Emendations on the second book of Lucretius

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Abstract

Six emendations are offered upon the text of the second book of Lucretius’ *De rerum natura*. Two emendations concern well-recognised textual problems in the book (*subitam* in 363 and the repetition of *in* in 483). The four remaining suggestions (three conjectures and one transposition) address parts of the book previously unsuspected by critics (549, 622-623, 708, 1136).

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The second book of Lucretius’ *De rerum natura* is perhaps the most understudied of the poem and remains the only book that has not yet received a commentary specifically dedicated to its entirety. It is hoped that this disappointing gap will soon be remedied. In the meantime, I offer below a few textual suggestions for the consideration of future editors, alongside those that I have already made on this book in passing elsewhere.

2. For suggestions on 53; 462; 1079, see «Sigmatic Ecthlipsis in Lucretius». *Hermes* 136 (2008), p. 188-205, at 197-198, 190-193 and 201-202; on 88; 263; 456; 1006, see «Lucretiana quaedam». *Phil.* 152 (2008), p. 111-127, at 111-116; on 114, see «Emendations on the fifth book of Lucretius». *MD* 60 (2008), p. 177-89, at 179 n. 5; on 250, see «Seven Lucretian Emendations». *Eos* 95 (2008), p. 97-99; on 252; 331; 428; 1168, see «Supplementa Lucretiana». *Arctos* 42 (2008), p. 11-23,
2, 361-366:

\[
\text{nec tenerae salices atque herbae rore uigentes}
\text{fluminaque illa queunt summis labentia ripis}
\text{oblectare animum subitamque auertere curam,}
\text{nec uitulorum aliae species per pabula laeta}
\text{deriuare queunt animum curamque leuare:}
\text{usque adeo quiddam proprium notumque requirit.}
\]

Thus Lucretius depicts the plaintive wanderings of the distraught heifer, engaged in futile search for her lost calf that has been slain for the sake of 

\textit{religio}. \textit{Subitam} of 363 has caused problems to editors since Lachmann, on the ground that no suitable rendering of the adjective seems possible given the clearly prolonged period of searching depicted in 355-360. In short, this is not a „sudden“ care at all; the translation of Bailey („sudden recurrent pang“) introduces in its second word a concept quite alien to 

\textit{subitus}. An alternative taken two centuries ago by Wakefield and followed by Munro (in later years), Nencini, Ernout and S.B. Smith \textit{inter alios}, is to interpret \textit{subitam... curam} in the sense \textit{cura quae subiit}, comparing the active force that \textit{praeteritus}, \textit{obitus} and a number of other compounds of \textit{ire} can bear. Yet to this defence one must make the strong objection that nowhere else in extant Latin literature does \textit{subitus} possess this sense.

Accordingly, emendation deserves serious consideration. Of the various conjectures offered, Lachmann’s \textit{solitam} is quite contrary to the truth: the heifer’s anxiety is not at all customary to her. Munro’s \textit{sumptam} is hopelessly prosaic and bizarrely implies that the cow actively took the \textit{cura} upon herself. Brieger’s \textit{subito}, though barely removed from the paradosis, is lamentably weak; the less said of Baehrens’ \textit{subidam} the better. Bernays’ \textit{dubiam} is, refreshingly, an emendation founded on good sense rather than the \textit{ductus litterarum}. A possible alternative is \textit{maestam}: the streams cannot divert the cow’s melancholic anxiety. Lucretius employs the adjective elsewhere of mourners themselves (1, 89; 6, 1281), victims (1, 99), the generally miserable (4, 1236), as well as of their hearts (6, 1152) and minds (6, 1233); for its use as a transferred epithet (i.e. for the \textit{cura} of the \textit{maesta vacca}), cf., e.g., Sil. 6, 551: \textit{haec Marus et maesta refoebebat uulnera cura}. A similar transference can be seen in Lucretius at 6, 645: \textit{pauida complebant pectora cura}. If \textit{mae-} or \textit{me-}

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were lost after -um, the resultant stam could well have been expanded to subitam so as to repair metre. We must merely suppose that this corruption occurred in the half-millennium before Macrobius came to cite verses 361-363 in his Saturnalia.

2, 481-485:

\[ \text{quod si non ita sit, rursum iam semina quaedam esse infinito debebunt corporis auctu.} \]
\[ \text{namque in eadem una quoisuis in breuitate corporis inter se multum variare figurae non possunt.} \]


The repetition of in as transmitted in 483 has been agreed by all to be indefensible. Various emendations have been offered, ranging from the violent (Lotze) to the unclassical (Lambinus), and twentieth-century editors have tended to favour Brieger’s simple alteration of the latter in to iam. Yet it is a curious place to insert an adverb — generously translated by Bailey „in these circumstances“ — and it has the distinct look of an emendation. My ear favours retaining the latter transmitted in, the required collocation eadem una... in breuitate displaying typical Lucretian word order. In lieu of the former in, therefore, I suggest that we read illa (preferable to hac): namque illa eadem una quoisuis in breuitate / corporis. To translate 483-485: „for in that one and the same smallness of any given atom, the shapes are unable to differ from one another greatly“. For the synizesis of eadem, cf. 1, 480; 4, 744; 4, 786; 4, 959; at Verg. Aen. 10, 487 we find the same pairing with this synizesis: una eademque uiia.

2, 547-550:

\[ \text{quippe etenim sumam hoc quoque uti finita per omne corpora iactari unius genitalia rei, unde, ubi, qua ui et quo pacto congressa coibunt} \]
\[ \text{materia tanto in pelago turbaque aliena?} \]

The sequence of interrogatives in 549 would run with more force without the et that joins the third and fourth elements (i.e. unde, ubi, qua ui, quo pacto): the particle could easily have been added by scribal error (a species of banalisation). et is wrongly inserted in Lucretius’ mss at 1, 820 (QG); 2, 637 (Q); 4, 235; 4, 677. Since Lucretius very rarely placed ui before a following vowel (only once (5, 162) in its 37 other occurrences), the removal of et would also restore a smoother and more natural rhythm than is offered by the prodelision of the conjunction.
2, 618-623:

*tympana tenta tonant palmis et cymbala circum\nconcaua, raucisonoque minantur cornua cantu,\net Phrygio stimulat numero caua tibia mentis,\ntelaque praepovert violenti signa furoris,\ningratos animos atque impia pectora uolgi\nconterrere metu quae possint numine diuae.*

Papanghelis

Along with the great majority of editors, I see no need to remove the double ablative in 623: *metu* is to be taken closely with *conterrere*, and *numine diuae* serves as an instrumental ablative. What strikes me as genuinely strange, however, is the postponement of *quaes* [*tela*] to ninth position in its clause. 622-623 would run both more easily and more forcefully if interchanged with one another: *conterrere metu quae possint numine diuae / ingratos animos atque impia pectora uolgi*. The transposition of single adjacent lines affects the poem’s transmission at 1, 14-15; 1, 1085-1086; 2, 5-6; 4, 250-251; 4, 863-864; 4, 1123-1124, and other instances no doubt await detection.

2, 707-709:

*quorum nil fieri manifestumst, omnia quando\nseminibus certis certa genetrice creata\nconseruare genus crescentia posse uidemus.*

Since *materia* is personified as *genetrix* in 708, the syntax would be eased after *seminibus certis* by inserting *a* before *genetrice*. It is by no means a difficult supposition that *certaa* was reduced to *certa*, either by a simple graphic error of the scribe (haplography) or by the loss of the sound between *certa* and *genetrice* when reciting the line in his head.

2, 1133-1138:

*quippe etenim quantost res amplior, augmine adempto,\net quo latior est, in cunctas undique partes\nplura modo dispargit et ab se corpora mittit,\nnec facile in uenas cibus omnis diditur ei\nnec satis est, proquam largos exaestuat aestus,\nunde queat tantum suboriri ac subpeditare.*

Again I offer a small change. In 1136 *diditur* is constructed with the prepositional clause *in uenas... omnis*, which leaves the dative of possession *ei (=rei*
crescenti) loosely appended. Given that *eius* was very often abbreviated *ei*’ or *e*’ in ancient *notae* and early minuscule, that Lucretius closed his verses more commonly with *eius* than *ei*³, and that damage frequently occurred to the close of lines of *De rerum natura*⁴, I suggest that Lucretius closed 2, 1136 diditur eius⁵.

3. *eius* closes nineteen verses, *ei* eight (excluding the present instance), of which only two (5, 729; 6, 795) are datives of possession.

4. For the loss of -*us* at the close of a line, cf. 3, 404 (Q); 5, 24 (Q); 6, 144 (*aest* for *aestus*); for textual damage at the close of the line, cf. 1, 748; 1, 752; 1, 1068-1075; 2, 331; 2, 428; 2, 1115; 3, 159; 3, 538; 3, 596; 3, 705; 3, 1061; 4, 612; 5, 586.

5. As a final note, I record my support of the following readings or conjectures in the present book: 564 *adauctu* (Purmann); 716 *quiquam* (Wakefield after *cuiquam*, the early vulgate); 734 *alt quoquos* (Lambinus); 978 *natura* (Gassendi); 1062 *saep* (Garcia Calvo); 1099 *inque* (early vulgate). The much-suspected *geminam* of 1082 is proven to be correct by the evidence of the Strasbourg Empedocles: see MARTIN, A.; PRIMAVESI, O. (1999). *L’Empédocle de Strasbourg (P. Strash. Gr. Inv. 1665-1666): introduction, édition et commentaire*. Berlin, p. 230 and 234.