

Lucretius' account of wild beasts in war (*DRN* 5.1308-49), when read as an allusive ecphrasis on Roman *venationes* condemning these spectacles as a perversion of human progress, is well integrated in his "anthropology," in book 5, and in the poem as a whole. His disturbing yet brilliant description adds nuance to his arguments about human development, complexity to the structure of book 5 and the larger poem, and a condemnation of civilization's regression in his own times.

Many scholars have expressed puzzlement over the source of these lines, even considering them evidence of Lucretius' insanity (e.g. Bailey 1947, 1529; Townend, *CR* 1985, 273-4). While it is possible that his account may derive from historical wars in which wild beasts were used as weapons (Schrijvers 1970, 298-305), *venationes* probably inspired the poet's images (McKay 1964, 124-25; Kenney 1972, 20-22). Still, even if some scholars find these lines unobjectionable by themselves (Kenney 1972; Segal 1990, 200-206), there is virtual unanimity among Lucretian critics that the lines do not fit well.

Yet this passage near the end of book 5 is connected with the proems to books 2 and 5, as one might expect given the importance of ring composition to the architecture of *De Rerum Natura* (Minadeo 1969). Besides several verbal similarities with the opening of book 2 (e.g. *fervere... videas*, 2.41; *effervesce... cernebant*, 5.1335), the passages are linked by theme and image. In the proem Lucretius describes *per loca campi... belli simulacra* (2.40-41), which could easily describe games held in the Campus Martius, where spectators sat in *templa serena* (2.8) to watch the carnage in the arena. This symmetrical connection supplies philosophical context for the animal ecphrasis – the Epicurean sage can derive pleasure from watching horror in which he is not involved.

Comparison of the end of book 5 with its beginning, however, undermines even this limited benefit of the *venationes*. In the proem to this book Lucretius minimizes the feats of Hercules – beginning with the lion, the boar, and the bull (5.24-26), the very creatures he writes about in the animal ecphrasis – noting that the earth is still full of wild beasts, but that civilized men have learned to avoid them (5.39-42). Lucretius later develops this idea, writing that man domesticated useful animals (5.860-70), and that fierce animals no longer pose the danger they once did (5.985-998). "Civilized" man now brings back "man's animal nature," represented in the proem to book 5 by Hercules and his violence (Saylor 1972, 309-10), by making animals dangerous again for the amusement of spectators in theaters, which are usually positive symbols of civilization for Lucretius (West 1969, 35-63). He describes the trainers of these animals as *saevus magistris* (5.1311), the only time Lucretius uses *saevus* of a person (as DeGrummond (*AR* 1982, 51-52) notes, 3 of the 15 appearances of *saevus* in Lucretius are between 1309-1314). They harm civilization both by trying to train wild animals who should be left alone, and worse, by training them to do violence (Shelton, *Eranos* 1996, 56). The "palinode" of lines 5.1341-49 (Segal 1990, 192-94) makes perfect sense when we read the preceding lines as inspired by *venationes*: After seeing animals and men slaughtered in the arena, Lucretius cannot comprehend that "civilized" men could be so debased and hopeless that they would pervert nature, progress, and civilization itself.