

CONCERNING THE PROBLEM OF EARLY RECEPTION
OF LUCRETIUS IN POLAND*

By

MIECZYŚLAW BROŻEK

Ancient Christianity did not only cause the elimination of the Jovian Olympus or its transformation into new religious realisations, but it also gave an effective blow to its most dangerous enemy, Epicureism. In its fight against Olympus, Christianity utilized Epicureism in part as an ally, but at the same time, it saw in Epicureism a danger to itself even greater than that of Olympus.

In this depopularization of the teachings of Epicurus even Lucretius suffered. Belittled by the Church writers, Lactantius, Jerome and others¹, Lucretius' work with difficulty survived the first centuries of the Middle Ages. In fact, although with the passing of time some manuscripts of Lucretius became once more available (particularly from the time of the Carolingian Renaissance)², even the later Middle Ages did not create conditions favourable to the spread of his Epicurean teachings. These teachings – which were known not only or even in spite of Lucretius' poem as much as from Cicero's anti-Epicurean writings³ – bore a decidedly negative reputation for godlessness, earthly hedonism and enmity towards the Church. For this reason, even in the 13th century, Dante was not yet able to think about Epicureism without condemning it⁴.

It was only the 15th century that declared battle in order to once more restore to Epicureism its proper place in European learning and philosophy. At that time,

* Originally published in Polish in "Eos" LXI 1973, fasc. 1, pp. 77–90.

¹ The work of Lactantius *De opificio Dei* is a seemingly continuous dispute with Epicurus-Lucretius; this author attacks them also in the *Divinae institutiones*. He does not hold back from expressions such as *delirat Lucretius, poeta inanissimus, ineptus* and the like. Also unfavourable is Jerome's comment on Lucretius: "T. Lucretius [...] amatorio poculo in furorem versus, cum aliquot libros per intervalla insaniae conscripsisset, [...] propria se manu interfecit" (*Chronici canones*, ed. I.K. FORTHERINGHAM, London 1923, p. 231, for the year 1923 = 94 BC).

² M. BROŻEK, *Dzieje tekstu poematu Lukrecjusza*, Meander XXVI 1971, pp. 101 f.

³ J. BURCKHARDT, *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien*, Wien 1930, p. 288.

⁴ BURCKHARDT, *op. cit.* (n. 3.), pp. 288 f.

Renaissance also began to restore Lucretius' poem, which, for almost a thousand years had lain unknown and condemned, or at best hidden from Church authorities, to the status of a literary and, shortly after, a philosophical work. We know that the well-known Italian humanist Poggio Bracciolini (1380–1459), who searched for and discovered many manuscripts of ancient writers, in 1417/1418 found a manuscript of Lucretius' poem and made a copy for himself. The first copy was already finished in 1418 and this very copy became the source for others which, however, were generally made only in the second half of the 15th century. As we well know, Gutenberg's discovery did not immediately strike the pen from the hands of scribes. The first printed editions of Lucretius' poem appeared in the last quarter of the 15th century⁵. Since then, this poem has not ceased to influence the form and thought of European, and therefore also Polish, writers and thinkers.

The preparation of a monograph on the history of Lucretius in Poland was the idea of the untiring researcher of ancient inspiration in the history of our writers, Tadeusz SINKO, that Titan of not only classical studies, but also of Polish and Latin-Polish studies in Poland. He tried to interest his students in whatever he did not have the time to do himself (since his almost ninety-year lifespan proved much too short). The observations in this article are also the fruit of his encouragement. This fruit is necessarily incomplete. The preparation of the entire subject requires assiduous preliminary studies, detailed studies from which the monographic image of the topic could be composed as visualized by T. SINKO.

In these studies, however, it is necessary to distinguish the influence of Epicureism on later thought from the influence of Lucretius himself. In Poland, Epicureism was known not only from Lucretius, but also from other sources, e.g., from the writings of Cicero or Lactantius. Research into the reception of Lucretius will, of course, need to be conducted against the backdrop of the history of Epicureism or the materialistic, hedonistic and sensualistic philosophical concepts developed from it or even the polemics stemming from them, but despite this, the result of these investigations should give the clearest possible picture of the reception of Lucretius alone, both here in Poland and more generally in the literature and learning of the world.

In mediaeval Poland, it is likely that only this negative attitude of the Church toward Epicurean thought, was known, particularly in its mediaeval shape. Among us at that time, even the name Epicurus or Lucretius would have been familiar, at least to foreign clergy⁶.

The first preserved traces of a knowledge of Epicureism among us can be attested in the well known precursor of humanism in our country, Gregory of

⁵ The first edition of Lucretius appeared in Brescia in 1473, the next in Verona in 1486, and then in Venice in 1495 and 1500 (*editio Aldina*).

⁶ In any case, also e.g. by Lactantius, Augustine, Isidore of Seville, etc.

Sanok (d. 1477), who is also believed to have known Lucretius' work. It would appear, however, that this view is taking matters too far.

Philippus Callimachus writes that in his early youth Gregory spent several years in German territory, even beyond the Laba river⁷. But is it possible to theorize that somewhere out there and already at that time Gregory became acquainted with Epicureism?

Later, between 1437–1439, he used to visit Italy. Here, in humanistic circles, the recently discovered manuscripts of ancient authors were certainly being much discussed, Lucretius among them. However, the fact that even Poggio himself had in 1429 not yet recovered his manuscript and did not read Lucretius in full⁸, that Francesco Filelfo (1398–1481) did not yet reveal a knowledge of *De rerum natura*, that even Lorenzo Valla (1407–1457), even he, most probably knew Lucretius only second-hand, i.e. from quotations in ancient lexicographers, grammarians and encyclopaedists⁹, demonstrates that the dissemination of first-hand knowledge of Lucretius' poem was in Italy even at that time rather slow. This suggests that such an early exposure to the poem was very unlikely for Gregory as well. In the humanistic circles in Italy, Gregory could only have heard (but not read) about the discovery of Lucretius' work and perhaps its contents as well.

It is also possible that Gregory could have heard about Lucretius later, in Hungary, in the circle of the bishop-humanist János Vitéz in Várad¹⁰.

Finally, after 1469/1470, Gregory's interest in Lucretius' poem may have been evoked by an Italian refugee, Philippus Callimachus (1438–1496). He was Gregory's guest and may have brought news about Epicurean-Lucretian affairs into Gregory's entourage and conversed with him on their subject. Gregory may have been open to some of these concepts, and later, in his biography, Philippus may have indicated that Gregory had accepted them.

All of this, however, remains in the realm of assumption and possibility. There is no strong evidence that Callimachus brought with him to Dunajów a manuscript of the poem *De rerum natura*¹¹, just as nothing permits us to conclude that Gregory himself read the poem¹².

⁷ *Vita Gregorii* 1: "in Germaniam ultra Albim fluvium penetravit".

⁸ In 1425, Poggio wrote to Niccoliegi in Florence, to whom he had once sent (probably in 1418) his manuscript of Lucretius: "If you send me Lucretius, many persons will be much obliged to you" (*Epist.* II 26). But even in 1426, he wrote again: "Make an effort, if you can, so that I can have Lucretius; for until now I haven't had the chance to read it through, since it has constantly been out of my house" (*Epist.* IV 2). Cf. G.D. HADZSITS, *Lucretius and His Influence*, London 1935, pp. 252 f.

⁹ HADZSITS, *op. cit.* (n. 8.), pp. 256 f.

¹⁰ K. MORAWSKI, *Historia Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego*, vol. 1, Kraków 1900, pp. 315 f.

¹¹ T. SINKO, *Polski Anti-Lukrecjusz*, Kraków 1911, p. 7.

¹² Cf. K. LEŚNIAK, *Lukrecjusz*, Warszawa 1960, p. 117: "Gregory drew the theory of sensual recognition from the poem of Lucretius"; also A. NOWICKI, *Grzegorz z Sanoka*, Warszawa 1958, p. 170: "He most probably read Lucretius in his later years".

The arguments proposed by A. NOWICKI¹³ (following T. SINKO and A. MIODOŃSKI), which would attest to Gregory's knowledge of the work of Lucretius do not prove this knowledge came from Gregory's own personal reading. The expression "(Gregorius) legebat [...] aut medicinas aut rerum naturas"¹⁴ is seen to be worth little already by NOWICKI (p. 197), following SINKO, who correctly reminds us that Isidore of Seville also left a work *de natura rerum* at the beginning of the 7th century, and, we may add, a hundred years later, Bede did the same. Moreover, just as *medicinas* denotes work within the domain of medicine, so *rerum naturas* can denote work within the domain of nature in general, and not particularly the *De rerum natura* of Lucretius. The juxtaposition of *medicinas* with *rerum naturas* also permits us to think of the *Naturalis historia* of Pliny. In any case, in the library of P. Tomicki (d. 1536), besides books on theology and medicine, Pliny (the Elder)¹⁵ was also found (among others).

The second argument is also hypothetical. This argument proposes that Callimachus ascribed to Gregory the opinion¹⁶ that the belief that animals should be considered as non-rational beings (*bruta carere ratione*) stemmed from human beings, not nature, since everything originates from the same seeds (*semina*) and all living creatures (*animantia*) preserve the system of multiplying themselves and existing¹⁷ – as if this opinion was supposed to have stemmed from Lucretius' *De rer. nat.* II 991 f. With Lucretianism and Epicureism in general, this opinion of Callimachus-Gregory shares only the general thesis: "omnium initium ab eisdem seminibus". Lacking in Lucretius, however, is the basic thesis of Callimachus-Gregory: "bruta carere ratione hominum dicebat esse inventa, non naturae". Also lacking is the comment: "generandi rationem vitamque ab omnibus animantibus aequae tueri ac conservari", as a conclusion or else argumentation to support the general thesis: "omnium initium ab eisdem seminibus". There are no grounds, therefore, to conclude that the above-mentioned opinion of Callimachus-Gregory can be traced to Lucretius alone¹⁸. The question of the rationality of animals was already discussed in antiquity, e.g. in Seneca and Plutarch¹⁹, and the problem

¹³ NOWICKI, *op. cit.* (n. 12), pp. 196 f.

¹⁴ *Vita Gregorii* 50.

¹⁵ H. BARYCZ, *Historia Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego w epoce humanizmu*, Kraków 1935, p. 696. Let us add that the aforementioned Bede enlarged his work *De natura rerum*, based on the work of Isidore, with borrowings from Pliny, and he refers the reader to Pliny for more information on a given topic.

¹⁶ *Vita Gregorii* 45.

¹⁷ We should read *generandi rationem vitamque*, after A. MIODOŃSKI, although MSS C, F and the last editor I. LICHONSKA (*Philippi Callimachi Vita et mores Gregorii Sanocei*, ed. I. LICHONSKA, Varsoviae 1963) have *ratione*, which was certainly not the intention of Callimachus-Gregory.

¹⁸ SINKO, *op. cit.* (n. 11), p. 6.

¹⁹ Sen. *Epist.* 121, where at the end we read: "tacitis quoque et brutis [...] ad vivendum sollertia est". (As for Plutarch, cf. SINKO, *op. cit.* [n. 11], p. 6, footnote).

of the difference between the *animal rationale* (human beings), and the *animal brutum* (animals) was particularly emphasized by Christianity, so Gregory could have been familiar with these from other sources.

The third argument suggesting that there was a direct connection between the thought of Callimachus/Gregory and the thought of Lucretius, also lacks force of evidence. Callimachus writes: “quae a physicis dicuntur de solis lunaeque ac reliquorum siderum magnitudine” etc. (*Vita* 45)²⁰. Epicurean views on the magnitude of the sun are discussed by Cicero, e.g., in *Academica* II 82. He also returns quite often²¹ to this topic and that of the magnitude of stars in general. He, too, employs the collective term *physici*. Similarly Seneca and Pliny the Elder did not omit this topic in their discussion of natural phenomena²².

Finally, the occurrence of the expression *aestate cicadae* in Gregory proves little, for these words must have been familiar to Gregory from Ovid²³, whose lexicon resounds in Gregory’s entire work²⁴.

I. ZARĘBSKI²⁵ discovered in cod. 1198 of the Jagiellonian Library in Cracow a commentary to Vergil’s *Bucolics* which had not been noted by WISŁOWSKI in his description of the contents of this codex. ZARĘBSKI expressed the hypothesis that this commentary could have served Gregory in his exegesis of the *Bucolics* at the Cracow University in 1438–1439 which is noted by Callimachus²⁶. The hypothesis is interesting, but not necessarily fruitful. Interesting, because the sixth *Bucolic* of Vergil, as explained by Gregory, provided in lines 31 ff. an opportunity to refer to Epicureism and Lucretius; but it is uncertain if fruitful, because this codex Bibl. Jag. 1198 was bought by the the Cracow University in 1447²⁷, that is ten years after Gregory’s presentation of the exegesis of the

²⁰ Lucr. V 564 f. (cf. IV 478 f.); cf. T. SINKO, *De Gregorii Sanocei studii humanioribus*, Eos VI 1900, pp. 268 f.; IDEM, *Polski Anti-Lukrecyusz* (n. 11), p. 6 f.; NOWICKI, *op. cit.* (n. 12), pp. 198 f.

²¹ E.g., *Acad.* II 126; 128 (cf. II 19 and 79); *Fin.* I 28.

²² Sen. *Nat.* I 3, 10; Plin. *HN* II 49 f.; 58; 85; cf. Bede *De natura rerum* 22.

²³ Lucr. IV 58 (“cum teretes ponunt tunicas aestate cicadae”); Ov. *Ars* I 271 (“vere prius volucres taceant, aestate cicadae”); Gregory, *Ad Callimachum* 5 (“id melius gratis possent aestate cicadae”); cf. A. MIOŁOŃSKI, *Philippi Callimachi et Gregorii Sanocei carminum ineditorum corollarium*, Kraków 1904, pp. 13 f. (= *Rozprawy Wydziału Filologicznego Akademii Umiejętności XXXVI* 1903, Kraków 1904, pp. 406 f.).

²⁴ The contents of Gregory’s work (similarly to that of Callimachus to Gregory, to which Gregory responds in his work) of an elegiac-erotic nature, the elegiac couplet and also Ovid’s favourite terms *patulus*, *Thalia*, *Aonius*, *garrulus*, *mulcere*, *mitis* which are rare or absent in Lucretius, clearly indicate Ovid’s influence.

²⁵ I. ZARĘBSKI, *Okres wczesnego humanizmu*, Kraków 1964, pp. 168 f., n. 26 (= *Dzieje Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego w latach 1364–1764*, Kraków 1964, pp. 151–187).

²⁶ *Vita Gregorii* 2.

²⁷ This can be seen from the original annotation on the cover: “Liber librariae collegii artistarum emptus pro tribus florenis, quorum duos mgr Zwanow dedit, quos ex dispensatione tenuit, et tertium de fisco [...] mgr Jacobus protunc decanus adiunxit”. The Peter of Żwanów mentioned

Bucolics. Nor we do know where it was purchased or how long the codex had been in Cracow. In any case, what we read in it concerning Lucretius is in fact a clear misunderstanding, which argues against the commentator's knowledge of Lucretius' work²⁸.

As a result of the above observations, it seems that the issue of the Gregory's knowledge of Lucretius has to be punctuated with a large question mark, if not crossed out. Gregory could have known something about Lucretius only in an indirect way.

Similarly, other people in our country, and in fact not just in Poland, must have gained information about Lucretius earlier than they gained first-hand knowledge of him through their own reading of his work. In the libraries of professors at the Cracow University in the 15th and at the beginning of the 16th century Lucretius is not found²⁹. He appears here only later in the 16th century, and we can consider this as the earliest time that the knowledge of Lucretius could be obtained in Poland through a direct reading of his work.

Particularly in the 16th century (and even earlier, in fact) many people would travel to Italy to study. They could all have come across the problem of Epicureism and information about the poem of Lucretius in some way (and in fact most probably did so). Not all of them, however, left clear traces of this in their works.

As is noted by the outstanding researcher into Polish culture and learning in those times, H. BARYCZ³⁰, Nicolaus Copernicus (1473–1543) lived in Italy in 1496–1503, which, in fact, is after the first printed editions of Lucretius and in a time when the Epicurean movement was well established in Italy, without doubt fuelled by the discovery and publication of Lucretius' work. Whether or not, however, he came to know the contents of that work through his own reading, is proved neither by his mention of atomism in *De revolutionibus* I 6 (towards the end of the chapter)³¹, nor the similarity of the thought of *De revolutionibus* I 8

here was a Master from 1433, Dean in 1443 and died before 1450, while the Jacob mentioned in the provenance of the codex is Jacob from Łyszów, Master from 1441 and Dean in 1447, 1451 and 1466. During the lifetime of Peter of Żwanów, Jacob was Dean in 1447.

²⁸ In the commentary to the words *per inane*, *Bucol.* 6, 31 we read: "Diversae sunt philosophorum sententiae de rerum origine. Nam Anaxagoras et Heraclitus dicebant omnia ex igne procreata, [...] Thales Milesius ex aquae humore, [...] Empedocles et Lucretius ex quattuor elementis; Epicurei vero, quos nunc dissequitur (hic sequitur?), dicunt duo rerum principia, coprus et inane: corpus vocant atomum, inane vero spatium in quo sunt atomi. Ex his duobus volunt quattuor elementa procreata, quae omnibus aliis rebus praestant originem".

²⁹ W. SZELIŃSKA, *Biblioteki profesorów uniwersytetu krakowskiego w XV i początkach XVI wieku*, Wrocław 1966.

³⁰ H. Barycz, *Mikolaj Kopernik, wielki uczonej Odrodzenia*, Warszawa 1953, pp. 43 and 54.

³¹ The relevant words: "Quemadmodum ex adverso [...] stellarum sphaeram", which in the MS are enclosed in parentheses and lightly crossed out, were already restored to the text by the ZELLERS in their Munich edition in 1949, and not by R. GANSINIEC in the publication of book I in 1953, as

with the *De rerum natura* IV 387 ff. Here, Copernicus is clearly quoting Vergil's *Aen.* III 72: "provehimur portu terraeque urbesque recedunt", and he in no way notes the fact that Lucretius had already made a similar observation even though invoking Lucretius would in this case have been more apt! In view of these facts, we must abandon all our *piissima desideria* for an early introduction of Lucretius into Poland.

Copernicus, who mentioned by name many authors who had been a source or inspiration for his approving or critical thoughts, did not mention Lucretius³². Overall, it does not seem possible to obtain any clearer evidence for Copernicus' Lucretianism.

For some writers, their subject matter did not yield an opportunity to refer to Epicurus or Epicureism. Thus, e.g., even on medical and therefore nature-related topics, adhering closely to this specialized subject, Józef Struś (Struthius, 1510–1586) mentions atoms in his medical work³³, but only in comparison: the "seeds" which cause the Gallic illness to become infectious are tiny bodies resembling atoms. "But not Epicurean atoms", the author stipulates.

In his lecture on the atomically invisible germs of disease Struthius followed in the footsteps of a doctor from Padua, Hieronymus Fracastorius (1483–1553), whom Struthius defends right after his mention of atoms against the charge of Epicureism (in this way defending himself as well). Struthius refers primarily to Galen and Hippocrates, who also see the invisible "seeds of pestilence" as the cause of infectious disease. Fracastorius, however, could have been led to consider the cause of infectious disease in invisible "seeds" by not only the "seeds" of Galen or Hippocrates, but also the atoms of Epicurus.

During the Renaissance, the main obstacle to revealing a knowledge of Epicurean or Epicurean-Lucretian ideas was still the consideration of orthodoxy with respect to the teaching of the Church. University faculty was composed of clergy. These, bound by either the traditional world-view or else by religious obligations, even if they knew and were inclined to accept certain conclusions of Epicurean thought as rational (as Callimachus asserted that Gregory of Sanok had done), did not want and indeed could not do so overtly.

thinks A. NOWICKI (*op. cit.* [n. 12], p. 195), who moreover baselessly and unnecessarily concludes from this comparison of invisibly small atoms and the visibly great bodies created by them with the relationship of small astronomical distances to great ones, conclusions that go too far pertaining to Copernicus as a supporter of atomism.

³² Pertaining to the matter of the size of the sun or moon, *De revolutionibus* IV 20, he could have rejected what Lucretius writes about the sun in V 564 f., but here he does not assume a polemical stance.

³³ *Sphygmicae artis libri quinque a Josepho Struthio conscripti*, rev. J. WIKARJAK, Posnaniae 1968 (Polish translation alongside the Latin text), pp. 308 f.

Moreover, many other educated people in Poland during the early Renaissance, even if they revealed that knowledge of Lucretius, also compensated for this by religious or simply anti-Lucretian declarations.

In Paul of Krosno (d. 1517) and his student John of Wiślica (d. not long after 1516)³⁴ it is difficult to find even a trace of familiarity with Lucretius.

Similarly, Andrew Krzycki (1482–1537), Archbishop of Gniezno and Primate of Poland, did not leave in his poetic works any traces of a knowledge of Lucretius, although as a student in Bologna at the end of the 15th century he could have become familiar with him in Italy³⁵. The same can be said as well of his protégé Klemens Janicki (1516–1543). For although he, too, was in Italy between 1538–1540, no echoes of Lucretius can be discerned in his works. Admittedly, already W. MASŁOWSKI³⁶ and others after him, including L. ĆWIKLIŃSKI³⁷, would like to compare praise of wisdom (*sophiae*) in Janicki's *Tristia* (3, 49 ff.), to Lucretius' *De rerum natura* II 1–61 and III 1 ff., and to see in this praise clear evidence that Janicki had read Lucretius. For this hypothesis, or even assertion, to gain credibility, however, one must bring to it a large measure of one's own desire that this be so. For neither Janicki's thought nor the vocabulary used in the praise support this conclusion.

Moreover, the attempt to comment³⁸ on *Tristia* 1, 85 "mortem astare" as a *locus similis* to Lucretius III 959 "mors ad caput adstitit" (cf. 1078 "finis vitae mortalibus adstat") also comes to nothing because the word *adstare* (*astare*) is commonplace in the poets as are expressions such as *effigies*, *imago*, *umbra astat* with reference to visions and images in dreams.

By ascertaining the lack of clear traces of the influence of reading Lucretius in the writers mentioned above, we would rather see in this the proof that these writers did not reveal their familiarity with Lucretius rather than that they had not read him at all. For we can discern this concealment in their contemporary, Jan Dantyszek.

Dantyszek travelled throughout Europe and also in Italy; he came late to the priesthood. Despite this, we find in his writings only one or two phrases that

³⁴ *Pauli Crosnensis atque Ioannis Wisliciensis carmina*, ed. B. KRUCZKIEWICZ, Cracoviae 1887, pp. XXXII ff. (cf. p. XXXVII, where KRUCZKIEWICZ concludes that Paul had a knowledge of Catullus, Vergil, Horace, Persius, Lucan and others), also p. XLII (referring to the classical education of John of Wiślica).

³⁵ *Andreae Cricii carmina*, ed. K. MORAWSKI, Cracoviae 1888, pp. XXIX ff., XLV ff. (pertaining to the Latin poets known to Krzycki). R. GANSINIEC planned to prepare a new edition of the works of Krzycki, but was unable to do so due to his sudden death.

³⁶ W. MASŁOWSKI, *De vita et poeti Clementis Janicii*, Vratislaviae 1857, p. 36.

³⁷ L. ĆWIKLIŃSKI, *Klemens Janicki, poeta uwieńczony*, Rozprawy Akademii Umiejętności Wydziału Filologicznego XVII 1893, pp. 283–476, Kraków 1893 (referring to Lucretius on p. 458); cf. *Clem. Janicii poetae laureati carmina*, ed. L. ĆWIKLIŃSKI, Cracoviae 1930, p. L.

³⁸ Klemens Janicki, *Carmina, Dzieła wszystkie*, ed. J. KRÓKOWSKI, Wrocław 1966, p. 21.

suggest Lucretius³⁹ among many echoes of Ovid, Vergil, Statius and many other ancient poets. The strongest evidence of borrowing from Lucretius and therefore of a knowledge of his poem *De rerum natura* in Dantyszek are the words *genus omne animantum*⁴⁰, which can only recall Lucretius' *De rerum natura* I 4, for it is less probable that Dantyszek acquired this expression indirectly⁴¹.

If, however, Dantyszek borrowed these words directly from Lucretius, then we again wonder that in the same work, i.e., *Carm.* 34 (*Epithalamium reginae Bonae*), in the speech of Mars to Venus, Dantyszek exploited only Statius' *Thebaid* III 291 ff., although Lucretius' famous invocation to book I of the *De rerum natura* could have provided him with many beautiful turns of phrase, spoken by Mars to the goddess. We can deem such an avoidance of Lucretius on the part of an orthodox Christian and son of the Church as completely understandable. More than that – we can even see in Dantyszek the first Polish Anti-Lucretian.

For in Dantyszek's *Carm.* XXXIII 1 ff.⁴² we read such statements as “sunt superi, caelumque suo rectore moveri quis, nisi mentis inops, cernens convexa negabit aetheris? Hoc tellus, aer et pontus...” etc., so

that there are heavenly beings, and who, unless one deprived of reason, will look at the vault of heaven and conclude that it is not moved by its steersman! By his hand is steered the earth, the air and the sea and everything that dwells within, is born of them and that takes its place in the established order. Surely, he has a care for this great machine of the world, thanks to which the life of the human race and all kinds of living creatures are equally upheld with lifegiving breath. He, omnipotent sower of human beings and creator of all directs everything by his will. Nothing ever happens that the will of God has not long ago foreseen...

If we then read such words and in addition to this if, in the Latin text, we clearly perceive Lucretian style and lexicon and a Lucretian spirit, then it is difficult not to see in these words a conscious polemic with Lucretius' ideas.

In this way, from this work of Dantyszek from 1518 we have gained a much earlier “sure document attesting to the vitality of Lucretius in Poland” than from

³⁹ Ioannis Dantisci *Carmina*, ed. S. SKIMINA, Cracoviae 1950. Parallel passages from ancient authors are noted below the text. On p. 14 (ad I 3, 221) SKIMINA notes that the expression *belli fulmen* was used by Lucretius III 1032 (= 1034 MARTIN) for Scipio, conqueror of Carthage; but Dantyszek, when he called Hannibal and Hasdrubal *duo belli fulmina* was familiar with this expression probably from Vergil *Aen.* IV 842: “geminos, duo fulmina belli, Scipiadas”. This was already exploited by Paul of Krosno (p. 21 in the edition of KRUCZKIEWICZ), and also by John of Wiślica, *Bell. Pruth.* I 19 f.: “fulmina Martis Scipiadas”. Similarly, the expression *canum vis* in Dantyszek, 23, 94 (ed. SKIMINA, p. 96). Also Dantyszek knew the ablative *famē* primarily from Vergil (*Georg.* IV 318; *Aen.* VI 421). Cf. also following note.

⁴⁰ 24, 170, ed. SKIMINA, p. 108.

⁴¹ It also appears unexpectedly, e.g., in the epilogue to the work *De conflictu duorum ducum et animarum* of Reiner of Leodium (1156–after 1182); cf. M. MANITIUS, *Geschichte der lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters*, vol. III, München 1931, p. 168.

⁴² Ed. SKIMINA, pp. 92 f.

the elegy of Kochanowski to Firley⁴³ which was previously viewed as such by T. SINKO⁴⁴ and which was composed after 1570.

More specific inquiries may reveal that this elegy is not even the second earliest such document. It is preceded, for instance, by the earliest editions of the *De rerum natura* from the catalogue of the Jagiellonian Library in Cracow originating from the years 1514, 1531, 1564 and 1566. For these editions were not only printed at that time, but presumably were also early arrivals in Poland⁴⁵. The presence of Lucretius' poem is in any case noted in the library of Walenty Widawski (1537–1601), who died while he was Rector of the Cracow University⁴⁶.

Before we pass to Kochanowski, we should mention that in spite of everything, the knowledge of Lucretius in Poland in the 16th century was not an evenly dispersed phenomenon. For one could think that Andrzej Frycz-Modrzewski (1503–1572) also preceded Kochanowski as a “document” of the knowledge of Lucretius. We read even in the literature on this subject such statements as: “A. Frycz-Modrzewski knew and quoted Lucretius...”⁴⁷. Meanwhile the only quotation from Lucretius⁴⁸ in Modrzewski – “Denique coelesti sumus omnes semine oriundi, omnibus ille idem pater est” – was without a doubt repeated directly or indirectly after Lactantius⁴⁹. Modrzewski does not mention Lucretius by name but he calls him in a non-specific way, *poeta ethnicus*.

Finally, however, given the present state of preservation and our knowledge of early literature in Poland, the first author among us who identifies Lucretius by name and even with some praise is Jan Kochanowski (1530–1584). In one of his Latin elegies (II 10, 65), Lucretius appears as *Latii lumen orbis*, i.e. as the star of the Latin world. In another (II 9, 22), Kochanowski also mentioned Epicurus and his theory of the building of the cosmos from atoms, without doubt also influenced by his reading of Lucretius.

However, in his elegy to Firley⁵⁰ (IV 3), which is the one most important for our topic, Kochanowski ascribes only as much reason to Lucretius as he could

⁴³ *Eleg.* IV 3; discussed later.

⁴⁴ SINKO, *Polski Anti-Lukrecyusz* (n. 11), pp. 7 f.

⁴⁵ Unfortunately, the exemplars of these editions in the collections of the Jagiellonian Library lack annotations which would permit the identification of their earliest provenance. To the editions from the 16th century that are found in the Jagiellonian Library also belongs the edition of D. Laminus, Frankfurt 1583, and others from 1595.

⁴⁶ BARYCZ, *Historia Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego...* (n. 15), p. 577; NOWICKI, *op. cit.* (n. 12), p. 193, following H. RYBUS, *Widawskie Archiwum Kościelne*, Łódź 1939, p. 35.

⁴⁷ NOWICKI, *op. cit.* (n. 12), p. 194.

⁴⁸ Lucr. II 991 f.; cf. A. Fricii Modrevii *Commentarium de republica emendanda libri V* (1551), ed. K. KUMANIECKI, vol. 1, Warszawa 1953, p. 137 (*De rep. emend.* I 24, 3, 1).

⁴⁹ *Divinae institutiones* VI 10, 7; *De officio Dei* XIX 3. In both places in the same wording as in Modrzewski.

⁵⁰ Cf. SINKO, *Polski Anti-Lukrecyusz* (n. 11), pp. 7 ff.

grant him in keeping with his traditional Christian orthodoxy: “The world is not created for human beings”. But the interesting thing is how this statement of Lucretius⁵¹ was here exploited in the interest of Christianity itself, whose believers could rightly ask: if God’s providence guards the world, why do so many misfortunes befall human beings? Dantyszczek asserted the intervention of God’s will in the functioning of the world, but he was not able to give sufficient evidence for this, mentioning only its positive action in the life of human beings at the individual level⁵². Kochanowski gives a reply that is more advantageous for Christianity: God created the world not for human beings, but for Himself, for His own pleasure in an excellent work worthy of its Creator, and in which the fitting position of the human being is that of servant, not that of the master for whom the world was to have been created⁵³.

In Kochanowski, therefore, the Creator-God, his excellent work, the duality of human nature, the immortal soul and its reward or condemnation after death remain, and only the responsibility for the afflictions of nature, which spoil earthly happiness for human beings, has been lifted from the shoulders of divine providence.

We must also remark that in the Latin works of Kochanowski (who spoke about “*Latii lumen Lucretius orbis*”) the impact of Lucretius’ language, style and thought is strangely inconspicuous. What we have are just a few verbal echoes⁵⁴, only seldom an affinity of ideas.

Here it is worth remembering e.g. *Elegy* III 17, 45 f., where the Epicurean *clinamen*, i.e. the swerve or deflection in motion of atoms as the mechanistic causal forces in the creation of the phenomena of nature, has been replaced by the force of love, by Amor. The poet writes:

⁵¹ Lucr. V 156 f.: “Dicere porro hominum causa voluisse parare/ praeclaram mundi naturam [...] desipere est”.

⁵² As in the life of Sigismund von Herberstein, who, in his role as ambassador of the Holy Roman Emperor returned successfully “from a voyage to Moscow full of adventure and dangers”; cf. S. SKIMINA, *Twórczość poetycka Jana Dantyszka*, Kraków 1948, p. 100.

⁵³ In Hymn 4 of the *Fragments*, Kochanowski opposes similar human reproaches to the particular care of God over human beings; cf. Jan Kochanowski, *Dzieła polskie*, ed. J. KRZYŻANOWSKI, vol. II, Warszawa 1969, p. 34.

⁵⁴ Perhaps then, the *caelituum* in *Eleg.* I 2, 20, which may be analogical to Lucretius’ *alituum* (II 928; V 801, 1039, 1078; VI 1216, ed. MARTIN). But the form *alituum* is also found in Vergil (*Aen.* VIII 27), in Statius (*Silvae* I 2, 184) and in Claudian, Lactantius and others; similarly *canum vis* in the hexameter clausula of *Eleg.* I 13, 25 is found in Lucretius (IV 681, VI 1222, ed. MARTIN), but also in Vergil (*Aen.* IV 132), Statius (*Theb.* I 625: *canum vim*) and others. Finally, therefore, a clear borrowing from Lucretius in the Latin works of Kochanowski can be attested only in a few expressions in *Eleg.* IV 3. Cf. Ioannis Cochanovii *Carmina Latina*, emend. J. PRZYBOROWSKI, Varsaviae 1884. – We could also expect the influence of the lexicon of Lucretius in Kochanowski’s verses that complete the Ciceronian *Aratea*. But even here the author, limited by the Greek text of Aratus, disappoints us and we can only infer here and there some echo of Lucretius, e.g., in v. 75: “quo nomine sit vocitanda”; Lucr. VI 298: “quem patrio vocitamus nomine fulmen”. Cf. the edition of PRZYBOROWSKI, pp. 375 f.

It is this god, who tore apart the darkness of endless night and from ancient chaos brought forth shapes; who brought the the battling seeds of things into a state of friendship and created the work of the world, worthy of being known. After penetrating all elements of nature, he alone upholds all creatures in endless succession.

In any case, the genesis and function of this train of thought in the *Elegy* is only explained by the context. This is a love-elegy, in which the poet condemns the greed of a maiden who preferring gold to love, sells her love although it is after all the highest creative power in nature. Let us add: just as Venus is in the introduction to the first book of Lucretius' work.

In this elegy we also perceive a little of the spirit of Lucretius' poetry. A little, because overall few traces of the mood and style of the Roman poet remain in the Latin works of Kochanowski. Another point is that at the very outset, *Eleg.* I 1, our poet observes the he has been made a poet by love.

Equally fainter, even perhaps more elusive traces of the knowledge of Lucretius or Epicurean thought in general have been left by Kochanowski in his Polish works. His well known hymn about Divine Providence "What do you want from us, Lord, for your generous gifts" (Hymn 25, *Hymns*)⁵⁵ is aimed against Epicurean ideas of the gods, and is echoed by Hymn 5 of the *Fragments* which, with equally open Christian avowal challenges the Epicurean notion of the unconcern of the gods: "Lord, how greatly err those who judge you to be careless, who think that you do wish to care for almost nothing. I do not know what else is necessary: against them the heavens witness and the stars...", etc.⁵⁶

Elsewhere (*Threnodies* 19, 65 ff.), basing himself on the hedonistic and ataractic ideas of the gods living in the *intermundia*, Kochanowski constructs his own imaginings about the life of the saved souls in heaven: "In heaven true delights, eternal delights, free from all decrees and secure: here no worries rule, here work is not known, here unhappiness, calamity has no place...", etc.⁵⁷

It is clear that he who accepts a life in heaven must reject the mortality of the soul. In the same poem (lines 25 ff.), the author does this in the words:

And so you consider us dead and lost and that for us the sun has been extinguished for ever? And we, truly, are living a life that has gained as much importance as the spirit is more noble than this gross body. Earth returns to earth, but how can the heaven-granted spirit be lost and not be summoned back to its proper abode?

Similarly, the poet presents the problem of the fear of death in a non-Epicurean fashion: evil people fear death, and rightly so, but it is not right for a good person to fear death. Thus it is not the belief in the mortality of the soul which

⁵⁵ Jan Kochanowski, *Dziela polskie*, vol. I, p. 299.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, vol. II, p. 35.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 81.

frees us from the fear of death, but a virtuous life. The poet assures us (Hymn 24, *Fragments*)⁵⁸ that “Heaven is the reward for virtue...”.

All of the above examples show us that, although Lucretius was known to Kochanowski, he was not among the authors that Kochanowski found useful in his manner of thinking or for his writer’s craft. Epicurean physics did not suit his philosophy which was anchored deeply in religious and traditional concepts, and Epicurean ethics did not suit his more stoic rather than hedonistic practical philosophy. He learned more from Cicero and also from Horace than from Lucretius⁵⁹.

From among other poets, let us also turn our attention to Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski (1595–1640), who, in his lectures on poetics which he most probably wrote between 1619 and 1626⁶⁰, quotes Lucretius as an example not of a poet, but at most a philosopher of nature, just as he considers Vergil in the *Georgics* to be at most a man skilled in the running of a farm, or Manilius as an astronomer, not a poet⁶¹. Moreover, in his lecture on dactylic hexameter, he gives an example from Lucretius II 76 of a four-syllable word at the end of the verse as a bad conclusion to hexameter verse: “augescunt aliae gentes, aliae minuuntur”, and, for another reason, a quote from Lucretius II 343: “squamigerum pecudes”, a phrase which also appears in II 1083. He does not mention Lucretius by name with either of these quotes⁶², but this is what he also does in the case of other poets, where the crux of the matter lies not in the author, but in his poetic art.

Except for these quotes from Lucretius which are given only for formal exemplification, Sarbiewski once addressed the content of Epicurean teachings. Writing about the role of ethics in poetry, he saw in the “conversation of the feasters in the *Odyssey*” the expression of Epicurean ethical thought, as in other places he saw expressions of Stoic or Peripatetic ethics⁶³.

With such consideration of Epicureism and Lucretius in Sarbiewski’s scholarly writings⁶⁴, we could expect some inspirations in his *Hymns* to also be more

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 56.

⁵⁹ Cf. also S. SCHNEIDER, *Lukrecyus i Horacy a “Treny” Kochanowskiego*, *Eos* X 1904, pp. 72 ff., where the author, encouraged by the comments of KALLENBACH, sees an overly pronounced influence of Lucretius in the *Threnodies* of Kochanowski.

⁶⁰ M.K. Sarbiewski, *De perfecta poesi*, ed. S. SKIMINA, Wrocław 1954, p. V.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 42 (21) I 4; 494 (247) IX 9.

⁶² M.K. Sarbiewski, *Praecepta poetica*, ed. S. SKIMINA, Wrocław–Kraków 1958, pp. 161, 4 and 174, 14.

⁶³ *De perfecta poesi* (n. 60), pp. 181, 19 f.

⁶⁴ It is true that in these works we are dealing with both learning and quotations that are undoubtedly taken from reciprocal sources, as in the great mythological work of Sarbiewski entitled *Dii gentium* (ed. K. STAWECKA, Wrocław 1972), written about 1627, where the author also borrows references to Lucretius from his source, in this case *Natalis Comes*; cf. p. 390, n. 20; p. 406 and nn. 42 and 43; also p. 122 and n. 83.

clearly drawn from Lucretius. This Jesuit professor, however, who, in the years 1622–1626 did not just study theology in Italy but also became acquainted with the humanistic content of what he was studying, based his own poetry on the examples of Horace and Catullus, longed to become a Latin Pindar in Poland, and, in his literary works, addressed historical, panegyric, moral, religious but not philosophical topics. If ever he fell into philosophical thinking, he always heard the voice of Sacred Scripture, Stoic or even Platonic ideas more easily than he would permit the words Epicurus or Lucretius to break through. Thus he did not draw on Lucretius, not even on his purely poetic devices. Nor is he ever drawn into polemic with him.

In the end, therefore, this poet, excellent in form particularly in the work published during his life, but not profound in content, proves completely disappointing to our topical expectations.