

Dryden, Milton, and Lucretius

'The Poet an Atheist exceeding Lucretius', scribbled one irate reader on his copy of *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681).¹ It is no surprise to find Lucretius invoked here as the epitome of unbelief, nor to find Dryden associated with the poet of Epicureanism. One does not have to look far in the theological and moralistic treatises of the Restoration to find Lucretius taken to exemplify the ultimate threat to Christian orthodoxy, or to find Epicureanism considered synonymous with libertinism.² Of course, those who had looked at the classical sources with any care knew that for Epicurus 'pleasure' (ἡδονή) signified mental tranquillity rather than bodily indulgence: 'pleasure' is the absence of pain, especially the pain caused by fear and desire. As one of Dryden's contemporaries remarked: 'Those, who will take the pains accurately to consider and weigh his Writings and narrowly search into his thoughts, may observe that he had no other intention, when he spake so to the advantage of Pleasure, then to make his wise man happy, to loose his body from griefs and troubles, to fill up his mind with delight, and to render them both equally satisfied. Those who have thought otherwise, have scandalized his innocence.'³ But the reputation of Epicurus continued to be contested, and the two views of him are exemplified rather neatly in *Paradise Regain'd*, when Satan suggests to Jesus that Epicurean and Stoic philosophy 'will render thee a King compleat / Within thy self', while Jesus scornfully replies that Epicurus was concerned only with 'corporal pleasure ... and careless ease'.⁴ I have argued elsewhere that Dryden was one of the period's most thoughtful students of the Epicurean philosophy as set out by Lucretius.⁵ In plays from the late 1660s and 1670s he turned to Lucretius to articulate a philosophy of disengagement from the cares of the world, defining that state of ἀταραξία which Epicurus advocated – freedom from disturbance. He was particularly interested in distinguishing true Epicurean philosophy from the distorted libertine version of it which was current in Restoration literature: in his heroic dramas he presents us with characters who give voice to a crude form of Epicureanism, a hedonistic ethos, while in the prefaces to those plays he

seeks for himself the tranquillity and peace of mind which retirement from public life would bring. This is particularly exemplified in *Aureng-Zebe* (1676), and its accompanying Dedication to the Earl of Mulgrave. Then in *Sylvae* (1685) he published his eloquent translations of extracts from *De Rerum Natura*, passages which highlight the two forms of disturbance which most commonly work against our peace of mind – sexual desire, and the fear of death. This reading of Dryden’s engagement with Lucretius stresses the attractions which the Roman poet held for him philosophically, though this is not to claim that Dryden simply espoused Epicureanism as his personal creed: rather, the Epicurean philosophy (particularly as mediated by Lucretius) was one of the stances towards the world which Dryden was interested in trying – in the double sense of ‘adopting’ and ‘testing’. (His non-dramatic poetry is frequently characterized by a play of different voices: internally within a single poem, as in *The Hind and the Panther*; in his translations as a dialogue between Dryden and his original; and often between different poems in the same collection, such as *Sylvae* or *Fables*.) And we should also recognize that Lucretius’ picture of the world as a collection of atoms in motion appealed strongly to Dryden’s poetic imagination, to his vision of the universe as chaotic, and of order as precarious and temporary. Indeed, the starting point for his celebration of harmony in ‘A Song for St Cecilia’s Day, 1687’ is the Lucretian chaos when ‘Nature underneath a heap / Of jarring Atomes lay’ (ll. 3–4).

In this essay I propose to explore the ways in which Dryden’s response to Lucretius was interwoven with his response to Milton. This may seem an improbable triangle, though resonances from both poets inform the opening stanza of the ‘Song’ which I have just quoted: Milton and Lucretius seem to have been linked in Dryden’s mind as poets of chaos and harmony.⁶ But they had a moral association for Dryden as well, suggesting to him ideas about the true nature of happiness, and the things which snatch it from our grasp. It is common to find that when translating one writer, Dryden brought into play comparable turns of phrase or of thought in other writers: so we find echoes of Cowley in his Horace, of Spenser in his Lucretius, of Milton in his Theocritus.⁷ But it is one thing to assimilate material from congruent texts within a shared moralistic or erotic tradition, another to bring into dialogue such ideologically diverse works as *Paradise Lost* and *De Rerum Natura*. Let me begin by addressing Dryden’s use of material from Lucretius in *The State of Innocence*, the opera based on *Paradise Lost* which he composed in 1674.

I

That Milton himself drew upon Lucretius in *Paradise Lost* has been suggested by several scholars. Though not as sustained an influence as Homer or Virgil, Lucretius provided a text against which Milton could define himself and

his project, as Philip Hardie has argued.⁸ His description of chaos is clearly imagined with the help of the Lucretian account of atoms in continual random motion,⁹ but perhaps more significant is the relationship between Milton's invocations at the beginning of Books I and III, and the invocations in *De Rerum Natura*, where Lucretius appeals to the light of reason, exalts the godlike Epicurus, and claims to be taking poetry into hitherto unattempted territory. Lucretius was correcting his contemporaries' habit of invoking the gods; Milton in turn corrects Lucretius, deftly insisting on the superiority of his own philosophical poetry and its dogmatic framework.¹⁰ More generally, Lucretius was one of those writers who presented Milton with the problem of how to conceptualize the relationship of matter and spirit, whether in a monistic or a dualistic way:¹¹ Lucretius and Descartes were contending for Milton's attention.

Given Milton's clearly oppositional relation to Lucretius, it might seem bizarre that Dryden should have kept *De Rerum Natura* open on his table alongside *Paradise Lost* as he composed *The State of Innocence*.¹² But in texts from different moments in his career, Lucretius is the writer whom he quotes or adapts when he ponders how one frees oneself from enslavement to fear and desire, those tyrants of the mind, and from the chaotic struggles of the political world, with its actual or potential tyrants. As for *The State of Innocence* in particular, various scholars have noted that Dryden introduces libertine and Hobbesian arguments into his dialogue, as if the philosophical agenda of *Paradise Lost* needed to be adapted to the specific concerns of the Restoration *avant-garde*.¹³ But more particularly, there are precise echoes of Lucretius, which have not been noted, which Dryden works into the fabric of his verse in order to clarify the distinction between true and false happiness, between satisfying philosophical pleasure and delusive libertine pleasure. For, as Bruce King observed, in Dryden's play 'Paradise within has come to represent those virtues of temperance and self-regulation that Dryden felt were necessary if man was to avoid life's unrest',¹⁴ and I suggest that for Dryden this line of thought was associated especially with Lucretius.

In *The State of Innocence* Lucifer espouses a debased version of Epicureanism. He seeks freedom from pain, as any Epicurean would, but ignobly, differing in this respect from his counterpart in *Paradise Lost*. Milton's Satan challenges his associates by saying:

who here
Will envy whom the highest place
.
.
condemns to greatest share
Of endless pain? (*Paradise Lost*, II, ll. 26–30)

and again:

for none sure will claim in Hell
Precedence, none, whose portion is so small

Of present pain, that with ambitious mind
Will covet more. (*Paradise Lost*, II, ll. 33–5)

Milton's Satan is embracing pain heroically as his public duty – albeit in part as a politician's manoeuvre to pre-empt a challenge from potential rivals. By contrast, Dryden's Lucifer tells Ithuriel:

Lives there who would not seek to force his way
From pain to ease? (*The State of Innocence*, III, iii, ll. 83–4)

But the pleasure or ease which he looks for is far from being Epicurus' ἀταραξία; rather, it is sensual indulgence. For when Lucifer first sees Adam and Eve he comments on their 'sated senses' (III, iii, 2), and wishes for a body so that he too may enjoy sensual pleasures:

Why have not I like these, a body too,
Form'd for the same delights which they pursue?
(*The State of Innocence*, III, i, ll. 91–2)

And the unattainable prospect of such pleasure causes him yet more pain:

this place ... but augments my pain
Gazing to wish, yet hopeless to obtain.
(*The State of Innocence*, III, iii, ll. 116–17)

For Milton's Satan, unfulfillable sexual desire is one of the torments of hell:

fierce desire,
Among our other torments not the least,
Still unfulfill'd with pain of longing pines. (*Paradise Lost*, IV, ll. 509–11)

Dryden modifies Milton's point so as to define Lucifer as a victim of exactly that painful enslavement to physical pleasure from which Epicurus sought to liberate mankind.

In formulating the temptation of Eve, Lucifer relies upon an understanding of the human mind which imagines it as an Epicurean world of random motion and chance combinations: when reason sleeps, he says, fancy wakes,

and wild Idea's takes
From words and things, ill sorted and misjoyn'd;
The Anarchie of thought and Chaos of the mind:
(*The State of Innocence*, III, iii, ll. 6–8)

'Anarchy' and 'Chaos' are images which Dryden has added to the equivalent passage in Milton (*Paradise Lost*, V, ll. 110–13). This may seem a reductive view of the mind, but unfortunately it is all too apt an account of Eve's intellect. Both Milton and Dryden focus on her intellectual as well as her moral confusion, for her inability to see through specious arguments is part of her downfall. Accordingly, the two poets carefully thread some key terms through the texture of their verse, implicitly asking us as readers to do better than Eve in identifying the falsity of diabolical rhetoric. In Milton's case,

one of his principal terms is 'wisdom'. The fruit may deliver knowledge, but it cannot deliver wisdom, and it is important that we understand that the two terms are not synonymous. God is repeatedly called 'wise',¹⁵ and Adam and Eve are given lessons by Raphael in being 'lowly wise' (VIII, l. 173). But Satan represents the tree of knowledge as a 'Sacred, Wise, and Wisdom-giving Plant' (IX, l. 679), and Eve takes up his tendentious vocabulary in asking herself why God 'forbids us to be wise' (IX, ll. 759); she decides that the fruit has 'vertue to make wise' (IX, l. 778), and after taking the fruit refers to 'the Serpent wise, / Or not restrained as wee, or not obeying' (IX, ll. 867–8), where her new understanding of what wisdom means is all too clear.

As Milton had laid out for us a semantic field for the idea of 'wisdom', asking us to distinguish between true and false forms of it, so Dryden explores the moral and semantic field of the term 'pleasure'. On the basis of the echoes from *Paradise Lost* in Dryden's non-dramatic poetry, John Mason has argued that it was Milton's depiction of man's capacity for pleasure to which Dryden was especially drawn.¹⁶ The same could be said of *The State of Innocence*, though here Dryden is carefully sifting the different kinds of pleasure which characterize the prelapsarian state. Before the fall, Adam had told Eve:

Angels, with pleasure, view thy matchless Grace,
And love their Maker's Image in thy Face.

(The State of Innocence, II, iii, ll. 34–5)

Here the true angelic pleasure is the beatific vision, and the sight of Eve when she reminds them of that vision: 'Grace' fuses spiritual and physical qualities. Similarly, when Eve in her unfallen state uses the word to describe the (implicitly sexual) pleasure which she and Adam take in each other, she refers first to Heaven which is the source of that love:

Heav'n, from whence Love (our greatest Blessing) came,
Can give no more, but still to be the same.
Thou more of pleasure may'st with me partake;
I, more of pride, because thy bliss I make.

(The State of Innocence, III, i, ll. 27–30)

Eve's pride and pleasure are innocent and pure: her pleasure has a heavenly origin, and her pride derives from the pleasure which she gives to Adam. But it is interesting that, in defining this admirable form of pleasure, Dryden has turned to Lucretius, for in saying that 'Heav'n ... / Can give no more, but still to be the same', he echoes the prosopopeia of Nature in book III of *De Rerum Natura*:

Nam tibi praeterea quod machiner, inveniamque
Quod placeat, nihil est: eadem sunt omnia semper.

(De Rerum Natura, III, ll. 957–8)¹⁷

Dryden would translate these lines in *Sylvae* as:

To please thee I have empti'd all my store,
I can invent, and can supply no more;
But run the round again, the round I ran before.

(‘Lucretius: Against the Fear of Death’, ll. 138–40)

And yet, when Eve speaks of experiencing ‘Immortal pleasures’ in Adam’s embrace (III, i, l. 44), should we begin to be troubled by this hyperbole? Looking around her at the abundance of Eden, Eve enthuses at the ‘pleasures’ provided by the uncultivated growth of nature:

Blest in our selves, all pleasures else abound;
Without our care, behold th’ unlabour’d Ground.

(*The State of Innocence*, III, i, ll. 56–7)

Does ‘without our care’ betoken tranquillity or laziness? Turning to Adam, she exclaims:

With thee to live, is Paradise alone:
Without the pleasure of thy sight, is none.

(*The State of Innocence*, III, i, ll. 88–9)¹⁸

‘Pleasure’ is an important word in Eve’s vocabulary; but what kind of Epicurean is she? She sounds more of a libertine than a philosopher. When Eve is tempted, she is offered both sensual gratification and godlike status: the tempting angel says, ‘taste without fear, and be happy and wise’ (III, iii, l. 35), enticing her by offering the fruit as a means of attaining a philosophical ideal. When she does take the fruit (switching now from her sober iambics to imitate the bad angel’s tipsy anapaests) Eve replies: ‘such a pleasure I find / As enlightens my eyes, and enlivens my mind’ (III, iii, ll. 36–7).¹⁹ Alas, this is far from being the pleasure of philosophical enlightenment which Lucretius promises his reader; rather, she is echoing what the bad angel had said a few lines earlier, when falsely claiming of his fellow-demons that

From spirits deform’d they are Deities made,
Their pinions at pleasure, the clouds can invade.

(*The State of Innocence*, III, iii, ll. 31–2)

Here ‘Pleasure’ now means ‘freewill’, an enticing but dangerous extension of the word’s semantic field. Eve should have heard the warning signal in that plural, ‘Deities’, but she is too bent on the prospect of her own form of pleasure. Through his use of such vocabulary, Dryden is asking us to do what Eve fails to do: to ‘apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better’.²⁰

If ‘pleasure’ is one key word from the Epicurean lexicon, another is ‘ease’, meaning tranquillity or ἀταραξία. Milton seems often to distrust ease,²¹ and makes the archangel Michael associate ‘pleasure, ease, and sloth, / Surfet, and lust’ (XI, ll. 794–5); and he distinguishes true peace from Belial’s arguments for ‘ignoble ease, and peaceful sloth, / Not peace’ (II, ll. 227–8),²² drawing

upon a Renaissance tradition which debated the nature and value of *otium*.²³ Dryden also explores the moral and semantic field of ‘ease’, though with a more positive, and specifically Epicurean, inflection.²⁴ In a moment of rare insight, Eve remarks that ‘Who always fears, at ease can never be’ (IV, i, l. 170), exactly the message of *De Rerum Natura*, which seeks to free us from fear of the gods or of death. But Eve shows no true fear of either death or God, and in rejecting one kind of fear (terror) she fatally rejects another (reverence). After Adam has eaten the fruit, Eve tells him, ‘Give to the winds thy fear of death, or ill’ (words of which Lucretius might approve), but her next line moves from true to false Epicureanism, as she now sees the purpose of their life entirely in terms of sexual pleasure: ‘And think us made but for each others will’ (V, i, ll. 83–4). Similarly Adam’s reply begins in sober Epicurean fashion:

I will, at least, defer that anxious thought,
And death, by fear, shall not be nigher brought:

but he likewise immediately slides into crude hedonism:

If he will come, let us to joys make hast;
Then let him seize us when our pleasure’s past,
We’ll take up all before; and death shall find
We have drain’d life, and left a void behind.

(The State of Innocence, V, i, ll. 83–90)

The word ‘void’ here is one verbal signal amongst several that Dryden is drawing on Lucretius’ vision of the universe to bring into focus the faulty reasoning and false perceptions of the fallen pair, articulated through their muddled combination of genuine and parodic Epicureanism.

Adam and Eve are not the only figures who enjoy ‘ease’ in *The State of Innocence*. Lucretius had written that the gods enjoy uninterrupted ease:

Omnis enim per se Divum natura necesse’st
Immortali aevo summa cum pace fruatur,
Semota a nostris rebus, sejunctaque longe.
Nam privata dolore omni, privata periclis,
Ipsa suis pollens opibus, nihil indiga nostri,
Nec bene promeritis capitur, nec tangitur ira.

(De Rerum Natura, II, ll. 645–50)

In Rochester’s translation, probably written around this time, the lines run thus:

The *Gods*, by right of Nature, must possess
An Everlasting Age of perfect Peace:
Far off remov’d from us, and our Affairs:
Neither approach’d by *Dangers*, or by *Cares*:
Rich in themselves, to whom we cannot add:
Not pleas’d by *Good Deeds*; nor provok’d by *Bad*.²⁵

This vision of the untroubled existence enjoyed by the gods was for Dryden a constituent of his personal ideal of the tranquil self: he quotes the Latin lines in the Dedication to *Aureng-Zebe* when he is defining his own wish for disengagement from the pressures of the world.²⁶ Milton, however, seems to have responded less positively to this ideal, for in *Paradise Lost* he makes Sin ask Satan to bring her to live ‘among / The Gods who live at ease’ (II, ll. 867–8). As Richardson observes, ‘Tis Sin who speaks here, and she speaks as an Epicurean’.²⁷ In *The State of Innocence*, Sathan speaks a version of Lucretius’ lines when he alleges that the good angels are enjoying such quasi-divine ease too much to care about guarding paradise:

Seraph and Cherub, careless of their charge,
 And wanton, in full ease now live at large,
 Ungarded leave the passes of the Skie,
 And all dissolv’d in Hallelujahs lie. (*The State of Innocence*, I, i, ll. 106–9)

Sathan gives a sarcastically sensual inflection to his picture, with the word ‘wanton’ preparing us for the sexual implications of ‘dissolv’d’, the common Restoration word for the state of orgasm. Dryden himself quotes a contemporary parody of these lines from one of his critics: ‘I have head (sayes one of them) of Anchove’s dissolv’d in Sauce; but never of an Angel in Hallelujahs’ (*Works*, XII, 95). The critic may have been deliberately obtuse in his comment, but his parody aptly provides another false kind of Epicureanism, this time gastronomic. Sathan’s distorted perception similarly perceives angelic ecstasy as dissolute hedonism.

But if Lucifer and his companions are false Epicureans, while Adam and Eve confuse true and false versions of the philosophy, the good angels speak like true philosophers. The archangel Gabriel uses this same passage in *Lucretius* with complete seriousness to speak about the impassibility of God:

What in us duty, shows not want in him:
 Blest in himself alone—
 To whom no praise we, by good deeds, can add;
 Nor can his glory suffer from our bad.
 (*The State of Innocence*, III, iii, ll. 71–4)²⁸

And Raphael uses this same passage when describing to Adam the kind of happiness which he should embrace: it will be a state of godlike self-sufficiency:

Mean time, live happy, in thy self alone;
 Like him who, single, fills th’ Etherial Throne.
 To study Nature will thy time employ. (*The State of Innocence*, II, i, ll. 43–5)

If it were not for that careful monotheistic parenthesis (‘single’) in the second line, this could be Lucretius addressing his pupil Memmius.

This appropriation of Lucretius to shape an impeccably orthodox piece of Christian theology may seem an outrageous piece of Drydenian wit, but

consider these lines from a contemporary work by another writer: God, we are told,

alone
 Dwells in himself, and to himself is known
 Containing all things in himself alone.

The members of the Trinity are similarly imagined, for

Each doth himself, and all the rest possess
 In undisturbed joy and blessedness
 Who from Eternity himself supplied,
 And had no need of any thing beside.²⁹

These lines come from a poem entitled *Order and Disorder: or; The World Made and Undone. Being Meditations upon the Creation and the Fall; As it is recorded in the beginning of Genesis*. It was published anonymously in 1679, and was for a long time attributed to Sir Allen Apsley; but it has recently been reattributed by David Norbrook to Apsley's sister, Lucy Hutchinson, the translator of Lucretius.³⁰ It is clear from the preface that the poem was written as an antidote to Lucretius, even as a penance for having translated him:

These Meditations were not at first design'd for publick view, but fix'd upon to reclaim a busie roving thought from wandering in the pernicious and perplexed maze of humane inventions; whereinto the vain curiosity of youth had drawn me to consider and translate the account some old Poets and Philosophers give of the original of things: which though I found it, blasphemously against God, and brutishly below the reason of a man, set forth by some, erroneously, imperfectly, and uncertainly, by the best; yet had it fill'd my brain with such foolish fancies, that I found it necessary to have recourse to the fountain of Truth, to wash out all ugly wild impressions, and fortifie my mind with a strong antidote against all the poyson of humane Wit and Wisdome that I had been dabling withal.³¹

Nevertheless, Hutchinson's imagination is so seized by the Lucretian vision of godly tranquillity that she draws upon it for her own description of the deity; she even conceives of the resurrection of the dead in Lucretian terms, before resuming a biblical idiom:

Our scatter'd atoms shall again condense,
 And be again inspir'd with living sense;
 Captivity shall then a captive be,
 Death shall be swallow'd up in victory.³²

The first couplet is pure Lucretius, the second pure St Paul.

While Hutchinson and Dryden have clearly both been impressed by the poetic imagination of Lucretius, what distinguishes Dryden's use of Lucretius from that of Hutchinson, I think, is that he is using the language to define a

debate: whereas I doubt whether we are supposed to register the Lucretian connotations of the language in *Order and Disorder*, in *The State of Innocence* it actively shapes and guides our responses. In part, this is Dryden's sceptical, dialogic intelligence at work, for he always relished debate, particularly one which would dramatize the clash of philosophies or ideologies. But just as strong an impulse in Dryden's poetics is the rhetorical move of *correctio*, adopting someone else's images or turns of phrase and reapplying them in the way which Dryden deems correct. Perhaps, then, this use of Lucretius in an adaptation of Milton is Dryden's corrective dialogue with both writers, suggesting that neither has delivered the last word on the nature of true happiness. Dryden explicitly rejected Lucretius' thorough-going materialism, and his insistence on the mortality of the soul; but he needed the philosophical schooling in equanimity which Lucretius provided, aware of his vulnerability to his own passions and to the turbulence of public life.³³ In this he was more the student of Montaigne than of Milton.³⁴ Moreover, if, as Spenser and Milton both thought, the best school of morality is the exercise of readerly discrimination, then Dryden is schooling his Restoration readers in the rejection of libertine rhetoric and the cultivation of more serious ways of thinking about freedom: perhaps he is in part rejecting Rochester's reading of Lucretius.³⁵ In effect Dryden is asking his contemporaries (as Milton had done) to distinguish liberty and license.³⁶

II

When Dryden came to translate portions of Lucretius for *Sylvae*, some ten years after completing *The State of Innocence*, Milton infiltrated his poetic vocabulary. If it had been impossible to rethink the account of freedom and happiness in *Paradise Lost* without interpolating thoughts and phrasing from Lucretius, it was equally impossible for Dryden to put his selections from Lucretius into English without using a diction which was in part Miltonic. And if we look at some of the moments when Dryden's mind slipped from *De Rerum Natura* back to *Paradise Lost*, we may be able to see that the influence of Milton on Dryden was not simply stylistic but conceptual; that the borrowings of individual words and phrases from Milton are linked thematically, forming topical clusters which show us something of what Dryden found to be most remarkable about Milton's poem.³⁷

I have been arguing that both Milton and Dryden (albeit in different vocabularies) were focusing on the question of how one lives wisely, and we find that one of the most persistent echoes from Milton across the whole corpus of Dryden's work is from the passage in book VIII where Raphael advises Adam not to worry himself about things which it is not necessary for him to know, things which God has, indeed, wisely hidden from him:

the rest
 From Man or Angel the great Architect
 Did wisely to conceal,

 Sollicit not thy thoughts with matters hid,
 Leave them to God above, him serve and feare;

 be lowlie wise:

 taught to live,
 The easiest way, not with perplexing thoughts
 To interrupt the sweet of Life, from which
 God hath bid dwell farr off all anxious cares,
 And not molest us, unless we our selves
 Seek them with wandring thoughts, and notions vain.
 (*Paradise Lost*, VIII, ll. 71–3, 167–8, 173, 182–7)

The idea that true wisdom, the easiest way to live, consists in the rejection of anxious cares which molest us, speaks to the Epicurean ideal; indeed, these lines in *Paradise Lost* themselves draw upon Horace's Epicurean ode III, xxix. This reading of Milton's philosophy (which is, of course, a very selective reading) led Dryden to use the phrases 'wisely hid' and 'anxious cares' repeatedly in his poetry: in his translations from Lucretius he writes that Nature 'wisely stints our appetite', that a potential sexual partner should not 'molest thy mind', nor should thoughts of death 'molest his head'.³⁸ Dryden uses 'wise' or its cognates with similar Miltonic associations in his translation of 'Horace: *Odes* III, xxix' (l. 45),³⁹ and, by my computation, on four later occasions. The phrase 'anxious care' appears in another of the translations in *Sylvae*, Horace's *Epode* II (l. 55), and in six later instances. An Epicurean thought has acquired a Miltonic shape in Dryden's poetic lexis. Another Miltonic element in the Lucretian translations is, as one might expect, the vocabulary for describing hell, for Dryden's 'burning Lakes', 'monstrous bulk', and 'stupendous Bridge' all come from Milton.⁴⁰ These are but particular instances of Dryden's imagination responding to Milton's sense of the extraordinary and wondrous in nature, and if we collect Dryden's Miltonic borrowings we see that what impressed him most was Milton's sense of the animation of nature. In the translations from Lucretius we find the natural world called 'vital, prolific, fragrant, teeming, various, productive', all in contexts which show that Dryden was drawing these terms from Milton. For Milton – as for Lucretius – the natural world was alive. The following ideas or turns of phrase in later poems by Dryden all come from Milton, some of them being used more than once: nature's livery, the steadfast earth, the teeming earth, earth's entrails, the womb of earth, fermented with moisture and prolific heat, a sylvan scene, sacred shades, a waving harvest bending, mossy seats, fairest fruit, loaded with fruit, weeping odorous gums, clasping

vines, embracing vines, tufted trees, the mute creation, joyous birds, fanned the buxom air, the stag's branching head, wandering fires, red lightning, impetuous rain, sporting winds, congregated waters, the canopy of heaven, a train of stars, stars which flew up to the skies, the wide circuit of the universe, the oblique course of the sun, the moon drinking borrowed light, the sky void of light, the dark abyss. Some of these ideas solidified into poetic diction in the eighteenth century, so that their originality and daring are not always apparent now.⁴¹ But these borrowings show that it was the perception of the animation of nature which so impressed Dryden in reading Milton's own poem *de rerum natura*.

And yet, most of these examples come from Milton's description of nature before the fall of man, a state of innocence which is always already lost, but into which we import our postlapsarian dreams and cares. It was not casually that Dryden called his opera *The State of Innocence*, for he was fascinated by what a prelapsarian condition might be like. It was Dryden who coined the phrase 'the noble savage' in *The Conquest of Granada* (1672), and he shared Montaigne's supposition that the state of nature before the advent of culture might have been one of paradisaic innocence rather than a Hobbesian war of every man against every man.⁴² But he was aware that civil society might well collapse in the future into a Hobbesian state of nature, a prospect which appears in *Absalom and Achitophel* in the form of a quasi-historical period when

These *Adam*-wits, too fortunately free,
 Began to dream they wanted libertie;
 And when no rule, no president was found
 Of men, by Laws less circumscrib'd and bound,
 They led their wild desires to Woods and Caves,
 And thought that all but Savages were Slaves.

(Absalom and Achitophel, ll. 51–6)

This passage starts with the Miltonic '*Adam*-wits' ('Licence they mean when they cry libertie'⁴³) but then moves into an adaptation of Lucretius' account of the savages who 'dwelt in woods and forests and mountain caves, did not look to the common good, and did not know how to govern themselves by custom and law':

Sed Nemora, atque cavos Monteis, Sylvasque colebant

Nec commune bonum poterant spectare, nec ullis

Moribus inter se scibant, nec legibus uti. (*De Rerum Natura*, V, ll. 953–7)⁴⁴

Similarly, Dryden's account of the sects in *The Hind and the Panther* draws upon the same passage in Lucretius when saying that 'In woods and caves the rebel-race began' (I, l. 196). Political and religious revolution springs from, and would return us to, a Lucretian state of nature. Dryden, Milton, and Lucretius may differ in many respects, but they share a strong vision of the

chaos, both material and social, from which human life emerged, and into which it is liable to dissolve.

III

Dryden, Milton, and Lucretius are interleaved once again in a complex work published in 1714. The most substantial response to Lucretius in the Restoration period was the translation by Thomas Creech, first published in 1682, praised by many contemporaries including Dryden, and frequently reprinted. In 1714, after Creech's death, there appeared a handsome new edition of this translation, probably compiled by John Digby, who had translated *Epicurus's Morals* two years earlier.⁴⁵ It represents the canonization of Lucretius, the appearance of this heterodox text in English in a format which emphasizes his classic status. The verse occupies only a couple of inches at the top of most pages, with the rest of the space devoted to double columns of commentary. It is the nature of this commentary, and the kind of reading which it invites, which concerns me here. Digby clearly sees Lucretius as a potentially dangerous classic, now that he has been translated, since his atheism might disturb unwary readers: 'Such Books are a sort of edg'd Tools, that either ought to be kept from the Weak, and the Illiterate; or, when they are put into their Hands, they ought to be instructed how to use them without Danger' (sigs. Bv–B2r). Accordingly, his annotations relentlessly deride the philosophical positions which Lucretius maintains: only a few lines into the first book, for example, the reader encounters a six-page note rebutting the Epicurean notion of deity (pp. 8–13). Nor is Digby much gentler with Creech's translation, correcting it at many points, interpolating his own versions of lines which Creech omitted, and supplying in his footnotes virtually the whole of Dryden's own renderings of Lucretius as an implicitly superior alternative. And yet, like many of Lucretius' Renaissance readers (whose testimonies he quotes) Digby is impressed by the moral value of certain aspects of the Epicurean philosophy, particularly its warnings against the greedy pursuit of money, power, and sexual gratification.

Digby's commentary mixes learned philosophical annotation with frequent citations of lines in the classic poets which seem to offer parallels of some kind with Lucretius. Many of these quotations illustrate natural and human phenomena through passages from Virgil or Ovid, and from a variety of mostly late seventeenth-century poets: Dryden is quoted on subjects which include springtime, shadows, sleep, dreams, prophetic rage, poetic fame, music, necessity, and the sun drinking the morning dew; Milton is cited on spices, chaos, eyelids, crops, hell, cranes, the Hesperides, the sun, the moon, morning, blindness, elephants, thunder, and much more besides; Cowley on the sea, the sun, rivers, and volcanoes; Shakespeare on sleep and storms; Oldham on lethargy, Blackmore on clouds, Garth on metals, Sprat

on plague. What these citations do, individually and cumulatively, is to suggest a method of reading Lucretius which distances us from his distinctive materialist philosophy, implying that we can take pleasure in the text without accepting the dogmatic message, that we can enjoy the poetic descriptions of man and nature while rejecting the philosophical explanations for these phenomena. Sometimes he will suggest that these parallels are actually borrowings, in which case the modern poet has, it seems, drawn on a Lucretian formulation or image without taking over the philosophy which it illustrates, or heeding its place in the poem's polemical structure. At other times, Digby overtly presents his modern examples as confutations of the text which he is annotating.

In particular, the frequent citations of *Paradise Lost* ensure that Lucretius' world is repeatedly contained and corrected by Milton's cosmology and its accompanying doctrinal assumptions. The account in Book V of *De Rerum Natura* of how the heavens came into being is accompanied by long quotations from Milton's creation story. Turning aside from his explanation of the Lucretian cosmology, Digby says: 'But let us hear the Best of Poets, and a Christian Philosopher, describing this part of the Creation. He speaks in the Person of an Angel' (p. 474); and later on he comments again: 'Milton's description of the first Beasts rising out of the Ground at their Creation, is so lively and sublime, that it well deserves to be transcrib'd by way of Illustration, to this Passage of our Poet' (p. 533). But the 'Illustration' is a rebuttal. And when Digby points out that Milton's allegorical figure of Sin owes something to the monster Scylla (p. 540), or reminds us that the fabled rivers of hell are 'finely describ'd by our English Homer, in his *Paradise Lost*' (p. 302), he is using Lucretius to impress on our minds the superiority of Christian teaching and Miltonic imagination. Indeed, at several points Digby suggests that Creech himself seems to be thinking of Milton rather than Lucretius (as, of course, Dryden had also done in his translation): annotating Book III, for example, Digby comments on Creech's reference to 'sulph'rous Lakes', which are not mentioned in the Latin: 'methinks our Translatour, in this Place, seems to have had in View, not so much the fabulous Hell of the Heathens, which Lucretius deny'd, and derided; as that real Place of eternal Torments, that we Christians justly believe, and tremble at: and which is thus excellently painted by Milton, in all its Horrour' (pp. 199–200). And so the mythology deconstructed by Lucretius is persistently reinstated by Digby's commentary.

At the same time, these annotations often acknowledge the ethical power of Lucretius, and his psychological insight. 'Epicurus', says Digby, 'was of Opinion, That not the least Part of Happiness consists in living exempt from Fear; and that this Happiness can be attained only by the Knowledge of Nature'; and to support his point he quotes from Dryden's translation of Book II:

These Bugbears of the Mind, this inward Hell,
 No Rays of outward Sun-shine can dispel;
 But Nature and right reason must display
 Their beams abroad, and bring the darksome Soul to Day.

(Digby, p. 90; 'Lucretius: The Beginning of the Second Book', ll. 64–7)

'Bugbears of the Mind' haunt some of the characters in Dryden's heroic plays, and Digby's quotations show that he appreciated that Dryden had been a close student of Lucretius when composing those works. From *Aureng-Zebe* Digby quotes two speeches on the terrors which attend a guilty mind (p. 276; *Aureng-Zebe*, V, i, ll. 46–9, 58–65), and from the same play he extracts these famous lines on the delusive hope that tomorrow will bring some new satisfactions which today has denied:

When I consider Life, 'tis all a Cheat;
 Yet, fool'd with Hope, Men favour the Deceit;
 Trust on, and think To-morrow will repay:
 To-morrow's falser than the former Day;
 Lies more: and while it says, we shall be blessed
 With some new Joys, cuts off what we possess'd.

(Digby, pp. 282–3; *Aureng-Zebe*, IV, i, ll. 33–8)

This is offered by Digby as a gloss on the end of Book III, where Nature chides her whining child, telling him that he has exhausted all her store, and she has nothing new to give. If *Aureng-Zebe* were a true Epicurean, he would have phrased his perception with less surprise and more equanimity. True equanimity, true Epicurean detachment, creates the kind of perspective on the world which is attained by the observer at the beginning of Book II of Lucretius, who surveys shipwreck and war from his safe retreat; at this point, Digby notes,

our excellent Dryden, describing the Life of a happy Man, says to the same Purpose with Lucretius:

No Happiness can be, where is no rest;
 Th' unknown, untalk'd of Man is only bless'd:
 He, as in some safe Cliff, his Cell does keep;
 From thence he views the Labours of the Deep:
 The Gold-fraught vessel, which mad Tempests beat,
 He sees now vainly make to his Retreat;
 And when from far the tenth wave does appear,
 Shrinks up in silent Joy, that he's not there. (Digby, p. 98)

What Digby perceives is not simply that these lines from a speech by St Catharine in *Tyrannick Love* (III, i, ll. 46–53) are an imitation of Lucretius, but that Dryden is making Lucretius part of the seventeenth-century tradition of thinking about the Happy Man, the *Beatus ille* topos.⁴⁶

Odd though it may have seemed for Lucretius and Milton to lie side by

side on Dryden's table, both writers challenged him to see the animation of the natural world, to imagine chaos and creation, and to develop his own understanding of true happiness. In translating these writers, by drawing them into this improbable dialogue, Dryden was both essaying their respective imagined worlds and defining his own place in a universe where (as he reflected in his final year) 'Mankind is ever the same, and nothing lost out of Nature, though every thing is alter'd'.²⁴⁷

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Notes

- 1 Marginalia on the copy in the Folger Shakespeare Library: see Paul Hammond, 'Some Contemporary References to Dryden', in *John Dryden: Tercentenary Essays*, edited by Paul Hammond and David Hopkins (Oxford, 2000), pp. 359–400, at p. 368. Though the marginalia cannot be dated precisely, the fact that this is a first edition (there were nine editions of *Absalom and Achitophel* within a year of its first publication) and the vehemence of the comments, suggests an immediately contemporary response.
- 2 For the reputation of Epicurus and Lucretius in the Restoration, see Paul Hammond, 'The Integrity of Dryden's Lucretius', *Modern Language Review*, 78 (1983), 1–23. For subsequent discussions which place Lucretius and Epicureanism in the context of seventeenth-century literature and philosophy see Richard W. F. Kroll, *The Material Word: Literate Culture in the Restoration and Early Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore, 1991); Jean-Charles Darmon, *Philosophie épicurienne et littérature au XVII^e siècle en France* (Paris, 1998).
- 3 *The Divine Epicurus, or, The Empire of Pleasure over the Vertues. Compos'd by that Most Renown'd Philosopher, Mr. A. LeGrand; and Rendered into English by Edward Cooke Esq.* (London, 1676).
- 4 *Paradise Regain'd*, IV, ll. 283–4, 299. All quotations from Milton are taken from *The Poems of John Milton*, edited by Helen Darbishire (Oxford, 1961).
- 5 In 'The Integrity of Dryden's Lucretius', and in *Dryden and the Traces of Classical Rome* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 156–70.
- 6 See the annotations to the 'Song' in *The Poems of John Dryden*, edited by Paul Hammond and David Hopkins (London, 1995–), III, 185–6; hereafter cited as 'Poems'.
- 7 See the annotations to the translations from *Sylvae* in *Poems*, vol. II.
- 8 Philip Hardie, 'The Presence of Lucretius in *Paradise Lost*', *Milton Quarterly*, 29 (1995), 13–24. See also Charles Martindale, *John Milton and the Transformation of Ancient Epic* (London, 1986), pp. 62, 74–5, 88. John K. Hale, *Milton's Languages: The Impact of Multilingualism on Style* (Cambridge, 1997), argues for Lucretian influence on *In Quintum Novembris* (pp. 40, 213 n. 34); see also pp. 77, 118–19.
- 9 *Paradise Lost*, II, ll. 890–910. Alastair Fowler (John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, edited by Alastair Fowler, second edn (London, 1998), *ad loc.*) mentions Lucretius only as a possible source or analogue for the phrase 'embryon Atoms' in l. 900, but I

- would suggest that Milton's reference to atoms implies a Lucretian pre-text for the passage as a whole.
- 10 Hardie, pp. 13–15.
 - 11 Stephen M. Fallon, *Milton among the Philosophers* (Ithaca, 1991).
 - 12 *The State of Innocence* was probably composed in the spring of 1674; *Aureng-Zebe*, which shows the marked influence of Lucretius, followed in 1675 (first staged 17 November). See *The Works of John Dryden*, edited by H. T. Swedenberg *et al.*, 20 vols (Berkeley, 1956–), XII, 321, 383; hereafter cited as 'Works'. Quotations from Dryden are taken from this edition.
 - 13 For good recent discussions see Derek Hughes, *English Drama 1660–1700* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 179–84; and Nicholas von Maltzahn, 'Dryden's Milton and the Theatre of Imagination', in *John Dryden: Tercentenary Essays*, pp. 32–56. I find it hard to understand Joseph Wittreich's conclusion that *The State of Innocence* and other Restoration responses to Milton are 'almost always bringing *Paradise Lost* into line with orthodoxy' (Joseph Wittreich, 'Milton's Transgressive Maneuvers', in Stephen B. Dobranski and John P. Rumrich (eds), *Milton and Heresy* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 244–66, at p. 247).
 - 14 Bruce King, *Dryden's Major Plays* (Edinburgh, 1966), p. 115.
 - 15 *A Concordance to Milton's English Poetry*, edited by William Ingram and Kathleen Swaim (Oxford, 1972), pp. 666–7.
 - 16 'The contact he made with *Paradise Lost* forces into prominence the primacy of the pleasure-principle, that God has given to man *artem fruendi* the capacity to enjoy his "fill / Of bliss on bliss" (IV. 507–8)': J. R. Mason, 'To Milton through Dryden and Pope', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1987, p. 77. I am very grateful to Dr Mason for his generous permission to cite material from his thesis.
 - 17 Quotations from Lucretius are taken from *Titi Lucretii Cari De Rerum Natura Libri Sex*, edited by Thomas Creech (Oxford, 1695).
 - 18 Did Marvell draw upon this couplet for his 'Two Paradises 'twere in one / To Live in Paradise alone' ('The Garden', ll. 63–4)? Marvell's poem seems to have been written after 1668 (see Allan Pritchard, 'Marvell's "The Garden": A Restoration Poem?', *Studies in English Literature*, 23 (1983), 371–88); and in his verses prefixed to the second edition of *Paradise Lost* in 1674 Marvell alludes disparagingly to *The State of Innocence*, so it is possible that he read Dryden's play before writing his lines. The Latin version of 'The Garden' has no equivalent to the stanza which contains these lines, so it could be a later addition. Marvell's poem was first printed in his *Miscellaneous Poems* (1681) and is not known to have circulated in manuscript, so Dryden is unlikely to have borrowed from Marvell.
 - 19 Act III scene iii is a version of the fall presented in the proleptic dream which Lucifer gives to Eve; the fall itself is enacted in Act IV scene ii.
 - 20 From *Areopagitica*, in *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, edited by Don M. Wolfe *et al.*, 8 vols (1953–80), II, 514–15.
 - 21 See the examples collected in *Concordance*, p. 143.
 - 22 The point is preserved in *The State of Innocence*, I, i, l. 132.
 - 23 For this debate see Brian Vickers, 'Leisure and idleness in the Renaissance: the ambivalence of *otium*', *Renaissance Studies*, 4 (1990), 1–37, 107–54.
 - 24 For Dryden's Epicurean usage of 'ease' in his non-dramatic poetry, see the notes in *Poems*, I, 470, II, 370.

- 25 *The Works of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester*, edited by Harold Love (Oxford, 1999), p. 108.
- 26 *Works*, XII, 153–4; Hammond, *Dryden and the Traces of Classical Rome*, p. 64.
- 27 Fowler cites only *Iliad*, VI, l. 138 as a source for Milton’s phrase, but Richardson’s remark is quoted in *Paradise Lost*, edited by Thomas Newton, 2 vols (London, 1770), I, 158.
- 28 The verbal similarities with Rochester’s lines (including the shared rhyme) make one wonder whether Rochester had shown his translation to Dryden; Rochester’s lines were not printed until 1691, and no manuscript copy of them is known, but in a letter to Rochester of 1673 Dryden quoted part of the passage in Latin: ‘You are that Rerum Natura of your own Lucretius, Ipsa suis pollens opibus, nihil indiga nostri: You are above any Insense I can give you; and have all the happiness of an idle life, join’d with the good Nature of an Active’ (*The Letters of John Dryden*, edited by Charles E. Ward (Durham, NC, 1947), p. 9).
- 29 *Order and Disorder: or, The World Made and Undone. Being Meditations upon the Creation and the Fall; As it is recorded in the beginning of Genesis* (London, 1679), pp. 3–5. For Lucy Hutchinson’s translation of the corresponding passage in Lucretius see *Lucy Hutchinson’s Translation of Lucretius: ‘De rerum natura’*, edited by Hugh de Quehen (London, 1996), p. 71. It includes the rhyme ‘possesse / quiettesse’.
- 30 David Norbrook, ‘A devine Originall: Lucy Hutchinson and the “woman’s version”’, *The Times Literary Supplement*, 19 March 1999, pp. 13–15. Norbrook is unable to date the poem precisely, but has found no evidence that Hutchinson had read Milton.
- 31 *Order and Disorder*, sig. (*).r.
- 32 *Order and Disorder*, p. 64. With the second couplet cp. Ephesians, iv, 8 and 1 Corinthians, xv, 54. References to ‘appetites’ and ‘aversions’ on pp. 23 and 68 suggest that Hutchinson has also been studying Hobbes.
- 33 *Works*, III, 11–12.
- 34 Montaigne is cited in the Dedication to *Aureng-Zebe*, and features in the pile of Dryden’s favourite books in the portrait of him painted by James Maubert circa 1695: the others are Shakespeare, Homer, Virgil and Horace – but not Milton. Montaigne cited Lucretius frequently in his *Essais*, and his heavily-annotated copy of *De Rerum Natura* has recently been discovered: see M. A. Screech, *Montaigne’s Annotated Copy of Lucretius* (Geneva, 1998).
- 35 After dedicating *Marriage A-la-Mode* to Rochester in 1673, and writing the letter cited in note 28 in the same year, Dryden’s relations with Rochester deteriorated. He was pilloried by Rochester in *An Allusion to Horace* (circulated in manuscript in the winter of 1675–76), which accuses him *inter alia* of being an unsuccessful libertine (ll. 71–6), and replied obliquely in the Preface to *All for Love* (published early 1678). But perhaps the Dedication of *Aureng-Zebe* to Rochester’s enemy Mulgrave (with its longing for withdrawal from a public career, and the use of Lucretius to express this), may be a first, wounded, response to Rochester.
- 36 Milton, ‘Sonnet XII’, l. 11; *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, in *Complete Prose Works*, III, 190.
- 37 The following analysis of Dryden’s borrowings from Milton draws upon the list of correspondences provided in J. R. Mason’s thesis, ‘To Milton through Dryden

- and Pope', pp. 643–792. Detailed documentation of all the parallels which I cite would be exceptionally cumbersome, but readers without access to Dr Mason's thesis will be able to identify the relevant passages via the Milton and Dryden concordances.
- 38 'Lucretius: The Beginning of the Second Book', l. 20; 'Lucretius: Concerning the Nature of Love', l. 19; 'Lucretius: Against the Fear of Death', l. 58.
- 39 See the note in *Poems*, II, 373.
- 40 'Lucretius: Against the Fear of Death', ll. 223, 192, 243; *Paradise Lost*, I, l. 210 etc, I, ll. 196–7, X, l. 351.
- 41 John Arthos, *The Language of Natural Description in Eighteenth-Century Poetry* (Ann Arbor, 1949), provides an invaluable catalogue of poetic diction and its sources.
- 42 See *Poems*, I, 72.
- 43 Milton, 'Sonnet XII', l. 11.
- 44 See *Poems*, I, 460.
- 45 T. Lucretius Carus, *Of the Nature of Things, In Six Books, Translated into English verse; By Tho. Creech ... Explain'd and Illustrated with Notes and Animadversions; being a compleat System of the Epicurean philosophy*, 2 vols (London, 1714). This edition is credited to John Digby by Cosmo Alexander Gordon in *A Bibliography of Lucretius*, second edn, with introduction and notes by E. J. Kenney (Winchester, 1985), p. 171. Among Digby's several classical translations is *Epicurus's Morals. Translated from the Greek by John Digby, Esq.* (London, 1712).
- 46 For this topos see Maren-Sofie Røstvig, *The Happy Man: Studies in the Metamorphoses of a Classical Ideal, 1600–1700*, second edn (Oslo, 1962). However, Derek Hughes sees St Catharine's speech as problematic in its dramatic context: see his *Dryden's Heroic Plays* (London, 1981), pp. 66–8.
- 47 *Fables Ancient and Modern; Translated into Verse, from Homer, Ovid, Boccace, & Chaucer: with Original Poems.* By M^r Dryden (London, 1700), sig. *C1v.

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