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POETRY AND PHILOSOPHY IN FIRST-CENTURY B.C. ROME: LUCRETIUS AND THE NATURE OF THE UNIVERSE

H.D. Jocelyn

It is my task this evening to honour the memory of Frederick Augustus Todd. No easy task, for Todd belongs to a period of our history which is too far away to be understood readily and yet not far enough to be discussed calmly. He was a product of the Sydney High School and the University of Sydney of the last decade of the nineteenth century. After two years of further study in the Universities of Leipzig and Jena he returned to Sydney in 1903 to devote the remaining 41 years of his life to the study of Greek and Latin literature, to the teaching of the Latin language to the young, to the administration of the University, and to various educational activities then more closely linked to the University than they are now. He married fairly late in life the daughter of an Anglican clergyman. He served as a military censor in the 1914–1918 and 1939–1945 wars with Germany. Through the socially and politically troubled 1920s and 1930s he supported with vigour a conservative view of how the Commonwealth of Australia and the State of New South Wales should be made to function. Despite his relatively humble origins—he was the son of an Alexandria bootmaker—he became, like his teacher Thomas John Butler (1857–1937)—the son of a Windsor draper—, a member of the University's professoriate. The best of his pupils, George Pelham Shipp (1900–1980), also devoted the whole of his working life to the University.

Todd's part in the founding in 1909 of the Classical Association of N.S.W. and his long service as an officer of that society require mention on an occasion like this. What he effected brought him many admirers. The English and Welsh parent body united at a time of educational ferment (1903) teachers of Greek and Latin from the schools and universities and lay people who had had themselves a classical education and wanted one for their own children. The two bodies wrestled in a similar way

with broadly similar problems and changed over the years as the character of classical education itself changed. They kept scholarship, teaching and social edification in some sort of harmony. Whether they can continue to do so is problematical, but the effort deserves praise.

Those who collected money to endow the series of lectures of which to-night's is the twelfth wanted each one to be 'on some aspect of classical studies'.[1] The term 'classical studies' refers now to something different from what it did in 1944 when Todd died. I doubt that it would have been used at all in 1898 when he matriculated at this university. Successive lecturers have endeavoured to fulfil the commission, but none can be said to have escaped the confines of the contemporary perception of 'classical studies'. None knew anything, or let on he knew anything, of Todd except the report of officialdom, something even in 1944 more like myth than history. It is not surprising therefore that most occupied themselves with the good and the great of Antiquity, with the men who were warriors and governors first and writers second or who, if they were merely writers, wrote about the concerns of warriors and governors. And certainly this was a side of the inheritance of Antiquity which stimulated many of Todd's public flights of rhetoric. In the course of a lecture delivered in the University's Great Hall on October 15, 1930 he declared: 'the *Aeneid* is a splendid call to patriotism, a summons to pride and hope and duty ringing out in a corrupt and war-shattered and well-nigh despairing world'. That is not the kind of thing anyone would want to say in 1996.

There is an unofficial legend, by no means complimentary to Todd, known in various shapes to many of us who were young in the 1940s and 1950s. From this legend, as from the official myth, emerges an uncomplicated and rather limited personality. A look at what Todd published in the learned journals between 1903 and 1943 suggests, however, that the simplicity and the limitations

1 See *The Union Recorder*, March 29, 1945, 20.

lay in the observers rather than in the observed. The scholar had a remarkably wide range of enthusiasms. He occupied himself not only with the higher genres of Latin poetry and prose but also with the lower ones, for example with the comedies of Plautus and Terence, the epigrams of Catullus and Martial, and the novels of Petronius and Apuleius. The pleasures as well as the burdens of the Roman ruling class interested him greatly. So too the character of the social groups which stood between the ruling class and the masses. So too even the physical remains of the ancient cities and towns. At a time when the affairs of the Faculty of Arts appeared to be attracting all his energy he worked at a critical edition of Martial's epigrams.[2] The anonymous scribblings on the walls of Pompeii and Herculaneum had excited him at least as early as 1911.[3] They among other things drew him to Italy twice, in 1924 and again sometime in the 1930s. He perceived that Zangemeister, Mau and Lommatzsch had published the scribblings, particularly those of a metrical character, in a very incompetent way, and around 1940 he began to write an ambitious treatise on the whole subject. Some notes and articles he composed about Pompeian obscenities are said to have upset the secretaries ordered to type them and the editors to whom they were submitted.[4]

2 In August, 1932 he talked of having been engaged for three or four years on the project. Nothing saw the light of day. In 1922 he had edited *Selections from Martial* for the use of his university classes (reprinted in 1927).

3 See the report of a lecture 'The Pompeian Wall Inscriptions' given to the N.S.W. Classical Association November 24, 1911, *Proc. Class. Ass. of N.S.W.* 1912, 26-31.

4 There appeared in print 'Three Pompeian Wall-Inscriptions and Petronius', *CR* 53 (1939), 5-9, 'Two Pompeian Metrical Inscriptions', ibid. 168-170, and 'Some cucurbitaceae in Latin Literature', *CQ* 37 (1943), 101-111. Manuscript notes on the Pompeian material and the text of a lecture given to the Classical Association of N.S.W. June 6, 1944 are preserved in the Archive of the University of Sydney.

Todd had also a streak of literary creativity, a little wider perhaps than either the official myth or the unofficial legend allows. He wrote verses for the amusement of himself, his family and his friends throughout his life. In English as well as in Latin. A set of Latin rhythmical verses with the title *Campanarum canticum* which he composed in 1928 for a hymn to be sung at University celebrations of Anzac Day and Armistice Day is often mentioned with awe. The war of 1914–1918 had affected him deeply, strengthening a sense of Britishness and creating an obsession with the cult of the war dead now increasingly hard to comprehend. He went so far as to publish the hymn in the British *Classical Review*.[5] Its maudlin sentiment hardly fits the sober medieval form. Some of the scurrilous epigrams which he composed about academic colleagues and men prominent in public life were probably at least as worthy of a wider circulation. There survive two elegiac distichs in which John Thomas Lang, the Premier dismissed by the Governor of New South Wales in 1932, became a latter-day 'Mentula'.[6]

The official myth highlights Todd's friendship with E.R. Holmes (1870–1952) and O.U. Vonwiller (1882–1972), the two colleagues who, according to the unofficial legend, stood to attention with him in the middle of the Quadrangle whenever the War Memorial Carillon tolled. Little on the other hand survives about a relationship with a younger and much more interesting man, C.J. Brennan (1890–1932), appointed to the staff of the University in 1909 and dismissed in 1925 for drunkenness and immorality. Writing in support of Todd's application for the chair of Latin in 1922 Brennan mentioned twelve years of intercourse with Todd and discussion with him of points of classical scholarship. Both men had been pupils of Walter Scott (1855–1925), Charles Badham's successor as Professor of Classics

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5 43 (1929), 1.

6 A scrapbook preserved in the Archive of the University of Sydney contains the distichs.

and Logic in 1885, M.W. MacCallum (1854–1942), appointed Professor of Modern Language and Literature in 1887, and T.J. Butler, appointed Professor of Latin in 1891. We know that Brennan despised Scott, a typical product of Balliol College as it was in the time of Benjamin Jowett, and lamented that it had not been given to him to know Badham. He had on the other hand a respect and affection for MacCallum and Butler. It is a pity so little is recorded of Butler before illness drove him into premature senility.

The 'points of classical scholarship' Todd discussed with Brennan would have been to do with textual criticism, an art dearer to the hearts of both men than the large topics thought appropriate in those days for Extension Board lectures and in these for regular undergraduate courses. The active grasp of the classical languages fostered by the exercises of prose and verse composition enabled men of talent to practise criticism in fruitful ways. Badham had been a great master of the art, better appreciated in Holland and Germany than in Britain. The colony of New South Wales seemed a barren place to go to. He nevertheless succeeded in planting here an awareness of fundamental things which survived his passing.

Todd's was no simple personality about which all might agree, nor is the surviving record of what he did, what he said and what he wrote free of obscurities and puzzles. He gained an education normally restricted to men born higher in society, an education normally of little intellectual or spiritual effect on the recipient, and he allowed much of his life to be consumed by efforts to keep that kind of education alive. Certain elements of it had, however, opened up a vision of art and science that few of Todd's New South Wales contemporaries beheld. The discourse of the odd Sydney teacher and the way of life he witnessed in the universities of Saxony broadened the vision. He stood out in more than strength of will from the bulk of the Sydney professoriate of 1903–1944. No sociological model will explain him. Those who established this series of lectures saw, or wanted to see, the

scholar, the educator, the examiner, the patron of good fellowship and the administrator as one man. Half a century on I feel they were wrong. Some of them did not wish to look into their own divided souls. The need now is not to perpetuate a myth which no longer gives the comfort it once did but to ask what was of permanent value in Todd's life and what was of none.

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It will soon become clear how much the manner of my thinking about Todd[7] has influenced my choice of a subject for this evening's lecture. I want in fact to talk about a figure of Antiquity who developed interests at odds with the values of the society in which he had been raised, a highly cultivated Roman of the first century B.C. deeply interested in philosophy and the writing of verses but at the same time anxious to maintain a position in Roman society. This was a highly stratified society with a governing stratum devoted to agriculture and the making of war. It clung strenuously to a code of religious and ethical practice it believed to be very ancient and therefore unchallengeable. It displayed both envy and contempt of the levels of culture and civilisation of other societies within its ken.

T. Lucretius Carus did not come from one of the families which made up the governing class of late Republican Rome. The kind of literary education he had received was spreading, however, in that class as well as among those who devoted themselves entirely to the acquisition or the enjoyment of wealth. He had patrons among the Tullii Cicerones and the Memmii. The long poem in epic hexameters on the real nature of the visible universe, which remained unfinished at the time of his death, contains clear references to his own aims and ambitions and obscure hints

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[7] What I wrote in *La filologia greca e latina nel secolo* XX, Pisa 1989, 560, now seems to me inadequate and unjust. C. Turney, U. Bygott and P. Chippendale, *Australia's First. A History of the University of Sydney. Volume I. 1850-1939* (Sydney, 1991) fail to make sense of the scholarship of the institution they treat.

about the personality of an aristocrat whom he wanted to please. This almost certainly was C. Memmius, a man who had composed erotic poems in his youth and who after his praetorship of 58 took with him to the province of Bithynia two youths, C. Helvius Cinna and C.Valerius Catullus, better skilled at writing verses than at doing anything else. Lucretius set forth his account of physical reality as though acquaintance with it would benefit the equilibrium of Memmius' inner spirit, as though indeed the conferring of this benefit was the sole aim of all his labours. At the same time he could not conceal either the tension which obtained between certain aspects of his theme and the ethos of his addressee's class or the distance which separated the mental excitement generated by his compository effort from the calm recommended by the philosophers he admired. On occasion he even gave the impression that Memmius had not so far been persuaded, and was unlikely to be persuaded, by the doctrine presented to him. Lucretius was clearly not a man at peace with himself or with the society in which he lived. What he left behind lacked unity and coherence. Large questions arise: what influence had Lucretius' consciousness of his social status on the manner of his exposition? how far did the constraints of Roman social life thwart the deep-level aims of the poet?

Smaller questions abound. The first concerns an omission. In the first two of the six books of his work Lucretius expounded the views taken by various Greek philosophers of a reality which they believed to underlie what was perceived by the senses. He gave most space to the doctrine of Epicurus about an infinite void in which indivisible particles of diverse shapes moved constantly. In the next two books he set out some of Epicurus' arguments for supposing that such particles composed not only the body but also the soul and went on to depict from an Epicurean standpoint the functioning of the soul. In the fifth book he described how the world which we perceive came to be and how it will pass away. In the sixth and final book he explained the phenomena which disturbed from time to time the tranquillity of the heavens and the earth. The work covered in effect that

department of philosophy which the ancients called 'physics' as distinct from 'logic' and 'ethics'. Signally lacking, although promised,[8] was an account of the gods. Did the intellectual difficulty of supplying such an account defeat him? or did he die before he finished one? or did the religious atmosphere of Rome frighten him off?

Despite the many references to religion and philosophy in extant first-century B.C. writing it is difficult to determine how easy it was in this century to treat fundamental questions freely and openly. Although neither physics nor the other departments of philosophy were of any obvious utility to the warrior, the statesman or the businessman, such studies had long engaged the interest of intellectually able youths of the propertied classes of Greek cities. They were now also attracting young Romans as family wealth grew, as time became available for activities other than military training, and as fathers lost their old severity. Some of the schools of philosophy founded in the fourth century at Athens had survived the deaths of their founders and continued to draw students not only from Athens and other Greek-speaking cities but also from barbarian states. Some men trained in the Athenian schools set up their own in other Greek communities; others found employment with wealthy families as intellectual companions of the head and his friends or as tutors of the young. A number of such companions are known from first-century B.C. Rome: Diodotus, for example, in the house of the Ciceros, Staseas in that of the Pisos, Antipater and Athenodorus in that of the Catos. It would seem, however, that most senatorial families remained indifferent, or positively hostile, to philosophy.. Harbouring a philosopher of the Epicurean sect brought especially virulent calumny.[9] We have to take seriously the fear of conventional ways of thought which Lucretius

8 See 1.54 and 5.146-155. The topic is touched on at 2.644-651, 3.18-24, 6.58-78.

9 Cf. H.D. Jocelyn, 'The Ruling Class of the Roman Republic and Greek Philosophers', *Bull. John Rylands Libr.* 59 (1977), 323-366.

expresses after he has praised Epicurus for demonstrating how unnecessary it is to fear the gods:

> illud in his rebus uereor, ne forte rearis
> impia te rationis inire elementa uiamque
> indugredi sceleris.[10]

Who the *uates* were to whom he alludes when talking of visions of the dead—

> tutemet a nobis iam quouis tempore uatum
> terriloquis uictus dictis desciscere quaeres[11]—

is hard to say. They can hardly be the *poetae* so often mentioned elsewhere in very much less tense contexts.[12] What they had to say about visions clearly counted for more in the eyes of many than the statements of philosophers.

A second question concerns the tone of Lucretius' discourse. He represented himself as a loyal follower of Epicurus and his poem as an effort to persuade a young Roman aristocrat of conventional outlook[13] to become one too. Epicurus himself had never, however, touted for followers.[14] He wrote nothing comparable, say, with the popularising *Dialogues* of Plato and Aristotle. Subsequent heads of the school which he founded waited for pupils to come to them. What they wrote addressed men already attracted to the founder's general way of thinking. None of them appears to have adopted the emotive manner of argument used with such remarkable constancy throughout the Latin poem. Lucretius was

10 1.80-82. Cf. 5.114-121.

11 1.102-103. Cf. 1.109.

12 2.600, 5.327; 405; 144, 6.754.

13 1.42 suggests that Memmius' father was still alive.

14 Cf. Seneca, *Epist.* 79.15.

not content merely to expound a particular view of physical reality. He affected to want the young Memmius to adopt the Epicurean view and pushed this view less as the solution to a set of intellectual questions than as an antidote to various conventional worries about malign powers and forces believed to be operating in the world.[15] Lucretius' evangelical tone has often been noted and declared to have been determined by the literary vehicle he chose for his discourse. That merely shifts the problem onto another plane. Whether the principal model of the *De rerum natura* was one of the poems of Empedocles or some prosaic diatribe of the Hellenistic period, the question abides: why did Lucretius give utterance in such an un-Epicurean way?

A third question concerns Lucretius' use of Latin for the exposition of Epicurean doctrine. The language of serious philosophy was still Greek in the first century B.C. and remained so for centuries. It was in Greek that Plotinus taught at Rome between A.D. 248 and 270. Why then did Lucretius write about physics in Latin? It would not do to say that C. Memmius knew no Greek. All the probabilities are that he knew this language as well as Lucretius did.

A fourth question concerns the kind of Latin used by Lucretius; this was a highly ornate archaising form of the language set in hexametric verses. The *De rerum natura* puts the poets Homer and Ennius on the same level as Epicurus himself[16] and praises Empedocles as much for his poetry as for his science.[17] Epicurus on the other hand had written in a very plain kind of Attic Greek and from time to time had denounced the poets of old Greece for encouraging conventional superstitions, for exciting base passions, for telling untruths about reality, and for obscuring the

15 See 1.146-154; 931-932, 2.40-46, 3.16; 37-93, 5.82-90; 1194-1240, 6.58-91.

16 For Homer see 3.1037-1038; for Ennius 1.117-120.

17 See 1.731-733.

irrationality of their propositions by means of elaborate artificialities of language.[18] Why then did the doctrinally loyal follower use a medium denounced by the master?

A fifth question concerns the state of mind which Lucretius attributed to himself as he went about the composition of his poem:

> sed acri
> percussit thyrso laudis spes magna meum cor
> et simul incussit suauem mi in pectus amorem
> musarum, quo nunc instinctus mente uigenti
> auia Pieridum peragro loca nullius ante
> trita solo.[19]

He suffered, he asserted, a kind of madness akin to that which affected a worshipper of Bacchus enthused by the god or a person in the grip of sexual lust. One thinks immediately of the view of poetic inspiration taken by Democritus,[20] and doubtless by Epicurus himself. Such a state of mind would, however, in the view of the atomist philosophers, have precluded any statement about reality being taken seriously. No momentary aberration inspired Lucretius' words. He would later describe similarly his reaction to the vision of reality revealed by Epicurus' writings:

> his ibi me rebus quaedam diuina uoluptas
> percipit atque horror.[21]

18 Cf. Clemens, *Strom.* 5.14, Heraclitus, *Alleg. Hom.* 4, 75.

19 1.922-927.

20 See Cicero, *De orat.* 2.194, *Diu.* 1.80, Horace, *Ars* 295-297, Clemens, *Strom.* 6.168. For the association of poetic with Bacchic frenzy see Plato, *Ion* 533 e - 534 a, *Phaedr.* 245 a.

21 3.28-29.

Epicurus, as Lucretius well knew, recommended freedom from passion, absolute tranquillity of spirit.[22] He would have been put out more than a little by a follower psychologically and physically thrilled by the doctrine of the atoms and the void. Lucretius could have restricted himself to talking of his hopes of literary fame or of the effort required by his enterprise. Why then did he choose to talk in such a radically un-Epicurean fashion?

* * *

It is easy to forget the obvious fact that Lucretius loved words and the ways in which they could be put together. Consideration of the poetry written in Latin before his time and in the first century accorded some honour and of the way the *De rerum natura* related to this poetry provides at least part-answers to my five questions. It will also sharpen the larger ones which I raised at the outset about the poet and the society in which he operated.

The greatest of the poetical productions of the third and second centuries was in the common view of Lucretius' contemporaries the epic *Annales* of Quintus Ennius, an immigrant from the Messapic town of Rudiae who gained the confidence of a number of aristocratic families during the 35 years he resided in Rome. This poem recounted the transfer of Aeneas and his followers from the Troad to Latium and the deeds of the Roman kings and consuls. The author claimed to be a Latin-speaking re-incarnation of Homer himself but, unlike Homer, had much to say about his own person and about the poetic process. The depth of Lucretius' admiration of the *Annales* comes out in the way his account of Ennius' achievement in 1.117–119—

> primus amoeno
> detulit ex Helicone perenni fronde coronam,
> per gentis Italas hominum quae clara clueret—

[22] See Epicurus, *Herod. ep.* 76-82.

is echoed by that of his own ambition in 1.927–930:

> iuuat integros accedere fontis
> atque haurire, iuuatque nouos decerpere flores
> insignemque meo capiti petere inde coronam
> unde prius nulli uelarint tempora Musae.

Likewise in the way his boast in 5.335–337 of having been the first to expound Epicurus' physical theory in Latin—

> denique natura haec rerum ratioque repertast
> nuper, et hanc primus cum primis ipse repertus
> nunc ego sum in patrias qui possim uertere uoces—

took up an Ennian boast of having introduced a new style of narrating epic events:

> nec dicti studiosus quisquam erat ante hunc.[23]

More note is to be taken of Lucretius' own view of the literary ancestry of his poem than of later efforts to place it with the 'didascalic' poems of Hesiod, Empedocles and Aratus.[24] The atoms corresponded with the heroes of Homer and the kings and consuls of Ennius and the void with the Mediterranean lands in which the personages of narrative epic moved.

Neither the theme nor the tone of the *De rerum natura* put it in the line of the *Works and Days* or of either of the hexametric pieces attributed to Empedocles. The anthropomorphic Venus and Mars of the opening 61 verses take us, who lack a full text of the *Annales*, to Homer. They perhaps took first-century B.C. readers

[23] See Cicero, *Brut.* 71. Skutsch's way of separating Ennius' words (*Ann.* 209) from Cicero's is unpersuasive.

[24] See Servius III.128-129 Thilo, Diomedes, *Gramm. Lat.* I.483 Keil.

immediately to Ennius. Certainly the promise made a little later in vv. 102–135 of a true account of the nature of the soul as well as of the phenomena of heaven and earth brings an explicit reference to the *Annales* and acquaints us with the presence at the very beginning of the older poem of a treatment of the questions which engaged the philosophers. Lucretius cites two false views of what happens to the soul on the death of a body, one that it takes up an abode beneath the earth, the other that it passes to another body. The latter view he attributes not to Pythagoras, the philosopher with whom it is normally associated, but to Ennius.[25] He goes on to relate how Homer appeared to Ennius in a dream and described to him the *rerum natura*. I should suggest that Lucretius' title was no straight echo of Epicurus' Περὶ φυσέως—otherwise it would have been *De natura rerum*—but a phrase from the *Annales*[26] taken up with polemical intent. No one produced a title like *Epicurea* for the poem.[27]

At least two of the eulogies of Epicurus uttered by Lucretius in the course of the *De rerum natura* appear to engage similarly with the content of the *Annales*.[28] Certainly, 1.62–79 and 3.1–30 are heavily redolent of the language used by Ennius of Roman men of state.

At 1.62–79 Epicurus' mind is said to have passed outside the fiery boundaries of the world we perceive with our senses and to have obtained a vision of the ultimate realities, of where the

25 1.116-126. It is usually a philosopher who is named in connection with a theory inconsistent with Epicureanism (cf. 1.635-711; 712-829; 830-920, 3.370-395).

26 *rerum naturam expandere dictis* (1.126) would be one of several Ennian phrases recycled in 1.116-126. Cf. 1.24-25 *uersibus ... quos ego de rerum natura pangere conor*.

27 Like the title *Aratea* given to Cicero's translation of Aratus (Cicero, *Diu.* 2.14, *Leg.* 2.7, *Nat. deor.* 2.104) or Sallustius' *Empedoclea* (Cicero, *Q. fr.* 2.10.3).

28 Nothing certain can be said about 3.1042-1044, 5.1-54, or 6.1-42.

boundaries of possibility and impossibility lie. Something quite inconceivable according to the materialist theory of the mind promoted by Epicurus himself. But a notion that the mind could free itself from the body and behold reality directly appealed to many philosophers of the Greek mainstream, and we may guess that the philosophising Homer of the proem of the *Annales* explained his knowledge of reality so. With

> et extra
> processit longe flammantia moenia mundi
> atque omne immensum peragrauit mente animoque

the mind of the philosopher is presented as like a Roman magistrate ceremoniously leaving the city and making his way through foreign parts.

The verses

> unde refert nobis uictor quid possit oriri,
> quid nequeat, finita potestas denique cuique
> quanam sit ratione atque alte terminus haerens.
> quare religio pedibus subiecta uicissim
> obteritur, nos exaequat uictoria caelo

bring Epicurus' mind back home laden with booty. The ancient reader would have thought of Ennius' account of the triumphal progress of a Scipio or a Fulvius Nobilior to the religious centre of the city, the temple of *Iuppiter optimus maximus*. Epicurus' victory put us, it is implied, on the level of Jupiter himself.

At 3.1–30 Lucretius claims to have beheld, as a result of reading Epicurus' writings, the ultimate realities, and even the abodes of the gods themselves. A most un-Epicurean claim. But it was an effective way of rebutting the view of these realities put forward by the Ennian Homer at the beginning of the *Annales* and by Ennius himself in the texture of his narrative. The laudation of the Greek philosopher

tu pater es, rerum inuentor, tu patria nobis
suppeditas praecepta

reflects challengingly the words which Ennius placed in the mouths of the Roman people as they mourned Romulus, the founder of their city, the conqueror of their enemies:

o Romule Romule die,
qualem te patriae custodem di genuerunt!
o pater, o genitor, o sanguen dis oriundum!
tu produxisti nos intra luminis oras.[29]

Epicurus, it is implied, has brought greater benefits to us all through his philosophising than king Romulus did to his people through military deeds.

The *De rerum natura* is thus neither just an attempt to explain Epicurus' reasoning about the subject of physics nor just a poetic effort of the kind made by M. Cicero in translating Aratus' Φαινόμενα.[30] There had been attempts to write in Ennius' way about the victories of Roman generals from 169 or thereabouts onward. Cicero began a so-called ἔπος on Julius Caesar's 55 expedition to Britain.[31] The genre took a long time to die. One or more of Domitian's German campaigns seems to have elicited hexameters from P. Papinius Statius.[32] The urge to flatter a patron was always stronger than any ambition of surpassing Ennius in purely poetic qualities. By mounting a direct challenge to the old poet's standing with a non-military theme Lucretius did something quite new.

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29 *Ann.* 106-109 Skutsch.

30 A work of the orator's youth (see *Nat. deor.* 2.104).

31 See *Q. fr.* 3.5.4; 6.3; 7.6.

32 See Valla on Juvenal 4.94 (from 'Probus').

The strongly Ennian character of Lucretius' verbal and metrical style would have been obvious in the first century B.C. Modern scholars have devoted many articles and monographs to his debts to his predecessors. Less attention has been paid to the vigour with which he endeavoured to improve on Ennius' exploitation of the resources of the Latin language. He could not simply recycle Ennian words and phrases as he sang of entities which lay beyond the reach of the senses and of the modes of reasoning by which these entities could be known. Novelty of theme demanded novelty of diction. What had been inherited from Ennius needed to be enriched. Changes in the ordinary language required that some of Ennius' locutions and some of his rhythms should be avoided. A spreading uneasiness about the degree of variation in morphology, prosody and versification which Ennius and the other poets of the third and second centuries had permitted themselves could not be ignored. The first-century B.C. readers of the *De rerum natura* would have recognised not only an adherence to the general shape which Ennius had given to the high poetic register but also a powerful drive for something new where particulars were concerned.

Challenging Ennius' preeminence in the top genre of Latin literature involved more than the presentation of a new subject and a renovation of style. The *Annales* breathed the ethos of the class to which C. Memmius belonged, and this had contributed mightily to its success. It was not simply an account of a series of happenings in time. There was symmetry between the Roman sack of Ambracia narrated in the fifteenth book, Pyrrhus' expedition to Italy narrated in the sixth, and the Greek sack of Troy narrated in the first. The rulers of Ambracia had claimed descent from the killer of Trojan Priam. The poem offered a semi-religious, semi-philosophical justification of Rome's imperial expansion. It called on the young in protreptic tones to emulate their fathers and forefathers. A good half of the original fifteen books sang of men little older than Ennius himself. The three books added later sang of men much younger. Ennius' view of life and the world could

not be renovated. It had to be either refuted or ignored. Lucretius ignored it less often, in my view, than scholars have thought. Occasionally, however, he let it divert him from a strict Epicureanism. There were even times when unwillingness to go too far against literary convention lead him into rank incoherence. His model caused problems parallel with those caused by his relationship with the Memmii and their class.

The formal structure of the *Annales* reflected that of the record of events kept by the *pontifices*, the most important of the Roman priestly colleges. The poem regularly showed the kings and the magistrates carrying out the religious duties which tradition prescribed. It gave prominence to happenings which seemed indicative of the will of the gods, to rituals designed to appease their apparent anger, to funeral ceremonies accompanying the disposal of the dead, to dreams in which the dead instructed the living. The model of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* led Ennius to recount direct interventions by divinities in human affairs, conversations between individual divinities, and assemblies of all of them, or at least of those of the heaven. Like Homer, the Latin poet presented himself at times as a mouthpiece of the divine Muses.

The theology of the *Annales* acquired a sophisticated and yet generally acceptable slant from Ennius' deployment of the doctrines of Pythagoras, a semi-legendary figure who spent most of his life in a part of Italy adjacent to Ennius' homeland and now firmly under Roman control. According to story Pythagoras had had barbarians as well as Greeks among his pupils. One of the barbarians was Pompilius Numa, the king credited with the design of some of the more striking features of Rome's mode of worshipping its gods. A statue of Pythagoras stood in the *comitium*, a space where in Ennius' day important decisions about matters of religious practice were taken. The claim made by Ennius at the beginning of the *Annales* to possess a soul which had once inhabited the body of Homer would have alerted his readers

to the character of much that followed.[33] The general account of physical reality which Homer's ghost, a Pythagorean εἴδωλον rather than a Homeric ψυχή, expounded to the sleeping Ennius surely had a Pythagorean character.[34] Fragments of other episodes show Ennius replacing the fixed and motionless heaven of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* with the eternally revolving sphere of those philosophers, Pythagoras among them, who saw something essentially divine in such a shape and such a movement.[35] A sort of physical unity sometimes takes over from Homer's set of quarrelsome anthropomorphic deities: the lower atmosphere shares in the laughter of Jupiter,[36] and Jupiter himself becomes a body of which the other Olympians are parts.[37] On at least one occasion an underworld demon of strife, *Paluda*, and some counterbalancing upperworld force of harmony are associated with the four elements of Pythagoras, or at least of Pythagoras as he was portrayed after the diffusion of the doctrines of Empedocles.[38]

The physical theory expounded by Lucretius set the religious ideology of the *Annales* at nought. The younger poet stressed again and again the freedom from fear of the divinities supposedly active in heaven and on earth which a correct understanding of reality would bring and the need to contemplate

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33 See Horace, *Epist.* 2.1.50-52 and Porphyrio ad loc., Persius 6.9-11 and schol. ad loc.

34 Lucretius 1.116-126 hangs on a reference to metempsychosis. The criticism of this doctrine at 3.748-783 doubtless glances at Ennius.

35 See *Ann.* 205.

36 See *Ann.* 446-447.

37 For the Ennian provenance of the words cited by Servius at *Aen.* 4.638 see S. Mariotti, 'Ennio, "Annali, Dubia" v. 6 sg. Skutsch' in *Storia poesia e pensiero nel mondo antico: Studi in onore di Marcello Gigante* (Naples, 1994), 425-431, A. Traina, 'Un probabile verso di Ennio e l'apposizione parentetica', *Mat. e discuss.* 34 (1995), 187-193.

38 See *Ann.* 220-221.

the divinities as they actually are with a tranquil spirit. He denied flatly the general idea of divine providence.[39] On the other hand he skirted carefully around actual religious practice. Such references as do occur in the *De rerum natura* practically all concern private rather than public cult and have little specifically Roman colouring.[40] The procession honouring the Great Mother so vividly described at 2.610–660 could have occurred in many a Greek city as readily as in Rome.[41] When the rationale of the thunderbolt comes up for discussion it is Etruscan rather than Roman superstition which gets denounced.[42] The fears which the unphilosophical have of what they may suffer after death are illustrated from Greek poetry.[43] It could be argued, as it certainly has often been assumed, that at such points Lucretius followed an Epicurean source without any thought of Rome, least of all of Ennius' *Annales*. His reticence about the practical consequences of his doctrine in the religious sphere should, however, be linked with both the absence of the promised account of the nature of divinity[44] and the meagre fulfilment of the promise to deal with the dreams of sleepers and the visions of the sick.[45] Fearing to meet head-on the force still left in Roman cult or to challenge the eloquence of Ennius' presentation he may have simply turned to one side. The wickedness which irrational fear of the gods could cause he illustrated with the story of

39 Cf. 2.167-183, 5.156-234.

40 Cf. 2.352-366, 3.48-54; 890, 4.1236-1237, 5.1161-1240, 6.387-422. The *induperator* of 5.1226-1232 must be Pyrrhus.

41 Noteworthy are the reference to *Graium docti ... poetae* in 2.600 and that to *uariae gentes* in 2.610.

42 6.379-386. For Roman suspicion of Etruria in religious matters see Cicero, *Diu.* 2.11.

43 3.978-1023.

44 See above, n. 8.

45 For the promise see 1.127-135; for the fulfilment 4.907-1036 (cf. 5.62-63).

Agamemnon's sacrifice of his own daughter to Artemis/Diana.[46] Yet Roman history, if not the *Annales* itself, had plenty of material equally grim and equally dissuasive. The signs and the interpretation of them which drove Agamemnon to permit the sacrifice, Lucretius did not recount. Was, we might ask, the unmentioned Calchas too much like one of the *augures* or *quindecimuiri*?

To what extent Epicurus' ethical theory followed necessarily from his physical theory may be disputed. Certainly it was not incumbent upon the expounder of one to deal exhaustively with the other. The fewness of references to ethics in the *De rerum natura* may constitute no problem. On the other hand the kind of life Epicurus had recommended in various writings brought him a notoriety difficult to ignore. This life was the complete antithesis of the one which Ennius described and passionately recommended in the *Annales*. Lucretius' own desire to be honoured as a great poet, even to replace Ennius in general esteem, could hardly be reconciled with the edict λάθε βιώσας. It can therefore be no accident that amidst all the praise lavished on Epicurus' ethical teaching in 6.1–41 no positive definition is given of the chief good or that, although the contemplative life is commended at some length in 2.1–61, neither here nor elsewhere is the life of the soldier or the statesman rejected outright. Only the seeking of excessive wealth and power[47] and the resort to evil means[48] are condemned. The ticklish question of the acquisition of an empire by a state is completely ignored. I should suggest that Lucretius consciously avoided a confrontation with the ethos of the *Annales* and sought to emulate only the passion with which Ennius advocated the maintenance of this ethos. He would have urged Memmius to the study of the atoms and their movements in the void in the way Ennius urged his readers to the exercise of the

46 1.80-101.

47 2.11-13, 3.995-1002, 5.1117-1130.

48 3.59-73.

military and political virtues. Hence the oddly un-Epicurean tone of the exposition.

The contradictions inherent in Lucretius' enterprise could not always be side-stepped. At two points a desire to challenge Ennius' poetic supremacy, a desire to present a completely different although equally serious theme, and a desire to maintain a relationship with an aristocratic patron come into open conflict: at 1.1–61, where he asks the goddess Venus to endow his verses with an eternal charm and to persuade her divine lover Mars to put a stop to the fighting in which Memmius is involved, describes the absolute separateness of divinity from our world, and finally calls on Memmius to pay complete and undivided attention to an account of the atoms; and at 1.921–950, where he admits the obscurity of his theme, refers to a hope that the treatment of one so novel will bring him poetic fame and to a mental excitement inspired by consideration of his project, emphasises the seriousness of the theme and the benefits which hearers of the poem will derive from their new knowledge, and finally contrasts the obscurity and repulsiveness of the theme with the lucidity and attractiveness of his own verses. Many have tried to establish a poetical or philosophical unity in what is transmitted at both points. It seems to me more sensible to be content with deducing a divided spirit in the author.

The doctrine about the nature of deity affirmed at 1.44–49 makes nonsense of the two requests put to the goddess Venus at 1.28–40. The verses occur again, however, at 2.646–651, where they fit the argument about poetic and popular talk of the Great Mother presented before and after. It can therefore be readily supposed that their first occurrence results from the incorporation within the text of a marginal reference to 2.646–651.[49] The two requests remain problematical, at the very start for any hearer already familiar with Epicurean theology and increasingly as the poem unrolls for any hearer with a memory of what he has

[49] The verses aroused suspicion as early as the fifteenth century.

previously heard. The one that his verses should have an eternal charm (1.28) sits strangely in the mouth of a poet who will proclaim again and again that only the atoms are eternal.[50] The one for an end to the warfare which occupies Memmius makes it hard to imagine how the latter could pay the attention demanded of him at 1.50–53 and many times thereafter. We must accordingly suppose that this request (1.29–40) was added to the poem at a late stage, after the general design stood fixed, and would have been removed had Lucretius lived to revise his work. The request that Venus should endow the verses of the poem with eternal charm (1.28) is of the same type as that made of the Muse Calliope for guidance at 6.91–95.[51] We cannot explain either away as a momentary lapse. The preliminary invocation of Venus was composed with extreme care.

Possession of a full text of the *Annales* would almost certainly enable us to solve many of the problems of the passage. The reference at 1.121 to *Ennius aeternis ... uersibus edens* indicates pretty clearly that some claim to immortality by Ennius[52] sparked *aeternum da dictis diua leporem* at 1.28. Although there is no reason to suppose that Ennius asked any deity apart from the Muses for help, it is clear that Venus, mother of Aeneas, source of oracular knowledge,[53] and protector of Aeneas' descendants,[54] played a prominent role in the *Annales* and possible that she often displayed the warlike aspects of her Roman figure.[55] In that case

[50] Cf. 1.221; 500; 540.

[51] The reference at 5.107 to a *Fortuna gubernans* is heavy with sarcasm.

[52] The elegiac couplet cited by Cicero at *Tusc.* 1.34 and 117 and *Cato* 73 probably reflects something said in the *Annales*.

[53] See *Ann.* 15-16.

[54] Romulus and Remus stood much closer to Aeneas than in the story canonised by Fabius Pictor. See Servius, Virg. *Aen.* 6.777, Serv. auct. *Aen.* 1.273.

Lucretius' emphasis on her sexuality would have a polemical edge. The goddess' association with ἡδονή/ *uoluptas*, stressed by the appellation *hominum diuumque uoluptas* (1.1—Calliope is similarly dubbed *requies hominum diuumque uoluptas* at 6.94) provides a bridge to Lucretius' Epicurean theme. The startling novelty of the idea that epic verse should have something of the charm of a goddess of sexuality[56] is in line with the novelty of the theme itself. The appeal to Venus alows furthermore a graceful compliment to be paid to the Memmii, who claimed descent from one of the warriors who accompanied Aeneas to Latium.[57] The young Gaius doubtless made political capital out of his family's devotion to the goddess.[58] 1.1–61 thus shows Lucretius driven into utterances inconsonant with Epicurean tradition partly by his determination to emulate a great poet and partly by his anxiety to maintain the goodwill of social superiors.

1.921–950 is easily detachable from where it stands in the tradition (in front of a demonstration of the infinity of the extent of the void and of the number of the atoms). Twenty-five of the verses with a small and insignificant alteration of the last form the proem of book 4 (in front of an exposition of the functioning of the soul). We may ignore the controversies to which this situation has given rise and treat the passage as a comment by Lucretius on his whole enterprise and in particular on the obscurity of his subject matter.

Reference has already been made to the desire for fame and the state of mental excitement which the poet ascribes to himself

55 On the Roman Venus see K. Latte, *Römische Religionsgeschichte* (Munich, 1960), 183-189.

56 It went far beyond the application of adjective *uenustus* to writers (e.g. at Cicero, *Orat.* 29) and writings (e.g. at Cicero, *Brut.* 262).

57 See Virgil, *Aen.* 5.116-117, 12.127.

58 For coins of Memmii with Venus on the reverse see M.H. Crawford, *Roman Republican Coinage* (Cambridge, 1974), nrs. 313 (106 B.C.) and 349 (87 B.C.).

in 1.922–925. Both emotions were proscribed by Epicurus. Both on the other hand were expected in the epic poet[59] and would have been displayed by Ennius.[60] There is no positive evidence that Ennius brought the worship of Bacchus into any account of poetic inspiration, but we cannot exclude the possibility.[61] The highlighting of the novelty of the theme would have reminded hearers of Ennius' pride in being the first to apply the dactylic hexameter to an account of the Roman past.[62] The propriety of the whole enterprise needed defence not so much against Epicurean philosophers hostile to all poetry as against the connoisseur of poetry who set strict limits to the subject matter appropriate to each genre of the arts: Lucretius accordingly proceeded in 1.931–934 to stress the grandeur of his theme and the spiritual freedom it would bestow on anyone who comprehended it. Against the negative obscurity some might find in this theme he set the positive lucidity and charm of the style. A conventional distinction,[63] which neither furthered nor confuted the case being made. The *suauiloquentia* which Lucretius claimed for himself in 1.945–946 would have recalled that which Ennius had attributed to M. Cornelius Cethegus.[64] In implying, however, in 1.935–950 that his theme was repulsive as well as obscure, that it had the nastiness of curative wormwood, he fell into incoherence. He had just allowed, in 1.926–930, the springs and flowers of certain trackless haunts of the Muses never previously entered by a poet to symbolise the substance of his poem. The Muses protected

59 For the first see Catullus 95.6 (on the *Zmyrna* of Cinna). For the second see Horace, *Serm.* 1.4.43-48.

60 For the first see above, n.52. For the second see Cicero, *Brut.* 71 and *Orat.* 171 (*Ann.* 206-210).

61 Persius, *Prol.* 1-3 and an ancient commentator associate Ennius' dream with Parnassus, a mountain shared by Bacchus with Apollo.

62 *Ann.* 209.

63 Cf. Cicero, *Fin.* 4.1, *Tusc.* 4.33, *Nat. deor.* 1.58.

64 *Ann.* 304-308.

philosophers, even the likes of Epicurus, as well as poets. There could be nothing repulsive or nasty in their haunts. At 3.10–12 Lucretius would talk of feeding on the writings of Epicurus as bees feed on the honey of flowers. He must have been thinking of the content rather than the famously unattractive style of these writings. At 5.20 he would describe Epicurus' doctrine as *dulcia ... solacia uitae*. Likewise at 6.1–6. For the inner Lucretius the atoms and their movements in the void were a theme as attractive as he hoped his verses would be.[65] He would have been driven into the unhappy comparisons of 1.935–950 by a desire to vary the idea of giving spiritual freedom to the hearers of his poem with one of curing their spiritual ills. Memmius and his like were unwilling to give more than a functional value to any intellectual activity. Ennius' *Annales* comforted their prejudices. In 1.935–950 their standpoint usurped Lucretius' own. The conventions of Roman society enchained at least for a moment a free-thinking rebel.

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I have tried in the course of this lecture to persuade you to look from a relatively fresh angle at a very strange work, perhaps the strangest of all those which have come down to us from Latin Antiquity, to look at it less as evidence for the history of Greek philosophy and more as a piece of Latin poetry. I have also tried to raise awkward questions rather than instruct you in facts or virtues. It is false to assert, and cowardly to agree, that enquiry into the classical literatures has reached its limits. You will have picked up certain analogies between the societies of early twentieth-century New South Wales and early first-century B.C. Rome and between the persons of Frederick Augustus Todd and T. Lucretius Carus. Such analogies do not take us far, but they help to focus questions, about Todd as about Lucretius. What Todd

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65 He even spoke of a *labor dulcis* (2.730, 3.419-420).

achieved as a scholar, as a teacher, and as an administrator is worth commemorating in these times. Why he did not, with his talents and his sensibilities, achieve more is a question we should ponder.