



University
of Glasgow

Barron, Richard (2014) *Composition portfolio*. MMus(R) thesis.

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Richard Barron

26 lines

a setting of lines from the
De rerum natura of Lucretius

for

**Eight-part chorus,
soprano solo and organ**

Resubmission

April 2014

Performance notes

- *26 lines* is intended for performance by a chorus of no more than four singers per part; it could also be performed with a single singer per part;
- a straight line between notes indicates portamento (not glissando);
- crossed noteheads indicate Sprechstimme;
- the pronunciation of the Latin text should not be anglicised: c and g should always be hard; ae should be pronounced as a diphthong (like English i), and i should be pronounced like English e; however, v should be pronounced as in English;
- performance time is approximately 18 minutes.

The text

26 lines is a setting of short selections the text of the Latin poem *De rerum natura*, written by Lucretius in the first century BC. It is a didactic poem, of over seven thousand lines, expounding the main tenets of Epicurean philosophy: that our world consists of the ceaseless flow of atoms that collide to form creatures and objects, then separate to pursue their endless course; that this has nothing to do with the gods and that we can live our lives free of the fear imposed by religion, serene in the true understanding of our place in the universe.

The text of *26 lines*, with translation, is shown below.

1. Invocation

*Aeneadum genetrix
.....caeli subter labentia signa
quae mare navigerum.....
concelebras, per te quoniam genus omne animantum
concipitur.*

Mother of Aeneas' race, who under the shifting signs of heaven fills the sea laden with ships, through you every kind of living creature is conceived.

2. Contemplation of Venus

Alma Venus, hominum divomque voluptas.

Nurturing Venus, pleasure of men and gods.

3. Terror, matter, reason

*Terror(em) animi tenebrasque....
....sed naturae species ratioque*

Terror and darkness of mind (must be dispelled) by the aspect and reason of nature.

Corpora sunt et inane.

There are bodies and there is void.

*...cuncta necessest
aut gravitate sua ferri primordia
rerum aut ictu forte alterius.*

Every atom must be carried onwards either by its own weight or by a chance blow from another.

4. Natural phenomena

*....venti vis verberat incita pontum
.....perfurit acri
cum fremitu saevitque minaci murmure ventus.*

The mighty wind whips up and batters the sea....Its fierce howl rages and roars with savage threat.

Tonitru quatiuntur caerulea caeli.

The blue skies shake with thunder.

Ventus fervidus....quae faciunt nictantia fulgura flammae.

The burning wind (scatters the seeds of fire) that kindle flickering flashes of flame.

*....magni circum moenia mundi
expugnata dabunt labem putrisque ruinas.*

The walls of the great world will be stormed all around, and will collapse into crumbling ruins.

5. Fulfilment

*Sed nil dulcius est, bene quam munita tenere
edita doctrina sapientum templa serena.*

But nothing is sweeter than to possess the strong serene temples built from the teaching of the wise.