

# A Particular Trust: George Herbert and Epicureanism

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## Abstract

This article explores George Herbert’s engagement with Epicureanism, and Lucretius in particular, with Donne and Bacon serving as important intermediaries. While differing on questions about divine care for the world and eternal resurrection, Lucretius and Herbert both use poetry to shape readers’ views about these metaphysical questions. In his Latin and English poetry, Herbert challenges Epicurean ideas about death and *securitas*, but he also begins to develop a Christian theology of nature that can accommodate Epicurean atomism, which sets him apart from an Aristotelian mainstream and makes way for the physico-theology of later decades.

Nay, even that school which is most accused of atheism doth most demonstrate religion; that is, the school of Leucippus and Democritus and Epicurus. For it is a thousand times more credible, that four mutable elements, and one immutable fifth essence, duly and eternally placed, need no God, than that an army of infinite small portions, or seeds unplaced, should have produced this order and

beauty, without a divine marshal.  
Francis Bacon, “Of Atheism” (1610)

And as thy house is full, so I adore  
Thy curious art in marshalling thy goods.  
George Herbert, “Providence” (1633)

This article aims to illuminate George Herbert's engagement with Epicureanism, and Lucretius in particular, with Donne and Bacon serving as important intermediaries.<sup>1</sup> This investigation will contribute to our exploration of Herbert's engagement with nature in the present debate in *Connotations*: while giving different answers, Lucretius and Herbert share an investment in big questions about nature and the divine, as well as a controversial conviction that these metaphysical matters are best handled poetically. What is more, in *The Country Parson* and *The Temple*, Herbert begins to develop a theology of nature that can accommodate Epicurean atomism, setting him apart from an Aristotelian mainstream and making way for the physico-theology of later decades. Recent literary criticism and intellectual historiography have set the stage for this study, as Lucretius's influence on poetry in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries is becoming better understood. While the Roman poet's heterodox philosophy would not be seriously entertained in English intellectual circles until decades after Herbert's death, there was patristic Christian precedent for appropriating aspects of Lucretius's magisterial *De Rerum Natura* (*DRN*), and Renaissance poets too were capable of appreciating the *DRN* in spite of its heterodoxy. Literary criticism from the 1920s and 1930s is also relevant here, as we recollect that Lucretius was repeatedly invoked in early conversations about what constitutes "metaphysical poetry." Considering Herbert through this lens will add a new valence to his frequent use of dust imagery in *The Temple* and help us understand better his mature theology of nature.

### Herbert and Nature

This essay will be joined by four other explorations of Herbert's engagement with nature: Angela Balla's "Herbert and Gerson Reconsidered: Mystical Music and the Conciliarist Strain of Natural Law in 'Providence,'" Sarah Crover's "Kinship and the River Cam: George Herbert's Anthropocentrism Reconsidered," Paul Dyck's "The Providential Rose: Herbert's Full

Cosmos and Fellowship of Creatures,” and Debra Rienstra’s “‘I Wish I Were a Tree’: George Herbert and the Metamorphoses of Devotion.” Together, these essays give the lie to the idea that Herbert was so spiritual (or “puritanical”) as to despise nature,<sup>2</sup> whether construed as the created world or human nature apart from grace.<sup>3</sup> They show that even in his devotional poetry, Herbert evinces a keen interest in the spiritual status of nature, asking what distinguishes us humans from nonhuman creation, what other creatures can teach us, what we might owe them, and what will be their eternal fate. Herbert also engaged throughout *The Temple* with unredeemed human nature in the form of classical learning: my essay and Rienstra’s bring to light previously unremarked engagement with Ovid and Lucretius, two poets who were associated with each other in the humanist circles in which Herbert participated.<sup>4</sup> Tellingly, all of us consider Herbert’s lengthy poem “Providence,” which emerges as an especially rich resource for understanding his most mature view of nonhuman creation. The poem memorably pronounces humankind “the world’s high priest”—but what does this mean? We do not all approach these questions from the same angle or reach identical conclusions, but we all agree that Herbert’s treatment of “uneven nature” (“Faith,” see n1) is worth a second look.

### Lucretius in Herbert’s England

The Roman poet Titus Lucretius Carus (c. 99-c. 55 BCE) was the most successful preserver and popularizer of the philosophy of Epicurus (341-270 BCE) through his six-book philosophical epic *De Rerum Natura* (DRN), usually translated *On the Nature of Things*. Epicureanism shares some ground with the popular notion of an “Epicure,” in that (as Bacon put it in *The Advancement of Learning*) Epicureans “placed felicity in pleasure and made virtue [...] to be but as a servant, without which, pleasure cannot be served and attended” (137-38). But Epicureans recognized that maximizing pleasure over one’s lifetime requires a good measure of virtue and moderation;

what is more, moral philosophy was only part of the picture. As Lucretius memorably captures, this sect believed (following Epicurus and Democritus before him) that the universe was composed of nothing but infinite, indivisible particles moving in a void, uncreated by any supernatural power. The “gods” are composed of more tenuous atoms than humans can see, but they are still material, and they do not concern themselves with human affairs. *Religio*, superstitious practices aiming to please the gods, are harmful and misguided, and Epicurus is to be venerated for delivering humans from *religio*'s clutches. We need not now fear death because death means annihilation, with no rewards or punishments afterward. The best life is therefore a life of ἀταραξία or *securitas*, literally “separation from cares”: secure in the truth that nothing is of eternal value, humans are free to live in a way that maximizes pleasure and minimizes mental and physical pain, avoiding political ambition, and gladly relinquishing life at the end.

Even in ancient Greece and Rome, these were minority views, a situation that did not change over the ensuing centuries. The Bible famously records St. Paul's engaging the Epicureans by proclaiming that Athenians were “in all things [...] too superstitious” in terms of moral philosophy (Acts 17.22, KJV), agreeing with the sect that this was a culture still in thrall to *religio*. And in natural philosophy, Aristotle's physics with its four terrestrial elements and denial of a vacuum prevailed over Epicurean atomism from the classical period into the Renaissance. Since Lucretius's own times, Epicureans have often been caricatured as mere hedonists or atheists, though the church father Lactantius (c. 250-325), an architect of European Christendom, engaged deeply (if combatively) with Lucretius's philosophy and poetics.<sup>5</sup> The general historical narrative of *DRN*'s relative obscurity throughout the medieval period, followed by a spectacular Renaissance recovery, has been upheld by recent scholarship, with some more focused attention being given to English reception of the *DRN* between its first known appearance on the island in 1461 and the flowering of interest and first complete English translations in the middle of the seventeenth century.<sup>6</sup> These studies implicitly or explicitly challenge early twentieth-century claims

that no meaningful engagement with Lucretius took place in England before the 1650s.<sup>7</sup>

The present exploration of Herbert and Lucretius contributes to this body of work and builds especially on the attention these scholars give to Bacon and Donne, both of whom influenced Herbert considerably. Other literary and philosophical engagements with Lucretius in Herbert's neighborhood are also worth mentioning: the first text of the *DRN* to arrive in England was commissioned and imported by a Cambridge man, John Tiptoft (1427-70), and wound up in the hands of one Jane Owen, friend to (and likely the niece of) the Welsh epigrammatist John Owen (c. 1564-1622).<sup>8</sup> After the publication of Dennis Lambin's widely popular Latin edition of the *DRN* (1563-70), more informed echoes and appropriations begin to crop up in English literature, including those by Edmund Spenser, George Sandys, George Puttenham, Ben Jonson, and Josuah Sylvester.<sup>9</sup> Besides Bacon, other thinkers to engage substantively with atomism in the first half of the seventeenth century include Henry Percy, Thomas Hariot, Robert Burton—who styled himself “Democritus Junior”—and George Herbert's brother Edward. (Lancelot Andrewes and Joseph Hall wrote of Epicureanism in the more traditional, horrified way.<sup>10</sup>) What is more, Herbert explicitly mentions Epicurus twice and atoms once,<sup>11</sup> and editors of Herbert's works occasionally note possible allusions to Lucretius; these references will be discussed below. In sum, Herbert was familiar with Epicureanism in general and Lucretius in particular, and probably not only through Donne and Bacon. Because he was so well acquainted with both men, though, their treatment of Epicureanism deserves attention here.

Donne's treatment of Epicureanism is less obviously sympathetic than Bacon's and may give a better indication of how Herbert likely related to the Latin philosopher-poet. Donne and Herbert were family friends; both were (eventually) clerics deeply invested in theology and the care of souls, and both wrote metaphysical lyric poetry. In his sermons, Donne repeatedly attacked the Epicurean notion that God is not involved in human affairs, but he found the Epicurean goal of *securitas* more congenial, claiming

that a Christian version of the doctrine is licit, for “even Tertullian, in his Christian philosophy, places happiness in *rest*.”<sup>12</sup> Donne was also interested in atomism: he owned a number of books treating the subject and was connected with natural philosophers interested in it, such as Percy and Hariot (see Hirsch 72). Donne’s most famous allusion to atomism appears in his *First Anniversary* (1611), where he writes dolefully that this world “is crumbled out againe to his Atomis / ’Tis all in pieces, all cohaerance gone” (212-13). Considering these lines, Nicholas Hardy accuses Donne of creating a false dichotomy between “an atomist cosmology and its Aristotelian or biblical rival,” illustrating “the gap between a genuinely Lucretian understanding of atomic interaction, and its parody” (208-09). This conflation of Donne with his speaker may not be quite fair: with “cohaerance” Donne could be nodding not only toward atomic lack of coherence (e.g. *DRN* 2.67) but also toward the repeated refrain in which Lucretius sets bounds on atomic chaos and monstrosity with his universal “*alte terminus haerens*” or “deeply clinging boundary stone” demarcating what can and cannot come to pass (e.g. *DRN* 1.76-77). In any case, Donne is clearly interested in atomic crumbling and its spatio-temporal limits. David A. Hirsch has traced through Donne’s work a preoccupation with the atomization of the body at death and its reconstitution in the resurrection, concluding that “[i]n the atom, as in God, Donne finds a lost center, an invisible and indivisible source of immortality” (89).

To this scholarly discussion of Donne and atomism, Jessie Hock has recently added the argument that “Donne’s thinking resonates with Lucretius’s when he tackles the tricky question of the soul’s corporeality, or the body’s spirituality,” partly because Lucretius “does this theorizing in a language of love,” the same approach Donne takes in many of his most famous poems, such as “Air and Angels,” “The Ecstasy,” and “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning” (98). When, in this last poem, Donne compares lovers’ souls to “gold to aery thinness beat,” for instance, Hock very plausibly hears *DRN* 4.727, in which Lucretius likens *simulacra* to “*brattea [...] auri*” — translated by A. E. Stallings as “gold to airy thinness beat” (Hock 96).

Hock's larger project is to show how early modern readers were tuned in to Lucretius's savvy use of poetry to shape hearts and minds, redeploying his techniques in the service of their own political or erotic ends, some of which (anti-war polemic, for instance) they shared with him. Hock views Donne as a "claspe" (e.g. 25, 100) linking an older Petrarchan deployment of Lucretius's poetics to the more serious engagement with his materialist philosophy on view in later authors such as Lucy Hutchinson and Margaret Cavendish.

Lucretius's poetics raise a final site of Donne's engagement with Epicureanism: the Epicurean analogy of atoms and letters of the alphabet.<sup>13</sup> In book 2 of the *DRN* he writes:

Quin etiam passim nostris in versibus ipsis  
 Multa elementa vides multis communia verbis,  
 Cum tamen inter se versus ac verba necesse est  
 Confiteare alia ex aliis constare elementis;  
 [...]  
 Sic aliis in rebus item communia multa  
 Multarum rerum cum sint, primordia rerum  
 Dissimili tamen inter se consistere summa  
 Possunt; ut merito ex aliis constare feratur  
 Humanum genus et fruges arbustaque laeta. (*DRN* 2.688-91, 2.695-99)

Why, notice that scattered throughout these very verses  
 Are many letters common to many words,  
 But still you must confess, each word and verse  
 Has different letters for its elements;  
 [...]  
 So, although various things possess a mix  
 Of atoms shared by many other things,  
 The constituted wholes may be unlike,  
 And it is right to say that different atoms  
 Make up mankind and grains and the glad orchards. (Esolen 76-77)

Donne uses this analogy of language and material reality cheekily to describe a woman in "The Anagram":

Though all her parts be not in th'usuall place,  
 She'th yet an anagram of a good face.  
 If we might put letters but one way,  
 In the lean dearth of words, what could we say? (15-18)

He also observes in a letter written in 1612:

But, sir, if our letters come not in due order, and so make not a certain and concurrent chain, yet if they come as atoms, and so meet at last by any crooked and casual application, they make up and they nourish bodies of friendship. (*Life and Letters* 1: 305)

Behind Donne's wry references to Epicureanism is a certain sensitivity to the philosophy and its possibilities. With "crooked and casual," he invokes Lucretius's notorious discussion of the *clinamen* or atomic swerve that gave rise to an infinite series of worlds, unintended by any supernatural intelligence. Donne's reference ends on a positive note of coherence, order, and friendship, however, and this too is in line with Epicurean teaching on the *ratio* of the cosmos and the value of friendship.<sup>14</sup> In linking human *poesis*, "making (up)," with the composition of the universe, Lucretius gives Donne a valuable resource for thinking through questions of divine creation and poetic vocation that mattered a great deal both to himself and to Herbert. Indeed, more than any other feature of the *DRN*, Lucretius's metaphysical poetics align him with Donne and Herbert and distance him from Bacon.

Still, in Francis Bacon Herbert had a friend who knew the *DRN* well and was remarkably sympathetic to Epicureanism. Besides writing several letters and poems to Bacon during his time as university orator at Cambridge, Herbert helped to translate Bacon's 1605 *Advancement of Learning* into Latin (*De Dignitate et Augmentis Scientiarum*, 1623) and wrote a beautiful Latin poem for him at his death (Drury 130-38).<sup>15</sup> On his side, Bacon dedicated his 1625 *Translation of Certain Psalms* to "his very good frend Mr. George Herbert" in gratitude for his help with *De Dignitate*. Notably, the *Advancement*—the text of Bacon's Herbert likely knew best—appeared during the



period between 1605 and 1612 when Bacon was most “strongly inclined toward atomism” (Gillespie 251), a bent that shows in his 1612 *Essays* as well. Bacon’s admiration for Lucretius is nowhere more evident in *The Advancement* than when he translates the famous opening of *DRN* 2 on his most cherished conviction:

Of knowledge there is no sacietie, but satisfaction and appetite, are perpetually interchangeable; and therefore appeareth to be good in it selfe simply, without fallacie or accident. Neither is that pleasure of small efficacie, and contentment to the minde of man, which the Poet *Lucretius* describeth elegantly,

*Suave mari magno, turbantibus æquora ventis: &c.*

*It is a view of delight (sayth he) to stand or walke upon the shoare side, and to see a Shippe tossed with tempest upon the sea; or to bee in a fortified Tower, and to see two Battailes ioyne uppon a plaine. But it is a pleasure incomparable for the minde of man to bee settled, landed, and fortified in the certaintie of truth; and from thence to descrie and behould the errours, perturbations, labours, and wanderings up and downe of other men. (52)*

In this passage Bacon effectively maps his *instauratio* onto Lucretius’s *ratio*: whatever specific physical questions remain unanswered—and Bacon and Lucretius agree that there are many—both philosophers have found the universal truth of the nature of things and moved from sea-swept ignorance to the tower of security. Besides this shared framing conviction that they have respectively found the true *ratio*, the two men also shared more specific beliefs.

This is not to say that Bacon explicitly assented to heterodox claims such as the universe’s existence from eternity or annihilation of the soul at death, but much that was in the *DRN* appealed to him. At this time, he called atomism a “necessity plainly inevitable” (Gillespie 251), for instance, though he later rejected the theory. He took a sympathetic view of the Epicurean emphasis on what might now be called wellness, as well as the willing relinquishment of life when it becomes a burden. He appreciated Lucretius’s preference for sensory perception as the most trustworthy basis for the ac-

quisition of knowledge, over and against the more cogitative methods favored by the majority in their respective ages. He even liked Lucretius's view of the gods to a point; the idea that gods are beyond human pettiness and that superstition is harmful resonates in many ways with Bacon's Calvinist upbringing.<sup>16</sup> Lastly, as I will discuss below, Lucretius and Epicureanism informed Bacon's understanding of nature and providence, in ways that shaped Herbert's understanding of these things as well.

Unlike Lucretius's, Bacon's cosmos points to God: he famously argued in his 1612 essay "Of Atheism" that "God never wrought Miracle, to convince Atheism, because his Ordinary Works convince it" (90). His natural philosophy, however, is more Epicurean than Aristotelian. He denies that any of God's works are truly ordinary, for atomism, the school "most accused of Atheism, doth most demonstrate Religion." He explains:

It is a thousand times more Credible, that foure Mutable Elements, and one Im-mutable Fifth Essence, duly and Eternally placed, need no God; than that an Army, of Infinite small Portiouns, or Seedes unplaced, should have produced this Order, and Beauty, without a Divine Marshall. (91)

It is worth noting in passing that the contrafactual situation Bacon describes, wherein "eternally placed" matter needs no divine intervention, is the deistic view retroactively credited to Herbert's brother Edward. At this point, though, Bacon is establishing that Epicureans of all people need providence to explain what happens in nature. Bacon returns to this point in the expanded *De Dignitate*, where he compares God's use of nature to that of a canny Machiavellian who "can use the service of other men to his owne ends and desires; and yet never acquaint them with his purpose" (166). So, too, Bacon argues,

the wisdom of God shines more wonderfully, when Nature intends one thing, and *Providence* draws forth another; then if the Characters of *Divine Providence* were imprest upon every particular habitude and motion of Nature. Surely *Aristotle* after he had swelled up Nature with *Finall Causes* [...] had no further need of *God*: but [...] those Philosophers which were most exercised in contriving those

Atomes, found no end and issue of their travaile, untill they had resolved all at last into *God*, and *Providence*. (166-67)

Bacon seems to hold that Lucretius (at least) believed in providence: in *Wisdom of the Ancients*, he translates Lucretius's *fortuna gubernans* in *DRN* 5.107 as "guiding providence" (64-65), giving a Christian tone to Lucretius's less directed hope that the world not crumble to atoms in his own lifetime. This may be a mischaracterization of Lucretius, but the idea of a chaotic and crumbling nature held together by providence resonates strongly with Herbert's mature views, as we shall see.

In sum, apart from any direct knowledge of the *DRN* gained during his education, Herbert had a model of a poet/priest's engagement with Epicureanism in Donne, and he spent considerable time with the work of Bacon, who knew the *DRN* and Epicureanism well and who evinces great appreciation for the philosophy, especially as expounded by Lucretius. Noting this appreciation, C. T. Harrison wrote that Bacon's Epicurean bent "was ignored by his contemporaries" (4). More likely, a perceptive reader and translator such as Herbert noticed but declined to respond directly, preferring (like Donne, and Lucretius himself) to work out his own philosophy of God and nature poetically. The question then becomes: to what extent did Herbert share Bacon's Epicurean sympathies? While there are obvious discordances between Herbert's devotional poetry and the anti-religious *DRN*, several points of harmony suggest themselves as well. All told, the engagement with the scandalous pagan philosophy of Epicureanism in Herbert's Latin poetry and even *The Temple* may surprise many of Herbert's readers.

### Herbert's Engagement with Lucretius's Epicureanism

For the remainder of this article, I will consider several places where Herbert's works resonate with Epicureanism as expounded in the *DRN*, bearing in mind that Herbert received Epicurean philosophy through Bacon

and Donne as well. These resonances comprise specific echoes as well as more diffuse thematic resemblances; together, they build up a case that the *DRN* is among Herbert's influences, even if it is not the most pervasive or visible influence. As mentioned above, Herbert makes two explicit references to Epicurus and one to atoms, and editors have noted a handful of allusions to Lucretius in his Latin poems. I argue that Lucretius also turns up in *The Temple*, both in Herbert's general use of poetry to convey his metaphysics, and in particular key terms such as "rest," "sweet," and (above all) "dust." Like *Advancement*-era Bacon, Herbert is critical of Aristotelian philosophy, and his treatment of material reality is increasingly consistent with atomism. And like Donne, Herbert answers the existential threat posed by atomism and mortalism with Christian hope in divine power and providence.

### 1. Metaphysical Poetics

Lucretius's name appears often in the literary-critical discussions of the 1920s and 1930s aiming to define "metaphysical poetry," largely because of George Santayana's influential 1910 *Three Philosophical Poets: Lucretius, Dante, and Goethe*. In the introduction to his popular 1921 anthology *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century*, for instance, Herbert Grierson distinguishes his metaphysical lyrics from "metaphysical poetry, in the full sense of the term," which "like that of the *Divina Commedia*, the *De Natura Rerum*, perhaps Goethe's *Faust*, has been inspired by a philosophical conception of the universe and the rôle assigned to the human spirit in the great drama of existence" (xiii, qtd. in Cutrofello 78-79). Four years later, T. S. Eliot clapped back in a lecture series given at Cambridge that it would be misguided to "identify 'metaphysical' with 'philosophical' and limit 'philosophical' to those poets who have given expression to a system or some view of the universe," though he concedes that such an approach would limit "metaphysical poets" to Lucretius, Dante, and Goethe.

For Eliot, Lucretius wrote “poetical philosophy” rather than “philosophical poetry” (48-49). Apparently not everyone listened to Eliot, for in 1933 we find James Smith complaining that “Dante and Lucretius [...] have frequently been held to be very like Donne—to be, in fact, metaphysical poets *par excellence*” (223). Like Eliot, Smith insists that “Dante and Lucretius [...] wrote metaphysics in poetry, rather than metaphysical poetry” (237, 239), which was instead the province of Herbert, Marvell, and Donne. Whether because of the success of Eliot and Smith’s particular campaign or the general march of literary criticism away from these types of questions, few readers of Herbert are now in danger of viewing Herbert and Lucretius as of a piece—to the point where it bears considering why readers a hundred years ago might have made this category mistake.

Simply put, both poets were invested in philosophical questions of ontology and teleology, and both put this philosophy (unusually) in poetic form, explicitly stating their reasons for this approach in similar terms. In the *DRN*, Lucretius famously compares his philosophical system, his *ratio*, with bitter but healthful medicine; his verses are like the honey a doctor smears around the edge of a cup to trick a child into drinking it:

Sic ego nunc, quoniam haec ratio plerumque videtur  
 Tristior esse quibus non est tractate, retorque  
 Volgus abhorret ab hac, volui tibi suaviloquenti  
 Carmine Pierio rationem exponere nostrum  
 Et quasi musaeo dulci contingere melle,  
 Si tibi forte animum tali ratione tenere  
 Versibus in nostris possem, dum perspicis omnem  
 Naturam rerum. (*DRN* 1.943-50)

So I too, since this doctrine seems so harsh  
 To many who have never sampled it,  
 Since the mob shrinks back in horror—I have desired  
 To reveal our doctrine in sweet-throated song,  
 Touching it with the honey of the Muses,  
 That I might hold your mind by this device  
 To attend to my verse, until you grasp the entire  
 Nature of things. (*Esolen* 51)

Here for comparison are the opening lines of Herbert's "The Church Porch":

Thou, whose sweet youth and early hopes inhance  
 Thy rate and price, and mark thee for a treasure,  
 Hearken unto a Verser, who may chance  
 Ryme thee to good, and make a bait of pleasure:  
     A verse may finde him, who a sermon flies,  
     And turn delight into a sacrifice. (1-6)

It could be that Herbert hit on this strategy independently, but now that Jessie Hock has shown how well-known Lucretius's persuasive poetics were in early modern Europe, it seems likely that Herbert is harkening to the verser of the *DRN* here, picking up the second-person address ("tibi") and touting of his own verses ("nostris versibus") as well as themes of sweetness ("suaviloquenti, dulci [...] melle"), youth ("pueris" 1.936, "puerorum aetas improvida" 1.939), and baiting ("ludificitur" 1.939, "decepta" 1.941), from the Latin passage. He also invokes the Epicurean ideal of "pleasure," an ideal he mentions explicitly nine stanzas later when his speaker admits that lust, wine, and avarice offer certain rewards while swearing offers none: "Were I an *Epicure*," he quips, "I could bate swearing" (60). Herbert is not an "Epicure," but he seems willing to use Lucretius's strategy to pull his readers in a different direction, toward a "sacrifice" rather than a *ratio*. Rather than evincing a misguided and harmful fear of the gods as Agamemnon's sacrifice of his daughter did for Lucretius, "sacrifice" for Herbert means the surrender of one's self to a God whose own self-sacrifice has put an end to death.

## 2. Death

Appropriately, editors have found Lucretian terminology in Herbert's blustering "Triumphus Mortis," "Death's Triumph."<sup>17</sup> "Triumphus Mortis" is one of two climactic poems near the end of *Lucus* (*Sacred Grove*), a

loosely unified poem sequence which dramatizes the transformation of stony, unregenerate man into living flesh and points to the similar concerns of "The Church" (Freis, Freis, and Miller, Introduction xix-xxiv). These two poems—"Triumphus Mortis" and "Triumphus Christiani. In Mortem"—can be read as a point-counterpoint attack on mortalism, similar to the denser treatment this subject receives in Donne's "Death Be Not Proud" as well as Herbert's own "Death." Death is the speaker in "Triumphus Mortis," which is written in unrhymed dactylic hexameter like the *DRN*; also like the *DRN*, the poem contains strident anti-war polemic. Death vaunts his power over humankind through war, the "tree of death" in the sacred grove of *Lucus*. Editors name Lucretius in glossing Herbert's account of the emergence of this "tree": Herbert describes ancient humans as living in oaks and then caves, "quercus habitare feruntur / Prisci, crescentesque [...] cavernas" ("The ancients are said to live in oaks, and then caves," 5-6), evoking Lucretius's account of human origins in book 5 of the *DRN*, "glandiferas inter curabant corpora quercus [...] nemora atque cavos montis silvasque colebant" ("they met their bodies' needs by feeding / from the acorn-copious oak [...] [and] lived in the wild woods and the mountain caves"; 5.940 and 955).<sup>18</sup> Then trouble appears: "Una ex arbore vitam / Glans dedit, & truncus tectum, & ramalia mortem" ("From one tree / An acorn gave life, the trunk gave a dwelling, and the branches gave death"; "Triumphus Mortis" 7-8). With these references to oak trees and acorns, Herbert not only echoes Lucretius's description of primal life among acorn-bearing (*glandiferans*) oak trees but also Lucretius's double use of *glans* as a bullet or cannon-ball.<sup>19</sup> This image of the acorn/bullet (*plumbea glans*) is a major focus in the grim poem (see 60-84): as dust rises from the dead on Death's sulphureous dinner table in hell, unprecedented amounts of carnage are made possible by the leaden "acorn," which rattles the fragile world itself ("fragilis [...] crepant coenacula mundi," 78) and outstrips even the plague ("pestis," 80) in deadliness. The Lucretian resonance of "Triumphus Mortis" grows when we recall that Lucretius concluded the *DRN* with a lengthy and gruesome account of the plague in Athens (6.1138-

1286)—a triumph for death and yet more for Lucretius's *ratio*, as the dying Athenians finally relinquish *religio*.

Herbert's redeployment of the *DRN* in his own treatment of death is complex. On the one hand, the two poets are diametrically opposed on mortalism, with Lucretius insisting in *DRN* 3 that immortal death ("mors [...] immortalis," 3.869) will have the last word, for death is the irreversible annihilation of our entire being. Herbert instead answers death's vaunting tersely and triumphantly with "the Lamb and the Cross" (*Agnum & Crucem*, "Triumphus Christiani. In Mortem." 6). On the other hand, Herbert and Lucretius both strongly oppose the senseless violence of war; and both ultimately arrive at similar attitudes toward death. For Lucretius, death is not to be feared and should indeed be welcomed as a release from consciousness. For Herbert, death is not to be feared because it is not what Lucretius says it is. Occupying the same place in "The Church" as "Triumphus Mortis" does in *Lucus*, Herbert's "Death" denounces an earlier view that death was an "uncouth hideous thing" (1), a view focusing on the wrong side of death and seeing only "flesh being turn'd to dust, and bones to sticks" (8). These sticks and dust are in fact "shells of fledg souls left behinde" that will "wear their new aray" at Doomsday (11, 19). In light of this knowledge, we can now "go die as sleep, and trust / Half that we have / Unto an honest faithfull grave" (21-23). For Herbert, in sum, Lucretian mortalism is what made Death so scary; now we can see Death as "fair and full of grace" thanks to "our Saviors death" (15, 13).

Closing "Death" with sleep and the peaceful image of a pillow of dust (24), Herbert introduces a theme of "rest" that arises as well in Donne's "Death Be Not Proud" and is central to his own "The Pulley." In all of these instances, Epicureanism hovers in the background, with its compelling case that eternal existence would equate to monotony and misery, and that the highest good to be sought is *securitas* in life followed by annihilation. Donne's speaker in his sonnet sounds Epicurean in telling Death, "From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be / Much pleasure; then from thee



much more must flow" (5-6), but he ends with a flat renunciation of Lucretius's *mors immortalis*: "Death thou shalt die" (14). In the sermon quoted above, Donne goes yet further, explicitly locating the Epicurean ideal of *securitas* not in a "short sleep" before an eternal waking but in the Christian's everlasting rest itself. Donne recognized with Lucretius that there is something good in the human desire for rest, but where Lucretius harnesses this desire to promote mortalism, Donne harnesses it to promote Christian devotion. Herbert too attacks the Epicurean version of *securitas* while acknowledging rest as a good human desire, in "The Pulley." In creating humans, the speaker says, God bestowed every gift except for rest, explaining that if he were to

Bestow this jewell also upon my creature,  
He would adore my gifts in stead of me,  
And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature;  
So both should losers be. (12-15)

The poem calls to mind Augustine's famous declaration, "Our heart is restless until it rests in you" (3), but Herbert emphasizes purpose rather than result, asserting that if our heart were *not* restless, we would never come to God. On its own, Augustine's pithy sentence leaves this counterfactual unexplored, allowing readers to dwell on the "after" of this scenario, a life of rest in God. Herbert ends the poem still dwelling on a prolonged "before":

Yet let him keep the rest,  
But keep them with repining restlessness;  
Let him be rich and wearie, that at least,  
If goodnesse leade him not, yet wearinesse  
May tosse him to my breast. (16-20)

This poem seems calculated to annoy an Epicurean. To "rest in Nature, not the God of Nature" is their central aim, and repining restlessness is exactly what they want to avoid. Far from being evidence of misguided ambition

as for Lucretius, weariness and affliction were for Herbert signs of grace, and rest was to be hoped for only after that journey.

### 3. Atomism

While Herbert relocates the Epicurean ideal of *securitas* in eternity and roundly rejects Epicurean mortalism, he still views these doctrines as worth his attention, even in *The Temple*. What is more, Herbert appears to share values with Lucretius: both authors convey their philosophy through poetry, both hate war, and both view rest as a good to be sought. In matters of natural philosophy, Herbert also appears to lean increasingly toward atomism, distancing himself from an Aristotelian majority and aligning with his friend Francis Bacon. This alignment was likely conscious on Herbert's part. Summing up Herbert's 1621 poem in honor of Bacon, "post editam ab eo Instaurationem Magnam," W. Hilton Kelliher observed that "to Herbert in this poem Bacon is—what Epicurus represented to Lucretius—the liberator of mankind from error, who freed the spirit of scientific enquiry and dispelled the Idols of the tribe" (543). I suggest that Lucretius's praise of Epicurus is an intertext rather than just an analogue for this poem, for Herbert praises Bacon's attack on the errors of old learning in terms that recall a passage from the *DRN* both men knew well from Bacon's *Instauratio Magna* itself. Herbert calls Bacon (among other laudatory epithets) the "pontiff of truth," "Lord of Induction," "scourge of sophistry," and "axe against error" (3-4, 14, 25). This last epithet, *securis errorum*, punningly calls to mind the Epicurean ideal of *securitas* in general and the opening of *DRN* 2 in particular, which we saw Bacon translated in the *Advancement of Learning*: "*Suave mari magno &c.*" There Lucretius pontificates about the sweetness of observing the wanderings ("errare," 2.10) of others, secure in the knowledge that the only thing to be sought in life is to be free from cares ("cura semota," 2.19).

Besides furnishing another possible allusion to Lucretius, Herbert's poem in praise of Bacon also highlights the extent of the agreement between the two men on the relative value of old and new learning: like Bacon, Herbert sees the Aristotelianism of medieval universities as full of errors, a view consistent with his declaration in the English "Church Militant" that Plato and Aristotle have been supplanted by Christianity, *ergo* by *amen* (see 51-56). Here I consider a related question: did Herbert follow Bacon in his mid-life preference for Epicurean atomism as a foil for Aristotle's natural philosophy? This is not Herbert's primary emphasis in superseding the Greek *ergo* with "Christ's Crosse"—but Aristotle is a particular target, and a look through *The Temple* turns up evidence that he may have come to favor Epicurus over Aristotle in matters of natural philosophy.

Herbert, in *The Temple*, appears sympathetic to two major beliefs articulated by Lucretius: the existence of elementary particles more basic than earth, air, fire, and water, and the future dissolution of human bodies as well as the world into a heap of those particles.<sup>20</sup> To start, in opening "Church Militant," he declares that "the smallest ant or atome knows thy power" (3). He could be using "atome" merely poetically, but it is a striking word choice that instantly conjures Epicurean philosophy, and which is not circumscribed or questioned anywhere in the poem. Herbert also questions the irreducibility of Aristotelian elements in "Temper (II)," when the speaker prays that God would remain with him "though elements change" (14); this line refers to the Epicurean doctrine that earth, air, fire, and water are composed of more basic atoms and therefore subject to change. Here, as elsewhere, Herbert is imagining the scenario described by Donne in the *First Anniversary*: that the world might "crumble [...] out againe to his Atomis" (212), into particles so small that no natural force can put them together again. Like Donne, in the face of this frightening possibility he turns to God, the only power strong enough to resurrect crumbled things.<sup>21</sup>

The possibility that Herbert accepts atomism looks increasingly probable when his references to dust are put in the picture.<sup>22</sup> Dust is one of Herbert's favorite images (see Wilcox xlii), and we have seen several references to

dust already in “Death.” Most of these references are drawn chiefly from the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer, as in the phrase “ashes to ashes, dust to dust” in the funeral service. But dust is also an effective way to illustrate the doctrine of atoms, and Lucretius himself uses dust in this way:

Contemplator enim, cum solis lumina cumque  
 inserti fundunt radii per opaca domorum:  
 multa minuta modis multis per inane videbis  
 corpora misceri radiorum lumine in ipso  
 [...]
   
 primordia rerum  
 quale sit in magno iactare semper inani.  
 dum taxat, rerum magnarum parva potest res  
 exemplare dare et vestigia notitiae. (2.114-17, 2.121-24)

Consider the rays of the sun that are always stealing  
 Into the shade of a house to pour their light.  
 There in the void you'll notice many and sundry  
 Dust flecks that mingle among the rays themselves,  
 [...]
   
 From this you can project how atoms are  
 Constantly tossed along the gulf of space.  
 If small things can provide analogies  
 For greater, and set us on the trace for knowledge. (Esolen 60)

Lucretius's metaphysical imagination is on view in this conceit, as he uses the image of dust-motes endlessly fighting in a sunbeam to give readers a better grasp of atomic theory. He understood that much of the work of persuading others to accept his *ratio* was imaginative: how could the basic building blocks of the cosmos be indivisible particles too small for anyone to see? For Lucretius, the proof was in the wanton crumbling and strife on view on a larger scale everywhere, from dust motes to plagues. The end of all this, he states emphatically, will be the utter destruction of the world itself: “Multosque per annos / sustentate ruet moles at machina mundi” (“The world's vast structure, / upheld for many years, will fall to ruin”; 5.95-96).

The biblical idea that the world and its creatures are dust and will return to dust thus resonates well with Epicureanism—better, Bacon suggested, than with Aristotelian natural philosophy—and many of Herbert’s references to dust can be read in this way. Herbert’s dustiest poem, “Church-monuments,” is a good example. Contemplating these monuments to the dead buried under them, the speaker wishes his own flesh to “take acquaintance of this heap of dust; / To which the blast of deaths incessant motion [...] / Drives all at last” (3-4, 6). “Incessant motion” tending to universal dissolution is a central tenet of Epicurean philosophy and one that the speaker wishes to understand better; and a “heap” in particular is a Lucretian image, seen in the lines above where the machine of the world will literally “run to a heap” [*ruet moles*]. Herbert continues,

Therefore I gladly trust

My bodie to this school, that it may learn  
To spell his elements, and finde his birth  
Written in dustie heraldrie and lines;  
Which dissolution sure doth best discern  
Comparing dust with dust. [...] (6-10)

Here Herbert’s *memento mori* is not a death’s-head as in “The Collar”; instead, he imagines the process of dissolution progressed to the point where nothing is left but dust, which his own dust might do well to join in spite of the jet and marble headstones separating them. These pulverized bodies help him “spell his elements”—understand his basic building blocks, with “spell” suggesting the Epicurean analogy of elements to letters of the alphabet that so interested Donne.<sup>23</sup> Herbert’s focus on dissolution here may in fact be directly informed by Donne’s lament that the world is “crumbled out into his Atomis,” based on a change he made between the Williams and Bodleian versions of “Church-monuments.” The final stanza of the earlier version contained the lines:

Flesh is but the glasse, which holds the dust  
That measures all our time; which also shall  
Be broken into dust. (20-22)

In the final version, Herbert changes this last line to “be crumbled into dust” (22, emphasis mine). “Crumbled” suggests atomic dissolution more strongly than had “broken,” especially read in light of Donne’s declaration of atomic crumbling and Herbert’s other references to a “crumme” of dust in *The Temple*.<sup>24</sup>

#### 4. Providence

As was the case with mortalism in “*Triumphis Mortis*” and “*Death*,” when it comes to atomic dissolution, Herbert follows Epicureanism to a point and then departs sharply at the doctrines of God’s sovereignty and care for humans, and his own attendant confidence in resurrection. Herbert’s stress on these doctrines takes on more imaginative weight in the face of atomism, as Bacon explained: in an Aristotelian world with very few elements, no void and intrinsic final causes, it is easier to imagine that God might be redundant. In the chaotic world of the Epicureans, something or someone is needed to hold things together—a problem on view (Bacon and later natural theologians would point out) in their recourse to *deus ex machina* assertions such as an unprovoked atomic swerve and unexplained universal boundary stones. Herbert gives a different explanation for why the world coheres, both in the present and in eternity: providence.<sup>25</sup> Especially in the poems “*Providence*,” “*Faith*,” and “*Vertue*,” Herbert puts into a positive, poetic form Bacon’s insights about the ways an Epicurean natural philosophy necessitates a wise and powerful creator. Bacon, we will recall, asserted that the order and beauty of the world could never have been produced from atomic chaos “without a Divine Marshall” (*Essayes* 91), and further, that “The wisdom of God shines more wonderfully, when Nature intends one thing, and *Providence* draws forth another; then if the Characters of *Divine Providence* were imprest upon every particular habitude and motion of Nature” (*De Dignitate* 166). Where Bacon turned from this line of thought to other things, Herbert followed it further.

I have argued elsewhere that *The Temple* shows the influence of this last claim of Bacon's about "Characters [...] imprest" on nature: over his career, Herbert moves away from an understanding of nature as a book full of signifiers, toward an understanding of nature as a household or cabinet full of things subject to divine and human use (see Calloway 99-100). Here I focus on Herbert's celebration of God's savvy "marshalling" of material reality to bring about his will independent of—perhaps in spite of—any intention woven into the fabric of nature itself. God's will is, currently, the persistence of the natural world in beauty and order, and ultimately, the eternal communion of himself with humankind despite the tendency of nature to run to seed that impressed itself so strongly on Lucretius, Bacon and Herbert.<sup>26</sup> In the face of this tendency, Herbert flatly declares in *The Country Parson*, the very persistence of the world is obvious proof of God's superintendence:

For Nature, [the Parson] sees not how a house could be either built without a builder or kept in repaire without a house-keeper. He conceives not possibly, how the windes should blow so much as they can, and the sea rage so much as it can, and all things do what they can, and all, not only without dissolution of the whole, but also of any part [...] He conceives not possibly, how he that would believe a Divinity, if he had been at the Creation of all things, should lesse believe it, seeing the Preservation of all things; for Preservation is a Creation, and more, it is a continued Creation, and a creation every moment. (281)

In "Providence," the second longest poem in "The Church" and one of Herbert's later compositions, the speaker celebrates the order and beauty of the present world, following the lead of Psalm 104 in adoring "Thy curious art in marshalling thy goods" (94). Where the Psalmist devoted verses to the original creation, however, this speaker focuses on the "continued Creation" visible at every moment; he marvels at plants, insects, and other creatures great and small (including humans), culminating with an exclamation that it would be impossible to celebrate God's works enough, or even to know them all. Combining the Psalmist's confident tone of praise with a Baconian attentiveness to nature, this poem would play a role in the rise of

the modern design argument through Henry More and John Ray (see Calloway 90-100).

For, while still in the celebratory vein of the Psalmist, "Providence" takes steps in the direction of a closer consideration of the "how" and "why" of creation. For example, the speaker considers the potential Bacon noticed for the divine Marshal and his creatures to be at cross-purposes, acknowledging that "all things have their will, yet none but thine" (32). He unfolds this idea:

For either thy *command*, or thy *permission*  
Lay hands on all: they are thy *right* and *left*.  
The first puts on with speed and expedition;  
The other curbs sinnes stealing pace and theft. (33-36)

With "all things" and "all," Herbert makes clear that he does not include just the unruly human will in sin's orbit; all of creation can misbehave, and it is a testament to God's authority that lower creatures can pursue their business while unknowingly bringing about God's will. It can also be the case, though, that creatures behave unconstrainedly not out of sin but for sheer play and diversity: "To show thou art not bound, as if thy lot / Were worse then ours; sometimes thou shiftest hands," the speaker declares, "Most things move th'under-jaw; the Crocodile not. / Most things sleep lying; th' Elephant leans or stands" (137-40). This idea that the world is characterized by bounded variety, Brent Dawson has shown, is shared by Lucretius as well (see 900-01). But Lucretius and Herbert part ways regarding the reason for the bounds—the reason the world currently hangs together—and regarding the immortality of the soul.

Herbert attacks Epicurean doctrine on these matters head-on in the poems "Faith" and "Vertue." As its title suggests, "Faith" affirms a peculiarly Christian virtue and one that Lucretius would not endorse. In closing the poem, the speaker explicitly raises an Epicurean doctrine:



What though my bodie runne to dust?  
 Faith cleaves unto it, counting evr'y grain  
 With an exact and particular trust,  
 Reserving all for flesh again. (41-44)

This stanza reads like a direct attack on Lucretian annihilationism, perhaps addressing Lucretius himself in response to his assertion that all will “run” [*ruet*] to a heap of atoms in the end, or Donne’s speaker who pronounced “all cohaerence gone” in the *First Anniversary* (213). Where Lucretius explained the world’s coherence with a “deeply clinging boundary stone” (“*alte terminus haerens*”) past which entropy may not go, Herbert imagines faith as the glue cleaving to atoms with a “particular trust”—a pun aligning Herbert with Donne in his final emphasis on resurrection as triumphant over atomic crumbling.

A final poem in which Herbert evinces bounded assent to Epicurean annihilationism is “Vertue,” which opens the same way Lucretius began *DRN* 2: “Sweet.” The poem’s title is scientific. It is an exploration of the “virtue” or essential properties of natural things—the way things are, to paraphrase Lucretius’s title—and the way natural things are in the poem is destined for dissolution. The speaker addresses various “sweet” things of the world in successive stanzas: the day, the rose, and the spring, concluding at the end of the first two stanzas, “Thou must die” (4, 8). This changes to a universalizing “all must die” in the third stanza (12); but the speaker does not end there, where Lucretius would. A final stanza proclaims:

Only a sweet and vertuous soul,  
 Like season’d timber, never gives;  
 But though the whole world turn to coal,  
 Then chiefly lives. (13-16)

The refrain in “Temper (II),” “Faith,” and here in “Vertue” is the same: though our bodies should crumble to atoms, and the whole world be destroyed, we will persist because God wills it. In the present, the very order and beauty of creation is a clear testament to God’s existence and power,

but Herbert repeatedly entertains the Epicurean notion that this world is eventually destined for total dissolution. Even in that dire circumstance, though, Herbert believes that death will not have the last word. Where the Epicurean lyric poet Horace famously wrote *pulvis et umbra sumus*—we are dust and shadow—Herbert instead insists that we are dust and faith.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>I would like to thank Sarah Crover, Paul Dyck, Sidney Gottlieb, Debra Rienstra, and Catherine Freis for helpful feedback at various stages of writing. Any remaining problems with my claims are my own. Quotations from Herbert's English poems come from Helen Wilcox's Cambridge edition; quotations of his Latin are from the *George Herbert Journal* editions edited by Catherine Freis, Richard Freis, and Greg Miller.

<sup>2</sup>The caricature of puritans as despising nature has some truth to it; see my discussion of this in *Literature and Natural Theology*, citing U. Milo Kaufman (183). For instance, in *Husbandmans Companion* Edward Bury catches himself enjoying a garden and "checkt my self for my folly, for letting out my affection upon such poor objects, and letting them grovel so low upon the ground" (120; see Kaufman 186).

<sup>3</sup>Wilcox notes of Herbert's poem "Nature" that the title has "three interlinked primary meanings: the created world, human nature, and the nature of God. The first two are regarded as fallen, but redeemed by grace: 'grace fills up uneven nature' (36 Faith 32)" (155). The first two meanings are in play in this article.

<sup>4</sup>On Ovid and Lucretius, see Hock, e.g. 47-48. On Herbert's coteries, see Malcolmson 1-20; Miller and Miller-Blaise; and Jackson 59-80.

<sup>5</sup>On reductive caricatures of Epicureanism from Cicero to Donne and Bacon, see Hardy 206-11; Hardy notes that Lucretius is often passed over in historical attacks on casual atomism. On Lactantius, see Kiel 623-24, and notes. Tertullian and Augustine (the latter a noted influence on Herbert) also dealt with Epicurean doctrine: see Harrison 1. The school is now being given more of a fair shake: see for instance Austin; and Siegfried.

<sup>6</sup>David Butterfield argues that "Lucretius was very little known throughout the medieval period until his dramatic rediscovery in 1417" (44). On early modern reception of Lucretius, see Norbrook et al. (eds.); and Greenblatt. On reception in England before 1650, see Herford and Simpson (on Jonson) 1: 255-58; Harrison; Kargon (on Bacon) 43-

53; Hirsch; Gillespie; and Hock. Harrison, Gillespie, Hirsch, and Hock all devote attention to Donne, as does Hardy.

<sup>7</sup>See Gillespie, e.g. 242 and 253, challenging Harrison and Mayo.

<sup>8</sup>See Butterfield 51-52; Barbour et al. xx-xxi; Stevenson 378-80.

<sup>9</sup>See Butterfield 56; Gillespie, and Harrison.

<sup>10</sup>See Kargon 5-42; Harrison 5-6 and 9-10. Percy and Hariot were both involved in the Virginia Company, like the Herberts. Though both spent the years from 1606 to 1621 in the Tower of London, their ideas remained in circulation. Edward would meet Lucretius's French disciple Pierre Gassendi and write about Epicureanism in the 1640s in his *De Religione Gentilium*. I list these connections as evidence of the ideas conversed about in Herbert's circles: on these intellectual networks, see e.g. Jackson 59-80; and Miller and Miller-Blaise, especially 2 and 18-19 on Lucretius. They note that a probable conduit of Lucretian ideas to these circles was the French poet Théophile de Viau (1590-1626).

<sup>11</sup>I am indebted here and elsewhere in this article to *A Concordance to the Complete Writings of George Herbert*, edited by Mario DiCesare and Rigo Mignani.

<sup>12</sup>Donne attacks Epicureanism in *Sermons* 9: 303 and 3: 324; the quotation comes from 5:194.

<sup>13</sup>See Harrison 19n8; Hardy 208-09.

<sup>14</sup>On *ratio* and limits on chaos, see Hardy; on Epicurean teachings on friendship, see Armstrong. It is unclear whether Donne noticed the Epicurean emphasis on friendship (downplayed in the *DRN* but discernible in other sources) or coincidentally made this connection.

<sup>15</sup>On resonances between Herbert's poetry and Bacon's philosophy, see Balla, "Baconian Investigation." While I agree with Balla that Herbert shows sympathy with Bacon in a number of ways, I take Crover's point that Herbert does not endorse a Baconian mastery of nature.

<sup>16</sup>On wellness and euthanasia, see e.g. *Advancement* 100-01. Bacon's emphasis on induction needs no citation, but for evidence he recognized this method in Lucretius, see e.g. *Advancement* 31. On the gods, see e.g. *Essayes* 16-18 and 92-93, and *De Dignitate* 118. On Bacon's Calvinist leanings, see Gascoigne.

<sup>17</sup>All possible allusions to Lucretius noted by Herbert's editors appear in his Latin poems, probably because Lucretius himself was a celebrated Latin poet and also because Herbert's best-known English works are not as concerned with strutting his humanist learning. Besides the allusions in "Triumphus Mortis," Herbert occasionally channels Lucretius's "purple" opening lines. For instance, multiple editors have noted a reference to the opening of the *DRN*, "Aeneidum genetrix," in the opening of Herbert's *Memoriae Matris Sacrum* IX, where he addresses his mother as "Genetrix" rather than the more usual "Mater" (Drury and Moul 548; Freis, Freis, and Miller 114). The editors of the forthcoming Oxford edition of Herbert's *Works* also suggest a parallel between Herbert's "saxa [...] percussa" (*Musae Responsoriae* 23.15) and Lucretius's "aeriae

volucris [...] percussae" in *DRN* 1.12-13. I am grateful to Rob Whalen for this information.

<sup>18</sup>The editors of the forthcoming Oxford edition of Herbert's *Works* make this connection; thanks to Rob Whalen for sharing. Translations of "Triumphus Mortis" are from Freis, Freis, and Miller. Catherine Freis notes further possible support for Herbert's associating primitive humans with acorns in his letter to Robert Creighton of May 6, 1627: Herbert writes that he is "feeding on mush and acorns following our ancestors' customs" ("Ego hic pultribus vescor et glande, more majorum," *George Herbert's Latin Prose* 74-75). This translation comes from Esolen (185).

<sup>19</sup>Freis, Freis, and Miller xxv and 266: "Lucretius used *glans* with the sense of 'bullet': *plumbea vero glans etiam longo cursu volvenda liquescit* ('and truly a bullet of lead even melts when hurled across a great length') (6.175)."

<sup>20</sup>A third doctrine Herbert may take up more obliquely is Lucretius's optics, wherein sheets of ultrafine atoms stream off of objects and bombard the viewers' eyes: in "Ungratefulnesse" the speaker describes the Trinity as a doctrine we will not see "till death blow / The dust into our eyes: / For by that powder thou wilt make us see" (16-18), and in "Dooms-day" he prays that God would "Summon all the dust to rise, / Till it stirre, and rubbe the eyes" (3-4).

<sup>21</sup>My argument here about dissolution and reconstitution of the speaker aligns with Rienstra's treatment of Ovidian themes in "The Church" in that both trace an arc of fragmentation and loss of identity followed by rebirth; Herbert's *Lucus* follows this same arc and also uses the figure of trees central to Rienstra's reading.

<sup>22</sup>See also Lang-Graumann, on Herbert and the motif of the "Allerkleinste."

<sup>23</sup>On the Lucretian and Platonic references in Herbert's phrase, see Lang-Graumann 165-76. I am grateful to the editors of *Connotations* for this reference.

<sup>24</sup>See "Longing" 41; "The Temper (I)" 14.

<sup>25</sup>Here my consideration of providence dovetails with Balla's reading of "Providence" as a poem exploring natural law, and also with Dyck's treatment of plenitude in "Providence." If, as Dyck points out, "Herbert cannot be consoled by a philosophy of cosmic fullness" because fullness without kindness "turns to exclusion," a Lucretian cosmos can paradoxically be more hopeful, affording a place where (as the speaker, a "crumme of dust," hopes in "Longing") God can "interline" more into the already-full book of the world and "humble guests" can still "finde nests" (49-54; see Dyck, and Balla, "Herbert and Gerson").

<sup>26</sup>Cf. *Country Parson* 271: "By his sustaining power [God] preserves and actuates every thing in his being; so that the corne doth not grow by any other vertue, then by that which he continually supplyes, as the corne needs it; without which supply the corne would instantly dry up, as a river would if the fountain were stopped." I use the idiom "run to seed" because Lucretius frequently referred to atoms as *semina rerum*, "the seeds of things."

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