TRANSCENDING THE BOUNDARIES: LUCRETIUS AND THE MOENIA MUNDI

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I would like to preface this paper by paying tribute to two notable Australian classicists who have recently passed away. The first is Kevin Lee, who was Professor of Classics at the University of Sydney since 1992 and previously Professor at the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand, both of which have hosted this seminar in previous years. Kevin died suddenly in Newcastle, NSW, on 28 May. Although better known for his work in Greek literature than Roman, he deserves to be remembered here as a humane and warm-hearted individual who did much for the promotion of classical studies at the two universities at which he held chairs.

The other is Peter Bicknell, formerly Reader in Classical Studies at Monash University, Melbourne, who died of a cancer-related illness on 10 June. Here I offer a more personal tribute. Peter arrived as a young lecturer at the University of Tasmania in the third term of 1962, when I was a first year student. It was his teaching of Petronius in third year Latin and of Epicurus in third year Ancient Civilisations that led to the development of what are now my two major research interests: Lucretius and the ancient novel, the latter now particularly focused on Apuleius. Subsequently we were colleagues at Monash during the 70's and remained friends ever since. While he was far more interested in philosophy and history than literature, Peter was endowed with a lively and adventurous intellect, one which in its own way sought to trancend the *moenia mundi* of which I am about to speak; and in recognition of and gratitude for the important role he played in my own intellectual and personal life, I dedicate this paper to his memory.

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This paper takes up the theme of the conference by raising the idea of centre and periphery to a cosmic level—in fact intercosmic, as the *moenia mundi*, the ramparts of the world, are in Lucretian terminology the barrier that separates our cosmos from the vast tracts of intercosmic space. They form a barrier both physical and intellectual: physical, in that they are the wall of flame that

encloses our *mundus* and marks it off from the outer regions of the *intermundia*; intellectual, in that they are the barrier across which the enquiring mind must leap if it is to arrive at the truth about the nature of the universe. It is a boundary in fact that the mind longs to transcend:

> quaerit enim rationem animus, cum summa loci sit
> infinita foris haec extra moenia mundi,
> quid sit ibi porro quo prospicere usque uelit mens
> atque animi iactus liber quo peruolet ipse.
>
> (*DRN* 2.1044-47)

> For the mind seeks an explanation (since the sum of outer space beyond these ramparts of the world is infinite)—an explanation of what it is that is out there which the intellect is constantly wanting to look into, and where the mind's projection itself flies freely through.

The prepositional prefixes to the verbs are significant here: *pro*spicere, 'look out in front', 'look ahead'; *per*uolet, 'fly through'. We are always looking out, attempting to expand the mind's *imperium*. The word *iactus* (literally 'throwing', 1047) is a military term, commonly used with reference to the hurling of weapons. The military conqueror throws his javelins into the enemy ranks in order to defeat them and expand the *imperium* of the Roman people; we project our minds into regions about which we are ignorant in order to expand our intellectual grasp of the universe we inhabit.

This military metaphor takes up one used earlier, in the celebrated passage of *DRN* 1 where the discoveries of the unnamed *Graius homo* of 1.66 are figured as a campaign of conquest. Here the philosopher's campaign is likewise marked by verbs prefixed with *pro* and *per* as his mind moves forward and through the territory to be conquered:

> extra
> processit longe flammantia moenia mundi
> atque omne immensum peragrauit mente animoque...
>
> (*DRN* 1.72-74)

> He advanced far beyond the flaming ramparts of the world and traversed the immeasurable whole with mind and intellect.

Commentators point out the military imagery here, but tend to leave it at that. I propose in this paper to argue that Lucretius is, at least by implication, inviting comparison between the intellectual conquests of Epicurus and a specific contemporary military conquest, namely Julius Caesar's conquest of Gaul.

If we take Cicero's well-known letter to Quintus of February 54 BCE as the *terminus ante quem* for the publication of the *De Rerum Natura*, and if we further assume that Jerome is correct in his assertion that Lucretius was still working on his poem at the time of his death, then it would appear that the poem was in the final stages of its development during the first years of Caesar's Gallic campaigns. The fact that Caesar was campaigning—and successfully campaigning—in Gaul was not something anyone living or working in Rome was likely to miss. As Caesar himself records (*BG* 2.35 *fin.*), a *supplicatio* of an unprecedented 15 days length was decreed by the Senate after the campaigning season of 57 BCE in recognition of Caesar's achievements, and this was followed by one of even greater length at the end of 55 BCE (*BG* 4.38 *fin.*). Indeed the *supplicatio* of 57 might well have suggested that the conquest had been all but completed in the remarkably brief period of two years (58-57 BCE).

In light of this, let us look more closely at the pasage from Book 1:

> humana ante oculos foede cum uita iaceret
> in terris oppressa graui sub religione,
> quae caput a caeli regionibus ostendebat
> horribili super aspectu mortalibus instans,
> primum Graius homo mortalis tollere contra
> est oculos ausus primusque obsistere contra,
> quem neque fama deum nec fulmina nec minitanti
> murmure compressit caelum, sed eo magis acrem
> inritat animi uirtutem, effringere ut arta
> naturae primus portarum claustra cupiret.
> ergo uiuida uis animi peruicit, et extra
> processit longe flammantia moenia mundi
> atque omne immensum peragrauit mente animoque,
> unde refert nobis uictor quid possit oriri,
> quid nequeat, finita potestas denique cuique
> quanam sit ratione atque alte terminus haerens.
> quare religio pedibus subiecta uicissim
> obteritur, nos exaequat uictoria caelo.
>
> (*DRN* 1.62-79)

> When human life on earth was disgracefully brought down before our eyes, overwhelmed under the heavy hand of religion, which displayed its head from the regions of the sky, looming over mortals with appalling aspect, the first who dared raise mortal eyes against and stand up to it was a man of Greece. Neither the reputation of the gods, nor thunderbolts, nor the sky with threatening growl subdued him: instead they aroused the courage of his mind the more keenly, so that he craved to be first to smash through the tightly-fastened bars of nature's gates. And so the vital force of his mind won through, and he advanced far beyond the flaming ramparts of the world and with mind and intellect traversed the immeasurable whole. From there he brought back for us knowledge of what can come to be and what cannot, and by what principle the power of each thing is delimited, having its deep-set boundary-stone. Wherefore religion is in its turn cast down and trampled beneath our feet, and his victory makes us the equal of heaven.

Echoes of Hector smashing through the gates of the Achaean encampment at the end of *Iliad* 12; of Horatius Cocles defending the bridge against overwhelming odds (Livy 2.10); and surely too of the enormous task Caesar set himself in undertaking the conquest of Gaul, where his *commentarii* record a series of brilliant military manoeuvres achieving such rapid and decisive victories over an enemy superior in numbers that he could say that in two years the whole of Gaul had been pacified (*omni Gallia pacata*, *BG* 2.35).

We can I think go further than a general remark of this kind. The details in Lucretius' representation of Epicurus' heroic campaign against religion resonate intriguingly with Caesar's own account of his Gallic wars. There is in the first couplet a strong sense of seeking to avenge a previous defeat which has brought disgrace to the conquered (*humana...uita cum foede iaceret*, 'when human life was disgracefully brought down'—for this sence of *iaceo* see *OLD* 5a). The subjugation of the human race to *religio* is represented in Book 5 as an historical event, as something that happened at a particular point in the development of civilisation, and something for which there is a causal explanation (see 5.1161-1240). Here too we find reference to the menace of thunderbolts (1218ff.) and celestial phenomena in general (1204ff.). Ignorance (*rationis egestas*, 1211) was the weakness which allowed religion to gain its supremacy; incapable of providing any rational explanation for these terrifying events, the human race ascribed them to the gods, thereafter spending their lives in the same fear as one would have of a hostile occupation force. People and kings alike tremble:

> non populi gentesque tremunt, regesque superbi
> corripiunt diuum percussi membra timore,
> ne quod ob admissum foede dictumue superbe
> poenarum graue sit soluendi tempus adactum?
>
> (*DRN* 5.1222-25)

> Do not peoples and nations tremble, and proud kings contract their limbs, convulsed by fear of the gods, lest on account of some evil deed or proud utterance the time has come for paying the penalty?

The disgrace is shared by the Roman nation, too:

> usque adeo res humanas uis abdita quaedam
> obterit, et pulchros fascis saeuuasque secures
> proculcare ac ludibrio sibi habere uidetur.
>
> (*DRN* 5.1233-35)

> That is the extent to which some hidden force tramples on human life and seems to crush the handsome rods and cruel axes, treating them with complete contempt.

The rods and axes associated with the highest office in the Roman republic are likewise cowed into submission by this seemingly invincible enemy. This is disgrace indeed.

Let us now look at Caesar. The strategic objective for Caesar's conquest of Gaul was to secure the northern frontier; the Alps had already been pierced by a series of Gallic invasions (Liv. 5.34-35.3), most famously that of 391-90 which culminated in the defeat at Allia and the sack of Rome, an event alluded to by Lucretius himself at 4.682f. (the famous story of the sacred geese). More recently there had been the fear of invasion by the Cimbri and Teutones. Before this was averted by Caesar's uncle Marius, there had been a series of disgraceful defeats of Roman armies under incompetent senatorial commanders: in 113 BCE at Noreia in Illyricum under Cn. Papirius Carbo; in 109 in the Rhone valley under the consul M. Junius Silanus; in 107 the Tigurini, a sub-group of the Helvetii, defeated an army commanded by the consul L. Cassius Longinus in the Garonne valley and forced the survivors to march under the dreaded yoke (L. Calpurnius Piso, grandfather of Caesar's father-in-law, was killed in the same battle); and in 105, after the defeat and death of the legate M. Aurelius Scaurus, came the disaster of Arausio (Orange), where petty rivalry between the *nouus homo* consul Cn. Manlius and the aristocratic ex-consul Q. Servilius Caepio resulted in a massive Roman defeat at the hands of the Cimbri with the loss according to Livy of 80,000 soldiers and 40,000 camp-followers.

So there is certainly a history of disgrace inflicted by this enemy, and a sense that something needs to be done in order to prevent it happening again. In narrating his campaign against the Helvetii Caesar on no less than three occasions mentions the death of Cassius, noting on the first the fact that his army had been sent under the yoke (*sub iugum missum*, *BG* 1.7.4) and on the second expressing satisfaction that his defeat of the Tigurini had avenged both a public and private *iniuria*:

> hic pagus unus, cum domo exisset, patrum nostrorum memoria, L. Cassium consulem interfecerat et eius exercitum sub iugum miserat. ita siue casu siue consilio deorum immortalium, quae pars ciuitatis Heluetiae insignem calamitatem populo Romano intulerat, ea princeps poenas persoluit. qua in re Caesar non solum publicas sed etiam priuatas iniurias ultus est, quod eius soceri L. Pisonis auum, L. Pisonem legatum, Tigurini eodem proelio quo Cassium interfecerant.
>
> (*BG* 1.12.5-7)

> This one community on an expedition outside its borders had, as our fathers tell us, killed the consul L. Cassius and sent his army under a yoke. So whether by chance or by divine providence, that very part of the Helvetian nation which had inflicted a notable disaster on the Roman people was the first to pay the penalty. In this action Caesar avenged private as well as public wrongs, since the Tigurini had killed the legate L. Piso, grandfather of his father-in-law L. Piso, in the same battle in which they had killed Cassius.

Reference to this battle also figures in the negotiations between Caesar and the Helvetian chief, Divico (pointedly described as the commander of the Helvetians in the war against Cassius at 1.13.2) in 1.13-14.

In subduing the Helvetii, then, Caesar is doing the same as Epicurus is said to do to religion: a wrong has been done and an avenging hero rises up to right that wrong. That which trampled is trampled in its turn; the *iniuria* involved in the killing of a consul (treading down rods and axes in Lucretius' phrase) has been rectified. A similar situation arises with respect to the Germans later in *BG* 1. The Germans under their king Ariovistus have occupied the territory of the Aedui, friends and allies of the Roman people; this, Caesar says, is a disgrace (*turpissimum*) both to himself and the republic (*BG* 1.33.2). We have to stop these Germans coming over the Rhine:

> paulatim autem Germanos consuescere Rhenum transire et in Galliam magnam eorum multitudinem uenire populo Romano periculosum uidebat; neque sibi homines feros ac barbaros temperaturos existimabat quin, cum omnem Galliam occupauissent, ut ante Cimbri Teutonique fecissent, in prouinciam exirent atque inde in Italiam contenderent...
> (*BG* 1.33.3-4)

> He saw that the Germans were gradually becoming used to crossing the Rhine, and that it was dangerous for the Roman people that a great horde of them should come; he also considered that uncivilised and barbaric people would not restrain themselves, once they had overrun the whole of Gaul, from going on into the Province and from there heading on to Italy—just as the Cimbri and Teutones had done before.

But a new factor enters the situation at this point: fear. Caesar's army halts at Vesontio (Besançon) to reprovision:

> ex percontatione nostrorum uocibusque Gallorum ac mercatorum, qui ingenti magnitudine corporum Germanos, incredibili uirtute atque exercitatione in armis esse praedicabant (saepe numero sese cum his congressos ne uultum quidem atque aciem oculorum dicebant ferre potuisse), tantus subito timor omnem exercitum occupauit, ut non mediocriter omnium mentes animosque perturbaret.
> (*BG* 1.39.1)

> As a result of enquiries from our men and what was said by Gauls and traders, who kept talking about the enormous physical size of the Germans, their unbelievable courage and their battle-readiness—they said that on numerous occasions when they had come up

> against them they had not even been able to withstand their facial features and penetrating glances—a sudden fear seized the entire army, which shook everybody's minds and spirits in no uncertain terms.

Caesar gives this fear great prominence in his narrative—the whole of 1.39 is given over to it, as it creeps over the entire force like a plague. At the end of the chapter Caesar reports being told by his staff that the troops are so demoralised that they would refuse any order to strike camp and advance. From his point of view this serves to highlight the resounding speech and skilful psychological manipulation of 1.40 which restores his troops' self-confidence; from the point of view of this paper, there is another interesting correspondence with Lucretius' representation of Epicurus. Religion too terrifies by its appearance: see 1.64f. (*quae caput a caeli regionibus ostendebat/horribili super aspectu mortalibus instans*, 'which displayed its head from the regions of the sky, looming over mortals with appalling aspect')—*horribili...aspectu* in particular recalling the *uultum* and *aciem oculorum* of the Germans, who tower above ordinary mortals by virtue of their *ingenti magnitudine corporum* just as *religio* looms over us from the sky. (For the adjective *horribili* compare Catullus' *horribiles Britanni* in a clear 'Caesarian' allusion in Poem 11.) And just as Caesar successfully overcomes the fear of his troops by pointing out some historical realities (including the defeat of the Cimbri and Teutones by Marius), so Epicurus overcomes our fear of the gods by pointing out the truth about what they can and cannot do. Both are portrayed as leaders who take their followers with them (note particularly the prologue to *DRN* 3); both win the confidence of their followers not just for the moment but for the whole campaign. Caesar's troops will never show the same fear again, not even when confronted with the gruesome sight of woad-wearing Britons (*BG* 5.14.3); Epicurus' followers experience a lifetime of liberation from the tyranny of *religio*.

One more point on the subject of fear. I suggested earlier that the state of humankind under the oppression of *religio* was rather like that of the inhabitants of an occupied country. The situation of the Aedui under German occupation is a case in point. As Diviciacus the Aeduan chieftain explains:

> Ariouistum...superbe et crudeliter imperare, obsides nobilissimi cuiusque liberos poscere et in eos omnia exempla cruciatusque edere, si qua res non ad nutum aut ad uoluntatem eius facta sit.
>
> (*BG* 1.31.12)

> [He said that] Ariovistus...was an overbearing and cruel ruler, demanding the children of every prominent citizen as hostages and perpetrating all kinds of punishments and tortures on them if anything was done contrary to his will and pleasure.

So great is their terror of Ariovistus that the Gallic chieftains will not express their feelings about him publicly to Caesar; the Sequani, who called the Germans into Gaul in the first place, are now so terrified that they will not even speak privately: they fear Ariovistus absent as much as if he were present, and because they have allowed the Germans into their territory they must now endure every kind of torture (*omnes cruciatus essent perferendi*, 1.32.5). The Sequani called in the Germans because they thought it would be to their advantage; now their situation is worse than anyone else's (*miseriorem et grauiorem fortunam Sequanorum quam reliquorum*, 1.32.4). The situation of human beings who posited the gods as a refuge from uncertainty is disturbingly similar:

> ergo perfugium sibi habebant omnia diuuis
> tradere et illorum nutu facere omnia flecti...
> o genus infelix humanum, talia diuuis
> cum tribuit facta atque iras adiunxit acerbas!
> quantos tum gemitus ipsi sibi, quantaque nobis
> uolnera, quas lacrimas peperere minoribu' nostris!
>
> (*DRN* 5.1186f., 1194-97)

> So they took refuge for themselves in ascribing all things to the gods and making all things turn according to their will...How wretched a race humankind is, now that it has attributed such deeds to the gods and added bitter wrath! Ah the groans they created for themselves, the wounds they created for us, the tears for our descendants!

The chiefs of the Aedui and Sequani are like the kings we saw earlier, convulsed by fear that a dire penalty will be imposed on them for doing or saying the wrong thing.

The goal of Caesar's campaign, as I said, was to secure the northern frontier and prevent any recurrence of the threatened invasion by the Cimbri and Teutones of the previous generation. The goal of Epicurus' campaign is to secure safety from another constantly threatening enemy: *religio*. In our passage, *religio* is represented as strategically occupying 'the regions of the sky' (*caeli regionibus*, 64). As any military commander knows, occupying the high ground gives you a great tactical advantage; taking control of the acropolis or high point of a city is also standard practice for a force of occupation. It was what the Gauls when they took Rome in 390 signally failed to do, thanks to the sacred geese. In order to defend humanity from this threat, Epicurus, like Caesar,

embarks on a campaign of conquest that takes him right into the enemy heartland: just as Caesar takes his army across the Alps in spite of resistance from local tribesmen occupying *loci superiores* (*BG* 1.10) to counter the menace posed by the Helvetian migration, so Epicurus defies the menaces of received religion to 'smash through the tightly-fastened bars of nature's gates' (*effringere ut arta/naturae... portarum claustra cupiret*, 70f.) and proceed 'far beyond the flaming ramparts of the world' (*extra/processit longe flammantia moenia mundi*, 72f.) to put these bogeys in their place; and just as Caesar's achievement is to fix the boundary of Roman *imperium* at the English Channel and the Rhine, so Epicurus' invasion of heaven and the infinite space beyond fixes for ever the boundary between what is possible and what is not (74-77).

As Hannibal observed, the Alps are the *moenia Italiae* (Liv. 21.35.9), impassable to all but the most intrepid. In contrast to Alpine snows, Epicurus' task is to pierce the wall of flame that surrounds this world-system, the *aether ignifer* ('fire-bearing upper air') that rose to the periphery as the elements separated in the process of its coming-to-be (*DRN* 5.457ff., 498ff.). Smashing through the tightly-fastened gates may sound like Hector breaching the Achaian fortification-wall with the intention of setting fire to the ships; but interpretations like Smith's that regard Lucretius' *flammantia moenia* as defences set on fire by the triumphant invader miss the point: this fire is like that with which Wotan surrounds Brünnhilde at the end of Wagner's *Die Walküre*, a barrier to all but the greatest of heroes. The heaven (*caelum*) that we thought to be the abode of the gods, from which they look down on us and judge us, is no more than a physical barrier that keeps us from perceiving the infinity of space that lies beyond. Hannibal showed his weary and demoralised troops the Po valley lying beneath them as they stood at the top of the pass (Liv. 21.35.7-9); Epicurus shows us the abodes of the gods as they really are and liberates us from the fear that false belief imposed upon us. *DRN* 3.14-30 vividly conveys this sense of liberation:

> nam simul ac ratio tua coepit uociferari
> naturam rerum, diuina mente coortam,
> diffugiunt animi terrores, moenia mundi
> discedunt, totum uideo per inane geri res.
> apparet diuum numen sedesque quietae
> quas neque concutiunt uenti nec nubila nimbis
> aspergunt neque nix acri concreta pruina
> cana cadens uiolat semperque innubilus aether
> integit, et large diffuso lumine ridet.
> omnia suppeditat porro natura neque ulla
> res animi pacem delibat tempore in ullo.

at contra nusquam apparent Acherusia templa,
nec tellus obstat quin omnia dispiciantur,
sub pedibus quaecumque infra per inane geruntur.
his ibi me rebus quaedam diuina uoluptas
percipit atque horror, quod sic natura tua ui
tam manifesta patens ex omni parte retecta est.

For as soon as your reasoning began to give voice to the nature of things, product of your divine intellect, the terrors of the mind scatter, the ramparts of the world fall away, I see the workings of the universe through the totality of emptiness. Divine power is revealed along with its restful abodes which winds do not shake nor clouds spatter with rain nor snow befoul falling white and hardened by sharp frost; but ever-cloudless *aether* surrounds them and smiles with its light spread far and wide. Furthermore nature supplies all things and nothing at anytime mars their peace of mind. But on the other side the regions of Acheron are nowhere to be seen, nor does the earth impede our discerning all those things which occur below in the emptiness beneath our feet. And at this point a kind of divine pleasure takes hold of me, and shuddering too, because nature by your strength lies so open and exposed, uncovered on every side.

Leaving aside the *diuina uoluptas* and *horror*, about which others have discoursed at length, we see once again the effect of Epicurus' bursting through the gates of the *moenia mundi*. The enemy is routed (*diffugiunt animi terrores*), the fortifications behind which they lay hidden collapse (*moenia mundi discedunt*; also *nec tellus obstat*), and their territory is open for us to take possession. This includes the gods in their *sedes quietae* (the ultimate Epicurean garden, where they enjoy perfect *ataraxia*) and the total absence of any underworld in which disembodied spirits might dwell.

In order therefore for us to obtain peace at the centre (that is, within our own mind) we must follow our victorious general in his journey to the periphery, beyond the *moenia mundi* into the intercosmic regions and the homes of the gods. Earthbound conquerors will never reach the limits. After crossing the Alps and extending Roman *imperium* to the Rhine and the English Channel, there are new boundaries with potential enemies beyond and so new boundaries to cross. Caesar does both in Book 4 of *de Bello Gallico*: he builds a bridge across the Rhine to campaign in Germany at 4.16-19; he sails across the English Channel to campaign in Britain at 4.20-36. In the case of the philosopher, once the *moenia mundi* have been breached there is nothing more to do. His strength has achieved far more than anything Caesar will achieve in a lifetime of campaigning, and the measure of his achievement is emphasised in the last two lines of the above passage (3.29f. *sic natura tua ui/tam manifesta patens ex omni parte retecta est*): it is by his strength (*tua ui*) that *natura* lies totally exposed. That is all there is. There are no more nooks and crannies, no more

boundaries beyond which the spirits of the dead or vengeful gods may be lurking. The infinite universe is there before you, operating according to defined processes, the deep-set boundary stone (*terminus alte haerens*) fixed immovably forever. What cannot exist never existed and never will exist. *eadem sunt omnia semper* (3.945); all things, always, the same.

Lucretius in his poem is I think clearly inviting us to compare the achievements of Caesar with those of Epicurus, to the obvious detriment of the former. This implies a political dimension to the *De Rerum Natura* and brings into focus once again the question of the relationship between poetry and politics that looms so large in Roman literary history. What signals within the *DRN* might there be to suggest that its target is Caesar specifically rather than ambitious politicians generally?

Some interesting work in this area has been done by J.D. Minyard in his *Lucretius and the Late Republic: An Essay in Roman Intellectual History*. Minyard points out that Caesar's career coincided with a period in Roman intellectual life in which the influence of Epicureanism was at its height. Caesar's father-in-law, L. Calpurnius Piso, mentioned at *BG* 1.12.7, patron of Philodemus and owner of the Villa of the Papyri at Herculaneum, was obviously involved, as were a number of Caesar's staff-officers in Gaul (C. Vibius Pansa, C. Trebatius, C. Matius). Minyard goes on to suggest that Caesar himself might well have found aspects of Epicureanism highly congenial:

> Indeed, if we were to speculate on the intellectual sources of Caesar's life...we could easily say that he exhibited in action the tenets of an Epicurean physics uprooted from Epicurean ethics. Acceptance of Epicurean mechanical materialism and disregard of Epicurean moral conclusions would give someone a great field for action in the world, freeing him from fear and laying on him no obligations except to his own rationalizing sophistication.
>
> (Minyard, *Lucretius and the Late Republic*, 18)

Eclectic Epicureanism was usually assumed to be adopted by those interested in the self-indulgent pursuit of pleasure; Cicero accuses Piso of being an 'Epicurean' of this kind at *in Pisonem* 69. But it could also be used by those intent on the pursuit of power. Accepting the argument that the gods have no interest in human affairs would certainly remove any fear of divine retribution for subverting the political process and using the position of *pontifex maximus* as one platform from which to do so. The *De Rerum Natura* is written as a reaction to this cynical eclecticism. The leading epic poem of the 50's was not to be the kind of work envisaged by Cicero in the *pro*

Archia, a poem extolling the achievements of a notable Roman conqueror, but rather a reminder to this conqueror and his Epicurean friends of what Epicureanism is really about communicated forcefully in a work of enormous poetic and rhetorical power. It is indeed, as Quintus Cicero wrote to his brother, a work artful as well as talented. And it takes up the challenge thrown out sarcastically by Cicero to Piso at *in Pisonem* 59:

> quid cessat hic homullus, ex argilla et luto fictus Epicurus, dare haec praeclara praecepta sapientiae clarissimo et summo imperatori, generi suo? fertur ille uir, mihi crede, gloria; flagrat, ardet cupiditate iusti et magni triumphi; non didicit eadem quae tu. mitte ad eum libellum...
>
> Why is this lightweight, this porcelain and mud-brick Epicurus, not hurrying to send these wonderful gems of wisdom to that illustrious and top-grade commander, his son-in-law? You can take it from me, that guy is motivated by glory; he burns, blazes with desire for a great—and deserved—triumph; he hasn't learned the same lessons as you. Send him a book...

Cicero's letter to Quintus shows that the *DRN* (or at least passages from it) was being read and admired by Caesar's staff in Gaul; maybe not sent by Piso, but certainly there and intended, one assumes, for the perusal of the Great Man himself. For a person who could write a two-volume work *On Analogy* while crossing the Alps, reading the *DRN* while in winter quarters planning the second expedition to Britain should have been a breeze.

Alert readers of Lucretius' poem may object at this stage that the ostensible addressee is Memmius, not Caesar. This is obviously true; it is just as obviously true, however, that Memmius is not the only implied reader. In fact the beginning of the poem in my view does not direct us to Memmius at all. Take the opening one and a half lines:

> Aeneadum genetrix, hominum diuumque uoluptas,
> alma Venus...
>
> (*DRN* 1.1f.)
>
> Mother of the sons of Aeneas, pleasure of men and gods, nourishing Venus...

The term *Aeneadae*, a Greek patronymic, can certainly be used as a synonym for 'Romans' generally, as it was by its first recorded user, T. Quinctius Flamininus, in 196 BCE. But it can have a narrower reference. Strictly speaking *Aeneades* means 'descendant of Aeneas', and in this sense can only properly be applied to members of the *gens Iulia*. Coupling the word with *genetrix* calls to mind Ennius' *Venus...genetrix patris nostri* ('Venus, mother of my father', *Ann.* 58 Sk.), a

prayer uttered by Ilia for aid from her divine relation (*cognata*, 59). and so drawing attention to a direct line of descent. The Julian family set great store by their descent from Venus via Aeneas and Iulus; Venus appears on the reverse of coins issued by Sex. Julius Caesar in 94 BCE and L. Julius Caesar in 90, and on coins issued by C. Julius Caesar himself from 49 onwards. Suetonius quotes an extract from Caesar's funeral oration for his aunt Julia (Marius' widow) delivered in 62 in which he makes much of the fact that the Iulii have Venus as their ancestor (Suet. *Div. Jul.* 6.1): according to Dio, Caesar was 'completely devoted' to Venus (τῇ Ἀφροδίτῃ πᾶς ἀνέκειτο) and put down his smooth complexion to the fact that she was his ancestor. Dio goes on to say:

> καὶ διὰ τοῦτο καὶ γλύμμα αὐτῆς ἔνοπλον ἐφόρει, καὶ σύνθημα αὐτὴν ἐν τοῖς πλείστοις καὶ μεγίστοις κινδύνοις ἐποιεῖτο.
>
> (Dio 43.43.3)
>
> And because of this he used to wear a signet representing her in armour, and made her his watchword whenever he was in a particularly dangerous situation.

Caelius jokingly refers to Caesar ar *Venere prognatus* in a letter to Cicero from Cisalpine Gaul in March 49, and Appian records that on the night before Pharsalus Caesar 'called upon his ancestor Venus' and vowed to build a temple to Venus Victrix in Rome if he were to be successful (*BC* 2.68). To begin his poem in the way he does suggests that Lucretius is targeting a descendant of Aeneas who claims a special relationship with Venus; what he also does is confront Caesar's *Venus Victrix*, the goddess who serves the conqueror's ambition, with *Venus Genetrix*, the source of all life and joy, the inspiration for the poem, Lucretius' Muse (1.21ff.). *This* Venus is begged to overcome Mars, god of war (1.29ff.); Caesar's Venus is armed for combat, a guerdon of success in war, inspiration for conquest and world-domination as she will be in the *Aeneid*. The contrast could hardly be more pointed; but it only has point if the real target of this poem is Caesar. Memmius is a smokescreen, a cipher, a fiction as W.R. Johnson rightly observes (*Lucretius and the Modern World*, 6ff.). He shares with Caesar a Trojan ancestry (ratified by Virgil *Aen.* 5.117), a family devotion to Venus (coins of a L. Memmius dating to 91 BCE) and a thoroughly opportunistic attitude to politics. In setting himself up as teacher of the unteachable Memmius, Lucretius can adopt the role of insistent, hectoring instructor, forcing admission to the truth of the fundamental Epicurean propositions with argument piled on argument. But the message is not for Memmius. It is for Caesar.

One more point before I pass on. The triumphant conqueror of 1.62ff., as invariably noted by commentators, is unnamed:

> primum Graius homo mortalis tollere contra
> est oculos ausus primusque obsistere contra...
>
> (*DRN* 1.66f.)
>
> The first who dared raise mortal eyes against and stand up to it [*religio*] was a man of Greece.

If you were asked in a quiz show 'What man of Greece went on a campaign of world-conquest?', you would probably answer 'Alexander the Great' (in spite of some political sensitivities involved in so describing his nationality). Taking note of this, we might say that it is Alexander to whom Epicurus is being compared, not Caesar. Were Lucretius Greek and writing in the third century BCE this would be a reasonable conclusion to draw; but of course he is not. The Alexander connotation I think is certainly there, and we could apply to Alexander's conquest of the Persian empire much of what I have been saying about Caesar's conquest of Gaul: that it was conceived in an ideology of vengeance, that it began with the crossing of a natural barrier (the Hellespont), that at the end it was pushing the boundaries of the known world, that there was always one more mountain range to traverse or river to cross, that the leader in question claimed divine descent (from Thetis via Achilles). And this is not inappropriate. For <u>this</u> *Graius homo* was the one whom Caesar <u>really</u> longed to emulate; as Suetonius, Plutarch and Dio attest, this desire of Caesar's dates at least from his quaestorship in Spain in 69. Caesar's quest to become the Roman Alexander colours both his actions and his narrative of those actions in the Gallic War. For Plutarch, Caesar and Alexander are the most obvious of the parallels in his *Parallel Lives*. Lucretius sets up a different *Graius homo* for emulation, one whose feats outstrip those of Alexander as they do those of Ceres, Bacchus and Hercules in the prologue to Book 5.

With this in mind, I think we can confidently say that Munro, Bailey and Grimal are right in suggesting that the following passage is also aimed at Caesar:

> quapropter quoniam nil nostro in corpore gazae
> proficiunt neque nobilitas nec gloria regni,
> quod superest, animo quoque nil prodesse putandum;
> si non forte, tuas legiones per loca Campi
> feruere cum uideas belli simulacra cientis,
> subsidiis magnis et equum ui constabilitas,

> ornatas armis pariter pariterque animatas,
> his tibi tum rebus timefactae religiones
> effugiunt animo pauidae, mortisque timores
> tum uacuum pectus linquunt curaque solutum.
>
> (*DRN* 2.37-46)

> Wherefore since neither wealth nor high birth nor reputation for wielding power are of any use to us in respect of our bodies, we must also regard them as being no use to the mind either—unless perhaps when you see your legions performing their manoeuvres in a seething mass across the precincts of the Field of Mars, strengthened by large auxiliary units and cavalry squadrons, brilliant in their armoured uniform and uniformly spirited, your religious beliefs are terrified by all this and flee in panic and your fears of death leave your breast unoccupied and released from care.

Acording to the three commentators I have mentioned (though none quotes the source), Caesar after the end of his consulship in 59 spent three months with his army in the Campus Martius before he left for Gaul; Lucretius envisages the great commander supervising his troops in their military exercises, confident in their ability to defeat any enemy against whom he might send them. But against the real enemy, the fear of the gods and the fear of death, they have no impact. The military imagery of the last two lines reinforces the idea: *religio* is not something that your soldiers can overcome and force to flee in terror like those flighty Gauls you write back to us about, and the fear of death remains firmly in possession of the citadel as an occupying force, unmoved by your attempt at liberation. Nor will your conquest bring any real peace of mind; as I said before, there is always one more mountain range to traverse, one more river to cross. The quest for military/ political world-domination is doomed to endless frustration:

> sed dum abest quod auemus, id exsuperare uidetur
> cetera; post aliud, cum contigit illud, auemus,
> et sitis aequa tenet uitai semper hiantis.
>
> (*DRN* 3.1082-84)

> While we do not possess what we crave, that seems to surpass everything else; but after we have got that, we crave something else; our mouths always agape, a constant thirst for life possesses us.

Plutarch's image of the restless Caesar casting around for new boundaries to cross and new lands to conquer at *Caesar* 58.4-5 fits well with this picture; having outdone all his rivals, he becomes a rival of himself (ζῆλος αὐτοῦ): Parthia, the Black Sea, the Caucasus, the Caspian Sea, Scythia, Germany, an empire bounded on all sides by Ocean. But would even *that* be enough?

Securing the frontier, particularly the northern frontier, was always an issue with those concerned about the preservation of Roman *imperium*. Caesar crosses the Alps to pacify Gaul and ensure that there will be no repeat of the Cimbri-Teutones crisis; the *Graius homo* crosses the *moenia mundi* to overcome the forces of ignorance that allow *religio* to terrorise the minds of human beings. Concern for the frontier is an issue for this conqueror, too:

> temptat enim dubiam mentem rationis egestas,
> ecquaenam fuerit mundi genitalis origo,
> et simul ecquae sit finis, quoad moenia mundi
> solliciti motus hunc possint ferre laborem,
> an diuinitus aeterna donata salute
> perpetuo possint aeui labentia tractu
> immensi ualidas aeui contemnere uiris.
>
> (*DRN* 5.1211-17)

> For lack of reasoning power assails the mind with doubt as to whether there was some generative starting point of our world and as a corollary some end point, up to which time the ramparts of the world can hold out against the strain of convulsing motion, or whether they have been endowed by divine will with eternal impregnability, so that, gliding through the everlasting passage of unmeasurable time, they can despise the forces of time.

Here of course we are faced with a paradox. Unlike earthly conquerors, we are not seeking to secure the physical frontiers against future invasion. The enemy that Epicurus' crossing of the *moenia mundi* has defeated are the *terror animi tenebraeque*, 'terror and darkness of mind', the product of ignorance of what can be and what cannot. The very first lesson that we learn is *nullam rem e nilo gigni diuinitus umquam*, 'that no thing can ever by divine will come into being from nothing' (*DRN* 1.150). There is no divinity out there who can override the laws of physics; transcending the *moenia mundi* in fact reveals that the gods are as much subject to these laws as every other entity in the infinite universe. It therefore follows that there is no divinity out there who can preserve the ramparts of our world against the ravages of time or invasions of noxious particles from without. Our peace of mind does not depend on securing the frontier: rather it requires us to accept that this world-system that seems so stable will one day fall apart, that the ramparts will be breached:

> sic igitur magni quoque circum moenia mundi
> expugnata dabunt labem putrisque ruinas.
>
> (*DRN* 2.1144f.)

> Therefore in like manner will the ramparts of our great world also be stormed and fall in crumbling ruin.

It is the price we pay for overcoming our fear of the gods. As the Master said, where death is concerned we live in an 'unwalled city' (πόλιν ἀτείχιστον—see *Vatican Sayings* 31). It is the end that will overtake all things, individuals and world-systems alike, and there is nothing we can do about it. What we have to do is learn to live with it. Conquering Gaul, even conquering the entire world, will not teach us how to do that, because the real enemy is not out there on the other side of the Alps but located right here at the centre: the false ideas about the gods that have occupied the citadel of our minds and robbed us of our power to reason.