

**Samuel J. HUSKEY**

**The Deeply Clinging Boundary Stone: An Element of Liminality in the *De Rerum Natura***

Various explanations for Lucretius' frequent use of repetition have been suggested by commentators. Some (e.g., Bailey, Deutsch, Maguinness) believe that a didactic poem relies on repetition for clarity and emphasis. Others (e.g., Dalzell, Ingalls,) attribute Lucretius' repeated words and phrases to the formulaic nature of traditional epic poetry. Some have even blamed the frequency of repetition on the effects of the love potion that is said to have driven Lucretius insane (Stampini). In my paper I will defend the poetic function of repeated passages in the *De Rerum Natura* by emphasizing a specific repeated passage (1.75-77, 1.594-96, 5.88-90, 6.64-66) in which Lucretius uses religious imagery to buttress his argument against religion.

Lucretius was concerned with making Epicureanism appealing to his fellow Romans. Since Epicurus' philosophy centers on a true knowledge of limits (of life, the universe, size, etc.), his task did not pose as much difficulty as it might seem. Boundaries played a prominent role in nearly every aspect of Roman religion. The *limen* is perhaps the best example, but a concern for liminality pervades Roman religious practice. Nowhere is it clearer than in the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, which was shared by Terminus, the god of boundary stones. From that vantage point, Terminus protected the laws and the boundaries of Rome (Serv. A. 9.446). Characterized by his obduracy, Terminus becomes a symbol of reliability, certainty and order.

As one of the oldest Roman gods, Terminus can be seen as a representative of traditional Roman religion, but Lucretius appropriates him as new symbol of Epicureanism. He introduces the phrase *terminus haerens* in the proem to his first book when he says that Epicurus taught us "what can happen, what cannot, and how the power of each thing is limited and its boundary stone clings deeply," (1.75-77). By placing *terminus* within this description of Epicurus' benefaction to humanity, he degrades the religious significance of the boundary stone; but through the religiously charged context of the first proem (e.g., the invocation of Venus, the personification of Religion) the boundary stone retains its religious connotations. As Lucretius repeats this passage three more times, he simultaneously emphasizes the significance of boundaries for Epicureanism and diminishes the boundary stone's religious importance, until Epicurus himself takes the place of Terminus, and his philosophy becomes the law that guarantees the integrity of boundaries, which, in Lucretius' view, is much more reliable than religious belief.