

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

TRANSCENDING BODY: LUCRETIUS, WHITMAN, AND THE ATOMS IN BETWEEN

JESSICA MYERS
SPRING 2015

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for a baccalaureate degree
in English
with honors in English

Reviewed and approved* by the following:

John Marsh
Associate Professor of English
Thesis Supervisor

Marcy North
Associate Professor of English
Honors Adviser

* Signatures are on file in the Schreyer Honors College.

ABSTRACT

Within the poetry of Lucretius and Whitman, both the small and large complexities of the universe are divulged and elaborated. Respectively poets from Ancient Rome and nineteenth-century America, their expansive treatises, epic poems in their own right, aim to fully understand the universe and grasp its core concepts: atomic makeup and interconnectivity, the interplay of the sexes, and death and the afterlife. Although these poets are separated by several seas and almost two thousand years, the rhetoric and ideologies of their poems are astoundingly similar, suggesting that the atomic basis of the universe allows for an intertwining of every living being, stretching into the infinite past and future.

Both poems, in addition to speaking poetically of the eternal embracing and fecundity of the universe, were composed during comparative historical moments of political turbulence and societal transformations. Lucretius wrote *De Rerum Natura* right as the downfall of the Roman Republic was on the verge of giving way to the Roman Empire; Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* appeared in 1855, the product of a newly founded America, a country that was still finding its footing and experiencing social fracture amid the issue of slavery. Though an unlikely pairing, these two poets and their respective *magna opera* (*great works*) share a similar set of beliefs that are realized in the scopes of two separate cultures and eras, and ultimately these two independent poems are entwined within the same poetic soul — just as their poets are interwoven by the eternal, unending atoms of the universe.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii.
Preface.....	iv.
Chapter I: The Equilibrium and Interconnectedness of the Universe.....	1
The Principles of the Atom	2
The Atom, the Void, and the Balance	5
Balance of Physical and Ethereal Interconnectedness	10
Chapter II: Sensuality, the Sexes, and the Essence of Love	17
The Role of God(s) Within Passion	18
Sexuality, and the Sensual Nature of All Things	24
Male and Female: The Union and the Clash.....	27
Chapter III: The Soul, and Its Convergence with Death and the Afterlife	34
The Composition of the Soul	35
The Soul, and Its Potential Immortality	37
Death Is Not To Be Feared.....	42
Conclusion: “If you want me again, look for me under your bootsoles.”	52
BIBLIOGRAPHY	55

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To the CURIAS Scholarship, and particularly to Sarah Salter and Sean Goudie, who taught me how to be an archivist, and who established within me a desire for discovery and a love of investigation.

To the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, which allowed me to leaf through letters that Whitman himself wrote. If it weren't for your special collection, I would have never known that Mark Twain wrote to Whitman the most beautiful birthday letter I've ever read.

To Professor Marsh, who took on my project when I had barely an inkling of what was to come, and who effortlessly guided me through the process of writing a thesis. From one Whitman lover to another — thank you.

To Dave, because you are my rock, and you are also my lobster.

To my parents, I will forever love you for being my biggest fans. You mean the world to me.

Lastly, to Walt Whitman, who is reading this in another lifetime, is witnessing the growth of his everlasting poetic soul, and is content.

Preface

In an undated manuscript found in the rare books library at Yale, tucked amid nineteenth-century letters and age-stained journals, live various unpublished literary thoughts of Walt Whitman that he collectively titled, “Poetry of the Future.” In these ruminations, Whitman discusses not only the movement of poetry within the advancement of civilization, but also the ideal poet, one that stands out among the rest. “As that individual becomes truly great who understands well that he is but a part of the divine, eternal scheme [...] so these Nations, so The United States, may only become the greatest and most continuous by understanding well the harmonious relations over all the globe, with Nature, Humanity, and History.”¹ For Whitman, the work of a poet is not to simply describe and elaborate, but to connect his or her writings with the broader scheme of nature, the world, the universe — all things. This “divine individual” should draw references from those who came before, as well as grasp the contemporary situating of his or her place within the universe. Whitman, a transcendentalist poet of self-realization and global interconnectivity, certainly aspires to this goal, aiming to be the Poet of his time.

Nearly two thousand years prior to Whitman’s first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, an ancient Roman poet Lucretius was embarking on a similar poetic treatise, one of explicating the inner-workings of the universe. Lucretius lived many centuries before Whitman, and while much is known about Whitman’s life, the same cannot be said for Lucretius — and yet, both poets almost mirror one another, sharing foundations of both poetic content and context. Although Whitman continued to write new works throughout his lifetime, *Leaves of Grass* is consistently seen as his

¹ Manuscript, “Poetry of the Future” by Walt Whitman, undated, box 3, folder 113, YCAL MSS 202, Walt Whitman Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

life's achievement, a poetic autobiography. Similarly, Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura* (*On the Nature of Things*) is Lucretius's expansive and sole surviving triumph. "Since there is no trace of [Lucretius] having written anything else, it may have been a lifetime's work, composed over a decade more," proposes Richard Jenkyns.² Dedicated to the craft of poetry, both men were striving to create the ideal poem, one that encapsulated the universe in its grasp. Whitman was constantly rethinking and revising his phrases and poem's structure, publishing eight editions of *Leaves of Grass* before finally completing it in the ninth edition, only several months prior to his death. While the historical details surrounding Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura* are rather obscure, the fact that it is his only known work and was left unfinished implies that he, like Whitman, took great care to restructure and refine his *magnus opus*.

In their contemplations of the universe and theories of time, both Lucretius and Whitman focus on three key facets: atomic and intangible interconnectedness of the universe; sensuality, sexual intimacy, and the notion of romance; and the spirit, the soul, and the roles of death and immortality. It is remarkable that, although divided both temporally and spatially, these poems are capable of having a conversation with one another, pondering similar notions and attempting to verbally express the happenings of the universe. With the exception of their views of romantic love and marriage, and the potentiality of immortality, Lucretius and Whitman are almost parallel, equals in the discussion of life. However, the stretch from ancient Rome to nineteenth-century America, the separation of an Epicurean philosopher and a transcendentalist poet, is a broad one. Although scholars have conducted studies on Whitman's inspiration from other ancient Greek and Roman poets, none have delved quite so deeply into the direct connection

² Richard Jenkyns, Introduction to *De Rerum Natura* by A. E. Stallings (London: Penguin, 2007), ix.

with Lucretius. Aside from Whitman mentioning Lucretius once, briefly, in his *Democratic Vistas*, the line drawn between these two poets could appear thin and unsubstantiated.

The primary and strongest basis for juxtaposition of Whitman and Lucretius is found, beyond their shared vision of the universe, in the comparative historical context of both poets. Although separated by thousands of miles and hundreds of years, the social and political circumstances of Lucretius's Rome and Whitman's America were strikingly similar, both undergoing vast and unprecedented changes. Although his exact dates of birth and death are not known, Lucretius is thought to have lived from around 100 BCE to 55 BCE. This time frame places him squarely in the turbulent transitional period between the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire, one rife with restless citizens and crippling dictatorships. There existed a divide between several hierarchical social groups who aimed to achieve political status in very different ways, and out of this tumultuous mess came the First Triumvirate, only the beginnings of which Lucretius would have been able to witness. Compare this to the environment in which Whitman is composing his *Leaves of Grass*: the year 1855, when a newly birthed America, fresh on the heels of its own independence, is striving to find its footing in its new homeland. Yet with the Civil War being pivotal in Whitman's poetry and his own family — his brother, George, enlisted in the Union army — for him, the historical context includes its own share of political and societal chaos and change. The republics of both Rome and America were in peril, and at the heart of these uncertain and crumbling foundations stood Lucretius and Whitman.

Perhaps it is in the wake of a shifting dynamic, when the dimensions of an entire nation's infrastructure are churning with change and struggling toward growth, that a poet's writings are filled with thoughts of the universe at its barest essentials, and the beginnings and endings of life. Perhaps there is something to be said about the way in which the mind tends to contemplate the

grand, comprehensive notions of existence, in the face of such paramount political and social transformations. This is what draws Lucretius and Whitman together: both poets, living in the midst of nations in progress, turned toward the universe, its ever-reaching and infinite grasp, and the human situation within it. Lucretius attempted to locate the tranquility amid the cultural chaos; Whitman believed his poetry would be America's salvation from it. In their separate moments in time, it is as though both Lucretius and Whitman took to poetry, putting their roles — and the role of all individuals — on paper.

In Whitman's own words, he wanted *Leaves of Grass* to speak of "the ripening of the Nineteenth Century, the thought and fact and radiation of individuality of America, the Secession War, and showing Democratic conditions supplanting the very thing that insults them, or impedes their aggregate way."³ The politically charged and socially budding atmosphere surrounding Whitman's life was as important for him to capture as his own thoughts on human life and the universe — because they are utterly intertwined. Personal beliefs align with the contemporary undercurrent of the community; both Lucretius and Whitman rely on the private lives of people around them, the public state of affairs, and the intimations of a divinity and an eternity to create an amalgamation of the universe. Both poets encapsulate their respective moments in time, capture the feeling of a nation, and project the part of the individual within the wide sphere of the perpetual universe. The relationship between Lucretius and Whitman, as well as the intersection of their works, is one that traverses centuries and joins two epic poems in a uniquely independent but utterly analogous discussion of the universe and all of its intricacies.

³ Manuscript, "An Old Man's Rejoinder" by Walt Whitman, Aug. 4, 1890, box 3, folder 112, YCAL MSS 202, Walt Whitman Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Chapter I:

The Equilibrium and Interconnectedness of the Universe

*For all that can decay,
Devoured by the ages, should by now have passed away.
But if, in all the span of days gone by, something has stayed,
The stuff that makes the universe, with which it is re-made,
These particles perforce are indestructible. Therefore
Nothing can be reduced to nothing...
— Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*⁴*

*There was never any more inception than there is now,
Nor any more youth or age than there is now;
And will never be any more perfection than there is now,
Nor any more heaven or hell than there is now.
Urge and urge and urge,
Always the procreant urge of the world.
— Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself”⁵*

As Lucretius and Walt Whitman embark on their respective poetic journeys, both aspire toward similar goals: to explain the origin and end of the universe, and to examine, between those two points, the cycles of life and death on the earth. These intentions are all-encompassing and multifaceted, and it becomes clear that, for both poets, there is a sense of interconnectedness between the components of the universe. It would be almost impossible to explain the intricacies of the universe and its inhabitants without revealing an overarching connection between all things, living and not. This interweaving exists for Lucretius in the atoms that compose everything; for Whitman, the prevailing foundation of atoms connects all things, both physically and spiritually.

⁴ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, trans. A. E. Stallings (London: Penguin, 2007), 10.

⁵ Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Brooklyn, 1855), 14.

Atoms are the basis of all universal things. Lucretius spends the entirety of Book I of *De Rerum Natura* elucidating the inner-workings of the atom, its properties, and its role within the greater world. The grand linking throughout the universe comes as a result of the single, foundational unit of the atom: the concepts of universal balance, interconnectedness, and ceaselessness are each a result of the atom, as well as inexplicably tied to one another because of the atom.

As both Lucretius and Whitman set out to demystify the ways of the universe, common themes of time, matter, and interconnectedness are at play throughout both poems. Where Lucretius focuses on and defines the atom in order to provide a concrete basis of understanding for the reader and to prove the atom's conceptual plausibility, Whitman has already assumed the atom to be true. All of the atom's characteristics that Lucretius suggests have been accepted and are at play in Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. Because of this, Whitman simply expands upon the basis of the atom. Its more empirical aspects having been implemented by Lucretius, the world of Whitman is intertwined and unending in the physical manner of the atom, and in the spiritual connotation suggested by the infinite atom's existence. Because there are infinite atoms, existing endlessly and creating every single thing, there must exist for Whitman an unending connection between all beings. Just as atoms create tangible things but cannot be seen individually, so too do they support an intangible, eternal relationship between all living things and all things that have lived before.

The Principles of the Atom

In order to explicate the universe and all of its working parts, the universe must first be broken down into its simplest, most comprehensible elements: atoms. Lucretius, in his era of first

century BCE, qualified as a philosopher in its many contexts; he mused on the ways of the world, theorizing and observing, and as a result *De Rerum Natura* is a long treatise, emphasized poetically but concerned with the logic of the earth. In this way, he was a quasi-scientist. He was unable to conduct modern-day investigations and did not have access to ample results in order to prove theories. “Scientific truth must be proved by research and experiment,” suggests Rosamund Deutsch; “the ancient thinkers had only their senses and genius on which to rely.”⁶ However, insufficient as his resources may have been, he had a goal in mind that remains relevant to scientists today: to explain the universe and everything within it.

His conclusion is that the basis of all things is the atom — indeed not far from actuality — and this conclusion, presented in the first book of his poem, is distinctly Epicurean in nature. According to Marshall Blume, Epicurus, a Greek philosopher who lived in the fourth and third centuries BCE, intended to “prove that matter is infinite, that void is infinite, and that the universe is infinite.”⁷ Lucretius was undoubtedly well read of Epicurus and agreed with his theories; he refers to his predecessor several times within his poem, once notably within the first 75 lines. “The vital force / Of his intelligence prevailed,” Lucretius writes of Epicurus, “and he advanced his course / Far past the blazing bulwarks of the world, and roamed the whole / Immeasurable Cosmos in his mind and in his soul.”⁸ Following in the footsteps of Epicurus, Lucretius sets out to prove the same notions of atomic foundation and the interplay of matter and non-matter.

In order to introduce the necessity of eternal atoms and void, Lucretius first provides the basis for their existence. “This dread, these shadows of the mind,” he suggests, must be

⁶ Rosamund E. Deutsch, “The Ancient and Modern Atom,” *The Classical Journal* 41 (1945): 102.

⁷ Marshall E. Blume, “Infinity in Epicurean Philosophy,” *The Classical Journal* 60 (1965): 174.

⁸ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 5.

illuminated and invalidated not by physical light or the heavenly light of gods, “but by observing Nature and her laws.”⁹ Lucretius acknowledges that men often fear worldly happenings because they are unfathomable, and thus such men seek to explain them using “powers divine.”¹⁰ However, Lucretius immediately dismisses the possible role of the supernatural and celestial beings as the reason for all earthly occurrences. Such gods and heavenly beings are prone to biases and pandemonium, and oftentimes “so potent was Religion in persuading to do wrong.”¹¹ Such beliefs cannot uphold an infinite and repetitive scale of the universe; as S. I. Vavilov, a Soviet physicist and writer, proposes, “the entire complex of things is then ‘physically’ explained.”¹²

In support of a tangible explanation of matter and existence, as opposed to a more divine one, Lucretius proposes two absolute principles. The first is: “Nothing can emerge from nothing.”¹³ This suggests that there must exist an order throughout the universe, an order that guides the creation and destruction of all things. For if no order were to exist, then nothing would be confined to its usual expectation: “People could pop out of the sea,” or the “same tree would not always grow the same fruit.”¹⁴ Because this is clearly not the case — one can always count on an apple tree to grow apples, and on animals to give birth to their own young — then an order must exist, regulated by some smaller, foundational particles. Lucretius argues that everything has its time and its place “because there is a separate power / In distinct things.”¹⁵ Everything must come from something, lest it confuse the natural order of the world.

⁹ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 7.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 6.

¹² S. I. Vavilov, “Lucretius’ Physics,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 9 (1948): 23.

¹³ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 9.

¹⁴ Ibid., 8.

¹⁵ Ibid.

The second principle of all matter corresponds with the first: “Nature does not render anything to naught.”¹⁶ Just as nothing can come from nothing, nothing can turn into nothing; having been borne from the primary particles, everything will reduce back into such particles. This is known today as the conservation of mass, and “is still one of the basic principles of modern science,” according to Deutsch.¹⁷ Lucretius uses this concept of conservation to confirm that matter, though it is created and it will perish, is never fully reduced into nothing. In this way, matter is indestructible, and he implies that it is thus reused by nature to promulgate the creation of new things. This is Lucretius’s basis for atoms: they are the primary particles, nature’s own building blocks, by means of which all things in the universe arise; by which all things are uniformly connected; and into which all things will divide.

The Atom, the Void, and the Balance

Atoms, the groundwork of all substance and matter, are necessary for the routine of the universe. As Lucretius has suggested with his principles and use of material logic, “each thing is made of atoms [...] until it meets a force that’s able to divide / It with a blow.”¹⁸ These particles, “primal and indivisible,” are “a pure and simple solidness [...] cohering tightly in a mass.”¹⁹ Such atoms, dense and packed, assemble to form solid shapes, such as a tree or a table. Lucretius allows atoms to assume various qualities so as to create all possible matter; for example, as Deutsch points out, “fluids are composed of smooth and rounded atoms.”²⁰ However, it is innately clear that atoms are required to form all areas of material; it is simply the quality of the

¹⁶ Ibid., 9.

¹⁷ Deutsch, “Modern Atom,” 99.

¹⁸ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 9.

¹⁹ Ibid., 20.

²⁰ Deutsch, “Modern Atom,” 99.

individual atoms that affects the texture of the produced matter, while the atoms must still remain “in tight array.”²¹

In opposition to this notion of closely packed atoms creating matter, the universe itself “is not one solid mass, all tightly packed.”²² Thus there must exist a void alongside the atom — empty space alongside matter. The empty space allows room into and from which matter can freely move, while matter is a necessary component to balance the void. The two work and act harmoniously, both necessary for the structure and movement of the universe. However, it is crucial to clarify that atoms and the void do not exist as entirely separate entities from one another, but instead they both are essences of all things.

Lucretius makes it very clear that atoms themselves cannot be inundated with any void; an atom is the smallest possible particle of matter, and thus is indivisible. However, matter as a compound form of multiple atoms must contain some sort of empty space, as void is necessary for movement and for change. For if there existed no void within matter, then “where can scaly fishes swim if water won’t give place?”²³ The world cannot be entirely constructed out of assembled singularities of matter, “since that would make motion impossible,” Vavilov suggests.²⁴ In addition, the elements would be rendered moot: for if no void whatsoever existed within solid matter, nothing would be affected by the natural elements, as there would be no crevices or gaps to fill. Nothing would be wet, nor warmed. Void is required for change and growth to exist within matter, and thus a balance between the two is undeniable.

It is with these two fundamentals, atoms and the void, that Lucretius confirms his definitive view of the cosmos: “Space is unbounded; the universe is infinite,” Vavilov proposes.

²¹ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 20.

²² *Ibid.*, 13.

²³ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁴ Vavilov, “Lucretius’ Physics,” 25.

“And matter in space is infinite as well.”²⁵ Not only does Lucretius suggest that atoms and the void exist unendingly — for all things they “knit together, loosely or tightly, from the ties / Of everlasting matter” — but also that both matter and space are infinite in their summation.²⁶ The first assertion Lucretius makes is that the universe itself is infinite in space and in time. “The universe must therefore have no limits in its sweep / In all directions,” he writes, suggesting that because there is simply nothing “beyond the universe,” then it does not have an edge, and thus displays no boundaries.²⁷ If all of space were to exist within the confinements of boundaries and limits, then eventually all matter “would have sifted from every side down to the floor / Of the universe.”²⁸ As ages would progress and advance, so would this supply of atomic matter, and at some end the supply would grow tired and useless, having exhausted its existence on the basis of the universe’s restricted perimeter.

If there exists a margin on space, then there must exist a corresponding margin on the activity of atoms and of void. This cannot be the case, as atoms and void are constantly being reused and recycled by nature, for the sake of progression. Thus, in addition to the infinity of space, “there must exist an infinite supply of matter,” Blume says.²⁹ Should there be a finite supply of atoms, the universe would very well be situated in a limited state of being: nothing could come about unless provided the required atoms, and because the atoms themselves are divided into types and classes, only a certain number of beings may be produced from combinations of any given atom. The universe is vast and unending, and in order for it to progress and grow from its original primordial state to its current one, it must be supported by a “supply / Of matter that could rise up from the Infinite, whereby / All that has been lost can in

²⁵ Ibid., 25-26.

²⁶ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 10.

²⁷ Ibid., 31.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Blume, “Infinity,” 175.

due season be replaced.”³⁰ It is not as though, once an animal is pregnant, she must wait for the death of a current one in order to give birth to the new. Although it is true that atoms are reused and recycled, the creation of new relying upon destruction of old, these atoms must be infinite so that all things can grow in their own time. Thus “atoms are supplied and ever flit, / Stirred up ceaselessly, out of the bottomless Infinite.”³¹ And, in concordance with an infinite and endless reservoir of atoms, the void must also be an eternal and limitless entity. “Void is enmeshed in things, and is where movement gets its start.”³² Thus matter and void, existing as inextricable essences of all things, are both infinite and ceaseless, creating new material from the destruction of the past and forever building and breaking down the beings of the uninterrupted universe.

It is in this resolution of the basic essences, and with this eternal structure of the universe, that Whitman expands upon the material nature of balance and explores its potential immaterial transcendence. Whitman, a poet both modern and metaphysical, uses the Lucretian view of atoms and the void as the philosophy for his own view of the world and how it and everything within it connects. Whitman will ultimately build upon these basic notions, speaking to an intangible, spiritual connectedness that is brought about by the physical materiality of atoms. However, this is not to say that Whitman does not explicitly discuss the atom.

Within the first five lines of the whole of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman speaks on the subject verbatim. “Song of Myself”^{*} begins: “I celebrate myself, / And what I assume you shall assume, / For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.”³³ From the very start, the poem exudes a reality that is fluctuating and balancing, the core of which is a “transmutation of

³⁰ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 33.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

³² *Ibid.*, 14.

^{*} When referring to poem titles in Whitman’s first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, the title that Whitman ultimately gave to each section will be used, as opposed to first edition untitled references.

³³ Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 13.

an improperly isolated unitary self into a more wholesome fluid and dialogic self,” suggests William McMahon, “ambiguously positioned partly in non-self and in others.”³⁴ For Whitman, the atom provides not only a foundation upon which all physical things thrive, but also upon which all intangible, transcendent facets are comprised. This opens up the sphere of the physical form, allowing it to connect with a more overarching, spiritual realm, and allowing all humans to connect with one another, throughout past, present, and future. Just as the meeting of matter and void allows an exchanging of materiality and emptiness, so too does this meeting provide a basis of balance, within all universal things, made of atoms and of emptiness.

Nature is perhaps the best context in which to view this infinite, expansive balance of all things. Both poets incorporate nature into this view of earthly balance, order, and progression, though each one does so with a slightly varying intent. In *De Rerum Natura*, Lucretius is much like Whitman in that he takes time to compose natural imagery, in the format of lists, in order to support his own points. For example, seeking to explain that there are many things that we cannot see but that still certainly exist, Lucretius lists off the invisible but prevalent winds, the sun as it dries damp cloth, and the slow but inevitable wearing away of stone when it is constantly touched by water.³⁵ For Lucretius, nature exemplifies constancy necessary to support his discussion of atoms and their essences. However, his discussion of nature extends past simply mentioning it: in his world, atoms are “those seeds that abide / Forever,” and it is “Nature the Creator” who regulates the progression of the world.³⁶ Lucretius uses natural language to refer to the foundation of the universe. Atoms act as the seeds of the world, required for production and an integral part of all beings; they are also small, sparse, and as seeds can be spread with the

³⁴ William E. McMahon, “Grass and Its Mate in ‘Song of Myself,’” *South Atlantic Review* 51 (1986): 42.

³⁵ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 12.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 9, 21.

wind, so too are atoms in constant motion. Nature is the overarching creator of all things, is responsible for the world's cyclical disposition, and thus joins together all under its authority.

Nature is also a fundamental focus of *Leaves of Grass*, a paramount exemplar of balance and order. In "Song of Myself," Whitman writes: "Seasons pursuing each other the indescribable crowd is gathered, / It is the Fourth of July . . . what salutes of cannons and small arms! / Seasons pursuing each other the plougher ploughs and the mower mows and the wintergrain falls in the ground."³⁷ These two lines, amid a long list of various locations and persons and snapshots of lives, express the endless balance and exchange. In the first line, it is the middle of summer, an exuberant celebration of independence and warmth; by the next line, winter has fallen, and the repetition of words creates a monotonous tone. The drudgery of wintertime opposes the lighthearted tone of summer, and in this way the seasons balance one another out, exchanging light for dark and excitement for tedium. The two seasons are connected in makeup and identity, but separated in essence, in tone — and this is perhaps the crux of Whitman's belief in atoms and universal balance.

Balance of Physical and Ethereal Interconnectedness

For Whitman, there exists a distinct connection between the physical realm and the spiritual one. If the body is made of atoms, and the mind and soul inhabit the body, then they too are explicitly intertwined with atoms. In this way, there is an incontrovertible balance within the human form: body, mind, and spirit are all simultaneously interwoven by atoms and communicating to one another. In addition, because atoms are eternal particles of the earth, constantly in use and reuse, then they must be shared among all in the universe. The atoms that

³⁷ Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 23.

inhabit you today are not yours alone; they once belonged to another person or creature or thing, and then to something else before. These are immortal and unchanging particles, surviving the span of the universe and continually fitting somewhere in between creation and death. In *Leaves of Grass*, the balance of atoms sees their corporeality meeting their perpetual, omnipresent existence. Thus Whitman projects “a kind of spiritually centered atomism,” according to McMahon, and it is with this basis that his broad and embracing spirituality connects him with all others, in all times and places.³⁸

Throughout *Leaves of Grass*, the speaker seems to experience and portray a spiritual awakening. The speaker’s connection with all others is immediate and imperative: “What I assume you shall assume,” Whitman writes, and it appears as though he is speaking to the reader him- or herself. As Jorge Luis Borges, an Argentinian writer, poet, and essayist suggests, “Now, in this way, there is a relationship between Whitman and the reader.”³⁹ This line, though shorter and somewhat introductory, provides a key basis for several meaningful sub-relationships that underscore the entire book of poetry: that a personal connection can cross the planes of spoken and verbal, and can also span across separations of time and space. Although Whitman may have written this over 150 years ago, penning the poem in some small room in Brooklyn, you may be reading it, now, displaced by states and centuries. This notion is examined further when the speaker declares himself as a voice of all persons, being so interconnected with everyone:

Through me many long dumb voices,
 Voices of the interminable generations of slaves,
 Voices of prostitutes and of deformed persons,
 Voices of the diseased and despairing, and of thieves and dwarfs,
 Voices of cycles of preparation and accretion,
 And of the threads that connect the stars—and of wombs, and of the fatherstuff,
 And of the rights of them the others are down upon,
 Of the trivial and flat and foolish and despised,

³⁸ McMahon, “Grass and Its Mate,” 43.

³⁹ Jorge Luis Borges, “Walt Whitman: Man and Myth,” *Critical Inquiry* 1 (1975): 714.

Of fog in the air and beetles rolling balls of dung.

Through me forbidden voices,
Voices of sexes and lusts voices veiled, and I remove the veil,
Voices indecent by me clarified and transfigured.
I do not press my finger across my mouth...⁴⁰

These voices, all differing in qualities and in owners, are placed alongside each other and lack any distinction. In this way, all voices are simultaneously connected with a verbal identity, but each is unique in its own tone and manner. Just as the singular, uniform atom creates myriad shapes and beings, so does each eternal voice contribute toward Whitman's own. He is the interconnecting link "in a most complex network," Robert Sholnick writes, "one which extends back to the origins of time, outward to the furthest dimensions of space, and laterally to other human beings, particularly the dispossessed, all those who have been denied a voice of their own."⁴¹

Whitman is suggesting a sort of monumental connection amid every thing that has ever, will ever, or currently thrives within the world. As atoms bond all things physically, they also emit a bond of the spiritual realm. For if "every atom belonging to [Whitman] as good belongs to you," then Whitman shares a deep, integral bond with every single atomic thing — and so do we.⁴² Lucretius's more observant, Epicurean foundation of atomic matter and physical infinity finds an ethereal soul in Whitman's world, so that everything in the universe touches all other things in some fashion.

Yet Lucretius, though dedicated to the more empirical and rational side of the dichotomy of things intertwining, is not far removed from the suggestion of an infinite spiritual

⁴⁰ Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 29.

⁴¹ Robert J. Sholnick, "'The Password Primeval': Whitman's Use of Science in 'Song of Myself,'" *Studies in the American Renaissance* (1986): 403.

⁴² Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 13.

connectivity. In further discussion of atoms and their role in the universe, Lucretius writes, “Moreover, nothing in creation is the only one. / Nothing is born unique, to grow up, by itself, alone.”⁴³ Having already defined atoms as being committed to one form for eternity — such as the atoms that create humans will always be renewed by nature to create more humans — this concept is not surprising, and one of the largest ones that separates him from Whitman. Lucretius’s atoms are confined to their set destiny, and fulfill their duties eternally; Whitman’s atoms are simply of the earth, the bodily atoms relegated to any physical form on the earth, and thus have a sort of independence and freedom.

For Lucretius, certainly, within the wide expanse of the universe, all things must have some match, fit into some category. However, this quotation seems eerily similar to excerpts from a passage in Whitman’s “Song of Myself”: “These are the thoughts of all men in all ages and lands, they are not original with me, / If they are not yours as much as mine they are nothing or next to nothing.”⁴⁴ Lucretius states that nothing in creation can be on its own, and has already asserted that creation includes all forms of nature and atoms. Thus, because human thought and activity can be included in the large scope of creation, the former quotation from *De Rerum Natura* opens an interesting dialogue about the plausibility of shared thought and inner essence. Whitman’s declaration that his own “original” thoughts have already acted within the minds of all men to come before him emphasizes Lucretius’s belief that nothing is born entirely unique. Atoms are eternally shared, and, for Whitman and perhaps even Lucretius, this indicates an eternal sharing of spirituality.

Lucretius, in another statement that may correspond with Whitman’s all-encompassing spiritual identity, defines the notion of time in terms of corporeality. The passage, though never

⁴³ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 68.

⁴⁴ Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 24.

fully realized in the rest of the poem, marks an interesting clarification of time: “Nor does Time exist in its own right. But there’s a sense / Derived from things themselves as to what’s happened in the past, / And what is here and now, and what will come about at last. No one perceives Time [...] as something apart from things at motion and from things at rest.”⁴⁵ Here Lucretius has entangled the passing of time with the infinity of matter; time cannot exist as a separate entity, and thus relies on atomic creation and destruction to define itself. As Vavilov suggests, Lucretius “converts time into a property of body and deprives it of all content apart from motion.”⁴⁶ Linking the overwhelming concept of time with the smallest particles of the universe allows for a tangibility of time as well as a resplendent sense of atoms. Time and atoms must exist together, as atoms could not be reused without the passage of time, nor could time have any true purpose without atoms to occupy it.

This relationship between time and matter is emphasized in *Leaves of Grass*: where Lucretius’s time exists purely through atoms, Whitman’s self is able to transpose across time via these shared, enduring atoms. Whitman not only speaks with a voice of all voices, he also lives with an explicit, unfathomable sense of all ages. One particular passage combines these ideas of time and distance: “My feet strike an apex of the apices of the stairs, / On every step bunches of ages, and larger bunches between the steps, / All below duly traveled—and still I mount and mount.”⁴⁷ Ascending to the summit of the cosmos, the speaker is rising above all ages and times passed, a god-like onlooker into the universe. Sholnick thinks of this as an “effortless mounting of the cosmic stairs serves to project the human presence forward into those extraordinary reaches of time.”⁴⁸ This image of Whitman, physically and spiritually climbing atop ages and

⁴⁵ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 16.

⁴⁶ Vavilov, “Lucretius’ Physics,” 25.

⁴⁷ Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 50.

⁴⁸ Sholnick, “‘The Password Primeval,’” 400.

distances, is rather supported by Lucretius's connection between ethereal time and tangible matter.

Lucretius devotes his writing primarily to explaining and asserting the existence of the atom. The smallest particle within the universe, the atom is paramount for explicating the makeup of the world and all that the world encompasses. Atoms create all things, Lucretius asserts; they are "as solid as can be, / And flit, unconquered, endlessly throughout eternity."⁴⁹ The universe, atoms, and the void that is indebted to all things — these are each eternal and infinite. In the history of time, all that has existed has been made up of the same atoms and void that you occupy today, and these atoms shall exist far past all deaths. In this way, Lucretius links together all forms and beings, as they all comprise the same boundless atoms. Whitman, having already assumed the existence of such atoms and unending universe, follows a similar line of thought. However, Whitman deviates from a strictly corporeal intertwining of beings: he elevates the notion of interconnectivity to an air of spirituality, proposing that if atoms connect our bodies at the base, then they must also connect our spirits, our voices, our souls. Time, having been inextricably devoted to the material, acts as a bridge upon which one can cross and correspond with all ages in all locations. In *Leaves of Grass*, Sholnick suggests, Whitman "escapes the usual limitations of matter and becomes an immaterial force capable of moving through and possessing every dimension of space and time."⁵⁰ Lucretius and Whitman both prescribe the notions of a limitless universe, ever changing and growing, the entirety of which is entangled in itself and its infinite parts. However, they differ in the rendering of this interconnectivity: Lucretius remains practical and grounded, focusing inward and smaller onto the individual atom; Whitman,

⁴⁹ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 30.

⁵⁰ Sholnick, "The Password Primeval," 416.

believing he is truly one with the entire cosmos, expands farther, upward, reaching for the stars with which he himself is intertwined.

Chapter II:

Sensuality, the Sexes, and the Essence of Love

*The children come from flesh and blood of both father and mother
When the seeds, goaded by Venus, were aroused throughout the frame,
And met as the two panted together, both burning with one flame,
Neither seed conquering or conquered, both continuing the same.*
— Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*⁵¹

*This is the nucleus after the child is born of woman the man is born of woman,
This is the bath of birth this is the merge of small and large and the outlet again.
Be not ashamed women . . your privilege encloses the rest . . it is the exit of the rest,
You are the gates of the body and you are the gates of the soul.*
— Walt Whitman, “*I Sing the Body Electric*”⁵²

Throughout *De Rerum Natura*, Lucretius hints at the existence of love and sex. His poem begins with an invocation to Venus herself, claiming that all animals “pant after [her], so do they heed / Caught in the chains of love, and follow [her] wherever [she] leads.”⁵³ Venus was the mother of the Ancient Roman world, the goddess of creation and love. In a movement both bold and unique, Lucretius calls upon her as the muse of his poetic endeavor, so that she may inform him to eloquently compose *De Rerum Natura*. However, Lucretius’s true discussion on the subject of love and its multifaceted existence is not fully realized until the fourth book of the poem. In this section, although he approaches love and sex with an idealized notion in mind, his criticism of marriage and love shines most brightly. Sexuality and marriage are necessary for the progression of the universe — however, they are not necessarily aspects of life to be desired.

⁵¹ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, trans. A. E. Stallings (London: Penguin, 2007), 144.

⁵² Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Brooklyn, 1855), 79-80.

⁵³ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 3.

Whitman reacts to sex, love, and sensuality in quite an opposing regard: for him, just as all people and forms of life are to be celebrated as equal components of the grand universe, so too are all the facets of people and life. Thus, the acts of love and sex are welcomed and even rejoiced throughout *Leaves of Grass*. Whitman supports the inherent connection between all humans, a connection forged by means of shared atoms and a common spirituality, and this connection extends into the joining of two bodies. The expression of love is a part of nature, something necessary and endless, and thus it deserves to be embraced as a natural experience of humanity.

The Role of God(s) Within Passion

“Life-stirring Venus,” Lucretius writes at the very start of *De Rerum Natura*. “Mother of Aeneas and of Rome, / Pleasure of men and gods [...] every species comes to birth / Conceived through you, and rises forth and gazes on the light.”⁵⁴ As Lucretius begins to compose his impressive, epic poem on all things encompassed by nature, it may seem quite fitting that he invokes the help of Venus, the Roman goddess of love, sex, beauty, and fertility. The equivalent of the Greek goddess Aphrodite, Venus is thought of as the mother of all things, a caring and seductive creator. Before Lucretius begins to break down the universe into the smallest of its essences, the seeds of the universe known as atoms, it would be reasonable to first consider what may be the grand creator of all things. Thus, of all the Roman gods or goddesses to be invoked, Venus, the ruler of nature and of love, seems to be a fitting candidate. However, such an invocation has caused confusion and inquiry among many scholars.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Lucretius, a follower of Epicurean teachings and theories, regarded Epicurus's belief — or non-belief — of the gods to be true: “the gods have no concern whatsoever with this or any other world,” states Elizabeth Asmis, a scholar on ancient philosophy.⁵⁵ This is not to say that Lucretius, or Epicurus for that matter, did not believe in the existence of the gods. The gods were so inherent within the Ancient Roman culture, to denounce them in their entirety would be unthinkable. Instead, Lucretius follows suit with Epicurus and simply suggests that the gods exist, but were not responsible for any initial creation and are not in control of any natural occurrences. Richard Jenkyns, a British academic scholar of classical tradition who wrote the introduction for A. E. Stallings's translation of *De Rerum Natura*, breaks down Lucretius's potential thought structure concerning the gods: “Insofar as the gods exist, they must be made of atoms, like everything else; they did not create the world, they play no part in its governance and they take no interest in us.”⁵⁶ They exist primarily as “independent entities,” their makeup of atoms connecting them not with an omnipotent realm, but a discrete one, where they do not hold sway over the goings-on of Earth. Lucretius himself asks in the fifth book, which speaks about the cosmos, “Where could gods find / A model for creating things? [...] And how did they discover atoms, how were their powers found, [...] Unless Nature herself supplied them with the paradigm for creating things?”⁵⁷ Lucretius suggests that there is Nature, a feminine, overarching creator figure, who is responsible for providing life to all creatures in existence, and who helps to move the universe forward. Indeed, according to Lucretius, “The universe was not created for our sake / By powers divine, since as it stands it is so deeply flawed.”⁵⁸ The universe is

⁵⁵ Elizabeth Asmis, “Lucretius’ Venus and Stoic Zeus,” *Hermes* 110 (1982): 458.

⁵⁶ Jenkyns, Introduction, ix.

⁵⁷ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 153.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

imperfect, and so this must be the work of nature and a constancy that is sometimes riddled with inconsistencies and blemishes.

Yet, Lucretius begins his poem asking for the guidance of Venus, not of Nature herself. He addresses a goddess, a being who exists but who has no true interaction with humanity, to provide eloquence and inspiration for his poetic endeavor. Perhaps he is following the traditional poetic device of beginning a poem with an invocation — though this is usually reserved for the Muses, or those believing in the gods' utter control. He may be setting the Roman atmosphere of the poem, welcoming Rome's ancestress.⁵⁹ Perhaps she is, in her own way, the goddess version of Mother Nature. Though it is difficult to theorize, Jenkyns suggests one possibility that makes sense within the Epicurean stipulations of nature: perhaps Lucretius is simply invoking the goddess of love because he is embarking on a poem about love — love of nature, and all of its many and varying parts.⁶⁰ Just as Venus symbolizes multiple facets of life — love, sexuality, fertility, beauty, growth — so too are there innumerable emotions and acts within nature, and every single thing is “the product of the push and pull of atoms.”⁶¹ In a sense, Venus is a symbol of nature and creation for Lucretius, if only for the beginning of the poem.

This notion of Venus as worldly creator and supporter of love is further realized as the invocation continues, and she becomes entangled with the image of Mars. “And as he leans upon your holy body,” Lucretius writes about Mars, “and you reach / Your arms around him, Lady, sweet-talk him with honeyed speech, / Pleading for a quiet peace for Romans.”⁶² Sensuality surrounds the image of these two gods, Venus and Mars, Love and Strife, as they come together, embodying the opposing forces of the natural world. “Both, it would seem, are necessary for the

⁵⁹ Asmis, “Lucretius’ Venus,” 458.

⁶⁰ Jenkyns, Introduction, xi.

⁶¹ Ibid., xii.

⁶² Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 4.

world to flourish,” Jenkyns proposes. “Without Love there would be no coherence or continuity, without Strife no activity or new creation.”⁶³ The two must exist in balance, in concordance with the overarching balance of the universe. Just as there must be creation and there must be death, both spurred on by the eternal movement of atoms, so too must Love and Strife correspond with one another, following the give and take of their grander perpetual home. However, it is crucial to remember that while Mars tends toward more bold and aggressive behavior, he is ultimately “conquered by Love’s everlasting wound.”⁶⁴ Moreover, as Asmis suggests, Venus subdues Mars over “by petitioning a passionately enamored Mars with ‘sweet words’” — she “brings peace not by using force, but by means of persuasion” and she “conciliates all gently and lovingly through their own will.”⁶⁵ This comparison of Love and Strife, or Venus and Mars, will come to full fruition as the juxtaposition of women and men as a whole. For Lucretius, just as there must exist Venus and Mars who are constantly in battle but must also achieve a harmony, men and women act and react to one another in a similar fashion — and, just as with the gods, it is typically women and their subtle persuasions that win out in the end.

In Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, the beginning does not clarify a specific invocation, but instead an enticing and bold exclamation: “I celebrate myself,” he writes, “and I assume what you shall assume, / For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.”⁶⁶ Though not quite an invocation, Whitman starts his poem with the words “I celebrate myself,” as opposed to Lucretius’s first words, “Aeneadum genetrix,” addressing Venus directly as “mother of Aeneas.” Immediately the focus has shifted from an ancient goddess who symbolizes the fertile urge of the universe, to the poetic imagination and ruminations of a mortal man. However, the intention of

⁶³ Jenkyns, Introduction, xii.

⁶⁴ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 4.

⁶⁵ Asmis, “Lucretius’ Venus,” 466.

⁶⁶ Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 13.

both beginnings may be quite similar to one another. While Venus may have been a provocative “Muse” figure, meant to encompass many facets in the same way the universe itself has a wide and sprawling grasp, Whitman himself is just as inclusive and fusing. “Do I contradict myself?” Whitman asks later in “Song of Myself.” “Very well then . . . I contradict myself; I am large . . . I contain multitudes.”⁶⁷ For Whitman, he is able to represent many layers and dimensions of the universe, in a fashion similar to the timeless and divine Venus. If all things are made of atoms, then all must be equal to one another, easily connected and comparable. Whitman is his own divine soul, requiring no godly invocation to enhance his poetic undertaking — or perhaps aligning himself as a godly inspiration, a Muse of sorts, and merely invoking his own knowledge and spirituality to guide the poem.

Similarly to Lucretius, Whitman believes in the existence of a sort of God, though not one singularly identified or constricted between religious boundaries. Also somewhat relating to the beliefs of Lucretius, Whitman’s God is not one who rules all or who reigns from the skies above. Instead, God is spread throughout the universe: “I hear and behold God in every object,” Whitman writes. “In the faces of men and women I see God, and in my own face in the glass; / I find letters from God dropped in the street, and every one is signed by God’s name.”⁶⁸ God is made human by means of atoms, which create all and into which all will dissolve. Lucretius’s belief in the all-controlling nature of gods and goddesses is rendered moot by the existence of atoms, which place all living beings on the same plane of essence. Whitman follows in suit — if a human is made of atoms, and so is God, then why should the two be separate at all? Whitman writes, “I see something of God each hour of the twenty-four, and each moment then.”⁶⁹ It is as though for Whitman, God is not merely one all-powerful ruler, separate from humanity and

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

governing all. Instead, God is scattered as the atoms of the earth, the spirituality that connects all, and is seen in every facet of every thing.

With this in mind, *Leaves of Grass* shows God as interwoven with all living things and all actions within the universe. Passion and love are innately natural facets of creation and the universe, and so Whitman unabashedly involves the presence of God with his vision of sexuality. Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* is rife with sensual insinuations and fleshly descriptions, and, at one point, he writes of God as a nightly companion: "God comes a loving bedfellow and sleeps at my side all night and close on the peep of the day, / And leaves for me baskets covered with white towels bulging the house with their plenty."⁷⁰ This passage suggests quite blatantly that God is not only present in all aspects of the universe, or permeating equally throughout each human act and thought — he writes quite boldly that God himself is a participant of the sensual nature of humanity. One "massive discovery," states William H. Shurr, "is the claim that God Himself approves of this flagrant sexual display, that the deity himself is a sexual being who fully participates in sexual activity and leaves in the morning as a grateful lover."⁷¹ This passage fully actualizes God as one who can take on a corporeal form, a human capable of loving passion and sensual protection. In a way, Whitman also aligns all corporeal forms with God — we are all spiritual, God-like, divine in nature. Where Lucretius's vision of the gods, though intrinsically connected to the entire universe through atoms, remains symbolic of human emotion and connection, Whitman's God is an active participant. Venus represents the passionate procreation of the world; God pervades this procreation, imbues it with his transcending spirit.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 15.

⁷¹ William H. Shurr, "Walt Whitman's 'Leaves of Grass': The Making of a Sexual Revolution," *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 74 (1991): 103.

Sexuality, and the Sensual Nature of All Things

Although Whitman's inclusion of God as a potential "bedfellow" may be shocking and out of the ordinary, the entirety of his *Leaves of Grass* provides a sort of sexual awakening for those who read it — though the awakening may be a rude one. Whitman steps into an area predating Freud, Shurr suggests, "with a fresh and open mind and a revolutionary temperament, attempting to describe a large range of sexual feelings and sexual experiences and to invent words and phrases to describe them; and then he goes on as a poet to celebrate them."⁷² From the first page of "Song of Myself," all the way to its climactic ending, the sensuality of human connection, earthly relationships, and divine worship are all made abundantly apparent, and are rejoiced throughout. At the heart of these erotic intonations is a necessary love for one's self. Whitman writes, "If I worship any particular thing it shall be some of the spread of my body."⁷³ Atoms are the true essence of each living thing — thus in order for one to love another person, one must first love and appreciate one's self. Whitman's appreciation for his own body falls almost immediately at the start of the poem, and sets the atmosphere for the sensual exploration and development that is to follow:

The smoke of my own breath,
Echos, ripples, and buzzed whispers . . . loveroot, silkthread, crotch and vine,
My respiration and inspiration . . . the beating of my heart . . . the passing of
blood and air through my lungs,
The sniff of green leaves and dry leaves, and of the shore and darkcolored sea-
rocks, and of hay in the barn,
The sound of the belched words of my voice . . . words loosed to the eddies
of the wind,
A few light kisses . . . a few embraces . . . a reaching around of arms,
The play of shine and shade on the trees as the supple boughs wag,
The delight alone or in the rush of the streets, or along the fields and hillsides,

⁷² Ibid., 101-2.

⁷³ Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 30.

The feeling of health the full-noon trill the song of me rising from bed and meeting the sun.⁷⁴

“In the first major action of the poem,” Shurr explains, “Whitman is naked and out of doors, admiring his own sexually mature and active body.”⁷⁵ This passage, although it occurs right at the beginning and is not all too long, is important on account of its joining of the body with nature. The central theme of all living things being comprised of nature and belonging to nature finds its sensual component in this meeting of body and nature. Whitman’s use of subtle but sexual new diction, such as “loveroot” and “silkthread,” both creates erotic imagery within the reader’s mind of the naked male form, and at once connects it to its earthly counterpart, “crotch” and “vine.” The senses are all referred to in conjunction with the speaker’s natural surroundings; “the poet expresses delight in and implies unqualified acceptance of each of the senses,” suggests James E. Miller, Jr.⁷⁶

This sensual connection of body with the universe is prevalent throughout *Leaves of Grass*, and it takes more forms than simply the body acknowledging and responding to nature. Later in “Song of Myself,” the speaker address the ocean directly, exclaiming, “You sea! I resign myself to you also I guess what you mean, / I behold from the beach your crooked fingers.”⁷⁷ Whitman’s sexualization of the entire universe does not stop at the beautiful human form, or the omnipresence of God’s touch — Whitman extends this sensual imagery onto nature itself. Just as mankind can feel and exchange passion, so too can nature, all giving and taking sensually charged atoms. “In celebrating [...] night, earth, and sea, Whitman thoroughly

⁷⁴ Ibid., 13.

⁷⁵ Shurr, “Sexual Revolution,” 102.

⁷⁶ James E. Miller, Jr., ““Song of Myself” as Inverted Mystical Experience,” *PMLA* 70 (1955): 638.

⁷⁷ Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 27.

sexualizes these elements,” Shurr suggests. “Each experience becomes more intensely sexual.”⁷⁸ The earth becomes a bedfellow, just like God, just like any man or woman. Nature is personified, an active participant in the fervor and procreation of the universe, as much a contributor as any person. “We must have a turn together,” Whitman continues, speaking to the sea. “I undress hurry me out of sight of the land, / Cushion me soft rock me in billowy drowse, / Dash me with amorous wet I can repay you.”⁷⁹ Whitman uses the support of atomic connectedness and a transcending spiritual interaction to join body, soul, and nature together as components of the universe in a constant sexual exchange.

In *De Rerum Natura*, Lucretius does not couple nature with the body quite as explicitly as Whitman does. As with Whitman, Lucretius discusses the entanglement of all living beings and the atomic foundation of the universe, and it is with this basis that the universe is able to progress and grow. In the first book of *De Rerum Natura*, Lucretius refers to atoms as “the seeds of things”: they are the most basic particles of the universe, and it is with these small parts that the universe is formed. The juxtaposition of atoms to seeds compares the building blocks of the universe to the fundamental origin of life. However, in Lucretius’s fourth book — the one primarily concerned with love, procreation, and marriage — the word “seed” is used in regards to sex. In the midst of describing a passionate coupling between two people, Lucretius writes, “Lastly, when their limbs are tangled, and they pluck youth’s bloom, / And bodies have a foretaste of the pleasures that now loom, / And Venus is about to sow the woman’s field with seed...”⁸⁰ Here, Lucretius uses seed, a word associated with nature and growth, to refer to a man’s semen, and the woman’s womb is referred to as a field ready to be cultivated. The bodies of men and women have been transformed into a seed and its pasture during the act of coitus —

⁷⁸ Shurr, “Sexual Revolution,” 107.

⁷⁹ Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 27.

⁸⁰ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 140.

the physical dimension of love is one intended for reproduction, with the helping hand of the apt goddess, Venus. Although Lucretius is not expressing a precise sensuality of nature like Whitman does in *Leaves of Grass*, Lucretius is still setting the intimate productive qualities of nature alongside those of humanity.

Male and Female: The Union and the Clash

Whitman's openness toward the universe and all of its inhabitants — whether in reference to sexuality, religion, race, age, and the list continues perpetually — does not retrace its steps when it comes to interpersonal relationships. No barriers exist in *Leaves of Grass*: “I love him, though I do not know him,” Whitman writes about a young man driving a wagon, and immediately the entire universe of sexuality is an open and varied atmosphere.⁸¹ Gender plays no role, nor does status or orientation. For Whitman, with atoms acting as an equalizer between all beings, to exclude one person would be to exclude the rest. “Whitman's temperament [...] seemed to require the license to swing freely among many sexual roles and sexual experiences,” suggests Shurr, and that Whitman did.⁸² Particularly as of late, it has become a common theme to investigate and muse upon the sexual orientation of the poet. *Leaves of Grass* is teeming with sensuous descriptions of all sorts of figures — and some happen to be men.

In perhaps the most widely discussed section of “Song of Myself,” an image is described of twenty-eight young men bathing by the shore, as an unseen woman, perched up in her home, gazes upon them. “Twenty-eight young men bathe by the shore,” Whitman writes. “Twenty-

⁸¹ Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 22.

⁸² Shurr, “Sexual Revolution,” 106.

eight men, and all are so friendly.”⁸³ Whitman describes the men with a tender tone, speaking of the beards of these men, glimmering with the spray of water, and how the water trickles down their bodies. As the woman studies the men, pretending as though she were on the shore with them, the reader is automatically placed in a similar position — a witness to the half-naked men, wet and smiling. The passionate care with which the men are illustrated, as well as many other male figures within the entire poem, seems to reveal a potential personal side of Whitman as a lover. However, the universe in *Leaves of Grass* is one of pure affirmation and praise — just as Whitman celebrates one person, he must celebrate all of them. Shurr reaffirms, “It is a mistake, at this point, to try to polarize Whitman as either homosexual or heterosexual.”⁸⁴ Polarization of any kind would be out of place in Whitman’s all-encompassing and welcoming world.

One section of *Leaves of Grass*, which is necessary for the discussion of Whitman’s rhetoric on sexuality and love, is found in the passage that would later become the poem “I Sing the Body Electric.” The imagery of an everlasting, ever-loving passion permeates the piece, which begins with the enticing assertion, “The bodies of men and women engirth me, and I engirth them, / They will not let me off nor I them till I go with them and respond to them and love them.”⁸⁵ In this section, Whitman’s earlier appreciation and love for himself becomes a pivotal principle. As Miller, Jr. proposes, “The awakening of self has been an awakening to the realization of the potentiality in the self to be all of these, to have all of their varied emotions, to engage in all of their sundry activities. The awakening has caused the eyes to turn not inward but outward, and has resulted in not contraction but expansion of self, excluding none, including all.”⁸⁶ To Whitman, all forms of all bodies are beautiful — all take part in the eternal exchange

⁸³ Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 19.

⁸⁴ Shurr, “Sexual Revolution,” 106.

⁸⁵ Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 77.

⁸⁶ Miller, Jr., “Inverted Mystical Experience,” 643.

of life, and so each person is made of nature's infinite and wondrous particles. The body and soul, inexplicably intertwined with the swirling and eternal atoms, are both pleased by one another. Whitman writes, "There is something in staying close to men and women and looking on them [...] that pleases the soul well, / All things please the soul, but these please the soul well."⁸⁷ Sexual pleasure and erotic desire do more than satisfy the body; they also gratify the soul, providing a sense of sensual spirituality that transcends the physical form. Perhaps Whitman's earlier discussion of God as bedfellow does not seem so shocking in these regards — sexuality and spirituality are entangled with one another, one no more important or holy than the other. The natural order of the universe advances all things forward, and so each of its components are just as necessary and praiseworthy as the rest. "The man's body is sacred and the woman's body is sacred," Whitman concludes. "If life and the soul are sacred the human body is sacred."⁸⁸

Such adoring thoughts seem to be lost on Lucretius, who concentrates his discussion more on the savageness of love and less on its beautiful qualities. "Venus makes their suffering light / In the midst of love," Lucretius writes, speaking on the lovesickness that plagues the lovers, "and Pleasure, mingled in, curbs back the bite."⁸⁹ From the very start of Lucretius's discourse on love, sex, and marriage, the reader is confronted not by the sweet idealism of romantic love, but instead by the biting sharp arrows, shot by Venus to penetrate the heart. This rather violent depiction of love-lust sets a tone for the remainder of his thoughts. Lovers, struck by these arrows, are unable to relieve the itch of lust and wantonness, and "they think that they can quench the fire / By means of the same body that ignited their desire."⁹⁰ In the end, the

⁸⁷ Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 79.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 80, 82.

⁸⁹ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 139.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*.

lovers — as Betensky describes, “writhing couples who bite and hurt each other in their frenzied efforts at total possession” — even in the throes of passion are unable to forever satisfy this eternal craving.⁹¹ Love is viewed less as an ethereal emotion that brings together two desiring and amorous individuals, but rather as an infection that spreads and lacks any cure whatsoever. John Stearns points out, “[Lucretius] tells us that love is not pure pleasure, but rather pleasure mixed with pain, for never is it satisfied.”⁹² Also unlike Whitman’s support of the always-beautiful forms of both men and women, Lucretius is highly critical of women and their appearance. “For desire makes men blind – / And generally they overlook their girlfriends’ faults, and bless / These women with fine qualities they don’t in fact possess.”⁹³ Love and lust, seemingly equal concepts for Lucretius, seem to bring out the worst facets of everyone: they cause ravenous desire, a constant need for someone new and exciting, and trickery in order to catch a mate.

The topic of marriage, which concludes the fourth book of *De Rerum Natura*, also does little to quell any anxiety toward love and relationships. As Lucretius has expressed his judgment of Venus and the chance wound of love’s arrow, he also is unconvinced of the positive power of long-lasting relationships. “Nor is the power of a god to blame, nor Venus’s dart, / When, from time to time, a plain girl steals somebody’s heart. / Sometimes it is the woman herself who has achieved this feat; / By winning ways, and keeping her dress and person clean and neat, / She makes it easy to learn to live with her.”⁹⁴ Here Lucretius seems to suggest that there are moments in the universe when love occurs, not as a result of Venus’s arrow or the intervention of the divine, but rather because the woman has utilized trickery or deception in her persuasion of the

⁹¹ Aya Betensky, “Lucretius and Love,” *The Classical World* 73 (1980): 292.

⁹² John B. Stearns, “Epicurus and Lucretius on Love,” *The Classical Journal* 31 (1936): 348.

⁹³ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 141.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 146.

man. This is not a positive reassurance toward marriage — instead, as Stearns points out, “the satirical note is resumed in the final assertion of the poet that even homely women know instinctively how to inspire love.”⁹⁵

In his final concluding point, Lucretius states, “It is familiarity that leads to love. [...] Haven’t you seen how drops of water falling, on their own / Have the power, over time, to wear their way through stone?”⁹⁶ This lasting attack on marriage is a sarcastic and upsetting one — it is not true love that acts as the foundation for marriage, but instead an ability for two people to get accustomed and dully used to one another. As B. Arkins aptly states, “By means of this companionship marriage wears a man out just as the repeated, continuous impact of drops of water upon a stone eventually wears out the stone.”⁹⁷ Lucretius’s woman does not strengthen her husband within the context of marriage; she does not fulfill him sexually, nor does she woo him with tender words and loving actions. Instead, she must trick him into marriage by means of being a decently attractive and clean partner. Then, she saps him of his energy and weighs him down — the marriage does not feel lofty and romantic, but rather necessary and unexciting.

Compare this to Whitman, speaking of the bridegroom and bride, their “love working surely and softly into the prostrate dawn, / Undulating into the willing and yielding day, / Lost in the cleave of the clasping and sweetfleshed day.”⁹⁸ This passion and ideal romanticism of Whitman is at a direct conflict with Lucretius, who approaches the topics of love and marriage in a much more skeptical manner. In the end, the only foundation that serves both poets is the atomic interconnectedness of the universe. The way in which love and passion grow from this fertile basis is quite separate, as Lucretius casts his doubts and criticism upon the concept of

⁹⁵ Stearns, “Epicurus and Lucretius on Love,” 349.

⁹⁶ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 146.

⁹⁷ B. Arkins, “Epicurus and Lucretius on Sex, Love, and Marriage,” *Apeiron: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy and Science* 18 (1984): 142.

⁹⁸ Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 79.

Ancient Roman love, whereas Whitman seems to bask within the passion exuding from the universe during every singular moment.

Given how frequently Lucretius and Whitman mirror one another, their views on the themes of the universe quite similar despite a nineteen-century gap, this disjunction between their beliefs of sexual intimacy and the growth of love is quite striking. Lucretius's apparent disdain for marriage and hesitance regarding women may have been one passed on to him from his teacher. Stearns points out that "the belief that Epicurus condemned love of woman and forbade the wise man to marry and have children has come to be accepted widely."⁹⁹ While this point may be contested among contemporary historians and philosophers, Arkins also argues that Epicurus "condoned casual sexual intercourse [and] condemned sexual love," and that Lucretius strictly upheld these doctrines. As an obedient student of Epicurus in regards to most topics, Lucretius's questioning of marriage and sexual intimacy may understandably find its roots in the teachings of his mentor.

Lucretius's more sheltered and dismissive opinion of love may also be a product of his historical placement within Ancient Rome. As Betensky writes, "Roman tradition naturally encouraged marriage because of the need to maintain family name, power and wealth among the upper classes, as well as the state's need for armies and rulers."¹⁰⁰ This emphasis on marriage and its value within the Roman society may have been cause for rebuttal and inquiry — rather than marry purely for the pleasure of love, or a deeper connection, the most important purpose for two people joining together was money, rank, and potential political influence. In fact, within a century after Lucretius's death, Emperor Augustus would implement a handful of marriage laws, all with the intent to enforce monogamy, punish adultery, and increase population.

⁹⁹ Stearns, "Epicurus and Lucretius on Love," 343.

¹⁰⁰ Betensky, "Lucretius and Love," 294.

“Marriage is described in such a low key,” Betensky suggests, “after the sharp brilliance and offensiveness of the attack of passion.”¹⁰¹ Love is a sharp pain, unable to be cured: Lucretius writes, “For love / Is unique: the more we have of it, the more it’s not enough, / And the more calamitous desire sets the heart aflame.”¹⁰² With an engagement of two people ending in heartbreak, loveless marriage, and ultimately death, perhaps Lucretius finds no favorable element in the love that Venus springs upon us.

Whitman and Lucretius are both founded upon the atom, but each poet stretches in a separate direction with his implications of interconnectedness. For Lucretius, the atoms that comprise the universe weave each being together, but do not necessarily contribute toward a higher power, an all-encompassing spirituality that is as real as the infinite number of atoms. However, in Whitman’s mind, God embodies the atoms that create all humans, and so romantic love and sexual intimacy extend further than the physical constrictions of atoms, and join with a divine, spiritual connection. Lucretius’s love is caught within the boundaries of marriage with societal implications and sex that must adhere to the law; Whitman’s love, in turn, roams free within the godly realm, interlaced with physical and ethereal notions, sacred in its own right.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 139.

Chapter III:

The Soul, and Its Convergence with Death and the Afterlife

*...the task that follows for me here
Is in my verses to explain and make the nature clear
Of mind and spirit, and toss that Dread of Death out on its ear,
Since that's what stirs the lives of mortals into such turmoil
From the very depths, and there is nothing that it does not soil
With the smirch of death, no pleasure, pure and clean, it does not spoil.
— Lucretius, De Rerum Natura¹⁰³*

*I am not an earth nor an adjunct of an earth,
I am the mate and companion of people, all just as immortal and fathomless as myself;
They do not know how immortal, but I know.
— Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself"¹⁰⁴*

In *De Rerum Natura*, Lucretius strives to tackle the difficult concept of death, the elusive nature of the afterlife, and the potential for immortality. Having largely divulged the inner-workings of the body and explicitly discussed atoms, nature's building blocks and the integral matter of the universe, Lucretius uses this foundation for his contemplation of the soul. Balance remains an essential facet of the universe, a consistent give and take of matter; creation and destruction must correspond, and out of this interplay arrives a necessary truthfulness of the soul and its transition from life into inevitable eternal death.

This delving into the soul and all of its intricacies is the breadth of Whitman's poetry. From the beginning of "Song of Myself," his own soul is one he intends to "loafe and invite."¹⁰⁵ The basis of his *Leaves of Grass* focuses on the exchange of soul with body, and on the meeting

¹⁰³ Ibid., 73.

¹⁰⁴ Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 17.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 13.

of death and immortality. Whitman aligns pairs of concepts seemingly at odds with one another and joins them harmoniously, supporting a balancing and exchange comparable to that of Lucretius. However, separately from Lucretius's belief that the soul cannot outlive the body, Whitman exudes a loftiness that favors the immortality and eternal life that encompasses all.

The Composition of the Soul

In order for sensation to be perceived and for the body to be in congruence with the mind, there must be some individual force inherently intertwined between the physical and mental forms. According to Lucretius, theoretically the body can perform actions and move of its own volition, and similarly the mind is able to imagine and think freely, and neither necessarily must affect the other. However, it is the spirit, this inherent connecting force, that is "struck by the mind's power" and in turn "drives the body forward."¹⁰⁶ The spirit, or *anima*, is an essential dimension of one's life, and together with the mind "they combine to form a single nature."^{107*} Although this principal knowledge of the spirit and its bond between the physical and the mental is insinuated throughout Whitman's poetry as well, the import of the spirit and its composition is emphasized most pertinently in and heavily expanded upon by Lucretius. He provides a deep study of the spirit and its role in the scheme of life.

However, unlike Lucretius, the soul does not occupy Whitman's body and form his inquisition, but rather joins alongside him in his poetic endeavor. In "Song of Myself," Whitman directly addresses his soul: "Loafe with me on the grass . . . loose the stop from your throat, /

¹⁰⁶ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 77.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 76.

* Here, it must be clarified that "spirit" must be used for Lucretius, as this refers to the vital force that occupies the body and situates itself in conjunction with the mind. "Soul" would refer to the fusion of spirit, *anima*, and mind, *animus*.

Not words, not music or rhyme I want . . . not custom or lecture, not even the best, / Only the lull I like, the hum of your valved voice.”¹⁰⁸ He speaks to his own soul, requesting its voice and contribution to this poem and to his being. This image of the soul, loafing beside him on the grass, may be metaphorical in nature, but intrinsically symbolic of Whitman’s view of the soul. In this way, it is clear that for Whitman, the soul is not static, not some strict juncture between emotion and action, but something living, breathing, tangible. As American literature scholar James E. Miller, Jr. suggests, when Whitman reaches out to his own soul, “the soul not only accepts the invitation but also consummates a union with the poet.”¹⁰⁹ From this point onward, “Song of Myself” contains not only a self-aware poet, but also the presence of the soul. In this way, the broad and inclusive subject matter that follows throughout the entirety of *Leaves of Grass* can be understood with an underlying sense of the soul’s own acceptance of everything.

Lucretius likewise considers the spirit in tangible, tactile terms. The spirit resides alongside the mind, and “nothing acts as fast as the mind imagines and initiates.”¹¹⁰ In this way, the spirit must comprise endless small, smooth particles, so that only one of these particles must be touched for the rest to counteract. It is not made of large and strong components, lest it stand firm and immobile; instead, Lucretius’s rendering of the spirit easily moves and flows, like water. Conceptually, the spirit is made physical by its association with the body; because the spirit has the capability to alter the physical form — such as “propel the limbs” or “change / The expressions of the face” — then certainly the spirit “must be physical in nature too.”¹¹¹ Physical wounds equally impact both the mind and body, and thus the spirit as the correspondence between them must be corporeal in nature, fleshly and woven amid the body.

¹⁰⁸ Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 15.

¹⁰⁹ Miller, Jr., “Inverted Mystical Experience,” 638.

¹¹⁰ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 77.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

Unlike Whitman's soul independent from its associated body, the spirit for Lucretius must not be seen as something that can successfully exist on its own. That is to say, the spirit does not exist perpetually, entering in and out of physical forms during the respective times of births and deaths. Instead, although the spirit may be physical in nature and composed of atoms, it grows and is added to the body at its earliest inception, and survives alongside the body, "closely bound up with the veins and tissue, / Sinews and bones," until their conjoined death.¹¹² The spirit is, from the very start, so interwoven amid the particles of the physical body, that they act as one form together. "Since spirits are so closely woven with flesh, it's clear instead / They are not able to extract themselves all in one piece / Nor safely from all sinews, bones and joints obtain release."¹¹³ Unlike Whitman, whose soul is able to loafe alongside him on the grass, both at once together and separate, the spirit of Lucretius requires a vessel, a physical form in which it thrives and by which it operates. "For the air itself would be a body — one that was alive — / If the spirit could hold itself together there."¹¹⁴ However, because the air and the spirit share such similar forms of the atom, fluid and flexible and smooth, the spirit would simply be uncontained and "scattered" among the winds. In Lucretius's world, the spirit cannot withstand death.

The Soul, and Its Potential Immortality

It is in this way, the spirit's necessary and intricate association with the corporeal, that the spirit in *De Rerum Natura* most significantly differs from the soul found in *Leaves of Grass*. Because Lucretius has the spirit so tightly intertwined with the bodily form, the notion of a soul existing past its stay within the body, or the thought of there being any form of significant

¹¹² Ibid., 92.

¹¹³ Ibid..

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 89.

afterlife, is dispelled. Surely it is agreeable that the body requires the soul to thrive: “Once the soul and flesh have parted ways, / The body left behind unravels utterly and decays.”¹¹⁵ However, this indispensability travels both ways. Because the spirit is granted a nature that is physical and pliant, it bends to match the body, and once the body has perished, so has the spirit. “Body and soul only exist because they’re yoked together,” Lucretius writes.¹¹⁶ While *De Rerum Natura* may conflate grandiose images of the universe and legitimized theories of science, its treatment of the spirit is one founded upon the more empirical and preemptive scientific evidence of Ancient Rome.

Lucretius also argues the mortality of the spirit by bringing to light the impossibilities of a pre-existing soul. Although atoms are the basic foundation of the universe, and are ceaselessly being recycled and revitalized, spirits cannot act in the same fashion. Plato, a Greek philosopher who lived approximately three centuries prior to Lucretius, postulated the theory of an eternal soul. This soul would relinquish one body at its deathbed and rebirth itself as a newborn’s own. Lucretius seems to directly argue this thought, asking, “If the nature of the soul’s immortal, and it creeps / Into the body as we’re born, why is it no one keeps / A memory of time before, why can’t we bring to mind / The deeds that we have done, why do they leave no trace behind?”¹¹⁷ Based on Lucretius’s belief that the spirit consists of atoms that are consistent and ever changing, then undoubtedly, should spirits indeed be immortal, these spirit-atoms would be put to new use in a separate individual. If this were the case, then one might be able to remember a “past life” of sorts, or garner recollections of the immortal spirit’s past existences. However, this is not the case. Although the spirit is made up of atoms, this is what causes the spirit to be a mortal, ephemeral concept; while the atoms thrive onward, eternally, the individual spirit is impermanent

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 82.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 89.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 92.

and cannot sustain the loss of its corporeal vessel. For Lucretius, the idea of an immortal spirit is simply inconceivable — there is no afterlife, nor are there immortal, recycled souls. There are only eternal, shifting atoms.

In the universe of Lucretius, “there are three types of things that last forever”: the solid, the untouched, and the eternal.¹¹⁸ The solid immortality situates itself as the Atom, the smallest particle of stuff that cannot be broken down any further. The atom is the building block of the universe, impenetrable. The untouched is the Void — this is the lack of solid matter like atoms, the empty space into which the movements of atoms flow. It is immortal on the basis of its ability to remain untouched and vacant; there must be a void to balance out the atom, an absence alongside a presence. It cannot be wounded because it cannot be filled. The final element of immortality is the eternal, known as the Universe: so large and infinite that could it become scattered, its pieces would have nowhere to go. It has “no limits in its sweep / In all directions,” lacking boundaries.¹¹⁹ It is this absolute inexhaustible space of nature, filled with both the solid and the empty, that completes the immortal trifecta.

In all of this, the spirit is not one of the immortal features. Though made of atoms, these spirit particles are constantly changing, growing, producing new life for the future. These atoms cannot remain in connection with a spirit for an eternal present, for they are needed elsewhere. Lucretius refers to atoms as “the seeds of things”; atoms are the fundamental origins of all things, and they are immortal, transcending all forms of time and structure. The spirit, while made up of infinite, eternal blooms of growth, is irrefutably tied to the flesh, which is both natural and quite mortal. Just as the body feels physical threats and attacks, so does the spirit.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

Because the spirit is so enmeshed within the body, its fluent matter effortlessly permeating every void in the body, it must fall alongside the body.

Taking an approach less formed from empirical fact and far more ambitious, Whitman wholeheartedly supports the essence of immortality within the soul. In fact, the concept permeates his poetry, and pervades even deeper, saturating each topic that he discusses. “I swear I see now that every thing has an eternal soul!” he exclaims in “To Think of Time.” “The trees have, rooted in the ground . . . the weeds of the sea have . . . the animals.”¹²⁰ This passage emulates immortality existing not only within each individual human, but also in all elements of nature, all facets of the universe. Lucretius believes that the universe is ceaseless and all will remain and progress; Whitman corroborates this, but extends it to each living being, including the entirety of humanity.

Whitman’s most dynamic semblance of immortality is the namesake of his book of poetry: grass. Tying both to nature and to death, the growth of grass is the ultimate symbol of eternal life and constant progress. When a child asks the speaker, “What is the grass?” he responds that it seems to be myriad things, but, ultimately, the grass seems to him to be “the beautiful uncut hair of graves.”¹²¹ For Whitman, an everlasting soul may be immortal but it does not exist on its own; instead, the soul that is situated within a human can become one indebted to the earth, to nature as a whole. The “soul” in *Leaves of Grass* exists individually, occupying each singular and separate body. However, at the same time, every soul connects from its individual body to an interconnecting existence. Think of a tree: while there may exist infinite branches, twigs, and leaves, all trace back, in body and in essence, to the strong and vast tree trunk. As

¹²⁰ Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 69.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

Lucretius's atoms and voids undeniably fasten every physical form together, so does Whitman's soul transcend all independent capacities and provide a cohesive form of universal spirit.

The speaker of "To Think of Time" argues that the whole sphere of the world works toward an infinite immortality: "I swear I think there is nothing but immortality! / That the exquisite scheme is for it, and the nebulous float is for it, and the cohering is for it, / And all preparation is for it . . . and identity is for it . . . and life and death are for it."¹²² Although the body and soul are immortal in their own rights, Whitman removes the focus of immediacy on the individual, and widens the scope to include all aspects and phases of the universe. Scholnick suggests, "Throughout 'Song of Myself' the speaker treats the theme of immortality and ties it closely to the concepts of evolution and conservation of force."¹²³ In the same way that Whitman uses this symbolism of nature and grass to show the evolution of life and its relation to immortality, he ultimately connects grass directly with eternal life. Grass is not simply a product of nature; if nature is a product of all life and the eternal beings it comprises, then the grass is also a product of this. "They are alive and well somewhere," the speaker says, referring to those who have passed. "The smallest sprout shows that there is really no death, / And if ever there was it led forward life, and does not wait at the end to arrest it, / And ceased the moment life appeared."¹²⁴ The souls of the dead, having become separate entities from their bodies, are in a sense reincarnated into the elements of the earth. While the physical bodies of those who have passed become atomic matter, reshaped into sprouts of grass or other elements of the earth, the souls separate from bodies and join the grander spirit of the earth itself, immortal and pervading.

In opposition to Lucretius's view of atomic matter being permanently fixed to its specific location — such as the atoms of trees will always create trees — Whitman suggests that the

¹²² *Ibid.*, 70.

¹²³ Scholnick, "'The Password Primeval,'" 419.

¹²⁴ Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 17.

atoms of the universe belong simply to the universe, and are not divided into zones and genres. In the end, as Sholnick suggests, “the speaker asserts that such is his diversity that he cannot be held to a fixed spot in the material world.”¹²⁵ Although Lucretius’s atoms are varied and expansive, they must be contained to and associated permanently with the individual body, thus ruling out any chance of an eternal or encompassing spirit. Whitman’s soul, in contrast, is integral first to the universe, and then to the body; all shares one soul from the very start of time, and so it exists forever alongside the ground beneath us.

Death Is Not To Be Feared

Despite how both poets differ on the subject of the soul and its immortality, both similarly view and are quite confident in regards to the prospect of death. In order to keep the balance of the universe stable and sound, there must exist an end that balances out the beginning. Death is utterly natural, a facet of the universe as common as air, and it must not be feared or delayed. According to Lucretius, fear of death is the singular and fundamental cause of devastating unhappiness and downfall in one’s mind. “It is largely the dread / Of death,” Lucretius writes, “on which these open wounds of life thrive and are fed, / For Vile Disgrace and Bitter Want seem so far from the state / Of a sweet, established life, they almost loiter at Death’s gate.”¹²⁶ This baseless fear of death causes people to clutter their lives, protecting themselves by means of vices such as greed and violence, in an attempt to separate themselves from their inevitable end.

¹²⁵ Scholnick, “The Password Primeval,” 421.

¹²⁶ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 74.

Whitman shares this line of thinking: death is natural, and perhaps to be welcomed and even anticipated. In “Song of Myself” he writes, “And as to you death, and you bitter hug of mortality . . . it is idle to try to alarm me.”¹²⁷ Having at length discussed and waxed poetic on the concept of life, the soul, and immortality, it seems only natural to expect death, to assume its power, and to find comfort within it. In fact, it is a hug of mortality that the speaker proclaims as “bitter,” as something that is disagreeable. It is as though the speaker much prefers the touch of eternal life, and must simply tolerate temporary mortality. As Whitman has proclaimed, “There is really no death.”¹²⁸

Within the words of *Leaves of Grass*, it can be easy to locate why death is no more exciting or frightening than any other facet of life. If immortality is true, and life itself is not ceasing but ever changing and progressing, then “death” is simply another transition in life. In a world defined by its constant metamorphosis and “transformations,” “the speaker denies the possibility of death,” Sholnick confirms.¹²⁹ If the natural world comprises such correlations of physical growth, and confirms that the foundational matter itself is indestructible, then to assume that there exists something as stark as an immediate termination of life seems implausible. The universe is consistent in its progression. “It is not chaos or death . . . it is form and union and plan . . . it is eternal life . . . it is happiness.”¹³⁰ In “death” is ceaseless existence, a permanency in the sphere of the physical realm. As Lucretius stated quite plainly in the opening lines of *De Rerum Natura*, “Nature does not render anything to naught.”¹³¹ Whitman takes this notion in a most literal and emphatic sense; humanity will forever hold a place, not explicitly in some

¹²⁷ Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 54.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹²⁹ Scholnick, “The Password Primeval,” 420.

¹³⁰ Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 55.

¹³¹ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 9.

spiritual realm or in the air, but in the very earth on which we roam. Just as souls are integral to the physical world, so is nature indivisible from the soul.

While death is equally as inherent and accepted in the beliefs of Lucretius, his writing portrays a more scientific, logical approach to the concept of the moment of death. He has already substantiated the theory that the spirit, inexplicably reliant upon the body, vanishes into air upon the last breath of a human life. However, just as the immortality of the soul intends to relieve Whitman's reader of the fear of death, the absolute mortality of Lucretius's spirit should also placate the anxious.

To die is an innate facet of life, and Lucretius spends much of Book III, "Mortality and the Soul," elucidating precisely how the spirit ends its physical affiliation with the body. "Body and mind are born together [...] they mature together, and grow old together too," Lucretius argues. "At once, all fails the same. / So it is only natural this spirit of which I spoke / Disperses, scatters on the high winds like a puff of smoke."¹³² This separation of the physical form and the spirit, brought upon by "the architects of Death: Disease and Pain," signifies that each aspect cannot thrive without the other.¹³³ Each component of a human life is so engrained with the others — joined at birth, growing with each passing year — that to contemplate the survival of one without the other is unimaginable.

Inextricably connected, even prior to the spirit's vanishing at the moment of death, the reciprocity of body and soul is apparent in the throes of death as well. "As we see that the flesh falls prey / To horrible disease and pain [...] So too the mind is prone to sorrow, terror, bitter care. / It follows, therefore, that the mind must also have a share / In Death."¹³⁴ The pain of death affects the body without doubt, but this implements a grief upon the mind as well, for as the

¹³² Ibid., 85.

¹³³ Ibid., 86.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 85.

spirit must relay even the most minute details between the body and the mind, so it is fated to become downtrodden with death, “since it appears / Disease can enter the mind with its contagion and its strain.”¹³⁵

Although death and its addendums may physically harm and mentally wear upon the individual, Lucretius relies upon a moderate removal of the individual in order to fully fathom the notion of death as something not to fear. For Lucretius, death is a part of the cycle of life, a constant recycling and reuse of the basic materials of the universe for the purpose of creating new life. With the destruction of death comes an origination of life, and thus death itself should not be feared by the individual on the grounds that his loss will provide the gain of someone new. In light of this, Tim O’Keefe notes that to view one’s life “in the context of endless cycles of new life arising out of the death of the old does not render one’s death not a bad thing,” but instead redeems it, as well as communicates why the destructive dread of death is harmful to one’s psyche and mental well-being.¹³⁶ Lucretius does not argue that death is *not* a bad thing, nor that it is *not* painful. On the contrary, he takes time to illuminate various circumstances in which sickness and suffering riddle the physical form, and thus affect the mental status. In addition, the timeline of a singular death is explicated; “we often see that it is piecemeal men succumb, / One limb after another losing life and falling numb [...] then chill death leaves its track / As it creeps across the other members.”¹³⁷ Death is torturous and inevitable and daunting — however, it should not be feared on the basis of its necessity to the progression of the universe. The individual must recognize his crucial role within the broad scope of all matter, in all sense of time. Lucretius “invites the agent to depart from a narrow consideration of death from his own

¹³⁵ Ibid., 86.

¹³⁶ Tim O’Keefe, “Lucretius on the Cycle of Life and the Fear of Death,” *Apeiron: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy and Science* 36 (2003): 61.

¹³⁷ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 87.

point of view,” and in its place assume a viewpoint that incorporates the import of the whole of the universe — the wide viewpoint of nature itself.¹³⁸

One argument supporting why death should not be feared is that the ending of one’s life stands in conjunction with the advancement of the universe. However, these abstract grounds are placed in apposition with a second logical thought: if death is utter annihilation of all constituents of a life, then to fear death is to fear something that does not cause true harm. The path toward death is, as Lucretius has explored, wrought with disease and pain: these are the two “architects” of death. However, a distinction must be made between the pangs and process of death, and the final end result of it. For as much as the physical and emotional torment that accompanies death may preclude an acceptance of it — and surely, here, fearing the “reeking of decay” and the “twisting passage of the flesh” is unavoidable — consequent death and its own reality do not give rise to any fear, for conceptually there is no place for fear in death.¹³⁹ O’Keefe coherently summarizes this: “Death cannot be harmful for the person who has died because after death he is no longer there.”¹⁴⁰

Death is an inevitable destruction of all that creates a human form: body, mind, and spirit. The atoms of each will continue to exist, but never will they again form that singular form of that specific individual. Having been born as one, they perish as one. “So when the bond is put asunder between body and soul, / The two from which we are composed into a single whole, / Nothing can befall us, we who shall no longer *be*.”¹⁴¹ At the very moment of death, all coherence is lost: the body does not sense, the mind cannot think, and the spirit, having linked the two, has no use any longer and dissolves into the air like smoke. This disconnection is made entirely and

¹³⁸ O’Keefe, “Cycle of Life,” 46.

¹³⁹ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 89.

¹⁴⁰ O’Keefe, “Cycle of Life,” 43.

¹⁴¹ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 97.

soundly, for even though all atoms of humanity are ceaseless and will be used for future generations, “what we were before / Is no concern to us as we are now, nor any more / Are we haunted by their former sufferings.”¹⁴² Essentially, if a present individual cannot recall the pains and troubles that were experienced by the former being of his atoms, then he shall not be able to feel any of these after his own death. “A caesura has been cast,” Lucretius contends, “between those different lives, a pause.”¹⁴³ Each individual life and death is one’s one, and nothing more — only atoms, not sensations and remembrances themselves, are shared. “Since we do not regard the pre-natal stretch of non-existence as having been anything horrible, by parity of reasoning we should not dread our post-mortem non-existence.”¹⁴⁴ The fear of death and what will follow only serves to trouble the mind and clutter simplicity, and has no real base.

Throughout *Leaves of Grass*, it is clear that Whitman follows a similar thought as Lucretius: death should not be feared. However, it has already been made evident that Whitman emphatically subscribes to the notion of a fully realized immortality. “I know I am deathless,” the speaker says in “Song of Myself.” “I know this orbit of mine cannot be swept by a carpenter’s compass.”¹⁴⁵ Whitman approaches this topic of death not logically or empirically, as with Lucretius, but instead in a more mystical, metaphysical light. For Whitman, death is not to be feared, not because we no longer exist at its arrival, nor because it is a part of the natural progression of the universe and will benefit future generations. “Death is not an end of the self,” Miller, Jr. further states, “but an outlet for it into the Transcendent, a relief from life, an escape

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 98.

¹⁴⁴ O’Keefe, “Cycle of Life,” 43.

¹⁴⁵ Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 26.

into permanent Union with the Absolute.”¹⁴⁶ Indeed, death is not an end, but a transition to a new form of infinite life.

Where Lucretius views atoms as the permanent foundation of the universe and the spirit being individually temporary creations of these atoms, Whitman seems to intertwine the two concepts. Atoms connect the entire universe, and so does the soul. *Leaves of Grass* begins with the mystical, accepting words: “I celebrate myself, / And what I assume you shall assume, / For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.”¹⁴⁷ From the very beginning, Whitman associates the reader with the speaker, in such an irrevocable fashion as to suggest the existence of a shared, common mind and soul.

Uniting this celebration of self, and then immediately linking the individual self with the broad, shared “you,” Whitman seems to be relaying an “enormous power of the subconscious mind,” as Sholnick proposes, and providing basis for a “deathless persona, capable of moving effortlessly through the cosmos.”¹⁴⁸ For this “you” in *Leaves of Grass* has transcended all manners of time, a ceaseless address to the newfound reader and an eternal joining of past, present, and future. “I am the mate and companion of people,” the speaker declares, “all just as immortal and fathomless as myself; / They do not know how immortal, but I know.”¹⁴⁹ Whitman is a fragment of all individuals, and in his immortal life, they tread his same “perpetual journey.”¹⁵⁰

However, although the soul seems to be the foundation of the universe, it is also made of atoms, just as atoms provide the basis in *De Rerum Natura*. Whitman certainly acknowledges the atom, as seen in the first several lines of the poem — however, he does not strive to separate the

¹⁴⁶ Miller, Jr., “Inverted Mystical Experience,” 658.

¹⁴⁷ Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 13.

¹⁴⁸ Scholnick, “The Password Primeval,” 422.

¹⁴⁹ Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 17.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 51.

entities of atoms and the soul. Instead, he suggests that every thing contains an eternal soul, as though this soul, as equally as atoms, is the cornerstone of each living thing. The eternity of every thing is intricately bound up in the eternity of the universe. “All goes onward and outward . . . and nothing collapses.”¹⁵¹ Death is as natural to the cycle of life as it is in *De Rerum Natura*, and equally not to be feared — but this is on account of the soul’s eternal relationship with the universe. Each individual has his own “orbit,” each is a small universe in and of himself, and it continues infinitely, withstanding the passing of the corporeal body. If the universe continues to evolve and progress, and every person is an essential part of this evolution, then the concept of personal immortality and conservation is aligned with the natural world and its eternal development. At death’s door, the body seems to return back to its eternal home in nature, and the soul joins the spirit of the earth. Whitman approaches his own death at the end of “Song of Myself”: “I depart as air . . . I shake my white locks at the runaway sun, / I effuse my flesh in eddies and drift it in lacy jags.”¹⁵² Just as Lucretius’s nature does not turn anything into nothing, so do the soul and body in *Leaves of Grass* remain fixed elements of nature, but fluid in their materialization. The speaker does not disintegrate entirely, but becomes air, sun, water.

While Whitman proclaims that there is no such moment as true death, and that to die is not something to be feared, this does not remove the looming darkness that it brings. Similarly to Lucretius, Whitman does not belie the actuality of death’s mark. “To Think of Time,” the third untitled poem in *Leaves of Grass*, is written in a style comparable to a funeral dirge. The poem, slow and calculated, asks the reader, “Have you guessed you yourself would not continue? Have you dreaded those earth-beetles?”¹⁵³ Death may be simply a transition of life, but this does not dismiss its dominion, its vigor and incessancy. Although death may symbolize an eternal union

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 17.

¹⁵² Ibid., 56.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 65.

with nature, it is not an individually exclusive circumstance: while one may move onward into death, others remain to witness the passing.

Therein lies the difficulty of death: whatever remains is reserved for those still living. However, it is the beauty of nature, its order and span of time, that spurs on satisfaction with death and immortality in the end. “Do you think I could walk pleasantly and well-suited toward annihilation?” the speaker asks in *Leaves of Grass*. “Pleasantly and well-suited I walk, / Whither I walk I cannot define, but I know it is good, / The whole universe indicates it is good.”¹⁵⁴ Death, certainly not an easy or kind transition, holds a place so crucial to and close with the inherent eternity of nature, that fearing it is foolish. “To die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier.”¹⁵⁵

For both Lucretius and Whitman, death transitions the living into an eternal state of being. In *De Rerum Natura*, immortality does not coincide with life, and thus, “though you outlive as many generations as you will, / Nevertheless, Eternal Death is waiting for you still.”¹⁵⁶ Nature churns on, ceaselessly, eternal death’s destruction formulating pathways for new life. In such a world, death shall not be feared on account of its total annihilation of the present forms, breaking down existing matter into smaller particles to be used for future spirits. In contrast, the soul of *Leaves of Grass* does not fear death, for the soul thrives onward even in the midst of death. As Miller, Jr. suggests, “Eternal life is granted to both body and soul, both the material and the spiritual.”¹⁵⁷ The body finds a place on earth in its death — to the speaker, the grass seems to be “the beautiful uncut hair of graves.”¹⁵⁸ In contrast, the soul finds purchase amid nature as well, becoming one facet of an all-encompassing, ever-pervasive natural soul. “I hear

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁵⁶ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 105.

¹⁵⁷ Miller, Jr., “Inverted Mystical Experience,” 659.

¹⁵⁸ Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 16.

you whispering there O stars of heaven,” the speaker says. “O suns O grass of graves O perpetual transfers and promotions if you do not say anything how can I say anything?”¹⁵⁹

While the physical form of the body exists within the material function of the universe, the individual soul is eternal, immortal, thriving in a transcending plane of infinite space and time.¹⁶⁰

The souls of both Lucretius and Whitman are intrinsic in nature and to nature; however, where the soul in *De Rerum Natura* is confined to its corporeal state and does not exist past death, the soul in *Leaves of Grass* exudes an eternal presence, welcoming death and finding a place within it.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁶⁰ Miller, Jr., “Inverted Mystical Experience,” 659.

Conclusion:

“If you want me again, look for me under your bootsoles.”

At the end of Whitman’s “Song of Myself,” in many first editions, the final period was missing. Some believe this is due to a simple printing error; however, many think that Whitman had intended it to be this way. In this regard, the end of the first poem of *Leaves of Grass* would read, “Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged, / Missing me one place search another, / I stop some where waiting for you” — no final period, no stopping point, rendering Whitman’s invitation perpetually unresolved and elusive.¹⁶¹ Comparably, Lucretius was never able to finish his *De Rerum Natura*, and so the unrevised poem ends on a rather eerie note of funerals and mourning: “They’d place on a pyre / Constructed by another their own loved-ones, and set fire / To it with wails and lamentation. And often they would shed / Much blood in the struggle rather than desert their dead.”¹⁶² It seems unlikely that Lucretius, who had just spent a great deal of his poem discussing why one should not be afraid of death, would leave his poem on the brink of it, the final words speaking to the utter destruction and emotional torment of death.

The themes of each of the poems are not new ones — they were contemplated prior to Lucretius’s composition, and they continue to be discussed today, after Whitman’s passing. Lucretius and Whitman are certainly like-minded in many ways, both placing atoms and interconnectedness at the forefront of their poetic convictions, and, from this basis, elaborating upon the makeup of the soul and its implications for immortality and eternity. Whitman may wholly endorse an all-consuming spirituality, a human divinity consisting of all souls, and

¹⁶¹ Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 56.

¹⁶² Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 238.

Lucretius entirely disagrees; similarly, Lucretius does not follow Whitman's notion of an eternal soul, and cannot locate the justice of romantic love. But these differences, seldom occurring but scattered throughout the comparison, may simply be a result of the separation in era and culture. Should Lucretius have existed in Brooklyn, strolling alongside Whitman on his familiar streets, perhaps the minds of the two may have been entirely inseparable; may Whitman have experienced the forum discussions of Rome alongside Lucretius, perhaps their principles would have been indivisible. Certain beliefs may be unable to transcend the time gap as efficiently as the lines of poetry, and particular ideas may be lost in the transference of time. However, this disjunction of time and location between Whitman and Lucretius is not something to bemoan, or to cast aside — rather, it is something to be embraced. The temporal and geographic separation, the eternal themes of both *Leaves of Grass* and *De Rerum Natura*, and the open-ended finales all amalgamate to create the foundation of the poems' importance: in their entireties, these poems lend themselves to a receptiveness for response and an invitation for continuation.

Sharing the universal themes of atomic basis, the soul, love, and death, the one factor separating Lucretius's and Whitman's ideologies is their nation. In his page proofs for "November Boughs," Whitman wrote, "Concluding with two items for the imaginative genius of the West, when it worthily rises — First, what Herder taught to the young Goethe, that really great poetry is always (like the Homeric or Biblical canticles) the result of a national spirit, and not the privilege of a polish'd and select few."¹⁶³ Ancient Rome and transcendental America provide contextual premises for each poem; *De Rerum Natura* could not have been written without its Roman context, nor could *Leaves of Grass* be apart from the newly founded America.

¹⁶³ Page proofs, "November Boughs" by Walt Whitman, Oct. 1, 1888, box 1, folder 6, YCAL MSS 202, Walt Whitman Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Yet both poems are somehow also separable from their histories — their aspirations of an explicated but ethereal universe span lengths of time and travel across seas.

Whitman follows up his first point for the “imaginative genius” with the second: “that the strongest and sweetest songs yet remain to be sung.”¹⁶⁴ In a way, the open-endedness of both poems give way for a similar poem of the next generation, the next nation, the next movement. Context works to shape the underlying implications of each poem, and so more may follow in suit, inspired but still individual. Just as Lucretius has followed in the footsteps of Epicurus and other philosophical predecessors, so too has Whitman gained poetic insight from Lucretius, and has passed on his *Leaves of Grass* for others to discover.

De Rerum Natura and *Leaves of Grass* intersect and entwine much like the universe that they discuss. In both poems, atoms are the irrevocable building blocks of the universe — they are eternal, unchanging, and forever occupy and create the world. The source of interconnectivity, they allow for an eternal bond to be shared between all facets of the universe. Whitman proposes that every soul is at once individual, separate, but at the same time an indivisible fragment of an all-encompassing worldly soul. Even at the introduction of death, the body will become eternally attached with the earth, while the soul separates and fuses with the infinite soul of the universe. In a similar fashion, the poems of Lucretius and Whitman interact and tangle, comprised of the same foundation, yet they are also able to stand on their own. As Lucretius suggests, “And thus you will gain knowledge, guided by a little labour, / For one thing will illuminate the next [...] all secrets will be opened to your sight, / One truth illuminate another, as light kindles light.”¹⁶⁵ Both Whitman and Lucretius, in their separate corners of the world, have witness the illuminated secrets of the universe, and have passed them on, through poetry, kindling the lights that follow.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 35.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Arkins, B., "Epicurus and Lucretius on Sex, Love and Marriage," *Apeiron: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy and Science* 18 (1984): 141-143.
- Asmis, Elizabeth, "Lucretius' Venus and Stoic Zeus," *Hermes* 110 (1982): 458-470.
- Betensky, Aya, "Lucretius and Love," *The Classical World* 73 (1980): 291-299.
- Blume, Marshall E., "Infinity in Epicurean Philosophy," *The Classical Journal* 60 (1965): 174-176.
- Borges, Jorge Luis, "Walt Whitman: Man and Myth," *Critical Inquiry* 1 (1975): 707-718.
- Deutsch, Rosamund E., "The Ancient and Modern Atom," *The Classical Journal* 41 (1945): 97-103.
- Jenkyns, Richard, Introduction to *De Rerum Natura* by A. E. Stallings (London: Penguin, 2007), vii-xxiii.
- McMahon, William E., "Grass and Its Mate in 'Song of Myself,'" *South Atlantic Review* 51 (1986): 41-55.
- Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, trans. A. E. Stallings (London: Penguin, 2007).
- O'Keefe, Tim, "Lucretius on the Cycle of Life and the Fear of Death," *Apeiron: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy and Science* 36 (2003): 43-65.
- Sholnick, Robert J., "'The Password Primeval': Whitman's Use of Science in 'Song of Myself,'" *Studies in the American Renaissance* (1986): 385-425.
- Stearns, John B., "Epicurus and Lucretius on Love," *The Classical Journal* 31 (1936): 343-351.
- William H. Shurr, "Walt Whitman's 'Leaves of Grass': The Making of a Sexual Revolution," *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 74 (1991): 101-128.
- Vavilov, S. I., "Lucretius' Physics," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 9 (1948): 21-40.
- Walt Whitman Collection. YCAL MSS 202. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.
- Whitman, Walt, *Leaves of Grass* (Brooklyn, 1855).

ACADEMIC VITA

Jessica Myers

379 East Mountain Road, Port Matilda, PA 16870 | jaymy67@gmail.com

PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY

Bachelor of Arts with honors, English | Minors: Latin, Art History

Expected Graduation Date: May 2015

RESEARCH

CURIAS GRANT RECIPIENT

CALS (Center for American Literary Studies) Undergraduate Research In the Archives Scholars

- Given to scholars whose theses are discussing subjects related to American literature
- Fosters an opportunity to further study thesis topic within an archive or special collection

SPECIAL COLLECTION & ARCHIVE RESEARCH

- Finished CURIAS Grant training at the Pattee and Paterno Libraries at Penn State
- Practiced archival research during at Library Company in Philadelphia
- Conducted archival research at the Beinecke Library at Yale University

INDEPENDENT STUDIES

LATIN POETRY INDEPENDENT STUDY

Penn State → State College, PA | *January 2014 — May 2014*

- Studied poetry of Catullus with fellow Latin minor student and Latin professor
- Translated text individually through the week
- Discussed textual connotations and implications in three-hour weekly meetings

INTERNSHIPS & EMPLOYMENT

RIGHTS & PERMISSIONS EDITORIAL INTERN

Pearson Learning Solutions → Boston, MA | *May 2014 – August 2014*

- Acquired permissions for custom textbooks
- Interacted directly with publishing companies, individual rights holders, and authors
- Completed multiple projects simultaneously in a deadline-sensitive work environment

COMPARATIVE LITERATURE STUDIES INTERN

Penn State → State College, PA | *August 2013 — May 2014*

- Directed Book Reviews department of the Comparative Literature Studies Journal
- Worked with faculty across the nation to secure book reviews for journal
- Managed timeline for book reviews, from request to final publishing