

**Daniel SOLOMON**

**The Sound of Silence: pleasure, pain, and the weather in Lucretius**

When Snyder resurrected Friedländer's all but forgotten study of Lucretius' sound effects, she introduced a new dimension to the increasing interest in Lucretius' didactic method. Ever since W.S. Anderson's pioneering article in 1960, more scholars have been inclined to interpret the *De Rerum Natura* in terms of deliberate contrasts of imagery, of values, and of emotions. Lucretius tends to present key terms in contexts that are alternately attractive and repulsive, nudging the disciple to resolve the contrast into a higher form of Epicurean pleasure (examples include articles by Duban, Minyard, Thury, Jope, and Nussbaum). I propose that the poem's auditory stimulations are likewise arranged to reflect a philosophical progression; the *amplificationes* of the weather are especially designed to startle non-Epicureans, before restoring them to a more stable composure.

Recent monographs in Epicurean psychology have drawn attention to the irrational aspects of philosophical instruction. The fragments of Epicurus' work *On Nature*, Book 25, appear to represent the soul's "improvement" by means of "pain-dissolving movements of atoms" (cf. *DRN*, 2. 963-66). Every external stimulus to some extent rearranges the atoms of the soul, producing either pain or pleasure. In ethical terms, the pain is worth the temporary sacrifice if the resulting atomic composition is more stable; hence the value of shock treatment.

Early in Book 1, a wild celebration of Spring (1.250-61) is juxtaposed with hurricanes and floods (1.271-94). Whereas a "first listener" of Lucretius will respond to the sound effects with pleasure or pain, the philosopher is so immune that he might as well be perched on a cliff, beyond their reach (2.1-14). As a result, storms are ever afterwards dramatized through the eyes of the uninitiate, such as the wretch susceptible to Acheron (4.168-73), the first civilized humans (5.1183-95), or the ambitious general with his elephants (5.1226-35). Only after such emotional convulsions is the disciple prepared to listen *aequo animo* to the scientific explanations of natural phenomena in Book 6. As a result, the *sapiens* preserves katastematic pleasure against the elements, just like the gods at 3.18-24: they are never disturbed by wind, rain, or snow, as they enjoy their world in complete, fulfilled silence.

Sound effects are meant to transform the soul. Those who enjoy poetry for its own sake are no better off than the *stolidi* devotees of Heraclitus, who simply love to have their ears tickled (1.638-44). Not only do the atoms of the sounds conjure vigorous imagery, they can "mix up" the listener if they are recited with particular force. A second recitation of the poem would not require as aggressive a delivery as the first, for the neophyte can be trusted to reflect upon the content without being seduced by the form.