

In Imitation of Lucretius-Bevil Higgons, 1670 to 1735

Post by “Joshua” of January 15, 2021 at 9:39 PM

<http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId...=&brand=default>

Yet another random find.

When I saw that this was published posthumously I started to get my hopes up. Too salacious to let out in his lifetime? Sadly not. This poem should be called *Against Lucretius*. It's basically a systematic refutation of Lucretius' Epicureanism as expressed in the first part of DNR Book I. First there's the invocation of the biblical creator. Then a paean to the triumph of Britain; next, a nod toward atomism but bracketed by the claims that God is the designer of the atoms, and that materialism itself could never proceed past the point of random chaos.

All boiler-plate up to here, but then an interesting turn: an inversion of the crime of Agamemnon. After laying out his belief that all races are brothers (as all men are sons of Adam), it is *fratricide* that marks out the real crime. Slavery, suggests Higgons, is proof that man is hopelessly sinful without the guidance of God. He might as well have translated it literally—"to such heights of evil are men driven *without* religion."

And just a few other features of interest. His science is mostly adequate for its time, but with an oddity or two. If I'm reading it correctly, he says in one line that gravity causes heavier objects to fall faster than lighter objects—something even Lucretius knew was wrong. He also acknowledges the probable existence of life on other worlds, which is somewhat odd for someone who believes in the myths of Genesis.

Its a fairly quick read, but doesn't amount to much for us. A few pages of serviceable but uninspired heroic couplets.

Post by “Joshua” of January 15, 2021 at 10:12 PM

Side note: he precedes his poem with a Latin inscription from Ovid:

"*Unus erat toto naturae vultus in orbe—quem dixere Chaos;*"

"There was one countenance upon all of the world—which they call Chaos;"

Post by “Joshua” of January 15, 2021 at 10:45 PM

Second side note: on the line "W-- govern'd in a B-- Reign";

I'm not entirely clear who is referenced here, but Higgons and his family were well-known Jacobites who held fast to the House of Stuart after the Glorious Revolution and the installation of the Hanoverian dynasty with George I.

My best guess is that "W" is Robert Walpole, who governed under "B", being King George (either the First or Second), Duke of **Brunswick**-Lüneburg. Walpole was a Whig and the Jacobites were associated with the Tory's.

Post by “Charles” of January 16, 2021 at 4:28 AM

This reminds me of a poem I came across just the other night.
<http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Darwin/temple0.html>

It's titled: "The Temple of Nature: Or, The Origin of Society: A Poem, with Philosophical Notes" by Erasmus Darwin (grandfather of *that* Darwin).

It opens up with a few lines from Vergil's Aenid.

Unde hominum pecudumque genus, vitæque volantum,

Et quæ marmoreo fert monstra sub æquore pontus?

Igneus est illis vigor, & cælestis origo.

Its primarily Darwin's own thoughts and ideas, presented as his version or creative equivalent of On the Nature of Things, given its wide scope and invocations of Venus at times and many references to Lucretius. Have yet to read the full thing, but perhaps this can serve as Higgons's foil.