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LUCRETIUS
DE RERVM
NATVRA

BOOK III

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SECOND EDITION



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FOR ANNE

‘Long life and good health to your honour,’ said he as he turned away.

The Philosopher lit his pipe.

‘We live as long as we are let,’ said he, ‘and we get the health we deserve. Your salutation embodies a reflection on death which is not philosophic. We must acquiesce in all logical progressions. The merging of opposites is completion. Life runs to death as to its goal, and we should go towards that next stage of experience either carelessly as to what must be, or with a good, honest curiosity as to what may be.’

‘There’s not much fun in being dead, sir,’ said Meehawl.

‘How do you know?’ said the Philosopher.

‘I know well enough,’ replied Meehawl.

(JAMES STEPHENS, *The crock of gold*)

[P]hysical matter is simultaneously indestructible and entirely transmutable . . . it can swap states drastically, from vegetable to mineral or from liquid to solid. To attempt to hold these two contradictory ideas, of permanence and mutability, in the brain at the same time is usefully difficult, for it makes the individual feel at once valuable and superfluous. You become aware of yourself as constituted of nothing more than endlessly convertible matter – but also of always being perpetuated in some form. Such knowledge grants us a kind of comfortless immortality: an understanding that our bodies belong to a limitless cycle of dispersal and reconstitution.

(ROBERT MACFARLANE, *The wild places*)

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PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

The conscientious commentator will offer his work to the public in a mood of doubt and self-questioning. As an Editor of the series in which this edition appears I have felt a special duty to keep in the forefront of my mind its declared aim: 'to provide the student with the guidance that he needs for the interpretation and understanding of the book as a work of literature'. The amount of guidance here provided may, however, strike some readers as excessive. If so, it is because it has seemed to me that in the past Lucretius' interpreters have not always taken enough pains to disentangle and follow his argument as he intended it to be followed, and this, whatever shortcomings may be found in the execution, is what I have attempted to do. The *De Rerum Natura*, in spite of the lucid style of which the poet was rightly proud, is a difficult book, and I have often preferred the risk of telling the reader what he already knows to that of leaving him in the lurch – the besetting sin of commentators. It may also be felt that there is here too much expatiation on the poetical techniques of Lucretius. In this department the existing commentaries seem to leave much to be desired. In spite of the lead given by H. Sykes Davies in his *Criterion* article of 1931–2 and in spite of more recent contributions in this field such as Professor David West's excellent *The imagery and poetry of Lucretius* (1969), the conventional idea of Lucretius' art still persists: *ingenio maximus, arte rudis*. Cicero knew otherwise; but posterity has yet to be convinced. The student who finds some notes inordinately long may care to note that an effort has been made to, so to say, 'grade' their contents so that the essential information is usually presented at the beginning.

It would have been tedious in the extreme to record each and every debt to my predecessors. My general obligation to the commentaries of, in particular, Munro, Ernout–Robin and Bailey will be evident. I must make specific mention, however, of the way in which my approach to the understanding and exegesis of Book III has been influenced by the superb edition of Richard Heinze – unworthily neglected by Bailey, who makes quite inadequate use of it. I have not been able to bring myself to reproduce any existing text; in preparing my own I have relied principally on Bailey's reports of the manuscripts.

It is a pleasure to record my thanks, for help and advice of various kinds, to Dr M. Baltes, Dr H.-D. Blume, Dr R. D. Dawe, Dr G. E. R. Lloyd, Mr Roland G. Mayer, Dr D. O'Brien, Mr N. H. Reed and Professor H. Tränkle. I am particularly indebted to my editorial colleague Mrs Easterling for suggestions leading to a number of important improvements in both presentation and substance. Professor R. G. M. Nisbet kindly agreed to read the

proofs, and a number of weaknesses have been exposed by his acute criticisms. I regret only that it was not possible to incorporate more of his suggestions. His and Mrs Easterling's vigilance has saved me from more errors than I care to remember; those that remain must be laid at my door, where they belong.

March 1971

E. J. K.

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Two considerations have prompted the thought that a second edition of this book may not be unwelcome. As informed interest in Lucretius has continued to grow – a fact strikingly illustrated by the number of translations that continue to appear – so it must be accepted that students now come to him less well prepared linguistically than was the case in the 1970s. Accordingly the Commentary has been extensively revised and enlarged, with, it is hoped, due account taken of the comments of reviewers – though my old friend and critic Professor David West would now miss in the notes the ‘brevity that comes close to wit’ that he admired in the first edition.

Three passages in the Introduction to the first edition have called for reconsideration: what was said there about the ‘middle’ or ‘florid’ style of oratory, the discussion of the diatribe and what is said about the spelling of *seorsum*. These points are dealt with at p. 13 n. 51, p. 14 n. 55 and p. 18 n. 73 respectively. The section on the text has been rewritten in the light of subsequent work in that field, especially that of Professor Michael Reeve and Dr David Butterfield, to both of whom I am greatly indebted for help and advice generously given. The *apparatus criticus* has also been revised in accordance with Dr Butterfield’s advice. Otherwise the Introduction is reprinted unaltered apart from a handful of additions to the footnotes in addition to the three noted above, and adjustment of the references to the secondary literature in conformity with current series style. In the Supplementary Introduction I have confined myself for the most part to comments on such post-1971 contributions to Lucretian studies (some of which are in any case noticed in the revised Commentary) as seem likely to be useful to readers of this book of the *De Rerum Natura*. I regret that it has not been possible to include references to all the important work of Professor Ferguson Smith on the Oenoanda inscription.

As the book passes through the press I take the opportunity of recording my grateful acknowledgements of the help I have received in the process of revising it for this new edition. Dr Monica Gale has generously taken time from the preparation of her eagerly expected edition of Catullus in this series to revise and amplify the Supplementary Introduction to its great benefit. Dr Robert Macfarlane has kindly permitted me to reproduce the passage from his fine book *The wild places* as a second epigraph, so providing the perfect rueful Epicurean gloss on the Irish peasant’s dour verdict: ‘There’s not much fun in being dead.’ Professor Roland Mayer volunteered of his goodness to read the proofs – an undertaking that cost him more time and wrestling with my type- and manuscript than either of us had initially bargained for. Finally I must thank and apologize to the members of the Production staff of the Cambridge University Press

who were faced with the task of transforming copy presented in computer-unfriendly guise into what is now offered to the reader. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Dr Iveta Adams. Her searching scrutiny has detected and eliminated a great many loose ends, inconsistencies and authorial slips of pen, typewriter and attention, and many others have been revealed by the vigilance of my fellow editors. For any that may have eluded our joint efforts the responsibility rests with me. My wife has never spared herself in the labour of retrieving books from shelves now inaccessible to me, and this edition is dedicated to her in love and gratitude.

May 2014

E. J. K.

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>CLE</i>	<i>Carmina Latina epigraphica</i> , ed. F. Bücheler. 2 vols. Leipzig 1895–7. <i>Supplementum</i> , ed. E. Lommatzsch. Leipzig 1926.
<i>CP</i>	<i>The classical papers of A. E. Housman</i> , ed. J. Diggle and F. R. D. Goodyear. 3 vols. Cambridge 1972.
Ernout–Meillet	A. Ernout and A. Meillet, <i>Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine. Histoire des mots</i> . 4th edn. 2 vols. Paris 1959.
Ernout–Robin	Ernout, A. and L. Robin. <i>Lucrèce De Rerum Natura. Commentaire exégétique et critique</i> . 2nd edn. Paris 1962.
<i>FLP</i>	<i>The fragmentary Latin poets</i> , ed. E. Courtney. Oxford 1993.
G–L	B. L. Gildersleeve and G. Lodge, <i>Gildersleeve’s Latin grammar</i> . 3rd edn. London 1895. (Cited by paragraph.)
<i>GLK</i>	<i>Grammatici Latini</i> , ed. H. Keil. 8 vols. Leipzig 1857–70. Reprinted Hildesheim 1961.
<i>GP</i>	<i>The Greek Anthology. The Garland of Philip and some contemporary epigrams</i> , ed. A. S. F. Gow and D. L. Page. 2 vols. Cambridge 1968.
<i>HE</i>	<i>The Greek Anthology. Hellenistic epigrams</i> , ed. A. S. F. Gow and D. L. Page. 2 vols. Cambridge 1965.
H–S	J. B. Hofmann and A. Szantyr, <i>Lateinische Syntax und Stilistik</i> . Munich 1965.
K–S	R. Kühner and C. Stegmann, <i>Ausführliche Grammatik der lateinischen Sprache</i> . 3. Auflage, ed. A. Thierfelder. 2 vols. Leverkusen 1955.
<i>NLS</i>	E. C. Woodcock, <i>A new Latin syntax</i> . London 1959. (Cited by paragraph.)
N–H	R. G. M. Nisbet and M. Hubbard, <i>A commentary on Horace: Odes Book I</i> 1970; <i>Book II</i> 1978. Oxford.
N–R	R. G. M. Nisbet and N. Rudd, <i>A commentary on Horace: Odes Book III</i> . Oxford 2004.
N–W	F. Neue and C. Wagener, <i>Formenlehre der lateinischen Sprache</i> . 3. Auflage. 4 vols. Leipzig and Berlin 1892–1905.
<i> OCD</i> ¹	<i>The Oxford Classical Dictionary</i> , ed. M. Cary <i>et al.</i> Oxford 1949.
<i>OLD</i>	<i>Oxford Latin Dictionary</i> , ed. P. G. W. Glare. Oxford 1982.

<i>PLM</i>	<i>Poetae Latini Minores</i> , ed. E. Baehrens. 5 vols. Leipzig 1879–83.
Roby	H. J. Roby, <i>A grammar of the Latin language from Plautus to Suetonius</i> . Vol. II <i>Syntax</i> . London 1889. Reprinted 1896.
<i>ROL</i>	<i>Remains of Old Latin</i> , ed. and tr. E. H. Warmington. 4 vols. London and Cambridge, Mass. 1935–40.
<i>TLL</i>	<i>Thesaurus Linguae Latinae</i> . Munich 1900–.

NOTE. For full titles of works cited by author and date only see the Bibliography.