Parallel Patterns: A Preliminary Comparison of Lucretius and Liu Xie 劉勰

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This article presents a preliminary comparative study of the 'cosmopoetics' of Lucretius and Liu Xie 劉勰, examining how each articulates a relationship between cosmological theory and poetic form. Through a comparative reading of *De rerum natura* ("On the Nature of Things") and *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍 ("Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons"), it explores the ways in which poetic form is situated within broader frameworks of natural philosophy— Epicurean atomism on the one hand, and cosmological patterning grounded in the *Yijing* 易經 ("Classic of Changes") on the other. Rather than tracing direct influence or thematic correspondence, the study adopts a micro-comparative approach that focuses on analogical structures, figurative practices, and textual organization. It suggests that in both works, linguistic and poetic form is closely aligned with accounts of cosmic process, complicating conventional distinctions between mimesis and participation. On this basis, the article considers how each author positions the poet, or sage-/philosopher-poet, as a mediator between nature and knowledge. The study contributes to ongoing work in Sino-Roman comparative poetics and proposes cosmopoetic form as a useful lens for comparative literary analysis beyond essentialist East-West models.
Keywords: Lucretius, Liu Xie, *Wenxin diaolong*, *De rerum natura*, cosmopoetics, comparative poetics, cosmology and poetry, Sino-Roman studies

namque aliud ex alio clarescet
"for one thing is illuminated by another," *DRN* 1.1115

刻鏤聲律，萌芽比興.
"carving and engraving tones and modes;
sprouting and budding in comparisons and associations," *WXDL* 26.5

Introduction

How can we explain the world? How does the way we talk and write about the world express and influence the way we think about it? How does our understanding of the shapes and processes of reality influence our understanding of language and its forms and functions? Joining attempts throughout history to address these questions at the core of the human scientific and literary enterprises, this paper will introduce an investigation of the relationships between cosmology and poetry in Greco-Roman and

Ancient Chinese thought by comparing the "cosmopoetics" of two writers, the Roman poet-philosopher Lucretius and the Chinese literary theorist Liu Xie 劉勰.[1]

Early thinkers about the nature of the universe expressed themselves in poetic form: on the one hand, the hexagram verses of the *Yijing* 易經 (Classic of Changes) on the permutations of *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽 that make up the universe; on the other, the Presocratic hexametrical poems on primordial forces and elements that constitute and shape the cosmos. Early thinkers about poetry likewise argued that poetry is (or ought to be), ultimately, natural. Aristotle argued that imitation (*mimesis*) and its enjoyment are natural to humans, as are rhythm and harmony. The Confucian tradition argued that poetry expresses the true nature of people. Along with such "natural" connections, poetry was also seen as patterned:[2] *jing* 經 "literary Classic" (but also literally "the warp of a loom")[3] and *textum* "woven thing" (but also "literature")[4] both appeal to the metaphor of weaving, which points to the textured, heterogenous, and arranged character of poetry. This pattern is seen also in the world: Chinese offers the metaphorical *jingwei* 經緯 "warp and weft," to refer to the arrangement of the universe—it is worth noting that the Greek word for the universe, κόσμος, from which we get our English "cosmos," means primarily "order, arrangement"[5]—, and Latin's *textum* is used, in Epicurean philosophy, to refer to the structure of atoms.[6] Alongside notions of cosmic resonance and patterning, in both Greco-Roman and Chinese poetics, we find a concern with didacticism, and an affective kind in particular: poetry, being able to express and move emotions, has the potential to educate (or to lead astray) and to reveal truths about humanity. Interestingly enough, in comparative studies of Sino-Hellenic/Roman poetics, Greco-Roman didactic poetry is rarely adduced as a

[1] My approach falls under what Wei Zhang, "Sino-Hellenic Studies: A Survey," *Museum Sinicum* 西方古典學輯刊 5 (2023): 228–95 calls "cross-cultural comparison" as opposed to "transcultural" or "cultural-critical."

[2] I do want to avoid the Poundian notion of ideogrammatic method, "juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated particulars capable of suggesting ideas and concepts through their relation" Laszlo Géfin, *Ideogram: History of a Poetic Method* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1982), 27; that is, the notion that Chinese characters, imagined hieroglyphs of a prelapsarian age, reveal the mysteries of nature. I am concerned with the figuredness and patternedness of poetry. See below on "naturalist" theories of language.

[3] The left-side radical, 糸, means "threads."

[4] *Oxford Latin Dictionary* s.v. *texto* 3b, s.v. *textum* 1b.

[5] *Liddel-Scott-Jones Ancient Greek Lexicon* s.v. κόσμος A.

[6] *Oxford Latin Dictionary* s.v. *textum* 3; Lucretius *De Rerum Natura* 4.743, 5.94, 6.997, 6.1054.

worthwhile comparand.[7] This is where I take my cue in my choice of texts. I am interested in the assumptions and claims about what poetry is and does (poetics) and what the universe is and does (cosmology) and how they relate to each other that underlie Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* "On the Nature of Things" (henceforth *DRN*), written in the 1st c. BCE, and Liu Xie's *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍 "The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons" (henceforth *WXDL*), written at the turn of the 6th c. CE.

At this point, I should give a methodological caveat. It has been said that while "comparative literature as a discipline is defined by the search for its object of study," Sino-Hellenic/Roman study, with its relatively defined object, is defined by "a search for methods, models, and justifications."[8] Accordingly, the first section of this paper will lay out *modi operandi* before offering a comparative reading of our two writers in the second section. In one part, this is because of the disciplinary silo from which and (largely) to which I am aiming this paper. I speak primarily from the perspective of Greco-Roman Classics rather than as a Sinologist. With comparative work, unevenness is often an unspoken given which, nonetheless, ought to be stated explicitly.[9] In another part, the necessity of a longer methodological section is because Sino-Roman comparative study is an emerging field, and within it Sino-Roman comparative poetics even less traversed. My hope with this paper is to trigger a conversation, to be improved upon and corrected by other scholars, especially those working from the disciplinary perspective of Sinographic poetics. I also hope to be useful to scholars of Greek and Roman literatures, like myself, beginning to foray into comparative studies. The aims of this article are to introduce the questions that might guide comparison of Lucretius and Liu Xie, argue for their importance, and suggest avenues of investigation.

I.

Lucretius' *DRN* uses poetic form to communicate a theory of the nature of the universe and the place of humans therein. Liu Xie's *WXDL* uses an overarching paradigm of the nature of the universe and the place of humans therein to anchor and structure his fifty chapters of literary theory. Both writers, then, combine cosmology

[7] Katharina Volk, *The Poetics of Latin Didactic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 34–43. defines the Greek/Roman didactic genre as displaying the characteristics: 1) explicit didactic intent, 2) teacher-student constellation, 3) poetic self-consciousness, 4) poetic simultaneity.

[8] Alexander Beecroft, "Comparisons of Greece and China," *Oxford Handbooks Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), responding to Haun Saussy, *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 12.

[9] In this, I follow B. Holmes, "Cosmopoesis in the Field of 'The Classical'," in *Deep Classics: Rethinking Classical Reception,* ed. S. Butler (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 269–90, who makes the convincing case of being explicit about comparatist methods embedded within the field of Classical Studies itself.

and poetry, the former revealing a poetics of science and the latter a science of poetics.[10]

This paper will begin to address and compare how Lucretius and Liu Xie answer the questions "how does the nature of the cosmos relate to the nature of language and poetry?," "how does poetry relate to, in its form as much as its content, a conception of cosmology and philosophy of language?," and "how does the sage-poet or philosopher-poet relate to the cosmos and to language and literature?" I should clarify: I am not so much concerned with analysis of the specific argumentation Lucretius and Liu Xie make regarding the nature of language, the nature of the cosmos, or even the nature of poetry, and whether or not their argumentation is supportable by their relative philosophical commitments. Rather, I am interested in why and how the two writers relate all three of these spheres to each other. The structure of their arguments, the intellectual traditions they are responding to are certainly different. However, they converge in their choice to merge poetics with cosmology. In adducing as comparanda Liu Xie, on the one hand, with the Daoist and Buddhist influences alongside the Confucian model in *WXDL*, and, on the other hand, Lucretius with his commitment to Epicurean philosophy, which falls outside of the usual Platonic-Aristotelian paradigm comparative study usually appeals to, I am also responding to certain impulses within the field of Sino-Hellenic/Roman comparative poetics.

A.

The last decade and a half has seen a large wave of scholarship on comparative literature, with foundation work laid at the end of the previous century.[11] Earlier Sino-

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[10] Although this paper answers the call from Zhang Shaokang, Wang Chunhong, Chen Yunfeng, and Tao Litian, *Wenxin diaolong yanjiu shi* 文心雕龙研究史 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2001), 591–2, for comparative study of *WXDL* (likening Liu Xie's treatise to Aristotle's *Poetics*), I am certainly not the first to compare Liu Xie to western literature. Cai Zongqi, *Configurations of Comparative Poetics: Three Perspectives on Western and Chinese Literary Criticism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001) has compared Liu Xie's explanations of imagination and creative process (*WXDL* 26 and 46) to Wordsworth's, connecting both to relevant cosmological paradigms; Zhang Longxi, "What Is *wen* and Why Is It Made So Terribly Strange?" in *Special Issue: Comparative Poetics: Non-Western Traditions of Literary Theory*, *College Literature* 23.1 (1996): 15–35, has connected Liu Xie's notions of literary patterning to the Renaissance and early modern notion of the "book of nature."

[11] Foundational works in English on comparative Chinese-Western poetics include James Liu, *The Art of Chinese Poetry* (Chicago: Taylor and Francis, 1962); *Chinese Theories of Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975); Stephen Owen, *Traditional Chinese Poetry and Poetics: Omen of the World* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985); Earl Miner, *Comparative Poetics: An Intercultural Essay on Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Zhang Longxi, *The Tao and the Logos: Literary Hermeneutics, East and West* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992); Yip Wailim, *Diffusions of Distances: Dialogues between Chinese and Western poetics* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993). Recent monographs are Cai, *Configurations* and Zhang Longxi, *From Comparison to World Literature* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2015) in English; Cao Shunqing, *Zhongxi bijiao shixue shi* 中西比較詩學史 (Chengdu, China: Bashu shushe, 2008) in Chinese; Cecile Sun, *The Poetics of Repetition in English and Chinese Lyric Poetry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), most recently, using comparison for cultural critique.

Hellenic/Roman comparative work focused on what Wiebke Denecke calls "ellipsis," that is the absence of some or other essential feature in one of the compared cultures (e.g. "why doesn't China have epic").[12] More recently, scholarship of the early twenty-first century has departed from earlier essentialist arguments an assumptions that one of the comparanda (usually the West) is paradigmatic. The impetus to pursue similarities, commensurability, and convergences was seminally argued by Zhang Longxi at a time when a great value was placed on articulating differences and when skepticism about cross-cultural understanding was the prevailing paradigm.[13] Zhang's perception of Otherness as an obstacle rather than focus of interpretation has been taken up by later scholars, shifting the emphasis of comparative analysis to debates within cultures and between cultural discourses. [14] By privileging the common denominator, or *tertium comparationis*, we can challenge the assumptions that similarities are obvious and therefore less significant. [15] In fact, to quote the comparatist Haun Saussy, "the distinction…between a common denominator that is supposed to be given, and one that is constructed by the exercise itself…is anything but hard and fast."[16]

This being said, the differences between *WXDL* and *DRN* should not be underestimated. It goes without saying that the different historical contexts of Lucretius and Liu Xie, the philosophical, literary, and political discourses, are significant factors in the convergences and divergences of their theories and writings (not to mention the elephantine issue of difference of language and literary form). Indeed, historical and cultural relativism are very useful lenses for literary criticism.

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[12] Wiebke Denecke, *Classical World Literatures: Sino-Japanese and Greco-Roman Comparisons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 13; Beecroft, "Comparisons".

[13] Zhang, "What is *wen*," 21; cf. Haun Saussy, "Review of *The Tao and the Logos: Literary Hermeneutics, East and West*, by Zhang Longxi," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 114.2 (1994): 328–9, praising Zhang's approach. See the final chapter of Zhang, *The Tao and the Logos*, 191, which pleads "or the recognition of the shared, the common, and the same in the literary and critical traditions of the East and the West beyond their cultural and historical differences".

[14] See also Zhang, "What is *wen*"; *Allegoresis: Reading Canonical Literature East and West* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005); and *From Comparison*. Cf. approaches of Beecroft, "Comparisons" and *Authorship and Cultural Identity in Early Greece and China* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Stephen Shankman and Stephen Durrant, *The Siren and the Sage: Knowledge and Wisdom in Ancient Greece and China* (London/New York: Cassell, 2000) and *Early China/Ancient Greece: Thinking Through Comparisons* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2002); Lisa Raphals, *Knowing Words: Wisdom and Cunning in the Classical Traditions of China and Greece* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992). In comparative science and philosophy, see the approaches of Geoffrey Lloyd, *Adversaries and Authorities: Investigations into Ancient Greek and Chinese Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), and Michael Puett, "Humans and Gods: The Theme of Self-Divinization in Early China and Early Greece." in *Early China/Ancient Greece: Thinking through Comparisons*, ed. S. Shankman and S. Durrant (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2002), 55–74, and *To Become a God: Cosmology, Sacrifice, and Self-Divinization in Early China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

[15] Cf. Holmes, "Cosmopoesis," 271–7.

[16] Haun Saussy, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry: A Critical Edition* (New York, Fordham University Press, 2011), 61.

My aim in this paper, however, is to reflect more broadly on the dynamic between poetry and cosmology and the way they mutually inform each other. Lucretius and Liu share a concern with the nature and value of poetry as it relates to the nature of the universe and our understanding thereof. Though they articulate their concerns differently, I would argue nonetheless that they should be put into conversation with each other when the question is something as transcultural and transhistorical as the value of poetry. In what follows, close readings of these two works will open new ways for us to tackle larger questions of poetics and cosmology and for "reading empathetically across cultures."[17]

The study of similarities, as noted, counters tendencies to make monoliths of Greek/Roman Literature and Chinese Literature. One of these tendencies is the oft-discussed dichotomy between Western "mimetic" poetry, that is *poesis* or fabrication whereby real experience (on natural, social, and transcendental levels) is fashioned into a representation or imitation, and Chinese "expressive" (or "affective" or "immediate") poetry, that is a direct relationship between reality and word. This dichotomy has been challenged scholars of comparative literature. [18] The generalization of Western poetry as "mimetic" stems from Platonic criticism of poetry's removal from truth and Aristotle's *Poetics.*' The generalization of Chinese literature as "affective-expressive" finds its basis in the famous statement from the *Shujing* 書經 (Classic of Documents), which offers a foundational articulation of poetics: *shi yan zhi* 詩言志 "poetry en-words intent."[19] Gu Mingdong, nuancing narrow interpretations of this statement, rightly points out that the *Xicizhuan* 繫辭傳 (one of the canonical commentaries making up the "Ten Wings" of the *Yijing*) extensively discusses images and imitation:[20] "The heaven gave birth to divine things. Sages modeled after them. The heaven and earth manifested changes. Sages imitated them. The heaven displayed celestial images which revealed auspicious and inauspicious conditions. Sages drew images of them. The dragon diagram appeared in the Yellow River and the tortoise diagram appeared in the Luo River. Sages took them as prior models."[21] Gu concludes, rightly, that this statement articulates the foundation

[17] Beth Harper, "East-West Cross-Cultural Encounters of the Lyric. Horace (BCE 65–8) and TaoYuanming (CE 365–427)," *Journal of World Literature* 9 (2024): 187–206, at 187.

[18] Gu Mingdong, "Mimetic Theory in Chinese Literary Thought," *New Literary History* 36.3 (2005): 403–24; Beecroft, *Authorship* and "Comparisons"; Harper, "Encounters of the Lyric". For the stance contrasting mimesis/metaphor and affective/feeling, see the foundational studies of Liu, *Chinese Theories,* Miner, *Comparative Poetics*, and Owen, *Traditional Chinese Poetry* and *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); more recently Cecile Sun, *The Poetics of Repetition,* (culminating her earlier work).

[19] The *Great Preface* 大序 to the *Shijing* 詩經 (Classic of Poetry) expounds on this: "what is internal will naturally find some externally correlative for or action, and…poetry can spontaneously reflect, affect and effect political and cosmic order" (Pauline Yu and Theodore Huters, "The Imaginative Universe of Chinese Literature," in *Chinese Aesthetics and Literature: A Reader*, ed. C. Dale [Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2004], 4).

[20] Gu, "Mimetic Theory," 405.

[21] Cited at Gu, "Mimetic Theory," 405.

of mimetic theory: the imitation of natural phenomena.[22] I will return to the question of language's natural origin below. In a recent appraisal of Sino-Roman comparative lyric, Beth Harper conversely identifies non-mimetic characteristics in western literature, urging scholars to leave behind the opposition between Chinese poetry as "more transparent or bearing a more direct relation to its reference" and Western poetry as "concerned with the constructedness of a poetic persona." She notes that the dichotomy is in no small part due to Greek theorization of literature largely bypassing lyric and other non-mimetic genres for the more representational genres of epic and tragedy. [23] In this, she follows Alexander Beecroft's admonition against taking individual works, often the Mao Preface and Aristotle's *Poetics*, as metonyms for the entirety of a given literary tradition.[24]

Over-generalizations and essentialism can also be countered by detailed readings of individual texts to complement and nuance broader, sweeping studies. Rather than sketch "big pictures," we can ask questions of specific writers. In proposing this kind of study, I follow the lead of Martin Ekström, who argued for "micro-level readings that explore not only the contradictions and discontinuities inherent in the two traditions but also the overlaps between them."[25] In doing such granular readings of "micro-details" in texts, I seek to answer not only "what are they trying to say?" but also "why are they trying to say it?" (their motivations) and "how are they trying to say it?" (the style and form of enquiry).[26] Rather than treating authors as case studies towards the construction of grand narratives, I suggest aiming for more thorough studies of individual authors.

As noted above, essentialism can also be tackled if we do not take one or two texts as representative of a tradition *in toto*. Harper's recent comparison of Chinese and Roman lyric is a welcome move away from this, rightly arguing that lyric, hardly an inconsequential genre in the Greco-Roman tradition, ought not be overlooked in comparative efforts. [27] In her approach, she answers a call from Beecroft who, observing the lack of comparative analysis of Greek and Chinese lyric, said "the fact

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[22] See n. 104 on quotations of the *Xicizhuan* in *WXDL*.

[23] Harper, "Encounters of the Lyric," 189–90.

[24] Beecroft, "Comparisons."

[25] Martin Ekström, "The Value of Misinterpretation and the Need for Re-interpretation," *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 76 (2006): 5–21, at 6, generally criticising macro-level studies of similarities; *pace* Saussy, "Review," 328, "the specific, the thematic, and the implicit always interfere with efficient comparison."

[26] Compare Lloyd's *, Adversaries and Authorities*, approach to comparative study of ancient scientific inquiry, which emphasizes understanding what hat ancient investigators thought they were doing, the criteria they worked with, the presumed values of cultural discourses. The last of these necessarily takes us into the values and priorities of the societies in which thinkers and writers operated. Along similar contextualizing lines, Michael Puett, "Humans and Gods" (challenging the distinction between eastern "consonant" and western "divided" cosmologies) and *To Become a God* (on the rise of theomorphic potential in sages), argued persuasively for usefulness of answering what the motivations were for writers and what they were answering or reacting against. On the motivations of Lucretius and Liu Xie, see below.

[27] Harper, "Encounters of the Lyric," 187–206.

that there are such equivalents, of course, minimizes the salience of the comparison if the goal is to understand gaps in the Chinese tradition."[28] I agree with Beecroft's observation that dichotomization occurs when we look only at one *kind* of evidence. Comparative poetics largely has dealt with what philosophers say poetry is and does, and in this narrow purview has been primarily concerned with the Mao Preface and the Confucian tradition and Plato and Aristotle's theories of literature.[29] I propose, therefore, looking at what poetry itself has to say about its nature and value, that is "immanent poetics" or comparative metapoetics.[30]

In an effort to move away from taking one or two texts as a metonymy of Greek and Roman poetics, I am also proposing a comparison between a *Roman* poet and a Chinese writer. Though it is a smaller field than comparative philosophy and science, there is already a substantial body of scholarship on Sino-Hellenic comparative poetics.[31] The same cannot be said of Sino-Roman poetics. Sino-Roman studies are largely focused on comparative studies of empire, since the contemporaneous Han and Roman empires present themselves as rather obvious comparanda.[32] Sino-Roman poetics, however, is a small and only recently emerging field in the last few years.[33] The wider aims of this paper are to expand the study of comparative science and comparative poetics to Sino-Roman studies and to put the study of comparative science in conversation with comparative poetics in order to better understand not only how and what we know, but how we communicate knowledge.

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[28] Beecroft, "Comparisons"; cf. n. 12 on "ellipsis"-oriented comparative study.

[29] Cf. Beecroft. "Comparisons": "our understanding of that field is crucially limited if we take, say, Aristotle's Poetics and the Mao preface to the Canon of Songs as metonyms for their entire traditions." This argument underlies Beecroft, *Authorship*, which looks at stories of authorship to understand poetics.

[30] Cf. Zhang, "Sino-Hellenic Studies," 256, cautioning against "following later philologists or philosophers to impose explicit poetics." Compare, again, the approach of Geoffrey Lloyd and Nathan Sivin, *The Way and the Word: Science and Medicine in Early China and Greece* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), on science but applicable to poetics: "The first step is to analyse what the ancient investigators themselves say they were trying to do—their conception of their subject matter, their aims and goals" (p. 6); cf. n. 26.

[31] Surveyed in Zhang, "Sino-Hellenic Studies," 256–61; see also Beecroft, "Comparisons".

[32] E.g. Walter Scheidel, *Rome and China: Comparative Perspectives on Ancient World Empire* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) and *State Power in Ancient China and Rome* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Fritz-Heiner Mutschler and Achim Mittag, *Conceiving the Empire: China and Rome Compared* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); survey in Fritz-Heiner Mutschler "China and Rome Compared—a Report," *Museum Sinicum* 西方古典學輯 刊 5 (2023): 296–357, at 297–327.

[33] Harper, "Encounters of the Lyric"; Mutschler, "China and Rome," 338–42; Jinyu Liu and Thomas Sienkiewicz, *Ovid in China. Reception, Translation, and Comparison* (Berlin/Boston: Brill, 2022). Strangely enough, Horace's *Ars Poetica* receives only passing mention in Sino-Hellenic/Roman comparative poetics, as in the present paper.

B.

Having returned to the connection between science and poetry, I come now to my central argument in comparing Lucretius and Liu Xie. In the second half of the paper, I will aim to show that for both Lucretius and Liu Xie, poetry's definition and defense comes for natural philosophy, from cosmology. To borrow Stephen Owen's words: "In its tradition of literary thought, a civilization tries to interpret the relation between its literature and its other concerns: to explain the role literature plays in that civilization and to describe literature and literary works in terms that have resonance in other areas of intellectual and social life."[34] Though not explicitly stated in either work, both authors are offering defenses of poetic *form*, its characteristics that separate it from plain prose, and claiming for it a certain value in response to another domain of meaning, namely cosmology. At this point, I return to the question of motivation, touched on earlier. Liu Xie provides an oblique answer to the question "why did he write this?" in the final chapter 50 "Xuzhi" 序志 "What I Intended" of *WXDL*, though, as I will demonstrate, the answer can be found in chapter 1 "Yuandao" 原道 (The *Dao* as Source). Lucretius, too, provides an answer in the "Second Proem" of *DRN* book 1 (lines 921–50), but this answer, too, permeates the rest of the poem. In other words, the works as wholes, their form and style, can tell us something about its motivation and meaning. This argument contains, as well, an implicated sub-argument: that there is value in using poetry's engagement with other discourses (in this case, cosmology) to understand and compare metapoetics.

The assumption that poetic form is distinct from prose in its function deserves further qualification. At the beginning of this paper, I laid out my object of comparison as the "cosmopoetics" of Lucretius and Liu Xie. The term derives ultimately from Pythagorean and Platonic traditions, though was used by Kepler for the "association of aesthetics, cosmology, and poetics."[35] In Greco-Roman Classics "cosmopoetics" is understood, rather literally, as "world building," but in early modern studies is used to refer to how poetry specifically (as opposed to prose) articulates and shapes understanding of the world and, vice versa, how understanding and knowledge of the universe dictates and necessitates poetic form. I propose taking this notion back to the texts of antiquity. Formal strategies, in cosmopoetics, are not simply external but active interventions in argumentation.[36] In studying cosmopoetics, therefore, I am concerned with the formal presentation of knowledge. Form, far from being mere ornament, carries knowledge from one domain to another. Accordingly, it matters not only "what" is said, but also "how" it is said.

[34] Owen, *Readings*, 3.
[35] Frédérique Aït-Touati, *Fictions of the Cosmos: Science and Literature in the Seventeenth Century*, trans. S. Emanuel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 1.
[36] On the appearance/image vs. reality in Greek and Chinese thought, see Lloyd and Sivin, *The Way and the Word*, 203, noting that the tension between the two arose primarily in the 3rd c. with the introduction of Indian metaphysics.

Concerning the connection between form and content and between text and reality, notions of language origin are relevant.[37] This paper therefore also revisits the "naturalist" conception of Chinese language and literature, analyzed and criticized by Zhang.[38] Proponents of such theories of Chinese language and literature draw largely on Liu Xie's discussion of *wen* 文 "literature" (but also "writing" and "pattern" broadly) in *WXDL* 1 "Yuandao" as the manifestation of the universal *dao* 道,[39] which sages, paradigmatically Confucius, were able to perceive and produce in their writings (i.e. the Classics). Accordingly, Owen, for example, explains *wen*-literature as the ultimate realization through which the natural order of things becomes visible/known and as such not human *imitation* of nature but rather part of nature and its processes.[40] A distinction, therefore, is drawn between natural "participation" by Chinese literature and "imitation" by Western literature.[41] According to this view, imitative poetry moves from art to nature, while natural poetry moves from nature (or the order thereof which is already art) to art; thus Chinese poetry exists without conscious human interference, "not a human creation but an integral part of nature or a natural process of manifestation."[42] As Zhang argues, however, to deny Chinese poetry concern with crafting fiction and assign it only a concern with authentic representation of reality (whether external or internal to the poet), though it frees it from Platonic critique of removal from truth also frees it from claims of art and creation, which subject occupies significant chapters of *WXDL*.[43]

Building on Zhang's critique of the false dichotomy between mimetic/ fictional/ creative language and non-mimetic/literal/uncreative language, as well as the mapping of these strictly onto "Western" and "Eastern" paradigms, the present study of Liu Xie and Lucretius also locates "naturalist" theories of language in ancient Western writings and these theories' interactions with the elevated role of the poet. Lucretius, following the tenets of Epicurean philosophy, is a naturalist when it comes to language, which

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[37] On Sino-Hellenic comparative studies of the relation of language to thought, see Zhang, "Sino-Hellenic Studies," 245–7.

[38] Zhang, "What is *wen*" (cf. *Allegoresis,* 20–45) attributes notions of Chinese linguistic naturalness to Pound and Fenollosa's misunderstandings of Chinese characters as being pure ideograms; cf. Haun Saussy, *The Problem of a Chinese Aesthetic* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 36, tracing dichotomies between nature and culture, concrete and abstract to the quarrels characterizing the Rites Controversy at the fountainhead of European Sinology.

[39] See below on Liu Xie's multi-valent use of *wen* in *WXDL*.

[40] Owen, *Traditional Chinese Poetry*, 20; similar arguments by François Jullien, *La valeur allusive: Des catégories originales de l'interprétation poétique dans la tradition chinoise (Contribution à une réflexion sur l'altérité inter culturelle)* (Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1985), 52; Liu, *Chinese Theories*.

[41] Within traditions, the dichotomy between "natural" and "fashioned" falls apart. Consider, for example, the many reflections in Greco-Roman literature that reflects on the art-ness of nature, e.g. Theocritus' *Idyll* 7's grove and the grove of Diana in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* book 3.

[42] Zhang, "What is *wen*," 23.

[43] Zhang, "What is *wen*," 17.

he expounds upon in *DRN* book 5.[44] The Epicurean theory of language contained a naturalist element, according to which early language development was determined by nature, followed by a conventionalist element, according to which language developed under the influence of free, rational human intervention.[45] Epicurus' naturalist linguistic theory combines functional (driven by practical necessity, like an infant pointing and making sounds)[46] and referential (driven by ontology, such that there is a real connection between the shape of a word and the reality of its referent, "a causal relationship between sensory input from a thing in the world and the utterance of a sound pattern particular to that thing or…to that thing's type"[47]) naturalisms.[48] The referential naturalism persists in the stage of language development when human rationality enters the picture. For words to have "the stamp of natural legitimacy,"[49] Epicurus maintains the centrality of "the first concept corresponding to each word" (*Letter to Herodotus* 37–8), namely "not only the first concept to come to mind on the utterance of a name…but also the first concept ever to have been subordinated to that name."[50] Thus, Epicurean linguistic norms held that words should be interpreted in accordance with their original, natural-referential uses.[51] As we will see later, scholars connect this naturalist theory of language to Lucretius' likening of atoms and letters to each other.

To clarify: I am not concerned with the theories per se of language's (and therefore writing and literature's) naturalness, whether found in Chinese or Greek philosophy,[52] but rather the notion of natural language origin as expressed by Liu Xie and Lucretius for their poetic aims. Are Lucretius and Liu Xie literally claiming that words (and therefore poetry) are in the same sphere of operation as atoms/*dao*?[53] On one level it does not matter: the impression or conceit of the images, myths, and metaphors is that they are. We can take "are" figuratively or literally or normatively. The point remains: the legitimacy of poetry, of figured and patterned language, derives for these two authors from its connection to cosmic processes.

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[44] Ancient *testimonia* attest to Epicurus being a linguistic naturalist, and *DRN* 5.1028–90 confirms Lucretius' acceptance of this element of Epicurean theory; see Barnaby Taylor, *Lucretius and the Language of Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 16.

[45] Taylor, *Lucretius,* 16.

[46] In this, feeling (πὰθη) and perception (φαντάσματα) are necessary, so that there is "a compulsive 'stimulus response' model of language use" (Taylor, *Lucretius*, 20); see also Tobias Reinhardt "Epicurus and Lucretius on the origins of language," *Classical Quarterly* 58.1 (2008): 127–140, at 131. We might compare this to the Chinese notion "feeling" responding to "scene."

[47] Taylor, *Lucretius*, 21.

[48] Taylor, *Lucretius*, 17.

[49] Catherine Atherton, "Epicurean Philosophy of Language," in *Cambridge Companion to Epicureanism*, ed. J. Warren (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 197–215, at 213.

[50] Taylor, *Lucretius,* 37–8 with additional bibliography in n. 83.

[51] Taylor, *Lucretius,* 38, cf. 41–2 for the relevance of this norm to *DRN*.

[52] Already skillfully addressed in Zhang, "What is *wen*".

[53] Never mind whether or not "we" or readers from antiquity to the present ascribe to such an ontological claim or whether the claim is supportable by Epicurean or Daoist/Buddhist/Confucian theory.

The motivation for stating this criterion legitimacy should be connected to the philosophical discourses ongoing during the composition of our two texts.[54] While Confucian philosophy certainly influenced the *WXDL*, the increased interest in metaphysics and a merging of Confucianism *Yijing* with Laozi 老子 and Zhuangzi 莊子 in the Six Dynasties period are relevant intellectual contexts.[55] It is in this heterogenous philosophical context that we should understand not only the cosmology but also the literary theory of *WXDL*.[56] In the two centuries (Wei-Jin period, 220–420) before Liu Xie wrote *WXDL*, there was a widespread debate about whether words could fully convey meaning. The debate on language stemmed from Daoist thinking, particularly Zhuangzi's linguistic skepticism.[57] Zhuangzian notions of the *dao* transcending language and comprehension became highly relevant to poets as the ones to undertake "to put in beautiful language all that is profound, subtle, probably, or improbably within the wide range of human experience and imagination."[58] Alongside

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[54] Owen, *Readings*, 4: "Although a tradition of literary thought has its own history independent of the history of the literature on which it reflects, in many periods it is bound in an intense, if often oblique productive relation to literary works; this is, what poets actually do can never be perfectly extricated from what poets believe they ought to be doing."

[55] E.g. Wang Bi, see n. 57; see also Wang Yunxi, *Wenxin diaolong tansuo* 文心雕龙探索 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2005), 58–60.

[56] Yang Mingzhao, *Xue bu yi zhai za zhu* 學不已齋雜著 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1985), 473–83, argues that *WXDL* is essentially Confucian; Vincent Mair, "Buddhism in *The Literary Mind and Ornate Rhetoric*," in *A Chinese Literary Mind: Culture, Creativity, and Rhetoric in Wenxin Diaolong*, ed. Z. Cai (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 63–82, argues that the title itself indicates the compatibility of Buddhism and Confucianism. A majority of scholars now understand *WXDL* as blending Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist thought, which should be contextualised in the Qi and Liang era convergence of tradition; see Zhang Shaokang, "A Survey of Studies on *Wenxin diaolong* in China and Other Parts of East Asia," in *A Chinese Literary Mind: Culture, Creativity, and Rhetoric in Wenxin,* ed. Z. Cai (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 230–1. Zhang, "What is *wen*," 22: "In his discussion of *tao*, he also mingles two different views, one from the *Laozi* that depicts *tao* as nonactive and running a natural course regardless of human concerns, and the other from commentaries on the *Book of Changes* that put a greater emphasis on the will of heaven and the agency of the sage, through whose work of mediation the will of heaven is fulfilled. In fusing the Taoism of Laozi and Zhuangzi with the Confucian ideas in the commentaries on the *Book of Changes*, Liu Xie is very much a product of his time."

[57] The 3rd c. philosopher Wang Bi commented on Daoist texts and Liu Xie borrowed extensively from these, and from his commentary on the *Yijing*, adapting in particular his terms *yi* 意 "conception" or "thought," *xiang* 象 "image," and *yan* 言 "word." See Richard Lynn, "Wang Bi and Liu Xie's *Wenxin diaolong*: Terms and Concepts, Influence and Affiliations," in *A Chinese Literary Mind: Culture, Creativity, and Rhetoric in Wenxin diaolong*, ed. Z. Cai (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 83–100, on Wang Bi emphasizing the gap between these terms and the inability of language to communicate the dao and Liu Xie stressing the ability (and process) to close the gaps and embody ontological reality in language; cf. also Ronald Egan, "Poet, Mind, and World: A Reconsideration of the 'Shensi' Chapter of *Wenxin diaolong*," in *A Chinese Literary Mind: Culture, Creativity, and Rhetoric in Wenxin diaolong*, ed. Z. Cai (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 101–26, at 112.

[58] Zhang, *The Tao and the Logos,* 53; cf. Liu, *Chinese Theories,* 31 on Zhuangzi's influence on Chinese artistic sensibility.

this skepticism, a debate in literary criticism raged between a didactic conception of literature urging a return to ancient simplicity and a defense of new, ornate literature flourishing in the Qi and Liang eras and criticized as "carvings of worms."[59] It is in light of this context, then, that we might understand why Liu Xie, in the rich style of *WXDL*, is so concerned with connecting *wen* to nature.

Meanwhile, in the 1st c. BCE, Latin philosophers were increasingly producing writing and at the same time increasingly concerned with the (in)ability of Latin to express abstract Greek philosophical ideas.[60] Lucretius explicitly expresses this concern: "It does not escape me that it is difficult to illuminate obscure Greek discoveries in Latin poetry, especially since one often has to use new words on account of the *egestas linguae* "poverty of language" and the novelty of the subject" (*DRN* 1.136–9). The concern with the *egestas linguae*, though directed specifically at Latin in this verse, is akin, I would suggest, to the Zhuangzian skepticism of language *tout court*. Lucretius' *egestas linguae* should also be read with Epicurus' concerns with the post-natural stage of human language development, when error and departure from "first concepts" might be introduced.[61] As Barnaby Taylor proposes, "one way of explaining the extraordinary linguistic exuberance of Lucretius' poem is as a response to this alleged problem of poverty."[62] Besides this skepticism of language, Epicurus' famous ban of poetry in education creates problems for Lucretius as the author of an Epicurean didactic poem.[63] This opposition to poetry as a serious and apt medium for enlightenment, suspicion of its deceitful potential, and the Epicurean stress on clarity and naturalness of language, then, provide an important backdrop to understanding Lucretius' view of poetry, including his own, and its ability to communicate truths about the world.[64]

The "why" of cosmopoetics, the motivation to respond to ongoing concerns about the functionality of language and poetry by tying poetry to cosmology, is bound up, moreover, in the "how," that is in the style of enquiry and the formal and figured elements of the works. By comparing a poem on natural philosophy with a natural-philosophy-shaped treatise on poetry, I hope to draw out the implicit poetics within

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[59] Valérie Lavoix, "Un dragon pour emblème: Variations sur le titre du *Wenxin diaolong*," *Etudes chinoises* 19.1–2 (2000): 197–247, at 230–1; Zhang, "What is *wen*," 28. Cf. n. 112.

[60] Taylor, *Lucretius,* 3–8; compare Cicero *On the Nature of Gods* 1.8, *On Limits* 3.5.

[61] Taylor, *Lucretius*, 27.

[62] Taylor, *Lucretius*, 2.

[63] Overview on Epicurean views of poetry, including Epicurus' famous "ban," in Michael McOsker, *The Good Poem according to Philodemus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021),

 38–63; Philodemus' *on Poems*, roughly contemporaneous to Lucretius, is highly relevant to discussions of Epicureanism and poetry, but falls outside the scope of the present paper. See in general McOsker, *The Good Poem*, esp. pp. 150–87 on form and content and pp. 249–54 on mimesis, and "Poetics," in *Oxford Handbook of Epicurus and Epicureanism*, ed. P. Mitsis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 347–76.

[64] Monica Gale, *Myth and Poetry in Lucretius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 141–5.

the *DRN*.[65] In the second section of this paper, I will offer close, comparative readings of a few passages of *DRN* and *WXDL*. I will argue that both Lucretius and Liu Xie forge the conceptual connection between poetry and cosmic processes by assimilating poetic elements and patterns to natural elements and patterns.

<div align="center">II.</div>

An overview of both works is needed. Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* (On the Nature of Things, 1st c. BCE) articulates a "theory of everything" in 7,5000 Latin hexameter verses.[66] This didactic poem, dedicated to the contemporary politician Memmius, sets out an expansive explanation of the universe: from atoms, heavenly and earthly phenomena, and the human mind and soul, to the nature of thought and the origins of language and literature. Book 1 lays forth metaphysical and physical tenets of Epicureanism, including the existence of atoms and the assimilation of them to letters. The movements and shapes of atoms are expounded upon in book 2, as well as the proposition that the world itself comes into being and dies. Book 3 deals with the nature of the soul and of death, which is not to be feared. Book 4 discusses sense perceptions and the phenomenon of love. Book 5 gives an account of the history of the world and of human civilization, including the development of language and literature (discussed earlier). Book 6 closes the work by detailing terrestrial, celestial, and meteorological phenomena, ending with a famous description of the plague at Athens and its extraordinary death toll. Much has been said about the structure of *DRN*: the six books form three pairs on atoms, humans, and the world.[67] This macroscopic arrangement is not unlike the earth–man–heaven paradigm put forth in *WXDL* 1, as we will see later. The stated target of *DRN* are the fear of death and the shackles of religion, from which true knowledge of "The Nature of Things" will free people. The opening and closing pairs tackle the latter fear, and the middle books the former, though his targets move throughout the work as well.

Liu Xie's *Wenxin diaolong* (The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons, 5th c. CE) offers an all-encompassing theoretical framework for literary criticism, including discussions of the origin of language and nature of thought and treatment of the various

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[65] On investigating styles of enquiry to determined "what the enquiries in question have in common…and where and why they differ," see Geoffrey Lloyd, *Ancient Worlds, Modern Reflections: Philosophical Perspectives on Greek and Chinese Science and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), viii.

[66] For an overview, see Peta Fowler and Don Fowler, "Lucretius (Titus Lucretius Carus)" (*Oxford Classical Dictionary,* online, 2016) and the chapters collected in Monica Gale, *Lucretius. Oxford Readings in Classical Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[67] *DRN* can also be divided into two halves, with books 1–3 discussing basic premises and books 4–6 discussing the ramifications of these premises. Further resonances between individual chapters can also be traced.

forms of literature.[68] The first five chapters (1-5) trace the development of literature from its ultimate origin in the cosmic *dao* through the Confucian canons to the *Chuci*.[69] Chapters 6–25 then treat all major genres. The second half, chapters 26–49, tackles individual critical issues. Chapter 50 "Xuzhi" explains the motivation and organization of the whole work, modelled after the symbolic numerology of the *Yijing*. The title of the work has generated a significant amount of scholarly discussion. Its components are: *wen* 文 "literature, culture, pattern," *xin* 心 "heart-mind, spirit, essence,"[70] *diao* 雕 "carve, chisel," and *long* 龍 "dragon." Generally, the title is understood in two parts: "literary mind-heart" and "carved/carving dragons."[71] The relationship between the two halves is an elusive riddle. Is it "the literary mind carves dragons" or "dragons carved upon/within the literary mind" or "literary mind or/opposed to carving dragons" or "literary mind is carving dragons?"[72] Some translations suggest that the "carved dragons" is the form which expounds and presents the "literary mind," thus pointing to the rich style of *WXDL* itself.[73] Following Vincent Shih,[74] I have gone simply with "and," as the English conjunction approximates the ambiguity of relation present in the Chinese syntax.

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[68] For an English-language survey of studies on *WXDL* in China and East Asia, see Zhang, "A Survey". In Chinese, see Yang Mingzhao, *Wenxin diaolong xue zonglan* 文心雕龍學縱覽 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 1995) and Zhang et al., *Wenxin diaolong yanjiu shi*. There are few treatments of *WXDL* in English other than Cai Zongqi, *A Chinese Literary Mind* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002) and Owen's, *Readings,* commentary, but see also Cai, *Configurations*, Zhang, "What is *wen*" and *Allegoresis*. For Chinese-language commentaries, see Zhan Ying, *Wenxin diaolong yizheng* 文心雕龍義證 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1989) and Yang Mingzhao et al., *Zengding Wenxin diaolong jiaozhu* 增訂文心雕龍校注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000). Yang, *Xue bu yi zhai za zhu* 學不已齋雜著, and Wang, *Wenxin diaolong tansuo* 文心雕龙探索, are useful sets of essays on basic points of interpretation.

[69] On *WXDL's* theory of literary history, see Zhang Wenxun, *Liu Xie de wenxue zhilun* 劉勰的文學史論 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1984). On the organisation of the first five chapters, see Chen Liangyun, "Lun Liu Xie de henxin wenxue guannian—"wenzhishunniu" benzhi yiyi xin tan" 论刘勰的核心文学观念 — "文之枢纽"本质意义新探, *Jianghai xuekan* 江海学刊 3 (1988): 150–7. Wai-Yee Li, "Between 'Literary Mind' and 'Carving Dragons': Order and Excess in *Wenxin Diaolong*," in *A Chinese Literary Mind: Culture, Creativity, and Rhetoric in Wenxin diaolong*, ed. Z. Cai (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 193–226, observes that there are two versions of literary history in *WXDL*: the first asserts simple/clear beginnings devolving to elaborate *wen* (e.g. ch. 29, 47); the second sees cycles and the elevation of recent developments in literature (e.g. ch. 45).

[70] Perhaps also "foundation" in a Buddhist sense, see Lavoix, "Un dragon," 207–8.

[71] Though "carving of dragon" may have had pejorative connotations earlier, certainly by Liu Xie's time it was a positive indicator of talent and literary praise (Lavoix, "Un dragon," 217–24).

[72] Lavoix, "Un dragon," discusses the title and its various interpretations in great detail and ultimately settles on *L'Esprit de literature en dragon ciselé* "The Spirit of Literature in a Chiselled Dragon." She points out that the visual disparity of the characters plays into the juxtaposition of the words: simple and indivisible next to highly constructed and ornamental (p. 241).

[73] Liu, *Chinese Theories,* 146–7 n. 24.

[74] Vincent Shih, *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 1983).

A.

For *DRN*, I begin with a set of passages which liken atoms to letters. All five are worth citing in full, along with the relevant contextual arguments being made.[75]

1. "So you should more easily believe that many bodies (*corpora* "substances") are common to many things, as we see elements (*elementa*) in words, than that any thing can exist without first beginnings (*principiis*)" (*DRN* 1.196–8). (Context: discussion about the principle that nothing can be created from nothing, a foundational principle for the existence of atoms.)

2. "Undoubtedly, since many first beginnings (*principia*) common to many things (*rerum* "substance") in many ways are mixed in things (*rebus*), therefore different things by different things (*variis variae res rebus*) are nourished. And **it often matters greatly with what and in what position the same first beginnings (*primordia*) are composed and what motions they give and receive between themselves;** <u>for the same things constitute (*constituent*) the heavens, sea, earth, rivers, sun, crops, trees, and animals</u>, but these things move mixed with different things in different ways. **And also here and there in our very verses (*nostris in versibus ipsis*) you see many elements (*elementa*) common to many words, although nonetheless one must admit the verses and words** differ from each other both in meaning (*re* "substance" or "thing") and in pronunciation (*sonitu* "sound"). So capable are elements (*elementa*) with only the order changed; and those which are the first beginnings of things (*rerum…primordia*) can employ many things whence each different thing (*variae res*) can be created" (*DRN* 1.814–29). (Context: refutation of Presocratics and assertion that atoms, not the four elements, are primary.)

3. "And now, therefore, do you see, as I said a little earlier, that **it often matters greatly with what and in what position the same first beginnings (*primordia*) are composed and what motions they give and receive between themselves**, and the same things, changed a little between themselves, create fire (*ignes*) and wood (*lignum*)? By the same principle, words themselves also are made up of elements (*elementis*) changed a little between them, when we mark wood (*ligna*) and fire (*ignes*) with distinct names (*voce* "voice")." (*DRN* 1.907–14). (Context: refutation of the Presocratics and assertion that it is not the case that all four elements are in all things but that the same atoms are in all things.)

4. "**And also here and there in our very verses (*nostris in versibus ipsis*) you see many elements (*elementa*) common to many words, although nonetheless one must admit the verses and words** consist of different elements (*elementis*); it is not that very few common words run through or that no two words consist of the same, but because all things are generally not the same as all other things. Thus likewise in other things (*rebus*) many first beginnings (*primordia*) are common to many

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[75] I have bolded lines that are repeated verbatim and underlined those which are nearly word-for-word repetitions.

things (*rerum*), but nevertheless can constitute between themselves a different whole; so the human race and crops and happy trees are rightly maintained to consist of different things" (*DRN* 2.688–99). (Context: different atoms affect the senses differently.)

5. "And also it matters that in our very verses (*nostris in versibus ipsis*) with what and in what position each thing is placed. For the same things signify (*significant*) the heavens, sea, earth, rivers, sun, crops, trees, and animals; if they are not entirely the same but for the most part largely are. But the position distinguishes the thing (*res*). Thus, likewise in things themselves (*ipsis in rebus*), when the combination, motion, order, position, and shapes are already changed, the thing (*res*) also must be changed" (*DRN* 2.1013–22). (Context: life and death are stages in a cycle as atoms disperse and reunite.)

In these passages, then, is the implication that just as letters in different combinations create different words with different shapes and different meanings (both form and content), so atoms in different combinations create different things in the world.[76] Two things are crucial: that the order and position (of letters or atoms) is of great importance, and that the output has great potential for variety, whether words (*verba*) or lines (*versus*) or substances (*res*). In a seminal article, Paul Friedländer made the connection between Lucretius' commitment to Epicurean theories of natural language origin and his use of atoms-as-letters analogies, arguing that "the atomistic doctrine of language provid[ed] Lucretius with a rational bond by which to connect his most personal pattern of sound with the philosophy he professed,"[77] Central to this "atomological" reading is referential naturalism in the Epicurean model of language origin, the notion that there is a link (whether ontological or analogical) between words and referents on the atomic level.[78] Especially in the third passage, we see quite

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[76] Cf. Empedocles on the mixing of different colors by painters (DK fr. 23 B); see Lisa Piazzi, *Lucrezio e i Presocratici: Un commento a* De rerum natura *1, 635–920* (Pisa: Scuola Normale Superiore, 2005), 27.

[77] Paul Friedländer, "Patterns of sound and atomistic theory in Lucretius," *American Journal of Philology* 62 (1941):16–34, at 30.

[78] Friedländer's thesis is picked up by Jane Snyder, *Puns and Poetry in Lucretius' De Rerum Natura* (Amsterdam: Grüner, 1980), 29–31; John Ferguson, "Epicurean Language Theory and Lucretian Practice," *Liverpool Classical Monthly* 12 (1987): 100–4; Ivano Diongi, *Lucrezio: le parole e le cose*. Bologna: Patron, 1988), 31–6, and "Lucretius, or the Grammar of the Cosmos," in *Lucrezio, la natura e la scienza*, eds. M. Beretta and F. Citti (Florence: L.S. Olschki, 2008), 27–34, at 28–30; Robert Maltby "Etymologising and the Structure of Argument in Lucretius Book 1," *Papers of the Langford Latin Seminar* 12 (2005): 95–112, at 96; most recently Abigail Buglass "Atomistic Imagery: Repetition and Reflection of the World in Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*," in *Teaching through Images,* eds. J. Strauss Clay and A. Vergados (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 105–36; rejected by Alexander Dalzell "Language and Atomic Theory in Lucretius," *Hermathena* 143 (1987): 19–28 (but see Buglass, "Atomistic Imagery," 106 n. 4 clarifying Friendländer's argument in light of Dalzell's, "Language and Atomic Theory," 21 criticism); Brooke Holmes, "Daedala Lingua: Crafted Speech in De Rerum Natura," *American Journal of Philology* 126 (2005): 527–85, at n. 112; Daniel Marković, *The Rhetoric of Explanation in Lucretius' De Rerum Natura* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 121–2; see also Volk, *Latin Didactic*, 101–2, who understands

literally in the shared letters IGN in different combinations in *ignis* "fire" and *lignum* "wood", reflecting visually (and audibly) in the verses of *DRN*—in fact, Lucretius thrice urges us to see "in our very verses"—the reality of the atoms in different permutations composing the substances of fire and wood. Lucretius, then, forges through this set of similes a connection between the forms and functions of language and the forms and functions of the invisible atoms which make up the world. Though in each of the passages above, the letters are the vehicle of the simile and the atoms the tenor, the simile contains the potential for two-way slippage. The implication of atoms being like letters is that letters (and whole verses, and by implication the entire poem) can imitate atoms.[79]

This simile-slippage is aided also by linguistic slippage. As has been long observed by commentators, one of Lucretius' techniques of argumentation-by-association is to change the reference of a term across occurrences.[80] For example, he uses *elementa* interchangeably to mean, atoms, letters, and the foundational principles of argumentation in *DRN.* The various frames of reference thus work to assimilate nature, language *in toto*, and Lucretius' poetry in particular. Thus, language provides an image of the world, but it is also itself intertwined with the world within the poem so that the poem *and* its contents are framed as being part of the world at large.[81] It is not inconsequential that images are not an immaterial phenomenon in Epicurean and Lucretian theories of perception: *simulacra* "images" are the sheddings of atoms off of an object that strike our vision, thus making us "see" the object (*DRN* 4.42–74). Alessandro Schiesaro, seeing *DRN* itself as a *simulacrum* of the world, aptly commented on its use of analogies to describe atoms: "In a system where all aspects of reality can and must be resolved into their atomic constituents, there can be no such thing as a purely illustrative analogy of atomic phenomena which is not at the same time causally dependent on the same invisible phenomena it illustrates, no analogical relationship between visible phenomena and invisible atoms which does not involve an ontological connection as well."[82] Elsewhere, Lucretius uses the image of dust

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Friedländer's argument as purely analogical: "Atoms and letters mirror each other, but they are not part of the same process…The Lucretian speaker is not interested in the possible ontological connection between his poem and the world it describes; what he conveys, or, rather, hunts at is the structural similarity between the two." On wordplay more generally in Lucretius, see Stephen Hinds, "Language at the Breaking Point: Lucretius 1.452," *Classical Quarterly* 37 (1987): 450–3, and Taylor, *Lucretius,* chapters 4 and 6, connecting Lucretius' linguistic play to Epicurean linguistic theories.

[79] Cf. Volk, *Latin Didactic,* 101; Buglass, "Atomistic Imagery," 116, "The reason the analogy is so neat may be because language for Lucretius is part of the world he describes: the principle therefore cam extend to his writing if he believes his own arguments about the makeup of the world."

[80] Volk, *Latin Didactic,* 117 observes that "it is thoroughly un-Epicurean", since Epicurus, as we saw above, was concerned that words be used according to their primary meaning (*Letter to Herodotus* 37–8).

[81] Buglass, "Atomistic Imagery," 120.

[82] Alessandro Schiesaro, "The Palingenesis of the De rerum natura," *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 40 (1994): 81–107, at 87.

motes in a sun beam to illustrate the motion of atoms in the void (*DRN* 2.114–24).[83] Schiesaro suggests that just as the dust particles represent atoms and at the same time are made of atoms, so letters (and words, and the poem) both are an image of reality and at the same time composed of the same reality.

Beyond Lucretius' urging us to see in the letters and words "in our very verses" the same atomic phenomena of the world at large, the process he claims for atoms are also perceivable across the macro-structures of *DRN*. Abigail Buglass has extended Friendländer's argument to the larger structures of *DRN*.[84] Lucretius re-arranges the same elements of the poem, both the small compounds of letters and larger compounds of images, lines, and arguments, to reflect on different aspects of reality at the atomic and phenomenal levels. She argues that the five repetitions of the *elementa* analogy cited above differ from each other in their immediate argumentative context, thus reflecting that rearrangement of the same *elementa*, that is the same analogy and even the same words and whole lines, can produce different products (i.e. arguments).[85] Despite their variety, however, when we zoom out, all of the argumentative contexts point towards the fundamental existence of atoms underlying all phenomena and processes in the world. Buglass' observation can furthermore be applied to the repetition of images and metaphors across the *DRN*. For example, the repeated use of the image of viewing a battle from a great distance (*DRN* 2.40–53, 2.118–20, 2.323-332). [86] The broader argumentative structure of the *DRN* therefore images *and* participates in the atomistic world the poet describes. The mimetic nature of *DRN,* on Schiesaro's reading of the poem as *simulacra*, is simultaneously participatory.[87] The figurative, formal, and stylistic elements, to borrow Lucretius' flexible use of the word, of *DRN* reflect the underlying atomic phenomena of the world and of the poem. To return very briefly to the first section of this paper: the mimetic–participatory dichotomy finds both poles collapsed upon each other in *DRN*'s conception of image, atom, and poetry.

The hidden figure, other than the atom, in this paradigm is the poet himself. Katharina Volk, though taking an analogical rather than ontological view of the poem-atom relationship, does propose, "The one real connection between the letters of the

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[83] Here, too, Lucretius slips between literary and natural reference points, moving from the dust particles smoothly into the language of argumentation: *exemplare dare* "to give an example"; both the dust particles image atoms *and* Lucretius' poem crafts an image.

[84] Buglass, "Atomistic Imagery," 111.

[85] Buglass, "Atomistic Imagery," 108–112; she also argues (p. 120–32) that by tracing intratextual arguments between the books of *DRN* we can see Lucretius building complex arguments out of accumulated, repeated, and expanded building blocks, which mirrors the atomic constitution of complex substances out of simple compounds (cf. Robert Wardy, "Lucretius on What Atoms Are Not," *Classical Philology* 83 (1988): 112–128, on *DRN*'s strategy to bridge invisible and visible worlds).

[86] One might compare Lucretius' use of this image to Liu Xie's use of the metaphor of arranging battle from a distance in the closing verse of *WXDL* 26 "Shensi".

[87] Volk, *Latin Didactic,* 103 describes this view: "the *De Rerum Natura* is thus both a mirror image or microcosm of the universe that it describes and at the same time part of it, in all its physicality…There is a great fascination to this view, which wholly blurs the boundaries between *carmen* and *res* and regards both the poem and the physical world as part of the same infinite movement of atoms."

poem and the atoms of the world is the Lucretian persona. He is a part of the physical *rerum natura*…this experience of composing the poem is itself part of the physical world that the poem describes."[88] In fact, the poet occupies a privileged position, somewhat on a threshold. The relationship between *carmen* "poem" and *res* "substance," between form and content, in *DRN* is complicated. Earlier views saw Lucretius-philosopher and Lucretius-poet as contradictory, and therefore the *DRN* as schizophrenic. Scholars now seek to understand how Lucretius combines his role as a philosopher and his role as a poet and how the *DRN's* philosophy and its form are unified.[89] Lucretius, both as philosopher and as poet, is at pains to make the student/reader *see*.[90] It is precisely the figurative aspect of poetry—its use of image, simile, metaphor, repetition, wordplay—that makes visible the invisible processes Epicurean atomism proposes. Conversely, it is the drive to teach these metaphysical and physical principles that legitimize and necessitate the form of *DRN*. In fact, at the very close of the "second proem" of *DRN* 1 (repeated at the opening of its second half at *DRN* 4.1–25), which describes the philosopher-poet's creative process as wandering in the un-traversed groves of the Muses and applying honey to a cup of medicine, Lucretius says he hopes the poem is enjoyable "while you look at (*perspicis*) the form (*figura*) in which the entire nature of things (*naturam rerum*) is arranged" (*DRN* 1.949–50).[91] It is hard not to see the *De Rerum Natura* itself as the *figura* in which *naturam rerum* is arranged. Poetic excellence, then, is not only in the service of philosophy but simply an aspect of philosophic and scientific activity: it makes the invisible visible.

B.

A very similar strategy to valorize poetry, I suggest, can be found in *WXDL* 1 "Yuandao." The purpose of this opening chapter is to show that literature in general is generated from the basic workings of the universe. The opening lines are as follows:

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[88] Volk, *Latin Didactic,* 105; cf. Segal, Charles, "Poetic Immortality and the Fear of Death: The Second Proem of the *De Rerum Natura*," *Classical Philology* 92 (1989): 193–212, at 207–9 on the intratextual echoes between the descriptions of atomic generation and the groves the poet traverses in the "second proem" of *DRN* 1. On the "second proem" and its depiction of the poet's flight of the mind, cf. Gian Biagio Conte, "Proems in the Middle," *Yale Classical Studies* 29 (1992): 147–59, and Lydia Lenaghan, "Lucretius 1.921–50." *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 98 (1967): 221-5. See Cyril Bailey, *Titi Lucreti Cari de Rerum Natura Libri Sex* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947), 757–8 on the question of whether the passage is repeated at beginning of Book 4. See below for comparison with *WXDL* 26 "Shensi".

[89] *Pace* Samuel Taylor Coleridge: "Whatever in Lucretius is poetry is not philosophical, whatever is philosophical is not poetry" (Letter to Wordsworth, 30 May 1815).

[90] Alessandro Schiesaro, *Simulacrum et Imago: gli argomenti analogici nel De rerum natura* (Pisa: Giardini, 1990); Gale, *Myth and Poetry,* 141–5; Buglass, "Atomistic Imagery," 135.

[91] Cf. *DRN* 4.24–5 "while you look at the entire nature of things (*naturam rerum*) and perceive its utility." A reader, by this point in the book, will be primed to hear the work's title echoed in this line and consider its usefulness.

> The **wen** 文 "pattern" as a power is very great. It is born together with heaven and earth, and why is it so? With the black [of heaven] and the yellow [of the earth], the myriad colors are compounded. With the squareness [of earth] and the roundness [of heaven], all forms are distinguished. The sun and the moon overlap each other like two jade disks, manifesting to those below the magnificent image of heaven. Rivers and mountains are brilliantly adorned to display the orderly configurations of the earth. These are the **wen** of the *dao* 道. Considering the radiance emitted above, and reflecting on the loveliness that inhered below, the positions of high and low were determined, and the two standards were generated. Only the human being, endowed with the divine spark of *xingling* 性靈 "consciousness," ranks as a third with this pair. And they were called the Triad [Heaven, Earth, and human beings]. The human being is the flower (*xiu* 秀 or "beauty") of the elements: in fact, the *xin* 心 "heart-mind" of Heaven and Earth. When mind came into being, *yan* 言 "language" was established; and with the establishment of *yan*, **wen** became *ming* 明, "bright," "comprehending," "admitting comprehension." This is the natural (*ziran* 自然 or "spontaneous")[92] course of things, the *dao*.[93]

Liu Xie then argues that since everything that comes into being has an external *wen* proper to its essential characteristic, humans, with their essential characteristic of mind, have *yan* "language" as their proper *wen*. Like Lucretius, Liu Xie mixes frames of reference. In these opening words of *WXDL*, he takes both language and natural phenomena as *wen* "patterns" of the *dao*. The pattern of language is assimilated to the (visible) phenomena of heaven, earth, sun, moon, rivers, and mountains. There is a sizeable overlap with Lucretius list of "heavens, sea, earth, rivers, sun, crops, trees, animals" (*DRN* 1.814–29, 2.1013–22), whose *elementa*, in their various arrangements—we might also say "patterns"—parallel those of different words with their variously-arranged (or patterned) letters.

From here, Liu Xie moves quite easily from the natural origins of *wen* to *wen* as the mysteriously appearing hexagrams of the *Yijing* and, by apparently seamless step, to Confucius' commentary on the *Yijing:*

> The origins of **renwen** 人文 "human pattern" began in the Primordial. The *xiang* 象 "Images" of the *Yijng* were first to bring to light *shenming* 神明 "spiritual presences" that lie concealed. Fu Xi marked out the initial stages [by producing the trigrams of the *Yijing*], and Confucius added the Wings [exegetical and cosmological commentaries accompanying the *Yijing*] to bring the work to a conclusion. Only for the two positions of *qian* 乾 and *kun* 坤 did Confucius make the *wenyan* 文言. For is not **wen** in the words "the mind of Heaven and Earth?!" And then it came to pass that the "Yellow River Diagram" became imprinted with the eight trigrams; and the "Luo River Writing" contained the Nine Divisions. (*WXDL* 1.3)[94]

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[92] An important Daoist term.
[93] Adapted from Owen, *Readings,* 187–9.
[94] Adapted from Owen, *Readings*, 190–1.

Next, *wen* slips into fully developed characters and quickly into the texts of the canonical Classics. Thus, cosmic pattern, by steps of association, is assimilated to literature.

> When the "tracks of birds" took the place of knotted cords, the **written word (*wenzi* 文字 "patterned writing")** first appeared in its glory. The events that occurred in the reigns of Yandi and Shennong were recorded in the "Three Monuments;" but that age is murky and remote, and its sounds and colors cannot be sought. It was in the **literary writings (*wenzhang* 文章 "patterned composition")** of Yao and Shun that the first splendid flourishing occurred. The song of "The Leader" [a verse in the *Shujing*] initiated "singing intent" [the origin of poetry].[95] The expostulation offered in the *Yiji* [chapter of the *Shujing*] handed down to us the custom (*feng* 風 or "air/ode") of memorials to the throne. (*WXDL* 1.3)[96]

The *wen* of the Classics, that is, of the Sages who founded and expounded upon the canon, expresses, in fact the *wen* also of the heavens and of human civilization. All of these *wen*—natural phenomena, hexagrams, characters, literature, astronomy, culture—are bound up in the literary-*wen* of the Sages, who manifest in turn the *wen* of the cosmic *dao*.

> From Fu Xi 伏羲 the mysterious Sage who founded the canon, up to the time of Confucius, the uncrowned king who transmitted the teaching, all took for their source the *xin* 心 "heart-mind" of the *dao* to set forth their *zhang* 章 "compositions," and they investigated *shenli* 神理 "the principle of spirit" to establish their teaching. They took the *xiang* "Images" from the Yellow River Diagram and the Luo River Writing, and they consulted both milfoil and tortoise carapaces about fate. They observed the **wen of the heavens (*tianwen* 天文 "astronomy" or "astrology")** to know the full range of *hua* 化 "changes"; and they investigated **human *wen* (*renwen* 人文 "literature" or "culture")** to perfect their transforming [i.e. civic-ethical formation of the people]. Only then could they establish the *jingwei* 經緯 "warp and woof" of the cosmos, completing and unifying its great ordinances, and they accomplished a patrimony of great deeds, leaving truths shining in their words. Thus, we know that the *dao* sent down its *wen* through the Sages, and that the Sages made the *dao ming* 明 "manifest" in their *wen* 文 "writings." It extends everywhere with no obstruction and is applied every day and never found wanting. The *Yijing* says, "that which stirs the world into movement is preserved in *ci* 辭 'diction.'" That by which *ci* "diction" can stir all the world into movement is the **wen** of the *dao*.

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[95] Cf. the *Shujing's shi yan zhi* 詩言志 above.

[96] Adapted from Owen, *Readings*, 191.

The strategy in *WXDL* 1 "Yuandao" to establish the literature-*dao* connection and assimilation depends on the polysemy of the word *wen*.[97] Much like Epicurus and his concern with the "primary conception" of any given word, Liu Xie takes the historical origin of a word as its "semantic center."[98] The various frames of reference, purposely confused as they are,[99] are nevertheless moored to a primordial origin and principle in the *dao*. The paradoxically moored confusion grants human-*wen* "the borrowed authority of nature"[100] so that it is not consequential to natural process but the manifestation (*ming*) of the *dao* itself.[101]

This is akin to Lucretius' atomic letters, not only in the conceptual link between nature and literary craft, but in its appeal to epistemological dynamics between form and reality and its employment of simile slippage: "nature is like literature" flips easily into "literature *is* nature." Just as in *DRN*, wherein *naturam rerum* is subsumed into the *figura* of the poem; so here, the paradigm of *WXDL* 1 "Yuandao" also "subsumes everything natural under the regulation and order of human invention, the *constructed* patterns and designs exemplified by the writings of ancient sages and Confucius himself."[102] Again, we revisit to the mimetic/crafted-natural/expressive dichotomy discussed in section 1 of this paper: it begins to crumble when we examine the "how" of a writers claims about the nature of literature.[103]

As Lucretius is dependent on the cosmology of the Epicurean tradition, so Liu Xie is dependent on the cosmology of the *Yijing*.[104] The influence of cosmological commitments on the macro-structure of the work can also be found in *WXDL* as in *DRN*. In *WXDL* 50 "Xuzhi," Liu Xie explains that the entire work, with its fifty chapters, is organized after the numerology of the number 50 in the *Yijing*.[105] The implication, then, is the *WXDL*, like the writings of the sages, manifests (*ming*) the *wen* of the *dao*. Likewise, the stylistic and argumentative elements of *WXDL* might be

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[97] Already in the Wei and Jin periods, *wen* had acquired a specific meaning of literature as the art of writing; cf. Zhang, "What is *wen*," 26 and *A History of Chinese Literature* (London: Routledge, 2023) 90.

[98] Owen, *Readings,* 186.

[99] Jullien, *La valeur allusive*, 35; Wang Yuanhua, *Wenxin diaolong jiangshu* 文心雕龍講疏 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1996), 60; Zhang, "What is *wen*," 23; Wang, *Wenxin diaolong tansuo* 文心雕龙探索, 58.

[100] Zhang, "What is *wen*," 23; cf. Zhang, *A History*, 92.

[101] Owen, *Readings*, 188.

[102] Zhang, "What is *wen*," 24.

[103] Cf. Li, "Order and Excess," 194–5 on sages transcending the opposition between artifice and naturalness.

[104] On *WXDL*'s dependence of the *Yijing* and its commentaries, see Owen, *Readings*, 186; Chen, "*Wenxin diaolong* yuandao yu *Yichuan* zhi guanxi," and "Lun Liu Xie zhi dao yu 'wenzhishunniu' de guanxi" 论刘勰之道与 "文之枢纽" 的关系. *Shenyang shifan xueyuan xuebao* 沈阳师范学院学报 5 (1998): 18–21. Compare *WXDL* 1 with the text of the *Xicizhuan* cited in section I.A.

[105] There are 50 basic divisions of the universe: the Ultimate, Heaven and Earth, the sun, moon, and four seasons, the five Elements (or Phases), the twelve months, and the twenty-four kinds of *qi* (cf. Owen, *Readings*, 620 n. 263). *WXDL* 50, then, corresponds to the Ultimate around which all other changes occur.

connected to its cosmology. Andrew Plaks has argued that Liu Xie traces rhetorical parallelism, which he himself employs,[106] to the natural/spontaneous (*ziran*) doubling at the core of cosmic processes.[107]

Though the role of the sage-poet is not as hidden in *WXDL,* the implications of *WXDL*'s cosmopoetics for Liu Xie himself is not as explicitly stated as Lucretius' "in our very verses." The multiple meanings of *wen* articulated and linked in *WXDL* 1 "Yuandao" provide Liu Xie a basis to judge (and defend) literature on the criterion not of civic ethics, as was the dominant concern of critics before him, but of aesthetics.[108] The shift from ethics to aesthetics as the criterion, allows him still to link poetry to philosophy, but in this case cosmology. Thus, the canonical status of the Confucian Classics is not their morality, but their ability to manifest the patterns of the *dao.* Kang-I Sun Chang has argued that this shift in criterion, manufactured, as discussed above, through the multiple-*wen*, constructs a new principle of canonicity.[109] The sage is able to perceive and manifest the *dao* in his canonical writing, to make visible the invisible like the poet of *DRN.*[110] Perhaps it is somewhat obvious (and even merely conventional), but it is worth drawing our attention to the fact that Liu Xie chooses to summarize every chapter with a verse section. That is, he chooses to give "pattern" to the arguments he lays out in *WXDL*. On this newly articulated criterion for the valorization of literature, *WXDL,* too, might achieve canonical, cosmic status.

The similarity, our *tertium comparationis*, is not immediately obvious: there are limited shared imagery or motifs between the two authors, and Greek atoms are rather unlike the Chinese *dao*. What is shared, however, is an insistence on the same-ness between cosmic processes (the manifestation of the *dao's* patterns or the movements and arrangements of atoms) and literary form (the articulation of the Canonical Classics and *Wenxin diaolong* or the verses of *De rerum natura*). Taking advantage of multiple frames of references for individual words and concepts allows Lucretius and Liu Xie to assimilate language in general to cosmic processes; this assimilation is then mapped onto macro-structure of text, so that the work itself is also assimilated to cosmic processes. Within this overarching paradigm, Lucretius and Liu Xie then claim for the sage/philosopher-poet (and ultimately themselves) a privileged, mediating position between nature and art as the one who can "make visible" the processes and

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[106] See Owen, *Readings*, 175–92 on parallelism in *WXDL.*

[107] Andrew Plaks, "The Bones of Parallel Rhetoric in *Wenxin diaolong*," in *A Chinese Literary Mind: Culture, Creativity, and Rhetoric in Wenxin diaolong*, ed. Z. Cai (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 163–74.

[108] Li, "Order and Excess," 193–226 discusses Liu's conflicting perspectives on *wen* as both order and excess, arguing that Liu Xie's ambivalent perspective as a broad conceptual paradigm of two poles: natural order and rhetorical exuberance, spontaneity and technical mastery, natural origins and human endeavour.

[109] Kang-I Sun Chang, "Liu Xie's Idea of Canonicity," in *A Chinese Literary Mind: Culture, Creativity, and Rhetoric in Wenxin diaolong*, ed. Z. Cai (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 17–32, at 18; cf. Cai, *Configurations,* 57.

[110] *Pace* Zhang, "What is *wen*," 28 "What is perhaps typically Chinese is Liu Xie's emphasis on the central role of the sages…they alone are privileged to know the mysterious *tao* and…manifest [it] in their writings."

patterns of nature. Lucretius' defense of poetry as a suitable educational medium rests on "its ability to concretize abstract ideas, by the use of imagery, personification / and figurative language in general, and thus enable the reader to grasp them with his mind."[111] Liu Xie defends the *diaolong* half of his title by tying literary-*wen*, its forms and patterns, to the patterning of the universal *dao*.[112] Schiesaro's comment on the form of *DRN* can aptly be applied to that of *WXDL* too: "The poem itself will be the most effective or the most damning example of its own theories."[113] Ultimately, for both Lucretius and Liu Xie, poetry and cosmology give shape to each other. They defend and even valorize the figured characteristic of poetry via recourse to natural philosophy. Liu Xie's "grand claim of literature's basis in nature is made to oppose a threatening alternative: there is always the possibility that literature (*wen*) is *not* essential, but rather mere adornment, something added."[114] The same can be said of Lucretius' didactic poem.

I have, in this paper, only examined the opening paradigms of *DRN* and *WXDL* that effect a foundational connection between cosmos and poetry. The creative and imaginative processes of the sage/philosopher-poet in navigating and manifesting the processes of the cosmos are given, in both *WXDL* and *DRN*, elaborate descriptions as flights of the mind to far-flung places. Besides striking similarities of images and motifs, both poetic-philosophic flights are placed at the opening of the second half of the work, the proem of *DRN* book 4 and *WXDL* 26 "Shensi" 神思 "Imagination," and call back to the passages of the opening paradigm. Treatment of these parallel flights, however, will have to await a future study. For now, I will content myself, to borrow from Liu Xie, that "the framework and outline is clear" (*WXDL* 50.4), since, as Lucretius says, "nothing can exist without first beginnings." (*DRN* 1.198)

I hope to have indicated avenues for comparative "micro-readings" of Lucretius and Liu Xie. The above reading has sought to illuminate one aspect of the shared "how" between *DRN* and *WXDL's* cosmopoetic claims. More can certainly be said of the passages discussed, not to mention the rest of both texts, but that will be the purview of future studies and, I hope, other scholars. As mentioned, the poetic flight-of-the-mind in *DRN* 4 (and 1) and *WXDL* 26 "Shensi", placed in both cases at the midpoint of the work, along with these passages' connections to theories of image and reality call out for comparison. The interplay of vision, thought, language, and metaphor in Liu Xie and Lucretius' accounts, too, deserves further attention. Likewise, the process of attaining *xujing* 虛靜 "emptiness/stillness" and *ataraxia* "tranquility/equanimity"

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[111] Gale, *Myth and Poetry,* 144–5.

[112] *Long* was classed, in fact, as an insect/reptile—similar to the older English "worm", likewise used of dragons—and so *diaolong* would evoke the old pejorative term for literary craft *diaochong* 彫蟲 "carving of insects" (coined by the first century critic Yang Xiong and used in the title of Pei Ziye's "Diaochong lun" 彫蟲論 (Essay on Insect Carving); cf. Lavoix, "Un dragon," 226, 230–2; Owen, *Readings*, 183 with n. 11). *Diaolong* would be an antithetical echo to *diaochong* (cf. Owen, *Readings,* 619 n. 243). possibly proclaiming the legitimacy of ornamentation provided it had dragon-like dignity.

[113] Schiesaro, "Palingenesis," 81.

[114] Owen, *Readings,* 187.

on the part of the philosopher/sage and how this relates to poetic creation is a fruitful line of inquiry. Both dramatically heroize their philosophic models: Epicurus and Confucius. More broadly, the density of allusions and modes and motives of reference shared by the two texts are ripe for analysis. The details of how Lucretius and Liu Xie advance their poetic and philosophic claims remain to be explored through further and more extended study.

   This paper also hopes to encourage a reappraisal of how we think about comparative poetics by considering how poetry interacts with other cultural discourses, in this case natural philosophy. At the foundation of my inquiry is a serious consideration of poetry as essential to scientific and philosophical knowledge and communication, and vice versa. Initial impressions and scholarly lacunae mean that the relationship between the two can be easily overlooked. 'Twinkle, twinkle little star; how I wonder what you are' is in one sense simply a nursery rhyme. But, in fact, it combines a detailed scientific observation about celestial phenomena—stars really do "twinkle" in a way that other objects in the night sky do not—with a fundamental cosmological question in a form that sticks in the mind of every English speaker from the moment they can understand language. Beyond mere ornament, poetic forms reveal hidden structures of the universe.

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