

# Notable Quotations and the Reception of Lucretius

Post by "Joshua" of October 13, 2021 at 11:32 PM

Classical:

*Marcus Tullius Cicero, Roman Statesman and Orator:*

Quote

*The poems of Lucretius are as you write: they exhibit many flashes of genius, and yet show great mastership.*

*Publius Vergilius Maro, Roman Poet:*

Quote

*Happy is he who has discovered the causes of things and has cast beneath his feet all fears, unavoidable fate, and the din of the devouring Underworld.*

*Publius Ovidius Naso, Roman Poet:*

Quote

*The verses of the sublime Lucretius will perish only when a single day shall consign the world to destruction.*

Late Antiquity/Medieval

*Lucius Caecilius Firmianus, called Lactantius; Roman Christian Writer, advisor to Constantine the Great:*

Quote

"the most worthless of the poets"

*Eusebius Sophronius Hieronymus, called St. Jerome:*

Quote

*The poet Titus Lucretius is born. He was later driven mad by a love philtre and, having composed between bouts of insanity several books (which Cicero afterwards corrected), committed suicide at the age of 44.*

Renaissance:

*Michel Eyquem de Montaigne, French Essayist and Philosopher*

Quote

*'Tis to much purpose that the great poet Lucretius keeps such a clatter with his philosophy, when, behold! he goes mad with a love philtre. Is it to be imagined that an apoplexy will not stun Socrates as well as a porter? Some men have forgotten their own names by the violence of a disease; and a slight wound has turned the judgment of others topsy-turvy. Let him be as wise as he will, after all he is but a man; and than that what is there more frail, more miserable, or more nothing?*

Quote

But, to pursue the business of this essay, I have always thought that, in poesy, Virgil, Lucretius, Catullus, and Horace by many degrees excel the rest.

*Lucy Hutchison, Puritan Homemaker*

Quote

*"As by the study of these I grew in Light and Love, the little glory I had among some few of my intimate friends, for understanding this crabbed poet, became my shame, and I found I never understood him till I learnt to abhorre him, and dread a wanton dalliance with impious bookes. Then I reaped some profit by it, for it shewd me that sencelesse superstitions drive carnall reason into Atheisme, which though Policy restrains some from avowing so impudently as this Dog, yet vast is their number, who make it a specious pretext within themselves, to thinke religion is nothing at all but an invention to reduce the ignorant vulgar into order and Government."*

Enlightenment:

19th Century:

*James Clark Caldwell, Confederate Soldier writing in a Union War Prison in Ohio:*

*Friday, November 4, 1864*

Finished **Lucretius**: I am very much pleased with "De Rerum Natura;" I think it the finest of the latin poems, the grandest achievement of the Roman Muse. Well has Bulwer pronounced the eloquence of **Lucretius** "like ebony, at once dark and splendid." His errors were those of his age, his greatness is his own. Many passages are obscured by the jargon of the school & the use of scientific or technical terms, but there is enough in the polished & melodious effusions of this preëminent Poet of the Garden, to constitute him henceforth one of my prime favorites. Wood was issued to-day, 1st time this week. Many rooms are as yet without stoves: Wood was withheld that we might be compelled to burn that which we were permitted to cut for ourselves a few weeks ago.

*John Tyndall, Irish Physicist;*

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2226-notable-quotations-and-the-reception-of-lucretius/?postID=14268#post14268>

## Quote

Is there not a temptation to close to some extent with Lucretius, when he affirms that 'nature is seen to do all things spontaneously of herself without the meddling of the gods?' or with Bruno, when he declares that Matter is not 'that mere empty capacity which philosophers have pictured her to be, but the universal mother who wrings forth all things as the fruit of her own womb?' Believing as I do in the continuity of Nature, I cannot stop abruptly where our microscopes cease to be of use. Here the vision of the mind authoritatively supplements the vision of the eye. By an intellectual necessity I cross the boundary of the experimental evidence, and discern in that Matter which we, in our ignorance of its latent powers, and notwithstanding our professed reverence for its Creator, have hitherto covered with opprobrium, the promise and potency of all terrestrial Life.

20th Century to Present:

*Albert Einstein, German-born Theoretical Physicist*



## FOREWORD<sup>[1]</sup>

[1]

The work of Lucretius will work its magic on anyone who does not completely wrap himself in the spirit of our time and, in particular, occasionally feels like a spectator of the intellectual attitude of his contemporaries. One sees here how an independent man equipped with lively senses and reasoning, endowed with scientific and speculative curiosity, a man who has not even the faintest notion of the results of today's science that we are taught in childhood, before we can consciously, much less critically, confront them, imagines the world.

*W. B. Yeats, Irish Poet:*

## Quote

"The finest description of sexual intercourse ever written."

*Christopher Hitchens, Anglo-American Journalist, Polemicist, Public Intellectual*

## Quote

*In January 1821, Thomas Jefferson wrote John Adams to "encourage a hope that the human mind will some day get back to the freedom it enjoyed 2000 years ago." This wish for a return to the era of philosophy would put Jefferson in the same period as Titus Lucretius Carus, thanks to whose six-volume poem De Rerum Naturum (On the Nature of Things) we have a distillation of the work of the first true materialists:*

*Leucippus, Democritus, and Epicurus. These men concluded that the world was composed of atoms in perpetual motion, and Epicurus, in particular, went on to argue that the gods, if they existed, played no part in human affairs. It followed that events like thunderstorms were natural and not supernatural, that ceremonies of worship and propitiation were a waste of time, and that there was nothing to be feared in death.*