

# Munro Translation of Lucretius

Post by "Cassius" of September 4, 2021 at 8:34 PM

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## INTRODUCTION

above, he nobly maintains the reputation claimed for his countrymen in that style of writing. The sixth book is unequal like the fifth: the beginning as far as 95 is very unsatisfactory and confused, as has been pointed out in the notes. Then follow some hundred verses in which the nature and working of thunder and lightning, the formation of clouds rain and the like are described. This portion is most carefully elaborated. There is not much room for the highest virtues of poetry; but still great qualities are here brought into play, quickness of observation and power of describing what is observed, vivacity of narrative, fine perception of analogy and much ingenuity of speculation: the language is simple, terse, direct and telling. Most of these merits are displayed in greater or less measure even in the flattest and most prosaic portions of the poem; but the verses here spoken of are not of this number. Quite recently I was glad to find the opinion I had long entertained of this section of the poem confirmed by the greatest of German critics in Riemer's Mittheilungen ueber Goethe II p. 645; and this is not the only place in which Goethe expresses the most unbounded admiration for our poet. What follows is not so satisfactory: Lucretius has to include a great variety of questions in a very limited space. These seem to be selected sometimes at hap-hazard: nearly 200 lines are given to the magnet, lively verses enough and very ingenious, but out of all proportion to the subject-matter. The description of the plague of Athens concludes the book: it is manifestly unfinished; and though it contains much noble poetry, it suffers from the unavoidable comparison with the austere beauty and simple grandeur of its original, which the poet has not always understood and from which he has sometimes departed without good cause. He has shewn himself here both too much and too little of a physician: he is too technical for the poet, too inaccurate for the philosopher.

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I am posting this mostly as a joke because I have been saying on the Lucretius podcast that I am looking forward to the part about magnets, but I do think there's an interesting point here. To me, the issue of magnets probably was indeed something Epicurus and Lucretius thought was important, because it is probably the closest-to-home instance of "action at a distance" that we have directly in front of us. The ability of one magnet to influence another could easily be described to be magical, and I suspect that the Epicureans wanted to take special care to come up with a non-supernatural explanation of the phenomena. So contrary to Munro I do think magnets warrant special attention 😊