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I. Discontinuity in Lucretian Symbolism

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There have been many valuable studies in recent years of Vergilian metaphors and similes and of the symbolism which forms so important a component of the *Aeneid*. It might seem surprising, therefore, that Lucretian symbolism has been largely ignored: with the exception of comments on a few passages and incidental observations in reference to certain themes, little has been done to define the particular technique of the *De rerum natura*.¹ The reason for this neglect, I venture to guess, lies in the difficulty of assessing the practice which I define in my title, namely, discontinuity. Whereas Vergil, the classical poet, integrates his symbols with a unified epic conception, Lucretius uses the same symbols in different, often contradictory senses. In this paper I shall describe this process of discontinuity as illustrated by certain common symbolic themes, then, following the suggestions of De Lacy's recent article, indicate the poetic solution for Lucretius' apparent dilemma.

¹ H. S. Davies, "Notes on Lucretius," *Criterion* 11 (1931) 36 ff., was the first to interpret Lucretian imagery in the modern method, I believe. Since then, especially in the United States, there have been several studies which, in dealing with portions of the poem, have contributed to the general question: e.g. J. P. Elder, "Lucretius 1.1-49," *TAPA* 85 (1954) 88-120; A. K. Michels, "Death and Two Poets," *TAPA* 86 (1955) 160-71; and H. S. Commager, Jr., "Lucretius' Interpretation of the Plague," *HSCP* 62 (1957) 105-18.

i. *Light and Dark*

We may begin by studying discontinuity in the use of the familiar themes of light and dark. As physical phenomena, neither light nor dark possesses extraordinary features: each represents one phase of the natural alternation of day and night occasioned by the earth's rotation in relation to the sun, and the same cause produces light and darkness. Therefore, for the physicist or the philosopher who can achieve the dispassionate attitude of the uninvolved spectator, it is important to describe the natural process without prejudice and, wherever possible, to combat the ignorance of those who fear darkness. Lucretius announces his purpose of explaining the movements of sun and moon (5.76 ff.) in order to free mankind of the superstitious belief that potentially malevolent gods control the heavens; it is in this spirit that he accounts later for night and day (5.650 ff.). With particular approval, he describes how primitive Man calmly faced night, naturally assuming that day would follow in due course as it always had (5.972 ff.). And even for himself, Lucretius has found that night provides peace (*noctes serenas* 1.142) and the opportunity for pleasant work on his poem. Thus, although one may instinctively prefer daylight,² a rational human being will not attach any great emotional connotations to light and dark.

That instinctive preference for daylight in mankind stimulates the poetic usage of light and dark as polar symbols: light has always symbolized something good, something that can be seen, known, and controlled, while darkness is associated with ignorance, fear, crime, and death. Lucretius' readers quickly become familiar with the concept of the Epicurean poet "illuminating" the "darkness" of ignorance. As Lucretius regularly expresses it, he couples fear and darkness: *terrorem animi tenebrasque*; and in the well-known simile he compares the ignorant fears of men to the terror of children in darkness.³ Indeed, it is because men struggle blindly in darkness that the poet has undertaken to write his epic, to let the light of reason (*lucida tela diei*) dispel our blindness (*caeca nox* 1.1115, *errantes caeca ratione* 6.67).⁴ In this respect he

² Later in the poem Lucretius can substitute for *serenus* of 1.142 the pessimistic epithet *severus*: cf. *severa silentia noctis* 4.460; *noctis signa severa* 5.1190.

³ The simile occurs three times: 2.55 ff., 3.87 ff., and 6.36 ff.

⁴ Lucretius associates light with the best qualities of poetry. Hence, he criticizes Heraclitus for obscuring his arguments (1.639 ff.) and praises Empedocles as *praecclarus*

follows directly in the footsteps of Epicurus, who lifted mankind up from the darkness of existence (*e tenebris tantis* 3.1; cf. 5.11).

When he discusses what mankind does not know, in its blind ignorance, Lucretius soon allows his symbols to become discontinuous, for some things that we do not know arouse the poet's wonder and he will not envision them as fearsome, while others awaken his sympathetic participation in Man's terrors. Therefore, it is useful to pursue the various associations attached to the adjective *caecus*. To begin with, Lucretius proposes to unveil the mysteries of nature and, to do this, he must explain the main features of the atoms. By a series of analogies, then by an axiomatic assertion, he argues that certain invisible bodies (*corpora caeca* 1.277, 295, 328, 2.714; *primordia caeca* 1.1110) underlie all creation. Any reader of Book 1 would soon admit that *caeca*, as attached to the atoms, possesses no menacing implications; to a certain extent, perhaps, the atoms are "blind," but essentially Lucretius uses the metaphor to emphasize their invisibility and clarify our "blindness." As one reads his description of the atoms in Book 1, one is constantly struck by the creative environment surrounding these bodies for, as we shall see, they symbolically possess life not only as *corpora*, but especially as *semina*. All is regular in the world of these atoms; nothing ever dies, nothing is ever created from nothing. The neutral associations of atomic "blindness" make it possible for Lucretius to use an analogy which in the case of human "blindness" he would never think of employing. One of his most vivid accounts of atomic movements occurs in 2.114 ff.; there he uses the violent action of dust particles in sunbeams to represent the *motus caecos* (127), the *error* (132) of the atoms; neither those "blind" motions nor that "wandering" partakes of the terror which belongs to human groping for security. Atomic "blindness" somehow fits in with the activities of daylight, and the *corpora caeca* are basically *genitalia corpora* (cf. 2.62 ff.).⁵

Like the rest of creation, men logically are constituted of *corpora caeca* and form part of the eternal atomic process, so that, (1.729, 732). Cf. J. H. Waszink, "Lucretius and Poetry," *Medelingen der koninklijke nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen*, Nieuwe Reeks 17 (1954) 243-57.

⁵ It is true that Lucretius compares the movement of the dust particles to a military engagement, but in my opinion the simile of 2.118 ff. is purely descriptive, free of emotional connotations. As I argue below, the symbolic theme of war acquires its pejorative associations in connection with Man.

if we could sufficiently distance ourselves, we could feel quite dispassionate about the cycle of life and death involving mortals. In fact it is impossible to remain dispassionate about what directly affects ourselves, and Lucretius is drawn into our ethical world, where he tries to deal with our fears; at that point "blindness" and "darkness" acquire strongly pejorative tones, and discontinuity enters. Rather than mere *corpora caeca*, we become for Lucretius *pectora caeca* (2.14), blind, unreasoning emotions (cf. *caeca cupido* 3.59, 4.1153; *vulnere caeco* 4.1120; *caecae caliginis umbra* 3.304).

We fear death and associate it with darkness, for we instinctively believe that we continue to exist somewhere, but in an environment which is the negation of this present sunlit world of ours. Lucretius tries to conquer such emotional misconceptions for, after all, Epicurus defined death as the limit of existence. If, as Epicurus argued, there is no Underworld or After-Life, death can possess no associations and should mean nothing to us. Lucretius disapprovingly records that Ennius wrote of *tenebras Orci* (1.115) and refers to the common poetic connection of darkness and Acheron (4.170, 6.251); but himself, he confidently denies the existence of Acheron as Epicurus did: *nusquam apparent Acherusia templa* (3.25). However, the more he enters into the fears of mortals, the more he indicates that death does involve dark reality, at least to the poetic imagination.

In the first place, Lucretius regularly speaks of life in terms of light, and with great enthusiasm. The first time we meet *lumen*, in fact, we are watching the lovely scene of Venus' arrival and the transformation of nature that results (1.5 and 9); this context provides permanent connotations for the famous phrase *in luminis oras* (1.22), where the "light" is surely the light of life. The creative, joyful associations of this light would seem to make death, by contrast, dark and drear.⁶ In fact, to die is to leave the light (cf. 3.1025, 5.989, 6.1197-98). When he uses such an image, especially to describe so vividly the creative side of nature as *lumen*, it is not always clear whether Lucretius represents human feelings or actually reveals his own poetic sympathies. However, he does partially counteract the dangerous discontinuity implicit in the "darkness" of death by providing the image positive connotations. Especially at the end of Book 3, when he gives up

⁶ Thus Lucretius associates blindness and death in 3.408 ff.

rational appeals and talks directly to our emotions, he tries to make of the "night" of death a dreamless sleep, something to covet, not fear. It is as if darkness has suggested in sleep a positive symbol to oppose to the terrors of black Acheron.⁷

To conclude, light and darkness are natural phenomena, and logically they should possess a purely descriptive value as images. We should know from our own experience that day follows night and, if we were scientific observers, we should be able to contemplate with serenity the eternal succession of life and death of individuals in the natural process. When we consider the atoms, indeed, we can succeed in divorcing ourselves from our personal prejudices: *corpora caeca* are unseen bodies in ceaseless activity with the potentiality of life (*genitalia corpora*). Like *Venus genetrix*, the atoms seem permanently associated with *lumen*, and their "death" can easily be envisioned as a handing on of the torch of life (2.79). Our part in the natural process is less simple. Contemplating our own inevitable death, we tend to regard it as the extinction of a desirable light, as a transferral to a realm of darkness and misery. Lucretius allows his sympathies to become engaged with these important human ethical preoccupations. In part he suggests that we labor in a darksome night of ignorance, which can be dispelled by the sunlight of *ratio*; in part he tries to transform our dreaded death into a dreamless sleep, that permanent *quies* which so many men desire. But at other times, regardless of the discontinuity, he throws himself unreservedly into rendering our terrors: thus storm clouds form into a horrible blackness (*taetra nocte* 4.172); they create menacing faces of black terror (*atrae formidinis ora* 4.173; cf. 6.254); even the coming of night can be described as frightening (*nox ubi terribili terras caligine textit* 6.852).⁸

II. *Terra Mater*

If Venus represents the stage of becoming, the creative phase of life in general, *Terra Mater* functions in a specialized sense to

⁷ See below the brief summary of the theme of death.

⁸ C. Bailey, *Titi Lucreti Cari De rerum natura libri sex* (Oxford 1947), commenting on this passage, says: "terribili: 'terrifying,' a strange epithet in this context for *caligine*, perhaps used, as Giussani suggests, for the sake of alliteration with *terras*." I think that we can go a little farther than that. By Book 6, Nature as a whole has become hostile to Man; hence the epithet fits the mood of the book, insofar as it represents Man's terror sympathetically.

cover that aspect of generation which depends upon the vital properties of the earth. Lucretius seems to derive "atomological" significance from the common syllables in *terra* and *mater*,⁹ and the expression *Terra Mater* sometimes appears in conjunction with *materies*, one of the metaphorical terms for the atoms (cf. 1.249 ff., 2.991 ff.). These metaphorical terms ("seeds," "bodies") indicate the basic creative force in the atoms; and indeed the atoms contract metaphorical "marriages" and engage in "sexual intercourse," all under the inspiration of *Venus genetrix*.¹⁰ Mother Earth also plays her part in the generative activity, for obviously much of life seems to spring from the soil. Thus we first hear of *daedala tellus* (1.7) responding to the advent of Venus by sending forth sweet flowers, and Venus is coupled with the earth in 1.228, the latter being thought of as a mother who nourishes her children.¹¹ It is in this context that Lucretius first uses the expression *mater terra* (251), to illustrate the eternal process of death and renewal that takes place in nature. Things are not totally destroyed, but they are torn apart (or divorced, *discidio* 249) and return to their material components (*materiai*); to exemplify this the poet starts from the suggestive etymology of *materies* and describes how the rains from Father Sky do not die but fall into the embrace of Mother Earth, from which result the fruitful trees, animals, and thriving cities full of children.

The allegory in 1.250 ff., a variation on that in Euripides and Pacuvius after him, has several notable features: first, *Terra Mater* unambiguously signifies the creative force of Nature, the underlying predominance of life over death; secondly, Mother Earth plays the sexual role of a mother, as confirmed in subsequent passages by the metaphors of birth used to define earth's functions; finally, the creation of Man forms part of the generative duties of Mother Earth, in no way distinguished from her other activities and, in fact, rendered ethically positive by the language used: *hinc laetas urbis pueris florere videmus* (255). Thus, Lucretius adopts the familiar Euripidean image and makes it an integral part of his own poetic vision. In Book 1, always thinking of the earth as a

⁹ Cf. P. Friedländer, "Pattern of Sound and Atomistic Theory in Lucretius," *AJP* 62 (1941) 20.

¹⁰ See below the brief summary of the theme of *Venus genetrix*, especially on the metaphorical implications of such terms as *concilium*, *coetus* or *coitus*, *congressus*, etc.

¹¹ Cf. *alit* 229, a metaphor which should probably be connected with the phrase *alma Venus* in 1.2. But on the latter, see R. Waltz, *REA* 59 (1957) 51-71.

beneficent parent, he describes her as *vivida tellus* (178), pictures her embracing (*amplectitur* 135) the bones of the dead and, in anticipation of 250 ff., tells how she brings forth her delightful offspring (*laetificos fetus* 193) with the help of the rains (cf. 1.1033).

If earth is the mother of Man, she should, by analogy with human mothers, to some extent explain his character and physical nature. As Lucretius develops the image of Mother Earth, he begins to differentiate her relation to Man from her benevolent maternal protection of plants and animals. Early in Book 2 he suggests that, from Man's point of view, nature is blemished (177 ff.); and in 2.576 ff., while describing the natural cycles he leaves us with the overwhelming impression of death rather than birth. It is in immediate juxtaposition with details about lamenting mourners and wailing babies that the poet introduces his second and much fuller discussion of *Terra Mater*. Because the earth seems to contain the source of all visible matter (2.589 ff.), including fruits and crops for Man and fodder for his cattle, Lucretius says that she deserves the titles of *magna deum mater*, *mater ferarum*, and *nostrī genetrix corporis* (598-99). This introduction significantly captures all the positive associations of creativity (*nitidas fruges*, *arbusta laeta*, *pabula laeta*) and almost identifies *Terra Mater* with the pleasing aspects of *Venus genetrix*. For the moment Man shares in the benevolence of the earth together with the animals, but only until Lucretius begins to develop the religious connotations of *Terra Mater*.

I do not here concern myself with the source of Lucretius' rationalizing interpretation of the goddess, nor shall I discuss the basis of his decision to assimilate the Roman deity Tellus and the Euripidean *Terra Mater* with the Oriental Cybele.¹² The point relevant to this paper is that, when men try to visualize her, Mother Earth becomes a deity of ambiguous, not to say frightening, powers. One has only to observe her attributes and the ceremonies of her worshippers: ferocious lions draw her chariot (because the wildness of children must be conquered and tamed); she wears a mural crown (connected with fortified cities); eunuchs accompany her (symbolizing the punishment deserved by disrespectful children); her attendants blow raucous blasts on horns

¹² Cf. J. Perret, "Le 'mythe de Cybèle': Lucrèce II, 600-660," *REL* 13 (1935) 332-57; and P. Boyancé, "Une exégèse stoïcienne chez Lucrèce," *REL* 19 (1941) 147-66.

and brandish spears (to inspire fear in the irreverent); people spread roses and throw coins before her (in recognition of her salutary powers); an armed band of Curetes dance for the goddess, stabbing themselves and rejoicing in their flowing blood (in possible reference to the duty of defending one's country). We might integrate these separate details as follows: the complex nature of Man in society, his violence, self-indulgence, and blasphemy, in short, his tendency to throw away the very gift of life and the opportunities of happiness, all complicate the concept of Mother Earth. Of course Lucretius catches himself up at 644 ff. to insist that the earth is devoid of sensation and hence of personality (652), to deny that she can be touched by anger; but the fact remains that *Terra Mater* has evoked negative associations in her relation to Man.

In Book 2 Lucretius seems to feel his way towards the idea which becomes clear in Book 5, namely, that earth mothered Man, but that Man quickly became dissociated from his parent. Without the mythological details, but in anticipation of them, he writes of the spontaneous generation of worms from *umida tellus* (2.873), seemingly impregnated by rain; and 875, closely approximating 2.596 (where the poet unmistakably describes the activities of *Terra Mater*) suggests that Lucretius is thinking of the maternal powers of the earth. Then in 991 ff., as a summary of this section, he embarks on another picture of *Terra Mater* and *Aether Pater* like that of 1.250 ff. The difference between the two passages consists in the fact that in 2.991 ff. the note of happiness, especially for *genus humanum*, is muted and, the eternal process seems to incline towards the destructive instead of the creative; certainly we hear no more of death "aiding" life (cf. 1.264). By the end of Book 2 the ambiguity disappears, for Lucretius depicts an aged, now sterile earth (1150 ff.) which has long ceased to benefit men. Now men are compelled to farm, and their life consists of exhausting and unproductive labor; the old *arator* can only augur Man's fatal destiny.

Book 5 elaborates the picture of Man's dissociation from Mother Earth, continuing directly from the mood of Book 2. For instance Lucretius now expands his argument about faulty nature (195 ff.; cf. 2.177 ff.) and therein makes two relevant points, one familiar and one new. First, he evokes the picture of the farmer again, though now specifying that the labor of ploughing and

fighting against hostile weather proves the unfriendliness of Nature towards us. Secondly, he clearly distinguishes men from animals, as he comments on the enmity between Man and beast (218-20), then on the special care which a kindly earth and Nature lavish on animals, not on men (228 ff.). While animals enjoy the munificence of the earth, men require nurses, walls, and armor, in order to face the life of evil (227) which lies before them. All of which seems to confirm the negative implications in the allegory of Cybele from 2.600 ff.

It is in the extensive account of Man's development from primeval times that we perceive most fully the significance in Man's separation from his mother. In the beginning earth brought forth all living things, and in particular she played the biological part of mother to the first men (5.807 ff.). Recalling 2.998, Lucretius insists on the validity of naming her *Terra Mater* (821), but then immediately moves to the change which took place when earth ceased generating mankind: *ut mulier spatio defessa vetusto* (827). In depicting the existence of early men, Lucretius observes that, because a hard earth (*tellus dura* 926) had created him, Man himself was rougher than at present. Moreover, the hard earth produced crude food (*pabula dura* 944), enough for humans in their wretched state (*miseris mortalibus ampla*); no mention is made now of the *pabula laeta* which we had come to associate with Mother Earth. The poet goes on to describe the enmity between men and animals (966 and 982 ff.), then the creation of shelters and clothes, forced on weak men who could not endure the climate of Mother Earth (1011 ff.).

As life is a struggle, force serves as Man's one weapon against the hostility of the natural environment and his fellow men (cf. *vi colere aevum* 1145). He can use fire to overcome the cold of hard Mother Earth, and he will also extend his own limited strength by making fire a deadly weapon (1245-46); or he may attack Mother Earth herself, burning back the forests in order to increase the arable land and exploit good soil (*inducti terrae bonitate* 1247). Since Lucretius has already described the farmer's life of toil, we may be sure that men deceive themselves about earth's bounty; they must fight for it. In fact war soon pushes the farmer's activity into the background, if it does not totally destroy agriculture (1289 ff.). Cultivated fields and vineyards, under the guidance of the creative tendencies in nature (*natura*

creatrix 1362), possess the beauty and the happy connotations (*laeta* 1372, *lepore* 1376) which remind us of *Venus genetrix*; but this beauty yields to the more formidable achievements of Man's restless utilitarian intellect. Gone now is the day when the rude rustic beat out his unrhythmical dance on Mother Earth,¹³ even then considerably alienated from her. Now earth signifies a thing, not a mother, an area to be allotted (*discreta tellus* 1441), part of that planned disorder of human existence which also requires heavily fortified cities (1440). In short, Man's increasing dissociation from Mother Earth probably emphasizes his basically complex nature, his perpetual tendency to undo every creative advance by making it the cause or companion of great destruction.

Mother Earth does not intrude herself in Books 3 or 4, nor would we expect her to do so.¹⁴ However, in Book 6 she plays the role of a cruel stepmother. For example, once Lucretius described how Mother Earth conceived when the rain penetrated her (*in gremium* 1.251); now Earth's womb (*in gremio* 6.539) contains nothing fruitful but instead empty caverns which permit earthquakes to arise and cause terror and destruction among men. Once Lucretius could talk of spontaneous generation from the earth (2.872), of how Mother Earth grew wombs and gave birth to the first men; now she threatens (*minitatur* 6.572) extinction by earthquakes; she creates sickness rather than the means of life: *et satis haec tellus morbi caelumque mali fert* (663; cf. 771, 788); she seethes (*exaestuat* 816) with fumes that kill miners; by Lake Avernus she brings forth (*summitere* 818; cf. the same verb in 1.8) deadly effluences (*mortiferam vim* 819) instead of flowers; she produces lawless storms (956-57), not sunny Spring days. Finally, miasma rising from the damp earth might account for pestilence, although Lucretius does not choose that particular explanation for the Athenian plague. The extent to which Mother Earth has altered may be indicated in the ironic reminiscence at this last occurrence of the word *terra* (1101): pestilence originating in the rain-soaked earth is described in a manner remarkably close to

¹³ In this passage Lucretius also emphasizes the break from the past by referring to primitive men, a race now long since extinct, as *terrigenae* (1411, 1427), the archaic compound reinforcing the impression of their remoteness.

¹⁴ In 4.734 we find the metaphor *amplectitur* with *tellus*, but the line is identical with 1.135 and, I would assume, written secondarily here.

that in which Lucretius tells of the spontaneous generation of life from the damp earth (cf. 2.872-73).

To summarize this discussion, Earth imagined as a mother exhibits a typical discontinuity. At first she embraces all Nature, including Man, in her creative functions, thus fully representing the part of *Venus genetrix*. When, however, she becomes more closely identified with Man, the poet no longer describes her as an unequivocally benevolent mother of happy children. She may become Cybele, a goddess both of creativity and of war and terror, as if to illustrate how men think of her and her dubious beneficence; or she may be pictured as an old woman, exhausted by many births and unable to maintain conditions favorable to men; or finally she may become altogether hostile to humans, a veritable stepmother scheming the destruction of unwanted stepchildren by means of earthquakes, poisonous fumes, and plagues. The point at which this discontinuity first occurs marks the transition from the delighted, but uninvolved, contemplation of nature's eternal process to engagement with Man's special position in nature and a world of ethical values. So Lucretius proceeds from his first charming picture of the total unity of Man and a creative Mother Earth to a final description of the human struggle against, and fear of, a menacing, deadly earth. An incidental comment on Man as an infinitesimally tiny portion of earth (6.652) may well epitomize that alienation of mother and son.

III. *Mars and War*

War cannot be called a physical phenomenon: rather it is a part, seemingly a permanent one, of human existence.¹⁵ Therefore, Lucretius does not explain the unknown causes of conflict but exploits its associations as a symbol. Men take different attitudes towards war: one can be involved as victim or victor, and one can stand outside the battle contemplating without emotional engagement the struggles of others. These attitudes explain the discontinuity of Lucretius' symbol. As an uninvolved spectator, Lucretius voices the typical Epicurean pleasure in disengagement (2.5-6):

suave etiam belli certamina magna tueri
per campos instructa tua sine parte pericli.

¹⁵ Among the *eventa* which immediately occur to Lucretius in 1.456 is *bellum*.

Although war is an undeniable fact, the philosopher has reached a place of security and lives exempt from the terror of actual combat as well as from the "struggle" of ambition which characterizes the harried existence of most men (2.11-13).

As a metaphor, war may define a situation without suggesting any emotional bias. When Lucretius describes atomic movement, he regularly thinks of it as violent and accordingly adopts the image of war. But what sort of "war" do the atoms wage? It hardly seems at first that we should be disturbed by this atomic conflict and imagine only the destructive nature of war, such as Rome had experienced under Marius and Sulla and was beginning to dread from the divided Triumvirate. At the hypothetical start of the universe, individual atoms fell freely through limitless space in parallel courses like raindrops. Then the *clinamen* began to operate, the atoms swerved from their straight paths, and a series of collisions occurred, multiplying indefinitely (cf. 2.223). As Lucretius calmly describes them, these collisions were blows (*plagae, ictus*), though not destructive blows, because the atoms are invincible (*invicta* 1.952). From random blows to the concept of symbolic warfare is only a step, as we soon see (2.118-20):

et velut aeterno certamine proelia pugnas
edere turmatim certantia nec dare pausam,
conciliis et discidiis exercita crebris.¹⁶

I interpret this as an unemotional image, a means of rendering dramatically vivid the ceaseless activity of the atoms (cf. *nulla quies* 2.95).

Indeed, not only is this atomic warfare at this point not destructive; it is *creative*. As in Empedocles' system Strife played a necessary part in conjunction with Love to produce this mortal world of mixture, so Lucretius views creation in part as the product of the metaphorical war, in part as the sole result of Venus' and Mother Earth's efforts; a dualism which is reflected in the lovely pair of analogies for atomic motion: first, a flock of sheep peacefully grazing on a distant hillside, a mass of white against green; secondly, a troop of cavalry frenziedly going through

¹⁶ De Lacy, in the article to which I owe so much, "Process and Value: An Epicurean Dilemma," *TAPA* 88 (1957) 124, cites this passage as one of many illustrations of the "opposition between nature and the good life which we try so laboriously to construct." I cannot feel that this war impresses us as destructive or even antipathetic; the "impious war" comes later, in connection with Man's personal interests.

maneuvers, raising clouds of dust and making thunderous noise (2.317 ff.).¹⁷ The constant collisions of separate atoms eventually result in unions under ideal circumstances, unions which Lucretius renders with metaphorical terms like *conciliatus*, *concilium*, *consociare*, *conglobare*. Davies observed that the atoms form a symbolic government on analogy with the Roman Republic,¹⁸ but we should add the point relevant in this context: organized government resulted from chaotic war. Thanks to that war the invisible atoms produce larger and larger compounds until finally the visible, variegated, and delightful universe emerges.

Since atoms never cease their movements, the atomic warfare is perpetual. It creates the visible universe by bringing about compounds, and it constantly destroys things by inflicting additional blows on the very compounds which it has created. At first, as Lucretius presents the stage of disintegration, he continues to seem dispassionate, and logically he should be. After all, he interprets the regular process of nature, its eternal cycle of creation and decline; one does not need to engage one's emotions over the simple fact that the atomic motions both create and destroy (2.569-74):

nec superare queunt motus itaque exitiales
perpetuo neque in aeternum sepelire salutem,
nec porro rerum genitales auctificique
motus perpetuo possunt servare creata.
sic aequo geritur certamine principiorum
ex infinito contractum tempore bellum.

It is precisely at this point that the war symbol begins to collect pejorative associations, for what in the undifferentiated universe is an equal struggle between creative and destructive tendencies becomes in Man's limited experience a most unequal contest. As soon as he describes the eternal process in relation to human existence, Lucretius begins to emphasize the unhappy fact of our mortality. Thus he continues (575-80):

nunc hic nunc illic superant vitalia rerum
et superantur item. miscetur funere vapor
quem pueri tollunt visentes luminis oras;

¹⁷ Again it seems clear that, being mock-battle (*belli simulacra* 324), these maneuvers involve no necessary negative associations. For a similar dualism in an analogy, cf. 2.660 ff., where Lucretius brings sheep and war horses together.

¹⁸ Davies, *op. cit.* (above, note 1).

nec nox ulla diem neque noctem aurora secutat
 quae non audierit mixtos vagitibus aegris
 ploratus mortis comites et funeris atri.

To represent the creative phase, the poet chooses not the happy activity of carefree children (cf. 1.255) but the wailing of newborn babies, their "sick" cries of helplessness, as if they are born but to die. And it is the destructive phase that predominates here and gives this passage its emotional tinge, for the final line conveys only the black unhappiness of human death. Gone forever is the dispassionate view of the atomic struggle; soon Lucretius envisions the end of the world in terms of storming a fortified city (2.1144-45; cf. 954 ff.) and in another book pronounces this atomic conflict an impious war (*pio nequaquam concita bello* 5.381).

This impious war brings us naturally to the function of Mars in the poem to Book 1. From the way Lucretius presents the god, presiding over *fera moenera militai* (or *belli* 29, 32), in contrast with the delightful activities of *Venus genetrix*, there can be no doubt that Mars represents one of the polar qualities of existence, namely, destruction.¹⁹ Few would hesitate to agree that Mars plays an ethical role; he destroys values: the peaceful landscape, the happy cities and towns of Italy, and the environment for producing poetry. He directs a bestial (*fera*) activity, whereas Venus can transform wild cattle (*ferae pecudes* 15) into frolicking, creative animals. If Venus acquires all the lovely associations of life, light, peace, and happiness, Mars automatically epitomizes the menace of *mors*. In fact it would not be improbable that the verbal similarity between *Mars* and *mors* becomes with Lucretius a semantic association. Some indeed have argued that the end of the *De rerum natura* does constitute a triumph of death and might possibly, when finished, have expanded the particular scene of Athens into a general comment on Mars' victory, balancing the domination of Venus at the beginning.²⁰ In any case this hateful rendering of Mars sets the poet in the role of participant in human problems, no mere spectator.

In Man's development, as depicted in Book 5, war becomes an ever more negative factor paralleling the improved material

¹⁹ Cf. De Lacy (above, note 16) 125.

²⁰ For various theories, cf. Bailey (above, note 8) 1724-25 and 1759. Commager (above, note 1) 114 regards the plague as the ending designed by Lucretius and denies the need of additions.

circumstances of life. Nature acts with innate hostility towards all things, so that the qualities necessary for animal survival consist of *dolus*, *virtus*, or *mobilitas*, means of overcoming this hostility, or on the other hand *utilitas*, because of which men protect or domesticate certain creatures (5.857 ff.). Man himself early engaged in war against wild beasts (966 ff.) and was in turn their victim. However, organized war did not exist in this early stage; death occurred for an intelligible reason, not the result of futile ambition (999 ff.). Even though tribal rivalries made themselves felt (1019 ff.) and absolute *concordia* proved impossible, men remained more or less content until political ambitions and economic motives made life itself a path of conflict: *certantes iter infestum fecere viai* (1124). The discovery of metallurgy might possibly be connected with a tribal dispute (1245); at any rate men soon perverted metals to the single purpose of warfare (1283 ff.), and enmity between peoples resulted in insane devices of conquest (1308 ff.). The first animal hide used as clothing brought death to its owner and started a train of wars over items of luxury (1418 ff.); indeed, at least one end product of Man's so-called progress is the tide of war (*belli magnos aestus* 1435). In this scheme of things it seems as if Mars constitutes a permanent force, always tending to destroy what Mother Earth and Man's ingenuity has created, always counteracting Man's advances through the greater capacity for destruction which Man achieves and abuses or through the more potent motivation to war and conquest which politics, commerce, and luxury instigate. War possesses only negative associations in Book 5.

Man's life amounts to impious, ignorant warfare, in certain respects. Atomic "death" helps the generative process, and atomic "warfare" creates, but the wars symbolically affecting humanity negate life and all its potential happiness. Thus those basic motives of men's behavior, avarice and ambition, are "wounds" of life (*haec vulnera vitae* 3.63). Warfare provides Lucretius with one of his most vivid proofs of the mortality of the *anima*, at the same time illustrating the ignorant frenzy of humanity (3.642 ff.). It is in terms of warfare that the poet describes that fearsome phenomenon, the murderous thunderbolt²¹; he

²¹ Cf. the simile of the shot catapulted through the air, 6.177, 306, and 329. The equinoctial season, when thunderbolts occur most commonly, is described as a period of *discordia* and *bellum* (6.364 ff.).

sympathetically renders our terror through imagery drawn from the most ruinous aspect of human existence. Even Venus, when brought into relation with men, can be represented as a vicious militarist; here is discontinuity of symbolism at its most obvious.

The scene of creativity in the proem to Book 1 comes about because the polar forces, Venus and Mars, each compromise a little: Venus resorts to valuable war and Mars yields to delightful love.²² Venus captures (14) animals with pleasure and drives the wound of sweet love (19) into their hearts, so that all nature, all that is *amabile* and *laetum* (23), propagates its kind. Not only that, but she insures a peaceful environment for the poet and Memmius by wounding and conquering Mars (*aeterno devictus vulnere amoris* 34).²³ *Venus genetrix* operates here in the realm of nature, a world that includes only as a minor element human love and generation; she is the mother of Rome, but Lucretius does not concern himself at this point how Rome came to be. Like the warfare of the atoms in Book 2, the conquests by Venus in Book 1 emphasize the eternal generative process in Nature. When, however, in Book 4 Lucretius describes Venus operating among men and women alone, the "eternal wound" replaces eternal creation as her chief association; she becomes an ugly, vicious, destructive deity, no longer *Venus genetrix* but merely *Venus victrix*. The poet entertains no thoughts for the sweet children which could result from human love, no thought for the fact that sexual intercourse among mortals, as among atoms, counteracts the destructive forces of war and death; no, for him, human love is violent passion, a ruinous battle; the lover resembles a dying soldier, and his fatal wound serves as the first of many negative metaphors in a diatribe against the erotic impulses of mankind.²⁴

Whereas the warfare of the atoms and of Venus possesses ambivalent ethical associations, losing its positive quality as soon as it enters the troubled world of Man, one symbolic war always carries the noble connotations of a crusade, and precisely because it involves Man. The initial description of Epicurus in 1.62 ff.

²² Elder (above, note 1) 105 ff. calls attention to the verbs of violence associated with Venus and their anticipation of the diatribe in Book 4.

²³ In a similar sense Lucretius refers to *voluptas* as *dux vitae* in 2.172-73 and acting in the sphere of Venus.

²⁴ Cf. the metaphors in *sauicia* (4.1048), *feritur* (1055), *vulnera* (1070), *laedere* (1082), *repugnat* (1088), etc.

represents him as a glorious Roman *imperator*, endowed with the stern qualities which once enabled Rome to expand her power over the Mediterranean (*acrem . . . virtutem* 69–70). In placing this passage here, in immediate juxtaposition to the proem in which he pleaded with Venus to conquer Mars, Lucretius exhibits his discontinuity of symbolism from the start: it is as if he announced that his symbols are not stable elements around which events are grouped, but that they vary according to the particular context and the point of view adopted. Epicurus is no brute Mars; rather his victory parallels that of Venus over the destructive tendencies of Mars in Nature. Superstition crushed men down until Epicurus first dared to challenge it, and his attack resulted in total defeat of the enemy. Whereas Venus' conquest is in the realm of Nature and results in physical life, Epicurus conquered by means of his life-giving intelligence (*vivida vis animi* 1.72); he makes it possible for men to understand the allegorical aspect of Venus and to participate in divinity, at least insofar as divinity signifies utter tranquillity in the face of Nature's variations.

Similarly Lucretius compares Epicurus in Book 5 with beneficent demigods like Liber and Hercules. Liber appears (5.14 ff.) as the god who gave mankind the vine, but quite possibly also his contemporary connection with Alexander the Great and the conquest of the East should be operative.²⁵ Hercules overcame (5.38) fabulous monsters; all Rome knew him as *Hercules Victor* and *Hercules Invictus*, and Stoics thought of him as the model for the active life of virtue. To Lucretius the achievements of Liber and Hercules are negligible, because they did nothing for Man's spiritual needs, as the first of which he lists the escape from *proelia* and *pericula* (43). What these mighty demigods could not achieve by force of arms (50), Epicurus accomplished by his mind and his writings. Therefore, Epicurus' conquests (*subegerit* 49), which potentially promise an end to the eternal warfare of human existence, possess connotations of creativity in complete opposition to those of Mars and of a higher order than those of Venus.

Following in the footsteps of the Master as he does, Lucretius, the man who prays for an end to Mars' dominance in Italy, adopts the manner of the warrior in line with Epicurus' purposes.

²⁵ Cf. A. Bruhl, "Le souvenir d'Alexandre le Grand et les Romains," *Mel. École française de Rome* 47 (1930) 202–21; also, *Liber Pater: origine et expansion du culte dionysiaque à Rome et dans le monde romain*, *Écoles d'Athènes et Rome*, Fasc. 175 (1953) 124 ff.

That technique which in this sense is so aptly named polemic exhibits the poet's strenuous concern with mankind and its desperate need to "conquer" all doubts. Thus, shortly after exalting Epicurus' victory, Lucretius himself sets forth to war. He fears that the reader might be overcome (*victus* 1.103) by the frightening words of priests and prophets, and he aims to give men the courage to resist such menaces (*valerent obsistere* 108-9). The reader must be vanquished by reason (1.624); he must see how Heraclitus, for all his martial fervor (1.638), conflicts with the truth (658, 693); he must recognize that escape from facts is impossible (1.975, 1052); and he should see through the contentions of the Stoics (1062). The bellicose language of polemic continues in Book 2 and throughout the poem, as Lucretius strives not only to conquer opposing theories and his reader's hesitations, but also to force a confession of surrender.²⁶ Conquest of this type deserves the title of victory, since it can lead to the true peace, the *quies* of the Epicurean ideal. Like his Master, Lucretius engages in a war to end all wars when he so effortlessly adopts the imagery appropriate to polemic.

In this symbolic theme of Mars and War, we may conclude, Lucretius feels perfectly free to move from ruinous wars to glorious victories, with typical discontinuity. Indeed, he can even maintain the dispassionate calm of the philosopher-spectator. When he describes the inanimate atoms, the poet employs the metaphor of war to define their ceaseless movements, movements which are both creative and destructive of the compounds (represented as a political order) that form the visible world; and, restricted to the soulless atoms, this metaphor carries no ethical judgment. But destruction of what we experience does have ethical import, and accordingly the poet renders the emotions of mankind when applying the symbol of war, taken in all its contemporary relevance to the threat of Caesar and Pompey, to the dying phase of life. With the same destructive associations he can use war to interpret the futile and ruinous concerns of men, their disastrous struggle for money and political power, their paradoxical amassing of troops, their suicidal passion. To understand the human process of decline and visualize it as evil war marks one side of Lucretian discontinuity. On the other side, wars may be good,

²⁶ Cf. *dede manus* 2.1043; *manus dandum est* 2.1129; also 2.748, 868, 869, 1040.

especially to the Roman mind, when peace and stability constitute the primary results of the conflict. It is a good war when Venus conquers Mars, but by no means good when Venus subdues men. The most glorious victory is that of Epicurus, followed by that of Lucretius himself, when reason replaces weapons and the enemy, those destructive tendencies in Man which occasion fear and real wars, once defeated, can never again prevent him from enjoying that ideal Epicurean peace.

IV. *Three Other Themes*

Light and dark, Mother Earth, and war sufficiently illustrate the process of discontinuity in Lucretius' symbolism, and we need not labor the point with meticulous investigation of other themes, especially since we have alluded to some in passing. However, before drawing a conclusion, I shall briefly summarize the discontinuous tendency of three other themes: *Venus genetrix* and her associations, death, and the sea.

Venus genetrix includes within her associations the ethical values which Lucretius perceives in the creative phase of the natural process.²⁷ The atoms illustrate this phase most clearly because they lack personality but do form combinations which, accounting for the visible universe, may by analogy be interpreted as sexual unions. Using metaphorical terminology for the atoms (*semina, genitalia corpora*; then *concilium* 1.182; *coetus* or *coitus* 1.185, 1026; *congressus* 2.549), the poet implies that they are pure potentiality and that like living beings they unite to give birth to our world. The animal and human species perform this same generative role and so respond to Venus' glorious advent like the rest of Nature by joyfully increasing and multiplying. But compared to atoms, any animal is complex (cf. 5.1073), and a human being is a confusion of conflicting motives; indeed the instinct to obey Venus seems to negate the noblest possession of Man, his *ratio*. Therefore, the more central the role of Man becomes in Lucretius' poem, the less attractive Venus is, until at the end of Book 4 she has reversed her associations and symbolizes ruin. Once the epitome

²⁷ Cf. De Lacy (above, note 16) 125. For a useful study of the role of Venus in the poem and the connection with the Venus of the end of Book 4, I refer the reader to Elder (above, note 1).

of true *voluptas*, she has degenerated to *libido* or *cupido* (represented as fire, wound, sickness, poison, blindness, flood, etc.), each ending in *dolor*. She whom the poet invoked as his ally and inspiration, who similarly must be connected with his "love" of the Muses (1.924) and of Epicurus (3.5), and who therefore potentially represents the salutary rational end which prompts the poet to write his epic, Venus has abased herself to a deceiving, ensnaring female, the archenemy of reason. *Venus victrix*, we might put it, has at last become dominant over *Venus genetrix*. However, even in the fervent diatribe of Book 4, Lucretius maintains that dualistic attitude which occasions discontinuity. While the chief impression remains that to Venus, as the enemy of human *quies*, disvalue is imputed, Lucretius twice refers to her activities with the language that deluded men use, making of human love *blanda voluptas* (4.1085, 1263).

In the motif of death discontinuity enters between the description of the inanimate atoms and of mortals; ethical values dominate as soon as Lucretius squarely faces the human fear of extinction (3.830 ff.), or whenever he describes death without consciously arguing against our fear.²⁸ Exempt from death or, to put it another way, living eternally (cf. 1.500, 545), the atoms can even suggest the values of the eternal process by emphasizing its fundamentally creative tendency. To a certain extent one can appeal to men by evoking this continuous process, the torch of life (2.79), and the like, but more persuasive arguments must be devised to overcome an instinctive fear of death. So in Book 3 Lucretius moves away from the equilibrium of the process and imputes values to its two extremes: life becomes struggle, sickness, a burden, Hell itself (cf. 3.1023, 1046); death masks itself as peaceful sleep, the achievement of *quies* at last. Still even if we missed the implications of Iphigenia's death (1.84 ff.) or that of the sacrificed calf (2.352 ff.)—death destroys young, valuable things—we could hardly ignore the theme of the "dying" universe in Book 5 and the horrible picture of death by plague in Book 6 for, as mortals, we must impute value to life. Lucretius, like Epicurus, must recognize the ethical significance of death. Chill death (3.401, 930, 4.924) and the warm, sweet light of life (5.989) automatically predispose us towards life which, as Lucretius

²⁸ On this theme, but in a different connection, cf. Michels (above, note 1).

himself once writes, is inextricably bound up with the very possibility of pleasure: *dux vitae dia voluptas* (2.172).

The sea symbolizes in Lucretius, both because of the traditional poetic language and his own feeling towards the element, measureless expanse and incessant motion.²⁹ The infinite extent and depth of the *mare immensum* (2.590) could be used to represent the infinite void (cf. 1.957); while the ceaseless motion of the waves provides an ideal image for the movement of the atoms within the void. Thus the universe can be described as a "sea of matter" (2.550). In developing the image, however, Lucretius tends to describe the sea as a destructive force, quite the opposite of *Terra Mater*; he adopts such traditional phrases as *salsas lacunas* and *campos natantis* to define its sterility and instability; he ignores the natural denizens of the ocean, the fish, to concentrate on the imperilled intruders, and the sailor epitomizes the troublous condition of human existence (2.1, 5.222); in fact the restless surging of the waves perfectly images the chaos of human passions: our anger, love, utter uncertainty, the tide of war into which we madly advance (cf. *volvere curarum tristis in pectore fluctus* 6.34). As he engages himself more and more with human ethics, the poet loses his feeling for the creative possibilities of the teeming ocean, a vision which he briefly caught in connection with the advent of Venus (cf. 1.3, 8, 17); atomic compounds resemble ships, intruders on the sea, beaten and wrecked by the violent waves (2.552 ff.); and the dying universe can be described, if the text *ad scopulum* be accepted, as running upon the rocks in shipwreck (2.1174). Like war and darkness, therefore, the sea comes to represent our conception of death, of the inexorable law of nature that impersonally threatens to engulf us and will ultimately plunge us beneath the waves.

In its connection with other images, the sea leads us directly towards our conclusion. We have said that it quickly loses its neutrality as a representation of the undifferentiated world of the inanimate atoms and, like darkness and warfare but more obviously perhaps, becomes a symbol of the dying universe in which we dwell, of nature's menace, and of the destructive tendencies within ourselves, our undisciplined emotions. In contrast to the restless instability of the waves, Lucretius evokes the realm of

²⁹ Cf. E. de Saint-Denis, *Le rôle de la mer dans la poésie latine* (Lyon 1935) 119.

Venus, the solid land with its bright happy flowers, the world of the sunlight, and the secure environment of the Epicurean philosopher. Whereas we can think of earth as "mother," he expressly denies that the sea has created us (2.1155). Creation, therefore, implies that one reaches land; that, I suggest, is one of the important implications in the famous phrase *in luminis oras*. Bailey regularly translates it: "into the coasts of light"; but on its first appearance (1.22) he comments that *oras* should probably signify boundaries. Unless he means "boundaries" between land and sea, he probably misses Lucretius' full implications, for the nautical metaphor (*gubernas* 1.21) which the poet has appropriated from Empedocles makes it virtually certain that our imagery is of the sea. Venus pilots Nature towards creation, so that every pleasant and lovable thing may reach the shores of light. The similar context for *in luminis oras* in 5.224 reinforces this interpretation; now, however, talking of Man, Lucretius thinks of the tragic destiny of the sailor rather than the beneficent steering of creative nature. Such discontinuity is possible in the natural world, for *Venus genetrix* is regarded in Book 4 as directly responsible for the sea of passion (4.1077) in which the lover is plunged. On the other hand, in the world of the intellect stability can be permanent, illumination inextinguishable. It is the philosopher's purpose to achieve firm footing on land (cf. 2.1), the absolute antithesis of the sailor's existence; and he can do so, because Epicurus made the peaceful shores of light available to all men (5.10-12):

quique per artem
 fluctibus e tantis vitam tantisque tenebris
 in tam tranquillo et tam clara luce locavit.

v. Conclusion

Analysis of these six themes, three at considerable extent and three summarily, exhibits the operation of that technique which we have called discontinuity of symbolism. Instead of using his symbols in a single sense, e.g. war always to signify destruction, Lucretius tends to allow the same symbol to assume any of three principal directions, according to its particular context. First, it may be employed to make us visualize the otherwise invisible process of atomic nature, in which case it usually possesses a more or less neutral tone; although sometimes Lucretius becomes

delighted with the regularity of the natural cycle, with its creative side, and may interpret his symbols positively, as indicative of a "good" process. Secondly, the symbol may be used to define the existence of human beings, whether as part of the natural order or in their normal moral activities. The imperfections and essential mortality of Man, together with his moral consciousness, automatically add ethical significance to his actions and to any imagery used to represent them; the natural process ceases to be neutral, its regularity loses its charm, and human destiny seems permanently under threat from inhuman nature and the destructive tendencies of the human character. Therefore, once neutral and even attractive symbols suffer perversion when applied strictly to the limited world of Man: war becomes his suicidal goal; Mother Earth turns sterile, then into a vicious stepmother; Venus becomes irrational eroticism; the infinite sea epitomizes the unfathomable emotional complexity of Man. And then there is the third use of symbol which differs from the other two in that it invariably possesses positive associations: to describe the life and achievements of Epicurus, Lucretius will use the same metaphorical systems, of war, birth, illumination and the sea, but always to define something good.

Now at one time it would have been conventional to continue by analyzing this variation or discontinuity in symbolism as merely another example of the inconsistency, the anti-Lucretius, in Lucretius' epic. Such a destructive approach is now no longer permissible for, if one had not suspected it before, De Lacy's recent elaboration of the basic Epicurean dilemma obliges us to recognize the origin of Lucretius' "inconsistency" in the ideas of his Master.³⁰ Epicurus set as his goal the calm understanding of Nature, in order to obviate the human anxieties that so often arise from uncertainty and superstition. To know nature as process, neither good nor bad, utterly free from the power of wilful deities, to view its operations with the serenity of an uncommitted spectator, represented for him the ideal form of existence. Paradoxically, though, "it is necessary that we enter into the world of immediate experience if we are to find any values at all."³¹ Men must not, cannot entirely disengage themselves from the human *eventa* that make up our ethical world. Therefore, with

³⁰ *Op. cit.* (above, note 16).

³¹ De Lacy (above, note 16) 118.

Epicurus begins the dualistic attitude which all readers find so prominent in Lucretius: the dispassionate calm of the spectator and the passionate involvement of a fellow human being and his sympathetic poetic imagination.

While Epicurus originated the dilemma of his sect, Lucretius dramatized it; and because of the poetic insight motivating his epic, I take it, the Epicurean dilemma acquires special prominence in the *De rerum natura*. Perhaps nowhere is this phenomenon more salient than in the symbolism of the poem. Once again Lucretius did not invent all his images. Some go back as far as Homer, and many were common to the philosophical literature of Greece; indeed he found much inspiration in the calm writings of his revered Master.³² When he appropriated traditional images, for example those of Love steering or of Mother Earth, Lucretius elaborated them and worked them into the texture of his poem, usually with ethical implications. Above all he personifies the lifeless atoms through metaphor and analogy, and he renders especially forceful the anxieties and moral confusions of Man. The result is unique: no philosopher, no poet interpreted the physical and moral universe as Lucretius did. On the one hand he created the poetry of the atoms: "We seem to be reading not the poetry of a poet about things, but the poetry of things themselves. That things have their poetry, not because of what we make them symbols of, but because of their own movement and life, is what Lucretius proves once for all to mankind."³³ On the other hand he captured with special vividness the dichotomy between a happy, eternal nature and an unhappy, doomed and suicidal mankind. This dichotomy, an aspect of the Epicurean dilemma, constitutes the basis of his discontinuity of symbolism.

³² K. C. Reiley, *Studies in the Philosophical Terminology of Lucretius and Cicero* (Diss. Columbia University 1909) 35 ff., commented on the fact that Lucretius took over metaphors existing in Epicurus when he called his atoms "seeds" and "bodies." Other technical terms in Epicurus may lie behind the developed imagery of Lucretius: e.g. *synkrousis* could suggest the metaphor of war in connection with the collisions of the atoms, for it is close to the bellicose associations of *plagae* and *ictus*; *synelthein* describing the combination of atoms possesses the same sexual implications as *coitus*; and the use of *genesthai* to define the creation of compounds parallels Lucretius' *gigni*. This is a subject that merits study. At any rate the conclusion seems safe that Epicurus used his metaphors descriptively and barely, without elaboration, while Lucretius perceived in the Master's language poetic possibilities and developed it in a unique manner.

³³ G. Santayana, *Three Philosophical Poets* (Cambridge 1910; New York 1954) 38.

Before Lucretius, Epicurus used metaphorical synonyms for *atoma*: "seeds" and "bodies." Lucretius appropriates the imagery and makes it function poetically: his atoms are *semina rerum*, *corpora prima*, *genitalia corpora rebus*, and *materies* (etymologically related to *mater*). But as soon as he states such terms, he suggests that he sees the natural process essentially through one of its phases, the creative stage; that is, he tends to extend the dominance of Venus over Mars, the symbolic victory of creativity over destructivity, into the world of the atoms. If the indestructible material of the universe is "alive," then life itself must be predominant. So the atoms exist in "darkness" and "blindness" but pulse with vitality; they wage wars whose prime result is not ruin but "peace" and "organized government"; they "come together" in sexual unions and generate this variegated world with no emotional complications; Mother Earth and Venus use them to replenish nature, and atomic "death" can be dismissed as the dissolution of constitutive particles which in fact "helps" other compounds to be born. The eternal process, when represented through the incessant activity of the atoms, acquires a value not only as an intelligible order but as a stimulant to calm pleasure, which a true Epicurean can attain by contemplation.

It might seem ironic that the Epicurean poet whose ideal is *quies* and who urges detachment from the frenzied passions, "struggles," and "fluctuations" of our existence should impute such value to the world of the atoms, while at the same time insisting on its total lack of *quies*.³⁴ I suggest two possible explanations for this seeming difficulty. First, while Lucretius stresses the constant turmoil, it assumes importance primarily because of its creative results; that is, we concentrate on the "political order" and the "birth" of the compounds more than on the "war" and "death." In a sense, then, the atomic compounds embody the

³⁴ I differ slightly with De Lacy on this point. De Lacy (123-24) implies that "restless agitation" in the atoms is in itself uncongenial, since Lucretius compares it to conflict and war. I have attempted to demonstrate that the metaphor in Lucretius does not possess automatic connotations and that warfare can be creative in Book 1 and the first part of Book 2. Potentially the atomic warfare can be interpreted negatively, and the poet does so as soon as he thinks primarily of Man's unhappy role in the eternal process. As I sense the mood of the *De rerum natura* in the early portions (and ultimately we may have to fall back on personal feeling in this matter), the activity of the atoms does have value, along with that of Venus and Mother Earth, and essentially because the role of Man can be temporarily ignored.

qualities of *quies* which individual atoms lack. Secondly, we do not really see or feel the atomic confusion, which Lucretius must argue out by vivid analogy and image; we perceive the seemingly stable products of motion. A famous analogy from Book 2 illustrates this fact: all atoms are in constant motion, but the sum of things appears to enjoy supreme peace (*summa quiete* 2.308 ff.). From a distance the peaceful flock of sheep ambling across a hillside strikes the eye as a stationary mass of white against a green background; similarly the chaotic maneuvers of a cavalry troop from afar appear as a single glitter on the plains. Bucolic and martial scene, when one adopts the role of spectator, make the same impression, one of *quies*. We may infer that, in Book 1 and the first half of Book 2, Lucretius emphasizes atomic restlessness only as a function of this supreme *quies*, a creative stability which otherwise emerges in the total triumph of Venus over Mars, Mother Earth over senescence, life over death. As a whole, the universe possesses stability; it is only when Man demands attention with his mortal claims that the universal *quies* shatters and the imminence of death and destruction dominates the epic.

Man's involvement in the process makes itself felt in Book 2, and at that point the symbolism loses its happy ethical note; death gradually predominates. It has not been noticed before, but at 2.522 ff. the whole view of life alters because the once neutral or positive symbols assume entirely different associations. We can observe this discontinuity in three successive paragraphs, all of which have received comment at separate points in this paper. The point of departure is Lucretius' insistence on an infinite number of atoms. Whether or not atomic infinitude suggests by contrast the finite state of Man, at any rate he urges his thesis by an analogy which stresses the violence and necessary destruction produced by atomic movements (551 ff.): we see compounds like the shattered fragments of a once proud vessel tossing aimlessly on the treacherous sea, and the *aestus materiai* (562) is a ruinous force. From this scene the poet proceeds directly to reflect on the eternal process. Here, as we have seen, the indecisive battle (*aequo certamine* 574) between destructive and productive movements tends to be decided, with the emphasis on death, funerals, and lamentation; "war" now becomes impious, an image of ruination. Immediately after this comment on the process, Lucretius continues by arguing that all visible nature consists of

compounds, of which the prime example is the earth (589 ff.). Now he re-interprets the symbol of *Terra Mater* (598 ff.), indicating for the first time the ambivalent powers of this Mother (here seen as Cybele), both her creativity and her menace, at least to the apprehensive mentality of Man her worshipper. Therefore, in quick order the poet has altered the connotations of three prominent themes, now making pejorative symbols the sea, war, and even Mother Earth. The factor common to all and effecting this change is Man, Man now at last viewed as the center of Nature. From here to the triumph of death (*mors immortalis* 3.869) in Book 3 and on to the horror of the Athenian plague in Book 6 is one continuous movement.

Although Lucretius allows himself to become engaged in Man's ethical problems and represents them with symbolic and emotional force, magnifying the Epicurean dilemma by the genius of his poetry, he does recognize his discontinuity and knows how the gap can be bridged. Philodemus and other Epicureans had exalted the significance of the Master through vivid imagery; Lucretius integrates this imagery with his symbolism for atoms and Man and suggests that Epicurus, the creator of the dilemma, was the one man to solve it. As the poet contemplates his Master, the metaphorical themes which represent the unhappiness of human mortality become transformed; the discontinuity so forcefully expressing Man's exclusion from the eternal process ceases, to be replaced by a new vision.³⁵ Whereas men face the darkness of

³⁵ The exaltation of Epicurus, the one man to solve the dilemma of process and value and end the discontinuity of symbolism, raises some problems. Lucretius praises Epicurus in the proems, and all my citations below come from proems. But scholars do not agree about the composition of the proems, any more than they do about the order of the books. Recently two German scholars have indulged in controversy on this point: H. Diller, "Die Proömien des Lukrez und die Entstehung des lukrezischen Gedichts," *Stud. ital. d. filol. cl.*, nuov. ser., 25 (1951) 5 ff., argues that originally Lucretius wrote his books in the present order but that he did not design proems for the even numbered books; then, very late, he wrote a proem for Book 2 which obliged him to append proems to Books 4 and 6. Thus, according to Diller, the proems for 2 and 6 were composed separately from their books, while the proem for 4 was merely repeated from 1.926 ff. K. Büchner, "Die Proömien des Lukrez," *Classica et Medievalia* 13 (1952) 147-235, disagrees strenuously with Diller. According to Büchner the proems were for the most part composed with their respective books—exceptions: 1.62-135, 4.26-44, and the entire proem for 3—and provide evidence for the commonly asserted order of Lucretius' books as 1, 2, 5, 4, 3, 6. Now since Lucretius composed Book 6 last and in the same period wrote 1.62 ff. (praise of Epicurus as a general) and the proem for 3 (praise of Epicurus as *pater* and *inventor rerum*), Büchner's theory would suggest that Lucretius might have come to his conception of Epicurus as

Acheron and ignorance, Epicurus represents the light of a calm new sphere of rationality and freedom from fear. War among human beings leads to destruction, and Mars symbolizes the tendency of Nature to negate us and what we cherish; but Epicurus wages war against ignorance, triumphs over superstition, and brings back to us as spoils the means by which we, too, can attain eternal peace (cf. 6.32). Where others are caught in the ruinous flux of Nature and wallow in a sea of passions, Epicurus saves himself (and others, if they will have it) from the waves (cf. 5.11, 6.34), to walk firmly on the shores of light, guiding those who will follow him (cf. 3.3) on a direct and sure path to the supreme good (cf. 6.26–28).

Epicurus then is the single exception to the prevalent atmosphere of destruction in Book 6, and indeed his philosophy constitutes the one means by which we can escape the crushing realization of our mortality, not to mention the futility of all human values. It is in a context of creativity and positive order that Lucretius speaks of Epicurus' birth³⁶; elsewhere Epicurus appears as a father, giving paternal advice and feeding us with words of life (cf. 3.9 ff.). Epicurus' perceptions alone in Book 6 give Nature a neutral aspect: he saw Nature for what it is, neither good nor bad, sometimes producing circumstances difficult for men (30–31), also providing us with all the material necessities for a contented existence (9 ff.). Consequently death never triumphed over the Master. In his lifetime he attained the security of the gods, a veritable god himself (5.8, cf. *divina reperta* 6.7), exempt from the terrors experienced by men under the threat of ultimate extinction. When he died, he alone of all people continued to live, still conquering death and its meaninglessness: not only does he live eternally in his tenets (*perpetua semper dignissima vita* 3.13); not only

the resolver of the dilemma late in the course of his poem. But the proem for 5, which both Diller and Büchner accept as original and which Büchner also thinks early, shows that Lucretius regarded Epicurus alone as free from discontinuity at a preliminary state of composition. There Epicurus is described as divine; he receives the positive symbols of light and conquest over the troubled, unstable waves (11), life-giving and delightful creativity (19–21), and of victory (22 ff., especially 49–50). Therefore, I think it safe to argue that, just as Lucretius inherited his discontinuity of symbolism from the dilemma originated by Epicurus, so he possessed from the start a belief—which may have become more pronounced, the more his subject became Man—that the Master solved his dilemma and himself symbolizes it by being free from discontinuity.

³⁶ Cf. *genuere* 6.5, the only positive use of this verb in the entire book.

does he provide men with the means of true life; but Lucretius himself speaks of him in the present tense, as though still alive and vitally significant (e.g. *refert* 1.75; *pater es* 3.9; *deus esse videtur* 5.19). So Epicurus provides the lone consistent example of Man's potentiality to ignore death and rather to lead a creative life, of the mind rather than the flesh, like the gods enjoying permanent *quies*, unaffected by the *motus* so characteristic of, and ruinous for, mortal existence.

Lucretius vividly portrays the dilemma of Epicureanism in the discontinuity of his metaphorical themes. He looks in one direction and sees the achievement of Epicurus, triumphant, enlightening, certain, eternally vital. He turns in the other direction and sees all too sympathetically the predicament of mankind: most people terrified in the darkness of their irrationality; some like him, perhaps, inspired by the Master but constantly reverting to their human imperfections. It is unfortunately true that most men destroy the values that could be theirs (cf. 6.9 ff.), and therefore, humanly speaking, Nature ultimately assumes a destructive form for them: their existence becomes a living death, every action motivated by fear of imminent extinction. While the atomic world and inanimate nature happily create a colorful world to delight the eye of the observant poet, his fellow men plunge into suicidal activities. However, we sick mortals can find health and life, we can free ourselves from our fearful fascination with the dying phase of nature, if we can follow Epicurus. It is humanity that gives Lucretius' images their negative associations, but it is Epicurus who can transform our false values into the *summum bonum* (cf. 6.26) by turning our gaze towards serene contemplation of the universal *quies* and its happy order.