

Background and Analysis: "Roman Poets of the Republic" by William Sellar (1881)

Post by "Cassius" of July 4, 2020 at 10:52 AM

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BOOK I NOTES II

Horace too and Ovid had carefully studied him: this commentary will in some degree shew what they as well as Manilius owe to him, though this last disciple is not worth much. Lucretius thus exercised indirectly no slight influence on the whole future career of Latin poetry. To pass to modern times, the Italian scholars of the fifteenth century, full of enthusiasm for everything classical, yet admired no Latin poet more than Lucretius, Virgil alone excepted. The illustrious French scholars of the sixteenth century, Lambinus Turnebus Scaliger, pronounced him one of the greatest, if not the greatest of Roman poets. In the seventeenth, the century of English erudition, he was of course well known to Milton and has been often imitated by him in the *Paradise Lost*: he had the fortune too to be entirely translated by one of the most accomplished cavalier gentlemen and by the most accomplished of puritan ladies before Dryden and Creech turned their thoughts to the same task. In more recent times he has been perhaps less praised and read; yet in France he has never been without enthusiastic admirers: it will be enough to specify Voltaire in the last century; Villemain, Sainte-Beuve and Martha in the present. Among Germans Goethe never failed in sympathy and admiration for Lucretius. In this country the most recent account of the philosophy and poetry of Lucretius is at the same time the fullest and most favourable and by far the best: I speak of that given by Professor Sellar in the Roman poets of the republic.

the Munro translation, and

It can be downloaded for free here:

<https://books.googleusercontent.com/books/content?...LSOQ0t8ELT-tHIA>

or

<https://www.google.com/books/edition/...tsec=frontcover>

Contents include:

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1610-background-and-analysis-roman-poets-of-the-republic-by-william-sellar-1881/>

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Post by “Joshua” of July 7, 2020 at 1:33 PM

Quote

[...] he had the fortune too to be entirely translated by one of the most accomplished cavalier gentlemen [...]

What a curious snippet...

This is undoubtedly a reference to the anonymous manuscript in the Bodleian Library at Oxford. I wonder if *gentlemen* is meant, or *gentleman*. Munro seems to have a hypothesis regarding its authorship. The list I've seen offers up 25(!) names of proposed translators. (Source: *Lucretius and the Early Modern*, Norbrook *et al.*)

Post by “Joshua” of July 7, 2020 at 1:35 PM

I say *undoubtedly*, because John Evelyn did not translate the poem in its entirety, and had little love for the cavaliers.

Post by “Cassius” of July 7, 2020 at 1:46 PM

You are much more into this than I have looked previously, Joshua:

(1) I haven't spent nearly as much time with Munro's notes as I would like. I know for example that he is the one who was interested in the ring, and made a drawing of that ring the logo of his book, but I feel sure there is a lot more productive detail to be found by anyone taking the time to read it.

(2) From what I HAVE read I have the strong impression that he was very favorably inclined toward Epicurean philosophy, much more so than Bailey, and almost to the same extent (or more) than DeWitt.

(3) I am not familiar with the manuscript at the Bodleian library or speculation as to its author(s). Can you point us in the right direction to read up on that?

Post by “Joshua” of July 7, 2020 at 2:44 PM

Oh, have no fear on that point, Cassius. I am certain you've spent more time with Munro than I have! No, it was the very interesting word *cavalier* that distracted me, and that is where my reading may bear me out: we studied the cavalier poets when I was at the University; they were Royalists devoted wholeheartedly to the cause (and person) of Charles I, and to the eventual restoration of his heir Charles II after the Interregnum.

The great problem of the manuscript in the Bodleian library is that we know almost nothing whatever about it. Here is what little we do know about the text, known to scholars as *Ms Rawlinson D. 314*.

The concrete facts are coded in the title just mentioned; it is a hand-drafted fair copy manuscript (Ms), bequeathed to Oxford as part of the extensive collection—over 5,000 articles of every description—of [Richard Rawlinson](#), being the 314th item under the heading *D.* for *Miscellaneous*.

And, what we do not know:

- 1.) The identity of the translator.
- 2.) The date of its composition.
- 3.) The early provenance of the text—which is to say, how it came to be in Rawlinson's collection to begin with.

Everything else that can be surmised is to be derived through textual criticism. It is believed to be a direct translation of a 1659 French revision of an earlier French edition of the Latin text, presented by Denis Lambin in 1563 (this being the same Lambinus mentioned above by Munro.)

And so from this, an earliest date of 1659 is suggested for the text.

On a slightly unrelated note, it was a copy of Lambin's edition that was found with Montaigne's extensive marginalia.

Post by “Cassius” of July 7, 2020 at 8:39 PM

So where does that fit on this list? (OOPS I see it - the first one!)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_E...De_rerum_natura

Post by “Cassius” of July 8, 2020 at 6:29 AM

Joshua I checked my files and don't seem to have much on this Rawlinson edition, nor can I find a PDF of the manuscript. Have you found an online version?

Post by “Joshua” of July 8, 2020 at 12:25 PM

Quote

Joshua I checked my files and don't seem to have much on this Rawlinson edition, nor can I find a PDF of the manuscript. Have you found an online version?

I've never found a copy of it either. The Bodleian Library holds the largest collection at Oxford, and the second largest in Britain. There are over 12 million documents to be digitized, and it's very possible that this edition hasn't ever been scanned or typeset. Every citation that I have found cites the manuscript itself.

Post by “Joshua” of July 8, 2020 at 12:44 PM

from Wikipedia:

Quote

The library operates a strict policy on copying of material. Until fairly recently, personal photocopying of library material was not permitted, as there was concern that copying and excessive handling would result in damage. However individuals may now copy most material produced after 1900, and a staff-mediated service is provided for certain types of material dated between 1801 and 1900. Handheld scanners and digital cameras are also permitted for use on most post-1900 publications and digital cameras may also be used, with permission, with older material.[48] The Library will supply digital scans of most pre-1801 material.

We might find it necessary to draft a careful and serious Letter of Request to the curators, to see if they'll digitize it for us. You do, after all, operate several of the very best Epicurean

resources to be found anywhere on the internet! They might be amenable if we volunteer to typeset the scan ourselves for the public record.

Post by “Cassius” of July 8, 2020 at 12:46 PM

I see that the wikipedia list says that it is prose, which makes it significantly more interesting to me, as I really dislike the "heroic couplet" versions given the poetic license they take with the text. I would say much the same of the John Mason Goode version, which i found on ebay and have a copy of.

In my reading the 1743 edition is the first really usable and trustworthy version, but perhaps the Rawlinson edition would be in a similar category. So I'd really like to see even a sample of the text.

Post by “Cassius” of July 8, 2020 at 12:50 PM

Just saw your comment about approaching the library, Joshua. This is where I dearly wish we had some friends in England. I do know of one possibility; I will email him.

Post by “Joshua” of July 8, 2020 at 1:05 PM

[Here](#) is a link to a 15th century Italian manuscript of the Latin text, held at the Library and included in its digital collection.

Quote

So I'd really like to see even a sample of the text.

Now that is one thing I **can** help you with!

From the same book I cited above:

Post by “Joshua” of July 8, 2020 at 1:17 PM

I find the sample rather charming myself, although I haven't compared it with another.

Quote

Just saw your comment about approaching the library, Joshua. This is where I dearly wish we had some friends in England. I do know of one possibility; I will email him.

If it comes to drafting a formal letter, multiple signatories with credentials might strengthen our request. I won't say it on the public forum without permission, but a certain someone has connections with the Library system in Ohio. We are, after all, a dedicated international group of sensible professionals.

Post by “Don” of July 8, 2020 at 5:41 PM

I'm not sure a letter would work. There's maybe a mechanism on their site for requesting interlibrary loans which may include digitization requests. Or there may be other official channels. I'll dig around.

Butthat's a BIG request! There are 162 leaves of text from a rare manuscript from 1500/1600s. There may be all kinds of limits on that.

I'm getting that from a description of MS Rawl. D.314 in Quehen's book of Lucy Hutchinson's translation. I took a PDF of the translation of D.314's excerpt in that book of about 3.25 pages but I can't upload an attachment to the forum, can I?

Post by “Joshua” of July 8, 2020 at 6:40 PM

Thank you for your perspective, Don! It is a big request. On the other hand, I have to assume that digitization is a constant and ongoing project for them. It might be interesting to know how they go about selecting which texts to start with—as I mentioned above, they've already scanned at least one Lucretius manuscript!

Post by “Don” of July 8, 2020 at 6:59 PM

[Quote from JJElbert](#)

Thank you for your perspective, Don! It is a big request. On the other hand, I have to assume that digitization is a constant and ongoing project for them. It might be interesting to know how they go about selecting which texts to start with—as I mentioned above, they've already scanned at least one Lucretius manuscript!

Good points! It's certainly a "nothing ventured, nothing gained." I'm wondering if getting in [contact with Hugh de Quehen](#) would be fruitful. Looks like he's affiliated with Univ of Toronto (link). He included those 3.25 pages of the anonymous D.314 [in his book](#). I wonder if he'd have access to a complete transcription.

([Cassius](#) has uploaded the PDF below that I scanned)

Post by “Cassius” of July 9, 2020 at 7:22 AM

Don yes you should be able to upload a PDF. Let me know if it doesnt work.

Also I am not clear. Do we have even a single image of a single page already?

Post by “Don” of July 9, 2020 at 8:41 AM

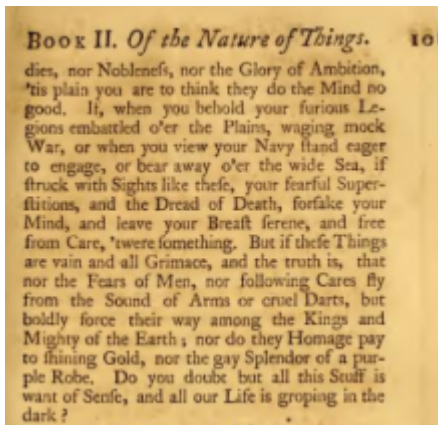
We don't have an image of the actual manuscript but a transliteration of several pages. but the file is too big to upload. The Google Drive link is above are end in my previous post. If you can upload it somehow [Cassius](#) from that link, I'll delete the link. (Always a little uneasy about linking directly to my drive).

Post by “Cassius” of July 9, 2020 at 9:22 AM

Don - I have split the PDF into three parts and attached them here. (I agree about issues with linking)

All this makes me more and more curious to see what the actual document looks like. I think it is really valuable to look at passages that I think are questionably translated and compare what the writers got out of them, and that's why in some cases I think the 1743 can be better than the later ones.

Maybe the one passage I find most revealing of all is the one at the beginning of book 2 that some translate as "reason alone" but which 1743 has as:



So I would very much like to see the original Rawlinson manuscript on that

Post by "Don" of July 9, 2020 at 4:38 PM

I found this footnote in a book on Google Books referring to the anonymous manuscript (Rawl. D.314) which the author said dates to around 1660: R. Barbour, "Anonymous Lucretius," [Bodleian Library Record](#) 23 (2010) 105-11; D. Butterfield has also worked to trace this manuscript and its attribution history. (Note: Link provides table of contents only for April 2010 issue.)

(Note: I tried to find the article in the databases from Kent State, but only the abstract and citation were available in MLA Bibliography).