

Poem in Petronius' Satyricon

Post by “Bryan” of September 8, 2024 at 10:22 PM

I do not think we have mentioned Eumolpus' poem in Petronius' Satyricon that is clearly Epicurean.

The book is in pieces, but the poem probably comes after this section (translation by Heseltine, and is purposefully in incorrect English):

[\(Link to section\)](#) [104] “I thought I heard Priapus say in my dream: 'I tell you, Encolpius whom you seek has been led by me on board your ship.' ' Tryphaena gave a scream and said, “You would think we had slept together; I dreamed that a picture of Neptune, which I noticed in a gallery at Baiae, said to me: 'You will find Giton on board Lichas's ship.' ' **“This shows you,” said Eumolpus, “that Epicurus was a superhuman creature; he condemns jokes of this kind in a very witty fashion.”** . .

Usener mentions that part, but I do not think he includes Eumolpus' poem. It is placed in various places in the book; here listed as poem 31 [\(Link here\)](#):

"It is not the shrines of the gods, nor the powers of the air,
that send the dreams which mock the mind with flitting shadows;
each man makes dreams for himself. For when rest lies about the limbs
subdued by sleep, and the mind plays with no weight upon it,
it pursues in the darkness whatever was its task by daylight.
The man who makes towns tremble in war, and overwhelms unhappy
cities in flame, sees arms, and routed hosts, and the deaths of kings,
and plains streaming with outpoured blood. They whose life is
to plead cases have statutes and the courts before their eyes,
and look with terror upon the judgment-seat surrounded by a throng.
The miser hides his gains and discovers buried treasure.
The hunter shakes the woods with his pack. The sailor snatches
his shipwrecked bark from the waves, or grips it in death-agony.
The woman writes to her lover, the adulteress yields herself:
and the dog follows the tracks of the hare as he sleeps.
The wounds of the unhappy endure into the night-season."

Post by “Cassius” of September 9, 2024 at 6:38 AM

Thanks Bryan and the point there is an exact parallel to what is in Lucretius, right? I will see if I can find it...

Book 4 - 962

[962] And for the most part to whatever pursuit each man clings and cleaves, or on whatever things we have before spent much time, so that the mind was more strained in the task than is its wont, in our sleep we seem mostly to traffic in the same things; lawyers think that they plead their cases and confront law with law, generals that they fight and engage in battles, sailors that they pass a life of conflict waged with winds, and we that we pursue our task and seek for the nature of things for ever, and set it forth, when it is found, in writings in our country's tongue. Thus for the most part all other pursuits and arts seem to hold the minds of men in delusion during their sleep.

Post by "Don" of September 9, 2024 at 10:38 PM

Nice find, [Bryan](#) ! Thanks for sharing.

And I agree, [Cassius](#) , those two share some common themes.

I tried to compare the Latin of the two, but Petronius doesn't seem (to my untrained eye) to have cribbed from Lucretius (Lucretius Born c. 99 BC - Died c. 55 BC (aged c. 44); Petronius Born c. 27 AD - Died c. 66 AD (aged c. 38-39)), although I'm sure Petronius knew Lucretius's poem. Maybe it was a Zeitgeist thing with the images that Petronius uses? Or maybe he was riffing on De Rerum Natura to show off his erudition? Here is the beginning of each poem/section:

[Lucretius](#)

Et quo quisque fere studio devinctus adhaeret
aut quibus in rebus multum sumus ante morati
atque in ea ratione fuit contenta magis mens,
in somnis eadem plerumque videmur obire:
causidici causas agere et componere leges,
induperatores pugnare ac proelia obire,
nautae contractum cum ventis degere bellum,
nos agere hoc autem et naturam quaerere rerum
semper et inventam patriis exponere chartis.

[Petronius](#)

Somnia quae mentes ludunt volitantibus umbris,
non delubra deum nec ab aethere numina mittunt,
sed sibi quisque facit. Nam cum prostrata sopore
urget membra quies et mens sine pondere ludit,
quidquid luce fuit tenebris agit.