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2011

Ephemeris NS Vol. I

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NS VOLUME 1
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EPHEMERIS

CYTHERA

We boldly ventured into
the pleasant realms of
Cythera,
gingerly, experimentally
peeling away the
thickly applied heavy
gold leaf
affixed
to our great Expectations.

~JAMIE MARIE BERILLA
MUSKINGUM UNIVERSITY



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LIMINA LETI, MORTIS METUS: An Analytical Contextualization of
Lucretius' Description of the Plague of Athens in *De Rerum Natura*

Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* is a work of staggering scope and monumental ambition. Appropriately given the title "On the Nature of Things," this poetic treatise broaches atomic behavior, volcanoes, the vastness of the universe, love, the history of the earth and of human society, magnetism – indeed, the subject matter is dizzyingly varied. And yet, such variety, however immense, does not detract from Lucretius' objective in writing the poem. By plumbing the complexities of nature, by logically accounting for the stuff of life, the poet-philosopher-teacher encourages his reader-student to remain grounded in this life and aims to quell the senseless fear of the unknown. Despite its frightful content and, consequently, its seeming incongruence with the poem, the epilogue poses no exception to this aim. Far from being discordant with the rest of *De Rerum Natura*, which exalts the Epicurean acceptance of death as natural and ineluctable and decries the widespread fear of death, Lucretius' description of the Plague of Athens reinforces his Epicurean mission statement and cinches the structure of the poem as a whole.

To begin with, although Thucydides' account of the plague in *The Peloponnesian War* clearly influenced Lucretius' description, the latter writer devotes more attention to the generative human body and dread of death. Both writers mention that the afflicted resorted to castration; however, Lucretius specifically states that men emasculated themselves because they were afraid to die (VI.1208-9: *et graviter partim metuentes limina leti / vivebant ferro privati parte virile...*). Thucydides, on the other hand, relates quite generally that "it [the plague] settled in the privy parts, the fingers and the toes, and many escaped with the loss of these" (II.49.7). Furthermore, in addition to noting, as Thucydides does, the bleak abundance of corpses, Lucretius poignantly describes heaps composed of

parents and their children (1256-8); indeed, he emphasizes the plague's disruption of the generative order. Another significant difference between these plague reports lies in their presentation of people's responses to the desolation. Upon discussing the Athenians' shameless violation of burial customs, Thucydides recounts their resolution to "spend quickly and enjoy themselves, regarding their lives and riches as alike things of a day" (53.2). He therefore indicates that they accepted the imminence and quickened inevitability of death in the wake of pestilential destruction. Though Lucretius does not mention this nihilistic abandon, he accentuates the "excessive lust for life" stemming from "dread of death" (1240) that induced people to spurn their ailing kin. This reference to the fear of death, which is noticeably absent from Thucydides' parallel discussion of familial neglect, is bolstered by the preceding ten lines. Here Lucretius, manifestly inspired by his Greek forbear, bemoans the tendency of plague victims to fixate on death and consequently enfeeble their spirit (1230-4). Dread of death thus plays a considerably bigger part in Lucretius' plague narrative than in Thucydides' account – indeed, both this fear and the human generative body occupy significant positions in the poet-philosopher's great work.

The notion of the generative body and the related act of procreation take root in Lucretius' introductory invocation of Venus. In this grand poetic eulogy, he exalts her as *alma* (1.2: "nourishing") and assigns her the epithet *Aeneadum genetrix* (1: "mother of the descendants of Aeneas"), which serve as the first two words of the poem. Within the first two lines of his treatise, therefore, Lucretius establishes the goddess of love as the consummate mother, one who not only perpetuates her stock but also nurtures and cares for her offspring. As the invocation progresses, the extent of Venus' propagative power increases. In addition to contributing to the production of Aeneas' descendants, the goddess supplies land and sea with their characteristic inhabitants (3-4) – indeed, "through her every type of living thing(s) is conceived and, having arisen, sees the light of the sun" (4-5: *per te quoniam genus omne animantum / concipitur visitque exortum lumina solis*). Lucretius further emphasizes Venus' role in perpetuating the generations of species by detailing her effect on herd animals. Having been "seized by the charm" of the love goddess, these beasts "follow [her] eagerly wherever [she] urge[s] each one to go" (15-16: *capta lepore / te sequitur cupide quo quamque inducere pergis*). As a result, Venus "make[s] it so that the generations eagerly propagate according to their species" (20: *efficis ut cupide generatim saecula propagent*). The magnitude of her influence is particularly evinced by the adverb *cupide*, which Lucretius uses twice in his description of the amorous animals. Although he employs the forceful *incutiens* (19:

“striking”) to characterize Venus as she infuses them with desire, he also presents the beasts as receptive to her touch. Indeed, they follow her eagerly and eagerly copulate; she does not impel them to procreate but endows them with the desire and the alacrity to do so. In his invocation, therefore, Lucretius both accentuates the generative capacity of the body and glorifies Venus as the activator of this capacity, as the one responsible for perpetuating the generations.

If the introduction of *De Rerum Natura* serves to exalt Venus as the mother and ultimate source of all creatures and, consequently, an appropriate muse for the poem (21-25), then the conclusion – Lucretius’ plague narrative – serves to remind the reader of death, the natural and ineluctable complement to birth. This account of the Plague of Athens, which harrowed the city from the years of 430 to 426 B.C.E.,¹ seems to undermine the elements which Lucretius so joyously celebrates in his invocation. To begin with, as the juxtaposition of Lucretius’ description with that of Thucydides illustrates, the poet emphasizes that some Athenians castrated themselves in the frenzy of disease. The implications of this drastic act are momentous. In “depriving themselves of their manly parts” (VI.1209: *privati parte virili*), these Athenians are also depriving themselves of the capacity to procreate, to perpetuate the generations. Such desperation stands in stark contrast to the lusty exuberance which Venus inspires in all creatures and which Lucretius glowingly depicts in the invocation. Far from being eager to sow their seed and thus populate the ages, the deranged men desire to emasculate themselves and thus permanently prevent their contribution to the proliferation of their species. This tension between the introduction and the conclusion to Lucretius’ work also manifests in his description of the plague’s effect on birds and beasts. Upon accentuating the motherhood and generative supremacy of Venus, he designates birds as the first recipients of her touch (I.12-13) and then chronicles her influence on terrestrial creatures (14: *inde ferae pecudes persultant...*). In similar fashion, having described the humans’ desperate resort to castration, Lucretius discusses the interaction between animals and the pestilence. Just as birds functioned as the first bearers of Venus’ mark, so do they assume the primary position in this section on nonhuman plague victims: *nec tamen omnino temere illis solibus ulla / comparebat avis* (VI.1219-20: “nor, however, was any bird by chance at all visible in those days.”). Though their primacy persists, they have switched roles – now they serve as the first animals to succumb to pestilential death, rather than the blow of life-giving, “pleasing love” (I.19: *blandum...amorem*). Moreover, whereas the beasts bounded jauntily

¹ King, 18.

through fields and rivers under the sway of the love goddess (14-15), now, under the sway of inexorable disease, the “sad generations of the beasts were not leaving the woods” (VI.1220-21: *nec tristia saecla ferarum / exhibant silvis*). The poet thus establishes a direct opposition between the victims – both animal and human – of the plague and the beneficiaries of Venus’ sweet touch.

Lucretius magnifies this inversion of the hopeful, life-affirming introduction by including a section in the epilogue that is noticeably absent from Thucydides’ account. Upon noting the rampancy of the disease and the resultant overabundance of corpses, the poet provides a poignantly specific example of the types of corpses one might have encountered amidst the devastation in Athens:

exanimis pueris super exanimata parentum
corpora nonnumquam posses retroque videre
matribus et patribus natos super edere vitam.

Sometimes you would be able to see the lifeless bodies of parents atop their lifeless boys and, on the other hand, [you would be able] to see that sons were breathing out their life atop their mothers and fathers. (VI.1256-58)

In addition to crafting a heart-wrenching passage that briefly yet effectively conveys the horrors of pestilence, Lucretius alludes to the invocation of Venus by accentuating the plague’s violation of the generative order. In blatant contrast to the fruitful, creative goddess of love, plague – a conduit of death – undermines the family, which is integral to the proliferation of generations and nullifies the generative capacity of the individual. This latter point is particularly evident in the scene described. Instead of depicting the bodies of *puellae* or even the gender-neutral *liberi*, Lucretius makes the corpses male (*pueris*, *natos*) – indeed, it is the sower of seed, the active propagator of the species, whom death victimizes in this section. To add to the poignancy of the passage, Lucretius situates *patribus* (“fathers”) next to *natos* (“sons”) and thereby emphasizes the boys’ erstwhile potential to become fathers and to contribute to the perpetuation of generations. The natural, procreative order accentuated in Lucretius’ invocation of Venus thus founders in his tragic epilogue – indeed, the generative power of the poet’s “nourishing” muse seems to degenerate in the wake of pestilential destruction.

And yet, Lucretius’ description of the plague need not be interpreted as an irreconcilable contradiction of his introduction. Although

he presents the reader with an explicit account of human suffering and devastation, he is not remiss in doing so. About twenty lines after he entreats Venus to guide him as he plumbs the nature of things (I.24-25), the poet announces that he will explore the fundamental components of things, “from which nature creates all things, makes [them] grow, and nourishes [them], and into which nature dissolves the same things, having perished” (56-57: *unde omnis natura creet res auctet alatque / quove eadem rursum natura perempta resolvat*). He therefore acknowledges that death is a natural occurrence and that it serves as a necessary and ineluctable complement to birth. Indeed, he does not sugarcoat the account, as he famously strives to lessen the severity of his philosophical thesis by communicating it through verse (I.943-7). Nevertheless, the harshness of the plague does not undermine its natural provenance. Before he recounts the symptoms of the plague and its desolation of Athens, Lucretius discourses on the origins of pestilence and thus offers up a rational explanation (VI.1090-1137). Rather than clashing with and contradicting the celebratory introduction, the epilogue complements it; as Monica Gale notes in *Lucretius and the Didactic Epic*, according to Epicurean thought, “we cannot have creation without destruction.”² The arrangement itself of the Latin text reinforces this complementary relationship between birth and death. As was mentioned earlier, *genetrix*, which literally means “female creator” and refers to Venus, is the second word of the poem and becomes the first word when translated; conversely, the last word of the plague narrative and, indeed, of the entire poem is *desererentur*, which translates as “they [the corpses] would be deserted” (1286). Although the sentence that features *desererentur* is somewhat uplifting – in it Lucretius states that people would “often brawl with much blood *rather than desert bodies*” (1285-6: *multo cum sanguine saepe / rixantes potius quam corpora desererentur*) – the notion of abandonment nevertheless concludes the poem. Therefore, *De Rerum Natura* both literally and thematically begins with creation and ends with destruction. It evokes a living organism, a creature whose life begins and inevitably, naturally ends.

However, not all of the circumstances detailed in the epilogue are natural and thus complementary to those which Lucretius extols in his introduction. Indeed, birds and beasts and humans are subject to death, just as they are subject to Venus’ erotic touch; *pueri* and *nati* may die

² Gale, 20.

before they become fully generative men. The preeminent unnatural act which Lucretius describes in his plague narrative is the self-castration committed by Athenian men. Although the disease naturally invades their private parts (VI.1206-7), Lucretius attributes their rash reaction to “grave fear at the threshold of death” (1208: *graviter...metuentes limina leti*). Once again, the arrangement of the Latin text emphasizes the fatuity of their behavior. Immediately after he characterizes these Athenian men as “fearful of the threshold of death” – that is, fearful of death’s advent – the poet writes, “they continued living, having been divested of their manly parts by a sword” (1209: *vivebant ferro privati parte virili*). *Leti* and *vivebant*, though separated by a line break, therefore abut each other. By syntactically forcing these antithetical elements together, Lucretius emphasizes the unnaturalness of the men’s action; instead of accepting death in its pestilential form, they resisted the nature of things and, as A.E. Stallings keenly translates line 1209, “managed to...hang on to life.”³ Though this maddening dread of death does not feature in the invocation, it does appear immediately before Lucretius expounds on his first principle. Indeed, it occupies a central position in what may be called Lucretius’ Epicurean mission statement: to “dash to pieces this fear and the shadows of the mind” by exposing “the appearance and the way of nature” (I.146, 148: *Hunc igitur terrorem animi tenebrasque...discutiant, sed naturae species ratioque*). Thus, in addition to recalling elements of the invocation and complementing its glorification of birth, the plague narrative serves to reinforce the mission statement that concludes Lucretius’ introduction – it emphasizes the necessity of dispelling the fear of that which is inevitable and illustrates how humans behave when such a fear persists.

Although fear of death emerges understandably in the plague narrative as a ruinous force, one that provokes men to emasculate themselves and thus affront the natural order, Lucretius does not restrain himself from producing a thoroughly frightening account of the plague. Many of the elements of this account are manifestly scary. In addition to chronicling self-castration, the poet catalogues the symptoms of the disease in harrowing detail: once the victim’s head has been “inflamed with raging heat” (VI.1145: *caput incensum fervore*), his eyes become red (1146: *oculos...rubentis*), his throat blackens and sweats blood (1147-8: *sudabant etiam fauces...atrae / sanguine*), and his mouth emits a “foul odor” (1154:

³ Stallings, 235.

taetrum...odorem) that is redolent of “putrid corpses” (1155: *rancida...cadavera*). Amplifying the shock factor of his account, Lucretius says that many of the afflicted longed so desperately for water that “from high they fell headlong [into] wells with their very mouths gaping open” (1174-5: *praecipites lymphis putealibus alte / inciderunt ipso...ore patente*). Humans acquire a ghastly appearance and commit drastic acts under the smart of the plague – these details are explicit, and they affect the reader at the visceral level. However, the narrative also features psychologically unsettling aspects. Upon illustrating the insatiable thirst of the plague victims, the poet establishes the inefficacy of medicine. Rather than stating that there was no cure for the disease, as he ultimately does in line 1226, he personifies medicine as a doctor “mumbling with unspoken fear” (1179: *mussabat tacito...timore*), baffled and himself frightened by the symptoms. An element of hopelessness thus permeates the scene. This hopelessness intensifies in lines 1199 to 1201, where the poet emphasizes that even those who had avoided the disease eventually succumbed to it. Lucretius therefore seems to conclude his treatise, which he wrote in order to dispel the mindless fear of death, by presenting death as something to be feared – indeed, the epilogue seems to undermine the treatise proper.

It is this seeming incongruity, however, that cements the plague narrative as a fixture of *De Rerum Natura*. In addition to being a poet and a philosopher, Lucretius is a teacher. One may even assert that he is first and foremost a teacher – indeed, he teaches philosophy by means of poetry. If the reader ought to regard the author as an instructor and, consequently, the literature as a series of lessons, it would not be unreasonable to expect an assessment of the pupil’s comprehension, a final exam of sorts. As several scholars have proposed⁴, Lucretius’ rendition of the Plague of Athens performs this precise function; that is, it serves to gauge how closely his pupils – both Memmius, the direct addressee, and the reader – have paid attention to his exposition of nature. Such an interpretation accounts for the bleakness and sheer horror of the plague narrative. Rather than striving to instill his students with dread of death, which he has written a thorough dissertation to combat, Lucretius wants to see whether they will renounce reason in the face of fear or accept these

⁴ Monica Gale, who discusses this interpretation in both *Lucretius and the Didactic Epic* (40, 42) and *Myth and Poetry in Lucretius* (228), cites David Clay (1983) in the latter book. When James Jope mentions the argument on page 16 of his essay, he cites Gerhard Müller (1997).

frightening images with aplomb, keeping in mind that death is natural and inevitable and that it is foolish to fear it.

And yet, the Plague of Athens is not the only phenomenon discussed in Book Six whose description contains frightful elements. As James Jope notes, in lines 121 to 129 Lucretius employs “vehement language (*perterrificrepto sonitu*)” to convey the “magnitude of the process” (21) of producing thunder; likewise, citing lines 197 to 200 (*magno indignantur murmure...in caveisque ferarum more minantur...quaerentesque viam*), he refers to the poet’s depiction of winds trapped within clouds as a “ferocious personification.”⁵ The terror of these descriptions is manifest – indeed, *perterrificrepto sonitu* (VI.129) translates as a “terribly rattling din,” and the winds are likened to raging beasts in the lines Jope cites. Nevertheless, the discussions of thunder and tempestuous winds are not comparable to the plague narrative. Aside from the fact that such descriptions focus chiefly on the phenomenon itself and, unlike the epilogue, do not chronicle human interactions with the phenomenon – that is, they do not establish an emotional connection between the reader and the description – Lucretius does not enable their frightening elements to seize his pupil. As Jope astutely comments, when the poet concludes his analysis of the thunderclap by comparing it to the popping of a balloon (130-1), he “belittles the thunder” and thus lessens its fear factor.⁶ Moreover, although the section on winds grappling with clouds (185-203) exhibits a dramatic, frightful flare not unlike that of the plague narrative, the depiction itself only spans seven lines (197-203); the reader, therefore, is left by Lucretius to absorb this depiction for a fraction of the time he will be left to ponder the plague narrative, which spans 148 lines. Indeed, by composing the epilogue, Lucretius enables the possibility that fear will overtake the reader. Granted, he provides a thorough explanation for the phenomenon (1090-1137) immediately before his illustration. After this, however, he withholds his teacher-ly guidance, leaving the reader-student to receive the frightening account of the plague on his own. Though Lucretius gives his pupil several helpful reminders about the destructive inanity of fearing death (1208-12, 1230-4, 1238-42), thereby encouraging an Epicurean reaction to the narrative, he offers nothing more in the way of instruction or explanation during the narrative. Even if he had intended

⁵ Jope, 22.

⁶ Jope 21.

to continue writing and to conclude the description of the plague with a reassuring rationalization,⁷ the fact remains that he presented his reader with at least 148 lines of frightening text and imagery. The teacher-philosopher-poet thus administers a formidable final exam, one that his reader-students will nevertheless pass if they remember and accept his rational explication of the nature of things.

Lucretius' retelling of the plague that struck Athens in 430 B.C.E. is deeply chimerical. Upon reading it for the first time, one may reasonably view the narrative as discordant with the rest of *De Rerum Natura*. Because of its viscerally and psychologically unsettling presentation of death, it seems to clash first with the poem's introduction, which exalts Venus as the *genetrix* of all things, and then with the poem proper, which serves to illuminate and decry the fear of death. A closer reading, however, reveals that the epilogue – that is, the plague narrative – is intimately connected to the treatise as a whole. By exploring death, the unavoidable and natural complement to birth, this narrative recalls Lucretius' resolution as put forth in Book One to explain the workings of nature to his audience and thus undermine the fear of death; by offering an unapologetically stark picture of human suffering, the same narrative, in the form of a philosophical final exam, tests the success of his resolution. In addition to emphasizing the poet's mission statement at these two levels, therefore, the epilogue establishes a link between the beginning and the end of the poem. Indeed, rather than being incongruous or out of place, Lucretius' description of the Plague of Athens is both integral to and firmly rooted in *De Rerum Natura*.

Kenyon College

⁷ Monica Gale, who states in *Myth and Poetry in Lucretius* that "few critics would nowadays deny that Lucretius intended his poem to end as it does in our texts" (224), regards the thematic links between the invocation and the abrupt ending as evidence that the latter was intentional.

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JOSEPH TUMASIAN



PEACEMAKER OR THE NEW HANNIBAL: A Literary Critique of Caesar and
Lucan in the Civil War

*Now swiftly Caesar has surmounted the icy Alps and in his mind conceived immense
upheavals, coming war.*

~Lucan's Civil War l. 183-185

INTRODUCTION

"By warfare's vast commotion Rome is shaken just as though the Carthaginians were crossing the Alps, Hannibal: the cohorts are filled to strength with recruits, every wood is felled for the fleet, the order has gone out: 'By land and sea go after Caesar.'" (Lucan 1.303-307)⁸ Students of classical history have read G. Julius Caesar's account of the Roman civil war (49 B.C.) in his book *Bellum Civile* in an attempt to understand Caesar. The story of this war is told by Julius Caesar himself, and must be read carefully because history is written by the winners. It would not be until years after the Roman Civil War, in the 1st century A.D., that Lucan, an intimate of Caesar's successor Nero, would write a book called *Pharsalia* that told of the events that led to the war and of the war itself. Lucan had the benefit of hindsight, and as A.W. Lintott says:

Lucan represents the views of those who had not only lived under the monarchy which was the final product of the conflict begun in 49 B.C., but had experienced its less agreeable consequences under the later Julio-Claudians. Lucan's work must in the end be judged as an epic poem, which it was surely meant to be, not a history in verse. However, the literary critic should

¹ All citations from Susan Braund.

not consider Lucan's treatment of history as a side issue; [because] Lucan does from time to time give an adequate account of military operations ...he must have consulted a historical source in order to discover detailed information.⁹

Lucan can be regarded as a reliable source, although not a contemporary of J. Caesar. Lucan should also be seen as an authority that can help students of history to understand the person of Julius Caesar. However, it is important to understand that Lucan subverts the "writing" Caesar's presentation of the "written" Caesar. The writing Caesar is presenting the written Caesar as a peacemaker with the common interest in mind; and Lucan presents the written Caesar as the new Hannibal. Therefore, by using both accounts of the civil war from Lucan's *Pharsalia* and Caesar's *Bellum Civile*, Caesar's own view of himself is brought into a balanced perspective.

Caesar may be read as the savior of the republic and promoter of the common good. After reading Caesar's *Bellum Civile*, it would be easy to believe that Caesar really had Rome's interest in mind, but Caesar shows his cards early in Book 1:

[Caesar's] standing had always been his first consideration, more important than his life. He felt hurt because a favor granted by the Roman people had been insultingly wrenched from him by his enemies; he was being dragged back to Rome with six months of his governorship stolen from him, even though the Roman people had sanctioned his candidature in absence at the next election. [Caesar 1 (9)]¹⁰

Caesar's standing, his *dignitas*, with the people had been his interest. He was insulted. His dignity was called into question in front of the people. After all, he says that the Roman people had sanctioned his candidature in absence at the next election. This had never occurred, but because it happened, he hoped to evince this as proof that the people loved him. Caesar admits his selfishness and that his station was more important than his life. His governorship was ripped from his possession early. He was held in suspicion and then dragged back to Rome. Caesar makes these arguments to incite the reader to anger. Caesar claims these hostile actions work against the common good. This grandiose self-perception would be the impetus to invade Italy.

CAESAR'S PERCEPTION

² Lintott, (1971) 488,490.

³ All citations from John Carter

Caesar cites greed, envy, and jealousy as the basic motives of civil war. Pompey and his cohorts are the pawns in a game that Caesar claims need not occur. He says:

Cato was driven by a long standing enmity to Caesar and the resentment at his electoral defeat. Lentulus was motivated by the size of his debts, by the hope of an army and provinces, and by the prospect of inducements offered by kings who desired recognition; he also boasted to his intimates that he would be a second Sulla, to whom supreme power would fall. Scipio was impelled by the same hope of a province and armies...Pompey himself, spurred on by Caesar's enemies and by his desire that no one should match his own status, had entirely turned his back on any friendship with Caesar and had reestablished cordial relations with their joint enemies. [Pompey] was keen to settle matters by fighting (1.4).

Caesar gives every reason why his enemies were keen to fight. He consistently tries to rely upon is his resolve for peace, but never does Caesar say that he began war for his own glorification. According to Caesar, Lentulus would fight for glory. Never does he say that the invasion was for the purpose of money or position; these are Cato's and Scipio's interests. Never in *Bellum Civile* does Caesar say that he is killing thousands of people for the sake of gaining the position of *Dictator of the Republic*, but he points to Pompey as doing as much. What Caesar does do is accuse Cato of resentment, Lentulus of greed and desire, Pompey of being misguided and wanting the power for himself and Scipio of feeling left out of the Roman elite. It would seem then, that while Caesar is pointing to the greedy mindset of those with power, the real person who is guilty is conspicuously elusive. Caesar does attach himself to the notion of peacekeeper, and says that he only used battle as a last resort. By the time he takes office as *Imperator-Dictator*, the plebeians are calling for his crowning. It is the oligarchic few with whom Caesar is troubled. It is the patrician minority, the loudest voice of power that opposes Caesar, as he says:

Thus the majority, browbeaten by the consul, frightened by an army at the doorstep [Pompey's], and threatened by Pompey's friends, voted unwillingly and under duress for Scipio's motion: that Caesar should dismiss his army before a certain date, and if he did not, he would be judged to be committing an act hostile to the state... stern views were expressed; the bitterer and harsher they were, the greater their enthusiastic approval by Caesars enemies (1.2).

Rome is frightened by an army at its doorstep. Caesar claim's that, if the senate did not approve Pompey's desires, then he, Pompey, would attack Rome with his army's. Caesar response is to protect the people by attacking Rome... for the common good. Rome's enemy was not Caesar the Peacemaker, but Pompey the Instigator. Caesar did not wish to frighten the people that he loved so much, especially since Caesar did not wish to fight, but only to protect a city on the verge of disaster.

Before Caesar would attempt to engage Pompey in battle, he claimed that he first gave Pompey the chance to maintain peace. Caesar was willing, he says, to do anything for the sake of the Republic. He just had a few *modest* demands:

[Caesar] was ready to descend to any depths and put up with anything for the sake of the republic. Pompey should go to his provinces, they should disband their armies, everyone in Italy should lay down their arms, the community should be liberated from fear, and the senate and the people of Rome should be permitted free elections and complete control of the state..., [Pompey and Caesar were to meet so that] all their differences would be resolved by discussion (1.9).

Caesar, ever the peacekeeper, was ready to fight to save the republic. Caesar's perception of himself as peacekeeper is demonstrated again in his writing. The commonly held belief that Caesar refused to give up his legions and go to Rome because of his personal fear of arrest and trial, would seem to be a fair conclusion. Caesar, however, stated that his desire was to maintain peace and because Pompey would not give up his legally sanctioned army. All Caesar could do at this point was to wait for Pompey's reply, but he never had any intention of letting Pompey keep the peace.

Caesar said that he had modest demands to ask of Pompey. If that were the case, then it would be reasonable to suggest Caesar should maintain peace in the Republic. Frederick Ahl writes, "Caesar's genius was founded upon a distorted and self-seeking megalomania and that his military prowess and forcefulness of character were vices not virtues, since they worked against the best interests of the state."¹¹ Pompey's reply to Caesar stated that, "Caesar was to return to Gaul, withdraw from Ariminum, and disband his armies; and if he did this, Pompey would go to Spain; in the meantime, until guarantees had been given that Caesar would do everything that he promised, the consuls and Pompey would go on levying troops" (1.10). While Pompey would go to Spain, he said nothing about disbanding his troops. Caesar realized this and responded:

⁴ Ahl, 191.

It was unreasonable of Pompey to demand that Caesar should withdraw from Ariminum and return to his province, while he himself kept not only provinces but also legions that were not his; to want Caesar's army disbanded, but go on enlisting men himself; or to promise to go to his province but not to specify a date by which he would go, so that if he had failed to start out by the end of Caesar's consulship, he would not appear to be guilty of having broken a falsely sworn oath. Indeed, not to spare time for a meeting nor to promise to attend indicated that the chances for peace were very slender (1.11).

This does not sound like a man who is willing to do anything to maintain peace but a pretext for battle. While Pompey acts within the law, Caesar prepares for battle.

LUCAN'S PERCEPTION

As Julius Caesar made that historical crossing of the Rubicon, the invasion of Italy, Lucan presents a scenario, explicating the events in a literary fashion to stress the significance of what this means: Hannibal crossing into Rome, not Caesar:

Caesar's massive forces with their gathered might made him confident to venture higher: he extends through all of Italy; he occupies the nearest towns. And empty rumour, speedy messenger of quickening war, augmented genuine fears; it invaded people's minds with pictures of calamity... (1.466-471).

Lucan says that Caesar occupies towns and spreads fear before him and destruction behind. Caesar invaded Italy from across the Alps, like Hannibal, and the people are afraid. Long gone are the days that Caesar was viewed as the Gallic conqueror. He is viewed differently now. Lucan says, "They picture him not as they remember him: in their thoughts he seems greater, wilder, more pitiless from the conquest of the enemy" (Lucan 1. 378-380). He is now a caricature of himself. Caesar *-imperator*, incapable of demanding anything modest, fights for pride and refuses to maintain peace as promised. Hubris! Of course the literary significance of the crossing itself is important, and in line 204 of Lucan's *Pharsalia*, Caesar is the first to cross the Rubicon, like Hannibal was the first to cross the Alps. Jamie Masters says, "It [the Rubicon] is a boundary that Caesar is trying to break through... [Lucan] imposes boundaries that Caesar must cross."¹² By

⁵ Masters, 3.

creating these boundaries for Caesar to cross, Lucan gives the impression that Caesar was bringing a foreign army, made up of Roman soldiers from Gaul, into Rome. Lucan does this in order to stress both the illegality and his actions and to draw the analogy of Hannibal crossing into Rome. Lucan says that Caesar was changed by years of war leading a Roman army comprised of soldiers that were truly Gallic. Hannibal was the last to bring a foreign army into Rome and Lucan tries to draw that correlation. Lucan continues, (*Roma*, on the far side of the Rubicon): "Where further do you march? Where do you take my standards, warrior? If lawfully you come, if as citizens, this far only is allowed" (Lucan 191-193). Lucan is stressing the point that if Caesar had the interest of Rome in mind, then he should have followed the law of the land and disbanded his army before he was to enter into Italy. By not doing so, he is making a formal act of aggression upon his country. He seemed like a foreign ruler with a foreign army. Caesar responds:

O Rome, the equal of the highest deity, favour my plans. Not with impious weapons do I pursue you- here am I, Caesar, conqueror by land and sea, your own soldier everywhere, now too if I am permitted. The man that makes me your enemy, it is he will be the guilty one. (1.200-203).

Lucan shows that the pleading of the goddess herself is not enough. Caesar is not declaring war on Rome but on the people of Rome that make Caesar their enemy. It is Caesar that subjugates Rome to himself, no longer as citizen soldier, but ruler.

Lucan writes of Caesar as he crossed the Rubicon, "here I abandon peace and desecrated law; fortune, it is you I follow. Farewell to treaties from now on; I have relied on them for long enough; now war must be our referee" (1.225-227). Lucan wished to emphasize that this precedent of Caesar is both aggressive in nature –*now war must be our referee*– and that there cannot be peace –*farewell to treaties*.

Caesar points to Pompey's so called greed in keeping his legions as justification for his actions. Pompey kept his army. Not only kept it, but was asked by the Senate to raise more troops. Lucan clarifies this reaction of Caesar's when he says, "As long as earth supports the sea and air the earth, as long as Titan revolves in his lengthy toils and the sky night follows day through all the constellations, there will be no loyalty between associates in tyranny and no power will tolerate a partner" (1.89-93). Caesar was too powerful, and this was a contest of wills that went too far because each party, out of arrogance, refused to cede to the other. But Lucan says:

Rivalry in excellence spurs them on. That fresh exploits will overshadow former triumphs and victory over pirates gives place to Gallic conquests, this, Magnus, is your fear; Caesar, you are roused by your long chain of tasks, experience of toil and your fortune not enduring second place; Caesar cannot bear anyone ahead nor Pompey any equal. Who more justly took up weapons is forbidden knowledge: each has on his side a great authority: the conquering cause of the gods... (1.120-127).

The favor that Pompey did for Rome of course has become almost legendary. The defeat of the pirates in the Mediterranean, and the short amount of time in which it occurred, was enough to give Pompey the title "Magnus." Caesar was hero of the wars in Gaul, a résumé that was impressive in any age; the new Alexander, the new contender for the position of hero. And while Pompey was married to Caesar's daughter before her untimely death, the separation of their houses with her death may have been the impetus that was needed for the two of them to decide who deserved to be at the top of the Roman pecking order. Caesar would have used any reason to keep his army, but under pretensions of peace.

Caesar, tried to persuade his reader that he was the beloved hero of the Republic, yet Lucan turns him into Hannibal, invader of Rome. "Lucan is more concerned with undermining Caesar's claim to moral justification for his own actions than he is with disputing the actions themselves."¹³ Fear is his vanguard and the people are driven to madness, as Lucan says:

The multitude is not alone in panicking, struck by empty terror, but the senate, too, yes even the fathers leapt up from their seats, as they flee to the consuls, the dreaded declaration of war. Then, uncertain where to go for safety, where to run from danger, wherever impulse of flight sweeps them on, they drive the peoples rushing headlong, breaking out in hoards who stick together in a long chain (l. 486-494).

The man who claimed to be the hero of the republic sent the senators running, impelled by an empty terror. This is not how Caesar wished to be viewed. Lucan would have the reader believe that it was terror and fear that impelled them to flee for their lives. Lucan has subverted Caesar's view of Caesar.

All the while the Senators were fleeing, the people as well felt a particular fear at the coming of Caesar. Caesar says in 1.13 that, "the townsmen at Auximum could not tolerate it if Gaius Caesar *Imperator*, was kept outside the walls of the town." Granted, but they did not want

⁶ Ahl, 191.

him inside the town either, for as Lucan says, "Rome, a city teeming with peoples and with conquered nations, large enough (should they mass together) for all humankind, was abandoned at Caesar's coming by cowardly throngs, easy prey" (1.511 -513). This is not the sort of welcome that Caesar presents in his writings. Lucan continues, "Yet such great panic we must pardon, we must pardon: they fear since Pompey flees" (1.521-52). And while Caesar admits an emptying of the city in 1.14, he attributes it to a false rumor of his armies being outside of the city. Caesar, the invader of Rome, has become Hannibal at the gates.

The city is changed, the people are afraid, the invading Caesar is coming. "The Caesar of the *Pharsalia* is endowed with superhuman vigor and energy, but it is energy used to attain ends dictated by narrow self interest, culminating in a destructive rather than a creative victory."¹⁴ Caesar is the cause of the ruin, as Ahl says. The great Pompey fled his friendship, and all Caesar touched turned to ruin. In Lucan's words, what madness was this? A narrow self-interested megalomaniacal act of madness:

Of wars across the Emathian plains, worse than civil wars, and of all legality conferred on crime we sing, and of a mighty people attacking its own guts with victorious sword hand, of kin facing kin, and, once the pact of tyranny was broken, of conflict waged with all the forces of the shaken world for universal guilt, and of standards ranged in enmity against standards, of eagles matched and javelins threatening javelins. What madness was this, O citizens? (1.1-8).

Lucan says that the eagles were matched. The power of Pompey and Caesar was the same; two citizens fighting one another and bringing javelin against javelin. "Caesar does not use his talents to cure the ills of the sick republic. He ends the sickness by killing the patient."¹⁵ A mighty people are attacking their own guts, a suicide; the goddess Roma disemboweling herself. Madness indeed, and Caesar was to blame.

CONCLUSIONS

Two thousand years after the war, Caesar proves elusive in who he really was, and remains convincing in his self-presentation. Caesar's perception of Caesar was also misdirecting. It was intended to persuade the reader to believe that Caesar was the victim of the Republic's misguided fear and enmity. However, a close reading of Caesar's *Bellum Civile* will reveal the

⁷ Ahl 191.

⁸ Ahl, 191.

insecurities that Caesar has and his desire to try hard to convince everyone of the rightness of his actions. Using Lucan's *Pharsalia* as a foil, the reader should be able to get a clearer perspective of Caesar. While neither Caesar nor Lucan should be read as the definitive perception of the person of Julius Caesar, the two books should be read together to get a more correct perception. However, it is important to understand that Lucan subverts Caesar's presentation of Caesar by presenting Caesar as Hannibal. Ultimately, a balanced perspective shows that Caesar is neither a passive peacemaker, nor a malign Hannibal.

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THE WATCHMAN: Aeschylus *Agamemnon* 1–39

The Watchman: In truth, I pray the gods deliver me,
The watchman, guarding year to toilsome year
On rooftops, eyeing sons of Atreus,
Arms bent and doglike. Well I know the stars
In dread assembly—brilliant, noble lords
Who bring the warm and winter months to men
While heaven turns to make them rise and set.
And now I watch for signals from the torch,
That beam of fire bringing word from Troy,
Report of conquest: in this way, I serve
A woman's manly-minded, hoping heart.
And when in dreamless slumber, drenched in dew,
I grasp this bed in worn anxiety—
For panic looms above me, never rest,
Unsteady eyes averse to wanted sleep—
I sometimes cry in anguish for this house,
Now hapless, governed once in majesty.
Deliver me from labors into luck
By bringing news that dissipates this murk!
Oh welcome, shining beam that makes the night
To shine as day and brings decree of dance
To crowds in Argos, gathered by your charm!
Hail, hail!
I raise this call to Agamemnon's wife,
And to the households, kindling them from sleep,
To summon every voice, if Ilium
Has fallen, as the beacon plainly tells.
And I myself will dance a prelude now:
My master's dice, it seems, have fallen well—

Three sixes have been thrown me by this sign.
Now, may the ruler of this household come
Once more to clasp his well-loved hand in mine.
Of other deeds, I dare not tell. A cow
Has trod upon my tongue. The house itself
Would gossip, if it could. In faith, I speak
To those enlightened ones, and flee the fools.

ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE, ANNAPOLIS



WHAT SHOULD I CALL THIS?: Ovid *Amores* 1.2

What should I call this,
how the mattress seems so hard,
how the sheets won't stay on the bed,
how I've passed a night (A WHOLE NIGHT) sleepless,
and my dizzy sick body's exhausted ossa ache
?

Because I think I'd know if I were lovestruck.

Or does that strategist strike secretly?
That'll be it.

Undetected arrows have accumulated in the old Emotion-Pump,
and Amor wreaks whirlwinds, the bastard, in my captive chest.

So. Do we concede? Or do we fan aflame the smoldering with a struggle?

Concede it is--the load shouldered willingly has a lighter air.
I've seen the flames on a shaken torch flare,
and I've seen em die when no one shakes it.
The oxen more acutely feel the whip
who protest the toil
than those who resolutely yoke up
and plow some soil,
and a cantankerous horse collects mouthfuls bruises,
while one that submits feels less of the bit--blah blah blah,
the point:
Amor wages far dirtier onslaughts, and more rude,
upon the reluctant than those who admit servitude.

So, Cupid, I confess: I'm your freshest booty.
here; I fling these plundered hands at you
all subjugated-like
at your bidding.

War's no use; I seek peace and a pardon.
I'd be no praiseworthy prize for you,
unarmed, ash-pile-ified by your flamethrowers.

Go myrtle-up your hair, tack up your mother's doves.
Stepdad'll hail you a swank chariot.
While the people titter of your triumph,
you'll guide those harnessed birds with steady skill ,
captive boys and girls in procession
splendorfying your pomp-stuffed parade.
I myself, a recent acquisition,
will exhibit my fresh wound and bear my new chains
complacently.

Common Sense will march along with bound-up hands
and Modesty, and Whosoever Else Dares Obstruct the Ranks of Love.
And they'll all fear you.

Saluting, they'll rumble at you with a mob's voice,
IO TRIUMPHE!

You'll have for a posse Mistake and Madness and Flattery
and your slew of persistent supporters,
without the advantage of whom you're just a
naked little boy.

From the tippymost top of towering Olympus
your delighted mother will clap for your triumph,
flinging wads of roses at your head.
Your wings bedazzled, your hair bejeweled,
you'll cruise, a golden kid in a golden car.

Then, if I know you at all,
you won't be preventing any forest fires.

It'll be a drive-by massacre.
You can't stop your arrows,
not even by begging;
your hard-by blaze burns bystanders.

Such was Bacchus in the conquered lands of the Ganges.

You tread em down with birds as he did with panzers.

As I'll be participating in the holy triumph, little sir,
don't waste resources on me.

Consider the victorious forays of your kinsman, Herr Caesar:

He protects the conquered with his conquering-hand.

DENISON UNIVERSITY



REVIEW: Isaac, Benjamin *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2004. Pp xiv + 563. Paper, \$31.95. ISBN 0691125988.

Benjamin Isaac's book, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, discusses the origins of racism. This book challenges the assumption that racism started in the Eighteenth Century, asserting that something as simple as judging people based on their heredity had to extend further back in history. He claims that racism is too narrowly defined to coincide with color prejudice and asserts the importance of knowing how and when racism began so that people can better understand how such prejudice can form. After discussing the nature of racism and claiming that it existed in antiquity, if only in the early, undeveloped form or "proto-racism," Isaac then goes on to interpret a wide variety of texts, from histories to dramas to letters to philosophical and medical treatises, showing the existence of racism. However, while Isaac likely has a point that racism does not come from nowhere, his method of looking for racism in the texts assumes a little too much about whole societies than can be found in such a small sample of writings. In this article, I will use reviews from David Noy and M. Lambert to show that, while Isaac has good points about the nature of racism, he also extrapolates his thinking too much, and has somewhat inconsistent interpretations of constitutes racism.

Benjamin Isaac's book begins with a section that lays out his thoughts on racism. The review by M. Lambert praises the book as an "academic tour-de-force" which it described as having "usability increased by clear structure." It is particularly keen on Isaac's definitions of race and racism, as well as his invention of the word "proto-racism," and their separation from ethnic prejudices.¹⁶ Isaac's book does do an interesting job of defining a very charged word, defining racism as "an attitude towards individuals and groups of peoples which posits a direct and linear connection between physical and mental qualities. It therefore attributes to those individuals and groups of peoples collective traits, physical, mental,

¹ Isaac, 405.

and moral, which are constant and unalterable by human will."¹⁷ He likely has a point stating that racism was not invented whole-cloth in the eighteenth century, and his definition for "proto-racism," his terms for early thoughts that follow this pattern, is "attribut[ing] to groups of people common characteristics considered to be unalterable because they are determined by external factors or heredity."¹⁸ Isaac does an interesting thing with these definitions, divorcing racism from necessarily having to attempt to create a scientific element or including a color-bias. Lambert feels that this definition is a step forward for race studies, and, sans a problem or two with Isaac's depiction of Rome's practice of feminizing foreigners, sees the book very positively.¹⁹ I tend to agree with Lambert that the definition of racism is interesting and compelling, but I disagree that the book is particularly clear.

David Noy's review makes the point that Isaac uses texts to represent widely held beliefs that may not have been intended to do so. Noy particularly criticizes Isaac for doing this with satires and oratories, but Isaac makes this assumption throughout the book.²⁰ Isaac's book looks at various forms of early prejudice. One such form is "the environmental theory" which stated that the climate that a people lived in would affect their physical and intellectual characteristics.²¹ Isaac rightly shows that the environmental theory led to prejudice and the thoughts of people belonging to "peoples of uniformly good or bad characters."²² But Isaac makes a leap when he ascribes this hypothesis to the whole. This happens when he links Hippocrates's *Airs, Waters, Places*, a medical text, to undisputed common assumption: "The theory is put forward here explicitly, but there can be little doubt that it was generally assumed to be a matter of course."²³ I do not think that justification can be assumed, at least not as an example of systemic racism, as Isaac shows other views as existing, and neglects to look at broad societal movements, sticking within the realm of ideas.²⁴ Isaac uses broad assumptions to get across his message that proto-racism existed, but does not show sufficient evidence to show that such racist thoughts, as opposed to general ethno-centrist thoughts, were particularly widespread.

Another problem with Isaac's work is its inconsistency in where it sees racism versus ethnic stereotyping. For example, Isaac states in his

² Isaac, 23.

³ Isaac, 38.

⁴ Isaac, 407.

⁵ Noy, 660.

⁶ Isaac, 55-56.

⁷ Isaac, 65.

⁸ Isaac, 76.

⁹ Noy 661

section on the Roman's views of the Germans that the Germans are a better people due to their purity: "we have...the undoubted assumption of the superiority of pure lineage: intermarriage between Germans and others would affect the quality of their offspring."²⁵ Isaac is making a big claim that this example of pure heritage was a proto-racist thought leading Romans to think of Germans as superior. However, when discussing the Jews, Isaac discusses the Roman distaste for this people, who were thought of as misanthropic. Isaac also discusses how the Jews were disliked for their apparent use of proselytizing to acquire new members to their religion.²⁶ However, Isaac does not link this mixing of peoples in proselytizing as an example of disliking the mixing of peoples. Rather, Isaac depicts all of the prejudices against the Jews as ethnic, and not proto-racist.²⁷ This inconsistency shows that Isaac does not always have a clear idea what separates ethnic prejudice from proto-racism.

Lambert points out that Isaac's book has "helpful summaries" and some "sensible conclusions," and that it is readable, but concludes that it never rises above a pedestrian work of analysis.²⁸ I tend to agree that, while Isaac includes some very helpful thoughts, including a thought-provoking definition of racism, and while it was a highly readable exposition, it did not make its case very effectively. Isaac's book left too much out to clearly link racism to these texts or define proto-racism as different from ethnic prejudices. While Isaac's book raises an interesting point about the history of racism, it never completely delivers, leaving too many questions unaddressed. However, the book does raise an interesting point and will hopefully inspire other scholars to follow up on this topic.

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¹⁰ Isaac, 436.

¹¹ Isaac, 451.

¹² Isaac, 482.

¹³ Lambert, 661.



BACK MATTER

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