon's death suggests a parallel with his attack on the Giants (a metaphor of Augustus' ascent to power), as described both in the *Metamorphoses* (1.151–5) and in *Tr.* 2.333 ('domitos Iovis igne Gigantas' 'the Giants tamed by Iuppiter's thunderbolt'). Much as the context differs, Phaethon, like Epicurus, is a Giant of sorts, whose aspiration to enter the sky is over-reaching: the verb *adfectare*, applied to Phaethon at 2.58 refers to the Giants in 1.152 ('adfectasse ferunt regnum caeleste Gigantas' 'they say that the Giants assailed the kingdom of heaven'), where *regnum* emphasizes the political subtext of the action.[105]

Even allowing for a good deal of scepticism on Ovid's part towards the Lucretian and Epicurean project, which we can read into his narrative of Phaethon's actions, Sol's anger at Iuppiter calls into question the punishment he metes out, and the adjective *saevus* applied to the thunder confirms Ovid's qualms. *Tr.* 2.333–8 provides an important parallel. There Ovid justifies his decision not to engage in epic, or, periphrastically, 'to tell of the Giants subjected by Iuppiter'. The reasons adduced for his choice are worth looking at. His *ingenium* is not up to the task, because the 'immania Caesaris acta' ('Caesar's mighty deeds') require a stronger inspiration. Better to give up, or Ovid's

where Phaethon is said to be asking for 'signs' of his true parentage (1.764 'oravit veri sibi signa parentis'). The outcome of the confrontation between father and son is markedly different. Laius tries to hit Oedipus as he walks near his chariot, but is hit back, and dies when he rolls out backwards from the vehicle 811–12 (ὕπτιος/ μέσης ἀπήνης εὐθὺς ἐκκυλίνδεται) in a movement which prefigures Phaethon's fatal fall from his father's chariot (2.320 'volvitur in praeceps'). Note, incidentally, the similarity between Oedipus' self-inflicted curse at 1183 and Merope's reply to her son: 'si ficta loquor, neget ipse videndum/ se mihi, sitque oculis lux ista novissima nostris!' (1.771–2, above n. 25).

[102] On Ovid's characterization of Sol and its Homeric models see Fucecchi 2002–3.

[103] The term is Choisy's (1950), a psychoanalist who investigates the fantasies of illegitimate children and regards Phaethon's fate as a self-inflicted punishment which stems from the unconscious (and unattainable) desire to punish their absentee or unknown parents.

[104] Sylvia Plath's reworking of the Phaethon myth in her poetry suggests comparable shifting dynamics. While in 'Ariel' (1962), which alludes to Hughes' 'Phaethons', she tropes the myth as an act of poetic empowerment *vis à vis* the tradition embodied, among others, by Hughes himself, and 'embraces extremity rather than moderation' (Clark 2005: 104), the first draft of 'Sheep in Fog' describes the subsequent fall from heaven, dramatically voicing self-doubt rather self-affirmation: 'The world rusts around us/ Ribs, spokes, a scrapped chariot/ … I am a scrapped chariot'. See Clark 2005 for a full analysis and further bibliography.

[105] Duret (1988) discusses Phaethon's myth as an allegory of dynastic succession under Augustus and Nero.

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craftmanship (*opus*) may be surpassed by the subject matter at hand: 'materia ne superetur opus' is a clever twist on the epiphonematic statement which sums up the description of the Palace of Sun at the beginning of Book 2. This is precisely what has happened when Ovid tried his hand at epic (2.336).

The same admission occurs at the beginning of *Amores* 2.1. There, in spite of the lighter tone, it is Iuppiter who, in a sense, suffers Phaethon's fate; 'magnis tamen excidit ausis' finds a precedent in Ovid's summing up of his decision to abandon epic themes: 'excidit ingenio Iuppiter ipse meo' (2.1.18 'Iuppiter himself dropped from my thoughts'). The poem is based on a systematic inversion of proportions, and of rôles. Ovid 'had in his hands' nothing less than thunder-clouds, lighting-bolts and Iuppiter himself[106] — or, in fact, a poem about all of this: a bold undertaking (11 *ausus*), but one for which he had adequate inspiration (12 'et satis oris erat' 'my words were up to the task'), and which would have resulted in a Gigantomachy, the 'cosmic struggles' (11 'caelestia bella') which define epic poetry. Both thunderbolt and Iuppiter fell out of interest (17 'ego cum Iove fulmen omisi' 'I let Iuppiter fall with his lightning') once the poet realized that the thunderbolts (*fulmen* refers both to a thunder- and a fire-bolt)[107] threatened against him by his girlfriend are a much more dangerous prospect that Iuppiter's own.[108]

These different takes on the same issue — Ovid's decision not to write 'now' (a certain kind of) epic poetry — are all part and parcel of his ongoing reflections on the nature of epic, his creative rewriting of the rules of the genre, and his self-positioning within the canon of epic writers. Ovid never renounces epic, as of course the *Metamorphoses* attest, but by blurring the boundaries between epic and elegy, by elegizing epic and epicizing the distich, he simultaneously proclaims his original contribution to the genre's evolving and expanding brief and marks his distance with respect to his most illustrious epic predecessors. Ovid is neither a Lucretius nor a Virgil: he wants to be both. The *Metamorphoses* claim a place of honour in the genealogy of the Ennian-Virgilian brand of epic, witness Pythagoras' speech,[109] while also incorporating the different approach championed by Lucretius (and Empedocles).[110] This polymorphic attempt at encompassing all the available routes to epic success through generic experimentation entails an agonistic attitude towards his predecessors,[111] which includes a margin of aggression and perhaps a residual anxiety not so much of influence as of failure,[112] or at least of concern about what the 'proper' boundaries of epic should be.[113] By Ovid's time, Virgil is already 'Virgil', not just the poet laureate *par excellence*, but also the embodiment (programmatically, at least) of a peculiar form of connection between artistic and political power such as the one theorized at the beginning of *Georgics* 3,[114] where Virgil shows himself willing and able to drive not one, but a hundred chariots in honour of Augustus (3.18 'centum quadriiugos agitabo ad flumina currus' 'I will drive a

[106] See McKeown notes on 15–16 and 17–18.
[107] McKeown on 19–20.
[108] On the Callimachean association of Iuppiter and thundering see Pretagostini 1995.
[109] Hardie 1993: 106.
[110] On the vocabulary of poetic succession in Ovid see now Ingleheart 2010.
[111] On Ovid's *aemulatio* of Virgil see Tarrant 2002: 23–7.
[112] Morgan 2003: 76–7 suggests, in the context of a very interesting discussion of Ovid's 'youthful' poetics, that 'Phaethon … like the *Metamorphoses* … strives for but falls short of epic status': he is, after all, just a *puer* (76).
[113] Hinds 1987: 127–33 discusses in depth the 'generic paradox' at the heart of the *Metamorphoses* and Ovid's 'fastidiousness' as conveyed by the Muses about 'the extreme of epic represented by the Pierid Gigantomachy'.
[114] The ekphrasis of the temple in honour of Augustus, which immediately follows, begins with a description of chiselled doors in the same materials, gold and ivory (26–7 'in foribus pugnam ex auro solidoque elephanto/ … faciam' 'on the temple doors I will sculpt the battle in solid gold and ivory'), as Sol's *regia*, whose doors (2.18 *foribus*) are also richly decorated.

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hundred four-horse chariots beside the stream').[115] When Ovid denounces Virgil's indiscretions in *Tristia* 2, pointing out that the *Aeneid* is hardly the candid poem Augustus naively praises, 'ille tuae felix Aeneidos auctor' (2.533 'the happy author of your *Aeneid*') packs in its two adjectives more in the way of pained barbs than frothy irony. 'Your *Aeneid*' points, both wistfully and scornfully, to a level of closeness and connivance between ruler and poet that Ovid cannot (or would not) approach, with the inevitable result that the fate of 'lucky' Virgil stands in marked contrast to *infelix* (elegiac) Ovid.

The lines preceding this statement are also remarkable: Ovid pictures himself as an obedient Phaethon, whose horses are confined to the narrow orbit of a predictable *manège* (*Tr*. 2.531 'invida me spatio natura coercuit arto' 'grudging Nature has confined me within a narrow space'), eschewing the wider spaces which proved fatal to the youth (*Met*. 2.167–8 'quod simul ac sensere, ruunt tritumque relinquunt/ quadriiugi spatium nec quo prius ordine currunt' 'when they feel this, the four-horse team runs wild and leaves the well-trodden track, and runs no longer in the same course as before'). In cruel paradox, however, this *tritum spatium*, the only one suited to his limited poetic strength,[116] is not even safe, while Virgil's lofty *bella* have turned him into the prince's darling. Even after we allow for the operation, in this context, of the founding patterns of exilic poetry — the insistence on poetic weakness, Augustus' interpretive mistakes — this section of *Tristia* 2 can be seen to stage a poetic rivalry played out in the contrast between epic and amatory poetry, and closely associated with the issue of acceptance on Augustus' part. In a compressed and allusive fashion, the passage prefigures the relationship between the *Thebaid* and the *Aeneid* which Statius will voice in his poems: the end of the *Thebaid* (12.816–17) 'vive, precor, nec tu divinam Aeneida tempta,/ sed longe sequere et vestigia semper adora' ('live, I pray, nor rival the divine *Aeneid*, but follow afar and even venerate its footsteps') points to distance and respect (these *vestigia* will not allow him to reach the *Aeneid* itself), but coupled with the hope of imperial favour (814 'iam te magnanimus dignatur noscere Caesar' 'already great-hearted Caesar deigns to know you'), while *Silvae* 2.7.79–80 voices competition, or even superiority, rather than respectful adoration.

The underlining notion that what is at stake is also a competition for the favour of the master helps us to understand why Iuppiter's action against Phaethon is presented in such polemical terms, rather than as an inevitable measure taken in order to forestall the destruction of the world. Just beneath the reassuring conventions of *recusatio* there lurks a complex set of emotions, a mixture of admiration for the rebellious epic of Lucretius, the lofty status of Virgil as the epic poet laureate, a resentment of the fact that the avoidance of epic (partial or total) did not result in acceptance but in rejection on the part of the only critic whose opinion, whatever its technical shortcomings, really does matter. Phaethon is, after all, an *inspired* poet, driven by the same violent inspiration which Ovid experiences. His mind 'leads' him (*fert* underscoring passivity) into uncharted territories, soon revealing a nightmare scenario punctuated by the recurrence of the same verb,[117] until the final *fertur* at 2.321, which marks the final stage of his downfall as it turns the active force of inspiration into passive punishment. His desire to be accepted as a fellow god literally (and metapoetically) — 'ede notam tanti generis meque adsere caelo' (1.761 'offer proof of such an illustrious parentage and show that I belong to heaven') — echoes in vain Horace's similar request for poetic recognition:

[115] Augustus also guarantees that the poet, abandoning the safety of *medium iter*, will have no fear of pushing his boat into the deep sea: 'te sine nil altum mens incohat' (3.42), another instantiation of mental flight.

[116] 'Vires exiguas' parallels a similar remark on Sol's part: 'magna petis, Phaethon, et quae nec viribus istis/ munera conveniant nec tam puerilibus annis' (54–5 'the gift you are asking for is enormous, Phaethon, and it does not suit your strength or your young age').

[117] 69 'ne ferar in praeceps' (Sol), 164 'nimia levitate feruntur', 207 'praecipites … feruntur'.

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'quodsi me lyricis vatibus inseres,/ sublimi feriam sidera vertice' (*carm.* 1.1.35–6 'but if you rank me among lyric poets I will touch the stars with my exalted head').[118]

The epic, thundering Iuppiter is the guarantor of a poetic order, of a hierarchy of genres, which still holds in the face of Ovid's protests. Lucretius and Virgil — not less than Iuppiter and Augustus — are authoritative father-figures who are bound to elicit a panoply of conflicting sentiments: admiration, envy, aggression, desire to emulate. Even if we accept that Ovid's unwillingness to engage in a certain type of epic is in effect Augustus' own fault — he is the one who would force the poet to sing of 'immania … acta', hardly a reassuring twist on *res gestae* — the decision to follow this particular line of conduct exacts a heavy price. Poetic rivalry, plotted onto the scheme of Oedipal conflict and competition for attention and approval is not assuaged just because, under particular circumstances, one of the competitors feels unable, or unwilling, to enter the fray.

Nor is the potential aggressiveness of Ovid's attitude very far behind. Striving for recognition (of his rôle, his innocence, his misery, his fame), and the hierarchic subordination it ostensibly entails, is easily morphed, as in so much of his exile poetry, into a thinly disguised threat, if not outright aggression.[119] Accustomed as he is to ride triumphantly on his own *currus*, Augustus, too, should be alert to the dangers his position implies. When, in a feat of Epicurean *ouranobatein* (57 'mente videbo'),[120] Ovid imagines the emperor's (fictional) triumph over the Germans of *Tristia* 4.2, Ovid casts Augustus *triumphator* in the rôle of a poet,[121] and, tellingly, voices the dangers he must now face: the chariot's horses are so excited by the tumultuous acclamations of the crowds that they buck, at the risk of overturning the chariot: 'ipse sono plausuque simul fremituque calentes/ quadriiugos cernes saepe resistere equos' (53–4 'you will yourself often see the horses, yoked four abreast, rear in confusion at the song, the applause and the din all at once'). The path to glory, whether for a poet or an emperor,[122] is always a risky Phaethontian business: 'ardua per praeceps gloria vadit iter' (4.3.74 'glory scales the heights by the steepest paths').[123] In his exilic misfortune it is for Ovid to fear thunder-fires and shaky chariots. In the long-term stakes of eternal *gloria*, such risks are more evenly allocated, and may even be reversed.

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[118] *Insero* echoes the Greek ἐγκρίνειν, 'to include in the canon' (Nisbet-Hubbard on 1.35). *Adsero* had already appeared in the *Metamorphoses* with a metapoetic suggestion when Apollo warned Cupid: 'tu face nescioquos esto contentus amores/ inritare tua nec laudes adsere nostras' (1.461–62 'you be content with your torch to kindle love, whatever it may be, and lay no claim to my honours').

[119] Oliensis 2004 is very good about this dynamic; on *Ibis* see Schiesaro 2011.

[120] See 57–60: 'haec ego summotus, qua possum, mente videbo:/ erepti nobis ius habet illa loci;/ illa per inmensas spatiatur libera terras,/ in caelum celeri pervenit illa fuga;/ illa meos oculos mediam deducit in urbem' ('all this I, an exile, will see in my mind's eye — the only way I can; for my mind at least has a right to that place which has been torn from me. It travels free through measureless lands, it reaches the heaven in its swift flight, it leads my eyes to the heart of the city').

[121] Hardie 2002: 311.

[122] As Hardie 2002: 311 points out, *Tr.* 4.2.47–8 'hos super in curru, Caesar, victore veheris/ purpureus populi rite per ora tui' evoke Ennius' claim to immortality *epigr.* 10 Warmington: 'volito vivus per ora virum' ('alive I fly from lips to lips of men').

[123] In the Phaethon episode *arduus* qualifies both the *prima via* which he must negotiate as he drives Sol's chariot (2.63) and Iuppiter's movement towards the *arx* from which he rules over the world and from which he will strike down the youth (306–8 'summam petit arduus arcem,/ … /unde movet tonitrus vibrataque fulmina iactat'). On *praeceps* in the discourse of the sublime see Hardie 2009: 215–16.

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