



## SHORTER NOTES

### THE STRANGE ABSENCE OF *HORT-* IN LUCRETIUS

#### ABSTRACT

*This note points out and ventures to explain the remarkable absence of both hortus, 'garden', and all forms of hortari, 'urge', in a poem that seeks to encourage the audience toward the Garden.*

**Keywords:** Lucretius; Epicurus; *hortus*; garden; *hortari*; exhortation

It is puzzling that *hortus* and any related term appear nowhere in the *De rerum natura* (henceforth *DRN*). The word naturally appears in conjunction with terms such as *seges*, *ager*, *uilla*, *uinetum*, *pecudes*, *arbustum* and *agellus* (for example Cato, *Agr.* 36.1; Cic. *Sen.* 54; Varro, *Rust.* 3.10; Columella, *Rust.* 4.18.1). So expected are these pairings that Lucretius' choice to omit *hortus* in an outpouring of agricultural diction at 5.1361–78 (including *agri*, *agellus*, *cultum*, *uinetum*, *seges*, *plaga*) demands explanation.<sup>1</sup> Compounding the dilemma is the fact that the term is missing in a work promulgating the teachings of the Garden, the Epicurean school's long-established nickname (for example Diog. Laert. 10.17; Cic. *Nat. D.* 1.120).

We might attribute the absence of *hortus* (κῆπος) to Lucretius' discomfort with invoking, even incidentally, that nickname. But unless Cicero's mocking employment of the diminutive *hortulus* somehow scared off Lucretius (for example *Leg.* 1.39; *De or.* 3.63), internal and external evidence for this motivation are wanting. Philodemus, Lucretius' contemporary, seems to have used the moniker without compunction (κῆπος; *P.Herc.* 164, 1021 col. 14). Metrical considerations for employing *hortus* and related forms similarly fail to explain the omission. Nor does *hort-*, when vocalized, prompt any infelicities that the poet might wish to avoid.<sup>2</sup> But things become weirder when we consider that even the homophonic but etymologically unrelated *hort-* of *hortari* ('encourage') and all related forms—including the compounds *dehortari* ('advise against'), *adhortari* ('urge on') and *exhortari* ('admonish')—never appear in the poem. To contextualize their absence in the *DRN*, we can note their regular occurrence across Cicero's surviving works. Lucretius' abstention is even more surprising since, as Marković observes, 'The poem as a whole can be described as an unusually well argued and documented act of moral exhortation.'<sup>3</sup>

My tentative explanation for this dual mystery has two related parts. First, although noticeably absent in contexts where we might expect *hortus*, the term does surface in the poem and in a way that specifically links it to Epicurus. Lucretius identifies his teacher only once—to stunning rhetorical effect—near the centre of the poem in an argumentative crescendo against the fear of death (3.1042–4):

<sup>1</sup> 'Fields', 'small plot', 'garden', 'vineyard', 'grain field', 'tracts'.

<sup>2</sup> Perhaps Lucretius wishes to avoid *hortus* since it can carry the sense of sexually receptive orifice, as in *Priapea* 5.4. Still, he employs *agellus*, a term used in an identically obscene way in *Priapea* 15.7. For other field and garden innuendo, see J.N. Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (Baltimore, 1982), 82–4.

<sup>3</sup> D. Marković, *The Rhetoric of Explanation in Lucretius' De rerum natura* (Leiden, 2008), 147.

ipse Epicurus obit decurso lumine uitae,  
 qui genus humanum ingenio superauit et omnis  
 restinxit, stellas exortus ut aetherius sol.

Epicurus himself died, when the light of his life had raced toward setting, Epicurus who excelled the human species with his keenness and extinguished all others, as the divine sun rises and drowns out the stars.

The argument crests with the following question: if even Epicurus necessarily perished, 'will you then falter and resent dying?' (*tu uero dubitabis et indignabere obire?*, 3.1045). The light/life and astral/solar imagery is immediately patent, but the ear hears additional interpretative valences. Since pronunciation of the *x* of *exortus* would largely overpower a subsequent aspirate, we cannot avoid hearing *hortus* when line 1044 is scanned aloud. *ortus* and *hortus* have no etymological relationship, but that would not prevent Lucretius, like Varro and others,<sup>4</sup> from sensing or playing on one here, especially given the organic use of *orire* in contexts of plant growth (*exorta ... arbusta*) and sunshine (*in luminis oras*, 1.179–87).<sup>5</sup> Similarly, in other sections about tillage and crop raising, we encounter the phrase *ad ortus*, 'for the purpose of plant growth', and it is not far fetched to think that an audience might hear *ad hort* and think 'for the purpose of a garden', which altogether coheres with those agricultural contexts (1.206–12; 5.206–12). At any rate, it would be a strange coincidence if, in the only location to name Epicurus and, as Snyder demonstrates, to contain layers of wordplay on his name (*Epicurus ... decurso*), we also encounter a phonically detectible *hortus*.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps we should understand the image to be Epicurus as both the life-giving sun and an embodiment of the garden it nurtures.

Second, if we hear *hortus* at this singular mention of Epicurus, we might also hear the *exhort-* of *exhortari*, a word we reasonably expect to find in a protreptic poem. What is more, the frequentative *hortari* was likely constructed from *hortus*, the reconstructed perfect passive participle of *horior*, an outmoded verb used by Ennius (*Ann.* 432) and certainly known to Lucretius.<sup>7</sup> When these verses are recited aloud, our ears sense that Epicurus, like the sun, rises above all and delivers to them the hard exhortation against fearing death since, like sunrise and sunset, it cannot be divorced from nature's perpetual revolution.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps it is also a simultaneous encouragement toward joining the Garden, a heavenly way of life (*aetherius*) that Lucretius trusts to be attainable here and now (cf. 3.322). A final oddity that feels more than coincidental is the fact that the exact form *exortus*—masculine, singular, nominative like the noun *hortus* or the participle *exhortus/exhortatus* agreeing with Epicurus—appears only here in the poem.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, the participle *ortus* occurs elsewhere (for example 4.432; 6.1141) and, with some metrical adjustment, the simplex would have served adequately in

<sup>4</sup> R. Maltby, *A Lexicon of Ancient Latin Etymologies* (Leeds, 1991), s.v. *hortus*.

<sup>5</sup> For similar types of wordplay and double entendre, see M. Snyder, *Puns and Poetry in Lucretius' De rerum natura* (Amsterdam, 1980), 108–21.

<sup>6</sup> Snyder (n. 5), 108.

<sup>7</sup> M. de Vaan, *Etymological Dictionary of Latin and the other Italic Languages* (Leiden, 2008), s.v. *horior*.

<sup>8</sup> See A. Schiesaro, 'The palingenesis of *De rerum natura*', *PCPhS* 40 (1994), 81–107, especially 92.

<sup>9</sup> The only other near candidate is the neuter singular nominative *exortum* agreeing with *genus* at 1.4–5. Here too there is a sense of *hortus* near at hand with sunlight (*lumina solis*) and crop-bearing lands (*terras frugiferentis*, 1.3–5).

line 3.1044. It seems that Lucretius purposefully reserves this particular gender, number and case of the compound for this unique appearance.

We are still left with the mystery of Lucretius' total avoidance of all forms of *horiri/hortari*. If we are right to hear *exhortus/exhortatus* at 3.1044, linked as it is to Epicurus, we might conclude that Lucretius presents the teacher as the only valid source of moral exhortation. This would conform with the poet's frequently expressed reverence for Epicurus (for example 3.9–15; 5.1–13), whose footsteps he follows and with whom he cannot vie (3.1–8). On the other hand, when Lucretius depicts his own role, he uses the language of explanation (for instance *ratio*, 1.28–30), teaching (for example *docere*, 3.31), expanding (for instance *pandere*, 1.55), clarifying (for example *claranda*, 3.36), expounding (for instance *rationem exponere*, 1.946; 4.21), illuminating minds (for example *praepandere lumina menti*, 1.144) and, of course, honeyed inducement (1.936–50; 4.11–25). There is only one *Epicurus ex(h)ortus*, as 3.1042–4 seems to emphasize.

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## FULVIA AND THE CHEEKY RHETOR (SUET. *RHET.* 5)\*

### ABSTRACT

*This paper concerns the translation and interpretation of a succinct quip of Sextus Clodius, a rhetorician in Antony's entourage, on the subject of Fulvia's swollen cheek. The jest is often interpreted as having suggested that she tempted Clodius' pen, and various double meanings have been proposed. Contextualization may supply a key. The remark could mean that Fulvia seemed to be testing the point of her stylus, and the dark allusion might then be to reports of the manner in which Fulvia had allegedly mistreated the severed head of Cicero.*

**Keywords:** Fulvia; Antony; Sextus Clodius; Cicero; Roman wit; rumour

When one cheek of Antony's wife Fulvia was more swollen than the other (*altera bucca inflator erat*),<sup>1</sup> Sextus Clodius, a notoriously sharp-tongued rhetorician in Antony's entourage, offered a witticism that was edgy enough to prompt Suetonius' comment that it *gained* rather than *lost* the man favour with Antony (*nec eo minus, immo uel magis ob hoc Antonio gratus*).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It is unclear whether this swelling was a facial characteristic of Fulvia or the result of a passing complaint. *erat* might suggest the former. Space unfortunately precludes here a discussion of the coin portraits sometimes identified with Fulvia.

<sup>2</sup> The intimation may be that Antony showed a lapse in taste in finding the man amusing (he was reputed to be careless and undiscerning in his bestowal of favours and ill will; Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 24.7–8;

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