
Lucretius' De Rerum Natura has received a great deal of attention recently, from Stephen Greenblatt's Pulitzer Prize-winning The Swerve: How the World Became Modern to monographs by Jonathan Goldberg and Gerard Passannante about this poem's depiction of Epicurean philosophy. This critical edition of Lucy Hutchinson's translation of De Rerum Natura offers an immensely valuable contribution to these scholarly discussions while promising to elevate a prolific writer's profile. Lucretius' six-book De Rerum Natura articulates Epicurean philosophy through a narrative account of the creation of the world and of the human race, ending with an account of the destructive Athenian plague. Hutchinson's manuscript translation of the entire poem was the first in English (though select salacious passages are excised); John Evelyn translated only the first book in 1656, the same decade in which most critics think Hutchinson would have undertaken her translation. Not until 1682 did Thomas Creech's complete translation appear in print. Barbour, Norbrook, and Zerbino's impressive edition illuminates Hutchinson's humanist range and her scholarly abilities while positioning the poem — her first major work — amidst the social, philosophical, and political upheavals of seventeenth-century Europe. It should introduce literary critics and historians to the wide-ranging oeuvre of Hutchinson that has only recently come to light. David Norbrook attributed the biblical epic Order and Disorder to Hutchinson in 1999, and
subsequently has published her elegies and publicized a religious commonplace book she co-authored with her husband. All of these texts, along with a religious tract by Hutchinson and the well-known Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson, will appear in the four-volume collected Works.

This two-volume first installment of the Works should really be considered three distinct pieces of scholarship: an extensive introduction; an exactly edited translation printed alongside the Latin edition(s) employed by Hutchinson; and expansive notes and commentary comprising most of the second volume. The 132-page introduction exceeds expectations for a critical edition. While providing background on Epicurean thought and Lucretius’ poetics as well as a biographical framework for Hutchinson’s translation, the introduction operates more as a monograph on the intellectual, social, and political influences of Epicurean thought as well as the many ways this philosophy was deployed across seventeenth-century Europe.

Authored largely by Norbrook, the introduction traces the intellectual influence of Lucretius and the “Epicurean Revival” across England and the continent, identifying Hutchinson’s myriad reasons for undertaking this complex poem (xxviii). Lucretius’ poem expressed ideas consistently viewed as atheistic and was therefore profoundly dangerous; undertaking to read—let alone to translate—De Rerum Natura was a highly suspect activity. Considering Hutchinson’s humanist impulses alongside of the political and social significance of translating Lucretius over the course of the turbulent seventeenth century, the introduction is partly an intellectual biography of Hutchinson; it subtly traces the intersections between Hutchinson’s Puritan beliefs and her commitment to humanist scholarship that propelled her translation of De Rerum Natura. Helpfully revising the over-worn trope of female modesty and apologia that has been applied to Hutchinson’s translation of Lucretius’ poem, Norbrook contextualizes Hutchinson’s choice initially to translate De Rerum Natura in the 1650s and then twenty years later to present her translation to the Earl of Anglesey.

If this introduction serves as a model for the subsequent three volumes, the complete edition will provide an extraordinarily nuanced account of Hutchinson’s life. Other strengths of the introduction include
locating Lucy Hutchinson and her husband amidst a range of intellectual circles and documenting the lively engagement of Lucretius undertaken by women intellectuals. Painting a rich portrait of the cross-pollination occurring between male and female intellectuals around Epicurean philosophy, the introduction fills a significant gap in recent scholarship on Lucretius’ poem in the seventeenth century.

The introduction also articulates the editorial goals for the volume, ones consistent with current scholarly interest in translation theory and the history of the book. The facing Latin-English format allows readers to engage Hutchinson’s translation choices by providing the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century *De Rerum Natura* editions she utilized. Recent scholarship suggests that Hutchinson used Daniel Pareus’ 1631 edition for the first five books of *De Rerum Natura*; she then turned to Dionysius Lambinus’ more heavily annotated 1570 edition in the midst of translating book six of the poem. The Latin facing text in this edition thus changes at the point that Hutchinson substituted the Pareus edition for Lambinus’. The edition is equally attentive to the making of Hutchinson’s translation of *De Rerum Natura*. Distinct scribal hands — those of Hutchinson herself and her scribe — are indicated with different fonts. This allows us to trace Hutchinson’s additions to the poem, from her versified summaries of each book to her marginal commentary, as well as her corrections to the scribe’s copy. The text’s amalgamated compositional process is carefully illuminated and documented in this original spelling edition of the poem.

Commentary on the poem comprises most of the second volume in this set. In its scope and depth, the commentary is a stunning scholarly achievement. It extends a number of the goals of the introduction and the Latin-English facing text of the poem: highlighting the translation choices made by Hutchinson, often by comparing them to her contemporaries Evelyn and Creech; directing the reader to modern criticism on both Hutchinson and Lucretius; sustaining the introduction’s focus on Lucretius’ reception in the period; and comparing Hutchinson’s use of images, motifs, and themes in this translation with her later writings. The commentary provides a rigorous overview of Epicurean philosophy while also providing a sustained reading of the original poem. Yet it simultaneously provides an integrated reading of Hutchinson’s entire oeuvre, using
her *De Rerum Natura* as the entry point. Just as the introductory biographical material will function as an intellectual biography once the *Works of Lucy Hutchinson* is complete, so too will these rich intertextual readings provide a unique roadmap to Hutchinson’s entire oeuvre.

The challenge of editing a translation of a text is keeping an appropriate focus on the terms of the translation itself rather than on the “original” work. This edition largely achieves that balance, providing enough context for Lucretius’ poem while not allowing that to overwhelm Hutchinson’s own artistic choices and the cultural and biographical contexts for her translation. One area where somewhat more information might have been useful is on the complex history of the manuscripts of Lucretius’ “notoriously problematic” poem (xv). As the introduction stresses, the complexity of Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura* was one of the attractions of this culturally dangerous text. Yet the volume includes limited information on the complicated transmission of, and subsequent bibliographical demands of, the poem. Some more information about the manuscript afterlives of Lucretius’ poem would have helped readers fully grasp Hutchinson’s humanist impulses, as well as her challenges, in tackling *De Rerum Natura*.

Given the quality of this edition, it is unfortunate that certain physical aspects of the book’s production were disappointing. Twelve pages of a gathering in Part 1 were loose from the binding, a frustrating detail in a set retailing at $375. At yet another point within the edition, the binding was so tight that it cut off the important marginal note indicating Hutchinson’s (and thus the edition’s) switch from the Pareus to the Lambinus Latin edition. Inconsistent printing quality mars pages in the introduction. The edition’s careful attention to the composition of Hutchinson’s manuscript translation deserved higher quality printing. One hopes that the high price tag for the entire four-volume collection — likely to be over $1000 judging from the cost of the first volume — will not deter libraries from acquiring the works of a writer as significant as Lucy Hutchinson. When the four-volume set of *The Works of Lucy Hutchinson* is complete, it will provide access to the full range of Hutchinson’s religious, lyrical, and intellectual contributions that have never been gathered together before. Volume one of this edition will hopefully mark a resurgence of scholarship on the remarkable Lucy Hutchinson, and in particular on her engagement with
a poem recently called one of the most important texts ever written. Reid Barbour, David Norbrook, and Maria Cristina Zerbino are to be commended for this tour-de-force edition of Hutchinson’s Lucretius, which unquestionably will become the authoritative text of her translation.

Shannon Miller
Temple University