

ATTITUDES TO NATURAL PHENOMENA IN ROME DURING THE LATE REPUBLIC

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ABSTRACT: Natural phenomena were part of ancient Rome's human history, and altered the political scene, the cityscape, and religious practice and belief throughout society. Over time, natural disasters in Rome came to be thought of in terms of poetic verse, and making capital, especially among Lucretius, Cicero, and Crassus. However, they were always nuisances and a threat to public and private space, as well as human and animal life. Throughout this article, it is demonstrated that occurrences of natural phenomena provided opportunities for pause, reflection, writing and action. It is also demonstrated that while some individuals remained true to long-held philosophies regarding these occurrences, others were willing to change their minds, over the course of time.

KEYWORDS: Lucretius; Cicero; Marcus Crassus; Rome Nature

INTRODUCTION

In this article, Roman attitudes to natural phenomena in Rome during the Late Republic are analysed, especially with regard to natural anomalies, like disasters. Particularly focussed upon are Lucretius and Cicero, whose philosophical tracts proved influential in forming Roman views on the nature of nature. At the heart of Rome's state was religious observance. However, Roman philosophical thinkers were replete with theories that transcended thinking surrounding the pantheon of gods. This article employs historical methods, examining ancient sources through the lens of modern scholarship, in order to demonstrate that while influential, philosophical views could differ from person to person – and individualistic ones at that – during the Late Republic. The aim of this article is to stimulate further thought, and debate, on the topic of Roman attitudes and

responses to natural disasters and phenomena, throughout its classical past. In doing so, a very Roman picture of the world will be developed as the reader continues throughout the text.

PRODIGIA

In the forefront of Roman responses to natural disasters, are the concepts of *prodigia* and the *pax deorum* – and indeed, a comprehension of these concepts is critical. However, many Romans responded to natural disasters with varying regard. Although the state's function was to maintain its public appearance before the gods, and its relationship with them – called the *pax deorum* – through the proper addresses to unusual natural phenomena called *prodigia* by state endorsed rituals and prayers called *remedia*. At a more basic level, responses to natural disasters could vary between groups, individuals, and a single person's types of responses from one time to the next. If what we could today term 'natural disasters' took on a religious importance for the ancient Romans, so too did many other natural phenomena – which Romans considered equally disastrous at times. Extraordinary and unusual natural phenomena Romans liked to call *signa*. These were divine communications by the gods to the Roman state, and its people. The Romans divided *signa* into two main categories: *auspicia*, through which Jupiter expressed his opinion on impending public actions, and *prodigia*, unsolicited signs sent by the gods to inform the Roman state about the status of the *pax deorum*.¹

Prodigia covered many natural phenomena.² Roman politico-religious convention stipulated that it was the Senate's duty to interpret all *prodigia*.³ The Senate would seek to interpret them through the *decemviri* priesthood in republican times, and the *quindecimviri* priesthood under the Principate, and it could commission the *sacris faciundis* to consult the Sibylline Books.⁴ Once interpreted, the Senate set a period of solemnity, usually two to five days, called

¹ A. Ziolkowski, 'Civic Rituals and Political Spaces in Republican and Imperial Rome', in Paul Erdkamp (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 394.

² Beard, M., North, J., Price, S., *Religions of Rome*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Vol. I, 1, 19.

³ On haruspices, see M. Beard, J. North, S. Price, *Religions of Rome*, Vol. I, 19-20. On augurs see 21-23.

⁴ *Ov. Fast.* 4. 247-248; 4. 257-60; A. J. Boyle, R. D. Woodard, R. D., 'Introduction', *Ovid: Fasti*. (London: Penguin, 2004), xxx.

supplicationes, during which time Rome's temples were open, and statues of the gods placed on couches. During these occasions, Romans offered prayers and sacrifices to them – practices called *lectisternia*.⁵ These priestly and senatorial interpretations of *prodigia*, and the resulting prescribed days and rituals for all Romans to observe, were together collectively called *remedia* – for they were a cure for the breakdown and resulting *stasis* concerning the *pax deorum*.⁶

THE LATE RES-PUBLICA

Inspired by the self-seeking zeitgeist of the times, throughout the 80s BC Marcus Crassus began to implement his own infamous and unbecoming way to reap handsome profits from natural disasters, in Rome. After having noticed that he could gain profits from the fires that burned dwellings in Rome, Crassus began to accrue sums by buying fire-damaged properties in Rome, and then developing, and selling them, at increased prices. In this endeavour, he was the first Roman to do so. Crassus would simply clear the fire-damaged property site after a fire, and then build new apartment blocks over those properties using his more than 500-strong cheap corps of slave architects and builders. Alternately, Crassus could rent them out, or sell them at exorbitant prices. Plutarch states:

‘Crassus also observed what frequent and everyday occurrences in Rome were fire and the collapse of buildings owing to their size and their close proximity to each other. He therefore bought slaves who were architects and builders, and then, when he had more than 500 of them, he would buy up houses that were either on fire themselves or near the scene of the fire; the owners of these properties, in the terror and uncertainty of the moment, would let them go for next to nothing. In this way most of Rome came into his possession.’⁷

Crassus' example was not entirely exceptional, but it was noteworthy. Alternately, portions of the senatorial order's desire to continue ritual. The reason for this lay in the nature of the continuity of Roman order. Religious ceremony

⁵ On *supplicationes* see Liv. 3. 7; 31. 9; 37. 3. On *lectisternia* see Liv. 5. 13; Val. Max. 2. 1; Suet. *Jul.* 76; Corn. Nep. *Timoth.* 2.

⁶ M. Beard, J. North, S. Price, *Religions of Rome*, Vol. I, 19, 22-23, 27, 37.

⁷ Plut. *Crass.* 2; L. Thommen, *An Environmental History of Ancient Greece and Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 76, 124.

was an all-pervading custom well into the Late Republic, and it served to maintain obedience to the Roman state with the Senate at its head. In Cicero's vision of the perfect Law-abiding society, family ritual and the established rites of the state were essential in all matters pertaining to the disruption of the equilibrium of the *pax deorum* indicated by a natural disaster.⁸ Besides *lectisternia*, public *supplicationes* were most important to the Roman Senate and the Roman state. Cicero advocated such ritualism be overseen by the state's priesthood: firstly, in the presiding over public ceremonies; secondly, in the interpretation of prophetic utterances; and thirdly, in rendering to the public any associated omens or portents which required a prescription of ceremonial responses.⁹

Cicero lent precision to the forms of responses to natural disasters and other *prodigia* in his *Laws*. Published after Cicero's death in 43BC, the *Laws* was a more positive sequel to the pessimistic *Republic*, published in 51BC. In the *Laws*, Cicero proposed a political model for Rome that contained elements of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy, with a leading military character to guide the state.¹⁰ Although his model held that a leading military leader prone to misuse the state and its resources could always emerge, even in the midst of growing militarism among generals like Pompey and Caesar, that did not hinder Cicero from finding comfort in its composition.¹¹ Cicero had confidence that in these and other generals 'right reason' – a natural attribute of all human beings – would ultimately prevail, and that, in the context of a state such as the one he proposed, such reason would always come to the fore and result in utopian-like justice. In that sense, Cicero and Livy shared similarities – in that both tried to create conditions to produce the ideal Stoic state. However, they differed insofar as Livy sought to

⁸ Cic. *Leg.* 2. 19-20.

⁹ Cic. *Leg.* 2. 21.

¹⁰ K. Büchner, 1984. *M. Tullius Cicero 'De Re Publica'* (Wissenschaftliche Kommentare zu griechischen und lateinischen Schriftstellern. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 1984), 395; A. Corbiell, 'Ciceronian Invective', in James M. May (ed.) *Brill's Companion to Cicero: Oratory and Rhetoric*. Leiden: Brill, 2002), 197; A. Lintott, 2008. *Cicero as Evidence: A Historian's Companion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 436-437; K. Tempest, *Cicero: Politics and Persuasion in Ancient Rome* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011), 101-102, 138.

¹¹ Cic. *Pro Murena*, 60-66; C. P. Craig, 'Cato's Stoicism and the Understanding of Cicero's Speech for Murena', *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 116 (1986), 229-239; A. Corbiell, 'Ciceronian Invective', 199-200; R. Stem, 'Cicero as Orator and Philosopher: The Value of the 'Pro Murena' for Ciceronian Political Thought', *Review of Politics* 68 (2006), 206-231; K. Tempest, *Cicero*, 101-102; Y. Baraz, *A Written Republic: Cicero's Philosophical Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 9.

create those conditions through exempla and thematic teachings in his history, while Cicero promoted the philosophical position that reason was innate and required little work – just an appropriate conditioning environment sufficed.¹²

Cicero's philosophical positioning rested upon his Stoic ideals. He admired the natural law of justice. However, he often tempered it with an awareness of everyday Roman common sense. Thus, while he admired the austerity of many Romans, and their quest for justice and virtue, Cicero recognised that austerity was not for every person. Cicero also recognised that justice, and virtue, were not consistently pursued by every Roman individual, over time. Thus, Cicero came to promote the idealisation of the virtuous person, as well as the utility of those more average. This brought together – within the context of the state – a sense of greater harmony between those who were perfect, and imperfect.¹³ These principles influenced Cicero's use of rhetoric, to an extent. Cicero considered himself a perfect human who sought justice and virtue, and he tried to allow his rhetoric to reflect these same traits. However, Cicero further differed with other Stoics in that he often tried to demonstrate, in his writings, how he arrived at his judgements based upon the development of the substance of an argument.¹⁴ Although Cicero admired the persuasiveness of Stoic philosophical public speakers, Cicero warned that such persuasiveness could be dangerous, especially if it was destructive to the Roman state.¹⁵ Thus, Cicero promoted a pragmatic acceptance of the existence of evil in the world, and held that an unwillingness to compromise can be problematic, at times.¹⁶ In this endeavour, Cicero adopted the Epicurean teachings of pleasure over pain and reflection over mindless acceptance – at the cost of pure fatalism. For, like Epicurus, Cicero believed not all was under human control. However, he did believe many aspects of life could be harmonised.¹⁷ Thus, Cicero adopted Epicurean teachings on the juxtaposition

¹² Cic. *Leg.* 1. 32-33; *Rep.* 3. 33; A. Lintott, *Cicero as Evidence*, 437.

¹³ Cic. *De Rep.* 3. 33; *Pro Murena*, 61-63; *De Off.* 1. 46; M. Morford, *The Roman Philosophers: From the Time of Cato the Censor to the Death of Marcus Aurelius* (London: Routledge, 2002), 22-24.

¹⁴ Cic. *Top.* 6 (= LS 31 F).

¹⁵ Cic. *De Rep.* 3. 9-31; *De Fin.* 2. 24; Gellius, *N.A.*, 6. 14. 10.

¹⁶ G. Reydams-Schils, *The Roman Stoics: Self, Responsibility, and Affection* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 25, 87.

¹⁷ Epicurus, fr. 54; *Principal Doctrines*, 24; Diogenes Oenandreas, fr. 54. 2, 3; N. Bakalis, *Handbook of Greek Philosophy: From Thales to the Stoics. Analysis and Fragments* (Bloomington: Trafford Publishing, 2005), 191-192, 196-197, 200.

of certainty in atomic structure, and the potential for uncertainty in voids, and personalised them, in relation to his Stoic ideals.¹⁸

Of course, political jousting was nothing new to Cicero, especially when it came to the occurrence of *prodigia* and their handling by state powers. In 63BC, Cicero contrived that the several earthquakes that were to shake Rome in that year were heavenly signs foretelling Rome of the threat that Catiline posed.¹⁹ In 56BC, another earthquake occurred in Rome, and the Senate turned to the Etruscan soothsayers for advice. This body interpreted this earthquake as a sign of human transgressions and the profaning of holy ground in Rome. The populist politician Clodius, after becoming an enemy of Cicero's over his testimony against him in court over the *Bona Dea* scandal in 62BC, with some political skill blamed Cicero for this, since his house had been built over the site of a shrine. But Cicero, not to be outdone and with matching skill, blamed Clodius for the earthquake, declaring that it had been sent by the gods in protest over Clodius' intrusion into the *Bona Dea* festival – the cause of much scandal in Rome. To protect Cicero from Clodius' gangs, the populist politician Milo gave Cicero a gang to counter Clodius' and protect him from danger, around his house. Thus, Cicero knew the political importance of prodigies.²⁰

In his ideal state, Cicero envisioned Romans worshipping, and supplicating, the traditional Roman gods only. New, and foreign, divinities were allowed to be worshipped if were endorsed by the state. In cities, shrines in public spaces were to be revered. In the countryside, groves and other abodes of gods were also to be respected, as well. But among the gods, demigods including Hercules, Liber, Aesculapius, Castor, Pollux, and Quirinus were also to be supplicated as beings 'whose services have secured them a place in heaven.'²¹ The proper interpretation of *prodigia*, and the decision of the appropriate response by the state to these could be referred by the Senate, to the Etruscan soothsayers – the *haruspices*. It was their decision regarding which gods were to be supplicated in the household, and in public on behalf of the Senate and Roman people. These customs ought to be

¹⁸ Epicurus, *Letter to Herodotus*, 39-40; N. Bakalis, *Handbook of Greek Philosophy*, 197-198.

¹⁹ Plut. *Cic.* 14.

²⁰ Dio. 39. 20-21; A. Everitt, *Cicero: The Life and Times of Rome's Greatest Politician* (New York: Random House, 2003), 165; K. Tempest, *Cicero*, 118, 141.

²¹ Cic. *Leg.* 2. 19.

observed, Cicero believed, ‘in perpetuity’.²²

In Cicero’s *Laws*, the author laid down that each Roman citizen should approach their tasks of *lectisternia* and *supplicationes* in a spirit of deep internal purity as well, and indeed, it was upon this sense of personal purity alone that the gods’ restoration of the *pax deorum* hung. Cicero states:

‘They shall approach the gods in purity; they shall adopt a spirit of holiness... God himself will punish whoever does otherwise.’²³

Cicero espoused that such purity must consist of a ‘pure heart’. This was prioritised higher by Cicero than even bodily cleanliness, ‘since the heart is far superior to the body’ and such a heart externally expresses itself through acts of ‘goodness of character’ which are more ‘pleasing to God’ than simply an externally ceremonially cleansed body without the accompanying pure heart. By these statements, one discerns that Cicero found evidence of varying degrees of personal senses of religious purity in the hearts of his Roman contemporaries. Cicero took pains to restore that religious purity – a sentiment that prevailed in the literary work of Livy, and the religious program of Augustus.²⁴

Such was the power that the Roman Senate exercised through religion, it had become blatantly clear to many during the second and first centuries BC that Roman power depended upon the state religion, and its ceremonies and rituals, to sustain it. Although only a fraction of the Romans’ writings have survived, of those we do have, in the Greek historian Polybius and the Roman statesman Cicero, there are clear signs that religion was a strong controlling device. Polybius, who was close to the Roman elite and observed thereby that Rome’s subjects were ‘restrained’ by the state ‘by mysterious terrors or other dramatizations of the subject’, that is, through myth and religious rituals, to ensure their loyalty to the state, including after natural disasters.²⁵ Cicero expressed throughout his writings, his belief that Roman religion be maintained at all costs, by the state, for ‘the maintenance of the state’ is ensured by ‘the prudent interpretation of religion’.²⁶

²² Cic. *Leg.* 2. 21-22.

²³ Cic. *Leg.* 2. 19.

²⁴ Cic. *Leg.* 2. 25-25.

²⁵ Polybius, 6. 56.

²⁶ Cic. *Dom.* 1; M. Beard, J. North, S. Price, *Religions of Rome*, Vol. I, 115; vol. II, 197-198.

Cicero, and indeed many Roman senators, believed that religious control was critical to maintaining the continued survival of the Roman state.²⁷

LUCRETIUS AND THE NATURE OF NATURAL DISASTERS

As was the case with other educated Romans, Lucretius looked to the earth – not as a source of exploitation or physical danger – but one of beauty. His external response to nature, together with its natural disasters, in its written form is as much one of awe and wonder as it is of fear. In his epic poem, *On the Nature of Things*, published in 55BC, Lucretius elevated the ‘crafty earth’ which ‘contrives sweet flowers’, and the ‘oceans’ that ‘laugh’, and the ‘skies that grow peaceful after showers’, to the rank of divine status in place of the Roman gods themselves. Thereby, the poet portrayed the earth in Epicurean terms, as the true guide of ‘the nature of things upon its course’, rather than the gods; thereby conveying the earth as being the divine medium through which the atomic structures and elemental particles change and progress upon life’s course.²⁸

For Lucretius and other Epicureans like him, natural disasters were not entirely disastrous in themselves, but were simply the signs of a living and powerful divine earthly being slowly running along its natural course to its own eventual death.²⁹ With the image of a living earth in the forefront of his mind, Lucretius believed that when this earth is in the throes of volcanic eruption, it is not as from a mere mixing-bowl shaped ‘krater’ as the Sicilians described the mouth of Mount Etna, but rather from the volcanic ‘jaws’ of a living and restless god. Thus, as Lucretius waxes eloquent:

‘Now I’ll set forth the reason from time to time fires breathe
Out of the jaws of Etna...

Crucibles of Etna this fire sparks and breathes its blast...

Sicilians call the summit a ‘krater’, to denote

‘Mixing bowl’ – the part we call the mountain’s mouth or throat.’³⁰

²⁷ Cic. *N.D.* 2. 9-10.

²⁸ Lucr. 1. 8-9; 19-21; 214-216; 221-224; D. Graham, *If the World Itself is Shaken: Roman Responses to Natural Disasters from the Late Republic to the Great Famine under Claudius and Nero, 65BC – AD63* (PhD Dissertation. Macquarie University, 2019), 54.

²⁹ Lucr. 1. 469-470.

³⁰ Lucr. 1. 639-640; 6. 681-692; 701-702.

Thus, for Lucretius, and other Epicurean Romans like him, the terror that often accompanied natural disasters – such as volcanic eruptions – could potentially be mixed with awe, and wonder.

In *On the Nature of Things*, humankind's search for fame and power is merely a social construct.³¹ For him, the mere thought of placing them above the welfare of the earth and its inhabitants, was sheer madness. It was proof to Lucretius that the state was in a condition of acute *stasis*.³² Indeed, in human terms, Lucretius believed that *stasis* could take hold of the body corporate and destroy entire civilizations, like a plague.³³ Drawing upon classical Greek philosophical motifs found in Hippocrates, Herodotus, and Thucydides, Lucretius also believed that the institutions of the state can suffer from sickness, much like a human being does. Lucretius believed that that was the case in Rome in his own lifetime.³⁴ Thus, it was *stasis* – a disaster of which the state of his day was so much a part – that Lucretius showed greatest horror at.³⁵

However, Lucretius was not an ordinary philosopher, and his writings constitute much independent thinking, meaning that Lucretius' philosophical opinions were not always shared by other philosophers. A great admirer of Epicurus, Lucretius chose to mention his debt to this founder of Epicureanism in his work.³⁶ But, despite the influence of Epicureanism, with regard to other Epicureans, Lucretius chose to fall silent. He did not even mention his famous Epicurean peer Philodemus, who knew of Lucretius, and whose library at

³¹ J. Warren, 'Lucretius and Greek Philosophy', in Stuart Gillespie and Philip Hardie (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to Lucretius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 19.

³² Lucr. 2. 11; 3. 63; 5. 1120-3; 5. 1135-42; A. Schiesaro, 'Lucretius and Roman Politics and History', in Stuart Gillespie and Philip Hardie (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to Lucretius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 45, 49.

³³ H. S. Commager Jr., 'Lucretius' Interpretation of the Plague', in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 62 (1957), 105-118; P. H. Schrijvers, *Horror ac divina uoluptas: études sur la poésie et la poésie de Lucrèce* (Amsterdam: A. M. Hakkert, 1970), 320; A. Schiesaro, 'Lucretius and Roman Politics and History', 55.

³⁴ For a comparison between Lucretius and Hippocrates, see M. Vegetti, 'metafora politica e imagine del corpo nella medicina greca', in *Tra Edipo e Euclide: Forme del Sapere antico* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1983), 41-58.

³⁵ On *stasis* in Lucretius, see G. Cambiano, 'patologia e metafora politica. Alcmeone, Platone, Corpus Hippocraticum', *Elenchos*, 3 (1982), 219-36, especially 224; M. Cagnetta, 'la peste e la *stasis*', *Quaderni di storia*, 53 (2001), 5-37; A. Schiesaro, 'Lucretius and Roman Politics and History', 55.

³⁶ Lucr. 3. 1-13.

Herculaneum may contain some allusions to Lucretius' work – although, this is yet to be authenticated.³⁷ However, with regard to other Italian Epicureans, whilst there are some resemblances to Lucretius in their works, no major philosophical links exist, and Lucretius mentions not one of them in his poem.³⁸ Thus, Lucretius' views of the natural world, and his understandings and responses to natural disasters, were unlike those of most of his Epicurean peers, marking him as unique in his attitudes towards nature and natural disasters. Thus, as David Sedley has put it, Lucretius operated 'outside established philosophical circles,' and within a more 'poetic one' - hence his mastery over verse and lack of interest in philosophical developments within Epicureanism itself.³⁹ Lucretius' views were influential over younger poets, but not over already established Epicurean philosophers.⁴⁰ Lucretius, the consummate poet, expressed an understanding of the earth in a poetic manner all of his own in a way that most others simply never could master as he did. In this regard, Lucretius differed to many Romans, including other Epicurean Romans, and since his ingenious ability to express himself through poetry was not as informed or indoctrinated as others' – Epicurean or not – this resulted in the paradox that through the production of a unique poetic work, Lucretius' views proved at once shocking to audiences and attractively comforting. Even Cicero, a philosopher himself, conformed to Lucretius' uniqueness for a time.⁴¹

CICERO'S RESPONSE TO LUCRETIUS' VIEWS ON NATURAL DISASTERS

Lucretius suspected that his philosophical tones would not be shared by the

³⁷ On the positive side, see K. Kleve, 'Lucretius in Herculaneum', *Cronache Ercolanesi*, 19 (1989), 5-27; D. Obbink, 'Lucretius and the Herculaneum Library', in Stuart Gillespie and Philip Hardie (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to Lucretius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 33-40. On the negative side, see M. Capasso, 'Filodemo e Lucrezio', in A. Monet (ed.) *Le jardin romain: Épicurisme et poésie à Rome. Mélanges offerts à M. Bollack* (Lille: Presses de l'Université Charles-de-Gaulle, 2003), 77-107; D. Delattre, 'Présence ou absence d'une copie du *De rerum natura* à Herculaneum?', in A. Monet (ed.) *Le jardin romain. Épicurisme et poésie à Rome. Mélanges offerts à Mayotte Bollack* (Lille: Presses de l'Université Charles-de-Gaulle, 2003), 109-116; D. Sedley, 'Epicureanism in the Roman Republic', in James Warren (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Epicureanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 41.

³⁸ D. Sedley, 'Epicureanism in the Roman Republic', 41.

³⁹ D. Sedley, 'Epicureanism in the Roman Republic', 41.

⁴⁰ D. Sedley, 'Epicureanism in the Roman Republic', 41.

⁴¹ D. Sedley, 'Epicureanism in the Roman Republic', 41.

majority of elite Romans for a long period of time – hence his poem’s sense of urgency and pessimism.⁴² That pessimism was well-founded, for in Cicero’s own philosophic treatise, *The Republic*, published soon after Lucretius’ poem itself was published, nature is most certainly not divine as Lucretius imagined. Rather, it constitutes the setting for the state’s traditional pantheon who charge human beings to show respect to them, and the ruling elites who are the earth’s caretakers.⁴³ That, according to Cicero, naturally brought with it a Stoic enthusiasm to attain heavenly favour – a heaven which, in typical Ciceronian discard of fatalism, lay above and beyond this earth in its ‘lowest sphere... subject to death and decay’.⁴⁴

However, caretakers aside, for Cicero as for other elite Romans, the earth was primarily a stage to seek glory on, that is, in the sense of *fama* and one’s glowing reputation, and the *gloria* accrued when one is the boast of all others. However, even Cicero recognised that *fama* and *gloria* were fleeting in the face of natural disasters:

‘...owing to the floods and fires which at certain times will inevitably afflict the earth, we cannot achieve, I will not say eternal, but even long-lasting glory.’⁴⁵

In respect for the earth, Cicero initially warmed to Lucretius’ *On the Nature of Things*, and upon its publication Cicero hailed its value in a letter to his brother Quintus as a work with ‘flashes of genius’ and ‘of great artistry’ (*multi tamen artis*).⁴⁶ However, as Philip Hardie has observed, ancient writers normally ‘oscillate between hero-worship and violent antagonism’ towards other writers, and that this is especially the case when the writing concerns ‘the ultimate truths of the universe’, which is precisely what Lucretius had wished to have the final say on.⁴⁷ Consequently, in oscillation, in a short span of time Cicero transformed from an admirer of Lucretius into a hostile critic of both Lucretius and Epicureanism.⁴⁸

⁴² A. Schiesaro, ‘Lucretius and Roman Politics and History’, 57-58.

⁴³ Cic. *Rep.* 6. 15; D. Graham, *If the World Itself is Shaken*, 56.

⁴⁴ Cic. *Rep.* 6. 16-17; D. Graham, *If the World Itself is Shaken*, 56.

⁴⁵ Cic. *Rep.* 6. 22-23.

⁴⁶ Cic. *QFr.* 2. 10. 3; P. Hardie, ‘Lucretius and Later Latin Literature in Antiquity’, in Stuart Gillespie and Philip Hardie (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to Lucretius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 113.

⁴⁷ P. Hardie, ‘Lucretius and Later Latin Literature in Antiquity’, 112.

⁴⁸ G. Pucci, ‘Echi lucreziani in Cicerone’, *Studi Italiani di Filologia Classica*, 38 (1966), 70-132; V. A. Novara, *Les Idées romaines sur le progrès d’après les écrivains de la République: Essai sur le sens latin du progrès* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1983), 386-443; A. Schiesaro, ‘Lucrezio, Cicerone e l’oratoria’, *Materiali e Discussioni*, 19 (1987), 29-

Indeed, although Cicero initially praised the newly published *On the Nature of Things* in his letter to Quintus in February 54BC, by May of that same year he had already begun work on his *Republic*, as he informed Quintus in another letter, a literary work that would become an open attack on Lucretius' Epicureanism.⁴⁹

Cicero set forth in his *Republic* that there existed a clear alternative to Lucretius' claims – an alternative that centred upon state endorsed symbolic dialogue of evolution, history and politics.⁵⁰ What was seen to be *stasis* – and therefore, a plague-like natural disaster inherent in the workings and abuse of the Roman state by Lucretius – was, by contrast, a fulfilment of Rome's destiny in the eyes of Cicero.⁵¹ For, whereas Lucretius believed that the earth's golden age had expired long ago with the expulsion of its kings,⁵² Cicero believed that Rome was 'strong and well-established' and at the dawn of a new golden age. Under this new golden age, Momigliano pointed out that the Roman state would consist of Cicero's magistrates and laws, not the kings envisaged by Lucretius, and would thus bring true harmony to the Roman state and the natural order of things.⁵³

In 54BC, it was not only Cicero who believed that the glory days of Roman imperial rule were still ahead of it. In that year, Marcus Crassus set out from Rome to conquer the Parthian Empire – a vast swathe of territory that spanned from the Euphrates to the Indus Rivers. However, as Crassus was about to lead his army out of Rome, violent storms with heavy rains intervened, and its strong winds tore a standard from a bearer as he was crossing a bridge, casting it into the Tiber. However, that was just the start of ill-portending omens. The violence

61; J. Zetzel, 'De re publica and De rerum natura', in P. E. Knox and C. Foss (eds.) *Style and Tradition: Studies in Honour of Wendell Clausen* (Stuttgart: De Gruyter, 1998), 230-47; P. Hardie, 'Lucretius and Later Latin Literature in Antiquity', 113.

⁴⁹ Cic. *QFr.* 2. 12. 1; J. Powell, 'Introduction', in *Cicero: The Republic and the Laws* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), xi.

⁵⁰ E. Andreoni, 'Sul contrasto ideologico fra il De re publica di Cicerone e il poema di Lucrezio (La genesidella società civile)', in *Studi di poesia latina in onore di A. Traglia* (Rome: Storia e Letteratura, 1979), Vol. I, 281-321; J. D. Minyard, *Lucretius and the Late Republic: An Essay in Roman Intellectual History* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 75; J. Zetzel, 'De re publica and De rerum natura', in P. E. Knox and C. Foss (eds.) *Style and Tradition: Studies in Honour of Wendell Clausen* (Stuttgart: De Gruyter, 1998), 230-47.

⁵¹ Cic. *Rep.* 2. 5; A. Momigliano, 'Review of Farrington (1939)' in Arnaldo Momigliano (ed.) *Secondo contributo alla storia degli studi classici* (Rome: Edizione Di Storia e Letteratura, 1968), 375-88.

⁵² Diogenes of Oenoanda, frag. 56; Hermarchus, frag. 24; A. Schiesaro, 'Lucretius and Roman Politics and History', 46.

⁵³ Cic. *Rep.* 2. 3.

of wind and rain stopped Crassus' army from crossing the bridge any further, concerned as it was by the possibility the bridge might collapse. Regardless, Crassus pushed on, succeeded in restoring confidence in his legions, and marched his army across the bridge and out of Rome for his conquest of the East.⁵⁴ However, the storms would continue for days, resulting in a rather destructive Tiber flood, which saw the loss of much human life as floodwaters soaked mud-brick and wattle-and-daub dwellings causing them to collapse under their own weight. Adding to the concern in Rome, this flood rose to an unusually high level, not only inundating Rome's lower levels, but also some of its higher reaches, reaching the temple of Mars, sweeping away the promenade of Crassipus as well as innumerable gardens and shops, and killing pets and livestock in and around Rome.⁵⁵ Once again, a storm would prove prophetic to Rome's ill-fortunes. Crassus would be killed in the Battle of Carrhae in 53BC, soon after his campaign against the Parthians began. The chaos that ensued would eventually result in civil war between Pompey and Julius Caesar – a war that would see Caesar win after his decisive victory in the Battle of Pharsalus on the 9th August 48BC, leading to Pompey's assassination in Egypt on the 28th September 48BC.⁵⁶

THE LEGACY OF CRASSUS AND THE EXPLOITATION OF NATURAL MISFORTUNE

If things were not bad enough for Rome, which seemed to be gripped by civil strife under the Late Republic, yet another violent storm would bode ill fortune to the inhabitants of the city. At the start of 44BC, Rome was struck by a second tornado in its history, accompanied by lightning, and days of storms and rain, afterwards. This resulted in flood. Many monuments were destroyed, including a statue of Cicero, outside the temple chamber of Minerva, which fell on its face breaking off its head and limbs. This was believed by many, at the time, to portend evil for Cicero, since that statue had been erected by Cicero the day before he went into exile, in 58BC – an exile which lasted until his recall to Rome by Caesar

⁵⁴ Dio 40. 18; Flor. 1. 46. 4; Plut. *Cr.* 19; Liv. Summary, 106; Iul. Obseq. 64.

⁵⁵ Cic. *Quinct.* Fr. 3. 7. 1; Dio 39. 61. 1-2.

⁵⁶ Cic. *Div.* 2. 22; Cic. *Tusc.* 3. 66; *Prop.* 3. 11. 35-38; Caes. *B. Civ.* 3. 103-104; Ov. *Fast.* 5. 583-586; 6. 465-468; *Pont.* 4. 3. 41-43; [Liv] *Per* 112; Strab. 16. 760; Vell. 2. 46-53; Val. Max. 1. 6. 11; Sen. *Dial.* 6. 20; Luc. 1. 683-686; Pl. *NH.* 6. 47; Plut. *Luc.* 36. 5-7; *Pomp.* 55. 77-80; *Crass.* 23-27; Flor. 1. 46. 8-10; App. *B. Civ.* 2. 18; Dio 40-42; 49. 21. 2; Just. 42. 4. 4; Fest. *Brev.* 17. 2; Eutrop. 6. 18. 1; 7. 5. 1; Hieron. *Chron.* 1962; Oros. 6. 13. 3.

in 57BC. Bronze tablets were torn from the temple of Loyalty, the doors of the temple of Wealth were broken,⁵⁷ large trees were uprooted, and houses unroofed. Floodwaters inundated the King's Memorial (Regia) and Vesta's shrines.⁵⁸

On March 15th 44BC, Julius Caesar was assassinated by conspiring senators.⁵⁹ In the climate of disharmony that was to follow, Cicero ever-increasingly came to envisage the primary role of nature was that of a resource purely exploitable by the state, and the exploitation of natural disasters by individuals for financial gain. Thus, Crassus' calculated profit-making methods were starting to catch on among senators in Rome. By April 44BC, Cicero was himself taking part in this practice, buying properties cheaply in bad states of repair owing to damage incurred by fire or flood or simply age, and then, once those properties feel under the weight of that damage, he would then rebuild them and sell them on. Indeed, in a private letter to Atticus in that month, Cicero even exuded with much titillation and excitement over this new venture in his life:

‘... two of my shops have fallen down and the rest are cracking. So not only the tenants but the very mice have migrated. Other people call this a misfortune, I don't call it even a nuisance. Oh Socrates and Socratic philosophers, I shall never be able to thank you enough! Good heavens, how paltry such things are in my eyes! But after all I am adopting a plan of building on the suggestion and advice of Vestorius, which will convert this loss into a gain.’⁶⁰

It is noteworthy that so soon after the excitement of Lucretius' published work, the statesman Cicero had by 44BC regarded the earth as simply inanimate, and exploitable by the opportunistic. Thus, Cicero gradually progressed from seeing nature through Epicurean lenses, then towards regarding it as a cause for political control, and then finally as a means for plain financial profit. Unfortunately, for Cicero, his profit-making career with property would be short-lived. His name

⁵⁷ Iul. Obseq. 68.

⁵⁸ Hor. *Carm.* 1. 2. 1-20.

⁵⁹ Cic. *Att.* 14. 10. 1; *Div.* 2. 23; *Phil.* 2. 28-29, 88-89; *Brut.* 23. 4; [Liv] *Per* 116; Ov. *Met.* 15. 799-851; *Fast.* 3. 697-707; Nic. *Dam.* 130. 66, 82-97; *Vell.* 2. 58. 1-2; 87. 3; *Val. Max.* 1. 6. 13, 7. 2; 4. 5. 6; 8. 11. 2; *Sen. Dial.* 5. 30. 4-5; *Plut. Brut.* 14-18; *Caes.* 63-67; *Ant.* 13. 2-14. 1; *Jos. BJ.* 1. 218; *Suet. Caes.* 81-82; *Flor.* 2. 13. 94-95, 17. 1-2; *App. B Civ.* 2. 115-120, 149, 153; *Dio* 44. 16, 21, 22; 46-47; [Vict] *VirIll* 78. 10; 83. 6; *Hieron. Chron.* 1973; *Oros.* 6. 17. 1-2.

⁶⁰ Cic. *Att.* 14. 9. 1; L. Thommen, *An Environmental History of Ancient Greece and Rome*, 76, 124.

was written on the proscription lists of Antony and Octavian, and he was summarily executed on the 7th of December, 43BC.⁶¹

CONCLUSION

Lucretius and Cicero both laid out blueprints for others to live by, and each blueprint stands in opposition to the other. The *stasis* this could produce in individuals of following generations is visibly seen in the example of Livy. While Cicero believed that each Roman individual approached state and domestic rituals in varying degrees of enthusiasm and interest – what was sacred to one was laborious to another – Livy regarded rituals as anathema to his philosophical ideals, but were political necessities nonetheless. Meanwhile, in the Senate, religious responses to natural disasters were of the highest priority, to maintain the Roman state's use of the earth for fame and glory so long as the gods approved. Members, nevertheless, approached natural disasters differently according to their religious responsibilities and personal aptitude for benevolence and dedication to others. Thus, we can detect changes within individuals' responses to natural disasters over time. As we have seen, Cicero would undergo gradual changes, and Cicero was not alone among Romans who changed their general religious and philosophical positions. Therefore, though the life-decisions Cicero made were not entirely unique to him, nor were they entirely identical to other Romans. In the case of each individual, these continuities and changes produced variations in responses to natural phenomena, including natural disasters. This made these Romans human, but also very uniquely Roman.

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⁶¹ Cic. *Rep.* 6. 27-28.

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