

HPAH 4009 – Roman History and Literature**Assessment 4: A summary (Approx. 250 words) of the approximate dates, key biographical facts, and main works of a selected author (Lucretius).**

When it comes to the life of the Roman poet, Titus Lucretius Carus, only anecdotal evidence survives, and much of that evidence is conflicting. The date of the poet's death is debated, but, is believed to be c. 55 BC¹. Evidence suggests Lucretius committed suicide at the age of 44, which would have Lucretius being born c. 99 BC². St Jerome writes that Lucretius was driven mad after drinking a 'love-philtre', and that the poet wrote between fits of madness, and ultimately, the downing of this potion lead to the poet taking his own life³.

Lucretius' only surviving work is the unfinished '*De rerum natura*' or, 'On the Nature of Things'⁴. It is thought by some that the poem was being written during or, perhaps, even after the date of 49 BC, again, this is conflicting evidence with regards to the believed death date of Lucretius⁵. It is believed that Lucretius was a member of the Roman elite, giving him the opportunity to study the objects and subjects referred to in his work, and, ultimately to write it⁶. The poem is a mixture of 'theology and physics', and is based on the philosophical ideas and systems of the Greek philosopher Epicurus, written as a poem (in Latin)⁷. The poem is epic in scale and written in somewhat of a mixture of styles, part rhetoric, didactic, with even satirical elements, all with varying degrees of technicality⁸. There is some evidence that suggests, or, has been interpreted as such, that Cicero had 'corrected' or edited the manuscript of 'On the Nature of Things' before the work was published posthumously. Cicero's exact role, if any, and which Cicero, is again debated and difficult to fathom⁹.

Word count 335

[Epicurus was a Greek philosopher born on the island of Samos in 341 BC, who founded the school named the 'Garden' in Athens c. 307 BC¹⁰. Epicurean philosophy (amongst many other ideas) was, in essence, sensory. The searching for pleasure over pain, in the hope of gaining enlightenment. The main aim of a person's actions should be to produce in that person the feeling of happiness¹¹. There are also many technical aspects to Epicurean philosophy, such as, the definition of 'chaos', the constantly moving atom, and their roles within the Universe¹².]

¹ Smith, 1992, p. X-XI

² Smith, 1992, p. X-XI

³ Classen, 1968, p. 79; Smith, 1992, p. XVIII-XXII

⁴ Smith, 1992, p. X

⁵ Hutchinson, 2001, p. 150; Sandbach, 1940, p. 72

⁶ Smith, 1992, p. XIV-XV

⁷ Hose, 1934, p. 161-164

⁸ Smith, 1992, p. LI-LIV

⁹ Smith, 1992, p. X-XIV

¹⁰ Dio Lae. X (Epi); Blackburn, 2016, online; Polleichtner, 2010, online

¹¹ Polleichtner, 2010, online

¹² Polleichtner, 2010, online; Dio Lae. X (Epi)

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