

## LUCRETIVS 2.547

Sed tamen id quoque uti concedam, quamlibet esto  
 unica res quaedam nativo corpore sola,  
 cui similis toto terrarum non sit in orbi;  
 infinita tamen nisi erit vis materiai  
 unde ea progigni possit concepta, creari 545  
 non poterit neque, quod superest, procreare alicue.  
 quippe etenim *†sumant oculi†* finita per omne  
 corpora iactari unius genitalia rei,  
 unde, ubi, qua vi et quo pacto congressa coibunt  
 materiae tanto in pelago turbaque aliena? 550  
 non, ut opinor, habent rationem conciliandi.

(Lucretius 2.541–51)

This is part of Lucretius' argument that, whereas the number of atomic shapes is finite (2.478–521), the number of atoms of each shape is infinite (2.522–68). In the immediately preceding lines (2.532–40) he contends that the second proposition is not disproved by the rarity of a particular species in a particular part of the world, because elsewhere that species may be very common. He gives the example of the elephant. Then, in the passage quoted above, he concedes, for the sake of argument, the false assumption that something unique in the whole world could be created, but says that in fact its creation, nourishment, and growth would be impossible unless there were an infinite supply of suitable material; for, if the atoms required to create and sustain it were limited in number, how could they ever meet in the vast ocean of matter? They could not.

Although there is no difficulty with Lucretius' argument in our passage, there is a textual problem in 547, and it is with this that this note is concerned. The manuscripts agree in reading *sumant oculi*: 'For let your eyes conceive (i.e. *imagine that you see*) the generative atoms of any single thing, being limited in number . . .' I quote the Bohn's Classical Library translation by the respectable nineteenth-century scholar, headmaster, clergyman, and uxoricide John Selby Watson.<sup>1</sup> Watson has done his best, but *oculi* is quite impossible in this context, and it is strange, as Munro points out, that all editors before Wakefield (1796), including Lambinus, printed it without apparently noticing anything amiss. The first scholar known to have suspected something wrong is Bentley, who obelised *oculi* in his copy of Faber's edition of 1662,<sup>2</sup> but did not propose any emendation.

Since the late eighteenth century at least twenty emendations have been suggested. Very few of them deserve serious consideration. Wakefield, after reporting and approving Bentley's unhappiness with *oculi*, tentatively suggests *ollei* (= *olli*), 'i.e. illi, qui

<sup>1</sup> John Selby Watson, *Lucretius on the Nature of Things* (London, 1851), 74. On Watson's career and the sensational event which caused him to spend the last years of his life in Parkhurst Prison, see *Dictionary of National Biography*. He had the distinction, rarely achieved by a murderer, of having the Latinity of a remark that he made at his trial discussed in Cabinet. Beryl Bainbridge's skilful and moving novel, *Watson's Apology* (London, 1984), is based on the events of his life.

<sup>2</sup> The copy is in the British Library (shelf-mark 680.e.4). Wakefield says that Bentley 'crucem parvulam . . . vocabulo *oculi* appinxit', but Kristian Jensen, of the British Library's Early Printed Collections, who has kindly examined the relevant page for me, reports that '*oculi* is preceded by a small vertical stroke above the line', and that 'in the outer margin, next to the line, there is a longer vertical stroke'. He further reports that the stroke preceding *oculi* is very close to its first letter, so that there can be no doubt that it relates to that word. I am very grateful to Dr Jensen for his assistance.

materiam cuiusvis rei infinitam esse nolint concedere, et principiis nostris consentire'. Waltz makes the same proposal (*olli*),<sup>3</sup> unaware that Wakefield had anticipated him one hundred and fifty years earlier. *Oll(e)i* is close to *oculi*, but, as Marouzeau says, 'à le tort de ne se rapporter à aucun sujet explicite'.<sup>4</sup> It is to be noted too that, although Lucretius has *ollis* ten times,<sup>5</sup> he never uses the nominative.

The only other conjecture, known to me, which retains *sumant* in its place in the manuscripts,<sup>6</sup> is Martin's *sumant alii*, which is intolerably feeble.

Most other emendations include a form of *sumo*—*sumam*, *sumas*, *sumamus*, *sume*, *sumantur*, *sumantor* (*sic*).<sup>7</sup> The most popular choice in this group is Munro's *sumam hoc quoque uti*,<sup>8</sup> which is printed by Bailey, Ernout, Diels, Rouse, Gigon, Valenti, Büchner, myself, Dionigi, Milanese, and Giancotti. But does the conjecture deserve its popularity? I no longer think so.<sup>9</sup> I do not object to the assumed corruption: although it is quite a large one, it is not implausible, and indeed my own 'solution' assumes an equally considerable corruption. My two queries concern other matters. One concerns the position of *uti*. Among the numerous occurrences in Lucretius of the conjunction *ut(i)* introducing a clause with the subjunctive I can find only six where it follows the verb. In five of these cases (5.872; 6.607, 784, 887, 1064) *ut* immediately follows the verb; in the sixth case (6.1214) there is one intervening word. In no case are there, as in Munro's emendation, two intervening words.<sup>10</sup> My second query concerns the claim, made by Munro and others, that his reading derives support from *id quoque uti concedam* in 2.541 (notice, by the way, the 'regular' word-order there). It is one thing for Lucretius to say that he grants a false hypothesis to his opponent, another thing for him to suppose that he himself holds it, and it is to be noted that in 2.560–4, where, after his simile of parts of shipwrecked vessels being tossed by the sea in all directions, he reiterates the impossibility of a finite supply of atoms combining to form any sort of thing, it is the reader who is imagined to be the holder of the erroneous opinion:

sic tibi si finita semel primordia quaedam  
constitues, aevom debebunt sparsa per omnem  
disiectare aestus diversi materiai,  
numquam in concilium ut possint compulsa coire  
nec remorari in concilio nec crescere adaucta.

<sup>3</sup> R. Waltz, 'Lucretiana', *REL* 29 (1951), 183–98, at 189–90.

<sup>4</sup> J. Marouzeau, 'Note additionnelle' after the end of Waltz's article (n. 3), *REL* 29 (1951), 198–200, at 199.

<sup>5</sup> There are ten certain occurrences of *ollis*. In 4.791 many editors accept Creech's *ollis* for *oculis*, but wrongly, in my opinion: see my critical note in the Loeb edition.

<sup>6</sup> F. Polle suggests *si qui sumant*.

<sup>7</sup> E. Orth, 'Lucretiana', *Helmantica* 11 (1960), 121–34, at 130, conjecturing *sumantor uti*, explains that *sumantor* is present passive imperative, with *corpora* (2.548) as subject. But the correct form is *sumuntor*, and one can only suppose that Orth is under the misconception that *sumo* is a first-conjugation verb. Even *sumuntor* would be completely implausible.

<sup>8</sup> *uti* is taken by Munro and some of his followers as concessive, by others as final.

<sup>9</sup> A. E. Housman, reviewing the first edition of Bailey's text of Lucretius (Oxford, 1900) in *CR* 14 (1900), 367–8, at 367 (= *The Classical Papers of A. E. Housman* 2.523–4, at 523), dismisses Munro's emendation as 'futile', but does not elaborate.

<sup>10</sup> Defending *sumam hoc quoque uti*, Munro claims that 'euphony has determined the position of the words, as *quippe etenim hoc quoque uti* would have had a very harsh sound'. But the contorted word-order of his proposal surely outweighs any supposed euphonic advantage. W. A. Merrill, 'Criticism of the text of Lucretius with suggestions for its improvement: Part I, Books I–III', *Univ. Calif. Public. Class. Philol.* 3 (1916), 1–46, at 20, alters Munro's word-order to *quoque uti sumam hoc*, but, apart from the inappropriate position of *quoque*, this is very far from the reading of the manuscripts, and Merrill's claim that it is 'the correct reading' rather takes one's breath away. He prints the reading in his 1917 text of Lucretius.

Munro's *sumam hoc . . . uti* is not in tune with *sic tibi si . . . constitues*. Preferable to his conjecture is that of Bailey, made tentatively in his 1947 edition, *sumas* (already suggested by Susemihl) *quoque uti*. This has the advantages that *uti* is less far separated from its verb and that the erroneous view is attributed to the imaginary opponent. However, one needs to ask why Lucretius did not write the more natural *hoc quoque uti sumas*.

I am now strongly attracted by Brieger's early suggestion, abandoned by him before he produced his Teubner edition of Lucretius and not even mentioned there, that *sumant* conceals *si iam*.<sup>11</sup> Lucretius is very fond of using *si iam* when he is introducing a false hypothesis conceded for the sake of argument: see, for example, 1.396, 968; 2.974; 3.540, 766, 843. *si iam* is therefore plausible in the present context. It is to be noted too that, when Lucretius has a direct question introduced by *unde*, as he has in 2.549–50, it is elsewhere always either preceded or followed by a conditional (or, in one case, quasi-conditional) clause:

- 1.225–31    *si . . . , unde . . . ? unde . . . ? unde . . . ? unde . . . ?*  
 2.251–7    *si . . . , unde . . . , unde . . . ?*  
 3.717–21    *sin . . . , unde . . . , atque unde . . . ?*  
 4.925–7    *ubi* (here virtually equivalent to *si*) . . . , *unde . . . ?*  
 5.181–6    *unde . . . , si . . . ?*  
 5.1046–8    *si . . . , unde . . . et unde . . . ?*

It is therefore highly likely that we have the same pattern in 2.547–50.

Brieger's full conjecture is *si iam hocce velis*.<sup>12</sup> This is attractively close to *sumant oculi*, but *velis* is a little weak and, although we have *hasce* and *hisce* in Lucretius,<sup>13</sup> we never find *hocce*.

The only other scholar who, to my knowledge, introduces *si iam* is Müller. He proposes *hoc si iam sumas*,<sup>14</sup> which is remote from *sumant oculi*: *si iam hoc sumas* (or *dicas* or *credas*) would be better.

My preferred 'solution' is *quippe etenim si iam hoc tibi dem finita per omne*: 'For indeed, if at this stage I were to grant you that . . .' With *si iam . . . dem* compare 3.540–1 *si iam libeat concedere falsum / et dare posse animam glomerari in corpore*. For (*hoc*) *dare* with the accusative and infinitive, compare, as well as 3.541, Cicero, *Tusc.* 1.25 *dasne aut manere animos post mortem aut morte ipsa interire?* and Seneca, *Q. Nat.* 5.14.2 *non illud aequae dabis esse aliquos et sub terra lacus et quasdam aquas sine exitu stagnare*. For the elision of *iam*, compare 4.1180; 6.8; and for the metrical sequence of caesural monosyllabic pronoun, disyllabic pronoun, monosyllabic verb, compare 5.99 *et quam difficile id mihi sit pervincere dictis*.

<sup>11</sup> See F. Susemihl and A. Brieger, 'Kritisch-exegetische Bemerkungen zum zweiten Buche des Lucretius', *Philol.* 24 (1866) 422–53, at 450–2. The relevant note is the work of Brieger alone. *si* had already been suggested by Lachmann, who followed it with *manticuler*—strangely, as Munro says. In his edition Brieger follows K. Winckelmann, *Beiträge zur Kritik des Lucretius* (Salzwedel, 1857), 12, in reading *sumantur uti*, which is palaeographically good, but involves a personal construction for which the only parallel in Lucretius seems to be *huc accedit uti . . . possint tamen reddi* at 1.565–6, where it is suspected that *reddi* may have been influenced by Epicurus' use of ἀποδοθῆναι (*Hdt.* 55).

<sup>12</sup> Before declaring his preference for *si iam hocce velis*, Brieger says: 'Wäre III, 240 die Lesart *quidam quod mente volutant* nicht so sehr zweifelhaft, so würde ich vorschlagen, *si iam hoc volvis*.'

<sup>13</sup> *hasce*: 3.35, 4.549, 6.211. *hisce*: 6.647 and, if Bernays's emendation is correct, 2.719.

<sup>14</sup> Müller seems to be unaware that *si iam* had already been conjectured by Brieger.

Like Munro's emendation, mine assumes a considerable corruption, but that a considerable corruption has occurred is suggested by the absence of a convincing emendation closer to the transmitted text. I assume that *sumant oculi* emerged from *si iam hoc tibi*. Although most of the individual letter-changes can be paralleled from the manuscripts of Lucretius,<sup>15</sup> the corruption is most likely to have been due to a general similarity between the two readings. *dem* may have been omitted, because, after the emergence of *sumant oculi*, it was seen to fit neither the metre nor the sense. The possibility that the text in the middle of the line had been partly obscured by damage cannot be ruled out.

Obviously I do not claim that my suggested reading must be correct. But I do claim that, unlike most other proposals, it is appropriate to the context. Now we have Lucretius characteristically making a concession to an imaginary opponent whom he identifies with the reader, which means that *si iam hoc tibi dem* is in tune not only with *id quoque uti concedam* in 2.541, but also with *sic tibi si . . . constitues* in 2.560–1.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *siiamh* → *sumant*: confusion of *i* and *u* and of *m* and *n* is common (see W. A. Merrill, 'Corruption in the manuscripts of Lucretius', *Univ. Calif. Public. Class. Philol.* 2 [1914], 237–53); *octibi* → *oculi*: for *u* for *ti*, see 4.1240, where Q has *parum* for *partim*; for *l* for *b*, see 3.553, where OQ have *tali* and V has *tale* for *tabe*.

<sup>16</sup> I am very grateful to Leofranc Holford-Strevens and to CQ's anonymous referee for their constructive criticisms. I have adopted several of their suggestions.

## OVID'S SYRINX

At *Metamorphoses* 1.689ff. Ovid embeds the tale of Syrinx within the episode of Io. At Jupiter's behest Mercury, disguised as a herdsman, tries to close Argus' eyes by piping to him and telling him the pipes' origin. He describes how the virginal Syrinx was spotted by Pan, and he is about to tell the rest (she fled, was slowed by the river Ladon, appealed to its nymphs and was changed into reeds, which Pan grabbed in place of her; his sigh in the reeds was so musical that he made them into pan-pipes), but Argus' eyes close first. Mercury deepens Argus' sleep with his wand and kills him. Enraged, Juno puts his eyes into her peacock's tail and then sends a Fury against Io, who flees to the Nile, where she begs Jupiter for release. He wins over Juno and restores her original form to Io, who becomes a goddess. The Syrinx insert has not received much scholarly attention, which is a pity, because it contains much that is interesting from a narratological point of view, and much of its humour, cleverness, and complexity has been missed.

The passage has impact *per se*. It has a *recherché* appeal. Apart from the fact that it is the earliest account to survive and one of the few detailed versions that we have,<sup>1</sup> no other author puts the story in the mouth of Mercury or uses it as a way of making Argus fall asleep.<sup>2</sup> That may well be an Ovidian innovation.<sup>3</sup> In addition, among the

<sup>1</sup> Only Ach. Tat. 8.6 and Longus 2.34 are comparable in length.

<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere Mercury puts Argus to sleep with either pipes or his wand (Aesch. *P.V.* 574–5, Nonn. *D.* 13.25ff., V. Fl. 4.388–9, Serv. *A.* 7.790). Ovid seems to be alone in employing both the pipes and the wand, and also the tale of Syrinx (various methods are needed to ensure success in the case of somebody who has a hundred eyes and is fighting sleep).

<sup>3</sup> So F. Bömer, *P. Ovidius Naso Metamorphosen Buch I–III* (Heidelberg, 1969), 205; B. Otis,