Warren Montag, "The Voice That Thus Can Wound: Swift's Reading of Lucretius"
K. Revue trans-européenne de philosophie et arts, 6 – 1 / 2021, pp. 430-445

Warren Montag

The Voice That Thus Can Wound: Swift's Reading of Lucretius

ABSTRACT: Jonathan Swift's *Tale of a Tub* (1704) was, he claimed, a satire on corruptions in religion and learning written in defense of the Church of England. The atomistic materialism of *De Rerum Natura,* with its rejection of an incorporeal spirit or soul and its critique of providence, was accordingly one of the principal targets of the *Tale*; Swift's contemporaries, however, feared that his parody was an application and extension of, rather than an attack on, Lucretius' philosophy. Swift's text shows their fears were well founded.
Keywords: atomism, materialism, language, satire, parody

1.

To suggest that Jonathan Swift ever produced anything resembling a reading (in the contemporary sense of analysis or interpretation) of any text, let alone a work of philosophy, might well be understood as nothing more than a provocation. To adduce Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* (DRN), a work Swift caricatured for satiric and comic effect, as the object of such a reading can only add to the sense of the futility of any argument along these lines. Finally, the fact that the sole text in which something like "Swift's reading of Lucretius" could plausibly be found is *A Tale of a Tub* (specifically, the augmented fifth edition published in 1710), would appear to render any investigation of Swift's relation to the work of Lucretius hopeless. The *Tale*, from the time of its publication in 1704, has generated unanswered, and perhaps unanswerable, questions concerning both the norms and objectives of its satire. The profusion of voices and narrative personae that appear and disappear in the text have left readers wondering if Swift ever speaks *in propria persona*: a reading that seeks to unmask Swift's personae will succeed only to find beneath the mask other masks, other personae. His practice of criticizing philosophical and theological positions, only then to occupy them through impersonation in order to turn them against other positions, engenders the feeling that he is engaged in a satire without norms, whose aim is to organize the mutually assured destruction of all existing philosophical and theological tendencies. Accordingly, his frequent recourse to parodic versions of materialist explanations of the corruptions in (the Christian) religion were taken by some of his most perceptive readers as proof that the *Tale* was an attack on Christianity and perhaps on the possibility of religion itself, as if Swift's attack on Lucretius took the form of a parody turned against itself to neutralize the prejudices that prevented the apprehension of Lucretius' theses.

2.

Indeed, Swift addressed these problems in the *Apology* published as one of the prefatory pieces added to the fifth edition of 1710: "some of those passages in this discourse which appear most liable to objection are what they call parodies, where the author personates the style and manner of other writers, whom he has a mind to expose" (Swift, 1920, p. 7). The very fact that Swift declares he has engaged in parody in some of the work's most objectionable passages and then proceeds to explain the meaning of "parody", captures the essential and irreducible ambiguity of his satire. The statement cited above is designed to exonerate the author from the charges of blasphemy, heresy and atheism his text has occasioned on the grounds that he has simply impersonated those he wishes to criticize and is speaking as them rather than himself. In doing so, Swift declares the effects of his work that both secured its popularity and brought condemnation, a collective misreading determined by the ignorance of a great many of his readers. The *Apology*, together with the many notes added to the fifth edition, represents Swift's desire to assert the rights of the author, not simply as proprietor of the work, but as its only legitimate interpreter, the individual who alone possesses a knowledge of what the work truly means. It is this desire, frustrated and diverted in so many ways, that results in Swift's collision with Lucretius, the thinker of speech and writing as "all material," "resistant" and irreducible to an incorporeal soul or mind. His attempts to impersonate Lucretius in order to parody the positions outlined in DRN often end up instead extending and developing them.

3.

Part of the *Tale*'s difficulty lies in the fact that its satire on the "numerous and gross corruptions in religion and learning" (Swift, 1920, p, 4) includes a parody of the form or, more precisely, what he regarded as the lack of form, that is, the disorder and incoherence, of the literary, philosophical and theological writing of his time. Thus, the body of the *Tale*, the allegory of three brothers who represent the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church and the forms of Protestantism that Swift described as sectarian and fanatical, is presented in sections 2, 4, 6, 8 and 11. The digressions (in sections 1, 3, 5, 7, 9 and 10, each on a different topic), together with an introduction and conclusion, disrupt the exposition of the allegory, as if the narrative develops by means of deviation and swerve, doubling back only to miss itself. The paratextual material, in the first four editions included a preface, two dedications, and a Note from the bookseller to the reader; in the fifth edition Swift added the *Apology* and over fifty notes, some unsigned, others taken from William Wotton's *Observations on the Tale of a Tub* (1705). Together, they

represent Swift's attempt to pre-empt or retroactively control the effects the work has produced since its initial publication, and the failure of this attempt to accomplish anything other than a reaffirmation of what was read as a materialist assault on religion in which Lucretius (who is cited on the title page) played an essential role.

4.

Lucretius, unlike so many other targets of the *Tale's* satire, is identified in Section 9, the *Digression Concerning Madness*, as one of those mad philosophers Swift calls "introducers of new schemes in philosophy," who "advance new systems" concerned with "things agreed on all hands impossible to be known" (Swift, 1920, p. 167). They do so in order to "reduce the notions of all mankind" to their own system and impose a kind of philosophical tyranny on the world: "Epicurus modestly hoped that one time or other a certain fortuitous concourse of all men's opinions, after perpetual justlings, the sharp and the smooth, the light and the heavy, the round and the square, would, by certain clinamina unite in the notions of atoms and void as these did in the originals of all things" (ib.). Here, Swift condemns the aim he attributes to Epicurus, as represented in *De Rerum Natura*, of reducing the diverse opinions of humankind to a single doctrine based on the rejection of any notion of incorporeal or immaterial existence, the notion that serves as the basis of the religions that give rise to fear, hatred and violence. The achievement of this aim, however, is far from assured: it is nothing more than the hope that from "a certain fortuitous concourse" of opinions and a wearing down of their differences, will follow the swerving and collision that will cause these opinions to unite as atoms do to form the original of a new thing.

5.

But does this passage really constitute a condemnation of Epicurus and Lucretius? Is its speaker one of those voices Swift "personates" in the service of parody? The fact that these questions are difficult, if not impossible, to answer, despite the fact that the passage is found in the *Digression Concerning Madness*, where Swift more than anywhere else in the *Tale* seems willing to condemn, more or less openly, certain philosophers, among them Epicurus/Lucretius, Paracelsus and Descartes, as mad, is significant. The difficulty in determining what words or phrases are meant to, or can, be read as ironic, centers on "opinions": certainly, "opinion" is used pejoratively here, meaning something like "belief" (and the differences in religious beliefs, above all, within Christianity, were to Swift the most frequent cause of conflict), a conviction regarding what was in fact unknowable. But more important is the question of

whether opinion is an immaterial, incorporeal product of the incorporeal substance called thought or mind, or whether it has a material existence. In the English of Swift's time, one could speak of sharp and smooth, light and heavy (or weighty) speech and writing; only the last of the oppositions, square and round, seems reconcilable with a satire on materialism. He appears in this sentence, and elsewhere in the *Tale*, attracted to the materialism of Epicurus and Lucretius, and immediately repelled by his own attraction.

6.

Whatever we have learned thus far, however, concerns Swift and not Lucretius. The nature of Swift's satire, its instability, the constant undecidability of the statements it generates, and the indeterminacy of the impersonation that often appears to be the necessary condition of his thought, all combine to create a formidable obstacle to extracting an account of Lucretius from the movements of disruption, deferral and dispersion that constitute the *Tale*. The difficulty, however, arises from a reading of Swift that pursues the text's hidden reserves, the places where the last mask is removed to discover a face, Swift's face, whose every expression communicates what his mind thinks. I propose instead the following thesis: Swift's reading of Lucretius is not to be found in what he says about Lucretius, but in what he does with him, in the deployment of specific citations from DRN in the service of his satire, but whose effects cannot be contained by it. Swiift cites DRN nine times in the *Tale*: on the frontispiece, and in Sections 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9 (two separate citations), and the Conclusion. There are citations from each of the six books of DRN, except Book II. Three are from Book IV, two are from Book I and the remainder are from Books III, V and VI. Seven of the nine passages from Lucretius in the *Tale* are cited in Latin without an English translation. In two cases (Sections 1 and 3), the Latin appears in the body of the text and is marked with an asterisk by which the reader is directed to an English translation at the bottom of the page, also marked with an asterisk. There is no indication of the translator or the edition from which the translation was taken, although most readers would have recognized the verse form (couplets in iambic pentameter) as that of the first translation of the whole of DRN, that of Thomas Creech, first published in 1682. In fact, the fifth edition of the *Tale* appeared within months of the passage of the *Copyright Act* of 1710, often referred to as "The Statute of (Queen) Anne", that constituted authors (and translators) as the rightful proprietors of their work. Despite the fact that readers of the *Tale* would likely have assumed that the translation was Creech's, the questions raised by Swift's inclusion of a translation of the Latin in only two of nine cases, concern translation and translatability, just as the two lines from Lucretius cited in Section 1 of the *Tale*, especially as rendered by Creech into English, force us to confront the

notions of voice, speech, writing and meaning or sense. We should not, however, too quickly dismiss as coincidence, the passage of the *Copyright Act* and the publication of the augmented fifth edition of the *Tale*: many of the additions to the latter serve in different ways to call into question the very notion of author as creator and proprietor that the Act codifies and establishes as law. The problem of identifying the satiric norm at work, like the problem of determining when Swift is speaking *in propria persona* and when he is engaged in ironic impersonation, may finally prove irrelevant to that unceasing rain of words, letters, marks and spaces that is the *Tale of a Tub*.

7.

Lucretius' makes his first appearance in the text proper in the Introduction, Section 1, which begins with a consideration of the problem of how "to be heard in a crowd" (Swift, 1920, p. 55) that is, the fear Swift expresses in a number of the prefatory paratexts that precede it, that his book, whatever its merits, will be crowded out of the market, buried under the ever-increasing number of books and pamphlets appearing daily, piles of unread and immediately forgotten publications reduced to the material composition of paper and ink into which the work of the intellect has simply disappeared. In the *Epistle Dedicatory to His Highness Prince Posterity*, the narrator argues that the apparent lack of works capable of achieving immortality is in fact an effect of the overabundance of such works, and a quasi permanent overcoming of quality:

Although their numbers be vast and their productions numerous in proportion, yet are they hurried so hastily off the scene that they escape our memory and delude our sight. When I first thought of this address, I had prepared a copious list of titles to present your Highness as an undisputed argument for what I affirm. The originals were posted fresh upon all gates and corners of streets; but returning in a very few hours to take a review, they were all torn down and fresh ones in their places. I inquired after them among readers and booksellers, but I inquired in vain; the memorial of them was lost among men, their place was no more to be found; and I was laughed to scorn for a clown and a pedant, devoid of all taste and refinement, little versed in the course of present affairs, and that knew nothing of what had passed in the best companies of court and town (p. 34).

In the introduction that follows, Swift transposes the problem to the perhaps more familiar terrain of the crowd to capture the sense of individual voices being undistinguished and indistinguishable, as if the jostling of sounds effaces the distinction between voices.

Whoever has an ambition to be heard in a crowd must press, and squeeze, and thrust, and climb with indefatigable pains, till he has exalted himself to a certain degree of altitude above them. Now, in all assemblies, though you wedge them ever so close, we may observe this peculiar property, that over their heads there is room enough; but how to reach it is the difficult point, it being as hard to get quit of number as of hell (p. 55).

To escape the levelling effect of concurrent voices "the philosopher's way in all ages has been by erecting certain edifices in the air" (p. 56). The edifices are reduced to three and described initially as "wooden machines for the use of those orators who desire to talk much without interruption. These are the Pulpit, the Ladder, and the Stage-itinerant". Soon and for the remainder of Section 1 they will be described as "oratorical machines" (ib.).

8.

According to modern commentators on the *Tale* (Harth, 1961, Clark, 1970, Keiser 2015, Smith, 2016), Swift has here adopted the persona of a seventeenth-century materialist (typically Hobbes) in order to show, by taking his argument to absurd extremes, that materialism rests on a category mistake: it cannot differentiate between the literal and the metaphorical and in fact carries out a literalization that reduces figurative uses of a term like "spirit" to its literal meaning as "wind" or "breath" (Keiser, 2015). Thus, for Hobbes and Spinoza Genesis 1:2, "And the spirit of God moved on the face of the water," becomes: "The wind (that like all things comes from God) blew on the surface of the water." The opening of Section 1, the Introduction to the *Tale* asserts in a similar way that the verb "exalt," as in a speaker's desire to exalt himself above the crowd, ceases to indicate the ability to command the crowd's respect and admiration and instead refers to physical space, to occupying a place above the crowd, as in a pulpit raised above the heads of worshippers. Swift's satire would thus consist of exposing the crude reductionism of those who deny any immaterial existence and collapse God into nature, mind into body and persons into things. Although modern readers tend to overlook Swift's references to Lucretius, their arguments suggest that the citations from DRN simply strengthen the attack on materialism. While the term "edifice" suggests a structure that rises to a certain height and thus upon which a speaker could stand and thereby exalt himself, the notion of an oratorical machine suggests something more, and more complicated. In fact, it not only escapes the charge of literalization, it may mark the point where Swift's satire turns against the reader who laughed at and took comfort in the attack on materialism (understood as a reduction of spirit to matter). A machine is defined in Samuel Johnson's Dictionary, citing John

Dryden as an example, as an engine, defined in turn as "any mechanical complication in which various movements and parts concur in one effect" (Johnson, 1766, II, 696.) A mechanism is "a construction of parts depending on each other in any complicated fabric" (ib., Johnson here cites John Arbuthnot, another of Swift's contemporaries). A later Eighteenth-century author, Wolfgang von Kempelen, used a passage from Lucretius in his work, *Der Mechanismus der menschlichen Sprache*, to describe the what he called the machine or mechanism of speech:

> "Hasce igitur penitus voces cum corpore nostro exprimimus rectoque foras emittimus ore, mobilis articulat nervorum daedala lingua, formaturaque labrorum pro parte figurat" (Lucretius, 1924, IV, vv. 545-550). "Thus we force these voices out of our body and send them directly through the mouth, while the agile tongue, maker of words, divides them, and the lips' enunciation gives them form (Kempelen, 1796, p. 4, my translation).

10.

If the production of sounds or voices is intially caused by a forcing of air through the mouth, resulting insounds, the tongue must subsequently separate them into words, in turn worked by the lips and given their proper form. The words thus produced concur in various combinations to form sentences that themselves may combine into larger units. While speech thus understood might itself be described as an oratorical machine, Swift's notion expands the number and variety of parts that concur to produce the effect of commanding the attention of a great number of people beyond the apparatus of the human body. The satire is abruptly redirected against those naïve enough to laugh at the idea of that one's voice is amplified by speaking from a pulpit or that various forms of compulsion compel people to listen to a discourse proclaimed from the pulpit, in a space whose disposition directs the auditors' eyes towards the speaker, while both law and custom demand silent acknowledgment of the authority of the priest. It is precisely the social and political effects of the oratorical machines that have necessitated an interest in the acoustic advantages accorded to one who speaks form the pulpit: the height of the pulpit, the place it occupies in the enclosed space of worship, and the quality and type of the wood used to make the sounding board situated behind the speaker (ridiculed by Swift). The oratorical machine might be thought of as an apparatus,composed of these and perhaps other material elements, that enables certain individuals to speak, while others, by means of law, custom, the distribution of authority and the organization of space, are commanded to listen. It is this apparatus that will determine not only if a particular spoken discourse will be heard or listened to, but even whether it will be received as eloquent or persuasive. Of the three oratorical "engines," the pulpit is in principle the site, rightly placed above the audience, from which legitimate speech emanates. Dissenting Protestants, according to Swift, reject

any ornamentation of the pulpit as encouraging idolatry, while in fact its purpose is to cultivate a reverence for the ecclesiastical authority they oppose.

11.

The political significance of the edifice designated as the second such machine is an inversion of the first: the ladder, that is, the ladder that the condemned man ascends so that his head may be place in the noose. Swift notes, however, that only in Britain is it "usual for everyone to make a speech before they be executed," giving those who are typically without voice a chance to speak publicly (Swift, 1920, p. 58). And only in Britain, perhaps, would it have occurred to anyone to collect these speeches and publish them in hopes of a healthy return on their investment, thereby increasing their public presence. Thus, those who have raised themselves above the rest by virtue of the iniquity of their crimes are made visible as well as audible only at the moment the state, in a display of its inescapable power, takes their life. Given the opportunity to repent publicly and to warn others not to follow them in a life of sin, many of the most notorious criminals do so in a way that enumerates and exalts their misdeeds, while gratifying the curiosity of the crowd and encouraging illicit and immoral conduct. Finally, the third oratorical machine, identified as "the stage-itinerant," is linked to the term, imported into English from Italian, "Mountebank," a derivative of "montambanco" or the imperative phrase "monta-in-banco", referring to one who climbs on a bench in public to promote fraudulent or counterfeit wares (p. 59). In a note furnished by Swift, this activity is also likened to that of a dissenting preacher standing on a chair or table to be heard at a conventicle (an illegal or unauthorized religious gathering).

12.

Thus the narrator's declaration that "it is manifest that for obtaining attention in public there is of necessity required a superior position of place" (p. 60) finally excludes the possibility of something like a simple conveyance of meaning from a speaker to an audience. The effectivity of public speech, whether legitimate or illegitimate, depends on the degree to which the oratorical machine elevates the speaker, amplifies his voice and organizes the space occupied by the audience. Speech and ultimately writing are thus bodies in motion whose speed and force depend on the power of the machine. Swift's own positions on the central role of the Church of England and its satellite, the Church of Ireland, in the broader social order and the importance of maintaining its traditional liturgy and ritual, including the spatial disposition of bodies according to a differentiation of functions, were based on the effects of submission he believed

this particular machine produced. The machines of dissenting Protestantism in the variety of its forms, and the speech necessary to their functioning, produced, in contrast, effects of resistance and an identification of piety with the abolition of the the established church and the destruction of the remnants of idolatry embodied in its music, architecture and ceremonies. Swift's religion came perilously close to a matter of bodies constrained to act according to the prescription of ritual, and of corporeal voices repeating sounds, words, and sentences as the liturgy demanded.

13.

But what of language itself, the speech that, initially at least, appears in the *Tale* as the primary instantiation of language, the voice that literally breathes life into language, that is, into the letter, by means of the actions denoted by the Latin verbs *spiro* and *respiro* and the noun *spiritus?* I have discussed elsewhere (Montag, 1994) the importance the opponents of Hobbes, Gassendi and Spinoza attached to the task of defending the mere possibility of an incorporeal and immaterial substance, that is, spirit (linked to the ideas of breath and life), and soul (*animus*), that principle of life separate from the body and which marks the point of death by its departure, in the face of the attempts to provide explanations of all phenomena, including the actions of thought and speech, based on material and corporeal causes alone.

Swift, unlike so many of his colleagues in the church, did not hesitate to appropriate materialist arguments, even as he satirized them, to show that the inspiration dissenters claimed to have experienced was purely physical. In fact, Swift takes this argument to the extreme: the dissenters' enthusiasm, far from being spiritual in nature, originates in either excretory or sexual functions, the result of an inhalation of putrid air or exposure to an extremely sublimated residue of the bodily fluids preparatory to sexual intercourse. Swift attributes the doctrine he calls "Aeolism" to the dissenters: drawing from Hobbes and Lucretius, he argues that for them the terms "spiritus, animus, afflatus, anima" are all finally names of "the original cause of all things:" wind (a synonym of flatulence) (Swift, 1920, p. 160). As noted by his most perceptive critic, William Wotton, even the notions of *vox Dei* and *vox de cælis*, and therefore the word of God, the logos, cannot finally escape the implications of such an argument.

14.

The materialization of voice and speech that forms the condition of possibility of the satire described above, and that begins in Section 1, draws extensively on Lucretius and Epicurus. Here, Swift moves

from the machine that renders oratory effective, to the character of speech and of voice that allow them to function as parts of this machine:

But although this point be generally granted, yet the cause is little agreed in; and it seems to me that very few philosophers have fallen into a true natural solution of this phenomenon. The deepest account, and the most fairly digested of any I have yet met with is this, that air being a heavy body, and therefore, according to the system of Epicurus, continually descending, must needs be more so when laden and pressed down by words, which are also bodies of much weight and gravity, as is manifest from those deep impressions they make and leave upon us, and therefore must be delivered from a due altitude, or else they will neither carry a good aim nor fall down with a sufficient force (p. 60).

Developing the idea that the force of words is directly proportional to the height from which they are uttered, Swift suggests that, as words are composed of sounds, themselves composed of bodies, and fall through the air, itself "a heavy body… continually descending," they must be "of much weight and gravity," and "delivered from a due altitude" in order to make enduring "impressions" on us. One of the targets of Swift's irony, a position he attributes to Epicurus and Lucretius, is the corpuscular theory of the Seventeenth century whose variants (associated with Descartes, Gassendi, Robert Boyle, Robert Hooke and Newton) are united in acknowledging the importance of Epicurean materialism, irrespective of their hesitations concerning its moral and theological effects. In fact, Swift's irony is directed against the elements in Lucretius that, even when transformed or rejected, were necessary to the concatenation of contingent encounters that led to the emergence of the modern physical sciences. But the work of parody and impersonation compelled Swift to imagine the material existence of speech and writing not just as closed, self-sufficient systems, but as parts of a machine or apparatus. As noted above, "place" is determinant of the efficacy of speech: the "higher" the place from which words are delivered, the greater the likelihood of their being heard. But here, the "weight and gravity" of the words themselves, independently of the trajectory imposed on them by the machine that sets them in motion, and determines through the quantity of force it imparts the depth and durability of the "impressions" they make in the mind of the listener, seem to have been literalized at the expense of their figurative meanings, those that designate mental, intellectual and thus incorporeal qualities and effects. It is at this point that Swift cites Lucretius' explanation of how sound and voice (*sonus et vox*) are heard (Lucretius, 1924, IV, vv. 522-534).

The citation of the original Latin appears in the body of the text: "*Corpoream quoque enim vocem constare fatendum est,/Et sonitum, quoniam possunt impellere sensus.** – Lucr. lib. 4." [vv. 526-527] (Swift, 1920, p. 60).**15**

The asterisk at the beginning of the Latin passage directs the reader to the asterisk at the bottom of the page, which precedes what initially appears to be (and most editions of the *Tale* assume is) an English translation of these lines. Swift cites Creech's translation, in which Lucretius' dactylic hexameter is rendered in the iambic pentameter of the heroic couplet. The demands this form imposes on any verse translation are considerable and Lucretius' intricately organized syntax disappears into the often truncated, but occasionally augmented, text of the translation. A comparison of the Latin and English, together with a careful examination of Lucretius' discussion of the perception of sound and voice, however, reveals that the English verse linked by the asterisk to the Latin passage cited above is in fact a translation of another, different sentence that occurs six lines later. Swift's citation from Creech, "*Tis certain then that *Voice,* that thus can wound/Is all *material; Body* every *Sound*" is in fact a rendering of "*Haud igitur dubiumst quin voces verbaque constent/corporeis e principiis, ut laedere possint"* (Lucretius, 1682., IV, vv. 533-534).

16.

Although there is a certain similarity of meaning between the two passages, in that both assert the corporeality of sound and voice on the grounds that they strike the senses (both verbs, *impello* and *laedo* may be translated as "strike," even if the latter suggests a more powerful blow, likely to cause damage or a wound), it remains highly improbable that Swift somehow mistook the later for the earlier line. One of Swift's objectives in the *Tale* is to unmask what he regards as false erudition, going as far as to direct his satire against the increasingly common practice of providing explanatory prefaces and indexes for philosophical works, a practice he felt enabled both critics and admirers to discuss what they had not read. Given that writers of literary and philosophical works at the beginning of the eighteenth century did not feel it necessary to include translations of a sentence in Latin, especially when it came from well-known authors such as Cicero, Vergil and Lucretius, Swift's gesture raises a number of questions. Providing a translation of a Latin passage might well be seen as another illegitimate aid to those who had no business reading such texts, above all, that of an "irreligious" author such as Lucretius whose arguments, once they became available to a broader audience, might embolden atheists and free thinkers. If this were the case, the effect of Swift's satire would be to divide his readers into two camps: those who could read Latin (and – a further division – those who had read Lucretius) and those who could not. The former would understand, and in all likelihood approve of, the trick played on the latter who, unaware that they have been misled, would understand only the translation to which they had been directed by the asterisk at the bottom of the page.

17.

The economy of Swift's satire, however, is such that he can turn even this "error" to his advantage. Not only does the passage from Creech's translation, cited out of context and in isolation from Lucretius' discussion of the corporeal existence of sound and voice, not correspond to the Latin cited in the body of the text, but it contains an addition or interpolation ("is all material") not found in the corresponding passage in Lucretius. In fact, Swift's citations (from Lucretius and from Creech) direct the reader to Lucretius' account of the senses in DRN IV, in particular, following a lengthy discussion of the sense of sight, the discussion of how "every kind of sound and voice is heard (*auditur sonus et vox omnis*)", the very problem to which Swift's satire has led, beyond the disposition of the speaker and the efficacy of the oratorical machine: the nature of the voice itself, of speech and the word. From the very outset, Lucretius insists, as he has in the case of vision, that both the production and emission of sound (including voice), and the ability to hear or perceive it become intelligible on the condition that we recognize that these are entirely corporeal processes (Koenen, 1999). Sounds and voices are composed of tiny bodies or particles that penetrate into the ears and strike the senses. Lucretius uses the verb "*impello*," meaning to strike or push against, to indicate the nature of the contact between the bodies of which the voice is composed and "the senses". When Swift extracts these lines (leaving them in the original Latin) and places them in his discussion of the necessity of calculating the weight of words and the resistance they will encounter in determining the altitude from which from which they must be launched in order for them to create an impression deep enough to withstand erosion through time, he has already begun to change their meaning in subtle ways that will serve his satire. The later passage cited from Creech's translation offers an additional proof of the corporeal existence of voice and speech by pointing to the pain occasioned by both shouting or yelling with great force and hearing a loud or piercing sound: only bodies could produce such pain. Creech deviates from the Latin in certain ways that simultaneously facilitate Swift's satire on materialism and turn his irony back upon itself, with the result that there emerges from the satire a materialism that has incorporated and extended that of Lucretius. The fact that Creech translates the verb *laedo* as "wound" instead of "strike" and ends the first line of the couplet with the single syllable "wound," stresses it both metrically and visually.

18.

The "voice that thus can wound" describes Swift's satire, which aims to inflict the most grievous wounds on his adversaries, that is, by means of words to bring about a diminution of their political and ecclesiastical power, a power which cannot be understood as merely symbolic or formal. A satire capable of producing such effects, such wounds, must be itself "all material". To Lucretius' insistence on the corporeal nature of the voice against those who asserted its incorporeality and thus its freedom from the movements and forces of bodies in nature, Swift has added the materiality of the oratorical machines, the apparatuses that organize the disposition of speaking bodies in social space. Historically, none has been as effective as the church and every aspect of its physical existence must defended against any attempt to reduce its capacity to command bodies and voices both to perform certain acts and recite certain words, and to refrain from performing other acts and reciting other phrases. We are thus far from an ironic literalization designed to call attention to the "reductive" character of Lucretius' thought. On the contrary, Swift has demonstrated the truth of Lucretius' assertions in the very act of attempting to damage them and reduce the prestige they enjoy: the material causes of corruption manifest themselves in the material forms of institutions and actions that themselves can be opposed only with equally material measures. William Wotton was not wrong to accuse Swift of undermining the very distinction between spirit and flesh, and body and soul essential to Christian doctrine.

20.

We cannot fail to note, however, that the voice that wounds and must by that fact be understood to be "all material," typically takes the form of writing rather than speech. For Swift, in the paradoxicality of his parody of Lucretius whose hyperbolization of the theses advanced in *De Rerum Natura* may represent their further development rather than their refutation, the materiality of voice does not consist solely of small bodies that strike the senses; the materiality of the voice manifests itself in the specific imprint it leaves on the *elementus* that is both acoustic and graphic. As Paul Friedlander noted in an article that, although published eighty years ago, continues to provoke discussion and debate, Lucretius' term *elementa* covers:

at the same time what we call letters and sounds- the elements of language, a limited number producing the abundance of words and verses. Thus they are an image of the atoms producing the world. To be sure, the variety of the atoms is inconceivably greater and so many causes concursus motus ordo positura figurae (Lucretius, 1924,

I, v. 685; II, v. 1021) are required to combine them into the nature of things, while language comes into being merely by the order, *ordine solo* (I, v. 827), of its few letters (Friedlander, 1941, p. 17).

Friedlander's interpretation of *elementa* in DRN is, or perhaps should be, far-reaching in its consequences: he has proposed what we might call the mutual immanence of voice/speech and writing. The former presupposes the existence of the latter and is guided by it, even in the invention of new words, while writing, by virtue of the graphic existence of the *elementa* preserves the impressions of sound. Thus, without hearing a voice pronounce the lines of Lucretius' poem, the reader easily perceives assonance and alliteration, and may well experience the rhythm of its dactylic hexameter. Moreover, Lucretius argues that a slight variation in the order of letters produces different words (e.g., *Ignis* and *Lignum*, fire and firewood):

Namque eadem caelum mare terras flumina solem
constituunt, eadem fruges arbusta animantis,
verum aliis alioque modo commixta moventur.
Quin etiam passim nostris in versibus ipsis
multa elementa vides multis communia verbis,
cum tamen inter se versus ac verba necessest
confiteare et re et sonitu distare sonanti.
Tantum elementa queunt permutato ordine solo;
at rerum quae sunt primordia, plura adhibere
possunt unde queant variae res quaeque creari.

For the same [sc. elements] form sky, sea, lands, rivers, sun; the same create, too, crops, trees, living beings, but only when combined with different elements and moving in different ways. And, moreover, in every part of my verses you see many letters common to many words, although you must grant, nevertheless, that the verses and words differ from one another both in their sense and in the sound of their sounding. So much can the letters do with only a change in order. But those elements that are the first beginnings of things can employ even more means by which all different things may be created" (Lucretius, 1924, I, vv. 820-829).

21.

Thus, the set of *elementa*, understood as a system in opposition to the infinite permutations permitted by the atoms, is, as a finite order, one of the infinite series of finite orders formed by falling atoms as they collide and conjoin. From this are we to infer with Friedlander that the system of *elementa* or letters is an

"image" of the movement of atoms through the void, a representation in miniature, that is, a kind simulacrum? The passage from DRN I, cited above, suggests that language, understood as the unity of speech and writing, is no more an image or representation than sea or sky. To follow Swift's reading of Lucretius is to abandon the language of signs and representation, the idea that words are corporeal expressions of incorporeal thought, or containers of necessarily disembodied meanings transferred by means of language from one mind or soul to another. Swift's satire on materialism is carried out by means of an exploitation of the resources offered by language in its material existence; it object is not to convince or explain, but to wound and to strike down. His parodic insertion of lacunae or hiatus in his text undoubtedly serves to ridicule what he regards as the overly fastidious and pedantic practices of scholars like Lambinus (Denis Lambin) or Richard Bentley who insisted on marking the places in their editions of ancient texts where words and passages are missing, or a philosopher like Spinoza who pointed out the breaking off of a sentence in the narrative of Cain and Abel, the absence of any explanation of Cain's killing of his brother, and thus a hiatus, unavoidable in Hebrew, that nearly every translation has attempted to obscure. For Swift, in one sense, such attention to the letter of the text endangers the transmission of its spirit. By parodying such practices, however, breaking off in mid-sentence to leave a space of five or six lines of text marked by ten asterisks in each of the missing lines and a marginal note, *Hiatus in MS*, or *Hic multa desiderantur,* or his disavowal of the printed version of the *Tale* on the grounds that the manuscript had long been out of his possession, Swift's parody, dependent on the trajectories of those bodies called letters and words, is subject to "the government of chance," as Creech put it and has deviated into an impersonation of an impersonation, that is, a joyful affirmation of the materiality of the text.

Bibliography

Clark, J., *Form and Frenzy in Swift's Tale of a Tub*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press.

Friedlander, P., 1941, *Pattern of Sound and Atomistic Theory in Lucretius*, in "The American Journal of Philology," 62, 1, pp. 16-34.

Harth, P.,1961, *Swift and Anglican Rationalism: the Religious Background of a "Tale of a Tub",* Chicago, Chicago University Press.

Holmes, B., 2005, *'Daedala Lingua': Crafted Speech in* De Rerum Natura, in "The American Journal of Philology", 126, 4, pp. 527-585.

Johnson, S., 1766, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 2 vols. London, J. Johnson.

Keiser, J., 2015, *'Very like a Whale:' Metaphor and Materialism in Hobbes and Swift*, in "Modern Philology," 113, 2, pp. 198-223.

Kempelen, W., 1791, *Der Mechanismus der menschlichen Sprache*, Vienna, J. V. Degen.

Koenen, M., 1999, *Lucretius' Explanation of Hearing in De rerum natura IV 524-562*, in "Mnemosyne", 52, 4, pp. 434-463.

Lucretius, 1924, *De rerum natura*, translated by WHD Rouse, London, William Heinemann Editions.

Lucretius, 1682, *Of the Nature of Things in Six Books*, translated by T. Creech, London, J. Matthews.

Montag, W., 1994, *The Unthinkable Swift: The Spontaneous Philosophy of a Church of England Man*, London, Verso.

Smith. F., 2016, *Language and Reality in Swift's Tale of a Tub,* Columbus, Ohio State University Press.

Swift, J., 1920, *Tale of a Tub,* A. C. Guthkelch and D. N. Smith (Eds.), Oxford, Clarendon Press.

Wotton, W., 1705, *Observations on* A Tale of a Tub*,* in *Reflections upon Ancient and Modern Learning,* London, Goodwin, pp. 519-540.