

From *On the Nature of Things* (*De rerum natura*), Book one
(with some reference in my comment to a passage in Book four)
by Lucretius, born at the beginning of the first century BCE, perhaps
99 BCE, probably no later than 95 BCE and who died probably in 55 BCE.
As translated by Anthony M. Esolen

Now it's clear that nothing can be limited
Without something beyond for boundary, some
Point beyond which our sense can't follow it.
But you must admit that nothing exists beyond
This All; therefore it has no limit, no end.
Nor does it matter in what place you stand:
Take any point you like—you leave the whole
Unbounded in all regions equally.

A few lines later, this comes:

...I'll follow you then; wherever
You place the shores, I ask, "What of the spear?
Where does it fly?" No end can be established;
Immensity prolongs the flight forever.

A passage that has followed, as has the other, this:

There's more: Nature dissolves all things into
Their atoms; things can't die back down to nothing.
...Never can things revert to nothingness!

How tempting to believe in innovation, in the poet making something new—I have needed this delusion myself, have in fact built something I dare call a "new literary paradigm" on the possibility of the new, yet one of the ancients had already made clear (in Latin) that "as all words share one alphabet, many things may be made from the same atoms," must be made from the same particles, hinting at some irreducible particle that exists in a finite number of basic forms, these combining to make all else, infinite variety within limits established by the nature of these particles, so human beings will not (in initial birth form) become an Andean peak or a pack of flamingos dancing in one of the rivers, perhaps a sulfurous one, at the feet of the Andes though some humans may do an Irish step dance in which the legwork seems to invent the flamingo ritual pack dance again--could it be that certain patterns are inevitable given the close relationship between all stuff? We're made of elements repeating throughout an immensity available on every scale, Lucretius instructing his readers to venture to the shore, to the limit of existence and from that shore to throw a spear that will still travel away from the thrower, will still

have somewhere to go, every somewhere a candidate for the center in a totality that is necessarily endless if it is indeed an *all*, and if endless, then centerless, as much space in every direction from every point. Wow. And looking, he says, into a puddle seemingly shallow gives access to a depth, to an infinity as immense as the celestial one that the puddle is able to hold. Wow² and Wow₂.

So beginning with any of these points, taking any point as a nucleus, and increasing distance from it while maintaining that speck as the center, eventually, the periphery embraces totality. And that is the powers of ten, an Eames film I saw in Chicago, the stills from the film that I have as a flipbook, the book about the size of things in the universe that I have taught when I invented a literary theory that caused me to seek that which could give my new point credence. I have reinvented something ancient, it turns out. I participate in one of the inevitable patterns, am part of a chain of observing the limits and joys of the senses, the logic and marvels suggested by consideration of scale. And I am comforted by Lucretius' love of what I consider lovable paradox, to be both bound and unbound, both finite and limitless. And I am comforted by Lucretius saying that recycling is the nature of things, not waste. There is no throwaway stuff (including ancient texts —how I need Lucretius!) for stuff breaks down into basic units that are then free to form something else, to be part of something else that can also be the center of everything, and by extension, exist in some form for as long as there is totality, as long as there is existence as both the container and the content.

This is how to live, and it has been the way to live at least since Lucretius. From the center where I (re)configure a way to make whatever forms are possible out of various components; from this center, I arrive at a totality that as it widens away from my ideas embraces Lucretius, his part larger for being wider --but my idea therefore a candidate for potency, for being a distillation: a potent drop at a present end of the funnel. I cannot resist another *Wow!*

—Thylias Moss