VI.—Lucretius 1.1–49

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The diverse problems posed by Lucretius' first proem are notoriously manifold.[1] For nearly a century now, and almost as vigorously in our own times as in those of Brieger and Giussani, a number of scholars have concentrated their attention upon questions related to the proem's structure and composition.[2] Starting with the assumption that the poem as we have it is unfinished — the degree of incompleteness is obligingly indeterminable[3] — and

[1] This paper is a part of a tentatively projected collection of essays on the *De rerum natura*. When reference is made below to the need for a special treatment of a matter, it is to be assumed that this matter will be discussed in some detail in the contemplated essays.

Abbreviations used below: Sellar = W. Y. Sellar, *The Roman Poets of the Republic*[3] (Oxford 1905). Regenbogen = O. Regenbogen, *Lukrez. Seine Gestalt in seinem Gedicht* (Leipzig 1932). Bignone = E. Bignone, *Storia della letteratura latina*, vol. 2 (Firenze 1945). Logre = J. Logre, *L'anxiété de Lucrèce* (Paris 1946). Bailey = C. Bailey, *Titi Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura*, 3 vol. (Oxford 1947). DeWitt = N. W. DeWitt, *Epicurus and his Philosophy* (Minneapolis 1954).

I should like here to thank my friend and student, Mr. Henry Steele Commager, Jr., for the insight his many penetrating observations on the poem have given me.

[2] For bibliography, see Bailey 2.585, note 1, and add: L. Perelli, "Il piano originario del poema lucreziano alla luce del suo svolgimento ideale," *RFIC* 25 (1947) 18–43; P. Merlan, "Lucretius — Primitivist or Progressivist?" *Journ. Hist. Ideas* 11 (1950) 364–68; H. Diller, "Die Prooemien des Lukrez und die Entstehung des lukrezischen Gedichts," *StItal* 25 (1951) 5–30; K. Büchner, "Die Proömien des Lukrez," *ClMed* 13 (1952) 159–235. I have not had an opportunity to examine G. Barra's *Struttura e composizione del 'De rerum natura' di Lucrezio* (Napoli 1952).

[3] Contrary to the hopeful view of J. van der Valk, *De Lucretiano carmine a poeta perfecto et absoluto* (Diss., 1902), Regenbogen 79 is probably right, albeit a bit dramatic, in holding that "Die letzte Hand konnte der Dichter nicht mehr anlegen. Der Tod, den er vielleicht freiwillig suchte, machte allem Planen und Schaffen ein Ende." But we have no way of determining what Lucretius' plans were nor how much a final revision would have changed what we now have. When we speak of the "unfinished" character of the poem, we should be careful not to think in Augustan or post-Augustan terms, but rather of Lucretius' poetic predecessors in the Latin canon. We should remember, too, that, as almost every critic stresses, the material within each book is well organized; that, besides the summaries of topics already treated and about to be treated which appear at the start of the books, the poet is careful, too, every now and then to give summaries in the middle of books, when needed (e.g. 5.772 ff.); that there are frequent cross-references (see Bailey 1.34, following Mussehl); that the poet often speaks of his own toil (e.g. 1.52; 1.142; 2.730; 3.419; 4.969–70); that he clearly refers to Book 6 as the final goal (6.92); that he is specific about polishing his verses (e.g. 1.933–34 and 6.82–83); that he was concerned about the ordering of his material (e.g.

relying upon the fact that in places our manuscripts have mixed up lines, these scholars have devoted themselves to what we might call the "archaeological" approach. By sorting out such strata as a "Memmius-proem" or an "Epicurus-proem," and by digging about for what they think to be the original and later arrangements of various sections, they "return victoriously" to tell us what Lucretius

2.1013 f. and 5.64); and that the present arrangement of the books, with its carefully articulated three groups of two books each, is almost surely not that in which they were composed — from which fact we learn a good deal about the author's fairly final and deliberate efforts.

The post-Lachmann arguments for the poem's extensively incomplete state, when examined, are not overly convincing (though obviously some books and passages are more polished than others; see K. Büchner, "Beobachtungen über Vers und Gedankengang bei Lukrez," *Hermes* Einzelschr. Heft 1 [1936] 47–103). Cicero's letter (*Q. fr.* 2.9.3) need not imply that Lucretius was dead in Feb., 54; on this passage, see F. H. Sandbach, "*Lucreti Poemata* and the Poet's Death," *CR* 54 (1940) 72–77. St. Jerome's notice, whatever be the date we believe it implies for the poet's death and whether or not we believe the notice at all (and I myself am much persuaded to the contrary by K. Ziegler, "Der Tod des Lucretius," *Hermes* 71 [1936] 421–40), does not say that Lucretius died before he had finished his work.

As for internal evidence, in general the stylistic analysis of Büchner (*op. cit.*) has taught us not to consider the abrupt transitions as evidence of incompleteness but as entirely characteristic. This poet writes in chunks, and he was not particularly interested, as his introductory particles show, in linking the chunks together. But his basic sequence of thought and emotion is usually perfectly clear. Hence many or most of the hitherto assumed *lacunae* have been convincingly explained away, and of those that remain, the majority should doubtless be fathered upon the scribes and the malignity of time. The same is even more true for what earlier critics had considered interpolations, and one is grateful that the extreme views on interpolation of G. Jachmann, "Eine Elegie des Properz — ein Überlieferungsschicksal," *RhM* 84 (1935) 210–28, have not, so far as I know, invaded recent Lucretian criticism. As for repetitions, we should remember that, at least in regard to the longest (1.926–50 and 4.1–25), antiquity knew the lines in both places (see Bailey 2.757–58), and that the fact that the poet often meaningfully varies single words in such repetitions argues for his intention to repeat a passage. Bignone 155 points out, too, that Lucretius would have found precedent for such iterations in Empedocles and Epicurus. We might add, too, that repetition is obviously to be expected in any didactic work.

As for the most powerful arguments for the poem's fairly incomplete state, the *largo sermone* (5.155) might be explained away by assuming either that the poet simply forgot his promise or that, if Book 5 were indeed composed before Book 3 (see Bailey 1.32–37 and esp. 35), then he had fulfilled the promise in 3.18–22. This description, I grant, is brief. But, if one wants to avoid technical aspects of the gods' "nature," as I believe Lucretius did (see note 10), and to keep merely to their "peaceful existence," it is hard to see how one could be lengthy (especially a man of Lucretius' militant temperament). I suggest, however, that by this phrase the poet meant another, quite separate and esoteric work which he had projected for those who had passed beyond the exoteric elementary instruction. As for the knotty case of the doublets in the fourth proem, perhaps here we should wonder — as I suspect we should wonder more often in the case of this sort of textual difficulty — whether the trouble did not begin with the author himself. If Cicero (*Att.* 16.6.4) could insert in

first wrote, then what changes he made, and finally — to make his sequence of thought and mood conform with theirs — what changes he probably would have made had he lived to make them. But since it has been obvious from the steadying work of Vahlen back in 1877 and of Diels in 1918 that, despite abrupt transitions, we almost surely do not deal in the first proem with the possibility of chance transpositions, and is now obvious too, thanks to the studies on 1.44–49 carried out by Bignone in 1919 and later by Regenbogen and particularly by Friedländer, that we have here no case of conscious or fortuitous interpolation, and since it is equally clear that the first proem is a proem not just to Book 1 but to the whole poem and that that poem is now imperfect to a degree which we cannot reckon, such archaeological approaches seem of little value. In the end, whether devoted to the first proem or to other passages, they tell us next to nothing about what the text means or how it may have come to have this or that meaning. They simply give us fairly subjective hypotheses about the text's biography[4] — no more helpful in the case of this poem than hypotheses about its author's life — and we are left with these melancholy alternatives: either Lucretius left the poem unfinished (and then we may conclude that it might have been a better poem had he finished it), or the work is indeed finished as it stands (in which case it would have been a better poem if Lucretius had been a better poet).

Much more fruitful, on the other hand, have been the proposals of Bignone on the possible meanings of Venus and *voluptas* in this

the *De gloria* a proem which he had already used in the third book of the *Academica*, may we not consider attributing the doublets to Lucretius' own carelessness?

In fine, I doubt that the *De rerum natura* is any more "unfinished" than, say, the *Aeneid* or the *Metamorphoses*. Nor do I put it in the category of the *De bello civili* or even of the *Argonautica*. Consequently, I agree with Bailey 1.32 that the disorder in the individual books has "been greatly exaggerated," and consequently, too, I regret the frequency with which Bailey has recourse in his commentary to such a statement as "In revision Lucr. might have rewritten it or put it in some other place" (2.654) or "It may be that Lucr. would have returned to this passage and elaborated it on these lines" (2.1143).

[4] The "archaeological" approach seems to have as its object the discovery of the order in which the books were composed and, more specially, in what order among themselves and in relation to the books were the six proems and the repeated passages composed. Justification for such chronological studies seems to be chiefly limited to the flickering and subjective light they may cast over the development of the poet's thoughts and mental states. In such studies generally two (unwarranted) assumptions peep forth: that Lucretius was incapable of reworking passages, and that in the case of repeated passages he used the passage first in that section in which it now seems to us to fit best.

opening address, and the stimulating examinations of the working of Lucretius' mind undertaken by Martha, Regenbogen, Büchner, and Bailey.[5] Following the lines laid down by these last-named scholars, I should like to approach the first part of the first proem through a consideration of some of the poem's dominant attitudes and typical ways of looking at ideas and things.[6] An understanding of these characteristics may help us to set a level focus at least upon the basic themes and moods of the first verses.

Among the poem's characteristic attitudes and points of view which may help us in our task of interpretation are three to which I wish now to invite a brief regard.

First, the poem moves with unembarrassed ease and rapidity from the physical plane to what we should call the metaphysical (or we may prefer to call it the mental or spiritual) — a movement sanctioned if indeed not required by Epicurean physics, since body and mind are both corporeal, coterminous, and cosensitive. Plainly Lucretius felt both planes to be inseparable parts of the all-embracing corporeal whole (cf. 2.37–39), and these frequent transitions are simply the result of his highly symbolic imagination. Very often, too, the same language is used for both planes. The poem can move very swiftly from Venus' physical *vis* (1.13) to Epicurus' *vivida vis animi* (1.72) on to the literally blazing walls of the world. The actual *aetherius sol* sustains and illumines and governs all physical things; Epicurus, compared to the *aetherius sol* (3.1044), brings us moral food and illumination (through the *lucida carmina* of Lucretius, 1.933–34, which present a *ratio* more potent than the *radii solis* or the *lucida tela diei*, 1.147). The master-image for birth — for the act rather than the fact of life — *in luminis oras*,[7] is used of

[5] These scholars may be said to have studied the poem's psychology. For work on the poet's psychology or personality (mostly for its own sake) — a not very profitable pursuit — see Logre (for a good deal of incidentally stimulating material) and M. Rozelaar, *Lukrez. Versuch einer Deutung* (Amsterdam 1943); very fairly reviewed by P. De Lacy, *CP* 42 (1947) 67 and by L. Edelstein, *AJP* 70 (1949) 95–96.

[6] Besides the three mentioned in the text, some of the chief ones are: the always present physical basis of the poem (often brushed aside or forgotten), the deep influence of the physical outlook upon the poem's language, the poem's impartial treatment of microcosm and macrocosm, its self-immersion in the immediate subject, its preference for concrete illustration over abstract argumentation, its emotional expansion in pictures (but not at the cost of the ultimate logic), its proleptic equation of perception and performance, its imperious belief in the power of the human mind, its air of violence, and its fear of uncertainty in all forms.

[7] To be fanciful, is the *oras* of this phrase dimly connected with that of the wormwood figure ("entrance into the moral life"; "*oras* pocula circum / contingunt mellis

physical and mental and artistic generation. To speak of an "emotional coloring" in the *De rerum natura* becomes literally precise and not just a critical metaphor. A whole psychic landscape can be distilled in such a phrase as *atrae formidinis ora* (4.173). Or consider disease. Physical and mental ailments are constantly conjoined in the poet's mind; the pathology of each is described in the same terms. At the close of the section giving us *inter alia* the picture of the drunkard (3.476–83) we find *mentem sanari, corpus ut aegrum* (3.510); later on, the man who dreads death is called *ebrius* (3.1051), and still a bit later the noble who frantically hurries forth from the city to his country house is *aeger* (3.1070). The one is spiritually besotted; the other is spiritually ill. The inner tumult of the atoms in the literal drunkard betrays itself in his physical stumblings; the others reveal their ignorance in their spiritual stumblings. So, too, for the passionate lovers in the fourth book. Their passion is described in the traditional terms of physical ailment, but we are at once made aware of the profound spiritual overtones when the poet tells us that these lovers, like the man who fears death or the bored noble, do not really know what they want nor how to overcome their disease (4.1118 f.). The uncertainty of the lovers is not only physical (4.1104) but also mental (4.1120). So in the account of the rise of early man, the physical wounds which he does not know how to heal —

expertis opis, ignaros quid *vulnera* vellent (5.998) —

are deliberately balanced against those which false religion has dealt us (*quantaque nobis / vulnera*, 5.1196–97), and we think of those in the plague who refused to visit their own sick — the moral note — who were left to die *opis expertis* (6.1242). To return to the fifth book, indeed all through its anthropology this sort of contrast between early man's physical lot and modern man's spiritual lot occurs repeatedly (e.g. 5.995-1010).[8] Perhaps, though, the most striking example of the movement from physical to metaphysical plane is to be seen in the description of the plague at Athens. Here the poet has taken the clinical record given by Thucydides and lifted it to a moral level by his so-called "errors"[9] in translating the

dulci flavoque liquore," 1.937–38), esp. in view of the connection of *dulcis* with peace and generation (see note 55)?

[8] See Logre 255 ff. Such a contrast I take to be a matter of isonomy.

[9] I disagree with commentators that throughout this passage Lucretius made "mistakes" in translating Thucydides. For "mistakes," they form a remarkably clear

historian; *cupido* and *metus* join as twin forces of destruction. Mankind, says Lucretius, fights for the wrong ends. The plague-stricken Athenians are no better than those who fight for position and wealth (2.13) or than the struggling lovers. Uncertainty about how to cure their physical suffering is matched by the Athenians' spiritual incertitude, and now we are brought back to the beginning of this book and to the *solacia dulcia vitae* (6.4) which Epicurus gave these same people. The final picture left us at the end of the poem is one of men who are tired, compelled, and diseased — physically and morally — living behind the barbed wires of greed and fear. The Homeric *aegris*, then, of 6.1 leads up to the *aegris* of 6.1152; spiritual frustration at the close matches physical frustration, and now we know that this ending was deliberately[10] designed by the poet emotionally to turn men to the only true salvation—Epicurus' *certa ratio*! Contrast with this the *nec ratio certa* of 6.1226.

Similarly in the first proem we shall find, in connection with the themes of *peace* and *generation* and of bodily and mental *voluptas*, this same sort of quick shift from the physical to the mental plane or to the artistic, and in our interpretation we shall be helped if we keep on the watch for these swift transitions.

The second characteristic which merits mention here is the

pattern, on which Commager (see note 1) has given me much help. Thus on 6.1152 Bailey notes "*cor:* Lucr.'s mistranslation for *καρδία*; note the epithet *maestum* which emphasizes this and anticipates the misinterpretation of *μετὰ ταλαιπωρίας*." But *anxius angor* (6.1158) will put us on the right track, and show us that Lucretius has transferred the whole from a state of physical suffering to one having overtones of mental distress. For *cor* also means mind, as in 6.5, and every other use of *anxius* and *angor* refers to a mental or psychic state. Here the poet has connected it with the *morbi* of *cupido* and *timor*. Cf. the *anxius angor* and *querella* and *coactans* of 6.1158–61 with the *anxia corda* and *cogi* and *querellis* of 6.14-16, and then note that *anxius angor* is used of Tityos in 3.993, *angat* of the lovers in 4.1134, and note, too, the union *angore metuque* in 3.903.

[10] Bignone 318–22 (and see Bailey 3.1724–25 and 1759) argues that Lucretius intended to add to our present ending an account of the gods. DeWitt writes, p. 5: "The only new topic was the nature of the gods, planned for the seventh book but never written," and so on p. 251. I myself assume that Lucretius intended his poem to be introductory and that, whether or not he himself had advanced far in the Epicurean doctrines, he therefore would not have wished to include in a protreptic and exoteric work more advanced and technical matters (such as DeWitt lists on p. 251). See note 3. What the *De rerum natura* now gives us on the nature of the gods would seem quite enough for such an introductory work. Moreover, I wonder whether he may not have intended, deliberately, to end with the depressing picture of the plague, contrasting so violently with the first and sixth proems, in order to move men into conversion through the time-honored method of frightening them into "true religion."

poem's habit of reacting to similar subjects with similar emotional responses, and very often with similar verbal responses. The repeated key-words, then, can tell us a good deal about the poet's thoughts and feelings in a particular passage. This evocation of similar phraseology is an instinctive, not a deliberate, matter, and probably stems from emotional association rather than from any conscious desire to call the reader back to an earlier point or to order the material. I do not for a minute mean that we should woodenly load any one word with a single, denotative, allegorical concept. That would be to rob it of the symbolic and evocative power which makes the poem so compelling. Rather, this is a loose and unconscious reaction. Let me illustrate. When Virgil uses *stans celsa in puppi* of Anchises (3.527) and again of Augustus (8.680) and yet again of Aeneas (10.261), he deliberately aims at the identification. But when Lucretius uses *diffuso lumine* of both the creative processes in the first proem (1.9) and of the abode of the gods (3.22), it is not a deliberate reminiscence but an imaginative association of the two ideas of *creation* and of *peace* (see the "third characteristic" below). Lucretius is reacting in a similar way to similar psychic situations. The cow searching for her calf is *desiderio perfixa* (2.360). The yearning which the dead man in the *Iam iam non domus* passage (3.894 ff.) is imagined to feel for his home, wife, children, and estate is *desiderium*. So, whenever the poem deals with impersonal, large-scale, "safe" reproduction (see below, 107), invariably the same telltale "theme-words" appear (see below, 110–11). The poem abounds with examples of this characteristic, and we shall be helped in understanding the first proem by keeping an eye out for the significance of such touchstones, as *lepos*, *flores*, *laetus*, *suavis*, *dulcis*, *blandus*, *exortum*, and *in luminis oras* elsewhere in the work.

Third, throughout the poem there are curious unions of concepts — odd dual allegiances — which to us might seem logically quite incompatible but which here are joined in some sort of emotional amalgam. I refer to such a connection as that between *peace* and *generation*, to which we referred above and which we shall find strongly accented in the first proem. How, we ask, can a man feel an element of peace associated with the busy act of generating? Perhaps the thing to do is not to ask "how" but to observe that the union exists. Or consider the poem's attitude toward peace and war. The former is the doctrinaire ideal; the poem begs for it

for mankind. Yet it palpably delights in describing martial array and seems to glory in depicting bloodshed. Indeed the poet himself is quite as restless and militant as his own atoms, and we the readers are constantly reminded that we are "vanquished" by the argumentation.[11] Or what of walls and ramparts? They protect this world of ours, we are told. But then Epicurus is eulogized for scaling them. Or what of the stark clash of feeling in the *Iam iam non domus* passage (3.894 ff.) between resignation and sorrow before Death? Or what of the continual pull in the word *voluptas* itself — the stress between bland detachment all the way up to the *requies hominum* of 6.94 and, on the other hand, the sheer animal lust in 4.1263? Or again what of the tentative correspondence, implied chiefly through the images of Venus and of the sun and light, that the poem hints at between Nature, Epicurus, and Lucretius?[12] Or what of Nature who at once sustains and yet frustrates Man,[13] or of the *foedera naturai* versus the *vis abdita quaedam* (5.1233), or of *natura gubernans* (5.77) versus *fortuna gubernans* (5.107)?

The reader must not try to explain away such dual loyalties by inventing false harmonies that we instinctively feel to be fabrications which satisfy only logic, and then mostly only faintly.[14] Rather, he must accept the fact that the poem often binds together

[11] E.g. 1.624; 2.748; 5.343, 735; 6.498; cf. 2.1043, 1129.

[12] E. A. Hahn, "The First Prooemion of Lucretius in the Light of the Rest of the Poem," *PAPA* 72 (1941) xxxii f., in a summary of an article which I wish had been fully published, notes that Venus and Epicurus are counterparts. We may also note the identification of Epicurus and the sun (*aetherius sol*) which dramatizes Epicurus' power of creation and nourishment — through ideas. The illumination cast upon the moral world, resulting from the explanation of the whole physical universe, is as embracing and sustaining as the sun which *recreavit cuncta gubernans* (5.404). Note *recreata* of 1.942, *recreaverunt* of 6.3, and *gubernas* of 1.21. By using terms of light for his own poetry, Lucretius betrays a view of himself — as not just an illustrator but also a creator. But as Epicurus was a creator of ideas, Lucretius is a creator of poetry. The two, working together, *recreate* mankind. Both Epicurus and Lucretius, then, perform a task like Venus' of fertilization. Indeed, we might even detect in Lucretius a never explicit tendency toward self-apotheosis when we read 5.6 and consider his own Olympians (poets and philosophers, 3.1037 ff.).

[13] Sellar 353. On p. 361 he also notes that while Lucretius professes an independence of all adventitious stimulants to enjoyment, yet he indicates a deep appreciation of the arts.

[14] As in trying to determine whether Lucretius was a primitivist or a progressivist. He is whichever best suits his emotional aims of the moment. He deliberately manipulates and commingles a conventional Arcadianism, a traditional story of the steady decline, and an Epicurean tenet of limited advancement. That these elements can exist side by side is made possible by his habit of carrying several planes of thought in his mind at once.

two quite disparate or even antagonistic feelings or ideas. From these strange unions, in fact, arise the powerful antinomies and tensions about which Regenbogen has written so acutely[15] and which, in the end, go far to make the total work so appealing in its humane penetration.

With these three characteristic attitudes of the poem in mind, let us turn to the first forty-nine lines with five questions which seem of special importance. In proposing some answers to these questions, we shall also consider the various themes and moods in the first forty-nine lines.

First, why should an Epicurean, who believed that the gods are not moved to action by the prayers of mortals, request a divinity for help in composing his verses and in securing peace for his countrymen? "It is useless," Epicurus had said, "to ask the gods for what a man is capable of procuring for himself."[16] Second, why should Venus have been selected for this divinity?[17] Third, what are the various meanings of *voluptas* in line one? Fourth, why should Venus be called the *voluptas* of these "reformed" Epicurean gods (plainly, from at least one point of view, there is no difficulty in understanding why she is called mankind's *voluptas*)? Fifth, what is the significance of the Venus-Mars tableau?

For convenience in the discussion, lines 1–28 will be designated as part A, lines 29–43 as part B, and lines 44–49 as part C.

The answer to our first question — why an invocation to a divinity[18] — is not to be found merely in convention, despite Lucretius' clear dependence upon the whole epic tradition.[19] Nor in imitation, despite the fact that his poetic master in philosophic verse, Empedocles, had begun his *On Nature* with an invocation to his much-wooed, white-armed maiden Muse to give him "such knowledge as divine law permits us creatures of a day to hear," and that before him Parmenides, more boldly and less reverently, had

[15] Regenbogen 80 ff.

[16] *Fragmenta Ep.* A 65 (Bailey, *Epicurus* [Oxford 1926]).

[17] For a summary of the problems involved in these first two questions, see Regenbogen 75–77 and Bignone 427 ff. Logre 42–80 gives a highly interesting and often penetrating analysis of the whole proem.

[18] G. Curcio, *L'apostrofe nella poesia latina* (Catania 1903) 51–52 notes the comparative rareness of apostrophe in Lucretius.

[19] See C. Murley, "Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, Viewed as Epic," *TAPA* 78 (1947) 336–46. The influence of the epic tradition, however, is surely stronger in the eulogies of Epicurus in the proems than in the invocation to Venus.

spoken, too, of his own goddesses.[20] No, for Lucretius as for Empedocles, it was not just a matter of convention or of imitation. The intense and passionate seriousness of this most moving of all pagan prayers from Rome denies such a superficial explanation.[21] One thinks of the *divina voluptas / percipit atque horror* of 3.28–29! As for the dismissal of the invocation as mere decoration, a *jeu d'esprit*, we need not linger over that.

Rather, the answer lies squarely in Epicurean theology, and specifically, as Friedländer has shown us,[22] in part C. Epicurus, we remember, so far as his logic could permit, kept the old gods of Greek mythology; Epicurus was no Protagoras. For thus keeping them, his critics like Cicero and Plutarch roundly rebuked him,[23] and surely they reflect traditional criticism. But like Xenophanes or Pindar, Epicurus purged and "reformed" his gods into admirable models for mankind. The traces of man's evil tendencies which cannot be overcome by Epicureanism are so small, says Lucretius, that *nil impediat dignam dis degere vitam* (3.322). True, Epicurus held, the gods do not participate in our affairs. But the reason for this is not hard to fathom: good men have no upsetting and disturbing desires which they might expect the gods to put into effect. Good men share in the ataraxy of the incorruptible gods. For good men, then, the gods remain as patterns of the ideal τέλος. As Farrington puts it, they "welcome" good men.[24] "For the gods," Epicurus had declared (if we read the text aright), "being exclu-

[20] Emp. B 3; Parm. B 1. On Parmenides' influence on Lucretius, see Hahn (cited in note 12). And Democritus had stressed divine frenzy (B 18).

[21] On the hymnal elements, see esp. Regenbogen 65–67. On Epicurean prayer, see G. D. Hadzits, "The Lucretian Invocation of Venus," *CP* 2 (1907) 187–92, and esp. DeWitt 283–88.

[22] P. Friedländer, "The Epicurean Theology in Lucretius' First Prooemium (Lucr. I. 44–49)," *TAPA* 70 (1939) 368–79.

[23] Cic. *N.D.* 1.123; Plut. *Non posse* 1102B–D; DeWitt 281–82.

[24] B. Farrington, *Science and Politics in the Ancient World* (London 1946) 157. This stimulating and provocative book seems to me particularly excellent in its treatment of Lucretius. (See, too, his "Second Thoughts on Epicurus," *Science and Society* 17 [1953] 326–39.) I heartily agree with him that Lucretius' intensity is owing to his having a "cause," and not to mental instability; that Cicero and Caesar are poor witnesses to the majority of their contemporaries' religious beliefs; and that the real feelings about death and punishment after death which any age has are not too likely to be reflected in its literature. I am not persuaded, however, that Lucretius was talking for and to the masses, nor that he was chiefly attacking the state religion (despite the Iphigeneia passage). Against the *plebeia veste* (2.36) and *plebeia* (5.1429) we may balance the *vulgus abhorret* (1.945) and *impia pectora vulgi* (2.622); in regard to religion, Lucretius seems to me to be attacking *all* kinds of false religion.

sively devoted to their own peculiar virtues, are partial to those like themselves, deeming all that is not such as alien."[25] Bad men, on the other hand, they simply ignore.

Hence the poem must open with a pious prayer of adoration. And it must go on immediately to expound the true, that is, the Epicurean account of divinity. So Epicurus in his extant letter on ethics, that to Menoeceus, begins at once with the nature of the gods (if only in an elementary way). For as regards the necessity of theology, in this respect at least Epicurus was in agreement with Plato and Aristotle. Lines 44–49 (part C) present this theology. They are lines of the utmost importance. Lest the reader be misled by myths about Venus — a trap into which some modern ones have fallen — part C tells him the truth about the gods in straightforward language. And it is noteworthy, too, that this same direct language appears when, in Book 2's proem, Lucretius gives us the Epicurean moral theory. Peace for men, approaching that of the gods, he says, is possible since Nature asks for nothing

> nisi utqui
> corpore *seiunctus dolor* absit, mente *fruatur*
> iucundo sensu cura *semota* metuque. (2.17 ff.)

We are sent back at once to part C of the first proem:

> omnis enim per se divum natura necessest
> immortali aevo summa cum pace *fruatur*
> *semota* ab nostris rebus *seiunctaque* longe.
> nam privata *dolore* omni . . . (1.44 ff.)

with its picture of the peace of the gods.

Part C is not a palinode after an irrational mythic outburst.[26] Lucretius is not recanting, not pulling himself back, but is giving a succinct exposition intended to educate the reader and "save him from error." So, too, in the second book when the poet again approaches this topic which above all others fascinates and awes him — the ceaseless and mysterious symphony of birth and generation (for note that his attitude toward death, far from being morbid, is chiefly in terms of death's enabling other things to be born; cf. 3.967–71) — when he again approaches this topic of birth, he again

[25] Epic. *Ep. ad Men.* 124; here I follow DeWitt's interpretation, p. 268, rather than that of C. Bailey, *Epicurus* (Oxford 1926) 85.

[26] See Bignone 143–44. I look on 2.655–60 and 5.405–6, on the other hand, as flat denials.

feels the compulsion for the only symbolism adequate to the vital and sensuous quality of his subject, Myth. This time it is in terms of the Magna Mater (2.600 ff.).

In the earliest Greek poetry, to go back to the domain of Homer and Hesiod, there had been no incompatibility between rationalization of reality and mythic expression.[27] There is none emotionally for Lucretius, either, as there had been none for Empedocles. The poet has reached into the past for a pattern, a form, in which he may find himself in general terms in relation to his immediate and particular subject.[28] Myth was the only suitable form Lucretius knew for the full recognition of such an ecumenical truth as birth and generation. In Book 2 he instinctively "stepped into" the myth of the Magna Mater.[29] And here, too, at the close of the Magna Mater myth, he carefully expounds the true Epicurean theory of the gods, and deliberately uses the very words that occur in 1.44–49 (= 2.646–51).

But now, if lines 1–20 represent in the traditional structure of a Greek hymn the opening address of praise and adoration of a divinity (albeit this time of a divinity who is only an admirable model for mankind), and if lines 44–49 are an exposition of straight Epicurean theology, what of our first question: why a petition to a divinity? We no more expect this from an Epicurean than we expect confession.

There is convention here, surely, whether we look at the epic tradition or at Parmenides or Empedocles, or at the rules of the hymnal form. These rules called first for the praise of a god and then for the requests. From the formal point of view, then, Lucretius is orthodox. And from the point of view of Lucretius the creative artist, his insight was never more clearly revealed than in his instinctive preference here for the emotionally cogent over the logically consistent. But what of the Epicurean point of view?

Lucretius has two requests: that Venus be his *socia* as he composes, and that she induce Mars to give the Roman world peace (so that the poet may write and the dubiously interested Memmius

[27] See W. Jaeger, *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers* (Oxford 1947) 133 ff.

[28] See T. Mann, *Freud and the Future* (1936; published in his *Essays of Three Decades*, trans. H. T. Lowe-Porter, New York 1947), for an excellent discussion of the relation of writer to myth. Sellar 350 notes that Lucretius' conception of Nature reveals "an unconscious survival of the state of mind which gave birth to mythology."

[29] Just as when, treating the same subject in 1.250 ff., he "stepped into" the myth of the wedding of Father Heaven and Mother Earth.

— whoever he was — might study). Lines 44–49 forbid our thinking that only twenty lines earlier Lucretius could either have totally forgotten his Articles of Faith or have been merely conventional. The answer lies, I suggest, in the Epicurean doctrine of the psychological communion between men and the gods. For if the gods "welcome" good men and are "friends of the wise," may not Lucretius have felt in a somewhat mystical way that they also "welcome" the creation of good things, such as Epicureanism and a poetic version of that *ratio*, especially since each is associated with lastingness and truth? The two requests are his two wishes. Like most poets, he looks for inspirational help. But for the fulfillment of his two wishes, Lucretius cannot expect direct aid, such as the Muses brought Hesiod under holy Helicon. For Lucretius, it must come indirectly, by keeping before his mind the ideal pattern of the gods and their perfect bliss. Venus, the symbol of ἡδονή, could not come to him. But, in a fashion, he could approach her, and if he kept her before his thoughts, she would "welcome" his work. He is virtually saying that, with God's help (which here means only "if I keep before my mind continually the picture of God" and thus "free my mind from thwarting disturbances") he will write a moving and persuasive poem. Inspired by his communion, he himself will achieve for himself the *aeternum leporem* which would make his verses lastingly effective for conversion. In fine, then, Lucretius in his two requests has conformed with the rules of the literary form, with the canons of artistic taste, and with the doctrines of Epicureanism.

Only after this invocation to a divinity and this exposition of the real nature of the gods in part C does the poet turn to *false* religion (lines 62–65 and 80–101).[30] This is a subject which will occupy more of his attention than the theory of true religion.[31]

Before approaching the remaining four questions and the crisscrossing themes of peace and generation in parts A and B, it will be helpful to recall in a general fashion what Bignone and Bailey had

[30] Lines 62–65 stem directly by contrast out of lines 44–49. Lines 80–101 (perhaps suggested by Empedocles B 137), contrasting *wrong* religion with the *true* and the *war* for which Iphigeneia was sacrificed with the *peace* for which Lucretius calls upon Venus (see Friedländer, cited in note 22), follow in a logical and emotional progression upon the opening prayerful appeal and the doctrinaire account of true religion. No transpositions nor lacunae here!

[31] Perhaps a matter of the Lucretian temperament, but also a usual necessity for reformers. See Sellar 363.

to say on Venus and *voluptas*. Briefly, Bailey had considered the Venus of part A to be more than conventional and more nearly allegorical (*Venus physica*), and he had looked somewhat despondently upon part B, the Venus-Mars episode, as a "relapse into conventional mythology," despite the attractive possibility of an Empedoclean "Love and Strife" allegory.[32] But then Bignone proposed that Venus in the first twenty-three lines represents one of the two kinds of Epicurean pleasure (the kinetic), while in part B she represents the other and higher kind, that of the gods themselves (the static). With a synclastic view upon Mars, Bignone proceeded to pick up the handy Empedoclean "Love and Strife" motive.[33] Bailey[34] was later tempted by Bignone's theory because thus "the proem would become a far more closely unified whole," even though Bailey had fully recognized the important observations of Büchner[35] on Lucretian style and had himself sufficiently explored "The Mind of Lucretius"[36] to know that this poet's "unconnected or loosely connected" style is, as Friedländer rightly insisted,[37] "not classical art but, rather, Hellenistic and archaic at once" — as indeed is usually the case with his thought, too.

But Bailey's hesitations remained, not based as we might have expected upon the objection that such a neat theory makes a poet too much like a self-consistent and rational writer of prose, but because of "the absence of evidence for the personification of ἡδονή in the static sense." (We should be surprised to come across any such personification, but on this more below.) "It is not easy," went on Bailey, "to think of either Aphrodite or Venus being conceived in that way. But it is possible," he granted, "that Lucr. had in mind the two kinds of ἡδονή and passed mentally from one to the other, slightly straining, perhaps intentionally, the conception of Venus."

To return to our second question, why was Venus the divinity selected for entreaty? Several reasons beside the obvious Aprodite–ἡδονή union suggest themselves. Possibly the sounding of the national note (already proclaimed in the first word *Aeneadum*, and

[32] Bailey 2.589–91.

[33] Bignone 427 ff.

[34] Bailey 3.1749–50.

[35] Büchner (cited in note 3).

[36] C. Bailey, *AJP* 61 (1940) 278–91.

[37] Friedländer (cited in note 22) 370 and his note 6; Bailey, too, recognized this point in 2.586.

picked up in the *Romanis* of 40 and *Latinis versibus* of 137) had something to do with her selection. For the poem is to bring Greek philosophy to the Italians, and Lucretius like Cicero is proudly aware of himself as a Roman pioneer. Possibly, too, the narrower desire to pay tribute to the *gens Memmia* motivated him. At least this proposal is piously transmitted by commentators, though it seems more tralatician than persuasive. Still, one's view here pivots partly on the importance which he gives to the eleven addresses to Memmius,[38] all, like the more meaningful phrase *in luminis oras*, to be found in Books 1, 2, and 5.

But to take up this matter of the Venus of the first twenty-eight lines from a general point of view, we should now look at our third query: What are the various meanings of the *voluptas* of the first line? If we analyze these opening lines, not from a structural point of view nor even from that of the sequence of formal philosophical tenets but rather from a consideration of its dominant themes, we find that two concepts involving pleasure are paramount here. One is the doctrinaire Epicurean concept of *peace*; the other is the exciting idea which captivates Lucretius more constantly,

[38] Bignone 160 ff., who fairly persuasively argues that Lucretius' Memmius is not the historical C. Memmius, holds that the *sperata voluptas / suavis amicitiae* of 1.140 f. is in line with Epicurus' views on the value of friendship. But see W. Allen, Jr., "On the Friendship of Lucretius with Memmius," *CP* 33 (1938) 167–81 for the view that Lucretius was looking for a patron. B. Farrington, "The Meanings of *Voluptas* in Lucretius," *Hermathena* 80 (Nov. 1952) 30–31 and "Lucretius and Manilius on Friendship," *Hermathena* 83 (May 1954) 10–16, argues — tellingly, too (and the association of *suavis* with peace [see note 55] supports his view) — that *amicitia* here is a technical term for the Epicurean fellowship. I myself wonder whether the addresses to Memmius mean much more than to signify the formal publication of the poem. But this depends on who we fancy were the readers whom Lucretius hoped to reach. (And whom did Cicero hope to reach in his philosophical essays? And which had the wider audience? As for the *N.D.*, which I do not take to be chiefly an "answer" to Lucretius, if we assume that it and the *Fat.* and the *Div.* were all aimed at the same audience [as I think we must assume], then perhaps we should conclude that of the three the *N.D.* was most designed as a *general* treatment for these special readers, unless we feel that all the literate public then was a "special" audience.) This important question of the readers aimed at needs separate treatment. In the case of Lucretius, Farrington 184 ff. attacks the reply "the nobility," and proposes "the general mass of the people" (which seems much too broad for credence); J. B. Bayet, "Lucrèce devant la pensée grecque," *MusHel* 11 (1954) 90–91 suggests "une aristocratie intellectuelle" (which again seems too narrow). Most plausible is the view of H. M. Howe, "Amafinius, Lucretius, and Cicero," *AJP* 72 (1951) 60, of possibly "the well-to-do citizens of the municipia" all over Italy. At all events, DeWitt 344 conjectures that "The effect of it (the poem) upon the intelligentsia of the capital was probably dismay rather than delight." But for the only contemporary evidence, see Cic. *Q.fr.* 2.9.3!

that of *generation*. This second idea of reproduction, as will be proposed below, seems to embrace not only living things but also, on the mental or spiritual or artistic plane, Epicureanism itself and even Lucretius' own poetry. And it seems not only to embrace their own generation but also their own *generative* power — their own power to be productive in themselves in turn. Further, in a dim and ultimate way the two themes of peace and generation are united. For, on the physical level, out of even sexual pleasure comes a transitory element of the pleasure of peace.[39] And out of the highest forms of generation, such as artistic and philosophic creativity, may come, Lucretius seems to imply, the pleasure of a peace for man which really approaches the pleasure of the peace which only the gods can completely possess. For Lucretius it is a major concern to contrast the short-lived peace with the more lasting, that is, to contrast kinetic with static pleasure.

But, to leave that matter for a moment, we might now make a few exploratory guesses about what may have gone on within Lucretius' conscious or unconscious mind as he began his prayer. ἡδονή, of course, would be uppermost in his thoughts. Its Latin equivalent, *voluptas* — exactly the right one, as Cicero bitingly remarked[40] — is therefore the all-important word. When Lucretius thinks of ἡδονή, his first thoughts surely center around that form of pleasure which Epicurus had maintained to be the higher, i.e. the extended static pleasure. Only the gods, as we said, possess this completely.[41] But for man it is a model at which he can and should aim. Thus for Epicurus, as for Homer or Plato in their way, the anthropocentric and the theocentric are combined. Farrington is right, surely, in saying that *voluptas* in the first line means Blessedness.[42] But chiefly, it should be added at once, within the dyad *divumque voluptas*.

Now, to consider the other possible meanings of the first line's *voluptas*, we must look at the combination *hominum voluptas*.[43] Here "pleasure," although itself an integral unit, takes on quite

[39] See C. Bailey, *The Greek Atomists and Epicurus* (Oxford 1928) 494 ff.

[40] Cic. *Fin.* 2.13.

[41] DeWitt 275.

[42] Farrington, *Hermathena* 80 (cited in note 38) argues that for Epicurus not Pleasure but Blessedness (τὸ μακαρίως ζῆν) was the *summum bonum*, and Venus is the personification of this Blessedness.

[43] For the dyad *hominum divumque*, should we look back to Ennius' *divumque hominumque* with the *volup* of seven lines earlier (A 234)?

different forms. For men, in theory there could be first of all the static sort of pleasure — natural and necessary — for which mortals should strive and for which — *o genus infelix humanum* — they rarely do. Then there are the various pleasures arising from the fulfilment of desires which are natural but unnecessary, and, lowest on the list, those which come from satisfying the desires which are neither natural nor needed. All these shades of meaning are embraced in the first line's *voluptas*.

To take up our fourth query — how can Venus be called "the pleasure of gods" — perhaps we should begin with Venus as "the pleasure of men," that is, with the kinetic pleasures usually sought by men. This sort of pleasure, this type of ἡδονή, would at once suggest Aphrodite to the poet — a venerable identification in the hedonistic tradition.[44] Naturally Ἀφροδίτη-ἡδονή becomes *Venus-voluptas*. But chiefly, we repeat, in regard to kinetic pleasure. It is not surprising that Bignone could not find examples of Aphrodite as personifying static pleasure, that is, the *voluptas* of the "reformed" gods. For one does not usually personify a static abstraction. Rather, the combination *Venus-voluptas* should more usually be concerned with men, not with gods, and mainly for Lucretius with the pleasure men derive from the sexual act — Tennyson's "genial heat of Nature" — through which comes the reproduction of all living things.[45] Venus, then, personifies the creative force of Nature through which the insensate atoms come marvelously to life. Obviously, as a creative force, she has nothing to do with the pleasure of the gods — with that perfect pleasure of rest and peace. Nothing, that is, except that any kind of pleasure is still pleasure and that Lucretius may emotionally as well as theoretically associate the two.

Hence, when we come to ask why Venus has also become in the first line "the pleasure of the gods," we might propose that this combination is merely a sort of extension or "carry-over" from Venus as the "pleasure of men," a carry-over — perhaps induced by the Homeric πατὴρ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε or by Ennius' *divumque hominumque* — about which the poet did not think too exactly. Or possibly in the second combination ("pleasure of the gods") the poet's thought has understandably shifted somewhat from the active to

[44] As clearly shown by Bignone 434–40. See, too, the references given by W. E. Leonard and S. B. Smith, *T. Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura Libri Sex* (Madison 1942) 197–98).

[45] As a study of all his uses of *voluptas* shows.

the passive as he thinks of the ideal static peace, and now, then, his meaning has veered more toward the ataraxistic "pleasure among the gods." Yet another explanation also suggests itself: even the lower form of pleasure, the kinetic, normally produces for a period a subsequent physical equilibrium of the atoms during which we have peace and rest. It may last, true, but for a brief spell. For passionate lovers after the sexual act it is but a *parva pausa*. For animals even the season of spring brings spells of peace and, if lines 1–5 stress the joy of reproduction, the mood of lines 6–9 is that of happy peace in connection with this act of reproduction. Beneath all types of generation lies, to varying degrees, this return to the pleasure of peace. Even for Lucretius producing his poem there are the *noctes serenas* (1.142), linked in their quality of rest with the *vitamque serenam* of the gods (2.1094) and the *templa serena* of peace-giving Epicureanism (2.8). Hence in the end there is this underlying if tenuous connection between the pleasure of reproducing and the pleasure of peace.

Perhaps in some such way there arose for Lucretius this double allegiance to peace and generation.[46] And this unsteady dual allegiance — unsteady, for *vera voluptas*, explicated in the proem to the second book, is always moving from aloof detachment to driving passion — may help us to understand, as we said earlier, some of the text's mighty tensions. For example, to return to Lucretius' calm nights of production, the adjective is *serenas* but the verb with them is far from peaceful. The kinetic *vigilare* wrenches against the idea of peace. Or, to take another instance, when he again approaches the idea of birth and again uses myth — this time the wedding of Heaven and Earth (1.250 ff.) — the adjectives are peaceful enough but the verbs vibrate with activity: *nitidae surgunt fruges* or *fessae pecudes corpora deponunt*. Even the baby lambs must be "struck," if only with "pure milk":

. . . lacte mero mentis *perculsa* novellas. (1.261)

[46] This equation of peace and creativity may originally, of course, have sprung from the Epicurean division of static and kinetic pleasures with their basic unity. But in Lucretius it seems to be more of an emotional than a doctrinaire or logical association. But perhaps if high creativity is somehow connected in the poet's mind with divinity (see below, 108), and if divinity is practically defined as leisure, then we may guess that unconsciously Lucretius felt that creation on a lofty level should not only guarantee rest but be itself restful. Certainly creative artists testify abundantly to the catharsis and peace which their activity brings. See William James' essay *The Energies of Men*.

This, of course, is simply an aspect of the quality of violence which is so characteristic of the whole poem.

* * *

Now perhaps we may turn, before taking up the Venus-Mars passage, to tracing these two themes of *peace* and *generation* in the first part of the first proem.

At the outset I wish to suggest the areas in which the second, that of generation, seems to operate. Once again we are back to the matter of the two planes: the physical and the metaphysical. For we seem to deal not only with generation in the realm of living things when animal mates with animal and produces offspring, but also with generation in the realm of poetry and in the realm of philosophy when these two (or the second through the first), once produced, may in turn produce serenity of the mind and happiness if we will but "mate" with them. In a way, there is an element of lastingness or a bit of immortality in connection with all three types of generation — animal, philosophic, and poetic. I say "a bit" since, while the atoms are indeed literally immortal and eternal (1.236 and 545), this world on the other hand and all things successively produced on it must finally succumb to the forces of destruction. Within the scope of this limitation, however, animals will go on reproducing their own kind, and Lucretius seems to ascribe a sort of lastingness to the potential productivity of Epicureanism and of poetry. The former gives us the truth; the latter impresses a truthful order on unrelated elements and sets things to pattern.

The matter of his attitude toward poetry merits a separate treatment.[47] Here it is sufficient to recall Friedländer's valuable observation that Lucretius' word for the deathless atoms and for the

[47] As for why Lucretius wrote in verse, for Epicurus' views on poetry see DeWitt 107–8 and for suggestions on those of Lucretius, see P. De Lacy's instructive "Lucretius and the History of Epicureanism," *TAPA* 79 (1948) 22–23 and P. Boyancé, "Lucrèce et la poésie," *REA* 49 (1947) 88–102. We must not forget, too, the influence of Hellenistic didactic poetry (as we do not that of Hesiod, Parmenides, and Empedocles), and the fact, too, that if a man of poetic temperament has a poetic tradition to hand, he will most likely write poetry simply because he is a poet. See H. C. Lipscomb's sensitive "Lucretius and The Testament of Beauty," *CJ* 31 (1935) 77–88. (My friend, Professor J. H. Waszink, has written what seems to me the most sensible and persuasive study on this subject: "Lucretius and Poetry," *Mededeelingen d. kon. nederlandse Akad. v. Wetenschappen*, Afd. Letterkunde [Nieuwe Reeks, Deel 17, No. 8; 1954]. I am sorry that this article came into my hands too late for present use.)

letters of the alphabet is the same — *elementa*.[48] It is these *elementa* which literally compose both *things*, living and inanimate, and the *words* through which lovely verse and life-giving philosophy are expressed.

In lines 1–5 the accent falls heavily on generation. *Genetrix*, *alma*, *concelebras*, and the fifth line

concipitur visitque *exortum* lumina solis

(with the immediate symbolism of light for birth) all sound this note. So far generation is only on the physical plane. Later on in the poem, *repertum* will also serve as the metaphysical counterpart of the *exortum* here.[49] In lines 1–5 Venus is *Venus physica* (save for the *divumque voluptas*). Epicurus had described pleasure in sexual terms among others, and Lucretius, like his master but much more excitedly,[50] eagerly responds to the thought of the pleasure in intercourse. Elsewhere Lucretius speaks of the *mutua gaudia* in the act and of the *communi' voluptas*, and in another passage he hails the life-giving *Venus-voluptas*, in the same symbolism, as divine:

ipsaque *deducit* dux vitae *dia voluptas*
et res per *Veneris* blanditur saecla propagent. (2.172 f.)

The *blanditur* here (like *blanda* when applied to *voluptas*) shows that Lucretius is now referring to the "safe" pleasure in the act[51] — the act performed on a large, impersonal scale. Right now, it is the *dia* in the first line quoted above which interests us. This *voluptas* is *dia* and is symbolized by a goddess Venus, because here as in the first proem we deal with the eternal force that inspires the unending chain of reproduction.[52]

[48] P. Friedländer, "Pattern of Sound and Atomistic Theory in Lucretius," *AJP* 62 (1941) 16–34. This is surely one of the most acute and helpful articles written in our times on the poet.

[49] Thus Greek philosophy is termed *Graiorum obscura reperta* (1.136). The phrase *animi natura reperta* occurs several times for Epicurean truth (e.g. 3.130, 203, 237). Man's gradual discoveries in Book 5, physical and mental, are *reperta*, and the discoverers (*repertores*) are saluted along with the poets in 3.1036. The letters of the alphabet were *reperta* (5.1445), and so were Lucretius' verses (3.419 f.). So even were Epicurus (6.5) and Lucretius (5.336 f.)!

[50] Despite Bignone 180 ff.

[51] Farrington, *Hermathena* 80 (cited in note 38) 27.

[52] Although apparently Epicurus never called the gods immortal, Lucretius does (5.53); see DeWitt 267, and his observation, p. 269, that for Epicurus "the word *immortal* comes to denote a quality of life, something superb or exquisite," and his

So, to digress for a moment on this matter of divinity, Lucretius calls only philosophers and poets among mortals divine.[53] Empedocles is so acknowledged (quite properly, too, since he himself had proclaimed his own divinity), and we may imagine that Lucretius applies this epithet because of the *generative* stimulus of Empedocles' discoveries:

> carmina quin etiam *divini pectoris* eius
> *vociferantur* et exponunt praeclara *reperta*. (1.731 f.)

Pectus, of course, is his brain (as in 5.1); *vociferor* in the poem always carries a solemn and holy quality; *reperta*, as we have just said, are the resultant "discoveries." Because these discoveries, through the poetry in which they are expressed, can be productive, the adjective *divini* is employed. Lucretius, in short, believes in the immortal effect of poetry — what it can do for men through its generative power. And Epicurus in the fifth proem is called, in the tradition of the school and in deep faith, a god.[54] Epicurus is a god because of the sweet solaces he has given us. Indeed these *solacia dulcia* (6.4) are expressly called *divina reperta* (6.7). He had become a veritable saviour, and we shall always remember his name. For from his teaching is born the real pleasure — peace of mind and body. *Dius* occurs thrice in the poem. It means in Lucretius not only "bright" but surely also "divine," as in Ennius' *o Romule, Romule die.* Once then, in the passage quoted above from Book 2 (172 f.), *voluptas* is called *dia.* Again, early in the first proem, the adjective is employed in the master-image for birth which Lucretius took from Ennius (*dias in luminis oras*, 1.22), and finally in the picture of almost Epicurean idyllic *peace* which the shepherds' pipes produce — music and poetry:

> per loca pastorum deserta atque *otia dia*. (5.1387)

Again, therefore, in 2.172 f. as in the poem's opening line, we find divinity associated with both *peace* and *generation.* And Venus is symbolically connected with both.

remarks, p. 114, on the "new kind of immortality" which Epicurean memorial writings aimed at conferring upon dead members of their circle.

[53] So Ennius' verses are eternal (1.121); Homer is ever-flowering (1.124); Democritus is a holy man (3.371; 5.622). These epithets are not just stock. The procession in 3.1024 ff. (through kings and generals up to poets and philosophers — from activity to rest — ending with Epicurus himself) is deliberately graduated.

[54] See DeWitt 98 and 282–83.

If then in the *voluptas* of line one the poem joins the static form of pleasure (the ataraxy of the gods) with the lower kinetic forms (such as arise from sexual activity), and if Lucretius ultimately blended in his mind the two concepts of peace and generation, yet we must admit that in lines 1–5 he is thinking chiefly of active physical generation. But lines 6–9 have as their key-note the subsequent peace that follows for a spell upon such activity or, to put it another way, the static pleasure of atomic equilibrium which ensues, however briefly, upon kinetic pleasure.

The theme of generation, to be sure, is still present in lines 6–9. Indeed it is rarely absent from any passage for long in the poem. But in lines 6–9 it is a minor motive, principally suggested by the mention of the *suavis flores* which the *daedala tellus* sends forth. We think at once of

> unde animale genus generatim *in lumina vitae*
> *redducit Venus*, aut redductum *daedala tellus*
> unde *alit* atque auget generatim *pabula* praebens? (1.227 ff.)

In these three lines, the *in lumina vitae* reminds us of the *lumina solis* of 1.5; again Venus and the *daedala tellus* are joined; the *alit* here reminds us of the *alma* of 1.2; the *pabula* recalls the *pabula laeta* of 1.14; finally, the *redducit Venus* recalls the passage from Book 2 which we just quoted above:

> ipsaque *deducit* dux vitae dia voluptas. (2.172)

Daedala in the same active, generative sense occurs, too, in the all-embracing phrase *naturaque daedala rerum* (5.234) — virtually the subject of the poem — and yet more strikingly in the *verborum daedala lingua* of 4.551. In this last phrase we have passed from the physical to the metaphysical — to the world of poetry and of philosophy — but the same epithet tells us that we are dealing here, too, with generation. And so in the case of *suavis*.[55] For in line 39 of the first proem Venus is asked to pour forth, on the mental plane, *suavis loquellas* upon Mars as she seeks *placidam pacem* for the Romans, just as *suavis* characterized the physical generation in:

> . . . tibi *suavis* daedala tellus
> summittit flores. (1.7 f.)

[55] A close study of all the uses of *suavis*, *blandus*, *dulcis*, and *dius* will show, I believe, that like *voluptas* they have a double application — to peace and to creativity. So *suavis* in 3.173, in reference to swooning, is correct; it carries here the connotation of peace (see Logre 196–97).

But the major theme of lines 6–9 is on the *peace* subsequent to generation. So in the verses

> . . . tibi *rident* aequora ponti
> placatumque *nitet diffuso lumine* caelum (1.8 f.)

we catch, do we not, a glimpse of the sublime calm that surrounds the abodes of the gods — the abodes that know neither wind nor cloud nor snow nor frost. Here the sky is everlastingly clear

> . . . et large *diffuso lumine ridet.* (3.22)

But then suddenly after line 9 in the first proem the motive of generation comes in again strongly. Venus' fête begins. The goddess stirs her train into motion throughout her broad realm. Lines 10–28 throb sensuously with the theme of production. Within this section, lines 10–20 have to do with physical production, and lines 21–28 with production on another level — that of the *De rerum natura.* The pace in 10–20 brusquely increases its tempo: birds fly; animals gallop; streams rush swiftly by, until we reach the full and rhythmic swing of

> omnibus incutiens *blandum* per pectora amorem. (1.19)

So far (lines 10–20) the poet is thinking of physical reproduction on a large, impersonal, "safe" scale, as the *blandum* indicates. This process goes on with violence and compulsion. The birds are *perculsae corda tua vi*, just as we saw that even the tender lambs in another description of generation were *perculsa* (1.261). The entire animal world is *capta lepore.*[56]

The pleasure of movement involved in this vast, impersonal act of reproduction is what we may conclude Lucretius considered, instinctively, a "proper" kind of kinetic pleasure.[57] To this theme of general reproduction he enthusiastically returns again and again, and we have available, thanks to his habit of using the same words for the same situations, a touchstone, perhaps derived from Empedo-

[56] *Lepos* is not just "delight" but often something like "attractive appeal" — the attraction which may lead to sexual union, as is brought out in 4.1133. And the notion of "charm" results not only from the fact that something has been produced but from the fact, too, that that thing will itself lead to production; see 3.1005–6.

[57] We may wonder, to make a strange suggestion, whether Lucretius, in his adaptation of the Epicurean doctrine of the psychological communion between men and gods, did not feel that in some indirect way the gods, though having nothing causally to do with generation, did not "welcome" safe generation and artistic and philosophical generation, even as they "welcomed" good men.

cles,[58] by which we can recognize this "proper" sort of active pleasure. This touchstone is the cluster of key-words which usually reappear whenever this theme reappears: *volucres*, *ferae*, *pecudes*, *montes*, *nitidae fruges*, *pabula laeta*, *arbusta*, *fluvii*, compounds of *salio*[59] (often with a literal, sexual suggestion), and, above all, *blandus* (or *blanditur*).[60]

Then with line 21 we come to the matter of Venus and Lucretius' poem. The poet says that since Venus alone guides the nature (i.e. the production) of things, and since

> nec sine te quicquam dias in luminis oras
> *exoritur* neque fit *laetum* neque *amabile* quicquam (1.22 f.)

he wishes her to be his *sociam scribendis versibus*. He seeks, perhaps, something of the mystical union — a real experience and not stock ornament — which Hesiod had with his Muses on Helicon.[61] He gives two reasons for this entreaty. The first is plainly connected with the physical birth of his work, and the *in luminis oras / exoritur* is precisely parallel to his earlier words on birth in the animal world:

> . . . per te quoniam genus omne animantum
> concipitur visitque *exortum lumina solis*. (1.4 f.)

But now what of *laetum* and *amabile* in the second reason? They do indeed mean "joyful and lovely." But more, too. Here we surely have a right to go back again to generation in the animal world for parallels to guide us to the poet's meaning. They are:

> inde ferae pecudes persultant pabula *laeta* (1.14)

where the epithet means "fertile" or "fruitful," and

> omnibus incutiens blandum per pectora *amorem* (1.19)

where the *amorem* means "desire to propagate." *Amabile*, then, carries the overtone of "worthy of love." Lucretius wishes his own

[58] See W. Kranz, "Lukrez und Empedokles," *Philologus* 96 (1943) 83–84.

[59] In 4.1200 *Venerem salientum laeta retractat*, Bailey's "shuns" seems misleading in the light of Lucretius' general use of compounds of *salio*; cf. 4.1270 and also 1.187 and 2.631. In the last case, the common conjunction of compounds of *salio* with *laetus* confirms Pontanus' emendation of *laeti*, while for the symbolism of *sanguine* see 4.1050.

[60] E.g. see the clusters in 1.250 ff.; 2.343 ff. and 594 ff. Even in the diatribe on love, when finally the poet turns to the woman who does not feign love, we know that he looked upon this sort as fairly "safe" by the key-words in 4.1197 ff.

[61] See K. Latte, "Hesiods Dichterweihe," *AuA* 2 (1946) 154 ff.

poem to be in itself productive. He wishes his readers to "mate" with it and through this communion to produce the right way to live life. In short, he asks Venus to give his poem appeal and attractiveness. He does not, we note, ask Venus to be the mother or midwife of his verses, but to be his "partner" (*sociam* is a legal metaphor). So his request is:

> . . . aeternum da dictis, diva, *leporem*. (1.28)

He asks for the same *leporem* by which the animals in line 15 were enticed to reproduce (*capta lepore*). And he asks that the *leporem* should be *aeternum*. If the *lepos* can be eternal like the atoms or the gods — for Lucretius unlike Epicurus went back to Homer's deathless gods and called them immortal — or like Epicurus' own teachings (*perpetua semper dignissima vita*, 3.13), then Lucretius' words, too, will have something of deathlessness about them (or as much as one can have in this ultimately doomed world). His poem will go on being productive, in that it will go on winning converts to the truth.

Hence in this initial hymn, it would not have been enough for Lucretius to have called upon a Muse or upon the Muses in general. These must wait for the "second proem" to the book (921–50) and then for Calliope in 6.94 (for the full truth about *voluptas*). But now at the start of the poem he must have with him the goddess who symbolizes generation, that she may give his poem, as she does the animals, the appeal which will evoke production.

Now we may turn to this "second proem" of which we spoke.[62] This is Lucretius' own poetic confession:

> . . . sed acri
> *percussit* thyrso laudis spes magna meum cor
> et simul *incussit suavem* mi in *pectus amorem*
> musarum, quo nunc instinctus, mente vigenti
> avia Pieridum *peragro* loca nullius ante
> trita solo. iuvat integros accedere fontis
> atque haurire, iuvatque novos decerpere *flores*
> insignemque meo capiti petere inde coronam
> unde prius nulli velarint tempora musae;
> primum quod magnis *doceo* de rebus et artis
> religionum animum nodis exsolvere pergo,
> deinde quod obscura de re tam lucida pango
> carmina, *musaeo* contingens *cuncta lepore*. (1.922 ff.)

[62] The second proem repeats many of the ideas and images of the first.

The hope for fame has struck him, and with the Bacchants' wand that represents poetic inspiration (since finally Apollo inevitably admitted Dionysus to Delphi). In the first proem the birds had been *perculsae* by Venus' power just as here Lucretius has been smitten (*percussit* and *incussit*). And we recall the key-line back there:

omnibus *incutiens* blandum per *pectora amorem.* (1.19)

The result had been animal propagation. Now Lucretius, on a different plane, is smitten with desire — desire for the Muses (*suavem in pectus amorem*). The result of this union is to be production, too — this time of his poetry. Again flowers, as in 1.8, appear as symbols of birth. But the *blandum amorem* of the first proem now becomes *suavem amorem.* For the animal world, the epithet is the one usually applied to *voluptas* on this plane: *blandum.* For the world of ideas and poetry, the epithet is *suavem.* Throughout the poem *blandus* (or *blanditur*) is to be the key-word for the impersonal, "safe" reproduction that the animals practice; *suavis*, tied to the concept of Epicurean peace, is to describe the sort of *mental* generation which contains in it an element of ataraxy. So Venus is asked to pour forth *suavis loquellas* upon Mars as she seeks *placidam pacem*; so Book 2 opens with *Suave, mari magno*; so Lucretius hopes to write with *suaviloquenti carmine* and later speaks in *suavidicis versibus.* And since, of course, poetic production is on the mental plane, Lucretius traverses with strong *mind* (we need a comma after *instinctus* in 1.925) the out-of-the-way haunts of the Muses.

All of this has to do with the production of his verses. But now what of their own power — the power of his verses themselves — to produce in their turn? At first sight it may seem odd that an Epicurean should be moved by the hope for praise.[63] Is this, we ask, the master's λάθε βιώσας? The answer lies in the hope Lucretius has for the salutary effect which his words will produce via conversion on the reader, if only the reader can be induced to join himself with these words. For Lucretius has *solacia* to give us (5.113), just as has his master (6.4). The union of Lucretius and reader — Lucretius never doubts for a moment that attentive reading means conversion[64] — will produce happiness. So Lucretius looks upon

[63] Cf. in*de coronam* of Lucretius (1.929) with fron*de coronam* of Ennius (1.118).

[64] One of the dominant characteristics of the poem (see note 6) is the belief that the greatest power is the capability of rationality. Hence knowledge becomes power.

himself, in the great Hesiodic tradition, as first and foremost a teacher (*doceo*). He deliberately courts the Muses so that his verses may have sufficient attractiveness to entice his readers to go on reading.[65] The stimulus which his verses may have for mental propagation will depend upon their having the same quality for which he had asked Venus before — poetic *lepos*. And in his accent upon the mental (*mente . . . peragro*) we perceive the same apocalyptic element which he himself noted in his description of Epicurus:

. . . omne immensum *peragravit mente* animoque. (1.74)

It is this vision which Lucretius hopes to inspire in his readers (6.647 ff.).

In this "second proem," then, the poet speaks not only of the production of his verses but seems to have in mind the "conversion" which his thought and the poetic appeal of his lines may themselves produce. It is plainly readers and converts he seeks, as passionately as Plato in Book 7 of the *Republic*.

* * *

To return now to the first proem and, finally, to our fifth question — what is the significance of the Venus-Mars tableau — we note that despite the first line's *hominum voluptas* the poet had avoided speaking of Man in terms of sexual pleasure.[66] This omission must reflect the same disapproval of passionate love[67] which bursts out with such vigor and at such length at the end of Book 4 and which can author the bitter

Hence the superiority of Epicurus over Hercules or Ceres in the fifth proem. *Possum* and *cognoscere* are, consequently, frequent and critical words, as Virgil recognized in his tribute to Lucretius. This belief in the power of the mind — *vivida vis animi* — often results in a sort of prolepsis which blurs the distinction between understanding and action. Thus Epicurus had merely to "desire" to burst nature's portals to do so (1.71); *ergo* of 1.72 betrays an emotional rather than a logical sequence. For Lucretius, it is only necessary for a man to *understand* Epicureanism to *become* an Epicurean.

[65] The *cuncta* of *musaeo contingens cuncta lepore* (1.934) shows that Lucretius in theory had no intention of writing "purple passages" (as he does not in practice. Some of the finest verses are to be found in descriptions of natural phenomena or technicalities of a physical sort).

[66] As noted by Logre 50. Man can come into 2.995 because production is here treated impersonally.

[67] On the differing views of Epicurus and Lucretius toward love, see J. B. Stearns, "Epicurus and Lucretius on Love," *PAPA* 63 (1932) xxxiv.

nequiquam, quoniam medio de fonte leporum
surgit amari aliquid quod in ipsis floribus angat.[68] (4.1133 f.)

In the Venus-Mars scene and in the fourth book's denunciation of the sort of passionate love which was ruining the Catulluses,[69] we are back to the second characteristic of the poem which we noted at the start (above, 93 f.) — its habit of reacting in the same fashion to the same psychic situations or states. In passionate attachment, as in false religion, Man loses his self-mastery. Not his mind but his emotions now dominate him. And where these may lead him is uncertain. Such incertitude is one of the chiefest foes which the *De rerum natura* seeks to overthrow for mankind. In its place, the poem offers a program of certainty founded on the certainty of naturalism. *On ne peut craindre l'impossible!*

In the first twenty-eight lines, whether dealing with production in the safe realm of the animals or in regard to his own verses, or with the Blessedness of the Gods, Lucretius had drawn a purely symbolic Venus. She had remained a true Epicurean divinity. And in the Venus-Mars passage she still remains this "reformed" goddess, associated with *tranquilla pace* (1.31) and *placidam pacem* (1.40). But Mars in his passion is reconstituted in flesh and blood and is anything but a true Epicurean god. He is the old Mars of the myth. Lucretius was not, I believe, so particularly interested here in pointing up the contrast between the old and the new theologies — though this is doubtless always at the back of his mind — as, having once found himself in the Mars story, in unconsciously holding up to us in Mars a picture of ourselves, of Man. It is Mars, then, who comes in an odd way to stand for the *hominum* of the first line, and Mars can do this because he is thought of here purely in terms of the old tale.

To go back to the birds and animals, even they had felt the lash of love to a degree. *Perculsae* and *capta* are not mild words. So does Mars, but much more so. Venus may be like the all-embracing, all-nourishing Magna Mater of Book 2, herself unmoved and moving all. We, the readers, know she is this; Mars does not. For he belongs to the world of the birds and animals.

[68] Note the generative symbols *leporum* and *floribus*. The connection of the water-imagery (*fonte*) with generation needs no explication.

[69] This sort of love is not to be confused with the robustness of Plautus, the indulgence of Terence, the sensuality of Ovid, or the sentimentality of Tibullus; see Bignone 274.

His pleasure is entirely kinetic. He is like the animals, save that he is an *individual*, personal instance. Nothing "safe" now! For the man called Mars is wasting away in uncertainty, just as the lovers are pictured in Book 4:

> . . . *incerti tabescunt* vulnere caeco. (1120)

It is not Venus who is the amorous one. She is the impassive Epicurean goddess. Mars, on the other hand, feels and suffers. It is he who is

> . . . aeterno devictus vulnere amoris. (1.34)

Hence, so far as Mars is concerned (but not, of course, in the case of the undisturbed, statuesque Venus), the *divumque voluptas* does not have a static but a kinetic meaning. But not the "safe" and impersonal sort of the birds and animals. For Mars of the myth is treated like a man and reacts like one. Myth has given us the typical in the individual. Though Lucretius had left Man out by name from the whole passage (1.1–44), yet by symbol he now enters. In the lines

> nam tu sola potes tranquilla pace iuvare
> *mortalis*, quoniam belli fera moenera *Mavors* . . . (1.31 f.)

we not only hear the sound *mors* in *Mavors* but we may suspect a significance in the fact that the second of these lines begins with *mortalis* and ends with *Mavors*. In general, then, if we think of the Magna Mater passage of Book 2 in the closest relation to the Venus of the opening lines of the first book, so when we read the Venus-Mars passage we similarly think of the love-passage that closes the fourth book.

But, to pull ourselves back for a moment and to ask how Mars came into the picture at all, we can perhaps supply an answer by imagining some such progression as this in the poet's imaginative course: already in the first word, *Aeneadum*, Mars must have been hovering dimly over his thoughts since, if Venus was the "mother" of the Romans, Mars was their "father." Then, too, the motives of Venus-*ἡδονή* and *Venus-physica* would lead on naturally to another myth about Venus. This might well have had to do with Mars anyway, since the Venus-Mars story was so well known. But this introduction of Mars would come the more easily since the poet's second request of Venus was: "grant us peace (which only you,

Venus, can procure)." Peace would automatically suggest war (just as the theme of peace was partly responsible for the tale of Iphigeneia's sacrifice for the sake of war). The thought of war would, of course, propose Mars to the poet. Then, since *voluptas* was central anyway in his mind throughout the entire passage, the combination of Venus and Mars in relation to *voluptas* would inevitably lead the poet back to the old tale of Aphrodite and Ares.

As we said, the impersonal act of reproduction in lines 1–20 was safe enough just because it was impersonal. But when the poet must speak of the *voluptas* of a person who is desperately in love, and when this person through the mythological medium feels and suffers as does mankind in passionate love, then we are bound to have such a person — here Mars — know the frustration and anxiety and torture and wounds of the lover at the end of the fourth book.

And this not without its irony! I have no doubt that Lucretius, once he found himself involved in the Venus-Mars story, enjoyed the sharp contrast within the first forty-three lines. "But now ask the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee." But ask a human being; ask Mars. Now Venus is no longer asking for early man's *glandes atque arbita vel pira lecta* (5.965). No, not even for our *pulchra Sicyonia* (4.1125), but for nothing less than *placidam pacem*! Lucretius the satiric reformer is commenting. For in essence the poet is asking for ἀταραξία from a goddess who can cause many ταραχαί, though being herself at this point also an Epicurean divinity, she cannot herself suffer as does the non-Epicurean, mythological Mars. Again all the more must we emphasize the importance which Friedländer attached to the six lines of straight theology (1.44–49).

Virtually, by line 49, Lucretius is saying: Man thinks he knows what *voluptas* is. It is the pleasure sought by Mars. But Man does not really know. "Sexual intercourse has never done a man good," declared Epicurus, "and he is lucky if it has not harmed him."[70] This is *falsa voluptas*, this passionate love with all its ταραχαί. As false as the religion depicted in 1.80–101. The real good is that of Venus as static ἡδονή, which brings ἀταραξία. The poet has now symbolically revealed the truth about the meanings latent in *hominum divumque voluptas*. The phrase pivots about the

[70] *Fragmenta Ep.* A 51 (Bailey, cf. note 16).

sentiment of Epicurus that "there are two ideas of happiness, complete happiness, such as belongs to a God, which admits of no increase, and the happiness which is concerned with the addition and subtraction of pleasure."[71] But the full force of these opening lines will not be felt until the end of the poem — not till the reader has gone through the love passage and the anthropology and now, once erotic pathology is done with, has arrived at

Calliope, requies hominum divumque voluptas.[72] (6.94)

Several elements in the picture of Mars in love are worthy of notice in the light of the suggestions just made.[73] Both Venus and Mars are stationary figures, but the verbs burden, as usually they do in the poem, the whole passage with an almost over-vigor. Mars "hurls himself back"; he is "overwhelmed"; his neck is "thrown back." At this point the two are physically stationed in our minds, but the strain and helplessness of the *armipotens* is strongly etched. *Inhians* foreshadows the effect of Venus. *Pascit* recalls the *pabula laeta* (1.14) and looks forward to the dire *pabula amoris* (4.1063). The combination of *in gremium* and *pascit* will be remembered later on when the poet, again mythically describing generation and again in a personal way (the Wedding of Father Heaven and Mother Earth), first asks

. . . unde aether sidera *pascit*? (1.231)

and then tells us of the time

. . . ubi eos pater aether
in gremium matris terrai praecipitavit (1.250 f.)

In the Mars scene *spiritus* and *ore* heighten the sensuality. The tremendous passion of the repeated *re*'s (*reicit*, *reposta*, *resupini*, *recubantem*) extends the stationary tension beyond the fixed immobility of the two forms and projects it into the tortured struggles of a Mars who is denied active expression. Now Mars has "fallen toward the wound" (4.1049). The entire statue — for it *is* one

[71] *Vita Epicuri* 121A.

[72] See G. Giri, "Intorno alla invocazione di Lucrezio a Venere e alla rappresentazione di lei con Marte. La invocazione a Calliope," *RFIC* 43 (1915) 53–55.

[73] I am not concerned here with how much influence Empedocles' "Strife" had over Lucretius' idea of Mars, but rather with what in fact Mars has become as the Lucretian treatment develops. For a neurological and psychological discussion of the tableau, see Logre 52–56. But the scene is not a true pietà!

and not just a description of one — is full of potential carnality and full of ultimate frustration. For the fateful *saepe* of Mars

> . . . in gremium qui *saepe* tuum se
> reicit . . . (1.33 f.)

shows that his desire is no more satisfied for long than that of Man in love:

> *parva* fit ardoris violenti pausa *parumper*.
> inde redit rabies eadem et furor ille revisit. (4.1116 f.)

And Mars was wounded by Venus (*aeterno devictus vulnere amoris*) just as was Man at the dramatic opening of the love-passage:

> idque petit corpus, *mens* unde est saucia amore.
> namque omnes plerumque cadunt in *vulnus* . . .
> . . . . . .
> sic igitur *Veneris* qui telis accipit *ictus*. (4.1049 ff.)

The thought of the *prima vulnera* (4.1070) and of the *vulnere caeco* (4.1120) comes to our mind. Bearing the Mars passage in mind, we feel the full acute force of the two jagged phrases in the fourth book: *Haec Venus est nobis* (1058) and *Veneres nostras* (1185).

* * *

The upshot would seem to be that the *voluptas* of the first line is freighted with three burdens of meaning; the ideal static pleasure of the Epicurean gods (at which we should aim and which also those engaged in artistic or philosophical creativity approach), the fairly harmless kinetic pleasure derived from the act of reproduction when this is conducted impersonally (and left to birds and animals, or to a man who traffics only with a *vulgivaga Venere* [4.1071]), and lastly the harmful pleasure of the passionate lover who does not know that "the means which produce some pleasures bring with them disturbances many times greater than the pleasures."[74] We conclude, too, that we cannot accept Bignone's neat division whereby lines 1–23 are made to reveal Venus as kinetic pleasure and lines 31–40 to present her as static pleasure. On the contrary, as we have said, all the three meanings of *voluptas* with various gradations are continually at play all through the opening lines, constantly shifting and intermingling as *voluptas* moves by degrees

[74] K.Δ. 8; cf. *Ep. ad Men.* 129.

from perfect bland detachment all the way to compelling ecstasy, and then back again. Nor is it surprising that we find these shifts and gradations when we remember Epicurus' insistence upon the basic unity of pleasure, though he classified pleasures according as they were short and intense or long lasting and moderate. Hence everywhere in these first lines of the *De rerum natura* we see the fundamental homogeneity of pleasure as the motives of peace and generation pass before us, and pass on both physical and mental planes. That is why, then, in these first forty-nine lines, birth, poetry, passion, peace, eternal life, and divinity can all be held in suspension in the easy solvent of a poetic consciousness.