

## LUCRETII, CYBELE, AND RELIGION

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FOR A CENTURY, SCHOLARS HAVE BEEN PUZZLED by what they regard as the un-Epicurean flavour of Lucretius' allegorical interpretation of the cult of Cybele in *De Rerum Natura* 2.600 ff., which appears to favour a morality based on religious fear. Patin viewed it as a digression betraying Lucretius' actual enthusiasm for religion ("l'*antilucrece chez Lucrèce*"). Perret and Boyancé attempted rather to explain the passage by postulating that Lucretius had taken it more or less uncritically from another source. Mueller has modified this view substantially by noting that Lucretius does not copy the allegory uncritically, but introduces it in order to reject it.<sup>1</sup> However, it has yet to be appreciated how Lucretius' allegory actually expresses an orthodox Epicurean point of view.

Admittedly, there is conclusive evidence that at least the kernel of the allegory was derived from a source. Similar interpretations of this cult were elaborated by Varro, Ovid, and the Stoic L. Annaeus Cornutus, and all four versions show sufficient correspondences to establish a common source. It is unfortunate, however, that the discovery of these parallels has led scholars to interpret Lucretius from the other sources without fully analyzing how his version differs. In fact, the differences in all four authors are more telling than the similarities. Each author shows not only accidental variations, but a pattern of changes which mould the allegory systematically to express his own point of view. This applies to Lucretius as well, and in the present paper, I shall attempt to understand his version philosophically, and to evaluate it as an Epicurean critique of the Cybele cult.

The systematic alteration of the allegory can be illustrated also from the other authors. Varro's version, for example, is preserved by Augustine (*Civ. Dei* 7.24 B-C). When Varro differs from our other sources, he tends to relate the mythic and ritual manifestations of Magna Mater to the physical earth, which he believes to embody the Divine Spirit. Thus, for him, the processional clangour which Lucretius presents as a powerful incitement of religious awe merely signifies the plying of the earth with metal tools in agriculture. Similarly, only Varro suggests a special meaning for the drum; it

<sup>1</sup>Jacques Perret, "Le mythe de Cybèle," *REL* 13 (1935) 332-357; P. Boyancé, "Une exégèse stoïcienne chez Lucrèce," *REL* 19 (1941) 147-166; G. Mueller, *Die Darstellung der Kinetik bei Lukrez* (Berlin 1959) 43-46. Boyancé subsequently concurred with Mueller's view (*Lucrèce et l'Épicurisme* [Paris 1963] 123 n.), and similar views are advanced, e.g., by David West, *The Imagery and Poetry of Lucretius* (Edinburgh 1964) 103-114, and Erich Ackermann, *Lukrez und der Mythos* (Wiesbaden 1979) 81-94. These works are cited below by author's name.

represents the circular shape of the earth. The geological slant of Varro's allegory is seldom noticed, but it was duly observed by Numminen:

Postquam Tellurem dixit appellari Magnam Matrem, non minus octo profert fabulae locos, quorum tamen omnes ad terram, nullum ad matrem spectare vult.<sup>2</sup>

Varro and Cornutus both offer mainly the rather crude type of physical allegory which was especially common in the Stoic school. Indeed, Cornutus' book<sup>3</sup> was a Stoic school-book, and it was largely from this work that Boyancé concluded that Lucretius used a Stoic source. However, Cornutus' allegory differs not only from Lucretius' treatment, which is mostly ethical rather than physical, but even from Varro's. Cornutus treats the Mother Goddess within a physical interpretation of cosmogonic myth, equating her with Rhea. After a Greek pun linking Rhea with rain, the noise of the procession is interpreted as representing thunder. The rest of Cornutus' version continues in this vein, with the cosmogonic myth of Zeus' descent from Rhea and Uranus—mentioned only briefly by the other allegorists—subjected to a detailed allegoresis.

Ovid's version (*Fasti* 4.179–372) is commonly cited for its verbal echoes of Lucretius, but Ovid's own interest in Cybele is ignored. I shall examine Ovid's interest in some detail, since it will yield important comparisons with Lucretius. The *Fasti* was Ovid's first attempt to write "serious" poetry, i.e., imperial propaganda. The calendar is used to celebrate Rome's greatness by idealizing her past. Some of the most moving portions of the work involve nationalistic rather than what we should call religious sentiments, such as admiration for the virtues of the Roman ancestors whose stories are narrated. Although Ovid recounts Greek aetiological myths, Schilling found that he would readily subordinate these myths in favour of Roman ritual traditions.<sup>4</sup> In addition, Ovid strives whenever possible to offer Roman aetiologies as well, even juxtaposing them with better known Greek myths—a principle which he proclaims explicitly (2.359 *Adde peregrinis causas, mea Musa, latinas*). Now, Cybele was not a Roman goddess; yet hers had been the first Asiatic cult to be recognized by Rome, and Augustus had formally restored it to emphasize the Roman link with Troy (Phrygia). Hence, this cult posed a very special case for Ovid. Whereas Lucretius criticized the theological assumptions of the cult, Ovid wished to authenticate it as a Roman cult, and, in particular, to mark its Roman origins and precedents.

Ovid's allegory is presented by a divine informant, the muse Erato. This is a convention which Ovid employs throughout the *Fasti*. However, the way in which Erato is introduced seems to signal a deliberate response to Lucre-

<sup>2</sup>P. Numminen, "Severa mater," *Arctos* 3 (1962) 143–166, at 151.

<sup>3</sup>Cornuti *Theologiae Graecae Compendium*, ed. C. Lang (Liepzig 1881) c. 6–7.

<sup>4</sup>R. Schilling, "Ovide, interprète de la religion Romaine," *REL* 46 (1968) 222–235.

tius, who, as we shall see, stressed the dreadful superstition of the cult. Lucretius had described the ritual procession as a frightening jangle intended to inspire religious fear. Ovid's procession begins with a clamour reminiscent of Lucretius' description, with Ovid in the role of Lucretius' frightened spectators, daunted by the noise (189–190); but in Erato he obtains an authorized interpreter who will allay his fears with an authoritative statement of the allegory.

Ovid makes clear from the start that he is concerned specifically with the Roman festival. For example, whereas Lucretius views the offerings and flowers showered on the procession as the response of frightened spectators (below, 258), Ovid justifies the offerings as a levy to construct Cybele's Roman temple, and the flowers express joy at her arrival in that city (346, 350–352). Ovid even adds an allegorical interpretation of such items as the visits to exchange gifts and the date of the Megalesian Games (353 ff.)—Roman features not mentioned by the other allegorists.

Indeed, whereas Cornutus, for example, treats at greater length the cosmogonic myth to fill out his physical interpretation, Ovid employs the allegorical material as a mere frame for a central panel highlighting purely Roman traditions, which are largely derived from Livy's account of the Roman importation of the goddess. This panel has particular literary interest and merit, and it deserves a separate study, which it has never received. Ovid takes Claudia Quinta, of whom Livy (29.14.12) merely states that her dubious reputation was improved by her participation in the ceremonial reception of the goddess, as his heroine for an imaginative and dramatic story of ancestral Roman virtue. Indeed, in Ovid's version, Claudia becomes an unconventional character, whose vindication strikes a characteristically Ovidian, and very untraditional, anti-moralistic note.<sup>5</sup> Yet at the same time, Ovid does not neglect the task which is the focus of his version of the allegory. Roman precedents for details of the Cybelean ritual such as the washing of the statue (339) are woven into the narrative. For example, Claudia's gestures before Cybele reproduce the motions of ritual penitents.<sup>6</sup> Ovid even finds an opportunity to reassert the Roman patriotic fantasy of Trojan descent (272).

Thus Ovid, Varro, and Cornutus each develop their own themes. Indeed, such revisions follow naturally from the philosophical presuppositions of ancient allegory. An allegorist did not set out to understand his subject independently of his own expectations. Allegory usually served to legitimate the beliefs of the allegorist by establishing an ancient precedent, or conversely, e.g., to rescue Homer from the criticisms of a more sophisticated age by ascribing to him later beliefs. In either case, the allegorist would assume the

<sup>5</sup>See esp. *Fasti* 4.309–310, *cultus et ornatis varie prodisse capillis / obfuit, ad rigidos promptaque lingua senes*.

<sup>6</sup>Silvana Fasce, *Attis e il culto metroaco a Roma* (Genoa 1979) 70.

right to find whatever meaning his own theory led him to expect, confident that this was the "true" meaning.

For this reason, the postulations of allegorists were quaintly arbitrary. Of course, allegory was a philosophical technique, and philosophers should be expected to interpret myths in terms of their own theories. However, while we might now expect them to consider also the historical character of a myth, the allegorists usually had no interest in historical accuracy. Some assumed that myths were fashioned with prophetic wisdom, and discrepancies existed only to conceal the meaning which they sought. We shall see that Lucretius did not share this assumption, but he too did not hesitate to understand the cult purely on the basis of his own principles.

To him, as to the other interpreters, it would have seemed pointless to reproduce "accurately" the postulations of another allegorist; for each author viewed only his own interpretation as authentic. The common source regarding Cybele was never simply copied. Varro and Cornutus—and I believe, Lucretius—interpreted the cult solely on the basis of their own philosophies. Only Ovid was interested in the history of the cult, and even his interest was not unbiased. Consequently, we cannot reconstruct the common source sufficiently to help. Nor should other allegorists be used indiscriminately to "explain" Lucretius, as those scholars do who conclude from Ovid's Roman emphasis that Lucretius was describing a specifically Roman ritual, or from Cornutus' Stoicism that Lucretius was offering a Stoic allegory.<sup>7</sup> Instead, we should contrast Lucretius with the other allegorists, and seek to understand his viewpoint from the pattern of his deviations.

The first few items of Lucretius' allegory correspond approximately with our other sources. The conventional portrayal of the goddess seated in a chariot signifies that the earth is suspended in space; the lions harnessed to her chariot show that even her wildest offspring are subordinate to her parental authority; and the mural crown on her head recalls the mountain sites of fortified towns. The crown is related to citadels also by Ovid, Varro, and Cornutus, and the wildness of the lions is mentioned by these authors.

<sup>7</sup>Boyancé's thesis that the common source used by Lucretius and the other authors was Stoic has met greater deference than his arguments merit. The Stoics were leading allegorists and the use of this source in Cornutus' manual shows that they were interested in the Cybele allegory. Yet Lucretius cites "old Greek poets" (600). It is true that he regularly uses this expression in connection with myths which he refutes (5.405 and 6.754), and that this designation seems to serve not so much to identify his sources as to categorize them in an unreliable class. Nevertheless, they are called "poets," and in the only case in which the source is known (6.754) it was in fact a poet—Callimachus (see Bailey's commentary *ad loc.*). It is interesting in this regard that Lucretius' description of the Curetes in 635–639 has been observed to correspond with certain verses of Callimachus (see Robert D. Brown, "Lucretius and Callimachus," *ICS* 7 [1982] 86–87); for with respect to this item, Lucretius' allegory corresponds with Ovid's, and probably with the source.

However, the respective emphases of different authors are already recognizable. Thus, Cornutus, extending his earth/rain pun, points out that rain comes from the mountains and lions are mountain animals. The leonine *pietas* is Lucretius' nuance; in other versions, the lions are not said to be subordinated to *parental* authority, but simply to Cybele's.

However, in 608 there is an abrupt change of scene. The poet shifts from past to present and begins what seems to be an eye-witness account of the ritual—a vivid picture of a loud, rhythmic procession. At the same time, he extends the allegorical interpretation, but now the symbolism is attributed no longer to the source described as “old Greek poets” in 600, but to contemporary adherents of the cult throughout the world (*variae gentes* 610).<sup>8</sup> Moreover, it is this part of the allegory that contains supposedly “antilucretian” elements.

Patin and others who favoured the “*antilucretè*” theory took these changes as a signal that Lucretius had departed from his source in 608, to give his own description of the cult. Since this would mean that Lucretius himself composed the suspect portions of the allegory, they concluded that he must have approved of the un-Epicurean features. In contrast, Mueller and most recent scholars, citing the occurrence of the allegory in other sources, conclude that the entire allegory must be taken from Lucretius' source, and they note that Lucretius attempts to dissociate himself from the un-Epicurean features.

I shall argue that Lucretius did compose this section, because it is precisely here that his version differs from the others; however, he does not approve of the un-Epicurean features, but rather ascribes them to the worshippers of Cybele.

Overall, Lucretius' allegory consistently develops one specific theme. In 610–628, Lucretius interprets four items: (1) the pun on *fruges* and Phrygia; (2) the castrated priests or *galli*; (3) the music and ritual weapons; and (4) the flowers and offerings. He relates all of these, except the first, to the use of fear to enforce the virtue of *pietas*. The *galli* are interpreted as an expression of contempt for filial ingratitude; their castration is a veiled threat of punishment. The threat becomes explicit in Lucretius' interpretation of the ritual weapons, and the offerings are seen as the cowed response of the spectators. Eventually, the celebrants will suggest that the goddess herself enjoins *pietas*

<sup>8</sup>It has been disputed whether Lucretius describes the cult as it existed generally, or only at Rome. However, the only certain indications pointing to the Roman cult are taken from Ovid, who had a specific interest in Rome. It is absurd to take Lucretius' words *per magnas terras* (608) and *magnas per urbis* (624) as a restrictive reference to Rome (as does, e.g., Ackermann, 88); these expressions show that Lucretius was interpreting the cult universally. Also, taken together, these two expressions are hardly consistent with the view of Numminen (above, n. 2, 146) and Schrijvers (*Horror ac voluptas: Études sur la poétique et la poésie de Lucrèce* [Amsterdam 1970] 201) that Lucretius is describing a specifically urban cult.

(641). This is a unified thesis, developed by a single author; and neither this thesis nor the same interpretation of any of these items can be found in any other source.

Ackermann hypothesizes that Lucretius "contaminates" the allegory with a Roman source which is responsible for the emphasis on *pietas* (92). Certainly this emphasis is uniquely Roman. The various duties which are mentioned—filial obedience, religious piety, and patriotism—signify a single concept only in Latin. Yet no other Latin version shows the influence of Ackermann's alleged source. Indeed, Ovid, who specifically set out to link this cult with Roman values, associates it not with *pietas*, but with chastity—a choice determined not by the traditional character of Cybele or of her cult,<sup>9</sup> but by Ovid's theme of Claudia's chastity. Similarly, it is Lucretius' context and interests that elicit the emphasis on *pietas*, which links religion with parenthood. The generative function of the Earth is an important feature of Lucretius' own poetic vision. He colours the atomic universe with a biological metaphor, in which Earth holds a key position in the cycle of life and death. Hence Lucretius repeatedly insists<sup>10</sup> that it is justified to call the Earth "mother." When Cybele is discussed, he has introduced this theme for the very first time, and explained it scientifically. It is a suitable occasion to dispose of an improper view of Earth's maternity.

Given the conventions of ancient allegory, and the precise relevance of the *pietas* theme to Lucretius' context, it seems inappropriate to postulate a second unknown source. More importantly, such a source would not explain Lucretius. Once again, comparison with Ovid is instructive. Ovid's Roman material originates from Livy, but it is completely altered, and the emphasis on chastity is entirely Ovid's.<sup>11</sup> On the existing evidence we must conclude that Lucretius has departed from his source in 608, and that this discussion of *pietas* and fear somehow expresses his own viewpoint. Patin accurately saw this transition. It is the natural reading of the text, and it is corroborated by the absence of parallel material in the other allegorists.

On the other hand, it is incredible that Lucretius should not only accept the exploitation of religious fear but at the same time deliberately emphasize it. For the element of fear is stressed constantly by the poetry of his description, as if to emphasize Lucretius' disapproval. Robin grasped admirably the import of this strain: "tous les éléments de la procession tendent à imprimer au coeur des hommes ces sentiments de terreur et d'angoisse qui sont l'essence

<sup>9</sup>Bömer (commentary on *Fasti* 4.324) notes that "chaste" was not a usual epithet of Cybele; but Ovid applies it to her to complement Claudia's chastity (324 *castas casta sequere manus*).

<sup>10</sup>Cf. 2.990 ff., 2.1150–1153, 5.319–321, 5.795 ff., and 5.821 ff.

<sup>11</sup>For example, Ovid stages a dramatic confrontation between Claudia and Cybele as the fulfillment of an oracular directive that the goddess should be greeted by "chaste hands" (*Fasti* 4.260) on her arrival. In Livy, the oracle had called for a *vir optimus* (29.11.6), and a man led the group that received her; Claudia was only one of a group of female participants.

même de la religion" (*ad* 609). The impression that Lucretius approves of this fear arose from the fact that it is associated with all the conventional duties of *pietas*.<sup>12</sup> The Great Mother is opposed to filial ingratitude (615), and favours patriotism and family pride (641–643). Actually, the very conventionality of these values should warn us that they are not Lucretius'. It is instructive in this regard to glance at the other contexts in which *pietas* is mentioned in the *De Rerum Natura*. Whenever Lucretius refers to this virtue, we find him correcting conventional misconceptions regarding it. Thus, in 2.1170, the tired farmer thinks that former generations coped with smaller plots because of their *pietas*, and fails to grasp that, in reality, he needs more land because the aged earth is less productive. In 3.82–86, Lucretius pleads with the ambitious statesmen of his day because they do not understand how their own fear of death is subverting social virtues. Finally, in 5.1198, he writes his famous protestation against Roman ritualism, *nec pietas ulla est velatum saepe videri . . . omnis accedere ad aras*.

Scholars who maintain that Lucretius took the entire allegory from previous sources have argued that he dissociates himself from the *pietas* elements by reporting all of these beliefs and practices in the third person plural (after *variae gentes: vocitent, edunt, attribuunt*, etc.—see Ackermann 86). Certainly this syntax implies that he does not advocate these beliefs. However, it need not signify that he is repeating this material from a source. Lucretius is simply offering his own interpretation of the cult. The worshippers are seen as advocating a conventional misconception of *pietas*, which Lucretius will afterwards correct.

Ackermann has called attention to the fact that Lucretius has a special way of using allegory (so, briefly, already West 103). Whereas the Stoics, who respected the classical poets and sought to reconcile them with their own world-view, championed allegorical interpretation to reveal Stoic truths in myths, Epicurus eschewed the method, since he saw no value in the poets. Lucretius, however, uses allegory to discredit the poets by revealing errors in their myths. The chief example analyzed by Ackermann is Lucretius' reduction of the myths of Acheron to symbols of the suffering resulting from irrational fear and desire in the present life. In that case, Lucretius suggests the reality behind the myths; however, he assumes that this reality was understood only by Epicurus, and not by the poets.

<sup>12</sup>An important exception is Schrijvers (above, n. 8, 54 f.), who interprets the passage in relation to his thesis that Lucretius uses the wonders of the world to lead the reader to a contemplative perception of the universe. He believes that Lucretius admires the procession as such a wonder ("*fascinans*" and "*tremendum*"). This general thesis relates to an important aspect of Lucretius' poem, but in applying it to Cybele, Schrijvers loses sight of a critical distinction elaborated by E. St.-Denis ("Lucrèce, poète de l'infini," *Inform. litt.* 20 [1963] 17–24): The contemplative *horror* of Lucretius' poetic vision rests on the security afforded by Epicurus' discoveries. It is experienced with calm serenity and it is completely incompatible with the upsetting terror of Cybele's cult.

Of course, this Lucretian style of allegory differs radically from conventional allegory. Although both Lucretius and, e.g., the Stoics found whatever meaning they wished, the Stoics based this licence on the assumption that the mythic poets had prophetic knowledge of the (Stoic) truth. Lucretius is debunking the mythical tradition. He assumes the ignorance rather than the wisdom of the poets, and his allegory sounds a sarcastic rather than a solemn note. Indeed, since the prophetic wisdom of the myths was the logical underpinning of serious allegory, perhaps Lucretius' technique should rather be described as pseudo-allegory.

At any rate, another tactic for an Epicurean "allegorist" seeking to discredit myth would be to interpret the intended meaning of a myth precisely as those false beliefs which an Epicurean would expect from myth—i.e., to assume not ignorance, but error. This is what Lucretius does in our passage. His interpretation attributes to the cult a misconceived design to inculcate *pietas* through fear.

Although the pun on Phrygia does not relate directly to this thesis, it signals Lucretius' technique. Cybele's followers, Lucretius tells us, give her a Phrygian escort because they claim that grain (*fruges*) was first grown there (612). This interpretation is Lucretius' choice, since it does not appear in any of the other allegorists. However, it is not Lucretius' belief; he elsewhere accepts the tradition that agriculture came from Athens (6.1–2). Lucretius is interpreting the cult as fallacious.

If we assume, first, that the inculcation of *pietas* through fear is the main theme of Lucretius' allegory, and secondly, that Lucretius does not approve it, but ascribes it to the cult, then much of the confusion in interpreting this text will be resolved.

Lines 614–618 explain the *galli* as a symbolic condemnation of filial ingratitude. In a historical interpretation—i.e., in an interpretation based on the actual traditions of the cult, rather than on the philosophical presuppositions of the interpreter—we might expect a reference to Attis. Scholars who have this expectation are puzzled by the plural *ingrati* in 615. Benario, for example, takes this as referring to the *galli* themselves, whom he thinks Lucretius condemns as overzealous.<sup>13</sup> But the condemnation is in indirect discourse; it is not Lucretius' judgment, but one which he ascribes to the cultists, and the subject is plural because the clause expresses a general law. If we compare our sources, only Ovid actually relates the *galli* to Attis (*Fasti* 4.221–246). Cornutus relates them not to Attis' castration, but—in keeping with his cosmogonic interest—to that of Uranus; and Varro devises a far-fetched interpretation to relate them to the Earth (*qui semine indigeant, terram sequi oportere; in ea quippe omnia reperiri, Civ. Dei* 7.24 B). Similarly, Lucretius is not concerned with Attis, but with the general admonition against impiety which he ascribes to the cult.

<sup>13</sup>H. W. Benario, "Lucretius 2.615," *CP* 68 (1973) 127–128.



In 618–623, Lucretius alludes to the frenzy of the orgiastic rite (*stimulat mentis . . . violenti furoris*) and infers that this excitement intimidates the spectators into religious loyalty by a show of force (623 *quae possint numine divae*). “Therefore” (*ergo* 624) the spectators shower the procession with flowers and offerings. This suggestion that the flowers are elicited by fear is hardly convincing. It led Giussani to rearrange the text; and when Ovid takes the flowers as an expression of joy at the arrival of the goddess (*Fasti* 4.346) he too may be righting Lucretius’ assertion. Nonetheless, that even the flowers manifest religious fear is a logical—perhaps the only logical—conclusion of the interpretation which Lucretius is developing.

The reference to the Greek name of the Curetes in 629 may signal a momentary return to the “old Greek poets.” For Lucretius concedes an alternative interpretation of the Curetes: either they represent the dancers who covered up the wailing of the new-born Zeus, or they signify the admonition of the goddess to fight for national and family honour. The first alternative corresponds with Ovid (*Fasti* 4.210) and reflects the common identification of Cybele with Rhea. The second appears only in Lucretius, and like his explanation of the flowers, it advances his thesis but actually sounds far-fetched. Perhaps Lucretius mentions the orthodox interpretation to vary his account and enhance its credibility. However, it also serves his purpose poetically, because the frightening din of the mythic dance and Jove’s cries is juxtaposed with the alleged admonition of the goddess (641 *divam praedicere*).

From an Epicurean point of view, it is at this point that the cult is most objectionable; for here the celebrants ascribe their concern directly to the goddess—a concern which, incidentally, this time involves that aspect of conventional *pietas* with which Epicureans were least sympathetic (i.e., political action). At the same time, Lucretius draws the din and terror to a climax. The striking image *sanguine laeti* (631), alluding to such practises of the *galli* as whipping themselves into a frenzy and sprinkling their blood,<sup>14</sup> shows their ecstatic seizure in a chilling light. Line 632 (*terrificas capitum quatientes numine cristas*) is verbally identical with 5.1315, except that *numine*—which must refer to the “enthusiasm” of the dancers—becomes *undique* in that verse.<sup>15</sup> The comparison is revealing; the context in Book 5 is a

<sup>14</sup>*laeti* is generally accepted as the most likely emendation for *flaeti*. It has been taken to refer to excitement rather than actual bleeding, but the latter was a familiar phenomenon in Cybele’s cult, and this phrase is used by Ovid in a context where it clearly means blood (the crude justice of Romulus and Remus *latronum sanguine laeti*, *Fasti* 3.63).

<sup>15</sup>The word *crista* is a zoological term for a lion’s mane (E. L. B. M. Davies, “Notes on Lucretius, Ovid, and Lucan,” *Mnemosyne* 2 [1949] 72–78, at 74). Hence it augments the terror when applied to the long hair of the priests.

Many have agreed with Giussani (*ad loc.*) that *numine* is used here in the sense of “nodding.” Since only this word differs in 5.1315, either *undique* must have been inappropriate for the dancers in 2.632, or *numine* for the lions in 5.1315. If *undique* were unsuitable, but “nodding”

scene so frenzied that it tempted Bailey to concur with St. Jerome that Lucretius was mad.

It is to this suggestion that Cybele enjoins *pietas* that Lucretius responds in 644–651 by referring to the calm indifference of Epicurean deity. This text is not an afterthought, but the poetic, as well as the philosophical, antithesis of the description of the ritual. Poetically, the uproar of the terrible procession is dispelled by the tranquillity of Epicurean divinity. Philosophically, the religion of fear is rejected. Indeed, poetry and philosophy in Lucretius' critique of Cybele's cult are complementary to an extent which has seldom been appreciated. The excitement of the procession is expressed poetically not only by the music, dance, and images, but also by repeated references to the pounding beat (*numero* 620, in *numerus* 631 and 637). The antithetical motif of quiet relieves this rhythm at the conclusion, but it emerges also briefly in a powerful glimpse in the midst of the procession. Line 625, *munificat tacita mortalis muta salute*, is set apart by the shift of subject to the goddess, as well as by her conspicuous silence.<sup>16</sup> The importance of the change of subject was perceived by West.<sup>17</sup> Cybele only gives her blessing; it is the noisy celebrants who advocate the errors of the allegory. When we have grasped the philosophical import of this observation, we shall understand why Lucretius fashions the allegory as he does.

We might expect an Epicurean to oppose the exploitation of religious fear; however, Lucretius does not object that the fear inspired by the cult is unhealthy for Man (although he would agree), but that such interests are unsuited to a goddess (646–651). For the basic error of religion was the ascription of any interest in human affairs to gods. Thus, in 6.68 ff., Lucretius warns that unless we give up thinking unworthy things of the gods, we ourselves shall suffer. Epicurus' *Letter to Menoeceus* (123) declares that true impiety consists in "tacking onto" our true concept of the gods false opinions regarding human interests which are incompatible with their immortal bliss. And the *Letter to Herodotus* (81) states that the greatest trouble for human souls comes from believing that gods have such interests. Both for

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apt, this would be because the dancers did *not* toss their heads wildly like lions, but in a restrained gesture. But in fact they did toss their heads wildly (cf. Ovid *Fasti* 4.244 *iactatis . . . comis*). On the other hand, if *numine* refers to their "enthusiasm," it would be inapplicable to the lions.

<sup>16</sup>There has been some controversy as to whether 625 is ironic. Giussani so views it (*ad loc.*), whereas Mueller insists that it is completely devoid of irony. As the entire passage is a "pseudo-allegory" to discredit the mythology of the cult we should expect some irony, and 625 is certainly an ironic touch. However it is not openly sarcastic; for that would have interfered with the serious depiction of the cult as a dangerous incitement of religious fear. The irony is poetic, not rhetorical; it arises from the situation itself.

<sup>17</sup>West 113. West imagines Lucretius apart from the crowd, enjoying a contemplative communion with the goddess. This is an entirely gratuitous speculation, but otherwise he understands well the meaning of the verse.

the individual and in the history of civilization, the bane of superstitious fear originates in this mistake. As a matter of disinterested curiosity, the gods' preoccupations held little interest for Epicurus or Lucretius. Their overriding concern was for the anxiety which resulted from embracing false beliefs in this regard.

The interpretation of the celebrants as ascribing a concern for human *pietas* to the goddess exploits the allegorical convention (Lucretius sees what he expects to see) conformably with Epicurean principles (the cultists are wrong). It presents the cult as a model of religious error. The worshippers are shown committing the infamous mistake responsible for Man's anxiety. That is why the allegory is appropriately orchestrated with a powerful description of the animated terror of the ritual. The description of the cult is like a motion picture of superstitious fear in action, and it is only after its dread force has been displayed that Lucretius counters with his critical response.

If Lucretius' treatment of Cybele's cult can be faulted, it is not because he loses sight of Epicurean principles (as in the "*antilucrèce*" hypothesis), but because he bears them too well in mind. The *pietas* allegory can be properly understood only in the light of the Epicurean principles which I have just recalled. It neither corresponds with the traditional allegory followed in the lines before 608 and reflected in other sources, nor with the actual character of the cult (see below, 261), but simply applies the standard Epicurean analysis of religious error to the cult of Mother Earth; i.e., it adapts an orthodox Epicurean view to a characteristically Lucretian context. It is extremely improbable that such an adaptation was contrived by anyone other than Lucretius.

Lucretius' response begins with a concession which "antilucrétian" interpreters read as a recognition of the value of the religious ethic, and which other scholars take as proof that the entire allegory came from another source:

*Quae bene et eximie quamvis disposta ferantur,  
longe sunt tamen a vera ratione repulsa.* (644-645)

What is conceded here is not the ethics of the cult, but the sophistication of the symbolism; for *disposta*—which was used, e.g., in rhetoric for the arrangement of the parts of a discourse—refers to a deliberate contriving of the allegory. Yet this need not be a reference to any literary source. The implicit agent of *ferantur* at this point in the text is not the "old Greek poets," but all adherents of the cult (*variae gentes*). Indeed, for us, a certain awkwardness arises from the coupling of *disposta*, implying deliberate symbolism, with the impersonal, public tradition indicated by *ferantur* with such an agent. But this is only the same awkwardness which we feel in reading any allegorical interpreter: even though Lucretius' allegory is based

exclusively upon his own presuppositions, he presents it as reliably expressing the intentions of the worshippers and the traditions of their cult.

Lucretius' use of allegory to interpret this cult as an example of what Epicurus found objectionable in religion was a clever mimicry and exploitation of the arbitrary allegorical technique; but as an Epicurean response to the reality of this particular cult it was inadequate. In fact, it betrays a weakness of Epicureanism.

Epicureans viewed the fear of death and religious fear as the greatest sources of anxiety, and undertook with missionary zeal to free their contemporaries of these fears. In the fear of death itself—the question of mortality—they addressed an ultimate concern of all ages, which elicited Epicurus' incisive logic and Lucretius' psychological sensitivity. In contrast, their discussion of religious fear was largely preoccupied with the tradition of mythological poetry. The plight of Iphigeneia, however passionately enlivened by Lucretius' presentation, was dated for his readers, as it is for us; and opponents of the school did not fail to notice this weakness.<sup>18</sup>

A fair evaluation of the opponents' criticism is difficult, because we should have to assess how much anxiety traditional religion caused in Hellenistic Greece and in the Late Republic. However, it can at least be said that the Epicureans were not addressing *all* of the religious anxieties of their contemporaries if they failed to grasp the special role of the mystery cults. Cybele's priests did not mutilate themselves to give an example of anything, but in a frenzy of ecstatic devotion; and the bloody rites to which Lucretius alludes were only voluntary consequences of the ecstasy. Although these features were suppressed in the official Roman cult, the success of this restraint was only limited. If the emotions which had always marked the Phrygian cult could be revived to make Cybele's a leading religion under the Empire, they must have persisted in some fashion under the Republic. Fasce has suggested that an unofficial, more authentic, "ethnic" celebration of the ritual was permitted (above, note 6, 44–46, 51), and Wiseman<sup>19</sup> has gathered evidence of the incidence of "suppressed" cult features, as well as the sinister light in which they were perceived by educated Romans. In any case, Lucretius' descriptive allusions show that he was aware of the orgiastic features of the authentic ritual.

Lucretius gives an excellent external picture of the frenzy of the ritual, but his allegations of moral intimidation do not touch the kind of religious obsession associated with the mystery cults. It was not fear of punishment for transgressions, but a more intrinsic danger, which was better grasped by Catullus and Euripides. Both Catullus' poem 63 (which seems to treat the

<sup>18</sup>Cicero is often cited (*Tusc. Disp.* 1.21.48).

<sup>19</sup>T. P. Wiseman, "Cybele, Virgil and Augustus," ap. *Poetry and Politics in the Age of Augustus* (Cambridge 1984), eds. Tony Woodman and David West, 117–120.

myth of Cybele independently of Lucretius as well as of the allegorical tradition) and Euripides' *Bacchae* portray the ecstatic loss of self-control as leading to self-inflicted disaster (Attis' castration/Agave's murder of Pentheus).<sup>20</sup> Surely a philosophy with tranquillity as its ethical goal and science as its means of liberation ought to have shared this distrust of ecstatic religion. In this regard, Catullus' poem, in which the narrator concludes with a shudder at the power of Cybele and a resolution to avoid such madness, was a more aware contemporary statement of Epicurean sentiment than the school's attack on mythic threats of punishment.

Unfortunately, the orthodoxy of the Epicureans kept them from elaborating new analyses of religious anxiety to supplement the master's critique of religion. And Epicurus himself, following Plato, had looked backward and reacted primarily against the mythology of the classical Greek poets.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Interestingly, both poets also associate ecstatic madness with a loss of masculinity (castration/Pentheus' cross-dressing) and of freedom (Attis) or dominance (Pentheus). Thus, the new religions are seen as threatening the fundamental classical values of reason, restraint, free status, and male dominance.

<sup>21</sup>I am obliged to Roger Beck for helpful comments and to Alexander Dalzell and his graduate students at the University of Toronto for a meticulous, genial, and constructive discussion of an earlier version of this paper.